



READY RESOURCES

A Publication of the Memphis Conference Connectional Ministries Office

EVANGEL: GOOD NEWS

The Greek word from which we derive “evangelism” is “evangel” meaning “good news.” Yet, today, when we hear “evangelism,” is that good news or bad news? We may think of a revival service, perhaps in the distant past, where an altar call was given. Sometimes, our mind conjures up images of a “TV Evangelist” in a silky suit, begging for money. Other times we think of pushy doorbell ringers or people on the street who approach and ask questions about eternal destination. Unfortunately, these expressions of “evangelism” often produce a negative, distorted view of what communicating the good news or “gospel” of Jesus Christ is all about. So, let’s look at Jesus.

For Jesus, sharing the gospel, or “good news” started with who he was before it became what he did. The same is true for us. “Who” precedes “what” in authentic evangelism. “Being” precedes “doing.” Evangelism is not an isolated or compartmentalized “program” in the local church. Authentic evangelism is the sum total of who we are and how we communicate the gospel. It is our witness, in word and deed, to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Just as Jesus embodied the gospel of the “Kingdom of God,” we are called to the same being and doing that points people to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

AUTHENTIC EVANGELISM IS THE SUM TOTAL OF WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL. IT IS OUR WITNESS, IN WORD AND DEED, TO JESUS AS SAVIOR AND LORD—TRANSFORMER OF LIVES, COMMUNITIES AND THE WORLD.

Both as individuals and congregations, *who we are* as representatives of Christ precedes and validates *what we do* as witnesses for Christ. If we don’t model authentic Christian discipleship in word and deed, our efforts to “reach people” for Christ to “evangelize” them simply do not ring true. If new people come to our church and do not experience a gracious, welcoming, healthy community of faith, they may very well keep searching for a place to connect with Christ and the church or stop looking all together. So often, “evangelism” is given a bad reputation by Christians acting badly. Far too often, our attitudes and actions discredit the presentation of the gospel to those who are not believers. We need to make sure who we are as representatives of Christ is the best “magnet” to draw people to Christ and his gospel.

Evangelism certainly takes intentional effort in the local church. The goal must be to produce authentic Christian disciples, grounded, shaped and transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. As Robert Webber writes in *Journey to Jesus*, “If we are to be an evangelizing church in today’s world, we must begin with a healthy, vital body of believing, worshiping, nurturing, discipling and socially active people—a church that is the continuation of the incarnate presence of Jesus in the world—a communal embodiment of what is preached.” Evangelism at its best is both imitating and representing Christ in word and deed. It’s both “being” and “doing.” Who we are, in Christ, precedes what we do.

As United Methodists with a distinctive heritage from John Wesley, we must continue to emphasize two key qualities of evangelism that remain essential characteristics of our Methodist and Wesleyan DNA:

1. A GRACE-BASED THEOLOGY

2. A CLEAR DISCIPLE-MAKING SYSTEM

For Methodists, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of transformation by divine grace. Therefore, our evangelism flows from the deep well of God’s love. The emphasis is on divine grace—as the saving action of Jesus Christ—followed by our lifetime of response.

Evangelism for United Methodist is not about one single moment of grace and response... it’s about a lifetime pattern of grace and response.

Authentic Christian disciples who live with “holiness of heart and life” as Wesley intended, are certainly “reborn from above” (John 3). Yet, mature disciples are not born, they are made. It is essential that our growing awareness and responsiveness to divine grace is tied to a “discipling system” aimed at producing authentic, maturing disciples whose lives bear evidence of their transformation by Christ. Inside this publication, you will find information and ideas for practicing grace-based evangelism tied to a clear discipling system.

“Go make disciples” Mt. 28:19-20

“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” John 20:21

“You shall be my witnesses” Acts 1:8

EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

How can individuals and congregations focus on a comprehensive understanding and practice of evangelism that continues the distinctive emphases Wesley initiated? The answer is by mirroring the distinctive approach of Wesley to *offer grace-based evangelism to all*, followed by a process geared toward *genuine transformation in every way as authentic Christian disciples*. Simply put, reaching people is tied to discipling.

Before we move from principals to practice, it is important to look at how a variety of people have defined evangelism. Here are some examples: “Evangelism is concerned with the whole disclosure of God in the world. The function of the church is to continue the incarnational principle Christ started.” -

-Jerry Cook in George Hunter’s To Spread the Power, 1987.

“Evangelism is every possible way of reaching outside the church: to make contacts with definite people, to cultivate their knowledge of the Christian faith, to lead them to confess Christ as their Savior and Lord, to bring them into (committed) church membership, and to help them commence Christian habits.”

-George Sweazey, The Church as Evangelist, 1978.

“(Biblically) Evangelism is a drama, a narrative that has a beginning, a middle and an end. The first sequence is an ongoing struggle- a conflict between powerful forces—the adversarial tug-of-war between good and evil, sin and holiness, life and death. The second scene is the announcer, the proclaimer, the witness who tells the outcome of the victory that has been witnessed. The third scene involves how the listener makes an appropriate response. These dramatic movements shape our evangelism: adversarial conflict, announcement of decisive victory and appropriate response.” -Walter Brueggemann Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism, 1993.

INVITE, AWAKEN, ACKNOWLEDGE and ALIGN

In our effort to define, understand, and practice grace-based evangelism in a way that reflects the approach of John Wesley that sparked the Methodist movement, four words can guide our approach. The words are: *Invite, Awaken, Acknowledge, and Align*. These four principals form, both the *focus* and the *method*... *the form and the function of evangelism in the local church*. When these four principals are translated into action in the local church, we remain grounded in the grace-based practice of evangelism we see Wesley using in his historical era. Though we live in a much more complex environment in many ways than Wesley did, the principals of being invitational, focusing on a growing awareness of divine grace, providing ample opportunities to acknowledge and respond to grace, and the ongoing effort to align one’s life with Christ and be accountable as Christian disciples are all still extremely valid and distinctive for United Methodists.

INVITE, AWAKEN, ACKNOWLEDGE AND ALIGN ARE BOTH THE FOCUS OF EVANGELISM AND THE METHODS WE NEED TO USE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH... THE FORM AND THE FUNCTION OF EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL CHURCH.

Wesley’s Evangelistic Goals

Wesley’s intent was to connect his preaching with a “discipling system,” which is a continuing process of spiritual formation and transformation rooted in a theology of grace. His efforts were aimed at four fundamentally important evangelism and discipleship goals:

1. To awaken people to their lostness and need of God.
2. To enroll them in a class.
3. To teach the awakened to expect to experience their justification.
4. To look forward to sanctification as God’s grace freeing their lives from sin to be motivated by love. (Hunter, To Spread the Power, p. 58)

Wesley’s evangelism goals are still valid for us today.

REFLECTION/ACTION:

- *Are we as Christian disciples and church members “intentionally” living authentic/invitational lives?
- *Are we “awakening” people to their need of God?
- *How are people in your church given specific moments and ways to acknowledge their responses to God’s grace? Do you celebrate Christian “assurance?”
- *Are people in your church showing clear evidence of aligning their lives with Christ and holding each other accountable in love?

GRACE-BASED EVANGELISM IN COMMUNITY

“Grace-based” evangelism emerges within communities of grace that awaken people to God’s transforming power and presence. The goal is to gradually and consistently increase awareness of God’s prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. As awareness increases, moments of acknowledgment must be celebrated in the overall worshipping community as the way to link evangelism to discipleship.

“HOW CAN I EVER LET GOD’S GRACE FULLY WORK IN MY LIFE UNLESS I LIVE IN A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO CAN AFFIRM IT, DEEPEN IT, AND STRENGTHEN IT? WE CAN NOT LIVE THIS NEW LIFE IN CHRIST ALONE. GOD DOES NOT WANT TO ISOLATE US BY HIS GRACE. ON THE CONTRARY, HE WANTS US TO FORM NEW FRIENDSHIPS AND A NEW COMMUNITY—HOLY PLACES WHERE HIS GRACE CAN GROW TO FULLNESS AND BEAR FRUIT.” HENRI NOUWEN, *The Road to Daybreak*, p. 101.

GRACE-BASED EVANGELISM TRANSLATES AWARENESS INTO RESPONSE

Awareness and response to divine grace is a life-long pattern. For instance, infant baptism emphasizes God’s gracious movement toward us prior to the personal awareness of the child. In the act of baptism, the community of faith both acknowledges God’s prevenient grace (the grace that goes before) and the claim of Christ on the child. As a communal response to grace voiced at baptism, the church promises to nurture and guide the child to a point he or she may make their own profession of faith. Infant baptism, therefore, is a crucial acknowledgement and celebration of the parent’s and the church’s awareness and responsiveness to God’s grace.

At confirmation, a teen’s acknowledgement of grace and response is crucial. Prevenient grace has led the child to a point of maturity and responsiveness where he or she can make their own profession of faith. If infant baptism was done, the confirmand is reminded of both the prevenient grace and gift of baptism that led to this defining moment of acknowledgement and response. Repentance of sin and profession of faith are the confirmand’s response to their awareness of both prevenient grace that drew them to this step of faith and justifying grace—the saving, forgiving and transforming love of Christ. ***Profession of faith is the centerpiece of Christian experience.*** It celebrates trust in the saving action of Christ on the cross—known as the “atonement” of sin. If baptism has not yet been received, the confirmand then receives the sacrament at that point-- as an acknowledgement and celebration of growing awareness and responsiveness to grace and pledge to seek authentic discipleship.

Here, a word about “assurance” is important. Wesley taught that the marks of an authentic disciple are faith, hope and love. Simply defined, “faith” is trust in the saving action of Christ on the cross. “Hope” is the assurance of forgiveness of sins—and confidence of eternal salvation. (Note: confidence in eternal salvation... NOT eternal “security” as in “once saved always saved.” The emphasis is on hope as “confidence.”) “Love” is two-fold. It is “love of God” and “love of neighbor.” *To put it all together... our intentional efforts to invite, awaken, acknowledge and align are aimed at producing disciples whose lives bear evidence of faith, hope and love.*

Wesley’s Evangelistic Preaching

In his book *How Great A Flame: Contemporary Lessons from the Wesleyan Revival*, James Logan points out that John Wesley’s preaching was very “systematically ordered” to do four things, related to the basic Biblical and theological understandings about human beings in relation to God.

The four “preaching” functions correspond to the four grace-based principals of evangelism highlighted in this publication.

In the local church, therefore, the preaching task must re-enforce the overall evangelism effort of the congregation:

To invite: All need to be saved from our human Sinful Condition.

To convince: All may be saved through Justification.

To offer Christ: All may know themselves saved by Christ and experience Christian hope as Assurance.

To build up in Christ: All may be saved to the utmost and be perfected in love as Christian Sanctification. (Logan, 2005, p. 29)

If we are to continue to pursue a comprehensive approach to evangelism aimed at authentic discipleship, then these four principals of thought and practice should be the core ingredients of all our evangelism efforts. This is the way we bring grace-based evangelism to life.

CONNECTING EVANGELISM AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Comprehensive evangelism is about linking awareness of grace, connection with Christ and the community of faith, and the call to spiritual maturity with an intentional “discipling plan.” In a comprehensive, grace-based evangelism approach, transformation of lives and the world are the goals. Spiritual formation and maturation are the centerpiece of the continuing, life-long pattern of discipleship.

The heart of the Christian journey, according to our heritage of Wesleyan distinctiveness, is “going on to perfection.” That means intentionally and “methodically” immersing our lives in spiritual disciplines as “means of grace” leading to spiritual maturation. Wesley called this heart of the journey “sanctification.” It is the life-long continuation of what our awakening to grace was meant to produce: **holiness of heart and life**. As Wesley sought to awaken people to their need of God and infuse them with the assurance of forgiveness of sin, he called them to enter into his “methodical” discipling system aimed at producing more than “Christians in name only.” Wesley’s aim was reaching people, then nurturing them to a point of spiritual maturity he called “Christian perfection” or “being perfected in love.”

A comprehensive, grace-based evangelism effort in the local church must be geared toward moving people into deeper and deeper awareness of divine grace that then translates into deeper and wider forms of response. We must clearly link, therefore, our theology of grace with our “discipling” system that offers ongoing opportunities for spiritual formation. This continuing process of “alignment” of life with Christ is the on-going challenge and journey of the Christian disciple within the context of divine grace.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CHURCH

***Write a detailed, comprehensive, grace-based outline of evangelism for your church, aimed at moving people from awareness, to responsiveness, to commitment, and then ongoing maturation and service.**

***Plan one event for your neighborhood/community per year to:** (Check)

- Invite/practice hospitality...*
- Awaken people to grace...*
- Acknowledge and celebrate responses to grace...*
- Check alignment with Christ: through spiritual formation groups.*

***Evaluate your church’s evangelism “magnets”:** (Check)

- Awareness, understanding and engagement with your setting.*
- Personal/communal authenticity, invitation, and hospitality.*
- A culture of spiritual passion, prayer and spiritual formation.*
- Use F.R.A.N. sheets to identify new guests to invite to church.*
- Create an environment of graciousness: warmth, welcome, and inclusiveness that is magnetic to the community.*
- Teach the skill of sharing “faith stories.”*
- Offer vibrant, celebrative, invitational, and transforming worship.*
- Offer video testimonies of change, assurance, and service.*
- Intentional tracking of guests and a variety of intentional contacts.*
- An expectation and emphasis on Professions of Faith!*
- Education, preparation, opportunities, and invitations aimed at moving people to Professions of Faith and greater commitment!*

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE:

Robert Mulholland has defined spiritual formation as “a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”

Comprehensive evangelism leads people through an expanding awareness of grace to a process of life-long spiritual formation and maturation. This movement must be at the heart of every local church’s evangelism and “discipling plan.”

REFLECTION/ACTION:

***Are the links between baptism, Profession of Faith and spiritual formation clearly understood in your church?**

***What is your church’s plan for intentionally moving people from invitation, to awakening to grace, to acknowledgement of commitment to Christ, then to alignment of one’s life with Christ in a process of spiritual formation and maturation?**

RESOURCES

“Called to Step Outside”
DVD and Idea Guide from the
Virginia Annual Conference
(804) 521-1156

Opening Ourselves to Grace”
DVD- www.cokesbury.com

Grace Esteem: New Life in Christ
By H. Eddie Fox

General Board of Global Min.
Website- Evangelism section
www.GBGM.org

The Foundation for Evangelism
www.evangelize.org

Net Results magazine
www.netresults.org