

WHAT EVERY PASTOR SHOULD KNOW

101 **Indispensable Rules of Thumb
for Leading Your Church**

GARY L. McINTOSH AND CHARLES ARN



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2013 by Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1435-2

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1995, 1996, 1998 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked Message are from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked Phillips are from The New Testament in Modern English, revised edition—J. B. Phillips, translator. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Contents

Introduction: Rules, Laws, and Ratios 11

1. Ministry Rules for Evangelism and Outreach 13

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. The Great Commission
Conscience Rule 14 | 5. The Unchurched Friends Rule 25 |
| 2. The Receptivity Rule 16 | 6. The Evangelism Training Rule 27 |
| 3. The Entry Event Rule 19 | 7. The Number of Conversions
Rule 30 |
| 4. The Side-Door Ministry Rule 22 | |

2. Ministry Rules for Visitors 32

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 8. The Visitor Label Rule 32 | 11. The Second-Time Rule 43 |
| 9. The Ten Minute Rule 35 | 12. The Visitor Agenda Rule 45 |
| 10. The Guests to Grow By Rule 38 | 13. The Information Center Rule 47 |

3. Ministry Rules for Worship 52

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 14. The Growth Rate Rule 52 | 18. The Planning Team Rule 62 |
| 15. The Sermon Preparation Rule 55 | 19. The Message Rule 66 |
| 16. The Visitor Hostility Rule 57 | 20. The Sermon Selection Rule 68 |
| 17. The New Service Rule 59 | 21. The Attendance Tracking Rule 70 |

4. Ministry Rules for Connecting with and Assimilating Newcomers 74

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 22. The Friendship Factor Rule 74 | 26. The New Member Sponsor
Rule 84 |
| 23. The Visitor Retention Rule 76 | 27. The Assimilated Member
Rule 86 |
| 24. The New Member Ministry
Rule 79 | 28. The First Year Rule 88 |
| 25. The New Member Orientation
Rule 81 | |

- 5. Ministry Rules for Small Groups 92**
- 29. The Group Diversity Rule 92
 - 30. The Number of Groups Rule 95
 - 31. The Newcomer Bonding Rule 98
 - 32. The New Groups Rule 100
 - 33. The Participation Levels Rule 102
 - 34. The Group Life Cycle Rule 105
- 6. Ministry Rules for Christian Education 108**
- 35. The Class Age Rule 108
 - 36. The Room Capacity Rule 111
 - 37. The Teacher-Student Rule 113
 - 38. The Sunday School Focus Rule 115
 - 39. The Two Step Rule 117
 - 40. The Party Rule 120
 - 41. The Top Forty Rule 121
- 7. Ministry Rules for Love and Caring 124**
- 42. The Love Definition Rule 124
 - 43. The Teaching Love Rule 127
 - 44. The Learning to Listen Rule 129
 - 45. The Birthday Celebration Rule 131
 - 46. The Short-Term Mission Rule 132
- 8. Ministry Rules for Volunteer Involvement 135**
- 47. The One Year Rule 135
 - 48. The Classes of Leaders Rule 137
 - 49. The Two for One Rule 139
 - 50. The Ministry Matching Rule 141
 - 51. The Ministry Positions Rule 143
 - 52. The Philosophy of Lay Ministry Rule 146
- 9. Ministry Rules for Programs 150**
- 53. The 80/20 Rule 151
 - 54. The Two-Humped Camel Rule 153
 - 55. The Rule of Fifteen 155
 - 56. The Goal Setting Rule 158
 - 57. The Laser Focus Rule 160
- 10. Ministry Rules for Staff and Leadership 162**
- 58. The Pastoral Staff Rule 163
 - 59. The Sabbatical Rule 166
 - 60. The Support Staff Rule 169
 - 61. The Apprentice Rule 171
 - 62. The Pastoral Tenure Rule 173
- 11. Ministry Rules for Facilities 177**
- 63. The Worship Capacity Rule 177
 - 64. The Fellowship Capacity Rule 180
 - 65. The Facility Balance Rule 182
 - 66. The Minimum Acreage Rule 183
 - 67. The Adequate Parking Rule 185
 - 68. The Restroom Capacity Rule 187
 - 69. The Building Stress Rule 188
 - 70. The First Building Rule 191
 - 71. The Building Age Rule 192
 - 72. The Playground Rule 195
 - 73. The Relocation Rule 197

12. Ministry Rules for Finances	200		
74. The Evangelism Budget Rule	201	79. The Mortgage and Debt Reduction Rule	210
75. The Salary and Benefits Rule	203	80. The Financial Stability Rule	211
76. The Ministry Budget Rule	204	81. The Fund-Raising Potential Rule	213
77. The Five Pockets Rule	206		
78. The Funding Vision Rule	208		
13. Ministry Rules for Change	216		
82. The Early Adopters Rule	216	86. The Soliciting Enhancements Rule	225
83. The Short-Term Change Rule	219	87. The Homeostasis Rule	226
84. The Means to the End Rule	221	88. The Discontentment Rule	228
85. The Good Math Rule	223	89. The Leaders First Rule	230
14. Ministry Rules for Revitalization	232		
90. The Monthly Prayer Rule	233	94. The Growth-Restricting Obstacles Rule	242
91. The Time for Renewal Rule	235	95. The High Morale Rule	245
92. The Successful Merger Rule	237	96. The Intervention Opportunity Rule	248
93. The Church Closure Rule	240		
15. Ministry Rules for Demographics	252		
97. The Ministry Area Rule	253	100. The Rule of Four	259
98. The Target Group Rule	255	101. The Isolation Rule	261
99. The Ethnic Identity Rule	257		
Notes	265		

Introduction

Rules, Laws, and Ratios

“How many visitors do we need to grow?” Jenny asked to no one in particular, as she slid into an overstuffed chair in the Petersons’ living room for the church’s quarterly leadership gathering.

“Well, technically, just one,” Mike responded while balancing his steaming cup of coffee.

“But according to our attendance records, last year we had over seventy visitors . . . and our worship attendance is down. So it seems like even seventy isn’t enough.”

“I guess it depends on how many of them stay,” Andy remarked as he joined the conversation.

“And how many of our own members stop coming,” Sylvia commented with an edge of disgust in her voice.

“Since we’re pondering imponderable questions, I’ve got one,” Andy said. “I’m trying to figure out how many workers we’re going to need this fall in the nursery. Any suggestions?”

“I think one should be plenty,” Mike responded. “Of course I’m not a young mom so I’m not sure what they would say. And if we’re bringing up questions about doing church, I’ve been wondering about how our budget should be broken down. For example, how much should we be spending for salaries, debt reduction, educational materials, mortgage, and outreach? With all this belt tightening, our finance committee will be rethinking our expenditures, and I’d like some guidelines on this.”

Listening to all these questions, the pastor couldn’t help but feel a twinge of anxiety in the pit of his stomach. He wished he knew the answers, but he wasn’t sure either.

Questions like these are similar to ones we have heard from pastors and other church leaders in our years of consulting. The specific people and situations may vary, but there is one basic question: Are there standard guidelines—or rules—for effective church ministry? The concerns, like church ministry, itself, cover a wide breadth of topics:

- How many staff members does our church need?
- How much should we be spending on our mortgage?
- How many visitors do we need to grow?
- How many people will our auditorium actually hold before attendance plateaus?
- How closely must we reflect our community for growth to occur?

For a number of years church leaders have analyzed, observed, and collected standard ways of measuring various aspects of church ministry. While many helpful guidelines are available, they are spread out in articles, books, and research papers too numerous for most church leaders to read, let alone remember or find when needed.

Thus we've written *What Every Pastor Should Know* in an effort to consolidate a number of these rules, ratios, and guidelines. Between us, we have led or contributed to more than eleven hundred national and local church seminars, conducted more than five hundred church consultations, and researched and written several dozen books on the broad topics related to congregational health, growth, and ministry. This book reflects those years of experience in an effort to present bite-sized insights and rules of thumb to church leaders on the go.

Think of this book as a reference to keep near your desk, providing you with basic guidelines for a fruitful ministry. Granted there are significant differences among churches, including their community, age, location on the institutional life cycle, denominational affiliation, and a host of other factors. These all contribute to the dynamic mix that makes for a healthy church. Thus while the rules of thumb in this book are not guaranteed to work in every situation, we believe they are generally reliable for most churches.

We don't claim that these are the *only* rules of thumb that exist. In fact, we encourage you to send us rules of thumb that have been helpful in your ministry. We may include them (with credit to you) in another volume.

If you're seeking an answer to a specific question or ministry area, turn to the contents where the rules are listed under each chapter title. We've tried to group the rules and guidelines into major categories, such as facilities, evangelism, education, and so on. Each category or chapter has a half dozen or so recommendations we think apply to most churches. Each rule includes a statement of the rule, followed by an introduction, an explanation, and then some practical ideas on how to apply the rule. If you don't have any particular questions in mind, it will be helpful simply to browse through the different rules and consider whether your church is (or could be) applying them. As you look at your church through the lens of these rules, you'll discover good ideas to improve your ministry.

Helping local churches fulfill the Great Commission is our passion. We hope this book proves to be a practical resource as you seek to make disciples in response to the call and example of Jesus Christ.

1

Ministry Rules for Evangelism and Outreach

The focus of this first chapter is evangelism and outreach because these topics are so important. Churches that do not focus on these ministries will die in just a few generations. Hoping and even praying that the harvest will be brought in on its own is simply wishful thinking. Yet many churches seem to base their activities on this naïve expectation. Howard Snyder observes, and we agree: “Evangelism is the first priority of the church’s ministry. . . . The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted.”¹

It is not just survival that should motivate a church to prioritize evangelism and outreach. It is the very call of Jesus—the head of the church—who concluded his earthly ministry with the words: “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19 Message).

In our experience, churches that prioritize evangelism and outreach in their prayers, in their member deployment, in their budget, in their staffing, and in their leadership training find that God blesses their endeavors with an abundant harvest. We know there is more to making disciples than just evangelism (thus the need for the remaining chapters of the book), but many churches that are not experiencing the potential harvest that is all around them are focusing on everything *but* evangelism.

So here are some guidelines for putting evangelism back on the to-do list for your church.

#1

THE GREAT COMMISSION CONSCIENCE RULE

At least three of every five elected church officers should have a “Great Commission conscience.”

■ Introduction

Is your church inward-focused or outward-focused? An inward-focused church spends its time, money, and people resources on self-centered activities. An outward-focused church invests its resources in others. An inward-focused church tends to focus on the past, an outward-focused church on the future. Inward-focused churches are motivated to perpetuate the institution; outward-focused churches are motivated to pursue a vision. Inward-focused churches serve the core constituency; outward-focused churches serve the community. Inward-focused churches use money to preserve the present; outward-focused churches use money to invest in the future. One good way to measure whether you are an inward- or outward-focused church is to measure your “Great Commission conscience.”

■ Explanation

What is a Great Commission conscience? It is an attitude that permeates the thinking and the decision-making process of a church. It is an attitude that sees people outside of Christ as lost and rejoices when new people join the church, especially if they are new believers. This attitude means disciple making is a priority and resonates with the Great Commission found in its various forms throughout Scripture. It is an attitude that sees missions as both “over there” and “right here.” It is an attitude that motivates both corporate and personal action in prayer, giving, and service for Great Commission results.

What is the Great Commission conscience that is necessary for effective outreach? Actually, there are two. The first is the *lay leader* Great Commission conscience: 60 percent. In other words, a church should have at least three of every five lay leaders (a voting majority) with such a conscience. The second is the *church membership* Great Commission conscience: 20 percent. That is, at least one of every five members of the church body has a similar Great Commission conscience. But how do you determine the Great Commission conscience of either? Simple. You ask them.

Here are ten statements concerning evangelism. If a leader or member of the congregation agrees with at least seven of the ten, it is an indication of a reasonably strong Great Commission conscience.

1. I see the primary purpose of our church as responding to the Great Commission.
2. I have participated in an outreach training event in the last year.
3. I have invited an unchurched friend or relative to a church event in the last six months.
4. I would support a motion to designate at least 10 percent of our church budget to outreach events and training activities.
5. I would prefer that the pastor call on nonmembers more often than on members.
6. I would be willing to take a new member or visitor home for dinner once every six months.
7. I have intentionally introduced myself to a new member or visitor in the past month.
8. I have talked with an unchurched person about my faith in the past three months.
9. I have prayed for a specific unchurched person in the past month.
10. I would be willing to be a pioneer in a new group or new church fellowship to help reach new people.

First, ask your church leaders (Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, deacons, ushers, elders, and others—anyone with a role or task responsibility in your church) to respond to these statements. Once you have collected the (anonymous) responses, determine what percentage of these people answered yes to seven or more questions. (It doesn't need to be the same seven questions.) If more than 60 percent of the total gave an affirmative answer to seven or more questions, you have leaders with a Great Commission conscience.

Next (if you're brave), some Sunday morning, ask your congregation to respond to the same ten statements. You're still looking for the percentage who respond yes to seven or more of the questions. If 20 percent or more respond favorably, you have a congregation with a Great Commission conscience. Research shows that when a group has a minimum of 20 percent who support a particular idea, this is the minimum number (or percentage) necessary to move the entire group forward. Less than 20 percent makes it an increasingly uphill struggle.

■ What You Can Do about It

If you determine that your leaders and congregation don't have a Great Commission conscience, what do you do? Here are a few ideas:

- Talk about it at your leadership meetings. It shouldn't be an indicting or judgmental discussion. It should simply be a discussion starter on some

important issues, namely, are we, as leaders, really committed to the Great Commission of making disciples? If so, how can we tell? Does the budget confirm our commitment? (See #74, The Evangelism Budget Rule.)

- Review the purpose and mission of your church. Is there a formal statement that describes your purpose? Do the church's activities, staff, budget, and program reflect the pursuit of this purpose or are they generally unrelated to it?
- Talk with the church board about how to build a stronger Great Commission conscience in the church.
- Review the other rules and recommendations in this book and discuss which of them might be applicable in your situation and how they could be implemented.
- Preach on the topic of the Great Commission and the mission of the church. Have small group leaders focus on this topic. Try a churchwide study of the book of Acts and its implications for your church.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,” said Christ, referring to himself (Luke 19:10 ESV). There is clear evidence that, when people grasp this passion, their churches come alive, reach people, and change lives. If your church has a Great Commission passion, God will bless most any efforts you make. Without that passion, it is unlikely that much of anything you do will be blessed.

#2

THE RECEPTIVITY RULE

For the most effective outreach, focus on receptive people.

■ Introduction

There is a principle found throughout Scripture that when applied will help every church better invest its resources for effectively spreading the gospel and reaching people for Christ. The principle is: Focus on receptive people.

■ Explanation

Not everyone is equally open and receptive to the good news of God's love expressed through Jesus Christ. Some people welcome the story with great joy and an open heart; others respond with disdain and a closed mind. While there is not much we can do to force open closed minds (only God can do that), there is much we can do when God connects us with people who have open hearts. The principle

■ What You Can Do about It

The Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Scale,³ often simply called a stress scale, provides a helpful way to identify transition events in a person's life. These events may be indicators of a person's openness or receptivity to religious conversion. (The number on the right is an indicator of the relative severity of the stress-producing event, on a scale of 1 to 100.)

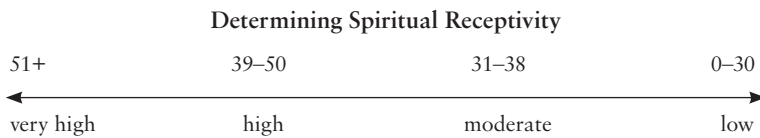
Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale

Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Death of close family member	63
Jail term	63
Severe personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Fired from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in family member's health	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Addition to family	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial status	38
Death of close friend	37
Change in number of marital arguments	35
Mortgage or loan over \$250,000	31
Foreclosure on mortgage	30
Change in work responsibilities	29
Son or daughter leaves home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse starts work	26
Start or finish school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours/conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in recreational habits	19
Change in social activities	18
Mortgage or loan under \$250,000	18
Easter season	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family gatherings	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violation of the law	11

When two or more of these events happen around the same time, the effect on the person is compounded. For example, a person who has experienced major physical problems (53) and is recently retired (45) would be more receptive than if either event had occurred separately.

Timing of the event is also a factor in determining receptivity. Events that have occurred more recently will have a greater effect on a person’s receptivity. The more distant the event, the less influential it is in determining a person’s present receptivity.

The scale below can be used to identify a person’s receptivity, based on the transition event values in his or her recent life history. In calculating the values on the stress scale, use 100 percent of the number if the event occurred in the person’s life within the past eighteen months. Use half the value if it occurred between eighteen and thirty-six months ago. Do not calculate a value if the event occurred more than three years ago.



Present the idea of receptivity in a small group or adult Bible class. The topic itself makes for a fascinating discussion. Then ask people in the group to think of several people they know in their social network. Have them add the total number of points from the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale, and then calculate (based on the instructions above) where they would be on the Determining Spiritual Receptivity scale. Obviously, a conversation such as this would lead to other issues, such as how individuals and the church can be responsive to particular events that create receptivity in a person’s life. It’s a good conversation to have.

#3 THE ENTRY EVENT RULE

Offer at least nine entry events per year
for effective community outreach.

■ Introduction

What pastor has not encouraged members to bring a friend to church next Sunday? And research tells us that friends bringing friends is the primary way churches grow. But in plateaued and declining congregations, most people don’t invite

friends to the church service on Sunday morning. Generally it's because members are unsure whether their unchurched friends will find the experience of interest or relevant to their life. And the risk of inviting a friend is not seen as worth the benefit. So how can you see more church members inviting more friends and relatives to church events?

■ Explanation

The remedy to the problem of members not inviting friends may seem counterintuitive. The answer is to offer more events. You can support your church members' disciple-making endeavors by increasing the number of events to which they can comfortably invite friends.

The key word is “comfortably.” Let's be honest. For most church members, it's uncomfortable to invite a friend or neighbor to a Sunday church service. It just seems too intrusive into the friend's life and creates an awkward situation if the friend says no. Many members feel it's likely to strain the relationship. Often it feels as if the member is using the relationship for the benefit of the church.

But when the church can provide events that are more likely to be interesting to the unchurched friend or family, then the assumption behind the invitation changes. Now the friend is the beneficiary. Consider the difference between an invitation to a neighbor family with two elementary-age kids to church, compared to an invitation to the same family to a Halloween party at the church. There are several benefits in promoting the latter. First, if the church member has never invited an unchurched person or family to church, inviting them to *anything* at church is going to take a monumental effort. But an invitation to a Halloween party is a much easier first step for the member. It's like a baby taking its first step—it's going to be small and tentative. But it's the first step toward more steps in the future. Kids who have fun at a Halloween party are more likely to want to return to other church-related events. And the parents are more likely to want to bring them.

These kinds of church-sponsored activities are called “entry events.” An entry event is a high-visibility, usually one-time activity or event, sponsored by the church and designed to be of interest to both church and non-church in the community. The goal of an effective entry event is to see a large number of unchurched adults and/or families attend the event with the idea of developing those contacts into deeper relationships over time, perhaps through an ongoing group or activity. (See #4, The Side-Door Ministry Rule.)

Here are a few examples of entry events to which members are likely to invite unchurched friends, neighbors, and relatives:

Holidays/Seasonal

- Valentine's Day father/daughter banquet
- Christmas pageant

- Halloween/harvest festival
- Fourth of July celebration
- Memorial Day picnic and parade

Sports

- Super Bowl Sunday
- Trip to local sports game
- Local Christian sports celebrity speaker

Family/Parenting Issues

- Discipline for Your Child seminar
- Guest speakers on relevant topics
- Beginning a Blended Family seminar
- Potty Training Your Youngster workshop

Marital Issues

- Getting Started in Your Marriage seminar
- Handling Divorce seminar
- Guest speakers on relevant topics

Special Interests

- Visit to local points of interest
- Picnic
- Welcome to the Neighborhood orientation
- Tax planning
- Parent/kid hike

Kids' Events

- Taffy pull
- Ice cream social
- Pet show and races
- Swimming party
- Pinewood Derby race

■ What You Can Do about It

Holding successful, high-visibility entry events is not only fun, it contributes an awareness of your church in the community and raises the corporate self-esteem of

the congregation. But keep in mind that successful entry events should be judged on the number of *unchurched* people who attend, not the number of church members.

Here are six recommendations for planning and conducting a successful entry event:

1. *Involve both church members and nonmembers in defining, planning, and conducting the event.* When people work together on a common task, relationships develop naturally. Even the planning of the event is a great way to involve non-churched friends and relatives.
2. *Publicize the event.* Distribute well-designed brochures and posters to get the word out about the big event. Provide a half-dozen copies of the brochure to each church member to give out to friends and relatives.
3. *Conduct the event in an appropriate location.* Think about whether you really want to hold your entry event on your church property. The chances are good that people not used to being on a church campus will be intimidated with the prospect of attending and might actually choose to avoid the event altogether if the location is a psychological barrier.
4. *The event should address a felt need.* The unchurched person's decision to attend your entry event will be based on his or her perception of the cost versus the benefit; the price versus the promise. Make sure the benefit of attending is worth the risk people are being asked to take.
5. *Opportunities for further involvement are communicated.* An entry event can be an extravagant waste of time and money if it doesn't lead to subsequent connections with many who attend. Think through the logical (and easy) next steps first-time contacts can take to continue a relationship with your church. Then make sure you communicate those steps.
6. *Names and contact information of attendees are obtained.* It will be up to your church to take the next step in nurturing a relationship with these new contacts. Name and email addresses are the easiest (and psychologically safest) way for attendees to give you their information. Offer to send them announcements of future events.

#4

THE SIDE-DOOR MINISTRY RULE

Churches should build a minimum of two side doors every year.

■ Introduction

The front doors of America's churches are closing. Traditionally people have come through the church's "front doors" to visit its worship service, education classes,

or special events. The primary way that most churches identify their prospective members is through visitors to these activities. However, in the past twenty years not only has the *number* of visitors been declining but also the *percentage* of visitors in relation to a church's total attendance has declined. To survive, let alone thrive, churches need to build "side doors" to create connections with the people in their community who will find faith.

■ Explanation

What are "side doors" for the church? Here is a definition:

Side door. A church-sponsored program, group, or activity in which a nonmember can become comfortably involved on a regular basis. It is an ongoing function in which a nonmember can develop meaningful and valued relationships with people in the church.⁴

The purpose of a side-door group or activity is to provide an opportunity for participants (church members and nonmembers) to develop friendships around something important they share in common. And relationships are the key to effective evangelism. It is through relationships that the gospel has primarily spread throughout the centuries, as well as today.

Here are just a few examples of actual side doors through which church members and nonmembers are developing friendships around common interests. Side doors have been created by churches for people who

ride motorcycles	want to get in better physical condition
have children in the military	wish to help homeless families
own RVs	play softball
are recent widowers	are interested in end-times
are newlyweds	have a bedridden parent
enjoy reading books	are raising grandchildren
are unemployed	are moms with teenage daughters
suffer from chronic pain	need help managing their finances
have husbands in jail	enjoy scrapbooking
are nominal Jews	are children in blended families
have spouses who are not believers	have children with a learning disability
are fishermen	are married to men who travel frequently
are single mothers	

enjoy radio-controlled airplanes	are divorced with no children
are pregnant	have a family member diagnosed
are affected by homosexuality	with cancer
struggle with chemical dependency	are single dads
are empty nesters	enjoy scuba diving
enjoy camping	are hearing impaired

And that's just a start!

About 10 percent of the churches in the United States are side-door churches in which “most of the new people who connect with the church made first contact through a ministry other than the worship service.”⁵ We also know that approximately 14 percent of churches in the United States are experiencing growth in their worship attendance. While we have not tried to correlate these two numbers, it would not be surprising to find a strong relationship between side-door churches and growing churches. Rev. Craig Williford, recalling his experience in leading two growing churches, says, “Our weekend services were very vital. But the side-door ministries produced more evangelism and brought far more people into our church.”⁶

But why are side doors necessary today for churches to reach out and evangelize effectively? It is because the longer a person has been a Christian, the fewer friends he or she has who are *not* Christians. Eventually many long-term Christians have no real friends outside their church or faith. Put another way, the outreach potential (and thus the growth potential) of a church that is comprised of mostly long-term Christians is quite limited compared to a church with many new believers. If your church is made up mostly of people who have been Christians for more than five years, you need to create some side doors where people can develop new friendships with people outside the church. A good rule of thumb is to create at least two side doors per year.

■ What You Can Do about It

So how does a church begin creating side doors—new groups, new classes, new activities—where members and nonmembers can build friendships? First, realize that side doors form around people's passions—topics or experiences that people care deeply about. Successful side doors connect people who share a common passion. Here are some guidelines for creating new side doors:

- *Find the passion.* Everyone in your church cares deeply about something—sometimes it's a number of things. Generally such passion falls into one of two categories: recreational or developmental. The first relates to how people like to spend their free time, which can range from making apple pies to studying zoology. The second category, developmental, relates to major life issues, which usually center around health, finances, relationships, or employment.

- *Hold an “exploratory” meeting.* Invite three or more people who share the same passion to a brainstorming session to discuss the idea of your church starting a new ministry for people who share the passion. Include an announcement in the church bulletin inviting interested worshipers to the meeting. Explain that participants in the meeting are not being asked to get involved in the project, just to share their ideas and brainstorm possibilities for a new ministry. Gather the group, perhaps over a meal, and explore the possibilities of your church starting such a ministry. Explain that one of the purposes of the ministry is to build friendships with nonmembers through connecting around a common interest. Let the meeting take its course and see what kind of interest is generated. If there is any enthusiasm, take the next step.
- *Research other churches.* Probably there are churches that have already developed a creative ministry in the area you are considering. If the brainstorming group is interested and willing, ask individuals to go online and search out any other churches that might have a ministry for people with that particular interest. Then compare notes with others who have done similar research.
- *Dream.* At your next brainstorming meeting, discuss what such a ministry might look like in your church five years from today. Assess the enthusiasm of the group in taking the next step to explore a new ministry. Don’t expect 100 percent success in all exploratory gatherings. If there aren’t at least three people with the desire to help start a new ministry, put the idea on the back burner. You’re looking for a spark of enthusiasm that might catch hold of a group of dreamers in your church.
- *Make a time line.* If there are at least three people willing to help birth a new side-door ministry in your church, work on a time line with dates and events for the next year. Agree that in one year the progress will be evaluated on this new ministry idea. And discuss how the church can be most supportive in this new initiative.

There is, of course, much involved in creating a fully functioning side-door ministry.⁷ But a majority of effective, growing churches today have a wonderful variety of such ministries that grew out of the passion of one or more members and have become well-traveled pathways to life in Christ and the church.

#5

THE UNCHURCHED FRIENDS RULE

For the church to grow, each worshiper should have an average of nine or more unchurched friends or family members.

■ Introduction

Research demonstrates that the most effective way to reach new people for Christ and the church is through the social networks of members' family and friends. This means that, for a church to reach out effectively into its community, members must be in regular contact with unchurched friends and family members.

■ Explanation

There is a direct relationship between the number of unchurched friends and family your average church member has and your church's potential for growth or decline. The basic rule of thumb is that if the people in a church have an average of three or fewer non-churched friends and family members living in your ministry area, the church will most likely decline. If the average is around six, the church will likely be plateaued. But if the average number of non-churched friends and family members is nine or more, then the church is very likely to be growing.

New churches are often silently empowered by the implications of this rule due to the large social networks that attendees have with non-churched people in the community. These new churches tend to reach people through conversion growth, and new believers in younger churches typically know twelve or more people who are outside a local church. As a church ages, however, members tend to spend more of their discretionary time in church-related activities and with church-related people, thus gradually losing contact with people outside the life of the church ministry. Over time, with fewer contacts, there is decreasing potential for effective outreach to occur.

■ What You Can Do about It

Activating outreach through the social networks of present members and worshipers is key for effective evangelism in a local church. Pastors can help their regular attendees discover their networks by using the following strategy:

1. Design a sermon series on a theme, such as "Making Friends for Jesus." A six-part series seems to work the best since it is long enough to cover the subject but short enough not to lose people's interest. Use passages that show how others invited friends and family members to find Jesus. John 1:35–51 tells how Andrew brought his brother Peter to Christ, and Philip brought his friend Nathanael. Acts 16:11–40 tells two delightful stories of how Lydia and her family were led to Christ and how Paul and Silas brought the Philippian jailer and his family to faith.
2. In the final sermon of the series, ask attendees to make a list of all their non-churched friends and family members. One way is to distribute two

- 3x5" cards to everyone in attendance. Ask them to make two identical lists of friends, neighbors, and associates who live within a ten- or twenty-mile radius of the church and are not currently active in a church. Then challenge the congregation to commit to praying for the people on their list at least once each week for the coming year. As a sign of their commitment to pray, ask attendees to place the other card in the offering plate as it goes by. Be sure to tell them you will not contact the people on their list but that you want to know how many people your church will be praying for in the coming year. Collect the cards, asking those in attendance to keep the other card in their Bible, purse, or a place where they will see it and remember to pray.
3. After collecting the cards, add up the total number of people listed and divide by the number of cards you receive. This will tell you the average number of non-churched friends and family members of your people. Compare this to the rule above to evaluate the effect of members' existing social networks on the growth potential of your church.
 4. The Sunday following this activity, announce the total number of people your church will be praying for in the coming year. Then on a regular basis (perhaps once a month), remind the congregation of their prayer commitment.
 5. Once each quarter, the church should host an event appropriate for your people to invite one or more of those they are remembering in prayer. These could include a Christmas Eve candlelight service, Easter sunrise service, alternative Halloween gathering, summer outing (camping, swimming, picnics, for example). Throughout the year, if and when friends and family come to Christ and your church, celebrate the occasions with the entire church body!

#6

THE EVANGELISM TRAINING RULE

Churches that are effective in reaching their community train at least 10 percent of their people in friendship evangelism each year.

■ Introduction

Encouraging—and equipping—people to connect with non-churched friends and relatives is just the beginning of effective evangelistic outreach in a church. But it is a very important beginning and the right place to start. Churches that are

successful in reaching new people for Christ focus on training a minimum of 10 percent of their people each year in friendship evangelism.

■ Explanation

It takes time to build the “evangelistic consciousness” of a congregation. This is particularly true when a church has seen little or no conversion growth in the past several years. While church leaders may desire to train many people quickly, the fact is in most churches people are not ready to participate in a new evangelistic program.

Because of this it is important to begin slowly by focusing on around 10 percent of your adults. This is about the number who will be open to nurturing more meaningful relationships with their non-Christian friends and relatives. By starting with this receptive 10 percent, your evangelistic emphasis will get off to a good start. The next year other adults will have heard about the good experiences from the first year’s training and be open to taking part.

Since new members and new believers tend to have more unchurched contacts than do long-term members, invite newcomers to join in the training the second year. Newcomers also have an excitement about the church and want to spread the word in any way possible. By recruiting and training new people, you will see the evangelistic outreach of your church grow quickly.

When a church has annually trained 10 percent of its members for five years, it reaches a turning point—half of the congregation has now completed the training. A new attitude and sensitivity toward newcomers becomes evident throughout the congregation. And as the church continues to train 10 percent per year, dramatic new life and enthusiasm take root as a growing majority of members become interested in reaching new people for Jesus.

There are many good books and study guides available for evangelism training. We recommend keeping the course a regular part of the educational process in your church. And don’t forget to include it in the new members classes.

■ What You Can Do about It

Here are some important things to consider as you plan your evangelism training. First, realize that there is much baggage out there about the “E” word. Somehow along the way, the word *evangelism* came to be associated with knocking on strangers’ doors, passing out tracts on street corners, and generally participating in activities that induce sweaty palms, stomach butterflies, and too-tight collars. If you expect to have people in your church sign up for evangelism training, realize there are many misconceptions.

Using the word *evangelism* is not a hill you need to climb. The very word is likely to inhibit your goal. In fact, as much as it may surprise you, the word *evangelism*

is nowhere to be found in the Bible. (The word *evangelist* is found only twice, once in Acts 21:8, referring to Philip who seems to have a specific function or role as an evangelist, and in Ephesians 4:11, referring to a particular spiritual gift that has been given to a limited number of members of the body of Christ.)

At the same time, the call to spread the Good News permeates Scripture. Christ made clear this priority: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15 ESV). Just because you don’t find the word in Scripture doesn’t mean we’re not called to make disciples. In fact, to make disciples is the ultimate marching order from Christ to his followers. It’s just that the word *evangelism* is not the flag under which this process must fly.

We should realize the traditional methods in which many of us have been trained to “do evangelism” are not necessarily the only ways—or even the best ways—to make disciples. Here is a brief description of three different approaches to the evangelistic process:

1. *Teacher-Student Approach*. This approach views evangelism as a one-way transmission of information from a sender to a receiver. The assumption is that people will give the correct response when given the correct information. If the receiver does not do what is expected, it is because the sender did not transmit the information in the correct manner.
2. *Salesperson-Customer Approach*. This approach views evangelism as a process of manipulation. The message might be an emotional appeal or it might be leading a person through a set of carefully prepared questions. The techniques of high-pressure salesmanship are based on this model of communication.
3. *Friend-Friend Approach*. This third approach views evangelism as a two-way interaction between equals. It is based on the recognition that no two people see things in exactly the same way and is an effort to look at things from the perspective of the receiver. This model does not rule out a desire to share one’s convictions but the desire is motivated by an interest in the other person and believing he or she would want to hear our conviction.

Which of these three approaches do you think come to mind when most people hear the word *evangelism*? If you said the second, you’re right. However, research indicates that 81 percent of the people who make a decision for Christ because of the Salesperson-Customer approach drop out of church involvement within a year.⁸

Here’s another interesting, but not surprising, result from the research: The third approach is by far the most effective in making disciples—new believers and active members of a local church. Of those who make a commitment to Christ through this approach, 78 percent stay active and involved.

So the *approach* to the process of disciple making is important. But obviously the content is as well. Here are four simple yet profound questions that your evangelism training should help church members answer:

1. How has being a Christian made a difference in my life?
2. What does it mean to be a Christian (in words understandable to a non-Christian)?
3. Why would I want my friend to be a Christian and member of my church?
4. How does a person become a Christian (in words understandable to a non-Christian)?

We recommend you spend several weeks in your training on each question—discussing, researching, sharing ideas, role playing, and reflecting on it. When your people feel comfortable with their answers, they will be better equipped to share their faith in a natural, “friend to friend” manner.

#7

THE NUMBER OF CONVERSIONS RULE

Churches that train members to reach out to unchurched friends and relatives see about 12 percent of these contacts come to Christ.

■ Introduction

New people will be reached for Christ as a church regularly trains its people and encourages evangelistic conversations with the non-churched. In most situations, these churches will see around 12 percent of their evangelistic contacts make a profession of faith over a five-year period.

■ Explanation

Effective evangelism happens when churches intentionally train, encourage, and resource their regular attendees to connect with their non-churched friends and family members. This takes place in three distinct steps:

1. A regular, ongoing evangelistic training class or small group is conducted that involves at least 10 percent of a congregation. The class/group focuses on practical ways to build friendships with those who are outside of Christ but within the natural networks of those who are already in the church.
2. Each participant lists the names of people he or she knows and commits to praying for and building a relationship with them during the coming twelve months.

3. Throughout the year, the church offers a minimum of four “seeker events” that focus directly on connecting newcomers to Christ and his church. As each event is offered, those who have been praying and building relationships with people outside the church try to bring them to the events.

When such a process occurs on a regular basis, about 12 percent of those non-churched friends and relatives will make a commitment to Christ and his church. Here is an example:

Number of church members trained	12
Average non-churched friends/family per member	8
Total number of people on prayer lists	96
Approximate percentage of people who come to faith	12%
Number of people who come to faith	12

■ What You Can Do about It

Here are a few suggestions to empower effective evangelism in your church:

1. Ask yourself, Do we have an intentional plan to train, encourage, and resource our current attendees to build relationships with their friends and family members? Churches with an intentional plan always do better than those without a plan.
2. Have your attendees make a list of their friends and family members whom they would love to see as part of the church. (See #5, The Unchurched Friends Rule.)
3. From these lists determine the total number of friends and family members identified, and multiply that number by 12 percent. This will give you an idea of how many potential new believers you may have in the following twelve months if there is a special love and prayer emphasis on these people.
4. If this number of people come to faith and your church in the coming year, what do you need to do now to prepare for them? For example, if you could potentially have twenty-four new believers join your church this year, how will you assimilate them into the family? Do you need a new adult Sunday school class? How about several new small groups?

By beginning a new class, small group, or welcoming process *before* these people come to Christ, you are acting on faith that God will bless the prayers of your attendees, as well as their invitations and conversations, by bringing new people to Christ and your church.