

# Small Talk

## Challenge On!

This newsletter is challenging you to evangelism. What can you give up, give away, or give into to make a Jesus-difference?

Winter 07



## Giving Up to Give Away

Romans 9:2-3 begins with these astounding words: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh." Is Paul actually saying that he is willing to go to hell if his fellow Jews can go to heaven? It is hard to believe that anyone would willingly give up his or her salvation. But Paul's statement forces me to ask the question, "What would I give up in order to share my faith?" Sometimes I am not willing to give up even the little conveniences of life.

First, I am simply too busy to share my faith, often because of religious efforts. I can be on so many committees or teams, lead so many small groups, and do so many things for the church that I fail to take the time to cultivate relationships with people who are not yet Christians. Today's "cup of cold water" includes the gift of time - taking time to share a meal or take a walk and listen to a person's story. Christians can show they are different by sacrificing some of their free time to spend time with a neighbor who needs the Gospel.

I'll admit it is easier to be with Christians. Being with people who have not yet come to faith sometimes feels awkward or uncomfortable because they challenge what I believe or make negative comments about the church. Effective communication means that I am careful to speak their spiritual language, to show sensitivity to their views and avoid being judgmental or critical. I am reminded that we are like missionaries in the North American post-modern culture. I Peter 3:15-16 instructs us that whenever we speak, it should be with gentleness and respect.

Although my family is a significant priority and commitment, that, too can become an excuse for not sharing my faith, for not including the "stranger" or the "alien" in my daily activities. However, as I look back on my children's growing up years, I believe it has been important for them to experience, first hand, individuals who came to faith. Observing the power of the gospel in action as they listened in on spiritual conversations around the dinner table and watching others become Christ followers affirmed for them the truthfulness of the gospel and challenged them in their own Christian walk.

Bill Hybels, in his series on evangelism, "Just Walk Across the Room," tells about attending his son's soccer game. He remembers the moment at the end of one game when his friends from church were leaving. He saw the coach picking up the balls, and for a split second he had the choice to go with his friends or turn and help the coach. It would be years before his son's soccer coach came to faith, but that simple act of turning away from the familiar and reaching out to someone new made all the difference.

Perhaps I will never join the Apostle Paul in saying I would be willing to give up my faith for someone else's. However, I do affirm that whenever I *give up* time or what is most familiar in order to *give away* my faith, the experience provides an opportunity to make a difference with eternal value.

Diane Averill, Small Group Ministry Developer, Eastern US Team

## incommunity

Plans are well under way for the July 18-20, 2008 Small Group and Evangelism Conference, *In Community*, at the new Westin Hotel in Lombard, IL.

The registration fee, \$220 (U.S.) covers meals, plenary sessions and breakouts. (reduced rates for spouses and students.) Hotel rooms are available at the discounted price of \$120 plus tax per night.

The planning team is grateful to God for His leading to a fine facility, an outstanding worship leader, keynote and breakout speakers whose topics will inspire, encourage and equip those who attend.

## Prayers Requested

Are you a prayer warrior? If the answer is yes, the Prayer Team of the 2008 Small Group & Evangelism Conference needs **you!** We desire God's blessing and guidance in every aspect of this conference—from the beginning to the end. Anyone willing to receive prayer requests is asked to e-mail your name and address to Jan Vander Laan at [2vans@sbcglobal.net](mailto:2vans@sbcglobal.net). E-mail Prayer-Casts are sent out approximately once a month. If you prefer to receive requests via snail mail—we will send you a printed copy. Call 1-888-644-0814 to be placed on the mailing list.

The Prayer Team



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## Resources

*Reveal* – This study asks tough questions related to spiritual growth and the church’s role in spiritual formation. The book format, is available at [www.revealnow.com](http://www.revealnow.com) .

*Nooma* – Short films that speak to relevant issues and spark lively discussions. Check them out at [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com) .

*Liquid* – DVD-based experience/small group Bible study. More information at [www.ExperienceLiquid.com](http://www.ExperienceLiquid.com) .

*Learning to Count to One*, by Al Mulder. A diversity study that can be used for small group discussion, available from [www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org); or 1-800-333-8300.

*Discover Genesis* – inductive Bible study on Genesis from the Discover Your Bible series. Consisting of 12 lessons each this is a new format and revised study. Part One (Creation and Covenant) and Part Two (For All Generations) are available from [faithaliveresources.org](http://faithaliveresources.org); or 1-800-333-8300.

*Church Communication Network* is a year-round satellite network that broadcasts equipping seminars and outreach events for every ministry area of the church. Check out this resource for churches at [www.ccn.tv](http://www.ccn.tv).



## Talk Back

We heard from Betty and Herman Vanderburg in Calgary, Alberta, who are using the Alpha material with an ESL small group. After presenting the first lesson they learned to proceed much slower because of language barriers and presumed Bible knowledge. “We had a beautiful evening nevertheless and look forward to learning together.” If you have ideas for evangelistic resources for ESL groups, please “talk back” to us via e-mail at [smallgroups@crcna.org](mailto:smallgroups@crcna.org).

## What We’ve Learned

Mary Werkhoven reports that her church participated in the 40 Days of Purpose initiative and learned “a lot”! These are the lessons from ‘Campaign One’ that greatly improved the experience with their next all-church endeavor, 40 Days of Community:

- Gather a team, including the senior pastor, 6 months ahead of time to strategize
- Allow facilitators the freedom to create groups that meet the needs of group members
- Short “just-in-time” training before the campaign for group leaders/facilitators works best

- Celebrate successes by making a video for the whole church
- Contact each group leader before the end date with options for continuing and a list of study/service choices

As a continuing visual a 5'x8' puzzle was created, a theme piece added each week. The final result? BETTER TOGETHER.

**We take this opportunity to thank Mary Werkhoven, Small Group Ministry Developer for the Pacific Northwest Region. Mary recently retired from Home Missions after ministering with us for 11 years. She is busy with her family, church, and other ministry endeavors in Sunny-side, Wash. Thanks Mary! May God bless you.**

## I’ve Got It – Out of Control!

One of the first words we learn to say is “Mine!”

The infants’ possessiveness makes us laugh, but morphs into new ways of bowing to the god of “my.” Young and old alike participate in MySpace, My Circle, my Facebook page, my blog, etc. The “I’m in control” lie continues. It’s *my* money, *my* church, *my* group, *my* work, *my* faith... These give the impression that I’m in control, that it’s all up to me, don’t they?

Most days we would like to believe that. But control is an illusion that distracts us from our need for God, and for mercy. It is the opposite of surrender, of submitting to and listening for God’s heart, his desires.

Randy Frazee, teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Ill. has a phrase he uses to send people out from a worship service. “The Church has left the building.” Christians leave their pews to a world of chaos and great need to be “the Church.” The Reveal study (see Resources) shows that as believers become more mature in their faith, “the church becomes less of a place to go for spiritual development and to find spiritual relationships, and more of a platform that provides serving opportunities.” Christian magazines today encourage Jesus’ followers to be his hands and feet in their community and around the world.

Ken Fong, senior pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles, strives to encourage the right attitude as his church engages the surrounding community. “As we reach out to kids in the neighborhood, we tell our congregation that we don’t just do this to be good Christians. We tell them that maybe these poor kids know something more than we do about knowing God, more so than us middle-class snobs,” he says. “It’s not enough to reach out because we think it’s the right thing to do. That is paternalistic. We need to see that there is something that different people with different perspectives can show us that we’re missing.” (Leadership, Fall 2007).

That sounds risky, like giving up control. Maybe the Christians in our small groups don’t need another Bible study. Maybe they need an out-of-control service project. John Stott writes, “Only if we serve, will we experience freedom. Only if we lose ourselves in loving, will we find ourselves. Only if we die to our own self-centeredness, will we begin to live.” (The Incomparable Christ, InterVarsity 2001)

Perhaps our answer to this famous question, “Who is my neighbor?” is another out-of-control question, “Who is *not* my neighbor?”

Diane Dykgraaf, Small Group Ministry Developer, Great Lakes Regional Team