

## Unique Aspects of “Big City” Evangelism by Mike Ruhl

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Peering out the window of an Airbus A320, I gaze down at Phoenix, Arizona, with mile after mile of homes, neighborhoods and bustling commerce complexes. Phoenix is in the fastest-growing county in the U.S. by actual number of residents. The countless red and gray rooftops are an exciting reminder of the enormous fertility of urban/metropolitan mission fields in our big cities. At least three aspects of “big city evangelism” make it unique.

**1. Population Density.** In big cities, hundreds of thousands of people live in close proximity. Living close together, people get their understanding of other people, cultures and their messages (the gospel included) directly from personal observation, rather than mass media. The secular city comes to its understanding of Christians by the same personal observations. As Christians move into increasingly-crowded sites, they proclaim the gospel also through their lives, manners and morals, in an “instant” fashion. Pulpits are augmented by relevant, sanctified lifestyles which communicate Gospel truth in authentic fashion.

**2. Human Diversity.** Big cities are diverse in race, ethnicity, language, economics, and, of course, religion (spirituality). How can people be convinced of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and teachings when so many attractive (and potentially deceptive) options exist? Remember that while Christ’s appeal went first to the Jews of his day, it went far beyond any one ethnic, religious or social group. After his resurrection, the apostles and others took the Gospel to Greeks, Romans, Africans and Asians; to the lowest slaves and the most powerful rulers. The Gospel was, and remains, for all people.

Remember also that only a relatively small portion of those who heard the Gospel received it as truth for their lives. The intelligentsia of Athens could not bring themselves to believe in a God who lived, died and rose again. While the Apostle Paul had greater “success” in evangelizing “lower classes of people,” these communities too had issues of hypocrisy, infighting and unbelief. Evangelism will continue to be a significant challenge in diverse American cities. For effectiveness’ sake, we should use all the tools at our disposal to proclaim a faithful Gospel: multilingual services, ethnic music and meals, and a deeper understanding of the social conditions so necessary for under girding a person to repent, confess and believe.

**3. Urban Media.** Big city evangelism is deeply impacted by the urban media. Some churches earn the labels of “shepherds” and “stewards,” while others are labeled as “proselytizers.” Authentic urban evangelism must “stay its biblical course,” and not weaken the witness by uttering a politically-correct sounding Gospel. City congregations simply need to evangelize as though television cameras were following every move. For if the message is “good” enough to draw attention on the evening news, certainly it will draw attention on the sidewalks and streets of our neighborhoods.

The future of “big city evangelism” will not unfold in the privacy of club-style churches or safe home environments. Cities, where large numbers of diverse people live their lives in public ways, are a contentious and exciting public forum for competing ideas and philosophies. Authentic Christians do have a heavenly mandate to speak what they believe. The city church has such

strong, saving words, coupled with loving actions and integrity. And that evangelism strategy will always speak convincingly to urban communities of America. ■

*Adapted from an article by Roger Johnson on CityVoices.com.*