

Connecting to the Community through Caring and Kindness

All effective evangelism and outreach begins with caring and kindness. As believers, we are here to help people along the journey, to point them in the right direction. But in the end, it is what God can do for them that really makes the difference. People will come to love God and accept Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit which draws them. John says this in his gospel account: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*” (John 6:44). The outcome of any evangelism encounter is not our responsibility, nor is it the result of our efforts only. The true evangelist is the Holy Spirit. It is our job to present the story in words as well as deeds of action and kindness.

Thus, evangelism becomes not only something we do, but also a way of life. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, “*Ye shall be witnesses unto me.*” Notice the emphasis is on “being” rather than “doing.” Bible scholars tell us that the words of the Great Commission are not just “go ye” but the meaning of the verb “go” literally means “going” or “as you go into the world.” I believe the way others see us living out our Christian life can lead to effective evangelism opportunities. In his book “*Witness is Withness*” author David Augsburg says “*You are being heard, not just your words.*” Who we are and what we say really matters.

In his book *The Unchurched Next Door* author Thom Rainer says, “*Eighty-two percent of the unchurched are at least ‘somewhat likely’ to attend church if they are invited.*” Just think of it! If we care enough about people just to befriend them and invite them to church the majority of them would accept the invitation. Statistics from *Church Dynamics* indicate that about 160 million Americans say, “I do not have a born-again experience.” If Rainer’s research figures are anywhere near accurate, if believers just *invited* people to church 130 million unchurched people would be willing to come to church with us.

Connect through caring

With families:

- Create a church-sponsored family-support center providing childcare, family social activities, and parent counseling
- Offer church-sponsored family retreats or trips for families in the near vicinity of the church.
- Provide Parents' Morning Out programs one morning during the week where the church members offer baby-sitting services.
- Offer marriage-maintenance classes to members of the congregation and to the community.
- Provide parenting programs to current parents and to young people - especially boys and young men - before they become parents.
- Create a family-to-family missions, or family clusters of six to ten families. Parents can adopt fellow parents as sisters and brothers; children can adopt each other as cousins.
- Reach out to parents and children beyond your neighborhoods by teaming up with suburban or inner-city congregations to sponsor programs for abused and runaway children, the homeless, and other families in need.
- Offer childcare and preschool programs of improved quality. Provide community leadership in creating public-private consortiums that open new child-care centers and create loan and investment funds for childcare.

- Offer mentoring and tutoring programs - especially for at-risk children facing stiffened promotion standards. Also, create community help centers for parents and children who need help with the college application process.
- Sponsor teen centers and after-school programs.
- Enlist older members of the congregation to share their talents and services with young parents and children.
- Host "alternative gift fairs" that focus on the needs of children in the wider community.

In the community:

- Celebrate the community with special worship services dedicated to a specific branch of government or civic affairs. Examples are "Law Enforcement Day" or "Government Officials Day." Invite members of these groups to the church and give special recognition to them for their work.
- Partner with businesses and financial institutions to offer free financial seminars at the church.
- Get involved in local community action programs such as clean-up campaigns, walk-a-thons etc.
- Open up the church to the community by offering the gymnasium and other church facilities.
- Sponsor local sports teams.
- Encourage individual members to join local service clubs.
- Host a "We love Our Local Businesses" church service, booth display and luncheon. Use a morning worship service to celebrate the local business owners in the church community. Introduce them in the service and allow them to set up a small display of their business in an appropriate room in the church. Provide a lunch for everyone and then allow church members to visit each display booth and learn about the services offered.
- Demonstrate a volunteer spirit. Get involved by becoming active in the P.T.A. Become a volunteer teachers' aid, help in a boys or girls club program or help with meals-on-wheels.
- Enlist Sunday school classes to participate in regular outreach ministry to the community.

At work:

- Pray for your co-workers by name.
- Invite them out for lunch, dinner, coffee, sporting events, plays, etc. Do things together.
- Invite an individual or couple for dinner to provide an opportunity to relate personally.
- Remember special days of your business associates: birthdays, weddings, sickness, and births. Send cards or e-mails, make telephone calls, or drop by.
- Become active in your business athletic teams.
- Participate with associates in regular sporting events such as racquetball, tennis or golf.
- Seek out other Christian co-workers and form a small group to plan a function that would help reach an unsaved or unchurched employee.
- Use the principle of "high grace" and "low pressure."

At home:

- Host a block party. It could have a seasonal theme such as Halloween, or Christmas, or simply a birthday party. It would include food, games and sharing times.

- Have a dinner. It could be an invitation to the entire neighborhood (within reason allowing space) or a “progressive” dinner limited to a few select families.
- Have a picnic. It might be a backyard barbeque or some “outdoor” type food and setting such as a family campout.
- Sponsor a special neighborhood event such as a golf tournament, tennis match or softball game.
- Open your home for “coffee fellowships” or “tea time” for the ladies.
- Open your yard to neighborhood kids.
- Form a neighborhood food co-op.
- Prepare and personally deliver a nice meal to a new neighbor.
- Take note of special occasions in your neighborhood such as weddings, graduations or military honors.

The basic rule to remember is to get plugged into *people*, not plans, programs or words.

Connect through kindness

Kindness evangelism is a simple, straightforward approach to sharing God’s love in simple, practical ways. It speaks to a person’s heart first rather than to his head (a gospel presentation).

Servant Evangelism is effective because it is

- quick
- high volume
- done in teams
- culture-current
- gives the Holy Spirit an open door to convict those we are leading to Christ
- allows shy people to launch into effective evangelism
- an approach families can do together
- easily picked up by new Christians
- simple
- friendly non-pushy, non-aggressive
- appeals to every segment of our cities
- emotionally safe
- giving-centered rather than asking-centered
- provides a safe place for ambitious people to expend their energy
- provides an open door for the miraculous—if God so moves
- big fun!

What are the long-term results of doing Kindness Evangelism?

The church will become oriented toward action. The church is in continual need of redefining. It seems clear that the church in America is living in an age of great inwardness. In light of this inward focus, we need to ask the question, "Why does the church exist?" We certainly exist to worship God and to grow in wholeness and Christlikeness, but Jesus made it clear that we must also give of ourselves if we hope to keep growing. The Great Commission links God's special presence to the action of the church going into the world. God is with us in an immediate sense as we carry His life into the world.

In addition, the church will be redefined to the surrounding community. The church in general has taken a lot of blows over the last few years, especially in the wake of scandals

involving sex and money. The world has falsely pictured the entire church as beggars always on the verge of going out of business. The perception of the unsaved is that “the church is just out for my money.” The third picture the watching world has of the church is that of a monastery whose residents have only one message, “Come in and join us.”

As we begin to do acts of kindness in the community, we will restate our identity: to show forgiveness, acceptance, and love from God. New definitions are slow to catch on, but hard work will get their attention. We become viable in the eyes of the world as we get beyond ourselves and serve our way into their hearts. In an age when the church has been judged by the world as being irrelevant and out of touch with people's very real needs and pains, we prove ourselves worthy of trust.

Another great benefit of an outreach through is that the community will be blessed with the presence of these deeds of kindness. When you begin to consider the long-term effects of this approach with teams doing many acts of kindness it causes the people in the community to take notice and opens the door for your church to reach out to them.

There is a simple equation for this type of outreach: Kindness evangelism = deeds of love + words of love + adequate time. Good deeds create “phone wires” for transmitting the spoken message. Believers should be the good news before they speak the good news

Sample Kindness Ideas

- Cut flowers from your garden and give them to someone
- Send a card of appreciation to someone
- Cook a meal for someone coming home from the hospital
- Give a gift to the trash men
- Clip coupons and give them away
- Give food coupons to homeless people
- Cook supper for a neighbor
- Help a friend move
- Sweep your neighbor's walk/driveway
- Learn to say “God Loves You” in Spanish
- Help someone carry their groceries
- Mow your neighbor's lawn
- Visit someone in the nursing home
- Pick up trash in the park or public area
- Rake your neighbor's lawn
- Pay for the person behind you in the McDonald's drive-thru
- Buy someone a coffee at Starbucks
- Buy an extra bag of groceries for the food pantry
- Listen to someone
- Write a letter or make a phone call to someone you like (or don't like!)