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Evangelism and the Small Church: A Personal Reflection on One Church's Desire to Share Jesus

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✧ Evangelism and the Small Church: ✧

A Personal Reflection On One Church's Desire to Share Jesus

Δ ΒΕΛΕΘΟΥΣΙ ΒΕΛΙΓΕΦΙΘΗ ΟΥ ΟΥΘΕ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΣΤΕ ΔΕΞΙΤΕ ΕΦΟ ΣΗΒΛΕ ΓΕΒΝΕ

By Paul Clark

Randy sold the church a copy machine. There was nothing significant about that. People come by the office to sell items all the time. But Randy was sent to me by Bob, a member of our church who works as a purchasing agent for a large company. Randy had gone to see Bob about a potential purchase, and Bob, who also helps the church with our purchases, sent him to me about a copier. Because of his acquaintance with Bob, Randy became important to me. During our conversation we discovered a mutual interest in golf and found that we have children of similar ages.

Last Friday Randy and I played golf, and, as I had hoped, we discussed church. Before we left, Randy said he would see me on Sunday. Sunday came, but he didn't. But that is okay, because we have another golf appointment set for this Friday and this time I have also invited a church member to go along with us.

Mark and Kelly were in the same Lamaze class as Leanne and I; both couples were expecting our first child. After spending a number of evenings together, we found some common interests and decided to get together again after our classes were completed. Now, six years later, we are still friends. Our children attended the same preschool. We have spent a lot of time together sharing dinners, sports activities, weekend and day trips, and activities at school. Two months ago, Mark, Kelly, and kids attended our church for the first time.

These are glimpses of two families' interactions with our small church and our attempts at evangelism. I say "attempts" because I (and our congregation) struggle with being an evangelistic church.

In a recent Wednesday night Bible study, I asked the group for input on this article. One person asked, "If we really knew how to do evangelism, would we continue to be a small church?" That was an interesting question. It prompted me to ask, "What hinders us from being a small church with an evangelistic heart?" and, "What helpful thought patterns should a small church have in place as it attempts to share Jesus with its community?"

Hindrances

I hate to say it, but one hindrance to our small church in developing an evangelistic mindset is me—the minister. One thing I noticed early in my ministry was that I did not have the "gift" of evangelism. That fact was plainly pointed out to me when we had an extended study on Wednesday nights about spiritual gifts. One of the final things the class members did was to take individual inventories of our spiritual gifts. That was when I made my self-discovery—I scored very low in the "gift" of evangelism.

At first I didn't know what to do with my new self-realization. Because I was the church's leader, I thought I was responsible for the church's evangelism. But then I

say that in order to grow, a congregation needs to “get small” by establishing such things as cell groups. We have a leg up already. Small groups can be an effective part of an evangelistic small church.

Worship events can be a little less formal (though not without excellence) and may provide an opportunity to share together on various spiritual levels. One of the special times in our Sunday worship is when the person who is praying for special needs asks our group for items for which to pray. Our visitors cannot help but see our dependence on God when they hear men and women ask for special prayers for various situations that are affecting each one of them.

Be good at a few things, not average at many. One of the most freeing lessons our church is learning is that God does not call us to be all things to all people. Often we hear about something that is being done at another church and we say, “Let’s do it here!” Or we may have good success with an evangelistic event and then try to outdo ourselves on it the next time. In those instances we often end up exhausting ourselves and our budget, finding no joy in the experience, and failing miserably.

We have decided to change that behavior with some healthier ways of thinking. We have cut back on nearly all the things we would like to do and are focusing on things we do well, trying to build on those strengths. God blessed us during our last Thanksgiving by enabling us to distribute about eighty-five full meal baskets. We were also enabled to personally serve a meal to a senior citizens’ apartment complex. The temptation this year will be to hand out three hundred baskets and serve a meal for the seniors as well as the rest of Saratoga County—however, we are not going to go in that direction. God will use us to reach as many people as he sees fit.

See evangelism as “process,” not “product.” The goal of an evangelistic small church should be to allow a person to come in contact with Jesus through its members, who then help that person make a decision to become a follower of Christ. That takes time. It takes members’ developing relationships with friends, family, and neighbors. It takes reliance on God and his Spirit to work things out

on his timetable. It is not merely a matter of keeping the doors open on Sunday or saying, “Well, if we have just the right presentation of the product or event, they will come.” Usually they do not. All members of the church need to be challenged to see that the process of bringing a person to accept Christ takes a personal investment of time and energy.

Randy, Mark, and Kelly are people who are “in the process” of becoming followers of Jesus. We may stay a small church for a while, maybe even indefinitely. That is okay, because the call of our church is not to become larger, but to bring people like these three into God’s kingdom and to help them become devoted disciples of Christ.

Hopes

N. T. Wright, in *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, says this about our role in God’s kingdom:

We can build for the kingdom . . . the poem that glimpses truth in a new way; the mug of tea given with gentleness to the down-and-out at the drop-in centre; the setting aside of my own longings in order to support and cherish someone who depends on me; the piece of work done honestly and thoroughly; the prayer that comes from heart and mind together; all these and many more are building blocks for the kingdom.

The small church plays an indispensable role in the kingdom of God. It is an important stone in the kingdom’s foundation. We in small churches have been placed by God in our communities, challenged by Jesus to be his followers, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s purposes.

It is my hope that God will use small churches as outposts for his kingdom. It is my dream that we will share our lives with each other in our churches and with those in our communities. Most important, it is my heart’s desire that we all, whether large or small, simply share Jesus.

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