

INTRODUCTION – AN EVANGELISM SNEAK ATTACK

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA — No one was sure why Minister of Music Norman Behymer used his youth choir that Sunday morning, leaving the adult choir members to sit in the congregation. Perhaps no one gave it much thought. In fact, it was part of careful planning. A sneak attack. A ballistic blessing Behymer was about to lay on the Council Road Baptist Church.

The youth choir finished an opening praise package, concluding with a particularly majestic feel. Suddenly, the bridal march began to play. Giggles broke out. Twins came down the aisle and lit a unity candle. More giggles. What was going on here? This was Sunday morning, not Saturday high noon.

Then a married couple from the church—secretly recruited months before—came down the aisle. She was wearing her original wedding dress. No more giggles. The congregation was confused but captivated. Something special was brewing.

When the couple reached the altar, Pastor Mark Hartman made a sweeping gesture over them and said, "I now pronounce you man and wife."

The couple stood facing each other, and again music began to play. But this time it was very different. Very dark. Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond's duet, "You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore," rang out.

"You don't bring me flowers, you don't sing me love songs..."

With each "You don't . . ." sung by Streisand, the bride took a step backward. With each "You don't . . ." sung by Diamond, the groom took a step backward.

As the song ended with "I wish I could learn how to tell you goodbye..." the pair turned away and walked to different exits, pausing for one desperate, tender, fleeting glance back at each other as they left through different doors. The children were left standing along.

Giggles had turned to wet eyes. Couples clinched hands as if holding desperately to marriage.

Hartman preached on the family and marriage. In mid-message Behymer and his wife sang Ray Boltz' "Let's Begin Again," the focus turning then to the positive attributes of a godly marriage. At the key change during the last chorus, the bride and groom entered from opposite sides of the sanctuary and joined hands in front of the pulpit.

Hartman finished his message, then invited couples in the congregation to come forward and renew their vows. The front of the church filled quickly. Couples packed the aisles, including the balcony. Holding hands, Hartman led them through the vows, including the kiss.

Then he invited the entire congregation to begin again with Jesus in rededication, or to begin a relationship with Christ and be born again.

Marriages were healed. Souls were saved.

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

FOREWORD – WHY THIS MANUAL

The story on the preceding page reveals an outstanding example creative ministry within the church. However, such unique events can be used to reach outside the body and form a natural bridge with the unbeliever.

Churches are filled with creative ideas that stay within the walls. As we consider how to reach our communities for Christ, let's put the same creativity to work. Valentine's Day is a very secularized holiday. Yet, its theme of love provides a perfect platform for the church to share the gospel. With a little brainstorming, observation of your community, and a willingness to draw outside traditional lines, the church can use Valentine's Day as an evangelistic time.

This manual is designed to give specific ideas you can use to share the gospel at Valentine's Day. But, more than that, it should also stimulate you to think of your own ideas to use the theme of love to plan effective evangelistic events.

Almost any event you have held for the church body can be adapted to reach outside the body and be evangelistic. Ask yourself: "What goes on in church at Valentine's Day that I can adapt to reach the unbeliever? What goes on in my community that I can plug into and use as a vehicle for sharing the gospel? What needs in my community can I meet under the banner of the theme of love through which I can share Christ's love?"

In addition to evangelistic event ideas, this manual offers preaching themes for Valentine's Day weekend, the entire month of February, or any time during the year. With the world focused on a watered-down, superficial definition of love, the gospel provides a perfect opportunity for pastors to redefine love in Christ's terms.

It is our hope that the creative ideas suggested in this manual, while specifically designed for the Valentine's Day season, will stimulate your thinking so that every holiday season can be used as a tool for reaching the unbeliever.

VALENTINE'S DAY – PAST AND PRESENT

Only Christmas tops Valentine's Day for the number of greetings sent—usually via card—each year. Without question, Valentine's Day is a popular day.

Perhaps we can best understand why by looking at its origins, which are vaguely defined at best. Among the legends and facts associated with the day:

- Valentine's Day can be traced back to the Roman god Lupercus and the Roman feast Lupercalia.
- There were at least three, perhaps as many as eight, people named Valentine who were martyred—all of whom had their feast day on February 14.
- The first Valentine was sent by Charles Duc d'Orleans from London in 1415.
- American commercial valentines were first produced in the early 1800's.
- Birds mated on Feb. 14, according to Europeans of the Middle Ages.
- Young girls were supposed to eventually marry the first eligible man they met on Feb. 14.

Bridging from this mishmash of legend and history to the love of Christ may seem a stretch—but in a way, it has been tried before. Hundreds of years ago the Catholic church tried to draw all secular holidays into the faith. It gave the day its name and replaced the heathen practice of drawing lots for sweethearts by having them draw the names of saints and telling them to emulate the attributes of whichever saint they drew.

Obviously, that effort was not a great success. But with a little creative thought and the power of the Holy Spirit, the church today can use the Valentine's Day as a vehicle for sharing the love of Christ and pointing to the way of salvation.

THE REAL MEANING OF LOVE

Love is a feeling.
An impulse.
An urge satisfied.
A physical thing.
Right chemistry.
A biological match-up.
Something you “just know.”
Love is “never having to say you’re sorry.”

This is what the world thinks. Obviously, love is misunderstood. To the world, Cupid is love, his arrow is man's desires, and its target is whomever we perceive can satisfy those desires.

It is your opportunity, especially at Valentine's Day, to set forth the right definition of love. Let's replace Cupid with Christ. Let the arrow be Christ's love, aimed at the heart of unsaved humanity.

Commitment and dedication need to be reintroduced to the equation of love. Marriage as the vehicle of love between a man and woman must be lovingly taught. Christ as the foundation—and thus only hope—for marriage must be carefully explained.

Jesus must be shown and shared as the embodiment of love. The unsaved and confused people of this world aren't likely to fall into your church in large numbers asking for answers. We must take the message to them in creative ways that package it attractively, yet reveal Jesus Christ when the package is opened.

You do not wrap a package for a child the same way you do for an adult. It is important, during the process of planning evangelistic events, to package something for all ages. You will find suggestions for Valentine's Day event that include every age group. Though each church will not likely include each age group at Valentine's Day, keep balance in mind in your long-term planning of events that reach people using the theme of love throughout the year.

This manual offers strategies to better share Jesus. It is formatted according to a simple “A-B-C” method for strategically planning evangelistic events.

“A” stands for “attraction.” No matter how dynamic your program, no matter how glorious your music, and no matter how engaging your speaker, evangelism cannot take place without an audience of unchurched people. Plan an event that which will attract the unchurched. Try to capture the interest of the community when promoting your event. Promotion must be accompanied by enlistment. Members of your church should bring their friends, neighbors, relatives, and coworkers to the event.

“B” stands for “bridge.” Provide a nonthreatening, relational bridge for sharing Jesus. This could be a meal, special music, group-building fellowship activities, evangelistic film, or a number of other elements to bring people together to hear the message of Christ.

“C” stands for “communicate the Gospel.” There is no point to your event without this. The gospel must be clearly and convincingly expressed to your audience. Plan to share Christ with as much care and detail as you use planning all the other elements of your event. Follow-up is crucial. You must record and follow up on all those who surrender their lives to the Lord.

Be daring. Be willing. Take the gospel to your community.

BASIC STEPS – ORGANIZING AN EVANGELISTIC EVENT

Following is a framework for organizing an evangelistic event. Although every church is unique, the principles and procedures suggested here are basic to every church's needs. This framework, or some variation of it, should be applied to all events.

1) Set the date.

Schedule the outreach dates as far in advance as possible. You may or may not have the outreach event on actual Valentine's Day, so be sensitive to other Valentine's Day-related events scheduled in your community. Also, do not schedule major church events the month preceding the outreach meeting in order to allow for thorough preparation. The date should be accessible to as many people as possible.

2) Establish the program content and personalities

Enlist workers for the event far in advance, especially any who may play a more prominent, public role, or who are undertaking decorating or design tasks that are time consuming.

3) Organize the people.

Outreach preparation is essential. Organize the congregation into working Ministry Teams. Depending on the size and complexity of your outreach event, you may organize Ministry Teams to lead the church in spiritual preparation, prayer, visitation, publicity, hospitality, and inspiration. Carefully select the chairperson for each Ministry Team. The pastor may choose to make the selection or assign the responsibility to another staff member or key leader in the church. Another method of selection is to work through the church's Evangelism Committee. (If you don't have one, you may want to consider starting one.) All Ministry Team chairpersons should begin their work at least six weeks before the outreach date.

The church's size will determine the number of Ministry Teams needed, as well as the number of people needed on each Team. Do not assume that the church only needs one or two Ministry Teams simply because you are not a "large" church. The key to effective preparation is to involve a large number of church members in some capacity of participatory preparation. Those involved will be the people most eager to invite unchurched friends. Generally, for every person you actively involve in the outreach preparation, you will have four or five additional people present in the outreach services. Some suggested Ministry Teams, along with specific plans for their work, are found later in this planbook. The Celebrate Jesus 2000 Revival Planbook provides detailed information on developing ministry teams.

4) Train the people to do the work.

We pastors are often guilty of giving people jobs without training them to do the work. Do not make this serious mistake. Once the Team Leaders have agreed to serve, the pastor, another staff member, or a qualified, committed layman should meet with each one individually. By taking time to meet in this manner, you demonstrate to each leader how special this outreach is, and how important is their involvement.

Give each chairperson a copy of his Ministry Team's worksheet and calendar. Share with them your excitement and emphasize the important part they have in leading the church into real outreach. Let them know that they are part of the Steering Ministry Team, which will be the primary coordinating team for the outreach meeting. Answer all questions as fully as possible so that each chairperson knows what they are to do.

5) Train the people to share the gospel.

If you are not going to do this, do not bother having an event.

6) Set goals.

To identify a goal is to define for yourself and for others what you believe to be God's will. Goals give a sense of where you want to go and, consequently, some understanding of where you do not want to go. Goals and plans provide a way of telling others what you think is a desirable outcome so they can work under the Holy Spirit's power to attain goals. Do not be afraid to identify specific goals for the church outreach. Make the goals concrete and measurable.

Once the Ministry Teams are appointed, the pastor and/or the general chairperson should lead the Evangelism Council and/or Steering Ministry Team to set goals and put them in written form. Suggested goals to set are:

- Attendance during the outreach
- Number of unsaved or unchurched people ministered to during the event
- Number of people involved in prayer for the outreach
- Number of professions of faith

The pastor or the general chairperson should not attempt to impose preplanned goals on the outreach. Goals handed to people are not likely to be taken as seriously as goals they set themselves. Therefore, the pastor or general chairperson should involve the Ministry Teams in setting the suggested goals and any other goals they may wish to establish. They will learn that goals soon become an expression of our faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for" (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

7) Initiate plans.

With the date set, leaders selected and trained, and goals established, it is time to put plans into action. Goals and plans are only dreams until they are put on the calendar and set in motion. The general chairperson should check with each chairperson to see that work is progressing. Above all, see that each chairperson has put his or her priorities and plans on his or her countdown calendar (supplied with each chairperson's worksheet). The calendar will serve as a reminder of work deadlines.

Each chairperson should start from the dates of the outreach meeting, then move backward and place each event on his or her calendar. The calendar will remind Ministry Team members of meetings and keep them from forgetting little jobs such as telephone calls to workers or the personal enlistment of helpers. Each Ministry Team, doing its job efficiently and on time, will prevent an exhausting, rushed feeling that often comes at the last minute before a major event. Encourage each Ministry Team member to fulfill his or her duties without further instruction from you, but let them know that you are available to give any needed assistance.

8) Maintain the spirit of outreach.

The people will be ready to enjoy a very exciting outreach if the Ministry Team leaders have faithfully carried plans through to completion. The pastor should express his appreciation to each leader for their work. As church members enjoy the fruits of their labor and the grace of Jesus Christ, they will celebrate the personal victories witnessed in each service.

The general chairperson should work closely with the Follow-Up Ministry Team in seeing that every person who made a commitment is contacted immediately and encouraged in additional steps of spiritual growth.

The pastor has a great role in conserving the spirit of outreach. He should remind the people that outreach is not over because the event is over. The real results of the outreach will be felt in the congregation—and in the community—forever!

9) Evaluate the outreach.

The pastor and/or the general chairperson should lead the Evangelism Council and/or Steering Ministry Team in an honest evaluation of the outreach. After the event, plans and goals used in outreach preparation should be evaluated. Note things that worked well. Note things that were not as effective as planned and ask why. Decide which plans should be repeated and which should be omitted in future outreach events. Always determine what you can do to ensure the next outreach is even better than the last. File your evaluations in a secure place and review them carefully before you plan your next event.

10) Pray.

Above everything else, pray. When you seek to win people for Jesus Christ, you are invading Satan's territory. Expect spiritual warfare. Effectual, fervent prayer with a heart

intention righteousness gets results! Planning, promotion, and creativity are all key to us effectively accomplishing our work in events such as these. But God accomplishes His work as we pray.