



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Cor. 13:14.

Evangelism is the focus of Purpose Driven Life this week. Of course this raises the obvious question, "What is evangelism?" D.T. Niles, the Indian evangelist once said, "evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food?" Evangelism is sharing the good news of the gospel with someone else, the word for gospel is the root of evangelism, it is the Greek word "euangelion," later translated into English as evangel. Evangelism is the action of sharing the evangel, the good news, the gospel.

David Luecke in his book Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance recites the story of Andrew in John 1:40-49, where he leads his brother Peter to Jesus. Luecke comments that this story introduces evangelism at its exciting best. One person encounters Jesus and recognizes him as the Savior. That person immediately shares the Good News with another, who then accepts the invitation to check out the discovery. This person, too sees Jesus as the Son of God and comes to faith. The circle widens. Luecke writes that this sequence has happened millions of times since. The first call to follow has been shared and repeated through the centuries until the circle has widened into the entire world.

Not by accident the predecessor church in which I was raised was named the "Evangelical Lutheran Church." Not by accident the current denomination to which we belong is named "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." This implies that evangelism is at the heart of our mission, it is even found in our name. An interesting fact, at least to Pastor Mike and myself, is that my father was director of evangelism in the old ELC and then American Lutheran Church for many years, one of his successors was Mike's Dad. Small world. This might help to explain why both of us have pastored congregations with a strong focus on evangelism.

But we must also recognize that evangelism strategies continue to shift, as the world changes around us. The mass evangelism rallies of Billy Graham and others in the past have given way to television and as well as more personal ways of sharing the Gospel. Going door to door sharing the good news has become increasingly problematic today as people are far more guarded about receiving strangers, and as more and more housing is protected by security features. Evangelistic phone calls risk being caught up in the current disdain against telemar-

keting. So how do we best do evangelism?

One of the best books today outlining a new strategy for evangelism is one by George Hunter entitled How To Reach Secular People. (By the way the first time I met Pastor Mike was at a senior pastors' conference where the keynote speaker was none other than Dr. Hunter.) Hunter specifically talks about how a congregation today can do evangelism, both corporately and also as individual members and believers. I will condense some of his suggestions.

1. A church can provide ministries of instruction. Secular people are largely ignorant of Christianity today, unlike a generation ago, so instruction becomes crucial. (This is why Alpha is so incredibly popular, it answers very basic questions about Christianity and Jesus Christ.) I was pleased that Hope offered some instruction after the movie "The Passion". I wish that everyone who saw the movie could have had some instruction before and after, because for many people who had no context it might have appeared only as random violence. The best churches offer many opportunities for learning.
2. An evangelistic church invites people to dedicate their lives to Christ. Pastor Mike is especially effective in this regard. So many pastors and churches try to help people continue something they have not yet begun. The average secular person needs to be told how to make Christian experience a fact instead of an aspiration.
3. A church helps secular people find meaning. Most people in this world are much less concerned with life after death than they are with life this side of death. So the church needs to help people make sense of their lives right now, find meaning and purpose. Hope has been very effective in helping people connect faith and life.
4. A church engages secular people in dialogue. Traditionally most churches have relied on authoritative preaching to reach the unchurched, but most secular people experience such preaching as authoritarian. Speakers today who get a hearing engage people in conversation, who are communicators rather than commentators. They are more likely to quote some living person rather than some

- dead historian, or use a clip from a movie or video, all of this to address real doubts and questions.
5. A church provides opportunities to meet credible Christians. Since credibility of Christians is crucial for secular people, a church becomes this forum. Christianity is more caught than taught. Social occasions must be created where seekers can meet such credible Christians, study their faces, ask questions and be in their company.
 6. A church provides opportunities to overcome alienations. So many people today have multiple alienations, from nature, from neighbors, from family, from economic or political powers, and sometimes even from themselves. The key to modern day agnostics is fellowship, koinonia, or as we say at Hope, "getting connected." So many people are lonely, or as Kennon Callahan says, "people come to the church to find community, not committees."
 7. A church provides ministries of affirmation. Christians should never insult, demean or project an aura of spiritual superiority. Non-trusting secular people will need a strong dose of positive affirmation before they will be willing to listen and hear and comprehend the reality of saving grace.
 8. A church can help people discover their dignity and self-worth. People need to hear again and again that they are created in the image of God, crowned with glory and honor. "God didn't make any junk," as one author says it. The church can be a new family for people searching for their true identity. Especially in small groups we discover people who love us, who call forth our gifts, who give us a new name, who help us find who we are and whose we are.
 9. A church can offer hope in the kingdom of God. (Lutheran Church of Hope can offer hope, sounds like what we should be about.) If many secular people see history as out of control and fear the future, the Christian teaching about the Kingdom of God, with its promise of Christ's coming with a new heaven and earth is revelation that needs to be shared. Christ is still in charge of the universe and will bring it to conclusion and fulfill his promises and purposes.
 10. A church can provide groups and support for people with addictions. We live in an addicted society, seems like just about everyone is addicted to something. Hunter says that the 12-step movement is the "underground revival of the past decade." More people are experiencing the grace of God in 12 step programs than all of the evangelism programs combined. Addictions are ubiquitous; food, alcohol, sex, television, money, pleasure, etc. The church can provide alternatives to these addictions.
 11. A church can identify and welcome receptive people.

- Secular people often experience receptive periods in their lives, when they are dissatisfied with the status quo, or when the grace of God seems to be moving in their souls, or when they are open to something else, or when they hit bottom. Churches should pray to be led to people whom God is preparing.
12. A church can reach across social networks. Secular people are best reached not by mass rallies but across kinship and friendship networks, which become the "bridges of God." Churches can coach their members to reach unchurched people in their social networks of relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, where they will find many of them far more receptive than we might guess.
 13. A church should provide culturally appropriate forms of ministry. Secular people are reached much more effectively through people, language, liturgy, music, architecture, needs, struggles, issues, leaders and leadership styles that are indigenous to their culture. Too often seekers have experienced church buildings, liturgies, stained glass windows, ancient music, and other forms as obsolete or intimidating. When secular people experience church as culturally alien to themselves, they often assume that the Christian faith is not for them. Where the forms are alien to the host culture, the church is dead and largely failing, says Hunter.
 14. A church needs to multiply units within. New classes, new groups, new choirs, new congregations will disciple more secular people than old units. Seekers are much more interesting in getting in on the start of something than in joining established groups. (Thus the huge response to Purpose Driven Life.) Most new believers join new churches, not old ones.
 15. A church offers ministries that meets needs. Secular people are more reachable through ministries that engage their struggles, felt needs and driving motives. By ministering to a range of human needs a church demonstrates Christianity's relevance. Very often contact is made with a church through ministries that meet a specific need.

As Rick Warren says, "The Great Commission is our commission." Jesus says to his followers, "Go everywhere in the world and tell the Good News to everyone." Lutheran congregations need to be centered around the calling of being evangelists, and each member is to be an evangelist. Blessings to you as you carry out this calling in one or more of the ways listed above.