**Three Ways to Reach Out in This Unique Moment in Time**

**By Kevin Harney**

In this moment, we need to reach people where they are, connect with them online or virtually, and be intentional to bring Jesus to people in creative ways.

Our world is changing rapidly. COVID-19 has brought uncertainty, economic turmoil, fear of sickness, and new realities like "sheltering at home." Six weeks ago, most of us had never heard terms like "flattening the curve.” Our world was a different place.

With this in mind, it is helpful to reflect on some practical and effective ways to continue the work of the Great Commission in the midst of a new reality that none of us asked for or saw coming.

Churches seeking to do effective Organic Outreach (evangelism) often seek to draw people onto their campus and invite the world to come to them. An invitation to a great church event will be an effective approach someday, but not this day.

In this moment, we need to reach people where they are, connect with them online or virtually, and be intentional to bring Jesus to people in creative ways.

This means we need to adapt as we share our faith and live as God’s missionary people.

For this to happen, putting on great events at a church will not be enough. The role of leaders in the church is to equip all of God’s people for works of ministry (Eph. 4: 11-13). Here are three simple and familiar ways to do outreach in this unique moment in time.

Pray with People

We should all call, text, or video chat with friends and family members who are not yet followers of Jesus. When we connect with them, we should ask the profound theological question, "How are you doing?" Then, listen. Listen well.

When they talk about a fear, anxiety, or deep sorrow, we can politely say something like, “Thanks for sharing that with me. No pressure at all, but I would be honored to pray for you right now if that is OK with you.”

I have asked non-believers that question countless times over the past 30 years and have only had four people say no. And, they said, “No thank you.” They were not angry and I did not experience persecution.

But hundreds and hundreds of non-Christians have been glad to have me pray for them. In many cases, they have tears in their eyes after being prayed for. There is often a powerful sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence after these moments of prayer. And, in many cases, it leads to spiritual conversations and questions.

In a time when there is so much uncertainty and fear, prayer is needed and often gladly received. Get in the habit of asking, "Can I pray for you?" When you do pray, don't turn this moment into a sermon or gospel presentation wrapped in the facade of prayer. Just pray. Cry out to God for help. Use normal language. And pray in Jesus’ name.

Community Service with Gospel Engagement

There are unique ways to reach our community in this moment. Although most parts of the United States and world are asking people to stay home, there are still many needs that we can help meet.

If any church takes time to call their local police, fire, and political leaders, they will discover that there are needs that they could use volunteers to help with. Food donations are needed for local programs, shut-in people need someone to shop for them, etc.

Of course, we need to follow the guidelines given for our community, but people who are healthy and able can still offer help. As a church engages in serving the vulnerable and at-risk people in their community, the door opens for a Christian witness.

Our church has a food pantry year-round. Our local authorities are thrilled that we are still offering this service and the need has increased the deeper we go into the COVID-19 epidemic.

As the economy struggles, more people need this service. Our team members (mostly volunteers) wear gloves, face masks, follow the prescribed guidelines, and they also offer prayer and words of encouragement. Of course, this is offered, not forced.

In addition, each bag of groceries includes a little booklet with a month of devotional reflections.

One key is that we need to train everyone to engage naturally in spiritual conversations when the door is open. Even with social distancing, people can talk on the phone, chat from six feet away, and share their stories of God’s presence and power in their life today.

What better time than now to equip follower of Jesus to articulate the life-changing good news of how Jesus gave his life for our sins and how we can receive his amazing grace by faith in his name.

As we to serve our community in this unique time, we need to be ready to give bread for them to eat, and also offer the living bread of Jesus. We can give a cup of water, but need to point people to the Living Water of the Savior. We can give clothes to keep people warm, but they also need to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

We can share our kindness and companionship, but a relationship with the Savior is what every heart is truly longing for. What we give is temporary; what Jesus offers is eternal!

Learn to ask good questions and listen

Many families are spending more time together now than they have in years (or ever). Rather than retreat to separate rooms and binge watch season after season of streaming shows, why not recapture the art of conversation?

Also, friends are looking each other up and reconnecting online and on the phone. What an ideal time to ask good question and listen. We can ask simple questions like, “How are you doing?” “What are you feeling these days?” and “Are there ways I can help you through this time?” We can also go a bit deeper.

Why not spend time asking questions like: What are your beliefs about God? What is your perspective on Christians? What do you think about my faith? Did you grow up in a religious home…what was that like for you? Could you share your personal journey of faith (or lack thereof)? What do you think about Jesus?

Another way to walk with others is learning to hear their stories, listen to their hearts, and discern where they are on their spiritual journeys. Too many Christians are worried they don’t have all the answers.

As you ask questions and let people share their perspectives and experiences, you will learn more about where they are in terms of faith. It might even lead to them asking you to share your answers to the same kinds of questions. It will certainly create spaces for the Holy Spirit to enter in and move in ways we never could.

Down the road, we will reengage people in church events and outreach programs. That’s fine! But today, we need to continue engaging in the Great Commission in some familiar but tailored ways. Then, when COVID-19 and sheltering at home are less central in our lives, let’s remember this moment and add these outreach practices to the flow of our lives going forward.

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The Exchange is a part of CT's Blog Forum.

The above article, “Three Ways to Reach Out in This Unique Moment in Time,” was written by Kevin Harney.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2020/april/three-ways-to-reach-out-in-this-unique-moment-in-time.html>

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This article may not be written by an Apostolic author, but it contains many excellent principles and concepts that can be adapted to most churches. As the old saying goes, “Eat the meat. Throw away the bones.”