

Catch the Vision

Allowing church members to personally experience evangelism changes their lives forever

Help me find my son," the woman screamed to those of us who were closest to her. The supermarket was packed with weekend shoppers. "He was right here a minute ago and now he is gone. Please help me find him," she pleaded. "He is three, has blonde hair and is wearing a bright yellow snowsuit."

I began praying, talking to customers and store personnel and looking for the boy ... all at the same time. I'll never forget how relieved I felt when he was found. He had wandered off to the other end of the store, fascinated by the array of products available and oblivious to the consternation he created.

As I explained later to my wife Rhonda, the thoughts and feelings I had before the boy was safely returned to his mom were intense and terrifying. One of our sons is the same age. What if he was lost? Would people help us to find him and bring him back?

The Great Commission is all about helping lost children find their Father. We believe the goal of this search is not simply to get people into church on Sunday. Rather, it is to see them related to the Father by the transforming power of His Word and Spirit.

On several occasions, Jesus stressed that the need to find the lost calls for an urgent response. At one point He said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Luke 10:2). He illustrates the vision for evangelism and a major hindrance: the number of trained workers who were available to God.

Jesus knew the worldwide need for evangelism would be a challenge for His followers in His day, and that hasn't changed across the centuries. The persistent problem the Church has faced is not an unresponsive world, but the dearth of people equipped to participate in the harvest.

Our background

Rhonda and I are missionaries with SIM,

the Society of International Ministries. Our history has been cross-cultural ministries. Since coming to Toronto, we have worked with a number of local churches. We help mobilize both Canadian-born and immigrant Christians for evangelistic outreach to ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and train those who have a heart for the lost in personal evangelism skills.

The end goal of all this work is the same: to teach and coach Christians to be more effective in dialoguing with non-Christians and moving non-Christians along the spectrum to accepting Christ.

Our guiding principles

Four main principles guide our ministry.

- **Ethnic focused.** We are primarily interested in reaching new immigrants and refugees to Canada. We believe that these worlds at our doorstep, with their diversity of cultures and religions, are God's challenge to the local church: "Will you participate in global missions here?"
- **Need oriented.** To have a personal relationship with God is the ultimate human need. We believe that the Gospel is made relevant and people feel valued when we express concern and compassion for the problems they face and the pain they experience.
- **Church centred.** We are deeply committed to the concept that all church members should be motivated with the vision of evangelism and be fully equipped to participate in the harvest.
- **Training primacy.** We believe it is more important to train soul winners than it is to win souls. We have learned through experience that teaching evangelism as a program in a seminar format is not enough to properly equip participants to witness and share the Good News.

The challenge is to help people to bridge the gap between knowing what to

do and doing what they know. We have found that greater development takes place when trainees are active participants in live situations and are provided with opportunities to reflect on what they have seen and done. When this happens in the company of others who are taking part in similar experiences, more learning results and confidence grows.

Evangelism process

The process we have developed over the years consists of four main elements: a personal evangelism seminar, extensive on-the-job training, felt-needs projects and an investigative Bible study for non-Christians.

Personal evangelism seminar—

We begin the process with an intensive 12-hour personal evangelism seminar format for groups of 15 or less. Using our own materials, we tailor the teaching to the specific needs of each group. They tell us how they plan on applying what they'll learn, and we provide various contexts for application beyond neighbours, friends or co-workers.

These applications vary and might involve doing a door-to-door survey, surveying people at the mall, dialoguing with strangers at a church outreach like a free carwash, or park outreach.

In the first session, we often have to help people uproot false assumptions and unproductive practices that prevent them from entering into healthy dialogues with non-Christians. We then devote time to developing their:

- empathic listening skills
- capacity to really love people and draw close to them
- ability to make transitions to spiritual topics from conversations about ordinary things
- ability to appropriately discern a person's openness to talking about spiritual things
- ability to use questions to draw people out and to discover their worldview
- ability to gently and respectfully challenge people's spiritual assumptions by using questions, identification and empathy
- ability to defend the faith when difficult questions come up, such as: How do I

know God exists? Why would a good God allow so much suffering? Why is Jesus the only way to God?

- toolbox of methods for clearly and appropriately sharing the Gospel message

On-the-job training—The on-the-job training segment is a process through which participants learn with and from each other, by mutual support, advice and questioning, as they learn to witness to non-Christians while having real responsibilities in real conditions. It is a social process carried out when a group of learners cause each other to examine afresh many ideas that they may otherwise have taken for granted.

This on-the-job training is not simply learning by doing. It uses both the knowledge gained from formal sources such as books, seminar sessions and expert leaders together with the knowledge gained through their experiences, and subjects both forms of knowledge to critical questioning and reflection.

Using this process ensures that a rich resource of experience and reflection is developed. It provides a structured way for gaining confidence in sharing the Good News with total strangers. Because participants agree to meet regularly and share their experiences, they are more rigorous in preparing their thoughts and in refining their reflections in preparation for the meetings. As ideas, thoughts and problems are raised for discussion, they are challenged and extended by other group members. These group discussions often result in new insights and spark new possibilities.

This training consists of two 13-week semesters during which participants are coached through home study, class time and a progressively more active role in personal evangelism to non-Christians.

Participants memorize a basic Gospel outline. Then they methodically add illustrations and Bible verses until their presentation is personalized and has become a part of them.

A thorough, step-by-step followup system for new converts is also part of the training. Discipleship begins immediately as participants learn to guide the new believer through the basics of prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship and

witnessing. During this followup care, the new believer is folded into the congregation and is invited to serve as a partner in the evangelism ministry.

Multiplication takes place in the second of the two semesters, when the trainees become trainers and each one equips two new trainees. This process comes right out of 2 Timothy 2:2—“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

By starting small and building through multiplication, a church can establish a strong core of experienced soul-winners in a surprisingly short period of time.

Felt-needs projects—To effectively train people, it is important that we provide them with the best possible source of prospects. People who have visited the church for worship services are the easiest group of people with whom to deal.

We have also attracted non-believers by facilitating relationships and offering genuine help to newcomers to Canada. After surveying people in the community, we discovered there were a number of practical things we could help them with that in the end could lead to Gospel sharing opportunities as well.

One felt-need was to help people prepare resumes so they could find work. Immigrants are often turned down because they lack “Canadian experience.” We are committed to helping them get what they need so they can be gainfully employed.


Friendship, genuine caring and hospitality are among the universal felt-needs we try to meet. Another is to connect some with language partners so they can improve their English skills.

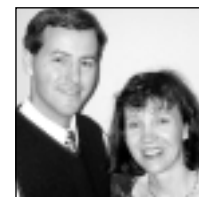
Investigative Bible study—The fourth element in this process is an investigative Bible study for non-Christians and for those Christians who are new to the faith. We use *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* by John Cross (GoodSeed International) as our study book and have found that it provides a clear and simple overview of the Bible’s main theme through the Old and New Testaments.



Jason is a gratifying example of this process in action. Having completed the 12-hour personal evangelism seminar, he was experiencing on-the-job training as we met with Carl in a neighbourhood donut shop. The purpose of our meeting was to help Carl complete a personal growth questionnaire. As he confessed to me later, when he and I began sharing the Gospel with Carl, Jason said to himself: “This is it! We’re doing it!” When Carl said he thought it was perfect timing to receive eternal life, Jason was ecstatic.

Simply telling the members of your congregation that they should witness to non-believers is very seldom enough to get them going. Challenging them with life’s greatest opportunity by training them, taking them with you and allowing them to observe and personally experience the joy of leading a person to Christ can change their lives forever.

However, lessons in evangelism have to be demonstrated over and over again, for a vision of this magnitude is not so much taught as it is caught. Our challenge to you is to design and implement a process that helps your members to catch the vision. 



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