

Targeted Evangelism by Kevin Wilson

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With about 90 worshippers gathering on weekends, St. John's Lutheran Church in Secor, Illinois, was like the majority of Lutheran churches in the mid-1990s. But about that time, church members realized their town of 250 residents had become a bedroom community for young families, according to Rev. John Schmidt, former pastor at St. John's. The congregation developed "a desire to reach the hearts of the children, to provide the opportunity for Christian learning," said Rev. Schmidt. St. John's chose to open a preschool to attract the young families and teach them the Christian faith. The first year the preschool drew about five children. However, the second year 25 children were enrolled. Targeted Evangelism was a success in rural Illinois.

Targeted Evangelism is intentionally connecting a specific group of non- church members to Jesus as part of the congregation's ministry. The targeted group can range from non- Christians who practice false religions to unchurched Christians who formerly participated in churches. The key factor is that the targeted group learns about Jesus.

Targeted Evangelism is often more effective than broad-based outreach because the church customizes the outreach effort. Leaders know exactly who the church is trying to reach, so the results are more measurable than in mass advertising. The ability to identify how God is working through the efforts translates into better stewardship of resources.

There are five basic steps to Targeted Evangelism.

1. Pray for the entire Targeted Evangelism effort throughout the process. The starting point for Targeted Evangelism is prayer. Utilize every avenue for prayer available to the congregation, from worship services to prayer chains to small groups. The Targeted Evangelism team is tasked with providing weekly prayer petitions and praises.

2. Form a team to implement the Targeted Evangelism effort. The key term in forming Targeted Evangelism teams is "shared." Look for people with *shared experiences*. People with like experiences often have a passion for reaching other people like themselves. Search for people with a *shared heart* for the lost. Members of diverse backgrounds can rally around this shared cause. Finally, find people with *shared responsibility* for outreach. A Board of Evangelism has authority to do such work.

3. Discern which groups to evangelize. Discernment starts by looking inside the congregation. Members with shared life experiences are the best place to start. For example, former Mormons are often drawn to seek ways to reach people who still are Mormon. The Targeted Evangelism team can survey the congregation, seeking referrals to unchurched community groups. The team also can seek discernment through sources outside the congregation, ranging from demographic studies to news publications to specialty stores in a neighborhood.

4. Develop the plan for reaching the targeted group. Many outreach efforts by congregations are basically "beacons." Signs on church property and newspaper ads "draw" the community to the church building. This rarely is effective in Targeted Evangelism. The group being reached is relatively small and unique and not looking for a church home. For this reason, Targeted

Evangelism plans include “bridges” to the targeted group. The team or church members “go” to the people the church wants to reach, then personally walk them into the life of the congregation.

5. Build on Targeted Evangelism successes quickly. When God causes people to come to Christ through Targeted Evangelism, He opens a brief window for new Targeted Evangelism efforts. God has provided the congregation with momentum. Wise church leaders will quickly call for more people to join the cause of Christ through Targeted Evangelism, especially those who were recently reached. In this way Targeted Evangelism is expanded. ■

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