

Worship as Evangelism

Children's Time in Worship

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EQUIPPING FOR . . . Worship

## Worship as Evangelism

By The Rev. Heather Vais, Thornhill Presbyterian Church, ON

Since returning from the Worship Symposium of Calvin College at Grand Rapids, Michigan, I have been doing a lot of thinking about worship in the church. Worship is and will remain the key element of Christian expression. We remember that worship was vital to the life of the early church and that Jesus regularly went to the synagogue. If, for the average church member, Sunday morning worship is the main or primary experience of God, then it is important for us to consider carefully what we do in worship.

Every congregation I know at least *says* it wants to grow and share the good news. (We call this 'doing evangelism'). I enter every congregation in which I serve with a mind for growth. After all, that is what we are called to do as a people of God, isn't it? In addition to the vital aspects of our Christian ministry of offering care to the needy and justice to the oppressed, we are called by Christ to a ministry of evangelism, that is, to share the good news and make disciples of all the nations.

A worship service gives us a wonderful opportunity to share the good news. We don't often think of our worship services in that way, but we should. In his book, *Good News Travels Faster*, (CTS Press, 1990), Joe Donaho states that research on main line Protestantism reveals that "in far too many congregations, the worship service is structured to appeal to the long-time member" and not the first-time worshipper.





However, a person's decision to join a church is based largely upon his or her experience in the worship service. The worship service may provide newcomers with their only experience of God in the week.

In the mid 1980s, Richard Stoll Armstrong offered many pastors and congregations an opportunity to rethink how we reach visitors to our churches in his book, *The Pastor-Evangelist in Worship* (Westminster John Knox, 1986). Effective evangelism, Armstrong says, begins in and with the parking lot. Mark Waltz in *First Impressions - Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church*, (Group, 2004), says the same thing. Providing ample parking is seen in many churches as a luxury most cannot afford. However, it is essential. In my previous congregation, as we grew, we came to realize that parking was a huge factor in whether or not people would come to church. Parents with small children and the elderly are of great concern when it comes to parking issues.

Once appropriate parking is established, what happens in the parking lot is essential as well. A friendly greeting, a helping hand, or helpful advice to a newcomer or regular member helps set the tone of worship before the church is even entered. I recently preached as a guest in an unfa-

miliar church. Before I was even out of my car, I was greeted by two members entering the building. It certainly conveyed the feeling of warmth and welcome to me, a stranger in their midst!

Greeters and ushers are also vital to a church's evangelical ministry. They are the first people visitors meet when they enter the church. Greeters need to be friendly and helpful to both visitors and members alike. When a greeter identifies a new person, he/she offers a welcome, exchanges names, and gives helpful information about the church, the facilities, and the service. It is imperative to give a good first impression!

Perhaps the most important evangelistic opportunity arises in the worship service. The bulletin is elemental in this. The bulletin is the primary piece of literature people keep when they leave the worship service. Having the name of the church, address, minister's name, phone number, e-mail, hours of worship, and office hours are important pieces of information everyone needs. The bulletin should be readable and the announcements should include all relevant information. I have been accused of being a publisher of small books! A bulletin doesn't have to be big, but if

you consider that many people refer to their bulletins through the week for dates and times of meetings and events, a bulletin with all the church's important pastoral news and activities in it will be very helpful.

User-friendly bulletins *do not assume anything!* Page references should be clear, and words to the doxology, introit, or other "familiar" songs should be provided for visitors. Not everyone who enters a Presbyterian church knows "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." One pet peeve I have is with the variations we, Presbyterians, have with the Lord's Prayer. Simply adding the word "trespasses" or "debts" beside the Lord's Prayer will go a long way in keeping a visitor (or guest preacher) from embarrassment.

It goes without saying that the sermon is key to announcing the good news to worshippers. The message needs to be scripturally-based, meaningful, challenging, and most of all relevant to people's needs and concerns today.

Music is about as important an evangelical tool in worship as the sermon. Music has the ability to reach

people on a deep emotional level and can appeal to people of all ages. "Music for worship," says Richard Webb in *Widening the Circle - Designing Worship that Reaches*, "... must speak God's truth and grace with the same power and clarity as the flow of the worship pattern (p. 46)."

When it comes to evangelism and worship, there are many other areas in the worship service to which we could give some attention. Corporate prayer, the children's story, special music, choirs, scripture reading, pew booklets, and visitor letters are all parts of the worship service we can consider. How do we share the good news in an effective way?

Worship, as one writer puts it, is the stewardship of faith, a natural response to the gift of faith we have been given. Therefore, our worship services must be a reflection of our beliefs. Our worship must be an outward expression of our inward joy. If people visiting our churches witnessed more of that joy, warmth, and conviction, they may just come back for more; and then maybe, just maybe, we'll find ourselves looking for the extra chairs.

## Children's Time in Worship

By Dorothy Henderson, The Vine Helpline: Connecting People, Places and Programs

What are the elements that make for a good children's time in worship?

- Use the time to help children understand specific parts of the worship service. Explain what is happening and why. Some parts of worship may seem strange to children (and adults) who have not grown up in the church. Help children learn about a particular act of worship.
- Tell stories in ways that children can understand about the church community or of belonging to the church, the feeling of being accepted by Jesus, being loved and cared for by people in the church, having love as the basis for the way we relate to each other.
- Retell the epic stories of the Bible. Children love stories. A good story has energy, conflict, surprise, emotion. A good story invites listeners to see God both in the story and in their own lives. Resist adding a moral or a "meaning," which may interfere with the story's strength. If you want to, though, try a preface instead: "Jesus once told a story to show people about God's love. He said that someone was going on a journey ..."
- Relate the children's story to the theme of the service. It can invite people into the sermon. Ask the children to listen for something specific in the sermon time.
- Always honour children when you talk about them and respond to them. Set an example for the congregation. Children are

usually embarrassed when singled out or when their remarks are repeated by an adult. They can say amazing things, but adults often laugh because they think the children are cute or clever. But children think they're being laughed at and may become reluctant to talk during children's time. They sense the risk and know that they may get an answer wrong in front of the whole congregation or have everyone laugh at them.

- Create an atmosphere of safety and comfort by avoiding didactic questions. Make sure that "story time" is not "interrogation time." For instance, avoid questions like these, "What was the story we heard about Jesus last week?" or "What was the name of Jacob's twin brother?" If children do not remember or know the answer, they will feel uncomfortable and fearful. If questions are used, avoid ones that require a "yes," "no," or an obvious answer. Use questions that inspire wonder, awe, mystery, exploration. Here are some examples:

"If Jesus came to live in our town today, I wonder where he would live ...?"

"I wonder where Jesus would work ..." I wonder what kind of people he would hang out with ..."

And, when answers and ideas are offered, don't repeat them but simply nod slowly and thoughtfully and say, "Could be."

## What to do with this article

- Use parts in your church newsletter.
- Copy it for your congregation.
- Discuss it at your session or worship committee meeting. How can your worship be seen more as evangelism/outreach?



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## Fall Programs for Children

Writer: The Rev. Jennifer Donnelly, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church, Toronto, ON

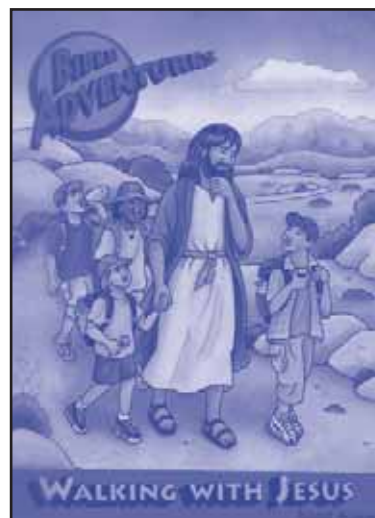
The fall months are an excellent time to offer a new mid-week or evening weekend program for children. Consider a Wacky Wednesday Club, a Homework Haven, a Fun Friday's Night, or some other creative name.

Mid-week and evening programs:

- supplement the Christian nurture of home and Sunday school;
- create community and help children stay connected to the church;
- provide wholesome and positive engagement for children and youth.

Children between 9 and 12 (the joining age!) are particularly fond of being part of a club.

<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>Bible Adventures 1</i> (five sessions); <i>Bible Adventures 11</i> (five sessions); United Church of Canada
<b>Contact</b>	www.united-church.ca /sales/ucph/1551341425
<b>Age of users</b>	Ages 5-12
<b>Cost</b>	Curriculum only: \$32.95; Kit: \$49.95
<b>Features</b>	Bible Adventures 1 explores the story of Paul and his friends and uses a nautical theme, Bible stories, drama, music, games, snacks, crafts. Kit includes poster, postcards, additional activities. Bible Adventures 11 uses the theme of walking with Jesus, and has a spirit hike, labyrinth walk, prayer scarves, drama, picnic table, and creation station.
<b>Advantages</b>	Easy to use and simple for any size group
<b>Challenges</b>	May need some supplemental resources; there is no multi-media support.



<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>Faithweaver Friends</i> , Group Publishing
<b>Contact</b>	www.fwfriends.com
<b>Age of users</b>	Pre-school - Grade 6
<b>Cost</b>	Director's manual: \$24.99; Kit: \$84.99
<b>Features</b>	Games, snack-it café, drama, projects-with-a-purpose, daily challenge, discovery centre, opening and closing celebrations.
<b>Advantages</b>	Easy to use and simple for any size group
<b>Challenges</b>	May need some supplemental resources; there is no multi-media support.

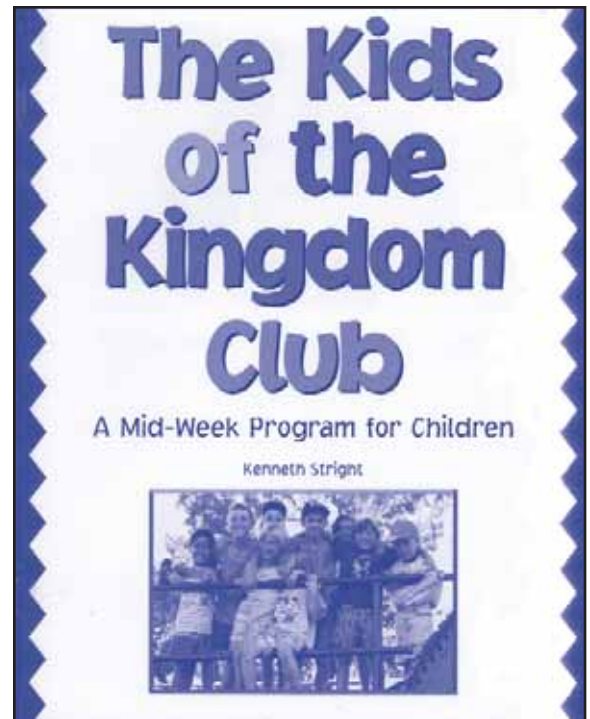
<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>High Point!</i> Gospel Publishing House
<b>Contact</b>	www.gph.org
<b>Age of users</b>	Kindergarten - Grade 5
<b>Cost</b>	\$59.99 for 5 weeks
<b>Features</b>	Multi-media, skits, creative, discovery-based learning. There are a variety of 5-week kits to choose from with topics, such as good anger, bad anger, respect, everyday choices, self-esteem, etc.
<b>Advantages</b>	Fast-paced, fun, works well in any size group; focuses on relationships; each session stands on its own
<b>Challenges</b>	Must have DVD, CD player. Several volunteers needed.

<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>Kid Connection</i> , Faith Alive Publishing
<b>Contact</b>	www.kidconnectiononline.org
<b>Age of users</b>	Kindergarten - Grade 6
<b>Cost</b>	Leader's Guide: \$12.87; Program CD: \$44.73; Family Magazine (for 3): \$7.90.
<b>Features</b>	Connects kids to church and home, God, community, other kids. This new curriculum is easy to use, biblical, and great for outreach.
<b>Advantages</b>	Reformed theology; online tips; uses multiple intelligences; training resources available online; undated
<b>Challenges</b>	You need to purchase curriculum quarterly (3 units x 4 lessons each).

<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>LOGOS</i> , non-denominational
<b>Contact</b>	Thelogosministry.org; 1-877-937-2572
<b>Age of users</b>	Preschool - teen; uses lots of adults as leaders and guides
<b>Cost</b>	Many resources available; Bible study books are \$14.99 per learner.
<b>Features</b>	A long-time, respected program of 45 years, LOGOS is based on the spiritual intent of the early church. The program includes four components—recreation play, worship skills, Bible study, and family time with a shared meal.
<b>Advantages</b>	This program engenders deep loyalties - both to the church and Christ. The strengthening of intergenerational friendships makes the church like an extended family.
<b>Challenges</b>	May be labour intensive for adults.



<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>Kids of the Kingdom, 1 and 2</i> , The Presbyterian Church in Canada
<b>Contact</b>	bookroom@presbyterian.ca; 800-619-7301
<b>Age of users</b>	Kindergarten - Grade 6
<b>Cost</b>	Each volume is \$9.50
<b>Features</b>	Each volume has about 20 sessions which includes games, music, worship, Bible, crafts, food corner, etc.
<b>Advantages</b>	Reformed theology; Canadian flavour; very affordable; easy to use
<b>Challenges</b>	May want to supplement with some audio visual resources



<b>Title and publisher</b>	<i>Mission Possible Kids</i> , non profit, non denominational
<b>Contact</b>	www.missionpossiblekids.org; 1-877-MPKIDS-1 (1-877-675-4371)
<b>Age of users</b>	Preschool - teen; uses lots of adults as leaders and guides
<b>Cost</b>	Intro pak fee: \$250; renewal fee: \$50 (annually); promotion paks and T-shirts also for sale
<b>Features</b>	Focuses on collecting goods for food banks, cooking meals for homeless, gifts for hospitalized children, raising money to end world hunger, etc. Uses the concept of “agents” - children hear spy music, and get calls to their next “mission.”
<b>Advantages</b>	Exciting, project-based, action-oriented
<b>Challenges</b>	Need to order from the U.S.

### Need a financial boost for a new children/youth program?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is in the process of establishing a *Creative Ministry with Children and Youth Fund*. The application form may be viewed at [www.presbyterian.ca](http://www.presbyterian.ca). Enter “Creative Ministry with Children and Youth” in the search box on the home page.

Additional information on these programs may be obtained through *The Vine Helpline: Connecting People, Places, and Programs*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada; 1-866-642-2830; [thevine@presbyterian.ca](mailto:thevine@presbyterian.ca).

Build Your Team

Establish the Foundation

Invite People to Give

Outreach to Your Community

Thank and Report

Education for Mission and Stewardship

The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
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## Encouraging Financial Stewardship

A checklist of ideas for your congregation

This checklist can help you develop a plan to encourage financial stewardship in your congregation. Don't be overwhelmed by this list. Assess where your congregation is at, choose an area you would like to improve, and decide what you can do now and what you will try later. Choose areas your congregation would enjoy and have fun doing. Think of this as more of a "fun-sheet" rather than a "work-sheet."

### Build Your Team

A team of people with a variety of skills and talents can really help move your stewardship plan forward. Look for people with a heart for mission, brainstorming, collaboration, discernment, and follow-through.

- Do you have a stewardship team in place?
- Do you have a planned-giving team in place?
- What gifts, talents, skills, and experiences does your team already have?
- What do you need to round out the group?
- How can the team see the work as a ministry opportunity rather than as a task to be done?

### Establish the Foundation

Remember, stewardship is primarily a spiritual matter concerned with all of life, not just a financial matter. Any strategy needs to be built on a strong biblical understanding of stewardship. An important part of stewardship is about how people grow in their faith, and how they respond to that growth. The most effective, spiritually-cen-

tred financial campaigns consistently focus the core of their programs on the joyful transformation of the giver in giving, and not on the need of the church to receive.

- Is your stewardship ministry rooted in a clearly articulated theology of God's abundant grace?
- Are you teaching stewardship as a way to discover the joy of generous living and giving in Jesus Christ?
- How do you talk about stewardship in your congregation? What language do you use? Do you talk of compassion and community vs. obligation and commitment?
- How do you incorporate stewardship into your weekly worship?
- Do you look at elements of stewardship, other than financial stewardship? How are you helping people incorporate stewardship into all aspects of their lives?
- Often people give where they are involved. What opportunities do you provide for people to become involved in the congregation - giving their time and talent?

### Include Children

It is very important that we teach children about stewardship from a very young age and provide many opportunities to involve children and youth in our stewardship initiatives and planning.

- How are you intentionally including children in your stewardship initiatives and education?

*A mission-based stewardship campaign asks,  
"What is God calling me to do?" rather than  
"What does the church need in order to pay its bills?"*

- What opportunities do children have to give during worship?
- How else can children participate in worship or the life of the church by exercising their skills and talents?
- How are you teaching about stewardship in Sunday school, mid-week programs, or Vacation Bible School?

## **Articulate Your Mission**

Remember, money follows mission. Your campaign should be based on mission priorities and should seek to inspire people to give. Look for things that will spark connections and fire conviction.

- Have you developed and articulated your congregational vision, mission, and purpose?
- If you have, what mission priorities excite you? What inspires you? How can you share this inspiration with others?
- If you haven't, what can you do to develop your vision, mission, and purpose in the short term? What can you do in the long term?

## **Invite People to Give**

People give in many different ways. For churches, the Sunday morning offering is the most obvious place where people give to the church. In addition to a weekly or monthly offering, people may give during spontaneous opportunities or special offerings that are planned throughout the year. They may also respond to short-term major campaigns.

Whether asking for an annual commitment, or for support for a special project, pay attention to how you ask people to give. People respond differently to a letter in the mail than to a personal invitation to give. A special dinner may provide an opportunity to talk about mission priorities and invite financial commitments. There are many different programs available that are designed to encourage people to give.

Make sure you are making it easy for people to give. Today, many people will give online, particularly people who once attended a church, or who don't attend regularly. Automatic debit plans can also help people give regularly. The following checklists give you more ideas for inviting people to give.

### *Regular giving to support the annual budget*

Many congregations focus an annual financial stewardship campaign on encouraging people to think about what they might give back to God weekly or monthly. Churches often encourage people to think about what they may commit to give to the church in a year, and challenge them to find ways to increase their gifts.

- Do you have an annual stewardship campaign to introduce the spiritual gift of generous giving and encourage members to examine their faith commitments?
- Does your annual stewardship campaign encourage members who are not currently financial givers to give, and inspire current supporters to deepen their spiritual and financial commitments?
- How do you ask people to make annual commitments? Do you have a letter campaign? Have you tried a visitation program to talk about giving? Have you utilized small groups? Have you had a dinner where stewardship and giving can be introduced?
- Today, many people are paid electronically - directly into their bank account. Do you have an automatic debit plan (PAR - Pre-Authorized Remittance plan) as a way for people to give electronically - directly out of their bank account? Do you have a way for people who give through PAR to have something to put into the weekly offering plate? Do you promote the program regularly?
- Have you explored online giving options?

### *Planned giving*

People generally give to the weekly offering from their current incomes - salaries, allowances, or pensions. This is pocket #1 and the contribution is usually part of their weekly or monthly budgets. But, people can also give from pocket #2, their accumulated assets. While people often associate this with bequests (gifts they give once they have passed on), there are many ways to give planned gifts while people are still alive - gifts of property, stock, and annuities. This type of financial contribution is generally quite substantial, long-term, and usually involves some planning . . . hence, it is

called *planned giving*. Generally these gifts can help fund major projects or new and creative ministries. Usually these funds shouldn't be used to cover deficits in annual budgets.

- Are you inviting people to give financially from both their current income and their accumulated assets?
- Does your congregation understand the many different venues that they may give from out of their assets - gifts of stock, annuities, etc.?
- Do you have a clear vision of how planned gifts can enhance the ministry and mission of your congregation and the larger church?
- Has your session considered joining the *Pro Visionaries* Planned Giving Network?

### *Special offerings*

- Do you offer special giving opportunities around Advent and Lent?
- What are you doing for the special Sundays encouraged by General Assembly?
  - *Presbyterians Sharing* Sunday (last Sunday in September)
  - Planned Giving Sunday (any Sunday - suggested May)
  - PWS&D Sunday (first Sunday in February)
  - Mission Awareness Sunday (last Sunday in April)
- Are you using The Presbyterian Church in Canada's *Gifts of Change* gift guide as a way for people to give special gifts through either special planned offerings or spontaneous giving?

### *Spontaneous offerings*

- Have you looked at your budget to see if there are items that people may give spontaneously to?
- Do you invite people to give to PWS&D appeals when emergencies/disasters happen?
- What other opportunities might people respond to spontaneously?

### *Short-term major campaigns*

Most churches can also usually handle a campaign for a major project that may span two to three years every three to five years.

- When was the last time your congregation had a sustained financial appeal? What was it for?
- What causes might have broad-based appeal in your congregation?
- What target could you set for a major project appeal?

## Outreach to Your Community

Members of your community may give to support the work you do. They may identify with your ministry to children or may appreciate an excellent music program. Community members may identify with an international or community project you are supporting - providing clean water, feeding the hungry, housing for the homeless. There may be times when you invite them to worship with you, to celebrate a community event or to support people recently bereaved. Consider how you invite them to give when they are part of your worshipping community. People generally give to projects/programs to which they have connections.

- Do you invite your community to worship for special events/special Sundays? What might bring people in your community together for worship? Have you invited them?
- Are there programs or projects that your congregation is doing that may generate community interest and community support? How are you inviting your community to give to work they may connect with?
- Do you invite community members who participate in your mid-week programs to financially support the work?



## Thank and Report

You have invited the congregation and the community into an ongoing mission relationship and this relationship needs to be nurtured. When someone gives, they should be thanked immediately. Then they should be told the impact the funds had. As mission priorities are typically set to encompass a year or more, consider a plan that goes beyond a simple one-shot thank-you.

Note: People respond differently to different types of reports. Consider how you might use:

- Statistics
- Stories of how people's lives were changed
- Goals (Were they met or was there a shortfall?)
- Testimonies from people who have benefited

- ❑ What are your plans to celebrate God's abundance and to thank donors for their generosity?
- ❑ How can you report financial gifts to your congregation? If you have had a special campaign, how do you communicate the results?
- ❑ How are you reporting finances to the congregation? Are you using a narrative budget? How can you show how basic expenses (salaries, utilities, improvements) are essential tools to help meet larger mission goals?

## Evaluate

Anything we do is worth taking time to evaluate to see how effective it has been.

- ❑ Have you scheduled time for an annual check-up and evaluation?
- ❑ How can you take stock, and what tools do you have that can tell if you have been successful?
  - Are we growing in generosity?
  - Are people giving in different ways?
  - Are children involved?

## Resources Available From the Bookroom

### ***Effective Church Finances: Fundraising and Budgeting for Church Leaders***

Price: \$33.95

Written by Kennon L. Callahan for committee members, key leaders, pastors, and church staff, this detailed study explores developing the church budget, fund-raising for the budget, setting giving goals for the congregation, and growing giving from year to year.



### ***The Whys and Hows of Money Leadership: A Workbook for Pastors and Lay Leaders*** Price: \$20.95

This resource will help get your church talking about money. Seven lessons help participants explore their personal relationships with money, learn about financial planning, and apply their learning to the church. It helps to connect the congregation's mission, vision, and goals with funding and provides sound principles for congregational money management.

### ***Ask and You Shall Receive: A Fundraising Training Program for Religious Organizations and Projects***

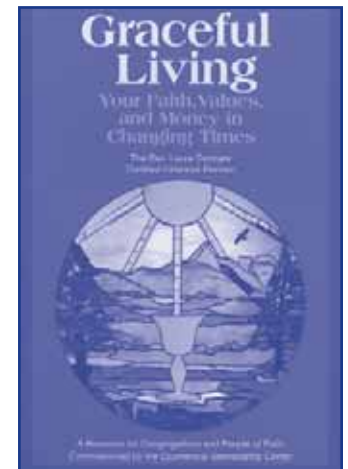
Price: \$31.50

This peer-led program by Kim Klein provides useful tips and information to help raise funds in the church by walking through the "how-to's" of asking for funds. It includes the most common fundraising scenarios: special events, direct mail, personal connections, and major gift campaigns.



### ***Graceful Living: Your Faith, Values, and Money in Changing Times*** Price: \$10.00

Written by The Rev. Laura Dunham, a Certified Financial Planner and Presbyterian minister, this resource helps people reflect on their attitudes towards money, clarify their values, and develop a comprehensive financial plan. It helps individuals work through their finances so they can see how they can contribute.



### ***The Joy of Generosity: Stewardship Resources for Your Church*** Price: \$56.50

This intergenerational resource provides an overall plan to introduce general concepts of stewardship and giving. It would complement an annual financial campaign.

### ***Money Matters in Church: A Practical Guide for Leaders*** Price: \$18.99

This book by Aubrey Malphurs and Steve Stroepe covers financial stewardship from articulating your theology of financial stewardship to managing resources and conducting a capital fundraising campaign. Questions at the end of each chapter help provide fodder for small group discussions.

### ***Inspiring Generosity*** Price: \$19.99

This book helps you develop stewardship programs. It includes general outlines of four types of annual stewardship campaigns: i) Personal Visits, ii) Consecrating Stewards, iii) Direct Mail, iv) Faith Promise.

Talking With Elders About Evangelism

Confidentiality and the Session— Session Starter #13

What's on Your Mind?

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## Talking With Elders About Evangelism

### The Power of the Everyday Conversation

Courtney Morris, Resource Staff, The Vine Helpline

For many of us, negative connotations come to mind when we hear the word 'evangelize'. We associate this verb with television evangelists or those aggressively bombarding us on street corners with apocalyptic messages attempting to scare us into belief in order to obtain salvation. However, these limited views of evangelism rob the word of its true meaning and its essential role in the life of the church. The root of the word 'evangelize' is from the Greek word "*euangelos*" meaning 'bringing the good news'. To evangelize is about sharing God, who has brought us great joy, with all those we encounter so that they can experience this same joy. Our desire to evangelize should mimic the deep yearning proclaimed by apostles Peter and John, when they said, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

As Presbyterians, we are good at preaching about our faith during worship or writing about it in academic circles but when it comes to talking about it in our everyday lives, we avoid it. We tend to choose evangelism through action rather than through words.

Many of us fear talking about God outside the church walls and when we do, we often do it in an awkward and limiting manner. Perhaps we do this because, in our lives, there is such a disconnect between church and 'real life' when there should be a reciprocity. We are hesitant to share our faith in fear that we will be rejected or



labelled a 'Jesus freak' or 'Bible thumper'. After all, talking about God is not acceptable conversation in our society today; it is a social *faux pas*.

Part of your role as elder is to be committed to the spiritual growth of your congregations, which includes ensuring that your members are given the tools to express their faith verbally. After reading a couple of books about participating in evangelism through conversation, I'd like to pass on some recommendations based on these two books - *More Ready Than You Realize* by Brian D. McLaren (Zondervan, 2006) and *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* by Thomas G. Long (Jossey-Bass, 2004).

First, try talking about God amongst yourselves in a session meeting and small groups in our congregations. I'll walk you through different ways to break free of old tendencies and to start to build new ways of talking about your faith and sharing the Gospel with others.

# Talking With Elders About Evangelism

## The Power of the Everyday Conversation (continued)

### Step 1: Evangelism Icebreaker

Even within our church communities or homes we have a hard time talking about God and what we believe. When we are given the words in worship it seems easy, but outside of this structured atmosphere it is difficult for many of us to share our faith, perhaps because it is personal or we aren't sure that we know exactly what we believe. As leaders in our congregations, we need to model for the members of our church how to express faith verbally.

Try this old Quaker activity as a way to initiate interaction in small groups on a basic but heartfelt level. The questions are basic but provide a way for people to move from introductory information about themselves towards getting acquainted with each other on a deeper level, and then to being able to make a theological statement about God. Begin by trying these Quaker questions with your session, then move on to small groups in the congregation, and then even to try them with friends outside the church. Before you know it, you will realize that talking about God is not so intimidating after all. With these few short questions, the words will just come pouring out.

#### Four Quaker Questions:

1. Where did you live as a child?
2. How was the house heated?
3.
  - a) What was the place of warmth in your house?
  - b) Who was the centre of warmth in your life as a child?
4. When did God become a warm being for you and how did this happen?

For more examples of variations of "Quaker questions," go to [www.presbyterian.ca](http://www.presbyterian.ca) and type "Family Table Talk" in the search box.

### Step 2: Connecting Sunday to the Rest of the Week

Our ability to put faith into words outside of the sanctuary depends largely on our seeing the connections between Sunday morning and the rest of the week. We need to stop saying that "we are getting back to the real world" when we leave church and continue our week on Monday mornings. If the only connection we make between Sunday worship and the rest of the week is that Sunday is where we get our batteries fuelled to

endure the remainder of the week, then we are missing something! Worship should do more than inspire us for the rest of the week; it should transform us into looking at every day and every interaction in a new way. The relationship between Sunday morning and Monday morning is not one of sequence but one of depth. Sunday discloses what is true about every day and should reveal to us where God is present at work in every aspect of life.

**Discussion:** How do you see the rest of your week connecting to Sunday worship? Talk about examples or stories from your week

### Step 3: Responding to "God chatter"

Spend some time listening to the chatter in your everyday life amongst your neighbours, family members, co-workers, fellow commuters, and other guests at a party you are attending. If you keep your ears open to what people say about God, you are likely to realize that a lot of "God chatter" or religious white noise exists. In this, there is a lack of depth in content of what is being spoken about God, who is often misrepresented. However, our casual use of God in our everyday phrases, such as "God willing" or "with God on our side" demonstrates humanity's hunger for an encounter with the living God and the need for authentic speech about God.

When people find out what I do, Christian ministry, it has been my experience that instead of being rejected, people are often curious and want to engage in honest conversation. They often want to know how I came to choose such a direction in my life. It is at this point that I am reminded of the advice of the apostle Peter who taught: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15) I have learned that I am more ready than I think to share the Gospel with others and that most people I encounter on a daily basis are just as ready to hear it.

**Discussion:** Talk about a time when someone experienced curiosity about your involvement in church. How did you respond to them?

In the coming week, make note of situations outside the church when you hear people mention God. What part of their life were they connecting God to? Were they referring to God in a positive light?

Watch for "What is authentic God talk anyway?" in the November '08 PC Pak.

# Confidentiality and the Session

## Session Starter Number 13

### Prayer:

God of truth and peace, we have gathered in this place and at this time to fulfill our calling as elders within this congregation. Help us to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction:

The Book of Forms (sections 120 and 120.1) deals with the confidentiality of the session. In part, they state, “... Meetings of session are not open to the congregation but the session may hold open meetings when deemed advisable.

In dealing with matters affecting the good name of members of the congregation, the session, and all members thereof, must observe strict privacy.”

### Scripture: Matthew 7:12

Jesus said, “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the law and the prophets.”

### A Brief Commentary:

Jesus teaches his followers not only what to believe, but how to live. In this instance, Jesus helps his followers behave in a way that ought to be just, kind, and humble, by impressing upon them the importance of treating others as they themselves would want to be treated.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “This is the golden rule, a handy rule, a perpetually-applicable rule, useful in every condition, and it never makes a mistake.”

### Reflection:

Christians share the essence of what we call, “The Golden Rule” with several other major religions. For example:

**Buddhism:** Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

**Hinduism:** This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you.

**Islam:** No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

**Judaism:** What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

It seems to be universally accepted that we live well together when we treat each other with the kindness, fairness, and honesty we expect from others.

One way the session can fulfill this principle is by maintaining the confidentiality of the session. While it is vitally important to communicate session decisions with the congregation (See the May 2008 Session Starter), there are times when it is just as important to keep session discussions private. Confidentiality is most often essential when session discussions centre on sensitive issues involving people.

Just as we would want the session to guard our privacy, so we must guard the privacy of others.

Disclosing confidential session information not only undermines the credibility of the session, but can be potentially harmful to the very people we want to protect. May God grant us the strength and wisdom to keep private what needs to be kept private.

### Discussion:

1. By maintaining strict confidentiality of the session, how do we fulfill the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:12?
2. What sort of session discussions and decisions ought to be kept confidential?

# What's on your mind?

## Who is responsible for assessing the performance of the minister?

Every now and then someone asks me a question like, "Who is responsible for assessing the performance of the minister?"

It is sometimes assumed that the session or the personnel committee of the session should review the minister's work within the congregation. It is an understandable assumption since, on the surface, it appears the minister is employed by the congregation and, therefore, the minister's performance ought to be assessed by the same people who assess the work of the other congregational staff, such as the organist, secretary, caretaker, and so forth.

According to the polity of our denomination, however, the minister is accountable to the presbytery and not to the session or congregation. It is the presbytery that approves the minister's call to a congregation. It is the presbytery that ultimately releases the minister from the congregation. During the period in between, it is the presbytery that oversees the work done by the minister.

How does the presbytery oversee the work done by the minister? It is hoped the presbytery and minister will develop the kind of rapport that fosters effective communication throughout the year so that solid ministry is celebrated while troubles are dealt with without delay and fairly. The presbytery also assesses a minister during its periodic visitations to the congregation. Further, if there are serious complaints within the congregation about the minister's efforts that cannot be resolved locally, the presbytery will usually become involved.

In practice, most ministers strive to cooperate with the session and the congregation and try to meet their needs and expectations. This is, nevertheless, an enormous task. A congregation of 100 people may have 100 ideas about

what the minister should do and how the minister should do it. Sometimes we joke about the expectation that a minister ought always to be available in the church's study but also spend time every day visiting in hospitals and members' homes. Naturally no minister can be all things to all people. It is hoped sessions and congregations will be understanding when it comes to the demands placed on the minister and cooperate with the minister to make the most of the minister's time and gifts.

It is the presbytery, not the session or the congregation, that assesses the performance of the minister.

Blessings,

Don Muir  
Associate Secretary  
General Assembly Office

## What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Do you wonder why Presbyterians do things the way they do? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the Book of Forms?

If you send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir, he will include answers in issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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