

## PREPARING FOR AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH SERVICE

(A checklist of obvious, and not-so-obvious, practical details to help things run smoothly.)

### BEFORE YOU START

We recognise that:

- Every time we meet as a congregation the gospel should be 'on view'.
- The normal way that God speaks to us is in the Bible. Its great message to us is an invitation to new birth wherein God rescues us from the wrath to come. This is achieved in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The declaration of His Lordship should always be present in our preaching.

So why have an "evangelistic service"? Because it is helpful and appropriate to highlight the key elements of God's rescue plan in a clear and concise manner with a challenge to respond. The ministry of the apostles provides many examples of this in the Acts of the Apostles.

In summary a good modern day **Evangelistic Church Service** is one:

- Where unbelievers are present
- Where the atmosphere is warm and welcoming
- Where the components within the service are comprehensible to the unbeliever
- Where the service is centred upon a clear explanation of the gospel
- Where there are opportunities for Christians and their invited friends to chat/discuss
- Where a response is invited and follow up is offered

---

### "WHERE UNBELIEVERS ARE PRESENT"

Evangelistic Church Services (or Guest Services/Invitation Services/Outreach Services, etc) require more effort on the part of the regular members. Sadly, these services can often be the least effective of our evangelistic endeavours. This is often because:

- Regular congregational members are already aware of being a big group and therefore are able to hide in the crowd – "No one will notice if I don't invite someone".
- People who have been Christians for some time believe they have run out of non-Christians to ask along – "I don't know anyone to invite".
- The sense of discomfort and unease that regular Christians have towards bringing unbelievers into their regular congregation – "The style of church and the unhelpful behaviour of my fellow members is culturally alien to my non-Christian friends".

To ask someone to prepare and preach evangelistically to an audience entirely made up of Christians is not a good use of our human resources. The speaker is better employed elsewhere.

All Christians in the congregation should be informed that the Evangelistic Service is designed to help the unbeliever. It is not intended, in the first instance, for their pleasure or fellowship. So it is important to pray for their friends and help them to have the courage to invite them. Make sure to emphasise that everyone should still come to church on these occasions even if only as a support for the others who are there. We should all want to meet, and encourage, each other's friends.

---

### **"WHERE THE ATMOSPHERE IS WARM AND WELCOMING"**

It is helpful remembering how some unbelievers feel about coming to church. We can experience similar emotions if we visualise attending an activity which is alien to us (E.g. A teetotaler going to a pub). Check the following as you approach your church building:

- Is the entrance, and the interior, neat and tidy?
  - Is it possible to have the 'Welcome Table' outside the front door? Visitors can be more at ease if they see this and it avoids the 'in-crowd' crush which occurs inside.
  - Are there sufficient sensible and mature people on hand to welcome and greet newcomers? We can only make a first impression once so members with more Christian maturity should be available for this task.
  - Parents may require safe and adequate child care to enable them to enjoy full participation in the service. This will mean that adequate provision will have to be made to accommodate small children and toddlers. Visitors may not be able to concentrate against the back drop of a crying baby or noisy toys.
  - Are the facilities clean and well stocked?
- 

### **"WHERE THE COMPONENTS WITHIN THE SERVICE ARE COMPREHENSIBLE TO THE UNBELIEVER"**

Not everything has to be dumbed down to such a level as to become trivial. But a serious attempt should be made to help the outsider understand what is going on.

- The Bible reading should be in a contemporary translation, preferably printed out. Are large copies required for the visually impaired?
- The service should be kept to a minimum (60 minutes is all that is required)
- If we want the visitor to sing the songs and hymns then we should not try to put personal feelings of adoration and pious emotion on their lips. Try to avoid words that are predominately subjective ("I love you Jesus"). Try for objective words and sentiments ("To God be the glory").
- Have prayers that are simple and succinct. It is good to pray for governments and authorities, the marginalised and the needy.

- The celebration of The Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) can be unhelpful in these contexts as it can leave the visitor/unbeliever with a sense of isolation and would require extensive explanation as to the meaning of words and actions.

It is very beneficial to ask 'Why are we doing this?', or 'What would a non Christian make of this?' In reality we are engaged in cross-cultural missionary work. It all has to do with putting ourselves into the other person's shoes and seeing how they understand what is going on.

---

## **"WHERE THE PROGRAM IS CENTRED ON A CLEAR EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL"**

**The Talk** needs to be located at the point where it will have the most impact in the program

- Don't schedule it first (in case people arrive late) nor put it last (in case people leave early or don't have time to discuss the content).
- The speaker should be speaking within 30 minutes of the starting time. People have been asked to come to hear a speaker. They will wonder why he/she is not doing it.

The preaching, or the talk, is the focus of the Service so do not distract from it. The guiding factor must always be "What is most helpful for non-believers?" For example

- In-house jokes create a sense of 'us-and-them' and make people feel left out.
- Only the most basic and brief Church notices pertaining to the meeting should be given. Appeals for supper rosters, Sunday School teachers etc. should be omitted.

As well as the talk, the program *could* include

- Drama – it would have to be well done, short and to the point
- Music/Singing performance – much better when placed before the talk
- Book, DVD or Video review

From experience we recommend

- Preparing a 'Running Sheet' with each item timed and give a copy to the speaker prior to the Event, as well as to each person involved in the program.
- Always introducing yourself or any other person participating
- Interviewing the speaker and always ask if he/she has any pre-prepared questions.
- Testimonies or interviews which go no longer than 3-4 minutes and are linked to the theme of the talk. Make sure to read Steve Abbott's booklet "Guidelines for Sharing Your Story" as you work with those who are preparing testimonies
- Only use drama or musical items if they clearly assist the talk
- Make sure all participants are well prepared.
- A bookstall with 'accessible' Bibles, the Jesus video, free gospels, tracts and carefully selected booklets.

## **"WHERE A RESPONSE IS INVITED AND FOLLOW UP IS OFFERED"**

How will you know if your guests want to know more about Jesus after the talk? Some of the possible ways of assisting are

- Giving away tracts, tapes, DVDs or books
- Asking them to tell the Christian friend who brought them
- Inviting them to talk to the speaker at the end
- Having them fill in a response card

From experience

- Follow up is easier if you give people the opportunity to respond
- Response needs to be carefully planned – determine best method of collection
- Stress that all details are private and indicate who it is who will read them
- It is best if the Response Card/Slip, pencils/pens and envelopes are already on the pews/chairs before the service starts
- It is best to collect all written responses soon after they have been completed.

If you use a Response Card it needs space for

- Contact details – name, phone or email and name of friend who brought them
- Simple box or boxes to tick indicating if the event was enjoyed and the desire to know more
- Any comments (so every one can write something)

Check the "Resources" link on this website for

- examples of Response Cards and Forms,
  - suggestions of Follow Up materials, books, tracts and electronic materials
- Evangelism Ministries can provide sample cards and response forms as well as suggestions for tracts and books (See Resources Guide)

**All 'Follow Up' preparation should be designed to help those interested in finding out more about Christianity or helping people who want to become Christians.**

This is an absolutely crucial matter! The speaker has only done part of the job. It will be of the utmost importance that you have a conversation with the speaker as to how any inquiry will be followed up. Consider the following:

- Who will do the follow up?
- Are they properly equipped to do it?
- Will it be one-on-one or will it be in a group?
- Will a course be used? (Eg. Simply Christianity, Christianity Explained, etc)
- Is there another Event, Group or Sunday/Mid-week meeting to which the person could be brought?

Whatever you decide, contact should be made with the person who has responded ASAP. It could either be by phone, letter or personal approach. Do not let it go past **seven days**.

## **"WHERE THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHRISTIANS AND THEIR INVITED FRIENDS TO CHAT/DISCUSS "**

Allow time at the end of the service for casual conversation. Any refreshments should be of good standard and the invited guests should be served first. Rudeness is not unknown in some contexts.

The **best thing** is to encourage the Christians to ask their friends what they thought of the talk.

---

## **...AND DON'T FORGET TO KEEP YOUR SPEAKER 'IN THE LOOP'**

Please provide the speaker with the following as soon as possible, either by email or letter.

- All details such as date, time, address and directions if necessary
- What style or standard of dress would be acceptable
- A simple profile of the congregation
- The approximate number expected

Please check with the speaker to see what is needed, eg

- Lectern
- Projector – overhead or data
- Microphone or PA
- Photocopied handouts