

>> **Evangelism through “Networking”...**

Tim Keller; July 1992

Philosophy of Networking

“Networking” was originally a modern marketplace-jargon word, which refers to deliberate relationship building to meet business goals. I use it to mean a whole philosophy of ministry based on friendship evangelism.

For years, Christians have talked about “friendship evangelism” as opposed to methods such as “cold contact” evangelism (street evangelism, tract distribution, cold calling), “mass evangelism” (crusades, radio/TV broadcasts), “visitation evangelism” (Evangelism Explosion). Friendship evangelism was always considered 1) informal, something that could not be effected much through leadership or programs, and 2) something that mainly only mature Christians did much. (Why? Because it took both courage and the ability to articulate the gospel and field questions.) Therefore, friendship evangelism was only ever seen, as a supplement to the REAL evangelism “programs”. Those programs were evangelistic services, or visitation evangelism courses, or broadcasts, and so on.

Why was friendship evangelism not seen as the REAL evangelism programs? 1) Pastors could not program friendship evangelism, and thus felt powerless to effect it. 2) Friendship evangelism seemed elitist--something only for advanced Christians.

No research can prove this-but the more modern, the more secular, the more urbanized, and the newer the cities and communities, the more these traditional programs do not seem to bear fruit. Why? Most programs rely on the reception of the gospel from a stranger. Either the crusade evangelist, or the trained “visitor”, or some other stranger must give the gospel to the non-believer. As our modern society becomes more privatized, as neighborhoods disappear and people “cocoon”, the likelihood that people will listen to a stranger diminishes. Radio and TV evangelism does fit in better with modern culture, but the follow-up gap is severe. (How do you get the spiritually awakened through TV into a church? The problem with a privatized culture-it creates people who are commitment-resistant. Radio and TV can do very little to turn the “decisions” into disciples.)

In response, many churches are discovering that the entire church can be based on a philosophy of networking. It is a complete retooling of the entire church’s ministry, giving every part an “outward” face, making virtually every ministry activity a - friendship evangelism event. This means everything -worship, small group life, education, etc. This is to create a “corporate culture.” It can be supported by planning and ministry programs; it can be done by even (and by ESPECIALLY) the new believer. (In fact, the new believer is critical; see below!) A networking philosophy consists of the following parts or principles.

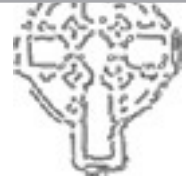
SUM:

In an increasingly privatized, secularized society, we will find more and more that:

1. People will not listen to the gospel from strangers: a) not to strangers who come to their door, b) not to strangers who call them, mail them, or even advertise to them.
2. People will not be assimilated well through strangers who follow them up by coming to their doors either. Assimilation takes enormous energy if we assume that most visitors come without a good relationship to anyone in the church.

RedMountainChurch

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



3. People will have to come a number of times to a program or service before even giving us their name in order to send them material/ newsletter, and so on.

By the early 21st century we may see that the main way churches did evangelism in the latter 20th century was: 1930's-1960's - Crusade Evangelism; 1960's-1990's - Visitation Evangelism; 1990's-present- Network Evangelism.

Principles of Networking

A networking church is developed primarily through cultivating a mindset, a collective attitude and only secondarily through setting up programs.

1. The key to networking: a partnership between newer/ "grapevined" believers and -mature believers. THE problem in evangelism is this: New believers have the connections and credibility with non-believers, but do not have the power to articulate. On the other hand, mature believers have the power to articulate but not the place in the worldly "grapevines". Example: To take an enemy occupied town, we need both , artillery, to smash a hole in the gate or walls, and infantry, to actually walk in and take the town. The worship /preaching is like the artillery, the relationships of members to their friends are the infantry. Without artillery, the new Christian may not even speak about his faith.

2. The critical event in networking: the internal "self-talk" that turns "comers" into "bringers". The critical event in a networking church is when a Christian (and especially a new Christian) comes to a worship service, a small group, or some other church ministry program and says to him or herself: "I have been actively talking to my non-Christian friends about Christ, and this is exactly what I have been trying to show and say to them all along, but this does it far better than I can do it." OR "I have been silent in my witness, but this will give me credibility as a Christian to my non-Christian friends, and therefore I now begin to feel the courage to reach out to them." A Christian becomes a "bringer" when two things happen: a) The internal thinking mentioned above occurs in response to the service, and b) the Christian brings a non-Christian or non-churched person who wants to come back! That experience confirms the "bringer" behavior and turns it into a habit. A bringer will use the church as a plausibility structure to reach out to his or her web-network.

In a networking church, you must be either a seeker, a bringer, or a cell leader (follow-up) OR YOU ARE DEADWEIGHT!

3. The cultivation of this "mindset" of networking.

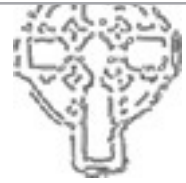
There must be an atmosphere of expectation that every member will always have 2-4 people in the "incubator", a force field in which people that are being prayed for, given literature, brought to church or other events. How is this mindset cultivated?

a). Brainstorm with the potential bringers the needs of their non-believing friends and colleagues. Make a list of their most basic needs, interests, hopes, fears, idols, aspirations, frustrations, dilemmas, prejudices, sins, strengths. (Make a list under each of these headings! Reflect in a disciplined way.)

b). Preach and present in every service and ministry so that both Christians and non-Christians are always intentionally challenged and addressed. Then be certain that the great truths of the faith are always brought into connection with the unbeliever's heart, that the gospel is used to answer the questions they are asking. If you don't know how to do it, get books, tapes, etc. of those who are.

RedMountainChurch

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



Evangelistic preaching is a “dynamic”:

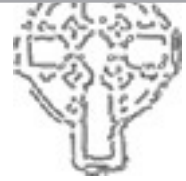
- i.)* First, you must preach as if skeptics, agnostics, etc. are there, and if you do, they will soon be there—they will be brought. This may mean at first you must do a lot of reading and listening through the media to the issues non-Christians struggle with.
 - ii.)* As a result, you will be talking to more non-Christians, listening to their objections, areas of confusion, and so on. The evangelistic appointments will then,
 - iii.)* have a shaping influence on your preaching, making it more evangelistically effective. You must always preach, thinking about the kinds of non-Christians you have spoken to as you study your texts and prepare your sermons. If you are talking to non-Christians constantly, the answers you give them will sink in and appear in your preaching. Only if you are talking constantly to non-Christians will your preaching address them and only if you address them will people bring them and only if they are brought will you meet them. And so on!
- c).** Modeling by the leadership. Your officers and leaders should all have an “incubator”. They should be constantly talking about their incubators in non-condescending terms. It should be evident to all that they are regular “bringers”, always working on and praying for people in their web networks. It may even be important to screen officer candidates for the presence of the “networking mindset”.
- d).** Kingdom-centered prayer. Your prayer meetings must be first of all oriented toward your “incubators”, seeking to push the boundaries of the kingdom outward over your community. See C. John Miller’s *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, chapter 7, on the difference between frontline prayer and maintenance prayer meetings.
- e).** Tools for networking evangelism should be everywhere -- handout pamphlets, books, tapes. A serious networking church would develop its own tracts and tools designed specifically for the kinds of needs and questions its “incubator” people have. If the tools are not being taken and using get others!
- f).** A constant variety of visitor-seeking events such as “Friendship Sundays”. But if the networking philosophy sinks in, Friendship Sundays become obsolete.
- g).** Continually evaluate all programs ruthlessly: are they BOTH challenging Christians AND non-Christians? Are both kinds of people regularly present? Are they both being kept interested?

4. The modes of networking, There are four basic kinds of “web networks”: familial, geographical (neighborhood), vocational (career/school associates), relational (friends not necessarily in the other networks). In urban areas, the latter two are more important; in rural areas the first two are more important. It depends! And different Networking-evangelism events can be oriented to one or the other. Example: Geographically based evening small groups are better for winning familial and geographical networks. But workday breakfast and lunch events in business districts are better for the latter two networks. Etc.

5. The process of networking Networking is a commitment to “process evangelism”. Most of the other programs of evangelism are “crisis” oriented, usually bringing the person to a decision very quickly -- through the signing of cards or through the praying of a sinner’s prayer. Research shows that a) the more varied ways a person hears the gospel, and b) the more often a person hears the gospel before making a commitment, the better the comprehension, the less likely of “reversion” to the world. Many people simply have “process personalities” -- they will never come to faith if they are pushed. They need to come in stages.

RedMountainChurch

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



In a networking philosophy:

a). It is expected that the non-Christian will be exposed to the gospel at least several times on the way to commitment. There is real opportunity afforded regularly for seekers to “cross the line into faith” and make a commitment, but there is never great pressure put on the will to “decide NOW”.

b). There are lots of opportunities for the seeker to list his/her questions and concerns, and for those issues to be addressed honestly. Question and answer times, appointments over lunch, reading sequences, etc. can afford this. Case Studies of

Networking “Pathways”

A networking church will discern, create, and keep track of “pathways” for the non-churched into the congregation. Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan (my church) affords a sample of such pathways.

1. Business-network events pathway. “BOLD”-inter-church preaching points at lunch time in the heart of the two basic business districts. Preaching is done for exactly 30 minutes (12:45-1:15 pm) in public cathedrals. Though they are churches, the space is “secular” space, used for concerts and cultural events, and is seen as public as a museum or art gallery. The mid-town meeting draws 250-300; the downtown meeting approximately 100.

“Harvard Club” is a twice a month evangelistic breakfast in a major business networking center. Christian men sponsor a non-Christian or unchurched friend. The meetings draw 50-60 each.

Many people come to Christ through this path: a) tapes from Redeemer (lowest commitment), b) then a visit to BOLD or the Harvard Club (modest commitment), c) then a visit to Redeemer for worship (higher commitment).

2. Worship service pathway. Worship is presented in varied styles, once a day with a question-answer forum, contextualized somewhat to professional culture. Preaching is designed to build up and challenge both believers and skeptics. The preaching is key to encouraging friendship evangelism, for it models it (the Christian hears the preacher talking to the worldly mind) and supports it. The worship is thus the “artillery” for evangelism and the Christian is the “infantry”. The worship pathway works like this.

a). Christian friend brings to church, and “follows up” through conversation. We even propose restaurants in the vicinity to use for follow-up.

b). Seekers returning to church are urged/drawn into 3 “fishing pools”:

i.) Foundations Class (Focused on basics of the faith; taught by staff for inquirers)

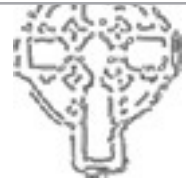
ii.) Membership Class (Focused on basics of Redeemer; taught by staff)

iii.) Visitor dessert. (The least formal; a question and answer session led by the senior pastor)

At each of these, cell leaders are to be present to recruit virtually all who come into a cell group. These events give staff and small group leaders the opportunity to draw into either cell groups or one-on-one evangelistic meetings. Also, the “bringers” may come with their friends as part of their personal follow up. Many people who come to Christ by this pathway simply report to their friends that they came to Christ on a particular Sunday; but some come and tell a pastor or officer after the service. We do not “ask for decisions” in the worship service, but we are becoming more systematic about having officers present to pray with seekers after the services. 3. Cell group pathway. Redeemer is using the basic “cell group model” popularized in overseas urban areas. This is much better for evangelism than the traditional Bible

RedMountainChurch

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



study approach. With the intimate oversight of the cell model, leaders/ facilitators may be newer Christians themselves. The regular support /oversight makes it possible to drive cell groups to regular invite more people into it. In addition, we expect to put most of the groups once or twice a year into an “outreach dessert” mode. (A target ministry of our church, “Business and Professional Outreach” enables that and has done 20 outreach desserts in one month this spring.)

The cell group pathway can work in two directions: a) The seeker is invited to the group and then comes to worship, or b) the seeker comes to church and is invited quickly into a group. In either case, the real evangelism happens more in the group than in the worship service.⁴ Felt need ministry pathway. Redeemer promotes divorce recovery workshops and groups, a ministry for people seeking jobs, a ministry to people with AIDS, several specific support groups, and a small counseling ministry. In addition to these “target ministries”, there is an extensive Singles network which attracts people looking for social connection through recreational events. All of these are entry points, and constitute a fourth pathway into the church. People come in response to an invitation to one of these events because it addresses a personal need. Often they are then drawn into the worship.⁵ Large Group Special Events. Occasionally, the church puts on a special concert (surrounding Christmas or Easter) or a “Comedy Night” or “Hot Topic Seminar” on sex, money, work or power! Or Pastor’s Gabfests. These are most like a traditional “evangelistic” event. A number of people have entered the church through them. Along with the whole “spiritual culture” of networking evangelism, they are very effective. But if the overall “networking culture” is missing, evangelistic special meetings won’t work well.

6. Alliances with other evangelistic ministries. There are a number of ministries which are reaching out to executives, international students, actors/actresses, college students-many of whom use Redeemer as a place to worship and to then bring friends/relatives who cannot be won to Christ by the ministry that won them. It takes all kinds of modes! To “ally” may mean to formally endorse and support, or simply have staff preach and teach at the para-church functions and give moral support.

Follow-up in the Networking Church

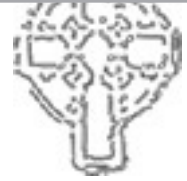
Pastors, officers, cell group leaders and other mature Christians in the church **MUST** be skilled at Networking follow-up. The new believer will bring non-Christians to church who will have questions and issues that they cannot address. Therefore, in a variety of ways, more mature Christians must be trained to do networking one-on-one evangelism. This usually means meeting over a meal for 3 or 4 times to talk about the gospel. Rapid follow-up will only happen if the church is saturated by cell groups. Otherwise, the staff will have to do it all.

A procedure:

- a).** Diagnosis. Ask: “where are you with Christianity?
are you Dissatisfied - Do you find aspects of Christianity unacceptable, distasteful?
What is your trouble with Christianity? Where is your beef?
Indifferent - Do you find Christianity simply unappetizing or irrelevant?
Where does Christianity fail to challenge you?
What would be relevant to you?
Cautiously interested - Are you in a learning mode, interested, gathering information, and yet not completely understanding?
What still does not make sense to you?

RedMountainChurch

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



Actively seeking, yet hesitant - Are you really searching for Christ, but find some fears hold you back? Does it seem to cost a lot and you are wondering about that? What costs give you pause? Make lists of issues after you have asked them these questions, and then you come back in the next 3 or 4 meetings and address these questions.

b). Presentation. A good approach is to use C.S.Lewis' argument from desire. (See "Hope" in Mere Christianity. See our church's pamphlet, "What does it mean to Know God?")

i.) If you are not finding yourself unsatisfied in life, you are either very young or very superficial. If you are successful in your goals, there is a "low growl" of emptiness; if you are unsuccessful, there is a "deafening roar" of emptiness.

ii.) Once you discover that, there is only 4 possibility-blame the things in your life, blame yourself, blame the universe/God, blame your separation from God!

iii.) A gospel outline can be the one in the "What does it mean to Know God?" brochure. Or the Evangelism Explosion outline. Or chapter 1 in John Guest's Go for It.

c). Handling Problems. *A basic approach:*

i.) You must see that you are already committed to religious, faith values. You already base your life on faith assumptions. All values of any sort are based on religious commitments.

ii.) Where do you get your faith assumptions? Don't you see they are arbitrary, just taken out of thin air? If you can believe anything you want to believe, then anyone can act any way they want. Arbitrariness destroys itself. Imagine if someone says to you, "I have a right to believe you are a child molester!" Why then do you do with God what you would not let anyone do with you?

iii.) There is no certainty without faith (think of how you hire people at the office!) The main way to begin to believe is to doubt your doubts? Why should you doubt everything but your cynicism?