

Evangelism through Events and the Sunday Service

I. Introduction

Ideally, evangelism occurs naturally in the life of a Christian. This was certainly the case in the early church and is seen in Acts 8. The church at that time existed only in the city of Jerusalem, but when Stephen was killed by the Jewish leaders, a persecution began that forced many of the believers to leave the city. It says in Acts 8:4 that these believers went about bringing the good news to those they encountered. These were ordinary believers. The church leaders remained in Jerusalem. In Colossians 4:5-6 Paul assumes that those in the church at Colossae will speak to others about Christ, and gives advice on how to do that effectively. Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:15 Peter assumes that in the course of life those that he is writing to will have occasion to defend their faith to those who do not believe.

II. Evangelism through Events.

Personal evangelism is not the only strategy for reaching the lost. It is a fact that most churches feel a corporate responsibility to reach the lost and develop different approaches to spreading the gospel through the ministry of the church. Ideally, churches should have a balanced approach to how they reach the lost, combining both the personal efforts of the congregation and the corporate ministry of the church. It is a fact the most churches will have non-believers visit at some point (Paul writes about unbelievers visiting church in 1 Cor. 14:23) so it is prudent for pastors and church leaders to think about how to address those who visit who do not know Christ.

Many churches plan events whose purpose is to reach out to the lost by having them attend these events and be presented with the gospel. Evangelism through events has both good and bad points.

The Good Points:

1. Planning events that cater to reaching the lost gets many people involved, and can bring a spirit of teamwork and purpose to a church.
2. These types of events encourage church members to invite their neighbors, friends, family and coworkers.
3. These events get people in the church to interact with the lost.
4. These events may see people come to salvation.

The Bad Points:

1. It may take the emphasis off of personal evangelism that is the responsibility of church members.
2. These events can be expensive to produce.
3. These events will fail if not done with excellence.
4. These events involve much planning and many meetings prior to the event.
5. These events may need time to show results; churches can be discouraged if the results are not what they expected.

If a church decides to do an event that they hope will reach those that do not attend church, there are many details to consider. Here is a model that has been used by many churches to plan events that will attract unbelievers.

First, you have to decide what kind of event you want to have. There are three basic kinds of events churches use to attract the lost.

The first kind of event is merely to have believers and non-believers share an experience together. This type of event has no gospel presentation, it is referred to as a **cultivating** event, designed to provide a time of interaction for church members and their friends, neighbors and family. Ideally, a church would use this type of event first and let the un-churched discover that they can attend a church event and have a pleasant experience. These types of events could be:

1. Sporting events.
2. Holiday related.
3. Music related (concerts).
4. Social service related (having a doctor come and speak on a medical issue).
5. Showing a movie (if you have the technology).

Because every culture is different, it is difficult to list events that would apply to every country and cultural situation.

These types of events will not have a message, devotion or any other type of spiritual emphasis. They are designed to cultivate non-believers, not reach them. **Also, these types of events do not need to be held at the church.**

The second type of event is a **planting event**, an event where the gospel is proclaimed through a message or short devotion. In this type of event an invitation is **not** given to non-believers. This type of event would ideally come after several **cultivating** events. This event could be the same as cultivating events (sporting, holiday related, etc.) but would have the added spiritual emphasis of a gospel message. In this event you are planting the seed of the gospel to those present, letting them think about the message but not asking for a decision.

Planting events include a message or short devotion, but not an invitation.

The third type of event is a **reaping** event where not only is a gospel message delivered but an invitation to make a decision is given to non-believers. This type of event would only come after having held first the **cultivating** event, then the **planting** event and then finally the **reaping** event. As mentioned earlier, none of these events have to be held in a church, though that is an option depending on the type of event.

The ideal order of these three types of events are:

1. **Cultivating** - An event where there is no spiritual emphasis but an opportunity for church members and the un-churched to share an event together.
2. **Planting** - An event where there is an opportunity for church members and the un-churched to share an event together followed by a brief message or devotion.
3. **Reaping** - An event where there is an opportunity for church members and the un-churched to share an event followed by a message or short devotion with an invitation to receive Christ.

To successfully execute these types of events, churches usually form teams to implement the different areas of each event.

1. The Strategy Team. They are concerned with Vision.
This team determines what type of event the church will develop. They would answer these questions:
 - What kind of event do we want to have? (Cultivating, Planting, Reaping)?
 - When will we do the event?

- Where will we hold the event?
- What is the purpose of the event?

People on this team need to be able to think in terms of strategy and vision.

2. The Preparation Team. They are concerned with Planning.

This team determines what is needed to accomplish the event. They would answer these questions:

- What do we need to accomplish the event?
- Where will we get what we need?
- When will we set up, tear down or make what is needed for the event?
- What do we need for child care?
- What problems might we face?

People on this team need to be detail oriented.

3. The Care Team. They are concerned with Execution.

This team makes sure people who attend the event have a good and pleasant experience on the day/night of the event. They would answer these questions:

- What do we need to make sure people have a good time?
- Who will greet people?
- Do we need ushers, who will do this?
- Do we need people to serve in other areas?

People on this team do the actual work at the event or recruit others to help run the event successfully and need to be people oriented.

Example: A church in Costa Rica decides to hold a soccer tournament, and will invite children from ages 7-18 to play on teams. Prizes will be given to the winning teams. What will the church need to do to make this a successful event?

The Strategy Team-They decide a soccer tournament hosted by the church will bring out lots of kids and their parents and will show them the church is interested in sports just like they are. They will determine:

- Where the event will be held.
- When the event will be held.
- What is the purpose of the event.

There will be no spiritual emphasis, this is a cultivating event, and church members should be encouraged to invite their friends and neighbors.

The Execution Team-They need to decide:

- Who do we need to talk to about using a soccer field?
- How much will it cost?
- Where will we get referees?
- How will we promote it?
- How will the teams be organized?
- How much will this cost?

- How much time will this take?

The Care Team -They need to decide:

- Who will greet the people as they arrive?
- Who will get the teams together?
- Who will oversee the event and look out for problems?
- Who will oversee refreshments if there are any?
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You can see that an event like this requires much planning, involving many people and a budget as well.

III. Evangelism through the Sunday service.

Many churches use the Sunday service as a means of evangelism, yet put little thought into how they approach or engage visitors who are unfamiliar with their church. Churches regularly offer an invitation to accept Christ at the end of their service without thinking through the implications of having un-churched people in the audience. For example:

1. The un-churched typically do not know the songs sung on Sunday morning.
2. The un-churched typically do not know many of the words used by the pastor in his message.
3. The un-churched typically do not know the order of service or how long the service will last.
4. The un-churched typically may not know anyone in the service and can feel either isolated or overwhelmed.

Let's look first at the good points of doing evangelism through the Sunday service, then the bad points and finally some principles on how to do evangelism through the Sunday service effectively.

The Good Points.

1. Most churches have visitors, changing to a service that is geared to reaching them through being engaging, appealing and helpful will have a greater impact than a service they might find alienating and confusing.
2. Church members can be encouraged to bring visitors because they know the service will be engaging, appealing and helpful.
3. The un-churched will bring their friends because they were able to relate to a service they found engaging, appealing and helpful.

The Bad Points.

1. The church leaders must decide if the Sunday service is just for believers or for the un-churched as well. If you decide that you want the service to relate to the un-churched you will perhaps have to change how that service is planned and executed. This has the potential to cause problems if leadership cannot decide on who the service is for.
2. If the church changes the nature of the service to relate primarily to the un-churched in order to reach them for Christ, believers will need a place to learn the Bible because the emphasis of the preaching will not be Bible instruction but preaching messages that relate to everyone, whether a believer or not.
3. If a church decides to use its Sunday service primarily to reach the un-churched it might take the focus off of personal evangelism that is the responsibility of the congregation.

You have noticed that we used these words to describe the Sunday service. Notice also that we have not used the phrase “worship service”. Un-churched people cannot worship God because they do not know Him. But they can sing and they can listen to a message that is helpful to them. This usually means that the message will deal with areas of life common to both the saved and the lost. Topics like fear, hope, family, worry, depression, joy, faith, gossip, slander, anger, pride, etc.

Engaging refers the presentation of the message. It should be given in such a way that it secures the attention of the audience. If the message is not presented in a vibrant, relational and interesting manner it does not matter what the topic is. This responsibility falls upon the pastor; he needs to be interesting, prepared and have application that fits both the saved and unsaved.

Appealing refers to the physical setting. If the church is not clean and attractive (as much as possible) visitors will notice. Think of how you clean and arrange your home when you have visitors.

Helpful refers to the content of the message. If un-churched visitors hear messages that they can relate to and application that fits into their lives, they will return to hear more. If you preach through the Book of Ephesians, which was written specifically to Christians, it will be much harder for the un-churched to relate to this part of the service.

IV. Conclusion

Ideally, evangelism is best when it occurs naturally in the lives of believers. Yet, it is a reality that every church will have those who attend who are not yet believers. Churches that accept this reality and make their services accessible and relatable to non-believers will have success in reaching them for Christ. Churches that focus primarily on Biblical instruction and the spiritual growth of their members will have less success in reaching the lost through their Sunday services. Similarly, churches that actively plan events to reach the lost will bring the church together for a common purpose and may see people come to Christ through their efforts. There is one common principle for both of these approaches to evangelism. **If they are not done well, with the appropriate amount of planning, preparation and above all, prayer, they will fail.**