

Lost in Church

Reaching Lost Churchgoers and Notional Christians Through Intra-Evangelism

How would your approach to evangelism be different if you knew that up to one-half of the people attending your church were not Christians?

As startling as this idea may appear, recent research indicates it is a hard reality for many churches in the United States. Researcher George Barna has discovered the disturbing fact that “half of all adults who attend Protestant churches on a typical Sunday morning are not Christian.” He also points out that people who call themselves Christians but are not born again are “a group that constitutes a majority of churchgoers.”

Barna’s findings are similar to those reported by Bill Bright, founder and fifty-year president of Campus Crusade for Christ. According to Bright, “Our surveys suggest that over 50% of the hundred million people in church here in the United States every Sunday are not sure of their salvation.”

In addition to discovering that 50% of people in church are “lost churchgoers,” the Barna Research Group has also revealed that 44% of Americans are “notional Christians.” These 90 million notional Christians are people who describe themselves as Christians but do not believe that their hope for eternal life is based on a personal relationship with Jesus and the belief that He died and rose again from the dead.

According to On Mission magazine, published by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, “notional Christians” do not know “whether they will experience eternal life, eternal damnation or some other outcome.”

In addition to not knowing their eternal destiny, many churchgoers hold to inconsistent beliefs about how people get to heaven. In an October 2003 study, Barna revealed that 50% of professing born again Christians “contend that a person can earn salvation based upon good works.” This clearly contradicts the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace alone, not by works.

The confusion of churchgoers also extends to the way of salvation. Although the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only way of salvation, Barna points out that “Many committed born again Christians believe that people have multiple options for gaining entry to Heaven.”

Reaching the “7:21 Window”

Barna says that many who attend Protestant churches have been “anesthetized” to the Gospel. Many have mentally accepted correct beliefs but have “lived without a shred of insight into what a relationship with Christ was all about.”

This shocking discovery that there are large numbers of lost churchgoers is not inconsistent with what the Bible says. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” He also says that many will cry out, “Lord, Lord,” only to hear Him say, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:22–23). It appears that Jesus’ solemn warning may apply to many who fill the church pews on Sunday mornings.

The staggering numbers of lost churchgoers and notional Christians mean that a wide window for

ministry is open—the 7:21 Window. This 7:21 Window includes lost churchgoers as well as notional Christians, who are both part of Jesus’ warning in Matthew 7:21. The pressing question, then, becomes, “How does the church reach the 7:21 Window?”

The Intra-Evangelism Solution

In response to the current crisis, Church Initiative, a church-equipping ministry, has created a bold and effective strategy for reaching the 7:21 Window. The strategy is centered on the concept of “intra-evangelism.”

“Intra-evangelism,” says Church Initiative, “is a dynamic outreach to lost churchgoers and notional Christians.” Intra-evangelism consists of two things, according to Church Initiative:

- It is “evangelism” in that its goal is to reach the lost with the Gospel.
- It is “intra” in that it targets lost churchgoers and notional Christians within the walls of the church.

Why Churches Need an Intra-Evangelism Strategy

Why must intra-evangelism become a top priority for churches?

First, as the research indicates, the need for intra-evangelism is huge. Although some church leaders may believe their church is exempt from having significant numbers of lost people, the evidence strongly indicates otherwise.

The reason why it may be difficult for church leaders to accept that members of their congregation may be lost is because many of these attendees have been involved in church for years. They may be nice people who give and attend church regularly. On the outside they might appear to be genuine Christians, but there is something missing whether it be lack of passion, hesitancy in serving or lack of Bible knowledge.

Second, as disciples of the Great Commission, church leaders must show love and concern for all who are headed to an eternity without Jesus Christ. This includes those with whom we shake hands at church. The lost whom we must reach out to are not just those “out there.” They are also “in here,” within the walls of our churches.

Third, effective intra-evangelism will lead to a spiritual awakening and increased spiritual ministry within churches. As the percentage of Christians in a church increases, the spiritual vitality of that church will also increase as more people will be using their spiritual gifts, talents and resources for the Lord. Plus, effective intra-evangelism will light a passion for other forms of evangelism. As a church focuses on strengthening its own spiritual condition, it will become better equipped to reach the lost beyond its own walls.

Facing Forever: The Intra-Evangelism Strategy

Church Initiative has developed a bold strategy to help churches reach those lost in the 7:21 Window. This strategy is based on the intra-evangelism tool called Facing Forever. Facing Forever is a dynamic 13-week video series on DVD designed to reach lost churchgoers who do not know their eternal destiny.

Done in a television magazine format, Facing Forever features interviews with Christian experts, real life stories and dynamic graphics. Group members meet weekly to watch captivating and informative video sessions and then discuss the contents. Facing Forever workbooks supplement the videos and challenge members to be sure about their eternal destiny.

What Church Leaders Are Saying About Facing Forever

Church leaders are already celebrating Facing Forever's ability to reach lost churchgoers and notional Christians.

"Two people have given their hearts to the Lord since we started the series," says Pastor Norman Shaw, Augusta, ME.

"We had nearly 200 people attend the first Sunday," says Pastor Greg Tatum, Indianapolis, IN.

"What I liked best about the series is the way it was advertised as 'intra-evangelism,'" says Danny Gray, a Facing Forever leader, Owensboro, KY. "I agree . . . that many people attending church do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."

Top Christian leaders, too, are recommending Facing Forever as an effective intra-evangelism tool.

"Facing Forever needs to be used in every church across America," says Franklin Graham, Founder of Samaritan's Purse.

"I heartily recommend this video series as a valuable evangelistic resource for churches," states Luis Palau, Founder of the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association.

"I recommend Facing Forever as a wonderful tool that will impact lives for God's kingdom," says Bill Bright, Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ.

How Close Will You Go?

The problem is huge. The need is urgent. Barna notes that if non-Christian church members continue along their current path "their chances of coming to grips with the truth about Christ and their own mortality are slim." The time has come for intra-evangelism. The time has also come for Facing Forever.

Christians have often been stirred to evangelism by being asked the question, "How far will you go to reach lost people with the Gospel?" Today, another question must also be asked— "How close will you go to reach the lost for Christ?"

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