

The Effective Church Links Mutual Caring and Evangelism

By Bob Young

I learned ministry “on the fly.” When I began fulltime preaching at age 21, I was green, inexperienced, clueless. I had to learn and develop effective ministry in my “laboratories” -- the local churches with which I worked. Very soon, I saw two things: the need for **evangelism** and the need for **mutual spiritual care**. I saw that the oft-repeated phrase is true: “the church has two tasks—to save the lost and to keep the saved saved!”

Evangelism. The search for effective methods of evangelism took time. Early evangelistic methods had limited success – revivals, campaigns, VBS, mass mailing, door knocking, and bus programs. Attendance would increase a little, decrease a little. (A church is defined as plateaued if annual increases or declines are 10% or less.) In many years deaths exceeded births, move-outs exceeded move-ins, and baptisms barely exceeded dropouts. In addition, too many of those baptized were soon gone.

After six years of ministry, I began ministry in a new church and adopted a model of evangelism built on making personal contact with family members, friends, and neighbors. The model **integrated evangelism and mutual spiritual caring**. New contacts were quickly involved in the fellowship and caring circles of the church. This commitment to develop deep, meaningful personal relationships opened the door to personal Bible studies. One of the most effective ways to reach people for Christ is to involve, include, and care for them.

During the next two decades of ministry, one church tripled in attendance and another church doubled. What was the key? Churches committed to mutual spiritual care! The church must be a place of caring, with every person both giving care and receiving care. Even before they are baptized, new Christians must see and experience caring. This is possible with thoughtfully designed concentric circles of fellowship and caring that encourage fellowship and meaningful spiritual relationships at multiple levels.

Today many churches try to link caring and evangelism. Generic caring is an insufficient partner to evangelism. The key to success is mutual, spiritual caring. Caring must be mutual; caring must be spiritual.

Linking mutual spiritual caring and evangelism leads to faithful Christians and the growth of the church. Through spiritual caring, each believer is given identity. Being part of a large church can easily mean living in anonymity. The back door of the church is sometimes open wider than the front door. When mutual spiritual caring and evangelism are thoughtfully linked, evangelism usually begins in a small group or class setting. In smaller groups, it is easier to include everyone in mutual care and love. People more quickly respond positively to the message of Christ.

Connecting mutual spiritual caring and evangelism will make a difference in your church.

- Effective fellowship and caring circles that provide the context for evangelism are one of the most effective ways to bring new people through the front door of the church.
- Integrating mutual spiritual caring and evangelism involves every member in outreach.
- Linking mutual spiritual caring and evangelism is one of the most effective ways to close the back door.