

IMPROVING EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

By Bob Young

A part of my life that I consider important is my physical health. Because it is important to me, I have targets related to healthy eating habits, limiting calories, monitoring my weight, and averaging 20-30 minutes of intense exercise daily. These targets are easy to hit—when I keep track of what I eat, my weight, and my exercise. I can see my progress! When I don't keep track, I easily get off track.

The local church that is serious about healthy evangelism will do well to set up measures to track progress. Many churches celebrate the number of baptisms, but those same churches often cannot tell you how many of those new Christians have remained faithful after five or ten years. Baptisms are often treated as accidents, unpredictable, as though no one really knows the process for moving a person toward faith and obedience. If we don't understand the process, we don't know what to do to tell the Jesus story effectively and move people toward faith. We don't know how to track progress.

Some people may react negatively to the idea of using numbers (statistics) to advance evangelism, but I can tell you from personal experience that counting maintains accountability and keeps us on target. If we want to pray more, we will be well served to keep track of our quiet times. If we want to read the Bible more, we will be well served to track our time in the Word of God. If we want to evangelize more, the same principle applies.

What we are talking about is healthy evangelism, and the outreach of a healthy church, with targets and accountability. Research reveals that a church with a healthy evangelism program can expect to add (and keep) about 10% to its membership each year, at least **doubling every 10 years**. When a church does not set up a healthy evangelism process, the result is often that the church looks like it should be growing but is in reality plateaued (approximately 10% change over a 10 year period). Even churches with annual growth of 2-3% will likely experience decadal growth of 25% or less. And some churches think they are evangelizing when they are only swelling because they do not carefully distinguish the various factors that increase attendance.

I hope that by now you understand that church evangelism efforts can be unhealthy and no one even knows it. I hope you are by now wanting to know more about some targets that can help improve evangelism in your church. Here are some suggestions to get your church started. (If I can be help, please contact me.)

- Make the evangelism efforts visible with announcements and by calling attention to health factors. Help the church recognize whether the evangelistic outreach is healthy or unhealthy.
- Include an evaluation of evangelism in each ministry staff and church leadership meeting. Look at the specific targets mentioned below. Talk about them and pray about them.
- Work toward the goal of every church leader effectively and visibly involved in evangelism.
- Establish the expectations that all church members will be involved in evangelism, with appropriate accountability structures.
- Train the members so that each members understands giftedness and how to become involved in evangelism according to that giftedness.
- Set up an easy reporting system for the following weekly targets.
 - Number of new evangelistic contacts (new persons contacted)
 - Number of spiritual conversations with non-members or unbelievers
 - Number of Bible studies taught

I encourage you to celebrate your successes. Remember that the goal is faithful disciples, not merely the number of baptisms. Churches that establish healthy evangelism efforts can expect that 90-95% of those baptized will remain faithful.