

Mission Moments – March 23, 2007
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From the Center for U.S. Missions
Following Jesus into the U.S. Mission Field
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Anchored to the Rock--Geared to the Times
by Michelle Connor

The catchy phrase that titles this article came from a recent evangelism conference, and was used by Youth for Christ when Billy Graham was working with them. It's a reminder that in evangelism, the content of the Gospel will never change. Yet our methods will change as the culture changes.

This challenge to connect an unchanging message with an ever-changing culture is daunting. Making it personal, how do I reach my non-believing friends and relatives, people who are immersed in today's culture? The conference helped me clarify some basics.

We first need to recognize what is actually going on around us in today's culture. It's painfully obvious we've moved to a post-Christian era in which the church is no longer a key player in the culture and, in fact, is mostly ignored and often mocked. This reality makes it even more important that we remain faithful to God and find new methods of reaching the lost with the Gospel!

To reach the lost, we must meet them on their terms. Think of it as fishing. When you go fishing you do not wait for the fish to come to you. No! You go where the fish are. Better yet, think of how Jesus did it in his ministry. He was always meeting people where they were, hanging out with tax-collectors and prostitutes. He did not make them come to him at the synagogue.

To meet people on their terms, we need to know what non-believing people need. One need is dialogue. They do not want to be preached at. They desire a safe place where they can be heard and respected and can ask questions of faith that matter to them. They want us to be authentic and our actions to match what we say. As Christians, we often do not realize that many non-believers do not have a problem with the real Jesus when they get to know Him. Most of their problems have to do with the church and us.

One of the greatest needs of non-believers is community. How great would it be if the church could be their answer for community! Perhaps it would be more likely to happen if we welcomed them in and let them belong, in some sense, before they believed, if we had small groups made up of mostly non-believers, if we provided a place where they could dialogue about their questions of faith.

As both prayer and challenge, if you have a heart for the lost, may you ignite that same passion in your local church and work strategically to reach the people that God also loves!

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10

Michelle Connor serves as the Center's Coordinator.

Moment Extras

Questions for Reflection

1. Where does your church meet non-believers?
2. What entry points exist for non-believers in your church?
3. How does your church intentionally connect to non-believers who worship with you or are touched by one or more of your ministries? Who effective has your church been in connecting? Hint: If they aren't sticking around what you're doing isn't effective.
4. Can people belong to your church before they believe? If so, in what ministries do they connect before believing? If not, what ministries might you initiate or retool to help people connect?
5. What steps does your church take to move people from belonging to believing?
6. What is one thing you will do to help your church be a welcoming place where non-believers can belong so that they may come to believe?

Quote

“Whether we like it or not, or whether or not it seems "fair" to us, the default religion on the mission field most of us find ourselves working on is "Western Style Christianity." While it has certainly proven to be helpful to many of us it also has made our work of finding missing people and helping them connect with Jesus quite challenging at times. In marketing lingo, we often experience "Brand Blur." In other words, when we say "Christian" the customer often pictures something quite different from what we are trying to say. But since "perception is reality" (at least in the mind of the customer) there is no use trying to educate them out of their illusion. We have to create experiences that will move them from one state of mind into another. Stories create an emotional experience that catch people off guard and enable them to identify with the person who is either telling the story or who is the subject of the story.”

From *First They Belong, Then They Believe*

Links

How to Get Your First-Time Guests to Come Back

By Rick Ezell

http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/lwc_cda_article/0,1643,A%253D162588%2526X%253D1%2526M%253D50088,00.html

(or www.lifeway.com/lwc > Ministry > pastor > as missionary > see title under "Also" near bottom of page)

First They Belong, Then They Believe (PDF)

By Robert and Denese Hall

http://www.newchurches.com/public/church_types/docs/house/first.pdf

News from the Center

Seminars coming up soon! See www.centerforusmissions.org for details.

- LINC Summit on urban ministry networks, Wed-Fri May 16-18, 2007, Houston, Texas
- Sharing Christ in the City, Fri-Sat April 13-14, 2007, Gary, Indiana

New! On the Edge: Training for Missional Leaders Summit encompasses a variety of trainings all offered Mon-Fri July 23-27, 2007, in Irvine, California. Joining our long-standing Basic Mission Planters Training that week is the new Advanced Mission Planter Training, plus a Behavioral Interviewing training, and another new training on Missional Coaching. Information on Basic Mission Planters Training and Behavioral Interviewing is on our website; details on the new trainings will be available soon.

Mission Moments, a biweekly electronic newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions, brings information and encouragement to all who desire to share the God's great love in Jesus Christ with others. The Center for U.S. Missions provides research and training for mission work among unevangelized people in the United States. A partnership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod World Missions, Concordia University in Irvine, California, and the North America Mission Executives of the LCMS, the Center serves all Christian denominations.

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