



Points of Entry

How many doors does our church have?

1 Peter 4:9-10; Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus is not merely a nice addition to complete an otherwise fulfilling life. He is essential to all life. Without him, our neighbors are utterly lost. This activity can help motivate and prepare your team to reach your community for Christ.

A nearly century-old congregation in Ohio had plateaued at 145 in attendance for 12 years. Then it doubled in the next five years. What happened? The congregation added a second staff person, whose primary responsibility was to expand the entry points for new people. During her first year, she identified a dozen volunteer allies. She began to build a list of prospective new members, most of the names coming from those who attended the special events she scheduled:

- ◆ a four-session divorce-recovery workshop,
- ◆ a new adult Sunday-school class that was started every year for those first five years,
- ◆ an appreciation Sunday for teachers employed in the local public school system,
- ◆ she enlisted a 63-year-old grandmother to organize a ministry for new mothers,
- ◆ she persuaded the leaders to expand the Christmas Eve schedule from one to two to four services
- ◆ she convinced the minister to teach a new Tuesday evening Bible study group if she would recruit the members for it,
- ◆ she found a person who could lead a series of marriage-enrichment events,
- ◆ she identified a non-member couple who agreed to teach a Sunday morning class for developmentally disabled people,
- ◆ she persuaded the governing board to add an early worship service to the Sunday morning schedule,
- ◆ she found someone to organize and direct a young adult choir for that new worship service,
- ◆ she talked the minister into working with a planning committee for six weeks before the first early service—and six of the nine members of that committee came from her list of prospective new members.

Behind the success

For most of these new entry points, this staff member enlisted others to help her. With few exceptions, she always included at least two or three people from her list of prospective new members. She followed the basic principle that most prospective members prefer to help pioneer the new rather than join the old.

Finally, instead of seeking approval from the appropriate committees and the governing board, all she sought was the withholding of a veto, sometimes expressed as, “Well, let’s try it one time and see what happens.”

Equally important, she did not wait for the boards and committees to take the initiative to tell her what to do. For the most part, she functioned outside the existing committee structure. She wanted help, not arguments. She understood and affirmed the value of ad hoc groups and single-function task forces. Rather than burden the nominating committee, she enlisted her own allies. Rather than ask the finance committee for budgeting, she raised the money needed through designated, second-mile giving.

—LYLE SCHALLER

To Discuss

1. What is an entry point? What are some in our church?
2. What special events or programs have had an effective outreach? Why?
3. Which of the above ideas may work in our church and community setting?