



# Reaching Our Community



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



# Reaching Our Community

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## Leader's Guide

How to use “Reaching Our Community” by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

*BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is not another program. You don't have to build a program from scratch or take another night to be out. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS works when you want it to, where you want it to, the way you want it to. It's completely flexible and designed to be easy to use.*

*You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:*

**1. Select a learning tool.** In this theme of “Reaching Our Community,” you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ research
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ sample retreat

**2. Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you have decided that your board or team needs to assess its understanding of church membership. There are two assessment options in this theme: “7 Ways to Rate Your Church” (p. 6) and “Religion-less Spirituality” (p. 7). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

**3. Photocopy the handout.** Let's say you selected “7 Ways to Rate Your Church.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

**4. Prepare for the discussion.** We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

**5. Lead the discussion.** Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Who Are the Unchurched?

*How key trends impact your approach to outreach.*

1 Cor. 9:19–23

*As you look to reach the unchurched in your community, consider how these trends in who they are how they are changing, from the Barna Group’s analysis of data from the past three decades, impact your church’s approach to outreach.*

**First, the unchurched population is steadily growing.** Since 1990, it has jumped from 30 percent of U.S. adults to 43 percent today. (We define unchurched as anyone who hasn’t been to a church in the last six months, excluding weddings and funerals.) It’s important to remember that while this segment has grown, it is still a minority. Most Americans continue to have some connection to a church, even if only for holidays.

**Second, the number of people who have never been active churchgoers has increased.** In the last two decades, the never-churched increased from 15 to 23 percent. Currently, one in four Americans has virtually no personal history of church participation. In other words, there is no spiritual “muscle memory” for nearly 60 million adults, a number that had been about 30 million at the beginning of the 1990s.

Crammed calendars, kids’ sports, endless entertainment options, and expanding weekend schedules are making church increasingly optional.

**Third, what qualifies as “regular churchgoing” is being redefined.** Active church attenders used to be those who attended three to four weekends per month. Today that’s been reduced to just one or two weekends per month. Crammed calendars, kids’ sports, endless entertainment options, and expanding weekend schedules are making church increasingly optional. Pastors say this is affecting their ability to build multi-week sermon series that build from Sunday to Sunday. It all means an increasing number of churchless weekends among Americans today.

Despite these changes, we’ve seen several positive trends. **For one, the perception of local churches as a valuable part of a local community is holding firm, even among the unchurched.** Most unchurched either view the presence of local churches in their community as a good thing or are indifferent toward it. Only 7 percent of unchurched adults believe that a church is a negative factor for their neighborhood. They tell us churches contribute to the common good of their community by addressing poverty, serving families, the elderly, or youth, cultivating biblical values or assisting those in recovery. These churchless adults aren’t beating down the doors to participate, but they’re not burning bridges with local churches either.

**Another positive trend: Millennial born-again Christians are demonstrating a renewed commitment to evangelism.** While Millennial born-again believers are less common than in previous generations, those who remain committed to Christ are sharing their faith with others. Their commitment to share their faith provides hope for the future.

Yes, overall, the trends are not positive. The unchurched are less and less responsive to being the target of “outreach” and increasingly resistant to being invited to church by friends.

America continues to be an anomaly: an affluent, developed country that retains strong churchgoing attendance among its population. But to keep that distinctive—and for the sake of the life-changing message of Jesus—the Christian community has an obligation to better understand today’s unchurched.

—DAVID KINNAMAN is the president of Barna Group and co-editor of *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Tyndale, 2014).

### Discuss

1. Why does it matter if more people are unchurched than ever before?
2. How might outreach look different to people from unchurched backgrounds?
3. How can we these positive trends help shape our outreach efforts to better reach the unchurched?

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

### Why People Come to Church

*A new generation of church planters is finding surprising answers.*

Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:42–47

*James Emery White helped found Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. In this interview White, a Southern Baptist pastor, helps churches better understand the type of person they are trying to reach with the gospel.*

#### Are people today even curious about the church?

*James Emery White:* Nothing could be more irrelevant to them than a local Christian church. The average seeker has gone through the “great divorce,” to steal a line from C. S. Lewis. The great divorce is the separation of spiritual longing from thinking it can be fulfilled through a particular religious faith, much less Christianity.

Most people no longer see their spiritual desire and search as involving the discovery of a faith or religion.

#### One critique of churches like yours is that to get non-Christians in the door, they dumb down the gospel.

Yes, the entry points of the church are designed for seekers, but what attracts them is an invitation by a friend. As Michael Green, in his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, writes, “In the early church, the gospel was shared like gossip over the backyard fence.” That begins the adventure of evangelism.

A seeker church creates an environment where someone can explore Christianity in ways most conducive to an effective search. The seeker-targeted church designs small groups, weekend services, special events, seminars—anything that enables a person to invite a non-Christian friend to explore the faith.

#### What makes attracting non-Christians so difficult for a church?

Many Christians have sold out to the culture of narcissism. There’s a spirit in today’s church that makes the needs and desires of the believer the center of attention. That is ironic, given that one critique of seeker-targeted churches is they sell out to the narcissistic mindset of contemporary culture by catering to its needs.

Seekers today are not interested in your beating around the bush. The best communicators in seeker-sensitive or seeker-targeted church models are blunt, in-your-face, and straightforward.

#### What attracts a secular person to a seeker church?

His or her relationship with a believer.

#### How’s that different from why a secular person would attend another type of church?

The dilemma is this: most Christians intuitively know not to invite their friends to church because they know it’s not designed for seekers. Nor will it facilitate the seeking process.

#### What makes a seeker church unique, then?

A seeker-targeted church understands its mission to reach out to irreligious, unchurched people in order to turn them into fully-devoted followers of Christ. I purposefully use “seeker-targeted” instead of “seeker-driven” to describe churches like Mecklenburg. Seeker-targeted throws the emphasis on the outreach element, the entry points into church life. ➤

## **Why People Come to Church** *continued*

### **What's the difference between a seeker-sensitive and seeker-targeted church?**

Most seeker-sensitive churches are simply contemporary churches with a heart for evangelism. They use some of the same forms as seeker-targeted churches—drama, media, contemporary music—but they are still oriented toward the already convinced. Being seeker-targeted is a set of values and a complete orientation to reach out first and foremost to the seeker.

Burning in the hearts of the leaders of this movement is a deep desire to be the church. They are simply trying to live out Acts 2:42–47, and that will never go away.

### **Discuss**

1. How does White's characterization of seekers—"nothing could be more irrelevant to them than a local Christian church"—correspond to the unchurched people you know?
2. What is our church's core evangelism strategy? How effective is it in reaching our community?
3. Matthew 28 indicates the core of the church is to make disciples. What is our system for taking people who are seekers and making them committed followers of Christ?
4. What values must inform our church if we want to become people who are "seeker-targeted"?

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

### 7 Ways to Rate Your Church

*Values that measure your spiritual environment.*

John 13:12–17; Ephesians 2:19–22

*Try to see your church from the perspective of a newcomer and then rate it according to these 7 characteristics:*

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <p><b>1. Can you sense the presence of God?</b> People expect God to come to church. I wish I could define what exactly people are looking for. I can't. I guess it's like beauty—you know it when you see it even though you can't put it into words. Experiencing the supernatural is a high priority in today's culture.</p>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p><b>2. Is it others-centered?</b> An others-centered church is immediately interested in new people, what they need, and how the church can help. The others-centered church talks little about its programs or its people unless that is truly helpful to the newcomer.</p>  |                          |                          |
| <p><b>3. Do you use understandable terminology?</b> Healthy churches tend to speak in terms everyone can understand. They make an effort to translate religious terminology into everyday language.</p>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p><b>4. Are there people who look like me?</b> As soon as most of us enter a room, we look around to see what everyone looks like. Our level of comfort can be high or low depending on how quickly we find someone else who looks like us. In a room full of women, a man thinks, <i>I'm in the wrong place</i>. In a church where all the people up front are men, women wonder if they are welcome.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p><b>5. Do you handle problems in a healthy manner?</b> You can often tell more about a church by the way it handles problems than by the way it handles success. This is an easy measure because every church has problems. A healthy church is not about the absence of problems. It's how problems are handled.</p>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p><b>6. Is your church accessible?</b> Wheelchair ramps and parking stalls are only the beginning of accessibility. Is there clear and easy access to getting questions answered, meeting new people, talking to church leaders, joining the membership, becoming part of a small group, resolving complaints, and signing up to serve?</p>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p><b>7. Is there a sense of expectancy?</b> Listen to hallway conversations about the church, and you can decide if the primary verb tense is past, present, or future. Most healthy churches are permeated with high expectations of God's blessing for the future.</p>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>—LEITH ANDERSON is the president of the National Association of Evangelicals. He formerly served as senior pastor of Wooddale Church, in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.</p>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### Discuss

- Which of the above characteristics are plainly evident in our church? How are they manifested?
- What is one concrete way we can improve our area of greatest weakness?
- In Ephesians 3:19, the apostle Paul prays that believers would be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” When has our church been filled with the fullness of God?

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Religion-less Spirituality

*Reaching people who think church is the problem, not the answer.*

Matthew 5:47; Romans 1:16

*“Growing numbers of Americans say they are spiritual but not religious,” says Robert Wuthnow in After Heaven, his assessment of American spiritual development since 1950. Theirs is a spirituality without truth or authority but filled with belief in the supernatural. It is a trend born of the modern fears of religion. The church must echo Jesus’ own powerful critique of religion and visibly demonstrate the difference between religion and the gospel. Two questions can help churches think about their core message:*

### 1. Does our church communication clearly distinguish between religion and the gospel?

Jesus condemned self-justification through moral performance, at one point claiming that religion was more spiritually dangerous than overt immorality. Both traditional religion and the new spirituality are forms of self-salvation. The religious way of being our own savior leads us to keep God’s laws, while the irreligious way of being our own savior leads us to break his laws. The solution is the gospel.

The gospel shows us a God far more holy than a conservative moralist can imagine—for he can never be pleased by our moral performance. Yet it also shows us a God far more loving than the liberal relativist can imagine—for his Son bore all the weight of eternal justice. His love for us cost him dearly.

Practically speaking, this means we must be extremely careful to distinguish between general moral virtue and the unique humility, confidence, and love that flow from the gospel. Without the gospel, we can restrain the human heart, but not change the human heart. The gospel calls for repentance over our self-righteousness. The true virtue that results creates an attitude of acceptance toward the poor, the outsider, and the opponent that neither religion nor secularism can produce.

### 2. Do our deeds demonstrate the difference between religion and the gospel?

Jesus condemned religion as a pretext for oppression: “If you only greet your brothers, what do ye more than others?” (Matt. 5:47). Only when Christians non-condescendingly serve the poor, only when Christians are more firm yet open to their opponents will the world understand the difference between religion and the gospel.

Pushing moral behaviors before we lift up Christ is religion. Religion has always been outside-in—

“If I behave out here in all these ways, then I will have God’s blessing and love inside.” But the gospel is inside-out—if I know the blessing and grace of God inside, then I can behave out here in all these ways.”

We, of all people, ought to understand and agree with fears about religion, for Jesus himself warned us to be wary of it, and not to mistake a call for moral virtue for the good news of God’s salvation provided in Christ.

—TIM KELLER is founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

## Discuss

1. Our church is known for \_\_\_\_\_ in this community (fill in the blank). Why?
2. What ministries or programs demonstrate our compassion for the poor, the downtrodden, the outsider (Matt. 5:47)?
3. What is one way we can tap into our community’s interest in spiritual things?
4. On what do we base our appeals to the nonbeliever?



## Strategy That Works

*Making adjustments to meet real needs.*

Genesis 12:1-3; Act 13:38-41

**The Case** When the first two cases of the evangelistic Jesus film arrived, expectations at Hope Chapel soared. The church planned to invest one year knocking on every door within a one-mile radius of the church, offering a copy of the Jesus film. The strategy called for follow-up phone calls and visits. The goal was 30 new converts.

One year later, expectations had shriveled into frustrations. Only one convert could be traced to the outreach. The church had covered only a half-mile radius. Fewer people seemed willing to participate. While the church rejoiced over the new member of God's kingdom, they were puzzled by the lack of fruit.

Some said, "We did our part. We were faithful, and God honors faithfulness. Let's keep at it." Others called for organizing outreach events like a Valentine's Dinner, a Super Bowl party, or a contemporary Christian music concert. Some clamored for a moratorium on programs—replacing them with an emphasis on relationship building. A few suggested starting a contemporary service on Saturday evening. Several grumbled about being pressured to go door to door: "It just doesn't work in our culture."

- What Would You Do?**
- ◆ What would you do with the stalled Jesus film outreach?
  - ◆ How does a local community shape a church's outreach strategy?

**What Happened** The church leaders decided to diversify their outreach efforts. They determined to identify and implement 3-5 strategies. They took a month to study the demographics of their community, another month to pray about possible strategies, and a third month to hammer out a plan, which included the following:

- ◆ Challenge each believer to identify a non-Christian friend, co-worker, neighbor, or family member and then to begin building a relationship with and praying for the salvation of this person.
- ◆ Involve the small-group ministry in an eight-week study of how to present the gospel to a nonbeliever.
- ◆ Plan one quality community outreach event during the year based on the profile of the community and the resources of the church.
- ◆ Continue the Jesus film ministry but turn it over to the half-dozen people who feel called to go door to door.

—STEVEN D. MATHEWSON is pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of Libertyville, Illinois, and teaches at Denver Seminary, Western Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

- Discuss**
1. What is our church's evangelism strategy? How do our outreach events fit into our larger philosophy of ministry?
  2. In Genesis 12, God promises to make Abraham a blessing to the nations. What role does our church play in that blessing?
  3. Given the demographics and needs of our community, what would be the most effective outreach event we could offer next year?

## Generation Hand-Off

*Ensuring the value of outreach gets passed on.*

1 Timothy 5:1–2; Titus 2:1–8

**The Case** When the new pastor came, the church was 13 years old, and the attendance had hit a plateau. Mostly late-middle-aged adults, whose children were grown and gone, filled the sanctuary on Sunday morning. During the next 15 years, newcomers to the church tended to come from the generation of the pastor—the baby boomer generation. The church seemed to have made the transition from one generation to the next.

But after the pastor had been there for 15 years, the median age of church attenders began to increase yearly. Few adults under 35 attended the church. Without a new infusion of youth, the church was, in essence, a generation away from serious decline. The pastor also realized his natural ability to speak to the younger generation was waning. The church faced a fork in the road: While things looked mostly rosy at the moment, the long-term health of the church was threatened.

**What Would You Do?**

- ◆ Identify the hurdles a church needs to clear in order to attract younger adults.
- ◆ How does a church hand off its values and leadership to the next generation?

**What Happened** Since the church was already fully into its second generation, the church leaders committed to making it a four-generation church. The immediate goal was to reach the young-adult community. The next was to develop and implement a plan for handing off the church's values and leadership to each subsequent generation.

After two years, the church hired a younger co-pastor. He was responsible for reaching younger adults and assimilating them into the church. A strategically formatted worship service for younger adults was implemented, with both pastors sharing the preaching load. The younger co-pastor also preached in the traditional service. Elements of the younger-adult worship service were intentionally and systematically incorporated into the main morning services to transition the worship style from the older generation to the younger.

The church leaders began training other leaders about the value and responsibility of passing the torch to following generations. Some ten years later, the church seems to have successfully made the transition.

—HARRY HEINTZ served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York for 38 years.

**Discuss**

1. What are the challenges in creating an outreach-focused, multi-generational church?
2. Paul asks Timothy to respect the elderly. How does a church respect and honor older adults while creating programming that attracts younger adults?
3. Being outreach focused doesn't necessarily mean hip music in Sunday worship. So what are the indicators that show a church has truly passed the value of outreach from one generation to the next?

## Creative Programming

*Balancing outreach with relationship.*

Romans 1:16; 1 John 4:19–21

**The Case** With a growth pattern stretching over two decades, we had grown from one Sunday morning service to two, then to three. Three services allowed us to serve more people, but that came at a price: There was an implicit message (at times explicit!) to get in and get out. Our coffee hour and greeting time were lost, and the services felt too clock-driven. After the first and second services, we had to clear the sanctuary and parking lots for the next set of worshipers. After the third service, we didn't encourage conversation; we simply wanted to get home. While the second and third services were well attended, the early service remained small, though with a loyal core group.

In recent summers we had gone back to two Sunday services spaced far enough apart to allow unhurried greeting times and then added a Thursday night service targeted to those who often take summer weekend trips. But when summer ended, there was little excitement to return to the frenetic pace of the school year.

**What Would You Do?**

- ◆ Growth always comes at a price—often the price of intimacy. What options does this church have?
- ◆ How does a church balance serving more people with serving well the people who already attend?

**What Happened** In mid-summer an elder observed that we seemed to enjoy Sunday worship more. The church staff and elders looked at the numbers. We had a more even distribution of worshipers in the summer. We enjoyed the times after Sunday services to greet others in unhurried ways; we were free of the tyranny of shortening the end of a service that had gone a little longer for good reasons. And the musicians had more time to set up. But what about the Sunday service on Thursday nights? Should we do that all year? We decided to make our summer schedule our regular schedule. That allowed us to serve more people, particularly those who often work Sunday mornings or travel (whether work or leisure related), all through the year.

Today our Thursday worship is better attended than the original early Sunday service was. New people are worshiping with us because of the Thursday opening, and the two Sunday services continue to thrive.

—HARRY HEINTZ served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York for 38 years.

**Discuss**

1. Where does our church feel most the tension between reaching out and serving those already here?
2. How should we think biblically about making changes in our church structure to reach out?
3. How can we help people in the church think strategically about new ways to reach out?

## Lost People Matter

*Their value determines your intensity.*

Luke 15:8–10

**Read** *Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.” In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*  
 Luke 15:8–10

**Comprehend** When I lose my car keys or my wife loses a contact lens, “operation recovery” immediately goes into effect. I have taken apart traps in bathroom sink drains, returned to restaurants, and even dismantled our living room furniture. On the other hand, when I lose a blue sock deserving retirement anyway, I don’t fret until I find it. The value of lost items determines the intensity of my search-and-rescue efforts.

When the religious leaders of Jesus’ day criticized him for hanging out with sinners, Jesus told three stories about lost items: a lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and a lost son (Luke 15:11-32). The shepherd left 99 sheep in a secure place to search for one lost sheep. He didn’t say, “Oh well, 99 percent isn’t bad. You’re going to lose one once in a while.” The peasant woman swept the reed-covered dirt floor until she spied the lost coin. She didn’t say, “Oh well, it’s only a day’s wage.” The father checked the road for the sign of his lost son’s return. He didn’t say, “Forget him. If he’s going to be such an idiot, then I’ll pour my life into my older son.”

In each case, the value of what was lost dictated an intensive search.

Jesus is saying that the value of lost people demands an intensive search for them. Our failures to reach our communities stem more from faulty perspective than from faulty technique. Intensive searches happen only when we place a premium on the lost item. Technique usually takes care of itself when we share Jesus’ perspective.

When we bump into people during the day, how do we view them? We notice that Todd is unfriendly. The truth is, he is lost. We know that Katie grew up in Buffalo, New York. The truth is, she is lost. We think of Rob as a kind grandfather and a reliable neighbor. The truth is, he is lost.

If people are really lost, and if these lost people are valuable, then an intensive search-and-rescue mission is in order. When we value lost people as Jesus did, outreach will happen, and more people will sing, “I once was lost, but now am found, ‘twas blind, but now I see.”

—STEVEN D. MATHEWSON is pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of Libertyville, Illinois, and teaches at Denver Seminary, Western Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

- Discuss**
1. Make a list of 5-10 people in our community whose “lostness” gets overlooked because of social, economic, physical, or vocational status.
  2. What search-and-rescue steps have we taken in the past? What steps should we take now?
  3. How does our church champion the value that lost people matter to God?

## The Impartiality of God's Love

*Nothing can keep salvation at bay.*

Romans 10:8–15

**Read** *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*  
*Rom. 10:12–13*

**Comprehend** The loss was tough on the family. Rick, the younger brother, drowned in a lake in the city park at 34 years old. Someone alleged he had been drinking and that there had been an altercation. When the police tried to catch him, he inexplicably ran and dove into the lake. Divers had to retrieve his body.

Deeply saddened, the family tried to grapple with unanswerable questions: How do you explain the waste of a life that started with so much promise? How do you make sense of a Stanford University graduate in engineering, living on the city's streets?

At the memorial service, the pastor clearly presented the hope of the resurrection for all who trust in Christ. One of Rick's brothers told how Rick had found his way to the Union Gospel Mission. Someone there gave him a Bible, and he had promised to read it. He read through the entire Bible in a year, and then he read it again. He gained a new sense of his brokenness and belovedness, and the faithfulness of God.

Who knows what happened at the end of this troubled man's life? Answers don't come easy, but the apostle Paul talks about the impartiality of God's love—so powerful it overcomes estrangement between Jew and Gentile, and alienation within one's soul. About our access to that saving power of God, the apostle is emphatic: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (v. 9).

That is the hope and the message for the broken in our community. Not even our brokenness—perhaps, especially not our brokenness—can keep God's saving faithfulness at bay.

—RANDY WORKING is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Lompoc and the author of *From Rebellion to Redemption* (Navpress, 2001).

- Discuss**
1. The apostle Paul's promise—“richly blesses all who call on him”—is a big invitation. How does our church communicate God's heart for all broken people?
  2. How would you measure our church's sense of urgency about reaching the broken in our community with the gospel? High? Low? In-between?
  3. Think of one broken person in our community who needs to hear the hope of the resurrection. Spend several minutes in quiet prayer, asking God to bring you in contact with him or her.

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Your Church in a Changing Culture

*Outreach starts with knowing your culture.*

Matthew 5: 13–16; Acts 1:8

*Culture is always shifting, but changes are usually slow, almost indiscernible. You can't see exactly where your church sit in it, but it affects your leadership. To lead people to reach their community with the gospel, you have to know how it's moving. Notice how Jesus coped with the changing culture in his ministry.*

### 1. Jesus entered his culture and played to its strengths and realities.

He clothed his message in common story forms, often using agricultural analogies. He engaged people where they worked and in the ways they perceived reality. He spoke out of their history and showed respect for their institutions unless they were clearly corrupt or heretical.

### 2. Jesus went first for the hearts of people.

It was as if he was saying, “Transform hearts, and the systems will change.” It took the disciples more than three years to realize that their ministry would not be temple-based, Jerusalem-centered, and priest-oriented. It would mean ministry in the streets by simple, Spirit-filled people speaking the gospel and doing great acts of loving service.

### 3. Jesus started small.

While he paid respect to the center of Hebrew culture (Jerusalem and the Temple), Jesus drew his core followers from the edges of society—younger, marginalized, and needy people hungry for change. Then he let the weight of what he had accomplished in them slowly overwhelm the institutions and hierarchies. He avoided the temptation to go for the “home-run ball” and settled for the “singles and doubles” of leadership development. Fifty years later, the world was being transformed.

### 4. Jesus gave people a dream—a new kingdom.

With the dream came the promise of power, the assurance that he would never leave them impotent, that he would return. That promise became so strong in their souls that they were willing to risk their lives. What culture-bound churches need is an all-consuming dream that makes people look forward not backward.

—GORDON MACDONALD is chancellor of Denver Seminary and editor-at-large for *Leadership Journal*.

## Discuss

1. Who are the marginalized, unreached people in our community? How does our church reach out to them?
2. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises the disciples power to be his witnesses. How have we seen God's power enable us to witness to our community?
3. How do our programs engage people where they work and in the ways they perceive reality?

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Reaching Through Teaching

*Connect with a post-Christian audience.*

Romans 10:14

*How will you reach people once they're through your door? Consider how your preaching and teaching connects with a post-Christian audience.*

In seminary I was taught that excellent preaching always started with the biblical text (preferably one chosen from among the four Lectionary texts assigned for a given week). I was to exegete the text, apply it to my hearers' lives, and then illustrate it. The process looks something like this:

Biblical text → Exegesis → Application → Illustration

This is excellent biblical preaching. But it also assumes that your hearers are interested in what the Bible has to say and that it has authority for their lives. This is a fair assumption for Christians. But in our increasingly post-Christian culture, many people are not so interested in what the Bible says, nor are they convinced that it should carry any authority for their lives.

So at least some of our preaching must have a different starting point.

In half of my sermon series each year, we start not with the biblical text, but with the human condition. What are the issues, struggles, or questions people are wrestling with? We then “exegete” these issues, and then ask how the Bible addresses them. We apply the biblical text, explain it and how it addresses the issue. Then we illustrate. This kind of preaching looks something like this:

Human condition → Exegesis → Apply biblical teaching → Illustrate

Here's an example from a sermon series I preached: The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins and Letter to a Christian Nation by Sam Harris had been on the bestseller lists for months. On Christmas Eve at our candlelight services (when our congregation nearly triples in size, largely with unchurched people) we announced a series entitled “Conversations with an Atheist.” We told the holiday attenders, “We will address the questions raised by Dawkins and Harris about the Bible, violence and religion, science and religion, and the problem of evil.” Each sermon began with the problem and ended with the biblical solution. Worship attendance in the following weeks increased by more than 30 percent.

Today about half my sermons begin with the human condition, and the other half begin with the Scripture text. Our congregation has come to expect it.

And they contribute to the planning. Every summer before I go away for my sermon planning retreat, I send an email to our entire church, inviting them to let me know what they are struggling with, questions about faith, questions their non-Christian friends are asking, and what they wish they could hear a sermon about. The response is tremendous; I receive decades' worth of sermon ideas! And the congregation enjoys being included in the process.

When sermons start where people live—their questions, struggles, and concerns—and then offer a timely and helpful word from the Scriptures, people are more interested in hearing what else the Scriptures have to say.

In that way, the one form of preaching leads to the other. I believe both are essential for creating healthy congregations that are serious about reaching non-religious people.

—ADAM HAMILTON is senior pastor of United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, and author of *Unleashing the Word* (Abingdon, 2009).

### Discuss

1. Which form of preaching do we tend to emphasize in our church or ministry?
2. What are the beliefs and values we are assuming in our intended audience?
3. Do we agree that both types of preaching are essential to a healthy church? Why, or why not?

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

### Ready Answer

*What to say when opportunity knocks.*

Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15

*Jesus is not merely a nice addition to complete an otherwise fulfilling life. He is essential to all life. Without him, our neighbors are utterly lost. This activity can help motivate and prepare your team to reach your community for Christ.*

**1. Preparation:** Distribute sheets of paper to each person. Have each take five minutes to respond to these questions:

- (1) What are the benefits—present or future—that being a follower of Christ affords you? List as many as you can. Try to identify Scripture references for each.
- (2) Respond to this situation: You are reading your Bible at a local coffee shop, and someone comes up to you and says, “Excuse me, but I notice you have a Bible. I’ve always wondered, ‘What is a Christian, and how does a person become one?’” Write your response.
- (3) What are the possible outcomes if you tell this person about Jesus? What should you do next?

**2. Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Ask each group to discuss their answers to questions two and three. Also, have one person in each group list all the answers they came up with for question one.

**3. Brainstorm:** Gather once again as a large group. Discuss question one—“What are the benefits that being a follower of Christ affords you?”—and record the responses on a blackboard, flip chart, or Dry-Erase® board. Have the group discuss their answers to question two. Then brainstorm some answers to:

- ◆ How are the benefits God gives us the basis for reaching out?
- ◆ What are some specific needs of people in our community?
- ◆ Which needs should our church help meet? (Note the answers on the blackboard or flip chart, and then record ideas for ways to meet these needs.)
- ◆ What is the first step in meeting the needs?

**4. Pray:** Spend 10-15 minutes in various kinds of prayer—quiet reflection or sentence prayers—asking God to renew each person’s passion to reach out. Also pray that God would raise up leaders for outreach ministries to proclaim God’s love in physical, tangible ways to your community.

—RANDY WORKING is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Lompoc and the author of *From Rebellion to Redemption* (Navpress, 2001).



## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Meet Your Church's Match

*Identifying neighbors to love.*

Luke 10: 29, 36–37; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

*Churches effective in outreach connect with the cultural, economic, and social aspects of their communities. This exercise will help your team identify connection points in your community and match community needs with church strengths.*

### 1. Identify

- ◆ *Understand your neighborhood.* On a map of your local community, draw a circle with your church at the center. If your church is located in a densely populated area, draw only a three- or five-mile radius. If you're in a rural setting, use an approximate average driving distance of your current membership to establish the circumference.
- ◆ *Identify various niches or sub-populations within your community.* You may want to list these on a flip chart or overhead. Niches may include: a) neighborhoods (subdivisions, mobile home parks, apartment complexes, senior citizen condominiums, etc.), b) institutions (schools, community centers, government facilities, nursing homes, jails), and c) businesses (factories, office buildings, retail areas).
- ◆ *Understand your church.* First, identify subgroups within the church: a) Sunday school classes, for example, b) age-related groups (seniors, young marrieds), c) interest groups (parenting, finances), d) small groups, and e) ministries within the church (children, youth, singles, choir).

Second, identify key events the church sponsors: Christmas program, Fourth of July celebration, marriage retreats, financial seminars, etc.

### 2. Match

On a large piece of paper or overhead, list your community niches in one column and subgroups or events the other. Then draw lines (like the matching exercises on tests when you were in primary school!) to connect those with the greatest affinity.

For instance, a seniors center near your church may most likely respond to the Fourth of July celebration, or your children's ministry may best reach the neighborhood elementary school. The singles ministry may be the best group to reach out to the apartment complexes. Identify several matches between your community and congregation.

### 3. Strategize

Now, think of how you could motivate your subgroups to adopt a segment of the community and then strategize to reach it. For example, leaders in your children's ministry may survey the principal and teachers in the elementary school about the greatest needs of children. Singles in your church may do a "prayer walk" through an apartment complex.

—WAYNE SCHMIDT is Vice President of Wesley Seminary at IWU and former pastor of Kentwood Community Church in Kentwood, Michigan, where he served for over 30 years.

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

### Further Exploration

*7 great picks on outreach and evangelism.*

**1. Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them** (*Tyndale Momentum*) by *George Barna and David Kinnaman*

Barna and Kinnaman analyze the results of a 5-year study based on interviews with thousands of religiously unaffiliated yet spiritually curious adults.

**2. Dispatches from the Front** (*Duke University Press*) by *Stanley M. Hauerwas*.

A blunt book about the postmodern culture and how Christians should respond.

**3. Foolishness to the Greeks** (*Eerdmans*) by *Lesslie Newbigin*

From a long-time missionary to India, this book addresses critical issues facing those who want to reach out with the gospel to modern culture.

**4. Love Without Walls: Learning to be a Church in the World, for the World** (*Zondervan*) by *Laurie Beshore*

This book will equip outreach ministries to spread the message of Christ and help every Christian more faithfully live out the great commission in their daily lives.

**5. How to Give Away Your Faith** (*InterVarsity Press*) by *Paul Little*

A classic on personal evangelism.

**6. The Rise of the Nones** (*Baker Books*) by *James Emery White*

In this hard-hitting examination of our churches' current evangelism methods, which often result only in transfer growth—Christians moving from one church to another—rather than in reaching the nones, James Emery White calls us to discover the mission field right outside our doors.

**7. Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith and How to Bring Them Back** (*Moody*) by *Drew Dyck*

The book identifies seven different kinds of leavers (the postmodern skeptic, the drifter, the neopagan, etc.) and offer practical advice for how to connect with each type.

## REACHING OUR COMMUNITY

# Sample Retreat Schedule

*How to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at a weekend retreat.*

*Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the Reaching Our Community theme. The purpose of this retreat is to give ministry leaders tools to understand the community in which your church resides and to begin to develop vision and strategy for reaching the people closest to you—your community.*

### Friday Evening

- ◆ 8–8:45 p.m. Opening Devotional: Begin the weekend with “Lost People Matter,” a devotional on page 11, to help leaders consider their motivation for evangelism and ministry to those outside the church. Either photocopy and pass out the devotional or use the handout as your notes for the opening talk.
- ◆ 9–9:45 p.m. Break-Out Session: Conduct the activity on page 15, “Ready Answer,” following the instructions in the handout.

### Saturday Morning

- ◆ 9–10:15 a.m. Opening Break-Out Session: Begin by giving your team an overview of the day: The morning sessions will lay a foundation for the afternoon. Then break up into groups of two or three to discuss the assessment on page 6, “7 Ways to Rate Your Church.” Reconvene to discuss your answers to the discussion questions.
- ◆ 10:15–10:30 a.m. Break.
- ◆ 10:30–noon. Group Discussion: Guide your team through the how-to handout on page 13, “Your Church in a Changing Culture.” Focus the discussion on ways your church can enter your local culture as Jesus did.
- ◆ noon—Lunch.

### Saturday Afternoon

- ◆ 1–2:30 p.m. Break-Out Session: Hand out the activity on page 16, “Meet Your Church’s Match.” This is designed to help your leaders match ministry groups with unreached groups in your community. Break up into teams of three or four for the initial discussion and then reconvene to hear the ideas of the others. Come up with one or two action steps as a result of the discussion.
- ◆ 2:30–2:45 p.m. Break.
- ◆ 2:45–4:15 p.m. Group Discussion: Handout the assessment on page 7, “Religion-less Spirituality.” After your team has read it, lead a discussion about the nature of the gospel and how to communicate it to people who have no experience with religious jargon.

Close the weekend by challenging your team or board members to view those in your community as God sees them—as lost people who matter. You may want to create an action plan to take steps to become more outreach focused.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.