



AN EVANGELISTIC COMMUNITY

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INITIATIVE EVANGELISM IN A CULTURE THAT LONGS FOR COMMUNITY

For years I've been beating my head against a wall trying to figure out how to be more effective in evangelism. I know and agree with our definition of successful witnessing: "Taking the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ, and trusting God for the results." That's a good definition and we teach it to our students. But our incredibly high ratio of exposures to involved new believers has left me longing for our evangelistic approaches to be not only successful, but also effective. I want to see more people come to Christ, get involved, and grow in their faith.

This year my staff and student leaders and I came up with an evangelism campaign that has been revolutionary for us. A larger portion of our movement is involved in personal evangelism than before and kids are coming to Christ. It's been a huge success.

I THESSALONIANS 2:8

The campaign is called Community 2:8 and is based on 1Thessalonians 2:8 which says:

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

That passage seems an apt description of what effective evangelism might look like in a culture that longs for community and desperately needs the gospel. We've found it helps us connect Crusade's long standing value of initiative evangelism with the culture's affinity for relationships without

diminishing either. And to top it all off, it's biblical.

We used to run a campaign called "First and Ten" that Cynthia Hagen and I developed at West Chester University. First and Ten had two components. "First" reminded us to first pray, following the divine order of evangelism: "Talk to God about people before you talk to people about God." "Ten" referenced a top ten list of friends, acquaintances, classmates, or scary lost people— pretty much anyone you wanted to commit to sharing the gospel with by year's end. Students would come up with a list, pray for the people on it regularly, and look for (or create) opportunities to share with them.

Community 2:8 builds on the evangelistic foundation of *Pray* and *Share*, and adds the community components, *Introduce* and *Invite*. Introduce suggests that students make sure that the non-Christians they are reaching out to get a chance to know as many believers as possible. The more Christians they know the better. The more they get a chance to rub shoulders with godly people the more opportunities there are for the gospel to be both explained and lived out before them. And if they know 8 or 10 people in Cru, or 4 or 5 in a Bible study they are much more likely to be willing to attend where they can again hear the gospel and see it in action.

Which brings me to the final step, *Invite*. We ask students to invite their friends to Cru socials, and unofficial parties our students hold. We remind them to invite non-Christians to go to movies or basketball games with no spiritual content whatsoever. We ask them to invite people to our weekly meeting, or special outreaches. Pretty much with any social gathering, whether there is overt evangelistic value or not, we want students to be inviting the lost.



PRAY, SHARE, INTRODUCE, INVITE

Please note the order there because it's intentional. *Pray* is first because we still believe that this adventure starts in prayer. It is God who draws men and women to faith so we want our students to cultivate the habit of praying for the lost.

Immediately on the heels of that comes *Share*. By which we mean the overt articulation of the gospel. The Four Laws. Your testimony. An explanation of substitutionary atonement. That sort of thing.

There is a temptation to move evangelism to the end of the process, waiting for the relationship to really get established. I think that's a bad idea. For one thing, experience shows that it's really easy to keep putting it off. We can second guess if it's "time yet" all the way until graduation. A lot of times our willingness to take a risk and share our faith can diminish over time. What we like to call "waiting for an opportunity" can really just be failure to overcome fear. Also, it seems disingenuous. If the gospel really is important to me, and if I really do like you, I think it makes sense to talk about it early in the relationship. Otherwise when I finally do bring it up it comes across as artificial. The gospel doesn't need to be our opening comment every time we meet someone, but it seems good to speak about Jesus early and naturally. Why wait?

Following that come *Introduce* and *Invite* as described above. It's not necessarily that neat and linear, because of course we keep on praying for them and sharing the gospel (or parts of the gospel) whenever it's appropriate. But nevertheless there's intentionality in the ordering of *Pray, Share, Introduce, Invite*.

COMMUNITY 2:8 AND INITIATIVE EVANGELISM

The evangelism model describes three modes of evangelism: ministry, natural and body. Community 2:8 obviously focuses on natural and body. But that doesn't mean we've left ministry mode behind. At Penn State we have done and will continue to do dinner line surveys, Quest surveys, and transitions to the Four Spiritual Laws. I'm not recommending a Community 2:8 style campaign replace that, but that it augment it. There are at least three good reasons not to commit that error:

1. Ministry mode is the best way to train students to share their faith. In that mode they can learn answers

to questions, transitions, illustrations, and solidify their ability to express the gospel clearly and concisely. Those skills will serve them well for the rest of their lives. Without them, they will be hard pressed to ever share their faith in the natural mode.

2. Ministry leaders should probably be sharing their faith more frequently than Community 2:8 alone will allow. They can certainly establish relationships and be involved in a campaign like C2:8, but their best contribution is probably to train students' in evangelism and go after those currently outside the reach of your students relational connections.

3. People come to Christ through ministry mode evangelism. Especially if you can come up with a way of surfacing what Roger Hershey loves to call "hungry hearts" you can expect students to come to faith in this mode.

And by the way, Community 2:8 itself is not a departure from initiative evangelism. I've noticed I can be sloppy and imprecise in using that term. Ministry mode and initiative evangelism are not synonymous. Neither are natural mode and relational evangelism. We should take the initiative to share our faith regardless of which mode we are operating in. And we should be relational as we share our faith regardless of which mode we are operating in. The terms "initiative" and "relational" describe ideal behavior in all modes of ministry. We should be intentional to move towards people, and treat them warmly and with respect regardless of how we met them. Community 2:8 is both initiative and relational in the natural and body modes of evangelism.

One of the unexpected benefits we've found in Community 2:8 is that it helps us reach the increasing number of students who struggle with shame more than guilt. Many students have great cause for shame and therefore, they hide. What they need is a community where they can feel safe enough to bring their junk into the light. Your movement can provide that community and help them come to Christ.



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