

PASTORAL CARE OF NEW CHURCH MEMBERS

A heartbreaking condition exists in every community and in every city where Christianity has spread. Hosts of nominal Christians seem never to grow in the faith or become dedicated in Christian discipleship.

"The number of inactive and unenlisted church members is a source¹ of embarrassment to churches."

"There are enough detached members among Southern Baptist alone to constitute nine thousand average size churches, or twenty-four hundred churches of one thousand members or forty-eight hundred churches with membership of five hundred each."²

"Conservation of evangelistic results is the responsibility of every pastor, every church, every organization in a church, and every agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Its necessity is so critical and so alarming that it should stir everyone who has the interest of the cause of Christ and concern for souls to do something about it."³

Christ commissioned the church to win men to a personal acceptance of him as Saviour and teach and lead each into Christlike maturity. This is total evangelism: the winning of the lost, and the maturing of the saved. They are two sides of the same coin, evangelism. We feel that one reason such a tragic condition exists within our churches is

1. W. E. Grindstaff, Ways to Win, Nashville: Broadman Press
2. C. E. Autrey, Basic Evangelism, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 142
3. C. E. Matthews, A Church Revival, Nashville: Broadman Press

an inadequate theology of total New Testament evangelism. This has resulted in improper motives of evangelism, in unscriptural methods of personal soul-winning, in almost complete neglect of the conservation of the convert, which has produced faulty results of our evangelistic endeavours.

"The most justifiable criticism that can be made of all that Southern Baptists are doing is their failure to conserve the results of their evangelism."⁴

"The true test of evangelism is not winning but keeping. Long overdue is a program of conservation that will prevent so much tragic loss to the churches."⁵

I. The Meaning of Conservation or Follow-up.

Follow-up covers the whole scope of the Christian life and growth following the new birth, to the bringing to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness young believers. It is not so much a program as it is a person; not materials, but men. "Follow-up is someone rather than something."⁶

1. Conservation or Care for New Church Members should be Person Centered. It is person to person, mind to mind, heart to heart. It is spiritual parenthood.

"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to

4. Matthews, op. cit., p. 102

5. Grindstaff, op. cit., p. 200

6. Dawson E. Trotman, Follow-Up, Christ for America Publishers

have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children" (I Thess. 2:7, 8, 11).

"A baby is not responsible to the parents until it grows a bit older, but from the beginning the parents are responsible to the baby." ⁷

Although Paul wrote many letters to his converts, he considered personal contact and time with them most necessary to effectively build up their lives in Christ. He wrote to the Thessalonians that he "was night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your faith" (I Thess. 3:10). To the Romans Paul wrote, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established" (Romans 1:11). When Paul had preached the gospel in the cities of Asia Minor, he returned to his home church. Then "...some days after, Paul said unto Barnabus, Let us go again and visit our brethern in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36).

2. The Primary Objective in Follow-Up is to lead the New Member, or Convert, into Christian maturity. It is not basically the making of church members conforming to programs, but the leading of church members to become conformed to the Person, Christ.

"And he gave (gifts) for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,

unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head (of the church), even Christ" (Eph. 4:11-15).

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28).

II. The Motivation for Spiritual Conservation.

Ours is a highly competitive world. Could it be that this spirit of competition has deeply penetrated into the organizations of Christianity? Is it possible that we have lost the true motives of evangelism?

I wonder what would happen today if the results of our evangelism were to be published, not on the number reportedly saved in revivals and personal soul-winning, but on those who are productive and active at the end of one full year? Would we labor as hard to keep them as we do to win them?

There is an imperative need for a re-evaluation of our motives in evangelism. Paul said, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ ..." (Eph. 3:21). He again said, "Let no man glory in men" (I Cor 3:21), but "...whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

1. Our love for Christ. "Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea,

Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

2. Aware of God's plan for his own. "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

3. Conscious of God's desire for man to properly worship him. We are commissioned to help these "babes in Christ" and New Members to mature spiritually so they may intelligently worship and fellowship with God and he with them. (Eph. 1:4-14)

4. Because of a love for the saints. (I Thess. 2:7-12; I Thess. 3:1,2,8; I Cor. 12:15, Col. 1:2-4)

5. A desire to reach the world with the gospel.

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Charles H. Spurgeon once said, "He who converts a soul draws water from a fountain; but he who trains a soul-winner digs a well from which thousands may drink to eternal life."

(1) This is the quickest way to win the world.

If one wins one, and both win another, and this continues with converts being won just as often as every six months, at the end of fifteen and one half years, if no one failed, there would be over two and three quarter billion converts. But wait a minute! Let us suppose that just about the time the first convert gets ready to go

after his first prospect, he gets sidetracked. He wasn't properly trained and guided and he washes out and does not produce or reproduce. Fifteen and one half years later you can cut your 2,176,000,000 down to 1,000,000,000, less that half, because the devil caused the first man to be sterile.

(2) This is the only way to win the world.

No one person could possibly win the win the world in his lifetime. It is, therefore, only reasonable that he must have help. This help must come from his converts and their converts.

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).

Conservation of converts is not optional, it is imperative if we are to win the whole world to Christ.

III. Some Methods of Conservation.

Robert D. Foster has stated, "The church has for centuries operated on the principle of addition while the Bible method is multiplication. Not just a few reaping a minium harvest, but rather every man reaching another man who is committed to reach still another. It is not a program, method, or some clever materials. It is spiritual parenthood. The infusion of life as father with son...not just getting a head full of facts into a man...but training through counsel, experience and time so that character, conduct and Christlikeness result."

8

8. Robert D. Foster, "The Challenge", Long Beach, February 7, 1959

1. Prayer for the New Member. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9,10). (Luke 22:31,32; Gal. 4:19; Romans 1:9-11; I Thess. 3:10)

2. Face to Face contact (Acts 15:36).

(1) By personal instruction (II Tim. 2:2; Acts 14:21,22) .

a. Instructing in personal Bible Study (Acts 20:32; I Peter 2:2; Matt. 4:4), teaching them to be obedient to God's Word (Joshua 1:8; John 14:21; John 15:14).

b. Leading them to develop habits of daily prayer by personally praying with them (John 15:7; Matt. 6:5-15).

c. Encouraging them to witness by deed and word by taking them with you on soul-winning visits (I Thess. 1:5; I John 1:3).

d. Engaging them in active places of service through the activities of the church.

(2) By living example (Phil. 4:9).

"But are these new Christians to be encourage to start daily habits of prayer and Bible study merely by being told? No, they must be shown. The person who seeks to do follow-up must be what he is trying to teach, for the learner will follow the example of the teacher sooner than he will his word." ⁹

Paul could say, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do."

(3) By group instruction and fellowship.

(Sunday school Bible study group, worship services, Training Union, Brotherhood, W.M.U., Pastor's New Members Class, etc.)

3. When unable to go personally, send another to take your place. (I Thess. 3:2,5; Phil. 2:19-23).

4. If impossible to go personally to care for the convert, or to send another, then a written letter, telephone call, or some means of communication can do a great deal to instruct and strengthen the New Member. Much of the New Testament was written as follow-up instructions to young converts.

This is total NEW TESTAMENT EVANGELISM: THE WINNING AND MATURING.

by Hal Brooks

Pastoral Ministry 32