

Articles to read

- *Gone fishin'*
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- *How to fish for people*
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The Lutheran

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Gone fishin'

Jesus commanded us to spread the gospel to all nations, but many of us are reluctant to spread the gospel at all, let alone to the people in our neighborhoods, workplaces, cities or county. In her article, Mary Anderson suggests a number of reasons why—as well as ideas for getting going.

Exercise 1: Tenacious stereotypes

Some mainline Christians avoid the terms “evangelism” and “evangelical” because they bring to mind associations that don’t fit their faith lives or congregational style. In doing so, we miss opportunities for ministry that reveal themselves below the surface of misunderstanding or stereotype.

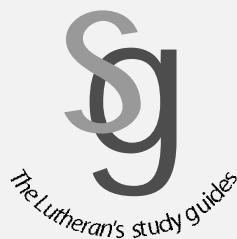
Here are some discussion questions to help get beyond the stereotypes:

- Ask study participants to share the words come to mind—positive, negative, or neutral—when they hear “evangelical” or “evangelism?” On a chalkboard or newsprint, make a list of them in three columns: Negative on the left, neutral in the middle and positive on the right.
- When the group has exhausted its list of ideas, discuss. How many of each type of word are there in the list? What does this say about our perceptions of evangelism and evangelical?
- What drives this perception? What’s true? What’s not true? How do we know?
- Looking at our list, could we see it as a compass for charting “our” brand of evangelism, using the positive words as a direction of where to go, the negative words where not to go and the neutral words in between?
- What kinds of ideas arise when you think of it like this?
- What conclusions can be drawn about how “do-able” evangelism is in our lives and church?

Exercise 2: How is your (our) church doing?

Most churches want to grow, to be effective in the community and the lives of church members, and most agree evangelism is a good way to make that happen. Here’s an exercise to check how your church is doing in the process.

- Start by discussing what would be the mark of an effective, evangelizing congregation. Any church. Make it hypothetical. Make a list of a few goals or signs that would be evident.
- One by one, discuss how your church is doing on each of these measurements. Give the church a grade of one to 10 for each, with 10 representing the ideal or perfect. Be honest. This isn’t about judgment, it’s about identifying areas of strength and weakness.
- Look at the overall picture. What are your church’s strengths? Weaknesses? Any marginal characteristics that could be developed into a strength?
- Where does your church need to go?
- How could it get there? List five concrete steps your church could do today to improve the picture. List two things that could be done next year. List one that could be done in two years.



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Exercise 3: "Doing" evangelism

Mary Anderson suggests that if our personal or congregation's tried and tired methods of evangelism aren't working, maybe we should try a different approach. Like the disciples who were told by Jesus to cast the nets elsewhere, we should try different things. Many Christians believe evangelism means getting people to come to church, but Anderson suggests the idea is not to "catch" people but "know" them. The paradigm shift in thinking could make a difference for your church.

- What is the difference between evangelizing by "catching" people and evangelizing by "knowing" people? What are the pros and cons of each?
- Specifically, how does your congregation "do" evangelism? Is there a plan? Ask the pastor or a member of the evangelism committee to discuss this with the group.
- Do the methods appear to be focused on catching or knowing?
- Does your congregation need to strengthen its efforts to "know" people? Within the congregation, outside the congregation, or both?
- What are ways your church could do better as an institution to help its members evangelize by knowing people?

Exercise 4: Sharing our story

One of the most moving ways to inspire people is to share your own story of faith. *Guideposts* magazine, for example, developed a group of publications devoted to doing just that. But what's our story? Not everybody has talked with an angel, had a mountaintop experience or spent 10 years in a monastery, but most of us have had a time when we have felt sure God was with us, guiding us, bringing people or situations we needed into our lives at just the right time.

- Ask participants to share in pairs times they were certain God was with them. Have the pairs work on this individually for 10 minutes. Assembling as a group, ask for volunteers to share stories. For each, discuss:
- Ask the partner how he or she felt hearing the story. What was inspirational? Did it make the partner think of occasions in their own lives when God was present? Did it make the partner desire for a better life with God?
- Ask the storyteller if she or he had shared it with others. Could they see themselves telling others to help their friends live more fully?
- As a group, discuss how hard it is to be personally revealing and how we can work to break down the barriers that keep us from sharing our story.

Discussion questions

- How does God use ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Can you think of people who accomplished great things in desperate circumstances? What does that mean for us ordinary Lutherans?
- "The gospel is contagious through human contact," Mary Anderson writes. "It doesn't have to be strong contact." How, in the lives of study participants and your congregation, is this true? How could it be better?