



When a Church Lacks Evangelism Efforts is it No Longer a Church?

Acts 2:41 tells us that on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 people accepted the words of the Apostles – the Good News – and received baptism as a testimony of their new life in Jesus the Christ. Faithfully and clearly the Apostles communicated, and the Holy Spirit successfully electrified many people about the truth they were hearing.

Two chapters later we read in Acts 4:8-12 the following words in The Message interpretation about the bold witness of the Apostle Peter:

8-12 With that, Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, let loose: “Rulers and leaders of the people, if we have been brought to trial today for helping a sick man, put under investigation regarding this healing, I’ll be completely frank with you—we have nothing to hide. By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One you killed on a cross, the One God raised from the dead, by means of his name this man stands before you healthy and whole. Jesus is ‘the stone you masons threw out, which is now the cornerstone.’ Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one.”

Churches in our tradition believe that the only way to eternal life is through a spiritually transformational relationship with God because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. There is no other God. No other prophet or seer.

Local churches have a core non-negotiable mission to share the Good News of Jesus with everyone. Churches cannot do so by proxy. They cannot say they give money to missions so that missionaries can do this for them. It is equally not proper to ever say, “That is what we hire our pastor to do.”

Yes, it is true, not everyone has the gift of evangelism. But a gathering of people who claim Jesus as Savior and Lord, where no one has and exercises the gift of evangelism, may no longer be a church. It may be a cultural gathering of Christians. But is it a church?

How Do You Define Evangelism?

Here is an exercise used with many churches. At a church or training gathering, participants divide into small groups of six to eight people. They define and explain the following three things and how they take place in their church. They define and show church engagement that is distinctive from one another.

- What is evangelism?
- What is new member recruitment?
- What is reactivating inactive people?

When used with laypeople only, where they seek to reach consensus on distinct answers for each of these questions, often they protest that all three of these things are the same thing. They feel all three are evangelism.

When anything like this is the response from a church, there is cause to worry if evangelism is a core principle and practice in that church.

In a major denomination – not Baptist – a national survey presented thousands of people with a list of activities that could possibly be evangelism in the minds of some people. Of the many activities on the list, the top answer was that reactivating inactive members was evangelism. It would probably not surprise you to know that this denomination is in steady decline and the average age of their membership is decreasing annually.

Who Does Evangelism?

Evangelism involves a direct presentation of the Good News of Jesus to people, plus many supporting activities. Prayer for people without Jesus as their Savior is one activity in which everyone can engage. That is, unless they think prayer is only about who is dying, who is sick, and who is in earthly life crises.

One well-known church pastor of the last several decades, whose church grew significantly under his leadership with a clear focus on evangelism, years ago made a startling confession. He does not have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Never has. Wish he did.

However, he always knew that this did not allow him to fail to do the work of evangelism. He regularly looked for staff persons and laypersons in his church with the gift of evangelism. Then he would bring them together and coach them in doing the work of evangelism. The result was faithful and effective evangelism.

No local church gets to choose not to do the work of evangelism. If they do, from an Acts of the Apostles perspective, are they a church? Where is your church in direct engagement in the work of evangelism and those activities that support it? If the work of evangelism is not present and active in your church fellowship, are you a church in the New Testament sense?