

SMART FISHING

WAYS A CONGREGATION
CAN REACH MORE PEOPLE
FOR CHRIST

JOHN HENDEE



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To my wife, friend, and love,
Carla B.

Contents

Introduction

We Can Learn a Lot From Fishermen	7
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SECTION ONE: SOME BASIC NEEDS FOR SMART FISHING

1. A Desire to Fish	15
2. Make Fishing the Top Priority	27
3. Stay Excited About Fishing	35
4. Training for Smart Fishing	47

SECTION TWO: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR SMART FISHING

Section Introduction: Let's Go Fishing!	61
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5. Pre-prospects	65
6. Prospects	95
7. New Members	107
8. Members	113
9. M.I.A.s	117
10. How to Build a Ten-year Plan for Smart Fishing	129
Conclusion	145

SECTION THREE: APPENDIX

A. Training Others for Smart Fishing	149
B. Factors in the Growth of Central Christian Church, Mesa, Arizona	151
C. Resources for Smart Fishing	159



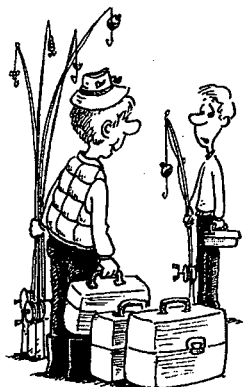
INTRODUCTION

We Can Learn a Lot From Fishermen

We had gone to San Diego to vacation and visit relatives. It had been many years since I had fished out on the ocean. Wanting to now, I had called several different fishing boat companies to listen to their recordings about how fishing had been the day before. Without exception, the person who had made the report was next to breathless with excitement over how fantastic the albacore fishing was. "El Niño" had brought unusually warm currents north and, with that, the big fish. It cost twice as much as I was planning to spend, and the trips were twenty-four hours long, but I was hooked. I couldn't resist their excitement over what could be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I was going albacore fishing!

Talk about excitement! The boat was to leave at about 10:30 P.M. I was at the dock and had paid my fees by about 8:45. I had gone out and bought a wind-breaker jacket and had borrowed my grandfather's pole and a small tackle box. "Let me at 'em!"

For an hour or so, I walked around the docks breathing in the salt air. Then other men started arriving to go on the same adventure as I. Panic struck when I saw them. To the man, each one came with big boots (I was wearing tennis shoes) and heavy coats (suddenly I felt cold in my flimsy jacket). Each one carried four or five big fishing poles (not one of them as small as the one I had) and a huge tackle box larger than the suitcase I'd used to come to San Diego. I had the feeling I had got myself into something for which I was not at all prepared. I decided I



had better talk to one of these men and find out what was going on. As it turned out, I had to run back and rent a bigger pole, get some large hooks, and brace myself for wet and cold.

The next morning, as we arrived at the fishing area, I found I still had a lot to learn. I watched the others for quite some time to get an idea of how to fish for albacore. What a day! I ended up getting two albacore near the end of the day. (Guys who knew what they were doing got ten to fifteen!)

It was a great experience, with many interesting events happening throughout the day. But as I looked back at the event some time later, I was struck by how vividly it illustrates the way we too often go about the work of the Lord. We hear His call to be “fishers of men.” We take off with much excitement. But we are ill prepared for the huge job ahead of us. We start fishing without the right equipment, without really knowing anything about the fish we’re trying to catch, and without a clue as to what are the best techniques for catching them. And this says nothing about how prepared we are to do anything with them once we do have them.

A study of successful fishing draws some obvious parallels with being “fishers of men.” Jesus’ charge to His disciples was to “go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16). Whether we are talking of His “fish” or “fruit,” we in the church can be a lot smarter in the way we go about His work in this world.

What has happened? Have we become lazy? Have we been misdirected or deceived? Have we simply become dull? In Luke 16:8, Jesus said, “The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” He was talking about us! He said we often are not as bright in understanding how to work with those in the world as they are with themselves. So let’s brighten up! We can learn a lot that will help us “catch” more men and women for Christ.

Jesus did call us to be “fishers of men.” In obeying that directive, there are five areas to which a local

church must give attention. Ignoring any one of them will produce large holes in our fishing nets. It will seriously hamper our ministry. Attention needs to be given to these five areas regardless of the country or culture, whether in a free country or oppressed, whether a denominational church or independent, in the city or in the country, large or small. A church needs to have a plan—a strategy—for each of these five areas. The specifics will vary from one church setting to another, and the plans will need to be re-examined and revised continually, but these five areas form the foundation for every successful ministry in the church. The five areas are as follows:

1. Pre-prospects
2. Prospects
3. New members
4. Members
5. Missing in Attendance—M.I.A.s

1. Pre-prospects

These are the people and families living in your area who don't know about your church. Very likely, they do not know anything about the Lord. They are in need of Christ and of a church home.

Your goal with pre-prospects is to let them know you're here, to seek to establish contact with them, befriend them, to create an interest in their participating or attending some event or service with your congregation, and to create an opportunity to share Christ with them and help them become His disciples.

2. Prospects

These are the people or families who have attended some event with your church. Contact has been established with them through an activity of the church or by an individual's reaching out to them.

Your goal is to follow up on them in behalf of the Lord, to attempt to share your lives and the gospel

with them, and/or to lead them to become Christians or to serve with you if they are already disciples.

3. New Members

New members are those who have recently accepted Christ and/or joined your congregation. Your goal is to meet with them and welcome them into the church family, to educate them in the Christian life, and to see that they are incorporated into the life of the church and the mission of Christ while they are with you.

4. Members

For sake of definition, a "new member" becomes a "member" when he has been incorporated into the fellowship. Your goal for your members is to attempt to get and keep them in groups and ministries that are helping to carry out the Great Commission of Christ in your community and the world, along with growing into Christlikeness in all areas of their lives.

5. M.I.A.s (Missing in Attendance)

These are members who have started missing the activities going on at or with your church for reasons other than illness, being out of town, or some other unavoidable reason. When you discover that a person is intentionally staying away and/or is leaving the church, that person is an M.I.A. and needs attention. He may be having personal problems, or he may be angry with the church or someone in it. You want to send someone on a search and rescue mission for such a person.

The average church spends most of its resources (including money, man power, planning, activities, and services) on area number 4 (members) and then wonders why it isn't growing (or catching any fish). They are not "fishers of men"; they are keepers of the

hatchery. A study by the Barna Research Group reported that only five percent of the average church budget is spent on evangelism, while thirty percent is committed to building and maintenance. "It's not surprising to find no change in the percentage of Christians in America considering the budget priorities of churches."¹

If we are content to remain keepers of the hatchery, our only growth will be biological (our own children—and we don't reproduce as many as fish do!) or transfer (taking goldfish out of your fish bowl and putting them into my fish bowl—just swapping fish).

This book examines all five areas and shows how a balance between them is necessary for good growth. Ideas are suggested for building a strategy and plan for each area. (See the chart on page 12.)

After sharing these five areas at a national convention, I had a young preacher from a church of about 100 members come up and say, "It sounds great, but it is so overwhelming; I don't know where to start!" As we come back to these five areas later in the book, I'll try to show you how to keep it as simple as possible. We can be a lot smarter in the way we are working in the church. We must be! A lot is riding on how well we do.

¹George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura: Regal, 1990).

Organizing for Evangelism

	Pre-prospect	Prospect	New Member	Member	M.I.A.
Current Ministries					
Total Spent					
Future Ministries					
Total Spent					

SECTION ONE

**Some Basic Needs for
Smart Fishing**



CHAPTER ONE

A Desire to Fish

If you don't have a desire to fish, you probably won't go fishing. But if you are like my good friend Jim Whitaker, a retired preacher from Long View, Washington, nothing can stop you from fishing! He once told me about his many years of fishing in the Northwest: "If I had a chance to fish, it didn't matter if I had to go upstream or downstream, whether I had to climb rocks or swim to get to a fishing hole. I got there." That's the spirit!

Cal Jernigan is one of my co-workers and an avid fisherman. One day he came into my office and cried out, "Oh, man, have I ever got the bug for fishing!" When he gets that bug, he gets out fishing!

A fisherman will get up at any hour, go anywhere, suffer every imaginable discomfort (including cold, wet, and heat), spend more money than he likes to admit for equipment and trips, read all he can about fishing, and even put up with the ridicule of non-fishermen. It's in his blood.

I remember one business author writing of several successful businesses he had studied. He wrote that they had followed a "tortuous path to success." Would that describe the commitment, dedication, drive, passion, and enthusiasm that you have in fishing for men and women? Or would haphazard, comfortable, lazy, distracted, and misled be more descriptive of your efforts? None of those leads to success in the work of Christ.

Fishing for men and women ought to be in the blood of every Christian. I actually believe it is; many just don't know it yet. Cal Jernigan asked me to go fishing one day, but I said I had too many other

RESPONSE:

- How would you describe the path your church is on?
- Where will this path lead?
- What kind of dream do you think the Lord would want for your church?

things to do. He reminded me that I needed to get my priorities straight! One great day on the lake and I'd be hooked; I'd begin to make the time for fishing—even if I had to put other things off. While he was only half serious, this is precisely the attitude we need to take in fishing for men.

My greatest desire as a new Christian was to help others find what I had found. However, there were many barriers to my doing that. I was afraid of people and new situations; I was afraid of "witnessing"; I had seen several bad examples of how to do it but had never been shown or trained in the right way to do it. Others may have different barriers. It is my hope that this book will show how to eliminate some of them.

We ought to be eager to get out and go fishing; there is no more Christlike, Christ-honoring thing we can do. Jim Whitaker told me the motto of a fisherman is, "Every time you have a chance to fish—GO!" That ought to be the motto of every Christian in fishing for men.

The early Christians had that fervor. Paul said: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15). In 2 Timothy 4:2 he said, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season." First Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

If one doesn't feel that spirit of evangelism in his heart, the best thing to do is to start reading the book of Acts with a heart to discover what the Lord wants him to do. I remember suggesting that in a class I was teaching years ago. I recommended reading Acts through ten times. An elder at our church was in the class. Without my knowledge, he set out to read Acts ten times. The result was such a burden for evangelism that he sold his building business and took his wife Carol and four sons to England to preach and evangelize for seven years.

Some find many excuses for not going fishing. Joseph Aldrich made a fine list of excuses Satan will throw out for people to use for not getting involved in being fishers of men:

1. Nobody else is doing it; why should you? (Generally a true statement.)
2. Your family is first. (Basically true.)
3. It's god (he wouldn't use a capital letter) who gives the increase, not me. (not bad!)
4. I'm too busy. (Probably true.)
5. I'm not able to talk to strangers about spiritual things. (One of his favorites.)
6. God is more interested in "being" than "doing." (It's got a ring of truth to it . . . not bad.)
7. I've got to go "deep" for a while. (Probably not true.)
8. Let Billy Graham do it. (Makes sense, doesn't it?)
9. Your own life is too messed up. (And it may well be.)
10. God's going to save everyone, anyway, so why get worked up about it. (Definitely not true.)²

There is another problem that keeps us from our work. It is sometimes called laziness. There are occasions when I have to "push" myself in the work of fishing for men. It's like working out at the health club, which I try to do four or five times a week. There are very few days I really "feel" like going down and riding the stationary bike for thirty minutes. It isn't fun. It doesn't feel "good" while I'm doing it. I just do it. I've determined I need to, so I don't sit around deciding each time whether I will. I just do it! Fishing can be hard work at times. Some parts of it aren't fun. But it needs to be done.

It is the same with our service for the Lord. We must realize that it must be done. People's salvation

²Joseph Aldridge, *Gentle Persuasion* (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), p. 68.

is depending on it. Then we must determine that we are going to do it. Our submission to Christ is demonstrated through it. There are days I don't feel like phoning all the prospects and trying to set up visits. Sometimes I really get tired of the phone! There are days I don't feel like heading off to spend the evening away from home. (I feel I must say here that, as a "full-time" employee, when I spend Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights out calling, I normally spend a few hours with my family at home in the afternoon. I don't expect members of the church to be out calling as often as I do—they can't go home at 3:00 and spend a couple extra hours before heading out for the evening. But I can, and the "mission" must not become an excuse to neglect and ignore my family before God. If I lose them, the mission is set back.) There are evenings I'd still rather stay home and rest, and do other things. When I don't "feel" like doing these things, I sometimes adjust my schedule, but more often than not, I just have to "force myself" to go ahead and do it anyway. I can't think about it a lot. I know it has to be done or I'll never catch any fish!

After I go down to the health club and work out, shower, and walk out, I'm generally glad I did it. I feel pretty good. The same thing happens when we do the things that have to be done in order to catch fish. After I get out there with the prospects, sit with them in their homes, and visit with them—as I head back home, most of the time I'm so excited I can hardly get to sleep when I get home, even though I might be physically very tired.

We have been commissioned to catch fish. No, we won't catch all of them, but we are expected to win people to Christ. We can't force or manipulate people, but we are to be teaching the gospel to those who will listen so they might have the opportunity to choose Christ. It seems so obvious. How many times does it need to be said? That is the reason the church exists. That is the reason the Lord hasn't returned yet (2 Peter 3:9).

Not long ago, I went fishing with Cal Jernigan. We did not have much time, so we had to go to the closest lake instead of his lake of first choice for catching bass. Knowing it was not as good a lake as some others, he warned me, "You will have to be willing 'not to catch any fish.' It may just be a good time to get out into the fresh air and have some good fellowship." That was agreeable to me. We did have a good time. Being out was enjoyable. We saw some bald eagles; he got one or two fish (I got none); we had good fellowship. But I couldn't take that very often. If I am going to go fishing, I want to catch some fish! I at least want to get some strikes.



The attitude of many Christians and churches seems to be, "Yes, we are called to be fishers of men, but you have to be content to just have good fellowship with other Christians at church and the opportunities to get out of the house. You have to be willing to 'not catch fish.'" I couldn't live with that. A lot of churches are dying with that attitude. Gene Rogers wrote, "Anyone can become a fisherman—the skill to do it will come from the will to do it." It all begins in our wanting and willingness to fish!

Some time ago, I was on a nonstop flight from the east coast to Phoenix. Near the end of the flight, the pilot turned on the intercom to announce that we were about a half hour from Phoenix. Realizing that most of the passengers were sleeping, he spoke in a very soft, low voice.

In the seat directly in front of me, however, was a five- or six-year-old girl who had been a live wire and a real challenge for her mom the whole trip. As soon as the pilot finished his announcement, she stood up in her seat and yelled at the top of her lungs, "Wake up, everybody! Wake up! We're almost there." Fortunately, I had been reading and was awake. But for most of the passengers, her unexpected scream was an electrifying, awakening shock. A lot of people looked over at her and her embarrassed mom with death threats in their eyes. It was actually quite funny to watch the whole thing.

As I thought about it later, I realized that situation is quite similar to the church's situation. Too many of us are flying along, 30,000 feet above the world, out of touch with it, asleep to what is really going on and what we really need to be doing for the Lord and for the lost. We need someone to stand up and yell, "Wake up, everyone! Wake up! It's getting late. We are almost there. And many aren't ready to arrive!" We need to be awake and on the job for the Lord.

I will never forget what I heard a man in our church say one day. Someone had asked him what he did for a living. His answer was, "I'm an ambassador for Christ. I also support myself working as a sign painter." When I heard that, I couldn't forget it. So simple. So obvious. But so seldom thought of that way and lived out. Don wants to catch fish. He is a fisherman-ambassador for Christ. That is the purpose of his life. He paints signs so he can feed, clothe, and take care of his family and himself.

As I thought about that, I realized we all need to be thinking that way. Until we do, the church's impact on the world will be minimal:

RESPONSE:

•How would this attitude or outlook change your day at work?

"I'm an ambassador for Christ; I support myself by preaching."

•How would it change what you do during the week?

"I'm an ambassador for Christ; I support myself as an engineer."

"I'm an ambassador for Christ; I support myself as a doctor."

•How would it change what you are involved with at church?

"I'm an ambassador for Christ; I support myself as a music director."

"I'm an ambassador for Christ; I support myself by selling. . . . teaching. . . . house-keeping."

We are here to fish—to be ambassadors for Christ. Our occupations allow us to support ourselves so we can be ambassadors. If church staff members thought that way, it would change their weekly schedules. I'm not here just to make music for God, or run programs for God, or keep up the house and grounds for God! I'm here to fish for men and women. Music

can't become a substitute for winning people to Christ. Music certainly may help! But making, playing, or singing music, or planning and running programs, or keeping buildings clean, or holding the office of an elder can't become a substitute for my personally reaching out to the lost. This applies to every endeavor of the church.

I was visiting a church in Pennsylvania a while back. The man who had been the preacher ten years earlier was showing me around the facility. It was old, but it had been well cared for and was in good condition. It was right across the street from a major university of 35,000 students. As the former preacher was talking about the church, he mentioned it had averaged well over 400 in attendance years back. I asked him what it was running at present. "Oh, about 50." It had gone the way of too many churches.

As we were walking around the building, I was thinking about things the church could be doing to reach more people and start growing again. I asked him if they had ever thought about having a preschool. They could offer good quality and low prices; it would be a way to establish contact with married students. Such a program would be ideal for student parents—they could drop their children off and walk across the street to school! Then the church could start a ministry to young couples.

The former minister said the idea had been presented before, but the trustees voted it down.

Well, okay! They don't have to like my ideas. Then I suggested that they could turn their fellowship hall into a lunch and study hall for students. Serve cheap but good lunches. Have it open from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Play some music in the background. Students could eat and study, and the church could start a college ministry.

"No, the trustees wouldn't go for that. They had a Jewish senior adult club approach them years back about renting their fellowship hall (which sat empty all week) from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. Monday through Friday for their club meetings. But when

they heard they wanted to put their pool table in the hall, they voted that down."

Now I was starting to get mad. The poor guy with me had to hear me out. I wasn't mad at him, or because they didn't do what I thought they should. I was angry that they weren't doing *anything*! It sort of reminded me of the man who had one talent—he was in Big Trouble with the Lord.

I said, "Who do these guys think they are? Do they think this is their building? This is God's building, and they don't own it. They obviously misunderstand their job. They think their job is to preserve and save this building for God at the second coming! They're wrong. God's not going to need it then—He's going to burn it up! They are supposed to *use* this building up to *save* people for the second coming."

The leaders of that congregation didn't want to grow and reach the lost. No matter what they may have claimed, their actions—or their lack of them—revealed their real attitude. (How true this is of all of us. How often my actions or lack of actions in reaching out in love reveals my real motives.) They didn't want contact with the outside world. Their lack of action betrayed what they said—if, in fact, they even bothered mouthing that they knew they were to be reaching people for Christ.

I wonder how many other Christian fellowships around the world are doing the same.

If my goal is simply to fellowship with other Christians, so be it. But that is not the Lord's plan for the church. In *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, Kennon Callahan points out that key number one is to "know your mission." A congregation must know why it exists in the Lord's mind. It will likely fulfill whatever it believes its mission to be. Many churches aren't fulfilling the Lord's mission because they don't clearly own it as their own. It is easy to substitute some other Christian activity as the end goal.

Father Theodore Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame University, was quoted in *Time* magazine in 1987:

The very essence of leadership is [that] you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.³

Jesus blew a loud and clear trumpet. What kind of trumpet are you and your congregation blowing? Are you calling fishermen to their boats to fish?

Jesus told the chief priests and elders, the religious "experts" of His day, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." (Matthew 21:43). He wants us to reach others for Him.

At the resurrection, I don't believe the Lord is going to ask any of us if we were in a local professional business club. He's not going to ask whether we graduated from Bible college or were president of our Bible college alumni association. He's not going to be interested in whether we helped plan local, state, or national conventions, or had been an officer of a Sunday-school class, the women's missionary group, or the church. It won't matter whether we attended all the church's board meetings, wrote a book, or led in public prayers.

The Lord will not be asking preachers how many weddings, funerals, meetings, ministers' groups, invocations, and benedictions they attended or performed.

I believe it is likely, though, that He will ask us if we caught any fish. What did we do to help others come to Christ? Did we produce any fruit?

What will your answer be?

The following story illustrates what seems too often to have happened:

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in

³Tom Peters, *Thriving on Chaos* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), p. 483.

the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to go about fishing.

Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. They sponsored costly nationwide and worldwide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing, such as the new fishing equipment, fish calls, and whether any new bait was discovered.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "Fishing Headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however; they didn't fish.

All the fishermen seemed to agree that a board was needed which could challenge fishermen to be faithful in fishing. The board was formed by those who had the great vision and courage to speak about fishing, to define fishing, and to promote the idea of fishing in faraway streams and lakes where any other fish of different color lived.

Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers were built whose purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology. But the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing.

Some spent much study and travel to learn the history of fishing and to see faraway places where the founding fathers did great fishing in the centuries past. They lauded the faithful fishermen of years before who handed down the idea of fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish. And they went off to foreign lands . . . to teach fishing.

Now it is true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's clubs. They anguished over those who

were not committed enough to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men?"

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he/she never catches a fish? Is one following if he/she isn't fishing?"⁴

Joe Aldrich wrote, "The church is no haven until heaven, no refuge until the Rapture. Nor is it a fortress to be defended, or the National Guard. It's an army focused outward; whose soldiers are deployed into barber shops, gas stations, businesses, and neighborhoods where the lost live, serve, and work."⁵

The church is a fishing force that is supposed to get off the dock and get fishing! We often act as if we think we will get the job done by talking about it. And we are dying for it.

So many Christians are "bored" with their Christian lives. They run around looking for new "spiritual experiences," or for a new church that will "pump them up." Their spiritual lives are dry. And a major reason is many of them are, in essence, doing nothing but mending nets. Granted, nets have to be mended, but you need to get out into the deep waters and throw those nets in and get some action!

Herb Miller wrote about some of the reasons churches aren't growing and reaching the lost. He said,

The fourth [reason] is an unconscious shift in focus from making disciples to serving disciples. . . . The fifth

⁴Win Arn, *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1979), p. 151.

⁵Aldridge, *Gentle Persuasion*, p. 6.

is the spiritual versus numerical growth fallacy. "We want spiritual growth, not just numerical growth." . . . That proud declaration sounds prophetic, but it is closer to pathetic. . . . An increase in size tends to produce an increase in quality in several areas.⁶

Yes, we are spending too much time and energy and resources on serving ourselves—column number four—and wondering why we aren't growing! I don't know that we need to spend less time on helping our members grow, but we must spend a lot more on evangelism. We either need to give more for other needs or quit spending as much on ourselves. We need to get out and make disciples, not just pamper the ones we already have!

⁶Herb Miller, *How to Build a Magnetic Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), p. 28.

CHAPTER TWO

Make Fishing the Top Priority

Christian leaders must get out and fish. They must be leading the church in fishing. I like how Robert Schuller comments about how he decided not to be a good golfer. He wanted to focus his energies on things that would make him a good “fisherman” for the Lord.

Herb Miller wrote, “Church leaders, by their priorities and actions, continually illustrate what business they have decided they are in. Some are in the sheep business. Others settle for being in the sheep shed business.”⁷

If the Lord looked over your weekly schedule, would He conclude you are in the fishing business or into net-mending? If it is net-mending, it must be turned around. You and your church (if you are just net-mending) are going to starve spiritually. Besides that, just net-mending is being unfaithful to Jesus himself.

Dan Biles said, “It’s the kiss of death for a minister to stay in his office. . . . A lot of pastors and synod staff people ought to be spending 80 percent of their time out of their office doing MBWA (management by walking around).”⁸

Did you catch that! Eighty percent! Do you want to catch fish, or do you simply want to watch them, think about them, pray about them, and write and talk

RESPONSE:

•Which business are you in—the “sheep” business or the “sheep shed” business?

•Which business is your church in?

⁷Miller, *Magnetic Church*, p. 44.

⁸Peters, *Chaos*, p. 181.



and preach about them? Most church leaders are not going to be able to put eighty percent in direct contact, but what about twenty to thirty percent? That would cause a revival in most churches!

Kennon Callahan, in *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*, lists visitation (getting out in the waters, fishing) as the second key to an effective church. The first key is knowing your mission or purpose for existence. He lists visitation as more important than all else going on in the church. I believe he is right. Show me a church that isn't growing, and I'll show you one that has no one out fishing/calling. They're just mending nets. They aren't out where the fish are.

Warren Bennis, while president of the University of Cincinnati, said,

Jesus said in the Great Commission that we should go into all the world (Matthew 28:19). Notice that he did not say we are to go into all the church. Leaders must continuously ask themselves, "What business are we in? Are we in the church business or the world business? Are we in the institution business or the people business? Are we concentrating on a mission-evangelism-extroversion focused ministry? Or have we settled for a nurture-maintenance-introversion focused ministry?"

Leaders in the Lord's church must make fishing a high priority. Tom Peters said that, for business leaders, "there can be no substitutes when it comes to the way the members of the organization assess your priorities and the seriousness of your intent. You are either 'on' the topic, or you are not."⁹

It won't do any good for leaders in the church to talk about evangelism, to hope for growth, or to expect their people to be evangelizing if they are not. It is a foolish, vain, ignorant, blissful, empty hope.

Apple's former top manufacturing executive—Debi Coleman—wrote, "I don't think you should

⁹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 503.

ever manage anything that you don't care passionately about."¹⁰ Could you and your church's involvement and expenditures in evangelism—fishing for men—be described as “passionate”?

Many church leaders claim they cannot be more aggressive in evangelism because they are “over-committed.” That's not so. As Herb Miller points out,

They are actually under-committed. They feel over-committed because they are under-committed to the most essential aspects of their work. . . . the important tasks should be done. The essential tasks *must* be done. Pastors who recognize that evangelism is one of the essentials find time to do it.”¹¹

Most excuses offered as to why a person is spending his life mending nets rather than fishing are going to sound very flimsy when standing in front of the Lord and He is “testing” what we have built on the foundation of Christ in our lives. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.)

Today, any leader, at any level, who hopes for even limited success must . . . lead from the trenches. The changes are first discovered out where the customer is, where the small new competitor is, and where the disgruntled dealer is, not in the stillness of the meeting room on an overhead transparency.¹²

Tom Peters wrote that about businessmen. As Christian leaders, we are also businessmen; we're in the fishing business. And the same applies to us. If we hope for even limited success, we must be out fishing. That is where we will learn how to be the best at what we are doing. We won't learn it all in the

RESPONSE:

•To what might you and your church be over-committed that will not help build the church for Christ?

¹⁰Peters, *Chaos*, p. 87.

¹¹Miller, *Magnetic Church*, p. 115.

¹²Peters, *Chaos*, p. 511.

stillness of an office, preparing agendas for board meetings and outlines for sermons.

Smart Fishermen Don't Get Sidetracked From Fishing

We must keep making sure we are giving attention to fishing and not just the idea of fishing! This is a tough thing to do. We can easily be diverted from what we are called to do.

We often get preoccupied with upholding and carrying out the policies, practices, and traditions of a historic and cultural image of the preacher, a church worker, or the church. We are often obsessed with our own created Christian rites, ceremonies, services, and chaplaincy roles—many of which have nothing to do with our commission from Christ. We have focused too much attention on “teaching them” (those who are already believers) to the neglect of “making disciples”—teaching non-Christians. Our audiences are Christian most, if not all, of the time!

There are other ways we get diverted from fishing. One is by substituting activity in the church, or practicing the Christian disciplines, for carrying out the commission from Jesus. We have been called to be fishers of men. To be effective at that, we must pray, study, give, sing, praise, fellowship, hold offices, try to unite Christians, be in and lead small groups, staff colleges and churches, and operate conventions, retirement centers, and camps. There is a lot of work to be done. But we cannot substitute doing these things for obeying our commission. We can't be best at our commission if we don't do some of these things, but they cannot become the mission. I know some preachers who spend more time working on their churches' weekly newsletters than they do calling on prospects. And they wonder why their churches are not growing. They've been diverted. It's no wonder many of them are also disillusioned with the ministry.

Another way we get diverted from the mission is by substituting “shark shooting” for fishing. Several

years ago, I was on a fishing trip off Catalina Island, near Southern California. From the other side of the boat, we heard a great commotion. We reeled our lines in and went over to join the crowd. A guy had caught a huge shark. We watched for twenty or twenty-five minutes as he fought with it. A deck hand came out and shot it several times to try to kill it before they brought it aboard. An interesting thing struck me as I looked back on that experience. All but one man had quit fishing. There was a lot of commotion—a lot of excitement—but we weren't fishing. We had paid good money to go fishing, but we had been distracted from it.

We must be careful not to get on the bandwagon of being against things in the name of Christ. We can't major on shark shooting. Be against whatever you want to be against—abortion, cults, demons, New Age, satanism, pornography, drugs, alcoholism, humanism, evolution, or any of a host of others. But don't substitute being against it for reaching out with the gospel. Don't fool yourself into thinking you are carrying out the Great Commission by being against evil or bad things. Preacher Bob Russell wrote, "Be careful that you don't get so busy pulling weeds that you forget to plant seeds." If there are no seeds, there will be no harvest!

Few if any people are going to be drawn to Jesus by what I'm against—especially if the thing I'm against is a major issue in their lives. Jesus didn't come to condemn people (John 3:16, 17), He came to save! He offered living water, bread of life, light, forgiveness, resurrection, and hope; not condemnation.

Another way we often get diverted is pointed out in Kennon Callahan's book, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*. I was taken aback just a bit a few years ago when I read in it, "People don't need programs—they need people."¹³

RESPONSE:

- Can you think of anything that is diverting the attention of you and your church away from fishing?
- What things are you and your church doing that are really "shark shooting" instead of "fishing"?
- How can you begin to plant more seeds?

¹³Kennon Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 64.

How true this is. We can spend hours upon hours building programs in the name of the Lord. But too often, these programs become the focus of our attention and energy. The building, organizing, and implementation of them can actually keep us from people! Ministry is people!

General McClellan was one of President Lincoln's greatest frustrations in the Civil War. He had twice the number of troops that the Confederate Army had in the same area, but Lincoln couldn't get him to engage the enemy. People would ride out from Washington on Sundays to have picnics and watch the troops march for them. Oh, it was impressive! They were all polished up and marching so nice. His troops were intended to fight, but all he was doing with them was maintaining them in a fine fashion.

Programs ought to put us in touch with people. Programs ought to help us meet the needs of people—not interfere with our ministering with or to them. Too many churches have programs that look and sound wonderful, but they don't engage us with those who need the Lord. And the Commander in Chief of the church must be exasperated!

Smart Fishermen Keep Themselves Free to Fish

A church needs to free its people and staff to fish—and then expect that they do it. I remember hearing Bob Moorehead, preacher at the large Overlake Christian Church in Seattle, tell about one of the first things he told the leaders when he went to that church. He said not to expect him at any Monday-, Tuesday-, or Wednesday-night meetings or activities because he would be out calling.

That is a fisherman's heart! He was called to be a fisher of men, and he's going to do it. And he determined he wasn't going to let the church get in the way of fishing. The results speak for themselves. He has led, he has trained, he has fished—and the "catch" has been great!

Most fishing needs to be done in the evenings, when people are home. I schedule meetings in other places at different times as much as possible. Week nights are prime time for calling. Our congregation recognizes that, so, over the past fourteen years, I've not been expected to attend week-night elders meetings or board meetings. The same is true of all our associate pastors and program directors. Our preacher is there, charting the course with our leaders, but we have been freed to evangelize.

One of our staff members was recently talking to a friend who worked at a church in the midwest. He was amazed to hear his friend talk about having a meeting at the church every night of the week. Yet this is normal for many churches. It is also nonsense! If we aren't bringing people in, we are just net-menders! We are *serving* disciples, not *making* them.

I remember when we first started asking staff members to set goals for how many people they would like to be responsible for bringing into the church each year! They were to set their own goals. Their raise wasn't tied to whether or not they reached it. We were aware that the results would be much affected by the kind of assignments they received and who the people were. One person could get assigned to follow up on a family of six at the same time another staff member would get assigned an individual. They would spend about the same amount of time following up on them, but if both sets of prospects joined, one person would have six to show and the other one. We were aware of that and didn't set it up as a means of competition among the staff. We also realized that different staff members would have different amounts of time to invest in calling (fishing). Our music people had several evenings tied up with rehearsals. Others of us didn't have those rehearsals, so we had more evenings free to do calling, and thus our goals were higher.

Whether we all liked this or not was not the issue. The issue was that, as paid members of the church, we ought to be reaching and teaching people.

RESPONSE:

•What do you need to do to be more free for evangelism?

•What does your church need to do to free its staff and members for evangelism?

The results of setting these goals were interesting. Most were initially intimidated by the whole idea. The weeks before the “year” began, our person in the office who assigned calls to the staff went around as usual making assignments. She would get many responses like, “Alice, I really can’t take any more; I’m already loaded.” This was the common experience from week to week. It was interesting how the perception of “loaded” changed the first week we began working on our year’s goal. Alice had no problem giving assignments to the staff. In fact, she often didn’t have enough assignments. Staff started coming to her and asking, “Alice, do you have any more assignments I can take? I need some more.” Most of the staff either came very close to or reached their goals—most of which were from twenty-five to sixty, or more. We had several women on staff who were responsible for twenty to thirty additions the first year!

We haven’t done it across the board yet, but I’ve been thinking that this same kind of idea should probably be done with elders, deacons, Sunday-school teachers, and other key church leaders. Their goals might be a lot smaller than the full-time staff members’, but shouldn’t the leaders in the church be contributing directly to the growth of the church? Shouldn’t they be out fishing, too?

Jesus expects the church to grow. He took the kingdom away from a people who were not producing any fruit and gave it to a people who would. Maybe the reason the church isn’t taking over the world is because we tolerate leadership that has redefined Jesus’ definition of a leader. We have “leaders” whose ministry is simply “making decisions” for congregations rather than “making disciples” for Christ. If that is the case, those leaders will have no true perspective on church growth and probably limited desire for it. The church may not be growing because they aren’t doing anything to contribute to its growing.

CHAPTER THREE

Stay Excited About Fishing

Smart Fishermen Keep Themselves Excited by Fishing

I really feel sorry for those leaders in the church who don't get involved in visitation and teaching the gospel. They may spend great hours in Bible study and prayer and do all the typical churchy things, but their greatest fulfillment as a Christian is missing. I have heard people share great answers to prayer; I have heard them tell about great healings in their lives; I have heard them talk about all kinds of great spiritual adventures in the Lord and in the Spirit. I'm happy for that, but I wouldn't trade any of them for the rewarding, fulfilling experience of seeing someone with whom I have shared the gospel become a Christian. Obviously, it is not just because of what I have done. It is the Word that brings about faith, but God can and does use Christians to help others come to a whole new life—an eternal life in Him. You can have all the other experiences, but if you aren't seeing others come to Christ because of your service to Christ, you are missing the best.

Roy Lawson, my preacher, asked me one day if I knew what kept me up in the ministry. I wasn't sure what he meant. Knowing Roy's sense of humor, I wondered if it was a trick question. So he gave me his assessment; he said something like the following:

I've seen you go through many of the same frustrations and discouragements anyone in the ministry does, but

the thing that keeps you up is going into people's homes and teaching them the gospel. You can go through a rough day and go out calling that evening. The next morning you have a great new story to tell about how people are responding to the Lord, and the problems of the day before have been minimized.

He was right. I would rather be out teaching people in their homes than doing most any other thing in this life. I do a lot of other meaningful things. I have had a lot of fun adventures. I love being with my wife and family. I have some dear friends I enjoy being with. I occasionally go hiking, fishing, hunting, sightseeing, or to a sporting event. I take vacations. I like to read, work in the yard, and watch some football. I take my days off. I like singing in our services, I enjoy teaching Sunday-school classes and reading the Bible. But I would rather be out teaching non-Christians about the Lord in their homes than most of the other things. And I think the Lord would rather have me doing that, too.

And you know what? You are capable of doing the same thing. You don't have to give up all your other responsibilities or interests, but we are failing when we let all those other things keep us from making disciples! You just need to get trained and start doing it.

I must state here what I alluded to earlier. I do not have the gift of evangelism. But that has not stopped me from being involved in helping hundreds come to know Christ by teaching them more about Him in their homes. When I was growing up, I developed a fear of people or new situations, which was evidenced by gagging or dry heaves. This gagging would hit me at times when I would have to enter an unfamiliar situation. It hit me in sports, school, eighth-grade graduation, going to the dentist, and going back to high school after Christmas break. It was not a pleasant experience.

When I became a Christian, I prayed that God would take the gagging away from me. How could I witness for God if every time I tried I began gagging

RESPONSE:

- Are you excited about evangelism and growing the church?
- What are you doing to build your excitement?
- What more could you do to build your excitement?

in front of the other person? Well, God didn't take it away overnight. The problem was removed, but over several years. I had to face the issue of "Am I going to let this problem stop me from teaching the gospel or not?" I didn't want to let it stop me, so I had to force my way through a lot of situations. And lo and behold—God did answer the prayer. But I had to do my part. I couldn't hide behind my fear. Part of the solution to my fear was going calling with an experienced caller and having a fishing pole (some kind of teaching tool) in my hand that I had been shown how to use. As my confidence grew, my fear diminished.

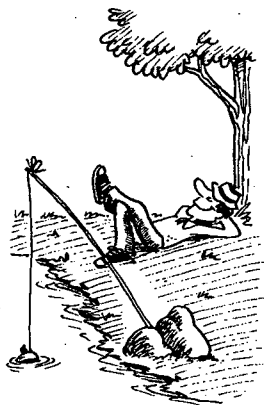
I still fail to speak up for the Lord in many situations where I could. I sometimes walk away thinking, "Why didn't I say this or that?" I'm still learning; I know and accept that. But my failings don't stop me from finding interested people to teach about Christ, and others whom I can begin befriending.

Smart Fishing Requires a Fisherman's Sensitivity to the Fish

Most Christians have the desire to fish (for men and women) and even to catch fish, but very often we aren't very bright in the way we go about it. We are under obligation to produce fruit, but we have also been given direction about using our brains in the way we go about it. The old adage is true: in most cases, we need to work smarter, not harder.

Now some fishermen are simply lazy. Some are disobedient. But many are working as hard as they can without getting the results they should. Most of them need to work smarter! We often go about it in ineffective ways because of poor models. Some of those poor models may even heatedly preach about how to go about fishing for men in ways that not only are not "the only way," but ways that are anything but the best.

I've invented two couples—sort of. One couple is Betty and Barney. The second couple is Fred and Wilma. Betty and Barney represent visitors to the



church. They were very active at another church before they visited us. What I've discovered is that most churches' evangelism is designed to reach Betty and Barney. They are not reaching Fred and Wilma because what Betty and Barney are looking for is the "right" church.

Not so with Fred and Wilma. They aren't interested in church. They are looking for something. They aren't sure what. It has more to do with life. If we want to reach Fred and Wilma, we are going to have to look at things differently. Fred and Wilma are your neighbors—some of them. They are good people. They aren't religious and aren't interested in church—they know all churches want is your money. Every holiday is another reason for them to have a party and get drunk and have "fun."

Churches are going to have to be much more sensitive to what Fred and Wilma are looking for rather than just what Betty and Barney are interested in.

I can't dictate the "only way" or the "best way" for any one person or congregation to evangelize. I've got too much to learn myself. However, over the past many years, I have learned something about what Jesus wants from His disciples about the "way" or "style" or "mental attitude" we should have as we go about fishing for men. It involves using our brains and our hearts—being sensitive.

Before I became a Christian, I had a few people try and "catch" me for the Lord. I got cornered by a Christian relative who tried "witnessing" to me one time. The fact that I wasn't interested didn't matter. I didn't like the "corner them and preach to them" approach at all. Following that occasion, I made sure I never got in the corner of a room where I could be trapped when that person was around.

On another occasion, I played eighteen holes of golf with a guy whose first words to me on the second tee were, "John, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" That day was almost enough to make me give up golf for fear of getting stuck with a guy like that again.

RESPONSE:

- List some Fred and Wilmas you know.

- What will it take to reach them?

- How will you have to approach them differently from the way you would approach Barney and Betty?

- How comfortable do you think they will feel in your church?

- What can you do to make them feel more comfortable?

Some time later, I became a Christian. I don't think these two people I just mentioned had much to do with my becoming a Christian. In fact, their examples loomed large in my memory. "Am I supposed to act like them?" I wondered.

I heard preachers strongly harangue about witnessing (later to learn few of them were doing what they screamed about) to people anywhere and everywhere. Then, being in the church, I was around some others who approached people as I had been approached and attempted to force the gospel on them.

These people suggested that, to be faithful, all Christians should be doing what they were doing. They were "fishers of men." Well, I tried doing it. I went to the beaches; I went door to door; I went to the amusement parks at midnight to "witness" and try to convert drunk sailors.

I never did really like it. Something seemed out of sync about it. On the one hand, I did get a real spiritual surge or charge from it. "If this is what Jesus wants, so be it!" But something still seemed wrong, and I disliked it enough that I eventually went the way of simply finding other things to do in the church. I ended up feeling guilty for several years, though, because I wasn't out "witnessing."

Now I don't mean to suggest that it is wrong to be out and about reaching out. But the way it is modeled is often poor, and it is not the only way. It is a good thing to be out and about in our own neighborhoods, work places, and communities befriending people as Jesus did. But the way it was modeled early in my Christian life was always to go *away* from our area to witness—down to the beach, to the parks, and to the malls; "witnessing raids," as it were. Something always seemed artificial about that.

I suppose it was Gene Rogers, a preacher I worked with for several years in California, who was the one who really started showing me another way of fishing for men. He showed me I didn't have to go out and jam the gospel down people's throats in order to convert them. As Joseph Aldrich pointed out, we are

called to be “fishers” of men—not hunters! We aren’t “head hunters for Jesus.” You are not being unfaithful if you don’t “confront” every person you walk by with the claims of Christ.

Several years after working with Gene, I read a passage in Matthew that blew the lid off the “slam-dunk, in-your-face” version of witnessing and gave great new insights into fishing for men. Jesus was sending His disciples out to preach, and He said to them, “Be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

I was stopped in my tracks. Of course, I had read that verse before—many times. But that day I saw it. I thought, “You would think by the way some Christians act, and some preachers preach, Jesus had said just the opposite! You’d think he had said to be as shrewd as a dove and innocent as a snake! They’ve got it backwards! That’s what is wrong!” I concluded Jesus meant this: “Think like a snake; don’t act like a snake!” Most people are afraid of snakes. Yes, I have run into a few who like them. They are the weird ones for whom zoos build the snake exhibits! But most people don’t like snakes. They are afraid they will strike them. So they avoid snakes. But as much as I don’t like them, I recognize that snakes are smart hunters. If they weren’t, they would starve to death. They have to be patient and careful in the way they approach and stalk or lie in wait for their game.

We need to be sensitive and patient. Doves aren’t known for their brains—but for their gentleness. They are often used as symbols of peace. I don’t know anyone in recorded history who has been killed by an attack from a dove. Doves would fall in the same category as parakeets. People act sort of crazy around parakeets. They want to hold them on their finger, put them on their head, and try to kiss their beak. That’s one thing with a bird, but I’m not going to do that with a rattlesnake!

What Jesus was saying was this, “Think like a snake when you approach people in My Name. Don’t scare them off by the way you act. Be innocent and

gentle. Don't be a spiritual striker in My Name. Don't give them reason to run away from you by the attacking way you act. If you do, they won't be there to listen to what you want to say!" As I read this passage, I yelled out to myself inside, "I can do that! I like that! I like people to treat me that way. I like to treat other people that way."

I don't care if we are talking about someone trying to sell me a car or if we are talking about politics or religion. Jesus was saying others will respond best to being approached that way. I then realized I don't have to be like those who force the gospel on others in the name of witnessing or evangelism. I don't have to be like those who seem to think evangelism means being obnoxious for God! And I don't have to feel guilty about it anymore. I want to do and to be what Jesus said.

I believe that many who "strike" others in the name of Jesus are actually doing more damage than they are good. Once struck at by a snake, you tend to avoid them in the future. If that "snake" was a Christian, you may conclude all Christians are that way, and that you'll have to be like that if you become one—enough reason not even to consider it. Unfortunately, some TV preachers act like snakes on TV from behind their glass walls. Not many, if any, non-Christians are watching them. They might stop and take a quick look as they are flipping from station to station. They may be a little amused or scared by them. But it is no different from those of us who don't like snakes quickly passing by the snake exhibit at the zoo where the snakes are safely behind glass. I may take a quick look, but only on my way to find what I'm really interested in at the zoo—which is anything besides the snakes!

We must be smarter and more sensitive. And we have to realize it's okay; in fact, it's what the Lord wants. We don't have to confront; we don't have to challenge, and we don't have to argue. Joe Aldrich said, "We argue as though Jesus needed defending. We do it, I think, because our ego is at stake, and we

must engage and defeat the adversary at all costs. We wind up shooting ourselves in the foot.”¹⁴

Some years ago, a young single man was going through our evangelism training. He had developed the style of striking people for Jesus. He was a nice guy—a likable guy—and he was on fire for Jesus. He’d go to the nearby park and hit ’em up. I met him talking with his married brother in a store parking lot one day. Later, I suggested we might go visit his brother some time. He said he couldn’t because his brother wouldn’t tell him where he lived or give him his phone number. When I asked why, he answered, “Because my brother doesn’t want me coming over to his house and always preaching to him as I have done in the past. So he won’t let me know where he lives.”

In the middle of our class discussion about being “smart” in the way we fish for men, Mark interrupted and said, “I think I’m getting it.” Then he broke into telling this illustration.

The alarm goes off at 5:00 A.M. We throw on our clothes and grab the fishing poles and run out the door. As we trail toward the lake, we can hear the ducks dancing and the crickets singing.

The morning fog feels good on our tired eyes and makes it easier to see that old wooden boat at the water’s edge. Pushing off carefully with the oars, we ripple our way to the lagoon where the trees hang over the deep shoreline water. We carefully lower our anchor into the water. Our knuckles get smashed and scraped as we use our hands to cushion the chain against the boat so there will be no unnecessary noise.

To catch the big one, we’ve got to think like that fish. Now if I were that fish, I’d be right over there, by that dead tree. That’s where I’m gonna cast. There it goes, *buzzzzzzzzz-click-fzzzzt!* I’ve got a big spoon on the end of the line, the best lure you can get. Now I’ll reel it in,

¹⁴Aldridge, *Gentle Persuasion*, p. 119.

quietly, making it swim like a little minnow. I'll cast again and bounce it off the mud bank and let it fall into the water carefully—ker plunk. Now slowly, slowly, there's a nibble, he's got it! Now, jerk up! I've got it! I thought like that fish and now I've got it!

Whoops, shhhh, can't get too noisy; there are a couple more big ones over by that big tree yet.

He was getting the idea!

Not only do we need to be sensitive individually, but our churches need more sensitivity in what and how we do things. Robert Schuller once told of going to a neighborhood Christmas party. The crowd was noisy, the room was filled with smoke, a lot of drinking was going on, loud music was playing, and he and his wife felt uncomfortable and out of place. When he got home, he asked himself, "I wonder if those people feel as uncomfortable and out of place when they come to my services as we did in going to their party?" He determined then to try to be more sensitive to the outsider, the seeker who may be wanting to get on the inside.

We all need to be learning more about how to do this. I remember following up on a man who had visited our services some time back. He was a fairly new Christian. Before becoming a Christian, he had been a "steel monkey" working on skyscrapers in Chicago by day, and a bouncer at a striptease bar by night. He said that people from his background would feel comfortable coming to our services. They wouldn't be put upon or embarrassed. They would be encouraged and feel comfortable.

We have worked hard to develop that kind of atmosphere. We try not to compromise on what Jesus asked for, but we avoid a lot of what passes as "Christian" actions and styles in many churches. These are not what Jesus asked for. They are our own created "Christian culture" styles—language, dress, bumper stickers, and music—much of which can't be found illustrated in the New Testament nor understood in a secular society.



I'll never forget another call I made. When I got to the house where I had an appointment, I discovered the wife had been called out on an emergency. I suggested we set up a time for me to come back when they both would be there. This was agreeable to the husband, who had just visited our services for the first time. After a ten-minute visit, I got ready to go. We shook hands, but he didn't let go as I turned to leave. I turned back toward him, realizing he wanted to say something else. "You know," he said, "I just have to tell you; you guys have got a hell of a church down there. I mean it is really something."

I couldn't help but get a smile on my face. Here was a non-Christian who felt good about having been in our presence where we had sung to the Lord, and preached about Him, and prayed. But we hadn't attacked him! And he liked it. And he was expressing it in a way that was very natural and normal for him. I answered him by saying (still with a smile on my face), "Well, I've never heard anyone put it that way before, but thanks!"

A way to summarize all this is simply, "Be sensitive to non-Christians." Don't expect them to have the same level of interest in spiritual things as you do at the present moment. Don't demand that they accept your way of doing things and your way of talking as equivalent with accepting the Christian message. Going to programs or services at the church building five times a week or saying "glory" or "praise the Lord" in their presence isn't necessarily modeling the Christian life.

John Fischer wrote an interesting poem about the difficulty we often have in carrying out Jesus' prayer that we be in the world but not of it. He hit the issue on the head. We need to study, examine, talk, and pray about how to be what God wants us to be and how to relate to those we're trying to reach for Christ.

"The In's and Out's of It"

"In it, not of it," the statement was made

As Christian One faced the world, much afraid.

"In it, not of it," the call was made clear,
But Christian One got something stuck in his ear.
"Not in it, or of it" was the thing that he heard.
And knowing the world was painfully absurd,
He welcomed the safety of pious retreat,
And went to the potluck for something to eat.

Now Christian Two, he knew what do,
He'd show those fundies a thing or two!
How will the world ever give Christ a try
If we don't get in there and identify?
So "In it, and of it," he said in his car,
As he pulled in and stopped at a popular bar.
I'll tell them the truth as soon as I'm able
To get myself out from under this table.

Now along comes Christian Three jogging for Jesus,
In witnessing sweats made of four matching pieces.
His earphones are playing a hot Christian tune
About how the Lord is coming back soon.
"Not in it, but of it," he turns down the hill
And stops in for a bite at the Agape Grill.
Like the gold on the chain of his "God Loves You"
bracelet,
He can have the world without having to face it.

While way up in heaven they lament these conditions
That come from changing a few prepositions.
"Not in it, or of it," Christian One thought.
But who in the world will know that he's not?
"In it, and of it," thought Christian Two.
But who in the world will know that he knew?
"Not in it, but of it," thought Christian Three.
But who in the world watches Christian TV?
And Jesus turns to Gabriel, shaking His head.
"In it, not of it," wasn't that what I said?¹⁵

¹⁵John Fischer, *Real Christians Don't Dance* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1988), pp. 132, 133.



CHAPTER FOUR

Training for Smart Fishing

Smart Fishing Requires Good Training

Good fishermen learn all they can about fishing. They listen for hot tips and hot spots; they go to fishing shows and boat shows; they visit tackle shops. They are alert! They are always trying to learn something new.

I remember when Gene Rogers started taking me out in the Pacific Ocean to do some fishing. I learned a lot from him. We would go out on large barges anchored off the coast and spend the day fishing. Gene had learned some techniques that really made a difference. He knew how to fish for different kinds of fish. His methods were different depending on whether he was fishing for surface fish or bottom fish. I was able to learn some good techniques from him. He trained me how to catch fish. Sometimes we would count to twenty, and if we hadn't caught a fish, we considered it a bad day.

We need to be trained in "fishing for men." For the very few who have the gift of evangelism, it might come "naturally." But for the rest of us, it is something we need to study, learn, practice, and keep learning more about. A fisherman is always looking for ways to catch more fish.

It is a good idea to spend some time with those who are catching fish and see what you can learn. That is the best place to invest some time. One fisherman was telling me that when he is around someone

RESPONSE:

•What is now being done in your church to train people to reach others?

•What more can be done?

else who is catching a lot more fish than he is, he'll simply take his line out of the water, sit back for a while, see what the other guy is using for bait, how he is reeling, how deep he is fishing, and anything else he can learn. Then he'll try doing the same. That's one way I have learned a lot about fishing.

If you are a good fisherman, let others spend time with you. Seek out those who look like they want to be fishermen and take them along. We don't give enough attention to training people in evangelism in the church. As a result, not many are involved in it. Most people don't like continually trying to do what they aren't very good at or aren't sure of what they're doing. Training increases confidence, skill, effectiveness, and results.

Tom Peters, writing about American business, pulls no punches:

Our investment in training is a national disgrace . . . despite lip service about people as our most important asset, we value hardware assets over people and have done so over the last century."¹⁶

We in the church have done the same. Our investment in training people for evangelism is a kingdom disgrace. Most preachers come out of Bible college or seminary poorly equipped to teach people the gospel in their homes. Thus, very few of them are able or even interested in trying to spend any time training the people in their churches in personal evangelism. We value our "hardware assets"—our buildings, colleges, staffs, programs, conventions, degrees, titles, positions, and meetings—over our people. We spend more time and more money on all these things than we spend on training people to be "fishers of men." Many preachers spend more time in ministers' meetings and conferences than they do in training their people in evangelism.

¹⁶Peters, *Chaos*, p. 388.

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The assumption is that involvement come as a consequence of nurture. My church over the past indicates that this valid—serious error—making an end that is meant to be a means.

We have spent so much time trying to get people—teaching them about fishing. Wonderful it is, but we haven't got them out. We would get them out fishing, most of them grow!

Cal Jernigan keeps telling me, "John really start catching them [bass], you'll be bass fishing!" I'm sure that is true. But good equipment to get and a lot to learn for bass before that will probably happen on a basis. I can't just sit around reading and bass fishing. I'd have to get out there and reel, put the line in the water, and my hands.

Tom Peters tells the interesting story of the Milliken Company:

Learning to sell mops and rags is no picnic. Classroom training for a neophyte amounts to twenty-two grueling weeks. A year's on-the-job trial with small accounts. Computer firms don't prepare their salespeople.

How does what you are doing to prepare to lead someone to Christ compare to Milliken training people to sell mops? "Twenty weeks"! "A year's on-the-job trial" period.

I wrote a letter to many Bible colleges in the country a while back. The main problem

¹⁹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 68.

Peters says, "Work force training must become a corporate obsession. It is not. And it is on this variable that the outcome of the overall competitive struggle may most strongly depend."¹⁷

Is training others how to become fishers of men an "obsession" with you and your church? I believe this is the variable on which the outcome of the overall struggle between the forces of Satan and the church may most strongly depend. We are in a struggle. The opposition is great. We must gain an obsession for teaching our people how to do smart fishing.

Peters wrote about the elements of a good training program. Number one was "extensive entry-level training that focuses on exactly the skills in which you wish to be distinctive." He notes that such firms as Disney, IBM, and Federal Express "overemphasize the skills that define their uniqueness."¹⁸

What is our uniqueness? Love? No, others are loving. A plan? No, others have elaborate plans. Doing weddings, holding funerals, and doing hospital visitation? No, others do those. Having buildings, making videos, organizing softball teams, camps, choirs, and potlucks? No, other religious and non-church groups have all those. What makes us distinctive from all others is the gospel. We should "overemphasize" in training the skills that define our uniqueness—the gospel!

Our people will get more involved in the mission if we would train them better in smart fishing. If they are better trained, they will teach the gospel to more. If one isn't trained, he will find many other "godly" things to do. He might major his ministry on prayer, Bible study, worship, counseling, the Holy Spirit, end times, or music. Yes, my effectiveness in making disciples will be weakened if I'm not praying and doing many of those other things, but I can't make those spiritual disciplines or ministries the end! They are

¹⁷Peters, *Chaos*, p. 388.

¹⁸Peters, *Chaos*, p. 391.

some of the means to the end! The end—the purpose, the mission—is making disciples.

The assumption is that involvement in mission will come as a consequence of nurture. My experience in the church over the past indicates that this assumption is invalid—serious error—making an end out of something that is meant to be a means.

We have spent so much time trying to “nurture” people—teaching them about fishing and how wonderful it is, but we haven’t got them out fishing. If we would get them out fishing, most of them would grow!

Cal Jernigan keeps telling me, “John, when you really start catching them [bass], you’ll be hooked on bass fishing!” I’m sure that is true. But I have a lot of good equipment to get and a lot to learn about fishing for bass before that will probably happen on a regular basis. I can’t just sit around reading and talking about bass fishing. I’d have to get out there and get a rod and reel, put the line in the water, and get scales on my hands.

Tom Peters tells the interesting story about the Milliken Company:

Learning to sell mops and rags is no picnic at Milliken. Classroom training for a neophyte rag salesperson amounts to twenty-two grueling weeks, followed by a year’s on-the-job trial with small accounts. Most computer firms don’t prepare their salespeople that well.¹⁹

How does what you are doing to prepare people to lead someone to Christ compare to Milliken’s training people to sell mops? “Twenty-two grueling weeks”! “A year’s on-the-job trial” period!

I wrote a letter to many Bible colleges across the country a while back. The main proposition of the

¹⁹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 68.

letter was this. A "Bible" college's graduating a student who can't effectively sit down and teach the gospel to another person is not much different from a high school's graduating a student who can't read. The response to the letter was very positive. All agreed. Many are working at helping to insure that their students—the leaders of tomorrow's church—have been better trained to do smart fishing.

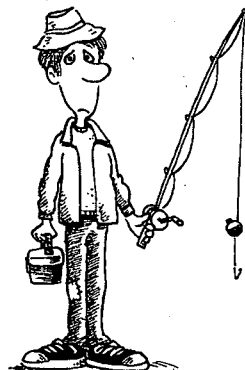
When it comes to evangelism training, we have a leadership crisis in our churches. A seventy-five-year-old retired preacher once sat in my office with a terrible burden on his heart. He had led a church to significant size before he retired. He loved the Lord. He was a good pulpit preacher and a wonderful pastor. But, with tears in his eyes, he said to me, "John, before I die, I have got to learn how to lead a person to Jesus!" There was a tear in my eye, too. We have to do a better job of training in evangelism (smart fishing) in our Bible colleges and in our churches. What are you and the leaders of your congregation doing in personally setting an example in evangelism—teaching the gospel to the lost?

Smart Fishermen Must Be Willing to Change Their Ways

We must have a willingness to change our ways if we want to catch fish. We have to want to be the best fishermen we can be. We must be more interested in catching fish than just sitting in a boat soaking and rinsing the line on our reels.

I was amazed the first time I went fishing with Cal Jernigan. He had three big tackle boxes full of lures and four or five different poles. He'd try one lure for a while and then another one—different color, size, from top to deep swimmer, etc. We boated from one part of the lake to another. We kept moving around looking for where the fish were. It didn't do much good to cast our lures into water with no fish present.

The church is often not catching any "fish" because we are sitting in the same spot, with the same



lure and the same pole, reminiscing about all the fish we used to catch; often unwilling to change our ways. It worked for us once (maybe); why should we change anything?

We in the church can't change our message. But most of our methods of carrying out the commission from Christ are changeable—and must be changed if we want to reach people for Christ. Our old lures, in many cases, don't work anymore. They are unappealing, rusty, and worn out.

We must simply learn to love change as much as we have hated it in the past. . . . Today, loving change, tumult, even chaos is a prerequisite for survival, let alone success.²⁰

We see churches dying all around us because they aren't willing to change. They are locked, not into God's ways, but into the ways and traditions of their denomination or congregation. In business and in the church, "failure, today, is failure to change."²¹

RESPONSE:

•Why are we so often afraid of change?

•What do you think your church needs to change in order to catch more fish?

There is no reason to fail in this way. We have no reason to fear change. We need to fear the consequences of not getting better results than we are now! We need to make change our friend, trust it, try it. Every change we experiment with won't work. Every lure of Cal's I tried didn't catch a fish. If it didn't eventually catch a fish, why would I keep using it? I wasn't interested in simply perfecting the art of casting. I wanted to catch fish!

If what you are doing as a church now isn't catching fish, make some changes. Don't change just to change. Change your ways so you'll catch more fish. God wants us to catch fish! If what you are doing now is not catching fish, it is likely not God's way!

Our attitude in the church is often "What's wrong with what we're doing? I like it." Peters says, "We

²⁰Peters, *Chaos*, p. 56.

²¹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 485.

must challenge everything, change everything, improve everything."²² Of course, some will argue, "That's fine for business, but we are the church. We are doing this to please the Lord." While it may seem that we are trying to please the Lord, the truth is a lot of what we are doing is to please us, to satisfy our own comfort zone—our likes and dislikes.

Jesus was a leader. He was a change agent. Everything about His life and ministry was designed to bring about change. He was bringing the end to a covenant that God's people had had for centuries. He met resistance, rebellion, anger—they killed Him! He came to bring change in covenants, which was going to result in change in the way God worked on earth and the way He was going to change lives. You will have enemies if you lead change, too.

If you aren't changing, you are stagnating; getting comfortable in the status quo. That is losing. Your fishing boat is sinking! Leaders in the church ought to be asking themselves in their own personal lives as well as for their congregation, "What have we changed lately?" We ought to be asking this every day.

Growth is increasingly essential to any organization's health. A firm is never static—it is either growing or stagnating. While growth for growth's sake at the extreme is silly, growth alone provides an expanding opportunity structure for everyone in the firm. Moreover, stagnation . . . is negatively affecting every element of the firm. Excitement spurs performance; contraction doesn't.²³

The entire purpose of change is to see how we can do a better job carrying out the Great Commission the Lord has given the church. We can always improve what we are doing. We often want to retreat in the

²²Peters, *Chaos*, p. 569.

²³Peters, *Chaos*, p. 622.

comfortable feeling that we have everything under control. If you have everything “under control,” you are simply ignoring a lot that needs attention around you. Stagnation promotes depression. You aren’t going to be growing if you and your people are stagnating. Constructive change can stimulate growth through the excitement that comes with it. What have you changed lately?

Peters also says, to enable all organization members to get comfortable with change and constant risk-taking,

management must be ever present, training, coaching, cajoling—and caring and comforting. A prime side benefit of such a direct presence is a radical reduction in information distortion, which is now more dangerous than ever.²⁴

If you are going to lead in changing things for the work of the kingdom, then you can help the members of your church get comfortable with change by being among them. Don’t make decisions and changes by long distance. Be among them; listen, learn, and be open to questions and criticisms; train them in their jobs; encourage them in meetings, on the phone, in notes, and in public praise. If they don’t see that you love them and care about them, they will likely run you out of town. By staying among them, walking the floor with them, you will be able to hear what people are saying. You will be able to clear up misunderstandings and false rumors, and you can defend, encourage, and correct.

Smart Fishermen Do Things Right

One big area of change will come from our simply wanting to do the best job we can in everything we do for the Lord. That means we must continually be

²⁴Peters, *Chaos*, p. 510.

examining everything we do in the church to make it the best it possibly can be. This will help us in our fishing. First we have to be doing the right thing (fishing); then we need to do it right! One fisherman told me ten percent of the fishermen catch ninety percent of the fish. They are doing things right.

This results from our looking at every job and task we do and seeking out a thousand little things we can do to enhance and improve ourselves, our services, our facilities, our programs—and anything else we can improve! Different people on our staff at times have been given the task in their job description of being the “enhancement observer.” That means their specific job was to keep their eye on everything we do and look for what is wrong and call it to our attention so we can fix it. Everyone really has this job! It is easy to get lazy and complacent and give rotten service. The church is a service organization! We often forget that. We must keep challenging ourselves—are we giving the best service?

In the business world, people know that quality pays. Leaders in the church must be obsessed with quality. People want and expect quality from businesses. They don't change their thinking when they come to church. They notice when quality is not there. They appreciate it when it is. Prospects' memories of “poor service” tend to outweigh the impressive building, the “ordained” preacher, the choir's anthems, and all the other things we too easily assume will win them. In the church, we must look at things through the eyes of those we are trying to reach. What would say “quality” to them? A weed-covered church lawn? Peeling paint on the building? Filthy carpets? No signs to show them where to go? Dirty rest rooms? Services that go long beyond the announced time? Finding no one to welcome them? Or just the opposite?

One preacher in California has a different elder bring a non-Christian friend to church each month. This person is asked to come and simply observe everything going on at the church as an outsider. Then

the elder and the preacher take the visitor out to lunch and ask him to critique the whole experience. What did he like? What didn't he like?

What a great idea! They will sure learn new ways to put quality in what they are doing. Quality enhancement, improvement, *change* is the job of every person in the church. Certainly for every leader. There are literally thousands of innovation/improvement opportunities in every church. You will never exhaust all the possibilities. And the more people you get thinking about quality for Christ and quality for the sake of fulfilling His mission and reaching our prospects, the more ideas you will get.

We ought to want to make everything the best it can be in the church. Every member of the church (especially leaders) shouldn't walk past anything that will show poor interest in quality without doing something about it. We ought not to walk by any need without making sure that it is being addressed. It may be someone looking for where to go, a piece of trash lying in the parking lot, floors that are dirty, or overflowing paper in trash cans. Whatever the need, we ought to address it.

I'll never forget the day I was attending a funeral. At the end, when people were going to the front to pass by the coffin, I saw Bob Prior ahead of me. Bob is a staff member at our church. There was a small piece of paper, no bigger than a quarter, in the middle of the aisle. Bob leaned over and picked it up. I was so impressed. It wasn't even our building, but that didn't matter to Bob. He knew that paper did not belong there, so he picked it up. That's just the way Bob is—at work, at our own church, or somewhere else, Bob believes in making things right!

If we deliberately ignore any little act of poor quality, lousy service, or uncaring ministry, we have helped to ruin the credibility of the Lord's church. As a result, we damage the church's ability to reach people with the gospel.

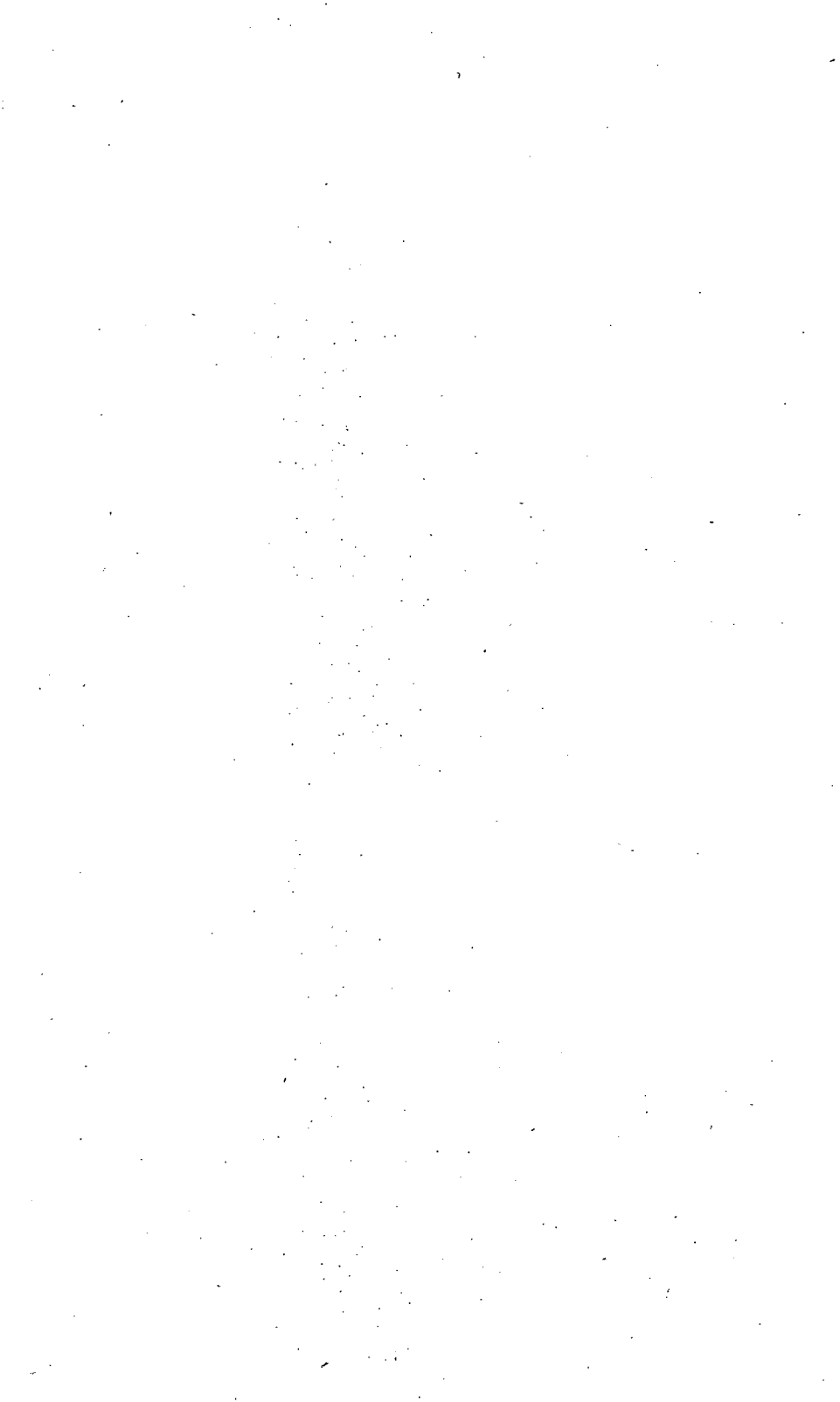
If we are going to allow, to encourage, and even to seek change, then we must also be willing to allow

failure. Many churches won't. But if you don't allow failure, you can't allow change. Not all changes are going to work. But if we're honest, we would realize that not changing is not working, either. So rather than refuse to try something for fear that it won't work, we will keep trying until we find what does.

I think one of the key factors in producing growth in the church is the ability to allow its leadership and staff to fail. A church may need to try five different ministries or programs to find the one ministry that works and meets the needs of the people. Too often, a church will drive off the minister or staff member who has a couple of programs "bomb." But successful churches have long lists of "bombs"—programs that failed. They just pick up the pieces and try again, thankful for the lessons learned from the failed attempt. (If the program fails because of laziness or incompetence, of course, that is a different matter.)

When I was our church's pastor of administration for a few years, I annually asked the staff to review all ministries and ask whether any of them were "dead horses" that needed to be buried. If the programs were not doing what we wanted them to and we had given them reasonable time and effort to do so, then we wanted to stop and do something else. Too many churches can't bury their dead horses. They have a program or ministry that dies, but they have done it for so long that they just can't think of not doing it anymore. It's a dead horse. They can't ride it anymore, but they still have the bridle on it. It won't walk, so they drag it around behind them. It is dead.

When we have a dead horse, we stop. We dig a hole next to it and push it in, cover it up, and go look for another horse. We are allowed to fail in our ideas and our programming.



SECTION TWO

Developing a Strategy for Smart Fishing



INTRODUCTION

Let's Go Fishing!

It is time to get a fishing pole in your hand. I would recommend that your church establish a "Fishing Task Force": a fishing team! Put a team together to lay out your church's fishing plan. I would make it from a broad spectrum of the people in your church including staff and volunteer people. This would need to be a group of people, men and women, representing the various ministry groups in your church; your best thinkers; active doers in building the church; your people who want to do a better job of fishing.

This section of the book brings us back to the five areas for smart fishing in a church's ministry. If you follow along and do your own homework, you will develop a strategy to help your church grow.

Area One: Pre-prospect

Area Two: Prospect

Area Three: New Member

Area Four: Member

Area Five: M.I.A. (Missing in attendance/action)

I was sharing this chart with a businessman in our church. After I had briefly summarized it, he said he has to give attention to the same five areas in his business. He has to figure out who his pre-prospects are to try and let them know of his business. Once they become prospects for his business, he must have a plan on how to approach them and try to persuade them into using his service. Once they become new customers, he must communicate with them and make sure things get off to a good start. Once they become regular accounts, he can't forget them. He must work at improving his service with them.

Should a customer drop his services at any time, he needs to try to find out what went wrong and to resolve the problem if possible.

In the following five chapters, I'll first explain each area in more detail. Second, I will list a variety of ways that a church might consider meeting needs in each area. Some of the ideas will include things we have done or are doing at Central Christian Church in Mesa, Arizona. In chapter ten, you will find a worksheet for each of the five areas on which you can start building the specific game plan for that area for your congregation. The goal is to build a complete ministry plan in these five areas for your church. The plan for your congregation isn't going to look exactly like the one for another church. Your own plan is going to change from year to year. It will need constant updating, and polishing! A final "Information Summary Chart" will further clarify your plan of action for the next ten years.

The remainder of the book consists of appendices to give you additional help to begin to build your specific plans for smart fishing. Appendix A tells how to train others for smarter fishing. Appendix B reveals some of the factors I have observed in the growth of Central Christian Church. Appendix C lists some additional resources that may be helpful.

The final plan will look a little bit different for every congregation based on its personality, leadership, and community. It is my hope that this will help your church develop a more effective plan for reaching the lost for Christ.

Using the Five-column Plan for Any Ministry/Department

It would be good for a church to apply the thinking of this five-column examination to every ministry area in the church. For example, the women's, youth, children's, music, nursery, and all other departments would benefit by studying themselves and asking what they are doing to reach pre-prospects in the

community, what they are doing to take care of the prospects when they walk into their program, what they are doing to help new members in their area, what their goal is for those who are members or regulars, and what plans they have for an occasion when someone starts missing.

Take the youth ministry, for example. Many youth programs, even with a full-time youth pastor on staff, are simply "Teen Church Baby-sitting Programs." How can you find out whether that is the case?

1. List how many specific things have been done in the last year to try to reach out to non-Christian kids who aren't going to any church. Be honest here in not listing programs that were called "evangelistic" but in reality were simply programs for the kids in the church.

2. Lay out the specific follow up-plans for when a youth visits the church or youth group.

3. What is the youth department's plan for follow-up on new Christians or new members?

4. What is the youth department's plan for those who are in the youth group? What goals have been stated for growth in their lives as Christians? What is being done to help achieve these goals?

5. What is the youth department's plan for those who quit coming? Is it a plan that really expresses the depth of concern those leaders who are working with the youth have for them?

These same questions can be asked of every ministry in the church, and of the church as a whole. They *must* be asked if the church wants to do "smart fishing." So let's plan our strategy for each of these five areas, and then work the plan to win the lost for the Lord Jesus!



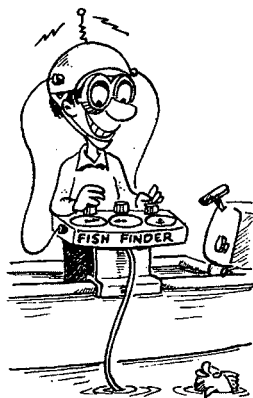
CHAPTER FIVE

Planning Your Strategy for Pre-prospects

Pre-prospects are those who live in your community who are not Christians and who may have no contact with a Christian group or congregation. They are lost. You have not established contact with them yet. They don't really know who you are, and you don't know them. This is probably the most important area, and yet the most often neglected. It gets a lot of lip service but little follow-through.

I remember going fishing out in the ocean several times on some large fishing boats. They do what they call "chumming." In the middle of the boat is a large tank filled with anchovies. A deck hand will dip a basket on the end of a pole into them, scoop up a bunch, and fling them into the water all around the boat. The idea is to attract the big fish in the deeper or distant waters nearer to the boat so the fishermen can try to catch them with their bait. We in the church must spend some time thinking about how to attract the pre-prospects close enough so they can decide whether they like what we have to offer.

As I have watched fishing enthusiasts over the years, I've noticed they do a lot to find fish. First, they get a boat to get to them. On these boats, they install fancy electronic depth finders and fish finders. They have little trolling motors to move slowly through the fishing waters. Then they talk about how different kinds of fish live in different-temperature waters, so you can expect to find certain ones on the surface and others ten to fifteen feet deep. Some fish like lures, others worms, salmon eggs, corn, or



marshmallows; some live in open water, and others live in the brush.

There are a variety of excellent resources on how to help you discover who the pre-prospects are in your community. My advice on this is to "keep it simple." You can spend too much time digging very deep here. Don't become a "demographic demagogue." Do enough to learn about your area but not so much you never get on to fishing!

First, in laying out your strategy for your pre-prospects, study the makeup of your community. Douglas A. Walrath, in *Planning for Your Church*, gives an excellent approach to "defining your territory" and for "informally" researching your community (pages 79-85). I like his plan. It is simple and to the point. I would recommend you get his book and read it. His best piece of advice is what one of his professors once said: "The most sophisticated research instruments you will ever discover are your eyes and your ears. Whenever you begin to do research, look and listen first."²⁵

Visit your public library and ask for basic demographic studies done on your community. Your city hall may also have some studies. Look and listen. Who lives around you? Are they married or single, young or old, rich or poor?

This will help in many ways. For example, we have a good singles ministry going for people in their twenties through fifties. There are a lot of singles in our area. Divorce is high in Arizona. Housing is moderately priced. There are quite a few jobs. Thus, there are many singles. Good reason for a singles ministry.

A preacher friend, Doug Osness, however, is preaching at a church in Anaheim, California. He saw a study of the makeup of his community and discovered there are very few singles. Housing is very expensive—too expensive for most singles to afford.

²⁵Douglas Walrath, *Planning for Your Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), p. 81.

There aren't many divorcees living there because, when a divorce takes place, neither spouse can afford to keep the house without the other's income. Thus, it wouldn't be wise to make a singles ministry a major goal for that congregation. Instead, the church is building its strategy on the many two-income families that live in the area.

What is expected for your area in the future? Growth, decline, stabilizing? Contact your city hall for projections. Talk to business people, builders, and banks in your area. See what you can learn that will help in your thinking about the church's work.

Second, study yourselves. Who are you? What are your strengths? What do you have to offer your community? What do you want to be? Develop a simple survey that asks these (and other similar) questions, and have your congregation fill it out. Not everyone will want to, but those who do will give you a good feel for what you're like.

Finding out who you are is very important because it will help you know how to reach out to you community. You will want to build much of your outreach ministry based on your strengths. You don't need to try to build a strong ministry in an area in which you are weak. Pour your time and energy into an area where you are already strong. Building your mission as a church will tie in with what you are or might be able to be good at in terms of ministry.

Kennon Callahan lists five questions to help you build your mission purpose as a church. You have to know your community and you have to know who you are to be able to answer these.

1. What specific human hurts and hopes do you have longings to help with?
2. What concrete strengths do you have with which to share effective help for these specific human hurts and hopes?
3. What three to five persons do you know who have similar longings and strengths in your church or in your community?

4. What events in the community would make this mission effort timely?
5. In what specific ways is this emerging missional outreach one in which God is calling you to invest your life?²⁶

A similar concept is deciding what kind of reputation you now have or want to have in the community. What do people think of when they think of your church? Is it good? If not, you better work on changing it if you want to catch fish.

Are you known as the church that has the dump-looking place? . . . has a lot of good things for children? . . . really cares about the elderly? . . . has boring, funeral-like worship services? . . . is a tight click? . . . has a great program going for alcoholics or divorcees or the homeless or youth? Just how do people think of your church?

We are working in our congregation on a hundred little things—all the time trying to be sensitive to the non-Christian who might walk into our service. We want to have the reputation of having lively and meaningful worship services. In that pursuit, we recently adopted the following theme for our church: “Central is a place to come to LIFE!”

We want to be a place where people will find **love**—first the love of our people, and then the most important love: that of the Lord. We want to preach, sing, and teach in such a way that people will leave our services, classes, and other activities having been inspired for the week to come. Our hope is that they will come to find the **inspiration** of our Great Lord and His Spirit. We hope people will come into our midst and find **friendship**. We want them to find people willing and seeking to befriend them and to introduce them to the best friend, Jesus. Finally, we are working to see that we are doing things that will encourage people and give them strength to face the

²⁶Callahan *Twelve Keys*, p. 6.

daily challenges of life. As we teach them the gospel, they will discover the greatest source of **encouragement** available. When people leave after being with our congregation, we hope they will have experienced some of these things and we will come to be known as the church "where people are coming to L.I.F.E."

Third, once you have identified who your prospects are (and you have an idea of who you are), you have to figure out some ways to get their attention. We in the church can be so naive and blind in our attitude about this. Sometimes we think, "Well, we have a sign out front. They know where we are; they should be able to find us! We aren't going to spend any money on this." That doesn't sound like an eager or smart fisherman.

Getting the attention of fish is a tough job. On a recent vacation in San Diego, I was driving down a street and passed a church facility. It was a neat place, looked to house a congregation of 200-300 people on Sundays. As I passed it, the thought struck me, "If I were a non-Christian living in this neighborhood in this fun-loving land of Southern California, and I drove by this building, what reason would I have to stop and go inside today or even on Sunday?" My answer was that I wouldn't go inside. Why would I want to? "All they want to do is mess up my life! All they are interested in is my money. I wouldn't be able to read pornographic magazines anymore; I'd have to get rid of some of my cable channels and give up my booze. No way, José!"

So how would they get me into that building? They would have to come get me. And they probably wouldn't be able to drag me in screaming and fighting. Someone would have to befriend me and give me some really good reason to go.

The same kind of thought struck me once when driving an elevated freeway in Los Angeles and saw the ocean of cars and thousands of homes for miles on miles. How are we going to reach them? The answer is "one at a time." We are going to have to live

in those neighborhoods with them, find the interested ones, and help them find their way to the Lord.

We asked those attending a recent special program at our church to fill out a simple attendance card. On it was a place to check why they had come the first time. The results were interesting:

2 came because of the newspaper ad

4 or 5 came from the mass mailing

9 or so came because they saw the special large banner out front

176 came because friends had invited them

Fourth, you need to develop a public relations mentality. Jesus said the children of the world often are craftier in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light. We need to be smarter in reaching out. It takes different kinds of lures to catch different kinds of fish.

A fisherman from Alaska told me how fishing guides determine what bait to use to catch dolly fish. They take their clients to the fishing area, and the guide will catch the first fish. He then cuts it open and sees what it has been feeding on. Then he immediately makes up the lures, which look just like what the fish have been eating. You have to throw out the right bait if you want to catch fish.

I call it the bartering mentality. In order for me to get you to come to my event, buy my idea, or support my cause, I must convince you that what I'm encouraging you to do will be worth more to you than what you will have to give up in order to participate—time, money, energy, etc. If you don't think it looks worthwhile, you won't do it. We're often not very persuasive with non-Christians. The bait we throw out looks pretty unappealing. We can do better. We may have to experiment a lot. If one approach doesn't work, try another. You don't quit trying because one idea doesn't work. Much of what we do may look great to us, and we can't understand why non-Christians aren't excited about it. But if they don't like it, we're wasting our time and energy.

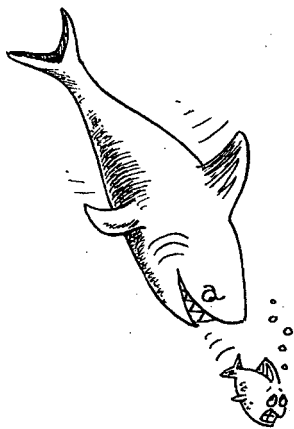
I was driving down a street in our city and passed in front of a small church building. Out in front was a large pink florescent banner with black lettering saying "REVIVAL" with the times and dates. As I looked at that, I asked myself, "Do they actually think that banner is going to cause many non-Christian driving down the street to stop the car and go back to write down the details so they can go?" Forget it. Out of a city of 300,000, I'd be surprised if even one person came as a result of that banner. We can thank the Lord for that one—if he comes—but it is going to take craftier work than that to reach most of the non-Christians around us.

You can get the attention of yellowtails (an ocean fish) with sharks or with anchovies. A shark will get their attention, but they will likely flee your fishing area. Anchovies will get their attention and bring them in closer.

Many don't catch fish because their lures are not inviting, or they keep casting where there are no fish. I might be thinking, "The lure looks neat to me. I spent ten dollars on it. The guy said it would work." But if the fish don't like it, it doesn't matter how good it looks to you. You won't catch any fish.

I remember reading the story about a dog-food company. The owner had spent tens of thousands of dollars on research to make a healthy dog food. He spent lavishly on the most attractive labeling and advertising, but sales were terrible. At a meeting with his salesmen, he was going on and on with them about how lousy sales were and what they should be doing to make things better. In exasperation, he finally asked them what the problem was. Why weren't they selling more? One of the men spoke up and simply said, "The dogs don't like it!"

Fifth, examine the friendliness of your friendly church. If you don't really want to grow, just don't be friendly to newcomers. Now don't be so blatant about it. Most all of us think we are friendly. Naturally we will be friendly to those we already know in the church (so we think, of course we are friendly), but



we often do not come across so friendly in the eyes of outsiders.

Most have to work at reminding themselves to be friendly to the newcomer or stranger. We had our staff do a little experiment a few years back. I had a secretary put a piece of paper on every desk on Friday afternoons. We explained to the staff that they were to write on it the names of five people or families they met and introduced themselves to on Sunday morning and put it back on my desk on Monday. After a month or so, I asked them whether they had been stopping and introducing themselves to that many folks they didn't know *before* we had them start filling out the paper. Out of about fifteen or sixteen people, only one person had already been doing it. We can get so caught up in the "important" things we have to take care of that we walk past the most important people there on Sundays.

I was talking to a preacher in New York who had visited the church in Florida where a good friend of his preached. His friend's sermon was great. The service moved right along and was enjoyable. But he said if someone from that church had contacted him that week and asked if they could come visit him, he would have said no because the people of the church were so cold and unfriendly. They probably don't know they are unfriendly—they probably are very friendly to each other.

John Samples of Standard Publishing tells of his visit to a church one Easter. While in the rest room, he heard an old timer complaining to a younger man about all the visitors taking up the best parking places and seats in the church. He resented the inconvenience it was to him. John inquired how long the man had been in the church, and received a long story on all the man had done for the church over many years, of offices he had held, and so on. John then said it was his first time there.

The man replied, "Yep, and I bet you'll be back for Christmas, too." If I didn't know John was an honest man, I couldn't believe this story, but it is true.

We need to take what I call a "Greeting Attitude Inventory." It just might help to expand our thinking about our ideas of being friendly. Score yourself, either 10 points or 0 points, on each of the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| | •Use this column to record your "score." |
| 1. When you walk into the foyer at church and see people you don't know, do you . . . | |
| a. introduce yourself and welcome the strangers? | •A: 10 points ____ |
| b. walk past them without greeting them?
(Just smiling doesn't count.) | •B: 0 points ____ |
| 2. When you see someone whose name you have forgotten, do you . . . | |
| a. ask him again what his name is? | •A: 10 points ____ |
| b. avoid the person, just saying hello from a distance? | •B: 0 points ____ |
| 3. When you go into the sanctuary to sit down, do you . . . | |
| a. look for a vacant seat near someone you know? | •A: 0 points ____ |
| b. look for a seat near someone you don't know? | •B: 10 points ____ |
| 4. When you go to a class, meeting, or rehearsal, do you . . . | |
| a. go around and greet those you don't know? | •A: 10 points ____ |
| b. sit down and wait for things to start or for someone to come to you? | •B: 0 points ____ |
| 5. When you arrive early at church, do you . . . | |
| a. go sit down, read the bulletin, and watch others? | •A: 0 points ____ |
| b. give a friendly greeting to those around you? | •B: 10 points ____ |
| 6. When you attend church, an activity, or class where not many people recognize you, do you: | |
| a. go home complaining about how unfriendly people were? | •A: 0 points ____ |
| b. go home determined to take the initiative next time so that everyone else will feel welcome? | •B: 10 points ____ |
| 7. When you are at any church event and you pass someone who is in a wheel chair, of a different | |

race, or different from you in some other way, do you:

- A: 0 points _____
 - a. avoid this person, look the other way, or ignore him?
- B: 10 points _____
 - b. take the initiative, introduce yourself and extend a welcome to them?

TOTAL _____

SUMMARY:

50-70 = Keep it up. You're making a positive difference!

30-40 = Fair, but room to improve!

0-20 = You must surely be a lonely person. Show some interest in others. You'll be glad you did.²⁷

Well, how did you do? Surely we can all improve in this area. Preachers, don't harangue your people from the pulpit about being friendly. Lead a planned effort to see that you and your church members give special attention to this project of becoming better greeters for Jesus Christ. Many "fish" will return to those "friendly waters." Without this friendly atmosphere, many of your other efforts are wasted.

Key Elements

Before you start using some of the ideas that come forth as to how to reach the pre-prospect, you need to do some house cleaning. You'll want as many things as possible to be in place when you make contact with the outsiders visiting you. Consider the following:

Worship Services

Look at your worship services. They can either be a stumbling block to reaching people or a bonus. Most churches will make first live contact with pre-prospects in their worship or celebration services. If

²⁷Adapted from John Hendee, "So You Think Your Church Is Friendly" (*Christian Standard*, October 22, 1989), p. 7.

your members are excited about what is going on in your services, they will be inviting others to come. If they aren't excited, they won't be inviting anyone.

What do your services communicate? When people walk into your services, what do they *feel*? Are they inclined to ask, "Did someone just die?" or, "Hey, did someone come back to life?" A lot of worship services look, smell, and feel like funeral services. Hey folks! We serve a *risen* Savior. Do your services reflect the joy and excitement that should come from that? Do your services reflect the excitement of a group of people who have been in a life boat for weeks when they see a rescue ship? We are on a sinking ship—this planet. We have a rescuer coming for us. Are we excited about that when we gather? Some studies show that over eighty percent of new members rate the worship service as a major reason why they joined.

Not many members are going to invite others if the service is boring, unfriendly, uninteresting, or not meeting life needs. Celebration or worship services need variety. The same old thing over and over and over will kill a church in our culture. Some churches seem to be in a "coma" and very near death already. If the worship is not lively, warm, and rewarding, the non-Christian will not be back. Many *members* won't be back!

I don't know a lot about music, but I know what sounds good and what doesn't. I know what is well prepared and what is sloppy. I know when a person is singing a song right and when he is singing a song way out of his range.

We live in a music world. People like good music. Music can make or break your services. Use some good music. Music turned a corner for us in our growth. It helps in evangelism. People so often say when we are visiting in their homes, "Boy, we sure liked the music." Debbie Hollenbach put quality and style in it. It's not all heavy organ music. There is variety. Whatever you do must "fit" with who your people are, whom you are trying to reach, and what and

whom you have to help provide the music. Don't try to do something for which you don't have the talent. I remember years ago sitting through an Easter musical in which the choir of eight or so was in way over their heads. It was the leader's fault. It was terrible! It was embarrassing! I would never have come back if it weren't for the fact that I had to in order to get my paycheck. I wouldn't have wanted to visit in the home of a visitor from that service.

I believe humor is important in a worship service. Much of this opinion has come from hearing the comments of non-Christians I've called on over the last decade. We have humor and humorous things happen in our services. Some of it is planned; much is spontaneous. Some of it borders on the absurd at times, but it all says something to the non-Christian. We aren't a "comedy club," but people get the idea that you can be a Christian and have fun in the "presence of God." Lighten up!

Timing in your services is very important. People don't like sitting in services in our culture when time is obviously wasted. They like things to start on time and end on time. We might think, "This is important stuff! So what if it takes another half hour." But the non-Christian, who does not appreciate the importance as much as we do, will often consider tardiness a lack of respect for him and his time.

Are your services easy to understand? I remember the first time I went to church and Communion was being served. I almost panicked. I didn't know what it was. They didn't explain it very well. As I saw the tray coming, I realized everyone would probably see me not take it and know I was an "outsider." But I wasn't about to take it because I wasn't sure what I would be getting myself into. I didn't want them to think I was one of them, either!

There is another thing I've seen some churches do that I really like. Before they collect the offering each week, they greet their first-time visitors and explain that, as guests on their first day, the visitors are not expected to contribute to the offering. That says a lot

to non-Christians who think all the church is after is their money.

If you have a bulletin, does it make it obvious to the outsiders that they are "outsiders" because they can't understand what is written or what the activities written about are? Does the language from the pulpit make people think that they are in a foreign land? We have our own cultural language, which we often think is "Christian." Yet the style of it may have no similarity to the way Jesus spoke to the uninitiated.

What Tom Peters wrote about business is especially relevant to the church:

We'd be much better off if we could pretend that our customers are foreigners who do not speak our language. They don't. Take a person who comes from the world of commercial banking. One of his customers might come from the world of contractors; the next from the world of women's wear boutiques. Then language and customs are dramatically different for each. Few of the banker's customers will speak "Banker."²⁸

If people don't speak "Banker," they are even less likely to speak "Church-ese" or "Christian." Reexamine your bulletin, your handouts, and your talk. Make sure that each will be understood by those whom you are trying to reach.

I will never forget the time I visited the Sunday morning services of Calvary Chapel in Southern California, where Chuck Smith was preaching. One of the things that impressed me the most about that visit was that Chuck Smith smiled. He smiled a lot. And it made so much sense! He should smile! Everyone who sits up on the platform in the services ought to smile! It doesn't have to be the put on cheerleader style smile, but there should be a smile most of the time. Visitors ought to know these people have something to smile about. It reminded me of how

²⁸Peters, *Chaos*, p. 188.



Smile!

many others I've seen sitting on platforms in churches and conventions frowning! Hey, this is not a funeral service! He's not dead! But you'd never know that by some preachers' demeanor.

Preaching must be the best the preacher can do. I'll never forget hearing our preacher's comment to our staff one day many years ago. Roy Lawson said, "I know I will let our people down in many ways. I won't always be there when they are in the hospital. I won't be available for some special events. But there is one area in which I cannot let them down, and that is in my preaching." Every preacher should make that commitment. It helps with evangelism. You can see it visiting in the homes of prospects. They like his preaching. It is lively, life related, with wisdom from the Scriptures. We don't have to go into the homes of our prospects and feel apologetic for his preaching. He helps build a good first impression.

I remember years back when I worked in a church where the preacher was preaching sermons he had written thirty years earlier. They were full of wisdom, truth, and love. But they put you to sleep. They were lectures, not sermons about a risen Lord who is coming back to this place to save us! Right or wrong, I was embarrassed to invite people to church—and I worked there! I know others were, too, because few visitors came. Preachers, work on your preaching. Go to local colleges or the university and take some speech classes. Videotape yourself and do some critical self-evaluation. See what it would be like having to watch and listen to you every week.

Most churches offer an invitation to respond to the gospel at the close of their services. If that is your practice, then do it right. Prepare for it. Think about what you will be singing and what you will say. And don't manipulate people. Otherwise, you'll turn off the non-Christians. They'll go find other waters.

I learned something very important about the invitation from our preacher Roy Lawson. He set the spirit of expectation for evangelism in our church when he was with us on his first Sunday. When the

invitation came, he didn't stand in the middle aisle with his face buried in a song book, looking like he was hoping no one would come forward. I don't even remember if he held a song book. All I remember is that he was walking back and forth from aisle to aisle (we had two) looking for people walking down the aisle. We all started looking around to see if someone was walking down the aisle. We all started thinking, "Someone go down that aisle. He expects someone to come forward and accept the Lord." It changed the spirit of the invitation at our church. We felt like we better get to work and reach some people. His sense of expectation was and is invaluable.

Now, people don't have to "go down the aisle" in our church to accept Christ or join the congregation, but we do have an invitation and we do expect that someone may be there who is ready to make a decision to follow Christ. An "expecting," non-manipulative invitation will help many in doing that.

The Front Line

I need to say a word about greeters and ushers. These are the "front line" people for reaching people who visit your services. Once again, Tom Peters's advice to business is right on target for the church.

The customer game is ultimately won or lost on the front lines—where the customer comes into contact with any member of the firm. The front line team is the firm in the customers eyes. Therefore, the front line team must be treated as the heroes they genuinely are—and supported with tools (training, systems) that allow them to regularly serve the customer. Surprisingly, all too few firms understand this.²⁹

John Maxwell of Skyline Wesleyan church in San Diego says ushers and greeters are the most important people on the campus. They are more important

²⁹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 213.

than the preacher in helping new people feel welcomed. A variety of other front line people might also be noted: parking lot attendants and information booth helpers are some of the first. Then the teachers, worship leader, choir members, and the preacher are "up front," too, and the way they handle themselves is important to the visitors' feeling comfortable.

Do you have visitor booths to help them find the nursery, rest rooms, children's class locations, and the sanctuary? Are there people there? Are they prepared to help people? Are they friendly? Are they eager to help? I went to a large church one time and stood in front of the counter in their information trailer for fourteen minutes waiting for help. I was curious to see how long it would take before one of the four people on duty (standing twenty feet away having coffee) would come over to see if they could help. "Normal" visitors will not wait that long.

We need to recruit and train some of our best people to be our greeters and ushers. A second impression I recall about Calvary Chapel was how well trained and efficient their ushers were. I wish you could see it. They were really working to help people find a seat.

Ushers need to smile. I remember visiting a non-Christian once who said, "The only thing I would change about that church is your ushers need to smile more!" You can bet I passed that message on. I watched an usher in another church one time who was at his "station" handing out bulletins to people who sat in his area. He didn't greet anyone. He didn't smile. He didn't look at the people. He didn't even hand out the bulletins. They had to take them from his pile—and some of them looked pretty uncertain about whether they should or not. Train your ushers. They are important.

Remember, we want to put our visitors at ease, not on the spot. They want to blend in—not be obvious. So the more signs, information helpers, greeters, ushers, and other helpers we have who are friendly and doing their job the better it will be.

- Appearance

Check out your facility. Are there weeds in your lawn? Get rid of them. Plant some flowers and bushes. Do you have adequate parking for visitors? Do they get the best parking spots or do the members who get there first take them? Do you need a shuttle service through the parking lot? Are the classrooms neat, clean, and bright? What about the bathrooms?

I shouldn't have to say this. There should be no more obvious point. If the work place looks shabby, if the toilets are foul, with graffiti on the walls, how can you dare preach about commitment, participation, quality, and service?³⁰

This wasn't written about church, but businesses. But the same is true for the church! How can we preach about commitment if our bathrooms stink and are messy? A detective from the Mesa Police force attended a wedding at our church. I knew him from the health club I go to. The following Monday, he went out of his way to come over to me at the club and tell me how he enjoyed visiting. He said, "I can tell your people are really proud of what is going on there by the way the place is kept up." People translate the look of your meeting place into your understanding of commitment.

What is the decor of your meeting place? Is it neat, pleasant, attractive? What does it smell and feel like? If you have any doubts about your place, why not hire an interior decorator or two to come in and make suggestion as to how you could make your meeting place more attractive, comfortable, and appealing.

I mentioned my friend Doug Osness. He is working with a church in California that meets in a movie theater. They are growing. They have a casual, comfortable setting with which non-Christians are familiar and comfortable. He commented how the people

³⁰Peters, *Chaos*, p. 461.

liked to be able to get coffee in the foyer and take it in with them. They even have the little cup holders in the seats to use. I asked him (somewhat in jest) if the ushers offered refills. Why not?

Do you have plenty of signs on your campus to help people find their way around? Of course, you know where everything is, but that doesn't mean your visitors do. Visitors will see it as an act of thoughtfulness and awareness that they are in your midst if you do considerate things to help them feel at ease and help them feel at home.

Okay. We have our boat in order. It is clean and sparkling. Our poles are ready. We are ready. Now what do we do to get the fish close enough to catch them? What can we do to reach the pre-prospect? We start chumming. Following are some "chumming" ideas for a church. You will need to continue to research and experiment and find other additional ways you can get closer to the "fish"; ways you can let the people in your area know who you are, where you are, and what you are all about, with the hopes that they will be interested.

There is one whole concept that I'm not directly dealing with in this book because others have dealt with it so well that to do so again is unnecessary. (See appendix C.) But it is vital to considering this whole area of evangelism. It is the idea that most non-Christians will be reached through their family, friends, or associates. We must not ignore this or try to "program" around it.

Part of finding prospects is finding people who have an interest in who we are, what we are doing, or what we have to offer. The other aspect is trying to create an interest on the part of those who as yet have no interest. Our programs must not be ends in themselves but tools to help us find interested people or to create an interest in people. We need to make sure that our methods don't do more damage than good. We need to make sure that we aren't bothering people who don't want to be bothered. We won't get

them! We need to find creative ways to find those who are interested or ways we can contact or befriend people who are not so that an interest develops.

Following is a partial list of different kinds of **lures** that we can use. They are not in any order of priority. Some will work in some places at some times and not at other times. Evaluate, experiment, and start looking for other ideas in what you read, see, and learn at conferences. Take time to visit other churches and see what they are doing.

Community Mailings for Special Events

A few years back we started using mass mailings. We had grown before we used them, but we discovered it helped us reach more people. Advertising companies specialize in mailings and mailing lists. Talk to them and find out what they offer and what their prices are. It is an investment, but one that will help you reach people. We have members who are now Christian because they first got a piece of "junk mail" from us. The mailings we have sent out have been to promote special events: Christmas programs, Easter, Fourth of July, and the like. We have tried to make them look attractive and "un-churchy." Saddle Back Community Church in California has used mass mailings as their key way to reach the unchurched, and they have reached them by the thousands.

New Home Purchase Addresses

You can buy these lists in some areas or get them free in others. One way is to check with realtors or brokers about the records listing home sales in your area. I recently heard of GGC Associates, Inc., in Costa Mesa, California, who will supply you with names of new people who have moved into your neighborhood. (See appendix C.) There are other companies that do the same kind of thing. Check your yellow pages under advertising companies.

Once you get the address list, mail a brochure to each of those homes with a letter welcoming the new resident into the area.

Door Hangers

We have people who are part of our congregation now because we hung door hangers on their door-knobs. We don't knock on people's doors anymore, but we have put brochures on their doors on Saturday mornings and had them in church services the next day. There have been some interesting stories. One couple was leaving their house on a Saturday to drive around town and look for a church to visit the next day. They found our brochure that had just been put there. They looked at it, went back in the house, and then visited us the next day. We had other similar experiences with adults and even teens.

Business Cards

Have a fold-over business card printed for your church members. Have the basic service times inside it. On the outside, simply have printed, "You're Invited." Give them to your members so they can hand them out to people they meet around town. They will be surprised to find out that the special invitation will be enough to bring some to your church.

Special Events

Hold special days in your church. Have special services at special times of the year. Many churches use these as great ways to make it easy for their members to invite prospects. Christmas is a great time to have special events, as well as Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and the Fourth of July. Create some of your own. A "Western Day" is becoming a surprisingly big day for us.

I know a preacher in New Mexico who invited one of the universities in the state to bring a music group

to their church to share in a Christmas special for the community. They accepted! As he expected, more people would come to their place for a program with a group from the state university participating in it than simply the church choir. They had a packed house. Be creative. And remember whom you are trying to reach with these days.

Pastoral Ministries

I thought some time ago that we need a person on our staff whose title is the POPE. It stands for **Pastor Of Pastoral Evangelism**. His job would be to lead us in using what are traditionally called "pastoral" ministries but focusing our efforts with these ministries on non-Christians. The average church and pastor are actively involved in pastoral ministries in the areas of funerals, weddings, hospital visitation, and counseling. Yet, with a few exceptions (and most of them aren't the result of a plan or strategy of the church or pastor), most of the time and involvement with these ventures is for people who are, or have been, in the church. These four things take up a large amount of time in the lives of most preachers. But where does Jesus tell preachers to conduct funerals? He only said one thing about burying the dead, and it would be hard to interpret that as a commissioning statement. Where is the church told to perform weddings? We aren't. It is a freedom allowed by governments. We aren't doing it because Jesus commanded us to. We do a lot of hospital visitation, but we usually walk by dozens of rooms to get to the one room that houses a member of our church.

It hit me one day that here is another area where we are spending too much time on ourselves. Granted, that is the way some in the church want it. But I have seen us and others reach non-Christians through our having a part in their weddings and family members' funerals, visiting some of them in the hospital, or by first meeting them as they came to the church for counseling. Why not plan major ventures

to use these common-life experiences to reach people by befriending them and then seeking to share Christ with them at the appropriate time? Most everyone in our community will get married, hold a funeral for a friend or family member, visit or end up in the hospital, and at some time need counseling. Why not fish in these pools?

Following are some simple thoughts on these areas. Could one of these become a way your church could begin reaching more lost for Christ?

Funerals

The task here is to discover ways we can make ourselves more available to un-churched people at the time of a death in the family. The strategy involves letting these people know who we are and how we would like to help. We could develop a group of volunteers to be involved in this work. They wouldn't focus on those in our own church but on those not in any church, with the goal of reaching them by loving and sharing with them at a crisis time in their lives.

Weddings

The task in this area is to examine how we can be more available to the unchurched in the community when they desire to get married. Another group of volunteers could be involved in this program to join those already working with weddings and premarital counseling programs. The focus of this program would not be those who are members, but the unchurched in the community. The hope would be that through our showing interest in helping them get off to a successful start in their marriage, we might be able to reach them for the Lord.

Hospital Calling

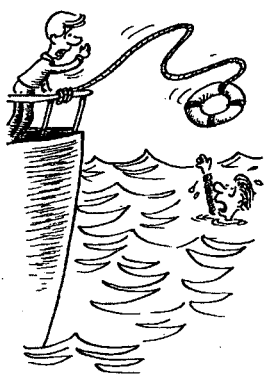
The mission here would be devising a strategy as to how we can train volunteers to become "chaplains" in local hospitals. Their goal would not be just to visit members of our own church, but to see how they could visit or be available to other people—

maybe even expanding their service to delivering messages and giving rides to and from the hospital. Their role could be virtually unlimited, restricted only by the motto, "Find a need and meet it!" The object would be to befriend the people and minister to them in the name of Christ and our church.

Counseling

Several years back, we opened a counseling center at our church. We hired a fine gentleman who had been a preacher before receiving his PhD in psychology at a major state university. He was on staff for about three years. I don't question that he was a great help to many people. He probably had more non-church people coming to him for help than any of the pastors of the church did. As I looked back on the experience, though, it struck me that I couldn't remember hearing about anyone finding Christ as part of his ministry. It likely happened, but I didn't hear about any cases where it had. A while after he left us, our church hired a retired preacher to become our pastor of counseling. I couldn't help but notice that, almost by the month, we saw Don Cox with someone who came to the church for counseling and along with that counsel became a Christian. It made it clear to me that, if we are doing "counseling" with non-Christians but not inquiring where they are in their lives spiritually and offering to let them know about Christ, we are failing to give them the best thing we have to offer. We are missing a great opportunity.

Some people say they think it would be taking advantage of a person to introduce evangelism in a counseling situation. I totally disagree. I must emphasize I'm for being "wise as a serpent" and "gentle [or innocent] as a dove." Failure to see whether people in counseling are interested in hearing about Christ as part of the counseling process—or maybe outside that setting—is being wise as a dove (that is, very foolish). If people aren't interested, fine; don't force it. But we can certainly offer it. I have found in over twenty years of doing some counseling that people



are turning to the church hoping to find something about God in their lives anyway. In my book, it is not taking advantage of someone who is “down and out.” To suggest that is similar to suggesting that I would be taking advantage of a person by throwing him a life preserver after they had fallen off a ship and were drowning. If offering Christ is part of the solution to the needs of a person, I’m sure they aren’t going to yell out later, “You took advantage of me when I was drowning by throwing me that preserver. I was weak and vulnerable then.”

Jesus offered himself as a solution to the needs of many people in crisis. We don’t need to start preaching at people when they first come in, but we do need to offer to introduce them to Jesus. It is very appropriate at some point to ask a counselee, “How would you describe where you are in your spiritual pilgrimage in life?” After that, then maybe one could ask, if there is any openness or interest, “Have you ever had the opportunity (or would you be interested now) in sitting down and making a serious examination of how to be at peace with God in your life?” Many who come looking for help want to find how to be at peace with God. Don’t miss the opportunities to help them.

Bible Studies Outside of the Church Building

I know of several churches who have successfully launched Sunday-school classes or Bible studies out in the community in homes and restaurant conference or banquet rooms. Get a nucleus together and plan a place and topic, and then lay out your strategy to start inviting people to it. I am amazed at how many “hardened” people accept an invitation to such a Bible study and later become Christians.

Telemarketing

Many groups are successfully starting new churches through “telemarketing”; using the phone to

invite prospects in the community to a new church or some major event going on at an existing church. The statistics report that ten percent of the people phoned by a team will be interested in being sent a mailer about the new church and ten percent of them will come on the opening day. The group that has pioneered this and has the resources to show you how to do it is listed in the appendix.

I know several who have used this approach and have got hundreds of new prospects to come to their church. The money it will cost you to do this will be a drop in the bucket compared to the number of prospects you can gain.

Divorce Recovery

A few years ago, our singles ministry began offering a "Divorce Recovery" program a couple times a year. They advertise it by word of mouth, brochures, and the area "singles" newspaper. I'm still amazed at how many singles—even non-Christians—will come to the church for this kind of program. We are regularly leading them to Christ. Many people in our society are dealing with divorce, struggling with it, and looking for help. An excellent resource to use is listed in the appendix.

Another approach to reach people suffering from poor relationships would be to offer "How to save your marriage by yourself" seminars. Parenting and single parenting seminars are also of help and interest to a lot of people.

"Farm" Areas

I was first introduced to this concept by Paul Hannaford when he was preaching in Arizona. It is taking the idea that many realtors use. You simply map out an area that includes several homes around the church, or in some other designated area, as your area to "farm." (If you have several "farmers," you could do several areas.)

Paul mapped out an area of about 500 homes. About every three months, he would go door to door, introduce himself, and ask the people he met whether they had a church home. If not, he invited them to his. Often a special program was coming up, so he would leave a flyer promoting it.

At each home where he stopped, Paul would leave something with the family: perhaps it was a calendar with the church's name and address on it, or a jar top opener with the name of the church, or some other promotional item. (You can order appropriate things from advertising companies.) He didn't try to convert the people or preach the gospel to them at the door. He was simply trying to become known and to befriend them.

Over the first couple years, many got to know Paul as the preacher at the local church. Many of them had needs develop in their lives that created a felt need for a church and for a minister; and guess whom they called! Of course, the preacher they had met who had shown an interest in them. Several families came into the church because of these contacts Paul had made with them.

I was visiting with a preacher of a church that wasn't growing in a small midwest town of about 600 people, and I asked him whether he had ever gone door to door to introduce himself and meet the people. He said no, but he had talked with those from the Methodist church and Catholic church about doing a community religious survey together. My only thought was, "What do you need them for? There are only 600 people in this town! You could do the whole town in a couple days!"

When I was youth minister at a church in California years ago, I went door to door through the neighborhood handing out flyers to promote a summer children's program I was running. At the door, I asked to meet a parent, introduced myself, and gave them the flyer and explained the program to them. I let them know I'd like their kid(s) to be in our activities. Most all these families were non-Christians. I

had a lot of kids end up in my program as a result of that effort.

Get out and find some prospects.

Open Up Your Facilities

There are likely many groups in your town that need a place to meet. You can charge a small fee if you want, but make your place available to them if possible. Our goal is to reach people, and one way to let them know we are here is to have them come into our facility for some other event.

You obviously must use some discretion. You probably wouldn't want to let the KKK meet there or other group whose goals would be out of line with the purpose of church, but we don't want to close doors to outsiders either. Remember, this is God's building, not ours. We are paying the mortgage with His money, not ours. We are to use His things to reach those who are lost. There are many different groups we have allowed to use our facilities, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeaters, local school teachers meetings, Smoke-enders, the Phoenix Boys Choir, the Phoenix Symphony, the Mesa Symphony, a touring violin teaching group, and others. We have put brochures about the church in the pews on some of these occasions as a condition for a group's using our facility.

I had a man call the church one day all upset that the Phoenix Symphony was being allowed to use our sanctuary. He complained that the church was "willing to do anything to make some money," and he thought it was wrong. I appreciated his concern, but pointed out to him that we weren't letting them use our place because they were paying us. (In fact, we might have let them use it for free if it had come up). They weren't playing anti-Christian music, and people in our community were coming into our sanctuary who would never come the first time to a worship service. In fact, I knew at the time of the man's call that we had people who had become Christians as a

result of having come into our building the first time to attend a symphony concert and later decided to try out a service on Sunday morning.

Allowing the symphony to use our building gets people into our building. Some come back. Some find life.

You need to check your state's/city's requirements for renting your facility. (It would be a good idea to have a lawyer advise you.) Then you need to set some basic use requirements and basic fees. Don't try to make money—just cover your expenses if need be. Your goal is to get people to think of *your* place as *their* place. They might come back to your services some Sunday!

Special Programs

There are a variety of programs you can run that will help you reach prospects. I already mentioned "divorce recovery." What are the needs of your community? Our music department goes all out on Christmas, Easter, and the Fourth of July with special programs designed to reach out into the community. One tremendous program for children was first started by Tim Coop at Crossroads Christian Church in Corona, California. He called it Kids' Kamp. It ran for one night a week for seven weeks in the summer. It was more geared to letting kids have fun than giving them a lot of teaching. I will never forget the first time I was there and saw people in Corona start to drop off 600 children at the church. That church became known as the Kids' Kamp church. I remember a family we reached because their little boy had attended Kids' Kamp. During the following year, there was a death in the family. Weeks after the death, the family was talking one evening and one of the parents made the comment that they really needed to start going to church. At that point, the little boy jumped up and said, "I want to go to the Kids' Kamp church." They did, and they ended up becoming Christians.

Specialty Newspapers

There are a variety of newspapers, singles' papers, kids' school papers, and high school and college campus papers that will often accept material that promotes your programs and ministries. Be creative in what you do. You can often even get free advertising in papers. We regularly have singles show up at our divorce recovery meetings because of listings in the paper's free section of activities for singles.

Births, Deaths, Weddings

I have known of some churches that mail cards and handwritten notes to those they find in the local newspapers who have just had babies or a death in the family, or who have just got married. They can look up the name in the phone book and find many addresses. Many will respond to this kind of thoughtfulness and care. Let new parents know about parenting classes or other services for young parents. Send a Scripture booklet with Scriptures aimed at addressing the appropriate need. Let people know you are there and you care.

Stay Put

Hang around a while. Having been where I am now for fourteen years, I have seen firsthand how staying with a church for a longer period of time can help in reaching people. It takes some people a long time to make a move. It will help some if a familiar face is still there. There are legitimate reasons to move, but it will help if you stay around longer than two years. I met a guy a year ago at church whom I hadn't seen for six years. He asked me, "Do you remember when you invited me to church? I decided to take you up on it!" That was over six years earlier. I'm glad I was there when he came!

I remember another family in our church whom I called on about two years ago. During the visit, the

wife asked her husband if he remembered when I had visited them before. At that point, I panicked! I hadn't remembered it! As it turned out, they had visited the church and I visited them, but then they moved away. Now they had moved back into town and they were looking for a church. I'm glad I was still there to welcome them and help them into our fellowship, even though I couldn't remember visiting them before.

Keep Your Eyes Open

There are a number of ways you can learn about attracting people to your church. Visit growing churches; attend their seminars. Read books. Attend church growth conferences. You'll get some good ideas. Study your own situation. What do you think might work in your area. Experiment. Doing something once doesn't mean you'll have to for life. If it works, keep doing it. If it doesn't, drop it. Some things take time to be effective. Use your judgment.

CHAPTER SIX

Planning Your Strategy for Prospects

What do you do with the fish now that you've got their attention? You've spruced your place up; you have greeters and ushers trained and in place; you've upgraded the music and the preaching. Now what are you going to do to follow up on those who become your prospects?

I heard a disturbing story several years ago. It came from a neighbor of ours, Sharon Gray. At the time my wife met Sharon, she had lived in Mesa not much more than a year. She was a fairly new Christian. A friend had led her to Christ a few months before she moved from Indiana to Arizona. (She had been raised in a Jewish home.) When she accepted the Lord, she prayed, "Lord, I'm going to start visiting churches, and when I find one that follows up on me, I'll take that as a sign that You want me to check that church out and see if that is where You want me to serve You."

Sharon started visiting in Indiana and finished the process in Mesa. When she visited a church, she got there early. If there were any registers, cards, or forms to fill out and sign, she did. She checked all the boxes: interested in the church, please visit me, and any other box that indicated an interest. She went through every line to greet the preacher after every service. The shocking thing was that she visited fifteen churches before one person contacted her. They were all "evangelical" and "evangelistic" churches—at least, they would consider themselves to be such. Every one of the churches sent her a first-time visitor letter. But not until she visited the fifteenth church did the preacher



follow up and call on her. As far as I know, she is still active in that congregation.

That's tragic! Some fish are throwing themselves at the feet of the fisherman, but they are ignored and left on the deck. And we wonder why we aren't growing and reaching more people.

One of our staff members was on a retreat for preachers a while back and overheard a preacher saying to some others, "I will follow up on a prospect after they have visited our church the third time."

How absurd! How ridiculous! His church wasn't growing, and I'm not surprised. If an insurance man, a salesman, or anyone in a business operated that way with their customers, they'd be bankrupt before they knew what was going on. A lot of churches are "bankrupt" because they have no working plan for what to do when they do get a prospect.

The following checklist details the main items you need to put together such a plan.

Checklist for Taking Care of Your Prospects

A Way to Get Information About Visitors

I visited an electronics store a few years ago in another city. I wanted two batteries. As I put them on the counter and put down some money, the clerk asked for my name and address. "What does he need that for?" I wondered. "All I want are these two batteries. I don't want more mailings from them." I decided not to give it to him. I said, "I'm from out of town." That seemed to appease him. He gave me my change, and I left.

This showed me how some might react to our asking for their name and address. They know what we want it for—so we can call on them. Well, if they knew about Sharon Gray's experience, they would know they don't have much to fear in the average congregation. We have cards in the pews and in every service (and special programs, too). We ask everyone (not

just the visitors) to fill out a card. We can't follow up on someone if we don't get the information on him. We don't use "Visitor Registration Tables." Visitors don't like being singled out and red tagged.

Many people will visit a few weeks, or maybe months, before they fill out a card. I visited a family once who had been visiting off and on for eleven years before they had finally filled out a card! They are there to test the waters.

Our card asks for a person's name, address, phone number (this is vital for us because we will phone people for appointments before we visit them), age group (child, youth, college age, twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, and sixty and over), and marital status.

Trained People to Follow Up on Prospects

In congregations in which lay persons do not call on visitors, 7-12 percent of first time worship visitors eventually become members. . . . With a good "immediate response" program the rate of eventual joiners can rise to 30 percent. A few churches reach 40 percent. Yes, ask the pastor to mail a note to all worship visitors on Sunday mornings. Yes, a "get acquainted" phone call to the home helps. But neither substitutes for an immediate, personal visit.

While churches can extend friendliness in various ways, nothing equals an immediate call in the home. Calling communicates caring. People respond to that. Sixty percent of those called upon will find them very helpful. Churches often allow a microminority of vocal, influential, dead wrong leaders to move their congregation toward death by sinking the most effective outreach boat they can put in the water.³¹

Most church staff members don't do "evangelistic calling," that is, calling on prospects for the church. Many preachers don't do any! Oh, yes, they will call

³¹Miller, *Magnetic Church*, pp. 73, 74.

on members—in their homes, in the hospitals, before and after funerals—but not many call in the homes of non-members, prospects about whom they know little or nothing. But few churches are going to grow until church leaders start calling.

The preacher must take the lead in this area. Most others in the congregation are going to march to the tune of his drum. If the staff or other leaders in the church are going to get out calling, the preacher is going to have to lead out front visiting and training!

As far as paid staffs are concerned, you can force them out. Simply make it a requirement of the job. Train them! But then get them out there. I learned how to catch fish by standing next to Gene Rogers. I learned how to call in homes and teach the gospel by going alongside Gene Rogers. If the staff members of a church are not calling, they are probably mimicking the behavior of their boss. Change that behavior. Get out calling. Then force them out into the real world, and you will see some good things happen in the kingdom of God.

If your church doesn't have an effective way to follow up on your prospects, I would encourage you to investigate and use a program I've written called the *Ambassadors for Christ* Training Program. This is the program I developed at Central, and we have been using it for eleven years. It is available from Standard Publishing Company. (See the appendix for a full listing of the materials.)

This is a seven-hour training program. It will teach people (called "Ambassadors") how to phone prospects and try to set up an appointment, how to conduct the first visit in the home, and how to present the gospel to them (using *A Peace Treaty With God*). This whole approach is a low-key way of seeing whether people are interested in a study of the gospel. If they are, the Ambassador will spend three hours in their homes teaching them about Christ.

I recommend it not because I developed it, but because it works. Many preachers and churches are now using it. Many who used to use a hard-sell, convert-

them-in-fifteen-minutes approach, are using it and like it much better.

In Titus, Paul urged his evangelist friend to "show perfect courtesy to all men." We have learned that if the fisher of men doesn't show courtesy, all he will get is "snags." So we have tried to develop an approach that will demonstrate perfect courtesy. We phone our prospects if we have their phone numbers to see whether it would be possible to visit them in their homes. We get their numbers off the registration cards from our services or activities. Aldrich writes, "You have not because you phoned not."³²

We believe phoning our prospects and seeing whether they even want us in their homes is a way of showing perfect courtesy. If they are interested in a visit, we can set up a convenient time for the visit within the next week or two. Our operating philosophy is this: "If you don't want me in your home on Tuesday night at 7:00 P.M., I won't be there. Now I would love to be there! But if you aren't ready for it, I'll respect that and not force myself on you at the front door."

If one is interested, then we visit in the home. We always take a special packet we've compiled. It has one of our preacher's books in it as well as a paperback New Testament.

I've seen some large churches get on a roll in their growth and then throw in the towel on trying to keep up with home visitation. They will simply invite all their visitors or prospects to an inquirers' class or pastor's class.

We determined we wouldn't do this. Visiting each prospect in his home means a lot more work. But we believe it is worth it. We want to make disciples, not just get decisions; and we believe we can do a much better job of that by going to people's homes and teaching them one-on-one about Jesus. It is much more personal and effective.

³²Aldrich, *Life-style Evangelism* (Portland: Multnomah, 1981).

We train our people that, on the first visit in the home, we are not there to convert the people, share the gospel with them, pray with them, or share "ten reasons why we have the best church in town." Some of these things might happen—we aren't limiting God—but our strategy is simply to befriend them and see whether they would like to hear more—the gospel. Most other evangelism programs I had been through train people to become spiritual quick-draw artists: "Shoot 'em while you've got the chance!"

I remember a woman I visited a while ago. She was a good example of how the right pieces in place can help prepare someone for your visit. When we got in the house and were visiting with her, she began telling what a wonderful time it was visiting our church. When she first got there, a young man came up and offered to help her find where her children would go. Then, after she sat down in the sanctuary, a woman sat next to her and was so friendly. At the end of the service, she got her visitor packet. Then she got the phone call from me on Monday night. Thursday she got the letter from our preacher. She was overwhelmed with the great reception. Our evangelism with her had been greatly helped by what had preceded the visit.

If a prospect is interested in more studies, we come back the following three weeks for a one-hour visit each week. We sit at a table, go through the material, and leave. We leave a copy of the study with the prospect and return the next week until we are done. After that, we will continue to follow up depending upon the prospect's situation and need.

I would describe our training emphasis to be on helping people learn how to "teach" the gospel rather than on what would be called "witnessing." Witnessing is popularly viewed as being able to talk to anyone you meet anywhere about Jesus and converting a prospect on the spot (or at least trying to by confronting him with the gospel—normally in a very abbreviated form). I prefer training Christians how to "teach" the gospel in the homes of people who are ready to hear it. You can train average Christians to do

that. They will enjoy it. They will see results. They won't have to jam the gospel down anyone's throat. They won't have to leave their homes each morning prepared to attack or strike people for the Lord. They can leave being prepared to love them and interact with them as gently or innocently as doves.

I believe we would see many more people led to Christ if we spent more time befriending people and seeking opportunities to get together with them in their own homes and teach them about Christ in a non-pushy way.

Following is a simple outline of how to train callers to follow up on your prospects:

1. Recruit a Few

I discourage leaders from starting with too many people. Start with as few as four or six. Look for a few people who are interested in reaching others for Christ. Look for friendly, loving people. Don't approach someone just because he holds an office in the church and "should be" involved in evangelism. I look for people whom I can imagine sitting in the homes of our prospects, people who would make a good impression on our prospects. If they are willing and interested, we can train them to be effective in teaching the gospel.

2. Use a Variety of Training Methods

We recruit the people to take the Ambassador Training program. This begins with a seven-hour classroom training seminar. We offer this seminar several times a year, usually over a Friday night and Saturday morning.

After they go through the classroom training, they are to listen to the practice tapes two or three times over the next few weeks. They aren't memorizing the *Peace Treaty*, but they are getting familiar with the way to go through it with someone.

After they have listened to the tapes, they practice with a "guinea pig." We recommend an Ambassador practice going through the studies with someone, most often a Christian (e.g., another person in training), but

not always, before going out and actually using it. This is just to work out the bugs and help the person get comfortable with it. We have had many people end up leading the people they practiced with to the Lord.

3. Give On-the-job Training

This could have been included under the variety of training methods, but it's too important to treat like an optional plan. This is a must! After the person has been through the other training, we assign him to a trained caller to go along on an actual call and observe. After going through one or sometimes two whole presentations, most will be ready to launch out on their own.

A Teaching Tool

You need to have a teaching tool that you can train people to use. Following are some suggestions about that tool:

1. First, it must be a universal method.

I've worked with several preachers who had excellent tools for their own use, but they weren't able to teach others to use them. In most cases, they required having to memorize too much. The tool must present the gospel in a thorough manner but not require the leader to have to memorize a lot.

2. It needs to go a little deeper than what you can do in five minutes at the front door.

I've seen the benefits of spending more time teaching people the gospel. We are presenting people with the greatest news ever known, and many people are trying to do it in five minutes. I don't think that is adequate time for a person to make an intelligent decision.

Suppose a neatly groomed young man came to my house one Saturday afternoon, and my oldest daughter answered the door. As she did, he smiled and told her he was taking a survey in the neighborhood and wondered if she could give him about two or three minutes. She said yes. Then he said he had a couple questions

he was asking and was glad to see she had answered the door. The questions went this way:

He: "Are you married?"

She: "No."

He: "I am glad to hear that. I have another question then. Do you ever plan on getting married?"

She: "Yes, if I meet the right guy."

He: "I'm glad to hear that. If I could have about four or five minutes of your time, I'd like to share with you four reasons I think you should consider marrying me."

She: (*Stunned silence—Is this guy for real?*)

He: "I have my notebook I'd like to share with you."

"The first section here has letters of reference. There is one from my boss, my business club president, and my pastor."

"The second section shows my house—well, actually the bank's—but I'm paying for it. There are two cars in the driveway as you can see in the picture. A couple of *nice* cars in the driveway. One of them would be yours."

"The third section has a letter of verification of employment. Now, if you are interested in marrying me, I'll show you what I earn a year. It is a great salary for a single guy—more than enough so you wouldn't have to work if you didn't want to."

"The fourth reason isn't in the book. It is that I could learn to love you, and I promise I'd take wonderful care of you and live to meet all your needs and wants in life."

"Would you marry me?"

She: (*Mouth hanging open in disbelief; he is sort of cute but—*) "You've got to be kidding me!"

As absurd as that story is, that young man would not be asking my daughter for as big a decision as many of us ask of strangers when we seek a decision to accept Christ after about five minutes of talk! The implications of becoming a Christian are greater and more far reaching than those of getting married. I'm giving my life away when I accept Christ! Now, I'm not against sharing the gospel with someone if that is the only time I or another might ever be able to do it. But in

most cases, I would rather spend several hours studying and sharing with a person than just five minutes.

3. It should allow you to go into the prospects' home for several visits.

Making several visits allows you to get to know the prospects better and helps build their trust in you—as long as your approach is above board. If you have been in someone's home three or four times, you have had quite a privilege. You have been in his home more than his doctor, his boss, his employees, or even some of his relatives have been.

Win Arn wrote,



Local congregations, sincere in their efforts to reach out with the Gospel, often “import” a program or formula that has seemingly been successful in other churches. The methods widely used often attempt to compact a life-transforming Gospel presentation into a fifteen-minute visitation call. In the process, little consideration is given to the unique needs of the individual. The non-Christian has a very limited opportunity to dialogue about the consequences of this major step of faith. No significant relationships are established.³³

4. It is always good to have something to leave with the prospects.

Sometimes there seems to be the mentality that “I’ve got to get a decision now because the longer the people think about this, the greater the odds they will reject it.”

Come on! The longer a person thinks about the gospel, the greater the likelihood he will become a Christian. Are you familiar with two great Christian men who came from being skeptics to great defenders of the faith because they examined the Christian faith to tear it apart and ended up believing its validity? Josh McDowell and Frank Morrison. Whatever our tool is,

³³Arn, *Church Growth Handbook* (Vol. 2, 1982), p. 16.

it can help to leave with your prospects a copy of it or other resources for further examination. We have nothing to hide. Our message is reliable enough that they can search and try it. When I used a memorized presentation, a person wouldn't have been able to find one passage I had quoted five minutes after I left his house. When we leave the copies with people, they can look at any of them again if they would like to.

Herb Miller urges this kind of patience by comparing evangelism to agriculture:

A basic agricultural principle is that you cannot harvest something until it has been planted. Ninety-five percent of all effective evangelistic interactions involve planting, not harvesting. The harvesting never happens on the same day and is seldom done by the same person.³⁴

Much of the harvesting we see comes after we have taught people and they have had a chance to consider it, weigh it, and then decide for Christ. Having the materials to look back over can sometimes be a help. With a several-week approach like the *Peace Treaty*, our Ambassadors do a lot of harvesting, too.

5. It needs to allow time for people to make a decision.

Be patient. Dr. Mont Smith refers to this as a "soak time." The Holy Spirit will use the gospel once a person has heard it. He can then convict a person—and it most often isn't instantaneous with hearing it. They need some time to evaluate, argue with themselves, and consider the cost of their decision.

A good fisherman can be casting in front of the same fish for a long time before it strikes; and it may do that just when the fisherman least expects it. We get in such a hurry sometimes. Jim Whitaker told me that the rule is that the fish seldom breaks the line. The fisherman usually does it. He gets anxious and wants

³⁴Miller, *Magnetic Church*, p. 33.

to land the fish too soon and pulls the lure right out of the fish's mouth or breaks the line.

6. Your tool needs to be more low key than most approaches being used today.

We live in a high-pressure sales society. You can sell a few products through high pressure, but most people don't like the pressure. Some missionaries in Mexico City visited with me once about the approach used in the Ambassador Training program. They commented that they liked the low-key approach. "Mexicans don't like high pressure and things being jammed down their throats." I assured them that those living north of the border don't like it either.

We have learned in following up on prospects that it's best to use a low-key approach. Get in touch with them soon, but don't force yourself on them. On our first visit in the home, we are not there to "get them into our church" or to promote ourselves as if we were earning brownie points with God. We are not promoting the church just to build it big. We are doing this for the Lord and to help the person find new life. We have found that it is good to be honest and not try to slip something in on people.

A young preacher once drove from about sixty minutes away to talk about ministry. He spent about two-and-a-half hours with me talking about church-growth ideas for the new congregation he was starting. Near the beginning of our visit, he asked me about *A Peace Treaty With God*, the evangelism tool I developed and use. He said, "I don't know how to push people for a decision. How do you do that?" My response to him was that I don't. I present the gospel with the *Peace Treaty*, try to make clear what they need to do next in their relationship with the Lord, and leave it there!

At the end of our visit, he commented, "The drive and time it took me to come here today was worth just hearing you tell me I don't have to push or force people to a decision." A lot of evangelism methods are training Christians how to push, or seemingly force, others to a decision. That's not smart fishing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Planning Your Strategy for New Members

Taking Care of the Fish Once They're in the Boat

Growing church leaders know that opening the door to high member participation percentages takes two keys: a group and a job. Ninety percent of new members who do not experience these two things will be inactive at the end of the first year. New member dinners, pictures on the bulletin board, stories in the newsletter—these are all good, but nothing can substitute for being involved in a group and having a job to do.³⁵

What is your plan to help people find a group and a job once they have come into your church? That more than anything else will ensure that you don't lose your new members as fast as you reach them. At Central, we are always searching for more and better ways to help ensure our new members get a group and a job. I know some don't want one or both, but we are going to keep working on it. Whatever you do for new members, do something designed to help them find a group and a job.

Many churches have "new member classes" for people who have just become Christians or have just joined the church. This can be good, but getting new members involved takes more effort than just having a class and giving information. Such a class needs to

³⁵Miller, *Magnetic Church*, p. 87.

be used to build relationships and to get the new members involved. One way to do that is through a program I developed called *Discipling New Christians With the Spiritual T.E.A.M.* (See appendix C.) These materials comprise two three-month programs designed for one person to meet with a few new Christians once a week. The T.E.A.M. studies cover twenty-six different issues of importance to new Christians. It gets them involved in doing some simple Bible study on their own while helping them, over a period of three to six months, to develop some new friendships. These new friendships need to be fostered. Help those on the T.E.A.M. to become a permanent team.

Remember, most importantly, new members need people—not just more programs and not just indoctrination. If they don't grow in relationships with other people, they may not be around to "indoctrinate."

When people come into our church, they are assigned to a trained "lay pastor" in their age group who seeks to reach out to them and draw them into a "Life Support Group" (Bible study/support group) and the activities of that age group. We also attempt to get them to attend our "New Member Game of Life Orientation," which meets for four weeks. We go over what we call the "Game of Life," something we adapted from a concept another church uses to motivate new members to get involved. Doug Osness helped us put this concept together.

Whether you use this "Game of Life" approach or some other, the things we communicate in this program are vital for all new members. Let me explain what we do, and then you can develop your own program to accomplish the same goals in your own style.

We start with giving the new members a "Game of Life" notebook. This gives them a sense of ownership in the program. It also allows for "soak time," time to look over the materials on their own and contemplate the issues we are addressing. Then we try to be sure they understand the following ideas about their involvement in our congregation.

Adults who join a church in which they do not participate soon feel they have entered a lonely crowd. Sitting in the bleachers is fine at the ball games. At church it is deadly. Ninety percent of new members who do not find a group and a job will either vegetate or evacuate. They will be inactive at the end of the first year.³⁶

We tell them we are sure they didn't come into the church just to vegetate or evacuate. It is our hope as well that these two things won't happen. So we want to help them find a group and a job.

There is no bench in this ball park. (See the chart on page 112.) If I am a Christian, I'm in the game! Now we all need a break from time to time. But God expects us to be serving Him, "playing the game." As 1 Timothy 4:7 and 8 says,

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

God wants us training ourselves in godliness—giving, serving, and growing. I can't do those things sitting on a bench. There's no bench in this game!

There are bleachers in this stadium, but they are already full. We aren't allowed in them; we are to be on the playing field. Hebrews 12:1 says "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for us." We are being watched. Other Christians are watching. The lost are watching. God, the angels of Heaven, and all the saints now with the Lord are cheering us on! "Don't give up. Serve the Lord. Give Him your best! Don't quit!"

We explain to our new members that four things have happened (not in order of importance or sequence) now that they are in the church. They have reached "first base":

³⁶Miller, *Magnetic Church*, p. 87.

- B:** they were *baptized* into Christ as He commanded.
A: they were *added* to the church.
S: they have *surrendered* to Christ and His lordship.
E: they have been *empowered* by the Holy Spirit to carry out God's mission here on earth.

Each of the four sessions in the new member orientation will cover one of the items for getting to "second base." Our encouragement is this: "There are a lot of things going on in this church. As a new member, don't let yourself get overwhelmed with them all. Don't feel obligated to attend everything. Don't feel guilty if you don't. Over the next four months, simply concentrate on getting to second base." Each of the four sessions then stresses in order (B-A-S-E) what is involved in getting to second base.

Week one, B: Bible Knowledge

During this session, we go over how and why it is so important to be studying God's Word. We give different methods to study the Bible, suggest different groups in the church that study the Bible, and give what help we can here.

Week two, A: Active in a Life Support Group

Here we explain our Life Support Groups and explain why it is important for them to be in a group in the church. We make them aware of all the different groups they can be a part of in the church and encourage them to pick one if they aren't in one already.

Week three, S: Serving the Lord

This week we stress the importance of having a job for the Lord. We have a list of all the kinds of jobs in the church. We have "entry level" jobs as well as jobs for experienced Christians. We encourage them all to make a commitment to a job.

Week four, E: Enhance Your Family Relationships

The last week, we emphasize how important it is to work on building family relationships. We suggest

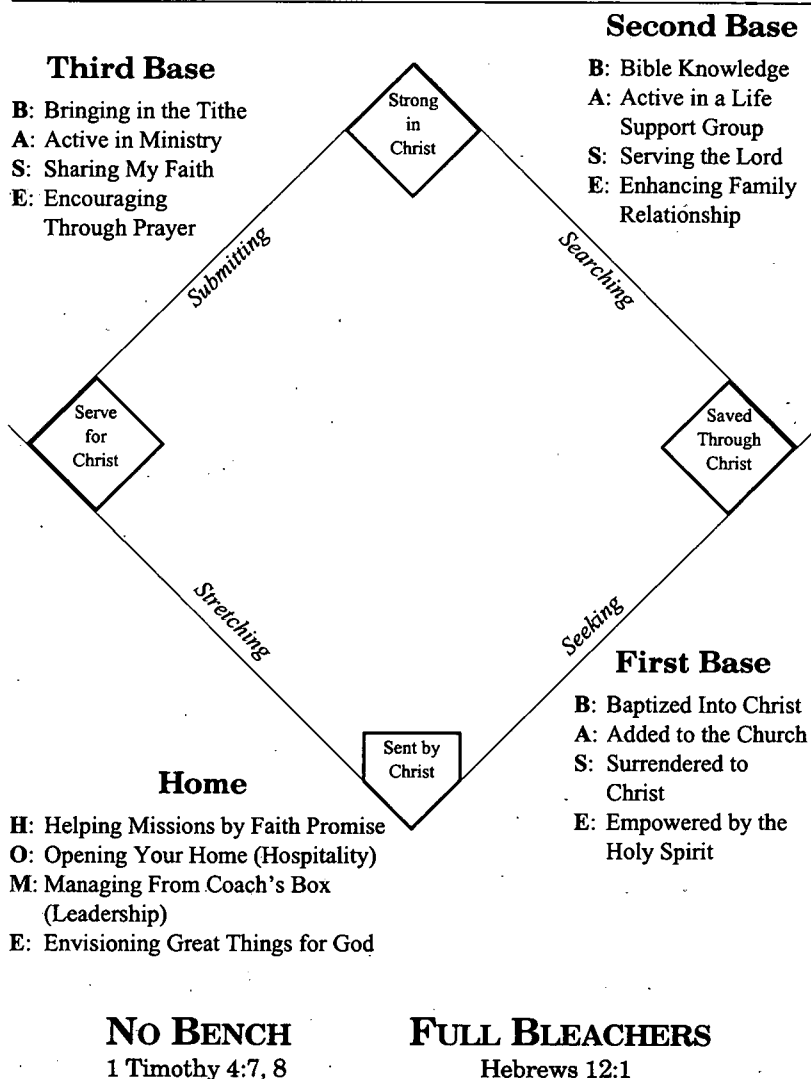
ways to do that. We inform them of all the classes, groups, and other programs and activities in the church designed to help them in those relationships: parenting, single parenting, marriage enrichment, and others.

At the conclusion, we encourage them to go on and start working on getting to "third base" and then to "home plate." We spend a month a year reminding our entire church about the Game of Life and their need to be running for home plate. The Game of Life notebook has materials to help them get there.

The Game of Life

"Adults who join a church in which they do not participate soon feel they have entered a lonely crowd. Sitting in the bleachers is fine at the ball games. At church it is deadly. Ninety percent of new members who do not find a group and a job will either vegetate or evacuate. They will be inactive by the end of the first year."

—Herb Miller



CHAPTER EIGHT

Planning Your Strategy for Members

Keeping the Fish Alive

Ephesians 4 gives directions about what leaders in the church ought to be doing for members of the body of Christ. "Equipping them to do the work of the ministry," rather than doing all the work for them. We ought to be helping Christians find their spiritual gifts to help build up the church, strengthen it, and see that it is fulfilling its mission.

Win Arn lists several characteristics of an "incorporated member" in a congregation. Are your members incorporated?

1. An incorporated member identifies with the goals of the church.

The specific goals of a church should (a) be directed toward accomplishing the purpose for why the church exists, (b) be clearly measurable and achievable, and include events/activities that will reach those goals, (c) be communicated clearly to church members—especially new ones, and (d) describe how people can become involved. The goals should be reviewed yearly.

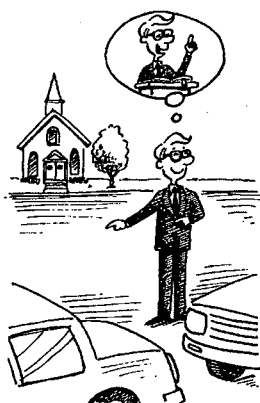
2. An incorporated member is regular in worship attendance.
3. An incorporated member feels a sense of spiritual growth and progress.
4. An incorporated member has taken necessary steps of affiliation with the Body.
5. An incorporated member has new friends in the church.

The number of new Christian friends a person makes during the first six months of his/her church life directly influences whether that person continues as an active member, or drops out. A study of 100 newer Christians (50 active, 50 inactive) shows the number of friends each group made in the church during the first six months

Number of new friends

in the church	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
Actives	0	0	0	1	2	2	8	13	12	12
Dropouts	8	13	14	8	4	2	1	0	0	0

6. An incorporated member has a task or role appropriate to his/her spiritual gifts.
7. An incorporated member is involved in a fellowship group.
8. The incorporated member regularly tithes to the church.
9. The incorporated member is participating in the Great Commission.³⁷



"Too often, preachers are doing all the exciting parts."

So often, about all we let members do is give a prayer, lead a meeting, sing a song, attend board meetings, teach a lesson, listen to us preach, and come to a potluck. WOW! And we wonder why they aren't more excited about the work of Christ. Too often, the preachers are doing all the exciting parts. Preachers do the marrying, burying, teaching, counseling, preaching, converting, and baptizing—all the real-life stuff, the exciting, most meaningful parts of ministry. If we want people to get excited about ministry, we need to recruit, train, and let them do the work of the ministry—not simply watch us do it.

We have seen what can happen to people who discover they are just as gifted and as talented as the church staff members. They get involved and make a difference. This is especially true in the area of teaching people the gospel. People need a vision; that is what we must give them. People need to get involved

³⁷Win Arn, *The Master's Plan of Evangelism* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982), pp. 153f.

in evangelism. That's what we must challenge them to do. People need to be trained and supported in the work of the Lord. That's what we must do for them.

We have a variety of ministries and programs designed to help members grow in Christ and ministry.

1. Worship Services

These may be taken for granted at times, but the worship services are a wonderful place to inspire, challenge, and encourage Christians in their daily lives and service. Our preaching, singing, and other aspects of the worship service ought to be the best we can make them.

2. Life Support Groups

We combined our Sunday-school classes and weeknight Bible studies into one program: Life Support Groups. Rather than trying to run two different programs, we are encouraging our people to get involved in one Life Support Group, either on Sunday morning or on a weeknight. They need a group. All these groups study the same lesson. The leaders go to a weekly staff preparation meeting to prepare the coming week's lesson. The leaders of the groups are called "lay pastors." Each one leads his own group, evangelizes prospects for it, and shepherds the members of it. The lay pastors are trained in evangelism, leading small groups, and pastoring people. We hold this training in two Saturday morning sessions a month apart.

3. Annual Game of Life Challenge

January is "Discipleship Month." During January, we ask all our members to evaluate where they are in the Game of Life. Have they gone to the bleachers? They can't. Did they go on a break and never return to the playing field? Did they get to second base and sit down? They need to get up, dust off their pants, and head for third base. We teach and preach about renewing commitments to the Lord and have them fill out a Discipleship Commitment Card for the rest of

the year. The commitments tie in with the steps in getting to second, third, and home on the Game of Life (see page 112). These all are ongoing things in the Christian life. We encourage them to see where they can grow and to set goals for the rest of the year.

The card is similar to this:

As a Disciple of Jesus Christ, I, _____, want to make the following commitments to Him and His church for this year:

- To study the Bible by _____
- To be in a Life Support Group by _____
- To serve Jesus by _____
- To enhance my family by _____
- To give of finances by _____
- To build my prayer life by _____
- To share my faith by _____
- To equip for ministry by _____
- To help Faith Promise by _____
- To practice hospitality by _____
- To manage as a leader by _____
- To envision great things by _____

4. "S-W-I-M-M"

This is a ministry we have to help train and equip our people for the work of the ministry: South West Institute for Missions and Ministry. Some thirty-five to forty different classes are offered each year. Most of the classes are seven weeks long; some are fourteen weeks. Each class session is two hours in length. Many of the classes are on popular issues like parenting, cults, and the like, while others are basic training for ministry classes, such as teaching children, being a youth sponsor, and planning successful ministries. Many Bible classes are also offered. People can work toward a Christian Leadership Certificate or an Associate Certificate of Ministry.

There are many other things we do through the year for our members, but these are among the main ventures to prepare them for service to the Lord.

CHAPTER NINE

Planning Your Strategy for M.I.A.s (Missing in Attendance)

Going After the Fish Who Swam Away

If you grow numerically as a church, you will lose some fish. Some churches don't grow because they aren't willing to do anything that might cost them a fish. I had the opportunity to watch some guys fishing in a harbor in Oregon. They were catching a lot of fish in their nets, but they were losing many at the same time. Their boat was filling up while hundreds were getting out of their nets. They didn't stop fishing because some were getting away.

Some will get away. We don't like it. But it will happen. We need to do our best to avoid having some getting away, but we must keep fishing. At the same time, we need to have some people prepared to go on "search and rescue missions" for the ones who do get away.

We call those who end up missing our M.I.A.s: Missing in Action, or Missing in Attendance. While we must not stop fishing, we must have a strong plan as to how to know when someone who is in the church is missing and then what we are going to do about it.

M.I.A.s are often used by churches as an excuse for not doing much about evangelism. It is called the "close the back door" concept. I've heard this concept espoused since I became a Christian. It basically says, "Why do we need to worry about trying to get

new people in the church when we can't take care of or keep the ones we have now? As soon as we can stop the others from leaving, then we can start reaching more."

This sounds good in theory, but it is most often a cop-out for doing nothing in evangelism. We need a plan to reach out to our M.I.A.s, but that plan must not be used as an excuse to quit reaching out to the lost who have never come into our midst. We will not keep all the people (Christians and non-Christians) we make contact with or even all those who join our church.

One expert said, "A church can attract ten new members to their church with about the same amount of energy it takes to get one inactive person to come back." This concept can lead us to a couple different conclusions. One would be not to waste any time on those who are M.I.A.s. That would obviously be a foolish plan. The other is to have a plan in place to follow up on your missing people, but to keep it in perspective with your evangelism program.

The following paragraph from a small church newsletter caught my eye one day:

Let me urge each of you to take another look at the list of names in the foyer. There are a great number of people there who have their membership at _____, but are not attending. We want to find out about all of them if possible. Have they moved away? Is their membership in another congregation now? Are they still in our area? How can we encourage them to become active again? We want this to be the year of restoration! Won't you sign up to check on a few names for us? The list will come down in a couple of weeks. Help us out now!

At least someone was attempting to find out what happened to some missing people—that is good. But they really do need someone to "Help us out now!" How did they manage to lose track of these people? I happen to know that this is a small church in a small town. How long has it been since they noticed these

missing people? Haven't they had any plan in place to follow up on them regularly? What have they been so busy with that they lost track of these people? Do they put a list like this up every few years? Are they building a plan to see that they won't need to use this approach again? How can they "lose track" of people in such a small town?

They don't have many people to start with. What if no one signs up to check on someone? Will they be left in the "We don't know what happened to them" list? The preacher should be taking more leadership than this seems to indicate. The concern is fine—I think the strategy is poor.

Take charge! I agree that you need to get a group of people who will go visit everyone who is missing. But I would guess that not many are going to sign up to go call on these people. The preacher or someone should take the initiative to follow up on them. Then start following up on anyone who starts missing even for a couple weeks. Don't let a list like this develop. The bigger a church gets, the more complicated the entire area of keeping track of your people and following up becomes.

I read an article some time back that shows the extremes to which some cult groups will go to reclaim those who pull away. The author—we'll just call him Tom—had been a leader in the group, but he began to question some of their dogmas and to search for the truth. As a result, he accepted Christ, but his wife refused to accept his decision. She contacted the leadership, who went to great pains to reconvert Tom:

1. They arranged a visit in another state to talk with one of their leading protagonists, who was very effective in confusing him about his decision.

2. They took him to their temple, where they paraded a number of their members by him to give their testimony.

3. They discredited the person who had been influential in sharing the gospel with Tom.

4. They brought in an apologist, who spent hours "proving" the cult's position. By this time, Tom was

having several doubts about his decision. The apologist put his arm around Tom and said that he could tell Tom was "straightened out."

5. Before he went home, Tom and his wife were taken to the cult's own bookstore across the street from the temple. There Tom was allowed to pick up any books and literature he wished without cost.

6. They arranged for Tom and his wife to go to the cult's national headquarters on their way home and to meet with several key leaders. They were put up in a fine hotel and treated very nicely.

Tom really began to feel he had made a mistake. Fortunately, however, after more study and the prayers of many Christians, Tom was delivered from the clutches of this cult.

This kind of experience is not uncommon. We certainly wouldn't recommend the tactics used in this story. I bring it up as an example of the length to which some people are willing to go in order to reach out to some in their group who are leaving or apparently leaving. The question is: "What efforts are we putting into reaching out to those who are leaving or falling away?" No, we can't make them the center of our ministry, or we will stop growing. But, still, we must not ignore or forget them. What is your plan for following up on those who are missing or leaving?

Are there holes in your nets? There is a natural problem in dealing with M.I.A.s. Not many people like going on search and rescue missions. We may get into some nitty-gritty problems with those folks. Our most natural assumption is that they are upset with the preacher, the Sunday-school class, the giving program—maybe even God himself! It could be that, or it could be that they are having family problems, moral problems, a major time of stress in their lives with work, finances, health, or burn-out. Their absence may well be a silent cry for help.

Most of us tend to shy away from people who have left the church. I overheard a discussion once about a family who had quit coming to our church. Those

talking about the family knew they weren't coming anymore and were talking about why they had quit—but they really didn't know why because no one had talked to them. None of them volunteered to follow up on the family; they all sort of dismissed themselves from being the one to do it with, "I really don't know them well enough." The connotation was that whoever knew them best was responsible to follow up on them, but no one claimed to be the one who knew them best. So no one followed up on them.

Then I heard another conversation between a man and a leader in our church. They were talking about the man's wife, who had quit coming. I don't know what her problem was. They were discussing the need for someone to go talk to her and try to help and encourage her back. The leader's comment was, "I think I'm too close to her."

As I heard that, the other conversation flashed back to my mind. I thought, "Wait a minute. What does this mean? To follow up on someone, you can't know him too well—but you can't be much of a stranger, either. You have to be sort of "medium" in your relationship with the person before you can follow up on him!" I wonder how often all of us have hidden behind either or both of those thoughts and not reached out to someone who needed to know we cared.

Most members wonder if someone will contact them when they quit going to church. My guess is they hope so in most cases. But few of them are ever contacted. We must be ready to go to them and see whether there is something we can do to help.

Lyle Schaller lists fifteen assumptions church leaders and members should have when they confront inactive members. They are well worth considering here. As you read through this, make a list of the implications of each one for your church. What does it suggest you ought to know or do?

1. We assume that every person who united with this congregation did so with complete sincerity and in good faith.

2. We assume that every person who united with this congregation and is now an inactive member has what is, from their point of view, a good reason for being inactive.
3. We assume that if each inactive member has a good reason for being inactive, they will continue to be inactive until after that reason has been identified and eliminated.
4. We assume that for us to speculate and attempt to identify that reason will be less productive than seeking to discover that reason more directly by talking with the inactive member.
5. We assume that since all our inactive members are normal human beings, they will respond like other normal human beings and offer excuses rather than reasons when we first approach them.
6. We assume that we can learn more by listening than by talking, and therefore our approach to our inactive members will be one of active listening. We can expect this to require at least several hours of active listening with each inactive member or inactive family.
7. We assume this listening process is more likely to require six to ten hours, rather than two or three hours, if we are serious about getting beyond the veneer of excuses and discovering the basic reasons why this member is now inactive.
8. We assume this process will probably require several visits, and it is unlikely to be accomplished in one or two visits.
9. We assume that the longer we wait after a member has become inactive, the more difficult it will be to help that person become an active member of the congregation.
10. We assume that few, if any, of the existing classes, circles, organizations, and face to face groups in this congregation are completely effective in caring for the members of that class or group, in listening and responding constructively to their hurts, anxieties, and concerns, or in being sensitive to the needs of persons not in that class or group. Therefore we need a backup system to reach and minister to the people

who are not cared for by the face to face groups, or we will always be faced with the problem of inactive members.

11. We assume that the person who has become inactive often has greater difficulty in coping with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anger, hostility, anxiety, or neglect than do the more active members of the congregation. Therefore it is of critical importance that (a) the inactive member be called on before these feelings have become deeply ingrained and (b) that the caller have the personality and skills which will not further intensify and enhance these feelings.
12. We assume that the vast majority of inactive members send a sign to the church when they experience an anxiety-producing conflict or sense of helplessness. If this signal is ignored, the member may enter into a period of inactivity to further test "whether anyone really cares about me." After the end of this test that person becomes an increasingly rigid, inactive member.
13. We assume that the spiritual needs of some members change as the years go by. Therefore some of our longtime members who may appear to have become inactive or who are shopping for a new church home should be identified not as bored or apathetic or hostile or disinterested but rather as potential graduates from our congregation. These are the persons who have benefited from everything our congregation has been able to offer them, and as graduates are seeking a postgraduate level of challenge in terms of their own personal religious experience and discipline.
14. We assume that in establishing meaningful communication with inactive members we are faced with two challenges. One is to listen. The second is to be aware of the assumptions we bring to the conversation with the inactive member and to recognize which of our assumptions may be counter productive.
15. Finally, we assume that while we do not have direct control over all the many factors that may cause a

member to be inactive, we do have complete and direct control over the assumptions on which we build our response to the inactive member as well as over what we do or do not do that causes members to become inactive.³⁸

In *Thriving on Chaos*, Tom Peters shares the results of a study done by Technical Assistance Research Programs:

Twenty-six of twenty-seven customers who have a bad experience with you fail to report it. The principal reason is not surprising: they expect no satisfaction if they do bug you. The scary part comes next—some ninety-one percent of those who complain won't come back. . . . And perhaps worst of all, the average person who has been burned tells nine to ten colleagues; thirteen percent of the malcontents will spread the bad news to twenty or more people.³⁹

This applies to the church, too. If you want to let people leave you, not knowing why and not trying to help with or solve whatever the problem is, you will communicate that you don't really care, and they will most likely have a bad taste in their mouths about your congregation and the Lord. They are bound to pass on that "bad report" to others they know in your town whom you are trying to reach.

I have also observed, and I believe the research in the business world would support this, that when you have gone to a hurt or disgruntled member to listen, to learn, and to help, and they see that you care about them, they will often come back and be a stronger supporter of the church than they had been before. Even if they don't, it will be harder for them to give a bad report if you have gone to them and, if necessary,

³⁸Lyle Schaller, quoted by Alan Harre, *Close the Back Door* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), p. 53.

³⁹Peters, *Chaos*, p. 112.

asked them to forgive you for having failed them and let them down. A well-handled problem usually breeds more loyalty than you had before the negative incident. So get out there and go after those M.I.A.s!

Reaching out to the M.I.A.s

You must have a plan on how to do this if you want to be effective at it. You need to train people to reach out and express the love of the church to your missing members.

Care Callers

For many years now, we have used a group called our Care Callers. We take attendance every week in our worship services. We ask members to fill out a card. Sunday afternoon, a group of people sorts those cards and records attendance on all our members. This becomes quite a job when you have over 2000 attending, but it is important whether you have 100 or 2000. Our adult members are categorized by age groups. When a person has missed services three weeks in a row, a Care Caller phones him and lets him know we have missed him and asks if everything is okay. Doing this has allowed us to catch some problems early enough to go and be of help. People don't stop coming just because they are mad at the church. If they are, we want to know about it, though. Sometimes we can meet and work out the problems. Others have personal problems—finances, family, work, health, spiritual, or some other. We are often able to uncover some situations where we are able to be of assistance. Sometimes, if we hadn't phoned, we would never have known about their need and would likely have left the people thinking no one at the church cared about them.



Responding to Complaints

You need to be careful in the way you deal with those who have a complaint. First, try to set up a time when you can meet with the people. If they don't

want to get together, we will often just talk over the phone. If we can meet, it most often will be in their home. On occasion, I have met in a restaurant with them. My concern is to get in touch with them and let them know I'm concerned about the problem.

Second, the most important thing to do is listen. See what the problem really is. Once I have an idea of what it is, I respond in one of the following ways.

1. *Apologize.* If we as a church, or someone in it, or I personally, have let them down, I apologize for the failure and ask them to forgive us or me.

2. Often the thing that has upset them is based on inaccurate information. I try to share the information that might *correct the misunderstanding*.

3. If their concern involves something that I don't know much about but needs to be followed up on, I will let them know I will follow up on it, find out more information, *investigate* more about the matter, and get back with them. I better be sure I get back with them by the stated time.

4. If their concern is over something they don't like and that needs addressing, I'll be willing to *take that concern back to the proper source* and let them follow through on it. Someone else may need to talk to them. Their concern might be over something I don't know much about and need to investigate myself and then report back.

5. They may be upset about something that has been, or is being, done by the church that they don't agree with. It may come down to simply having to say something like, "I'm sorry you don't like what we are doing. We believe we are doing it to help advance the cause of Christ. I'll be glad to *share why we're doing it*. . . . I appreciate your sharing your concern with me. I hope this would not be a big enough concern to cause you to leave us [if they suggested they were]. If you do leave over this, I hope you find what you're looking for out there. If not, I want to let you know that we still care about you and will always have an open door for you." I've used some variation of this many times.

Often people just want to be heard. The fact that you cared enough to get together with them and listen will solve a lot of problems. If the person is a perpetual troublemaker, then it would be good to read Titus 3:4-7 first.

Dealing With Troublemakers

One of the great roles the elders of Central Christian Church have played is protecting themselves and the church from the troublemaker. Most troublemakers don't see themselves as troublemakers. I have used the analogy that our elders are like Musk oxen. Whenever someone comes around who wants to give the church, the preacher, or the elders unjustified, unreasonable trouble, they put the "cows and calves" in the middle and back in toward them with their heads and horns facing out, ready to do battle to protect the "family." They are great protectors of the body of Christ from those who would do it damage.

Our preacher was asked to lead a meeting for other preachers along with the chairman of our elders. In preparing for it, he asked me, "Why do we have such harmony among our leaders?" My response was that they shut out troublemakers. It is not that the elders all agree on everything themselves. But when a troublemaker sees he can't get control of our board of elders or the church, he leaves. The ones who are left still don't all agree on everything, but they are agreeable, cooperative, and reasonable people who don't have to get their own way on every issue.

Now we must be careful not to abuse this. We have to be careful that we don't shut out the energetic, the prophet, the driver, and the visionary and call them troublemakers! There is a difference. And if we shut out the wrong people, we do damage to the church.

Another big issue that must be mentioned in talking about this area is that the church must allow people to disagree—agreeably. We must accept differences of ideas and opinions, and tolerate different kinds of people and personalities. That is one thing I so appreciate

about Central. There is a toleration of those who are different and disagree—agreeably.

Love Them

The bottom-line message we want to communicate to all those who are M.I.A.s is, "We love you. We are sorry to see you leaving. If we can change what is upsetting you, we will. If it is something that we legitimately feel we cannot change, we are sorry. If you don't find what you want or are looking for, you will be welcomed back here."

This approach is so important, and the smaller the town the more important it becomes. You need to release people so you and they don't have to fear meeting each other every time you go downtown. When you release them, you can with good conscience meet them anywhere without anxiety. Your church will develop a reputation of being tolerant and compassionate with those who disagree.

Over the years, I have learned something about many of those who leave our church for what they think is greener grass in another church. Many will discover an interesting thing about that green grass on the other side of the fence—there is dirt under it—maybe it is muddier than ours. Many of them will be back! The way we treat them when they leave will have a big impact on whether they ever feel they can come back if they should choose to.

I know of many who left and were told they were still loved, and who have come back.

CHAPTER TEN

How to Build a Ten-year Plan for Smart Fishing

A key ingredient to helping a church grow is a long-range plan. If you don't plan on sticking around for very long, this won't be of much interest. But if you are on board for the long haul as a leader in the congregation, why not lead in laying out a ten-year plan for your church's growth?

When I was twenty-five, ten years seemed so far away it was hard to think about. Eighteen years later, having been in Mesa for over fourteen years, I realize how fast ten years flies by. Why not make the most of it?

Following is a simple plan for laying out one-, five-, and ten-year long-range plans for your church. It focuses on an analysis of the five areas and determining the kinds of things you can do. Worksheets are included to help you lay specific plans for each area. Make several copies of these worksheets so that each ministry area and program can use a set—as well as the leadership's use of them for the church as a whole. Each department can then make a ten-year plan in conjunction with the overall plan for the congregation.

I would recommend reading Kennon Callahan's books before starting the process: *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* and *Effective Leadership*. These are both tremendous books that can help you understand the mission of the church and planning for it.

Start With Prayer

Pray alone. Pray with others. Ask God to show you what He wants you to do to carry out His will.

Get Out in Your Town or City

Determine who is there—and who will be there in ten years. Whom are you trying to reach? Check at the library or city hall to get demographic studies done by your state, city, and major businesses in the area.

Study the Needs

What are the needs of the people in your community now, and what do you anticipate them to be in the future? What are the needs of the people in your church?

Once you have a list of needs, prioritize them. Which is most crucial and must be done immediately? Which ones can wait?

Finally, determine what you can do to try to meet these needs. Especially notice which of these needs can become opportunities to introduce people to the gospel.

Make Up Your Mission Statement

The number-one key to growth is your mission. What does the Lord want you doing? For what do you want to be known? Identify your mission. Write it down.

Gain Ownership of the Mission by the Leaders of the Church

The leaders of the church ought to be a part of clarifying and determining the mission. Once that is done, you need to start educating the members of your church about the mission. Preach about it, teach about it, write about it, pray about it. Make posters and slogans. Keep asking if all that goes on in the life of the church is helping to reach the mission.

Complete the “Worksheets for Smart Fishing”

Divide into ministry areas or teams. Have the people in each ministry area of the church complete the “Worksheets for Smart Fishing.” The more groups that are involved, the more comprehensive your strategy will be—and the more likely you will be to catch fish! The worksheets are at the end of this section. Copy as many as you need for your own church’s program. Research each area. Visit other churches. Read books and interview experts in each area. Brainstorm among yourselves.

Write Out Your One-, Three-, Five-, and Ten-year Goals

Take the worksheets and note the “What,” “Who,” and “When” sections. Double check each of these. Have some ministries been left out?

Then include them. Does the timing (the “when” columns) reflect the relative priority of each ministry? If not, get first things first. Do these ministries reflect the mission of the church? If not, refine them.

Establishing the priorities can become a real juggling act. You must consider ultimate priority as well as reality. You might want “Build a building” to be a one-year goal—you need it now. But it may have to be a three- or five-year goal. (Even so, a one-year goal could be to assign a task force to begin the work on it.) Many of the goals will change as time goes on. You might be able to move some five-year goals up, but you may also have to move some one-year goals back a year or more.

Once you have these worksheets filled out, use the Information Summary Chart to pull all the pertinent information together. This chart follows the worksheets and may be copied for your own church’s use.

Lay Out Plans to Reach These Goals Over Ten Years

The size of your church will greatly affect this whole process. The bigger you get, the longer it takes to do the planning because you have a lot more people to involve, and it takes a lot more time to implement change. I heard someone explain the difference in making changes in small churches to making them in a large church in the following way: making a change in a small church is like turning a speed boat around. It takes a few seconds. Making changes in a large church is like turning an oil tanker around. It takes four hours!

The key to such change is determining what smaller changes need to take place along the way in order to effect the larger change. Do you want to have thirty Ambassadors trained and in service in five years? Then plan to have four by next year, eight the year after that, fifteen the third year, twenty-two the fourth year, and thirty after five years. Your specific numbers may vary, but you need specific goals and plans to reach those goals in order to achieve them. One training program may give you the four Ambassadors you need to reach your first-year goal, but you will probably need two the following year—and at least two a year after that. Plan for it. Schedule it. Make it happen.

Have the Leaders Officially Adopt the Vision

They must lead! They are sticking their necks out. Consider the turtle. He never makes any progress without sticking out his neck. A wise leader makes sure he has someone behind him!

Communicate the Vision and Plans

Let your people see it, think it, feel it. Let them get excited about it. Ask for feedback. Listen a lot. You will gain some great insights. Don't let the normal nay-sayers stop you. Love them but don't let them stop the church.

Let the People Know What Is Happening

Share the results of planning and progress as you implement your goals. Announce achievements or setbacks in appropriate places. It may be in the services, as part of other programs, in your bulletins, special letters, or in some other way. Be open and honest. Be willing to change. Examine the facts. Are we getting what we want? Don't bail out too soon. Give things a chance, but bury dead horses.

Report and Have Some Hoopla

Hoopla is celebration and recognition. Keep the vision alive. Recognize people for their work and achievements. Have dinners, parties, desserts, music, and anything else that says, "Nice job!" whenever milestones are achieved! Don't get too serious. We are serious enough as it is. Lighten it up a little. Smell the roses.

Worksheet for Smart Fishing

CATEGORY: PRE-PROSPECT

What Is YOUR Mission With the Pre-prospect?

Write and refine your church's (department's) mission to the pre-prospect. What do you want to accomplish in your efforts toward them?

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Study the pre-prospect in your community. Who are they, what are their ages, marital makeup, interests, and ethnic makeup?

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List below the worst things you can think of that can happen to a pre-prospect in regards to the work of your church. (See the list of ideas/examples below.)

- Never hear of Christ
- Have a bad experience with a Christian/church
- Never meet a Christian
- Never see a Bible or read the Gospel
- Never get invited to our church
- Go through a crisis alone/ be passed by (Good Samaritan)
- Not know our church exists
- Not know what our church is all about
- Have us wait for them to come to us.

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Now that you have identified the worst things, you can begin to build your strategy by simply asking yourself what needs to be done to see that none of these things happens. You can list those in the right-hand column below ("What"). This will require more research in some cases, but when you have finished you will have identified the first list of things you need to start to work on for smarter fishing in this category.

Then you can begin to prioritize and assign these tasks. Fill in the next two columns ("Who" and "When") with the names of people who can do the things that need done and the times by which you need them in place (if it is an ongoing need) or completed (if it is a static need).

WHAT: What needs to be done to improve this area?

WHO: Who is going to be in charge of working on this?

WHEN: When do we want the changes to be implemented?

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
Workers			
Worship			
Music			
Greeters			
Ushers			
Preaching			
Style			
Look of place			
Facility			
Parking			
Landscaping			
Special ministries or programs			
List other things you need to work on or to have in place			

Worksheet for Smart Fishing

CATEGORY: PROSPECT

What Is YOUR Mission With the Prospect?

Write and refine your church's (department's) mission to the prospect. What do you want to accomplish in your efforts toward them?

Study those who are your prospects. Who is coming to your services, programs, etc.? Who isn't coming that you could or should be reaching in your community?

List below the worst things you can think of that can happen to a prospect in regards to the work of your church. (See the list of ideas/examples below.)

- Can't find a place to park
- Doesn't know how to get into the building
- Can't find the nursery
- Can't find the restrooms
- Dirty restrooms
- No one speaks to them
- No one follows up on them
- They don't like the preaching/singing, etc.
- You don't get their name and address

Now that you have identified the worst things, you can begin to build your strategy by asking yourself what needs to be done to see that none of these things happens.

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
Workers			
Registration Cards			
Record System			
Home Visitation Strategy			
Trained Evangelists			
List other things you need to work on or to have in place			

Worksheet for Smart Fishing

CATEGORY: NEW MEMBER

What Is YOUR Mission With the New Member?

Write and refine your church's (department's) mission to the new member. What do you want to do or accomplish in your efforts toward them?

Do a study of your new members. Who are they? What are their ages. How long have they been Christians? How long have they been attending your church before joining?

List below the worst things you can think of that can happen to a new member in regards to the work of your church. (See the list of ideas/examples below.)

- No one follows up on them
- They are forgotten
- They aren't helped to start growing in Christ
- They don't find a group
- They don't make any friends
- They don't find a job.
- They get too many jobs
- They get too involved at the church to the neglect of other things in their lives.

Now that you have identified the worst things, you can begin to build your strategy by asking yourself what needs to be done to see that none of those things happens.

What things do you need to have in place in order to take care of your new members?

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
Workers			
Clarify how to become a member/participant/servant/leader			
Plan to follow up on new members			
Plan to get new members into a group			
Plan to get new members a job			
Plan to help new members get to know people			
Plan to help new members know about the church			
List other things you need to work on or to have in place			

Worksheet for Smart Fishing

CATEGORY: MEMBER

What Is YOUR Mission With the Member?

Write and refine your church's (department's) mission to the member. What do you want to do or accomplish in your efforts toward them?

Study your members. What are their ages? What kinds of jobs and income levels do they have? How long have they been members? How many are involved? What is their former church backgrounds?

List below the worst things you can think of that can happen to a member of your church. (See the list of ideas/examples below.)

- Be a lukewarm Christian, not growing into Christlikeness
- Not feel a part of the church
- Not know they are saved
- Not be sharing their faith
- Not be practicing the spiritual disciplines
- Not know what their gift of ministry is
- Not be practicing "it's more blessed to give than receive"
- Not be pastored by members of the church
- Have to go through troubles by themselves
- Not know anyone when they come to activities at the church
- Not be trained for ministry
- Not be shown appreciation for the service they do give
- Be allowed to lead an un-Christlike life without anyone's going to them to address the problem in love
- Ignore obvious sin in the life of your leaders in particular or members in general

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Now that you have identified the worst things, you can begin to build your strategy by asking yourself what needs to be done to see that none of these things happens. What things do you need to have in place in order to take care of your members?

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
Good Preaching			
Bible Study			
System to Keep Attendance			
Regular follow-up when absent			
Plan to Involve Them in Ministry			
List other things you need to work on or to have in place			

Worksheet for Smart Fishing

CATEGORY: MISSING IN ACTION

What Is YOUR Mission With the M.I.A.?

Write and refine your church's (department's) mission to the M.I.A. What do you want to do or accomplish in your efforts toward them?

Study the M.I.A. in your church. How many are there? How long have they been missing? What are their ages? Do they fall into categories? Does this reveal a ministry group you need to begin or strengthen?

List below the worst things you can think of that can happen to the M.I.A. in your church. (See the list of ideas/examples below.)

- No one misses them
- They aren't followed up on
- People talk about their missing but don't phone
- They have a serious illness and no one knows
- They are approached from a condemning attitude
- People gossip about them
- They aren't "released"
- We don't discover a problem that may affect others in the church

What things do you need to have in place in order to minister to your M.I.A.s?

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
Workers			
Tracking System to Know They Are Gone			
Care Callers			
List other things you need to work on or to have in place			

Information Summary Chart

Ministry Area: _____

Goals for this area:	in 1 year	in 3 years	in 5 years	in 10 years
No. of members				
No. of worshipers				
No. of additions				
No. of ministries				
No. of groups				
Other				

People needs to meet: _____

Programs to build the kingdom: _____

What you will need to reach these:

	in 1 year	in 3 years	in 5 years	in 10 years
Money needs				
Building needs				
Parking needs				
Staff needs				
Program needs				



Conclusion

Cal Jernigan is always working on his boat. He recently added two more seats to it and recarpeted it. He is always buying new lures. I saw a new huge tackle box. He bought a new trolling motor. He is listening for good fishing tips, and looking for hot fishing spots.

He still has some bad fishing days. He came in the office the other day all excited about catching a six-pound bass. He knows there are bigger ones in the lake. He will be back there as soon as he can arrange it.

We never know everything we need to know about smart fishing. We can and must continue to examine the ways we are trying to reach people for the Lord. We can always find some ways to be smarter in what we are doing. We need to be fishing, not just mending nets.

May the Lord bless you as you drop you nets into the water. If we drop them, He will bless us with a catch! It's a lot of work. But full nets are a thrill.

SECTION THREE

Appendix



APPENDIX A

Training Others for Smart Fishing

Following are suggestions as to how you can use this book to train others to get involved in "smart fishing," reaching out to win the lost in your own community. You can set up and invite people to a "Smart Fishing" seminar, retreat, workshop, or class. Provide each of them with a copy of this book.

I've included a suggested outline. You can fill the time in with additional material from the book or material of your own.

Keep what you share brief. Give them time to respond to the Response questions. They can share their responses with the whole group or in small groups. You could cover all this in six to seven hours with breaks allowed.

Session 1: Introduction; 30 minutes.

Session 2: Some basic needs for Smart Fishing; 20 minutes.

Session 3: Smart fishermen make fishing their top priority; 20 minutes.

Session 4: Smart fishermen don't get sidetracked from fishing; 20 minutes.

Session 5: Smart fishermen keep themselves free to fish; 15 minutes.

Session 6: Smart fishermen keep themselves excited by fishing; 15 minutes.

Session 7: Smart fishing requires a fisherman's sensitivity to the fish; 15 minutes.

Session 8: Smart fishing requires good training; 15 minutes.

Session 9: Smart fishermen are willing to change their ways; 15 minutes.

Session 10: Smart fisherman have a well-planned strategy.

Step one: Pre-prospects; 30 minutes

Step two: Prospects; 30 minutes

Step three: New members; 30 minutes

Step four: Members; 30 minutes

Step five: M.I.A.s; 30 minutes

Response Questions

The "Response Questions" are the questions in the outside margin scattered throughout the book. These questions are designed to get the people

in your evangelism program to interact with the principles of “smart fishing” described in this book. During your training seminar, allow time for the people attending to think about and discuss these issues.

Looking Ahead

Introducing all this is just the beginning. You will need to decide how you want to crystallize your game plan in each of the five areas. You may want to lay out a six-month plan that includes the following:

1. Have your initial seminar.
2. Research each of the five areas.
3. When to have reporting back sessions.
4. How and when to have your final draft ready to present and adopt. (“Final” only in terms of getting this started.)
5. When you will evaluate what you are doing every year. You will need to be improving what you are doing, changing to help you be more effective in your work.

APPENDIX B

Factors in the Growth of Central Christian Church, Mesa, Arizona

In the time I have been at Central Christian Church in Mesa, Arizona, I have witnessed substantial church growth. This growth has not come by any one great, spectacular event. It has just been steady, faithful progress. I'll briefly address some of the factors I have observed that have contributed to the growth. They aren't in any order of priority, but it is my hope that they can serve as motivation for others who want to see their churches grow.

1. A Commitment to Grow and Reach Those Outside the Church

If a decision comes down to "What will please members or what will help us reach the lost," our leaders have chosen the latter. One example of this is our decision to relocate. We knew we would lose members by relocating three miles away to a high school for a year or so while our new facility was being built. We knew of the inconveniences. We knew the short distance would seem like a long way to some. We knew the amount of money that was going to be spent. We knew we didn't need to do all this for those of us already in the church. We were happy where we were. The decision to relocate and rebuild was made for those who weren't yet in the church.

2. A Willingness to Pay the Price for Growing

It costs a lot to grow. *It costs in dollars.* When Central expanded on our former location to make room for growth, our monthly mortgage went from \$500 to \$5000 a month. Few were sure we could handle that. When we relocated and rebuilt, our monthly mortgage went to \$50,000. Inflation had done its job over the years, and we had also grown in size significantly, but \$50,000 was still a huge amount of money. It called for some big sacrifices financially. People gave and will be giving a lot to make it possible for us to have our new location to help us reach more for Christ. It costs.

When you grow, *it will cost you in terms of friendships.* When you go to two services (or three) or make similar changes, you won't get to see every-

one as often. There are some people in our church whom I used to see every week, but now I may not see them more than once or twice a year. I don't like that, but I don't like not growing even more. Failing to make the changes necessary to grow hasn't been an option for us. It costs.

It costs in time and conveniences. In the high school, people were starting at 6:00 A.M. to set up the nursery, Communion, and other items needed. Even in our new facility, many staff and members arrive between 6:00 and 6:30 A.M. on Sundays to prepare for the activities that begin at 7:30. It takes time. It would be a lot easier not to grow—just have 9:00 Sunday-school and one service at 10:30.

But it also pays! We have a lot of pay days. Invitation is a regular one, when we see people with whom we have been working come to Christ. Another comes when we see people with whom we are studying accept the Lord in their homes. The pay is great!

3. Evangelism Is Not Just Talked About

Evangelism takes a lot of time. We have been willing to make the commitment to that. We are willing to visit and then spend three more nights in the home of any prospect in order to teach him about Christ. We have a lot of people doing that. We have seen a lot of easier evangelism programs. We could just offer an "Inquirers Class" on Sunday mornings and let any interested people come to that and teach them the gospel. That would be so much easier. We wouldn't have to train Ambassadors. We wouldn't have to spend as much time in phoning and record keeping. And we would have a lot more nights at home over the year. But we wouldn't be reaching as many people, either. We would be doing more talking about evangelism than practicing it.

We work hard at being sensitive to the outsider. One current member of our church, when we first followed up on him, asked me if we had had professionals come in and advise us. I thought that was an interesting question coming from a Jewish Yuppie. I asked him what he meant, and he commented about how well everything was done on Sunday mornings from signs, to neatness, friendliness, and the quality of the services.

People in our culture—non-Christians in particular—respond to things' being done right. They expect it in their grocery store, their garage, and their workplace, and they are impressed when they find it in a church. It has helped us reach many people by simply gaining their respect in that way.

4. The Preacher Is the CEO

The leaders at Central long ago made the preacher the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the staff. He answers to the elders. The staff answers to him. They trust him. He trusts them. It is a great arrangement.

This doesn't mean the preacher makes all the decisions, but he is given the freedom to be a real leader (which includes working with the elders). A leader's success isn't measured by how many people he controls, but by how many he is serving. A lot of church leadership groups treat their preachers the way parents often treat their teenagers—with lack of trust and confidence. Such churches won't grow. Our leaders let our preacher lead.

5. The Music Is Excellent

I can't begin to do justice to what eleven years of good music has meant to our growth. When Debbie Hollenbach came on our staff, she turned our music program around. She made our music something we could always be proud of and know our prospects would not be turned off by. Some churches would reach more people if they would disband their choirs and stop letting some people sing solos.

6. We Have Been Willing to Leave the Back Door Open

The "Close the Back Door" philosophy is one of the worst excuses for not being more involved in evangelism I've ever heard. It's also one of the most common. "Why should we try to reach new people," the line goes, "when we have so many going out the back door." I've heard this in little churches and in big churches. It is a cop out. It is wrong. I have not heard many church growth people talk about it in these terms, but I'll say it this way: "If you want to grow, you *must* be willing to *lose people*."

We don't try to lose them. But even while we are working hard to do everything right, we know we will lose a few. You can't please everyone! Accept some losses. I can think of various elders over the years who left because they didn't like what the church was doing or how it was doing things. We hated to see them leave, and we were not nasty to any of them, but we weren't going to stop growing because one or two people didn't agree with the whole group.

7. We Are Willing to Change, Experiment, and Be Flexible

A common characteristic in every growing church I'm aware of is a willingness to experiment. We are always experimenting, trying different things, wanting to do a better job.

Our leaders are willing to bury dead horses. If a ministry or program is not working or doing what it was intended to do, we get rid of it. We do not keep doing it because we have done it for forty years or because someone will get upset if we don't do it anymore. I recently heard a news story about a woman who was found dead in New York sitting up in her chair. She had been dead for six months! But some of the people with whom she had lived

didn't believe she was dead. We can act that same way about a lot of sentimental things in the church. If it is dead, give it a polite, proper burial.

Be sensitive in the way you bury dead horses. It was someone's pet and may have contributed for a long time to something good. Just as a parent has to be careful when his kid's pet bird or fish dies, we have to be careful about laying to rest a church program. Parents sometimes wrap the dead pets up and put them in little boxes and have funerals for their kids' sake. Don't be brutal or cold. Celebrate the good it did even as you close down the program. But if it is dead, bury it.

People don't like change. Some churches never get to make many changes because they try some big things and everyone fights it. I've concluded that the leaders of a church (especially the preacher) need to start making little beneficial changes in the life of the church. Start making a lot of little changes to get people used to change. Someone will most likely be against anything you do. But you need to spread out the dislike. If you seldom make changes, everyone is going to see it when you do, and there will be a big reaction. Do it a lot, and you're not as likely to get as much fuss over any one item. Then later, when you want to make the bigger changes, you will have watered down some of the opposition.

Change is difficult for us all. I'm a big instigator of change, and it's still hard. Last year I saw a need for some major changes in the way we were conducting the major portion of our education ministries. I was depressed. I knew we needed to make the changes, but it meant starting all over in many areas. I was comfortable with the current situation. I had worked for thirteen years to get some of the things to the place they were. I was tired. I'm more tired now—in one sense—but I'm rejuvenated in other ways. Dreams, plans, trying to make it all come together. It will come together—just in time to find a better way to do it!

In *Thriving on Chaos*, Tom Peters begins this way, "The old saw 'If it ain't broke don't fix it' needs revision. I propose: 'If it ain't broke, you just haven't looked hard enough. Fix it anyway.'"⁴⁰

8. Our Leaders Have Allowed for Changing Leadership Roles

This affects both the preacher and the rest of the leadership—paid and volunteer. Over the years, we have seen a lot of change. A major element of this has been the elders' moving away from having to know all and decide all that goes on in the life of the church. Our leaders don't and can't know

⁴⁰Peters, *Chaos*, p. 3.

everything that goes on in a church this size. They entrust a lot of work and ministry to people in the church. But they don't have to put their stamp of approval on every action or decision that is made before something can be done. They demonstrate a lot of trust. If the trust is abused by someone, they will deal with that. But if what people are doing in various areas of the church is helping accomplish the goals of the church, their philosophy is, "Go to it."

The elders still set policy. But if they had to approve everything and know about everything that was done, we would be a quarter the size we are now, and they would have to meet for four or five hours every week to hear it all.

9. We Have Added Staff When Needed

We have been pretty fortunate in adding staff. I heard one guy say hiring a staff member is a little like getting a mail-order bride. She may look good on paper and have good references, but you really don't know what she is like until you live with her.

A church must add staff to grow. I'm convinced most churches don't grow because they don't add new staff soon enough. They keep waiting until they have the salary money as excess income and they can see how they can pay for it before they will hire another person. Bad move. Many churches wait until they grow another fifty or a hundred before they will add another staff member. In many cases, they won't grow until they add another staff member. Our men have tried to keep ahead in the staff area.

10. Our Leaders Have Made Sure We Have Adequate Facilities

They added on to the old place. We met in a high school auditorium. We have built a sanctuary that will eventually seat 3000 worshippers. If you don't provide some kind of space for your ministry, it will not keep growing. It can be rented, your own, or whatever, but you have to have room.

I call it the "Bonsai Factor." Bonsai trees are little miniature trees that are kept small by keeping them in little containers. They are cute. But they will never grow. They are purposefully kept small. We often do the same with the church. Don't build the staff, don't provide the programs, don't provide the space, and you won't grow.

11. We Have Laughed

There has been a lot to be tense about. A new \$50,000 monthly mortgage has been plenty to worry about. There have been hundreds of things to cry about. But we have kept laughing: together, at ourselves, at other things. We have humor in our services (which a lot of non-Christians really appreciate).

We try not to take life so seriously that we quit laughing and having fun. We need to remind ourselves at times to lighten up!

12. We Try to Do Things Right

One Sunday morning, one of our greeters, Lou Ebel—who was an executive for Sears for many years—came to me quite concerned that the glass doors had fingerprints all over them. We had to get them cleaned before people started coming! This little action reveals the spirit here at Central. If we are going to do something for the Lord, let's do it right. Let's do it as well as they would at Sears! This spirit has applied to facility, to programs, to worship services, to music, to teaching, to outings, and even to restrooms. It applies to everything!

13. Central Has Been Mission Minded

If a church wants to grow, it must think of those beyond its own town. It must be involved in missions. Central has been willing to give of its best! This has cost us greatly. We have had some tremendous leaders and their families go to the mission field. We have lost the benefit of their help here at home, but it has benefited the kingdom.

It has also built our spirit. We have been growing in our giving money to the mission field. We could sure use that money to help pay bills at home, but we don't dare touch that for ourselves. We need to and want to give more to the world for the Lord.

14. We Have Worked to Be Friendly

I said enough about this earlier in the book.

15. We Have Shut Out the Troublemaker

Over the years, I've seen that our elders will be tolerant with, and will listen to, people who disagree with what they or the church is doing. But they will not allow them to take over. They will listen, share, be flexible, and cooperate as much as possible. But they won't let troublemakers take over the show. Most troublemakers, or good people who develop a different outlook, leave when they see they won't get their way. Our leaders carry out the admonitions of Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10.

16. We Have Put New People to Work

If you are ready to work today, we've got a job for you. We work hard at recruiting people. Much of what we have learned about recruiting is in my book *Recruiting, Training, and Developing Volunteer Adult Workers*, published by Standard Publishing.

17. We Have Brought in New Leadership

As people have become involved, we have seen leadership potential developing in some of them. We encourage this and get these people into leadership positions as we are able.

Many churches stifle their growth because the leaders don't let anyone new into their group until they have been around enough years to be sure they won't rock the boat. Our leaders have brought aboard those who give evidence of spiritual maturity, and the church has benefited from their life and enthusiasm.

This is not to say the older leaders are crowded out. Bringing in new leadership and keeping the old are not mutually exclusive. We've been able to allow younger people to move into leadership while keeping the "old timers" around.

18. Our Church Takes Good Care of the Paid Staff

They have worked at giving good salaries, taking us on staff retreats, sending us to conventions, providing health insurance, giving adequate vacations, providing special five-year anniversary get-aways, giving a four- to six-month sabbatical to pastors for every seven years of full-time ministry, making something special of annual anniversaries, and a host of other little things that communicate love and appreciation. Knowing how difficult it is to provide much of this in times of relocation and building when money is very tight, we especially appreciate these efforts.

19. We Have Learned to Live With Being Different

We have accepted the fact that some people won't like us, won't fit in with us, will be different from us, and will like things and do things differently from the way we as a group operate and live. We have learned to accept the fact we won't be like every other—or even any other—church. We will have our unique personality. We just need to see that we are growing into Christlikeness.

20. We Have Been Faithful in Spiritual Disciplines

This includes teaching the Word of God, being active in prayer, giving, and other spiritual disciplines. From the pulpit and in other ways, we encourage faithfulness, and the lives of our leaders model it as well.

21. We Have Tried to "Pastor" Our Members

We follow up on them when they are absent, visit them in the hospital, and provide counseling to them when in crisis. We give food, clothing, and money in moments of need. Our elders help serve Communion to all our

shut-ins every Sunday. We have a number of support groups to meet a variety of special needs. We have not ignored our members. Jim Whitaker (a staff member in his 80s) says, when members are hospitalized, he wants to beat them to the hospital and be able to greet them!

22. We Haven't Let Setbacks Stop Us

Sure, we have had setbacks. We have been slowed down, but we have not been stopped. We have changed directions, but we have not been stopped. We have been knocked down, but we didn't stay down long. We have kept moving ahead despite the obstacles.

23. We Haven't Let Success Stop Us

This one may sound strange, but it is vital. Some churches become satisfied with what they have done and fail to do more. Even more common is the problem of perfectionism. A church may have a good program, but it could be just a little better; so they keep refining it until it takes away from their being able to start new ministries. We haven't let the fact that things aren't perfectly in place stop us from going ahead. If you wait until everything is perfect, you will be going backwards.

APPENDIX C

Resources for Smart Fishing

Surveying Your Community

Douglas A. Walrath, in *Planning for Your Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), gives an excellent approach to "defining your territory" and for "informally" researching your community (pages 79-85).

New Home Purchases

GGC Associates, Inc., in Costa Mesa, California (1-800-444-9521), will supply you with names of new people who have moved into your neighborhood for 39 cents each (\$39 for 100 names).

Telemarketing

The ministry that has developed and refined this approach best, that I'm aware of, has a program called "The Phone's for You." Mailing address: Friends Church Southwest Yearly Meeting, P.O. Box 1607, Whittier, CA 90609-1607. Phone number: (818) 915 6611.

Divorce Recovery

The ten-week video series by Clyde Besson, *Picking Up the Pieces*, is an excellent resource. Check with your local Christian film/video outlet to see about getting it.

Evangelistic Calling

Ambassadors for Christ: Training for Evangelism, Trainer's Manual (item number 3221). *Ambassadors for Christ: Training for Evangelism, Student's Manual* (item number 3222). *A Peace Treaty With God* (item number 3223). *Presenting "A Peace Treaty With God"* cassette tapes (item number 3224). Order from Standard Publishing, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45231, or from your local Christian bookstore.

Life-style Evangelism

The concept is taught by the Navigators and is explained by Win Arn in *The Master's Plan of Evangelism* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982) and by Joe Aldrich in his *Life-style Evangelism* and *Gentle Persuasion* (Portland: Multnomah, 1981, 1988).

New-Member Discipling

Discipling New Christians With the Spiritual T.E.A.M. is available from Standard Publishing. It consists of a *Coach's Manual* for the leader of a small discipling group, and two manuals for the new disciples: a *Rookie Season* manual for new Christians, and a *Veteran Season* manual for those who have completed the *Rookie Season*.