

## **EVANGELISM IS A NECESSITY**

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Evangelism is not an option – it's a necessity. If a church doesn't engage in effective evangelism, then death beckons for the church. In the words of Texan author William Easum: "Congregations whose membership has plateaued or is declining have much in common with dinosaurs. Both have great heritages. Both require enormous amounts of food... Both became endangered species. ... Like the dinosaur they have a voracious appetite. Much of their time, energy, and money is spent foraging for food (for themselves), so that little time is left to feed the unchurched. ....Either their pride or their nearsightedness keeps them from changing the ways they minister to people.... All around are unchurched, hurting people... But many refuse to change their methods and structures to minister to people where they are in ways they can understand. Like the dinosaur, their necks are too stiff or their eyes too near-sighted. Clearly God doesn't care if these congregations survive; but God passionately cares if they meet the spiritual needs of those God sends their way". Sadly, there are many churches living in the past, who are in essence only living for themselves. These churches are on the verge of extinction – indeed, almost certainly 1000s of them will close their doors within the next 10 or 20 years, as indeed 1000s of them have already done so. So for their self-preservation – let alone for the sake of the salvation of others – churches need to turn outwards and begin to engage in effective evangelism. But how can this be done? The Apostle Paul surely supplies the answer: "By all means save some" (1 Cor 9.22). The evangelistic task begins with building bridges of friendship with people outside the church. We have found that one very effective form of bridge-building is holding quiz evenings twice a year. These evenings are always extremely popular with 'outsiders' – with the result that normally 50% of those present are non-church goers. Furthermore, they are so simple to organize – all one has to do is to hire a quiz master and provide food ('ploughmans') and sell drink. Then there is 'Alpha' – currently we run three courses a year, two of an evening, and another of a lunch-time. We've kicked the videos into touch – we find a personal presentation much more effective. Surprising as it may seem, our experience is that just putting a large banner outside the church advertising the next course brings people in - there is something to be said for getting on to a nation-wide band-wagon. Evangelism, too, entails putting on special services. Like many churches we have experimented with 'seeker-services' - indeed, currently we aim to put on one a term. However, there is no doubt that the most successful services in attracting non-church people are baptismal services – so instead of directing the sermon to the candidates, I always ensure that the sermon is directed to their friends and relatives. And so I could go on. In today's climate effective evangelism is no easy task. But no evangelism today – no church tomorrow.

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