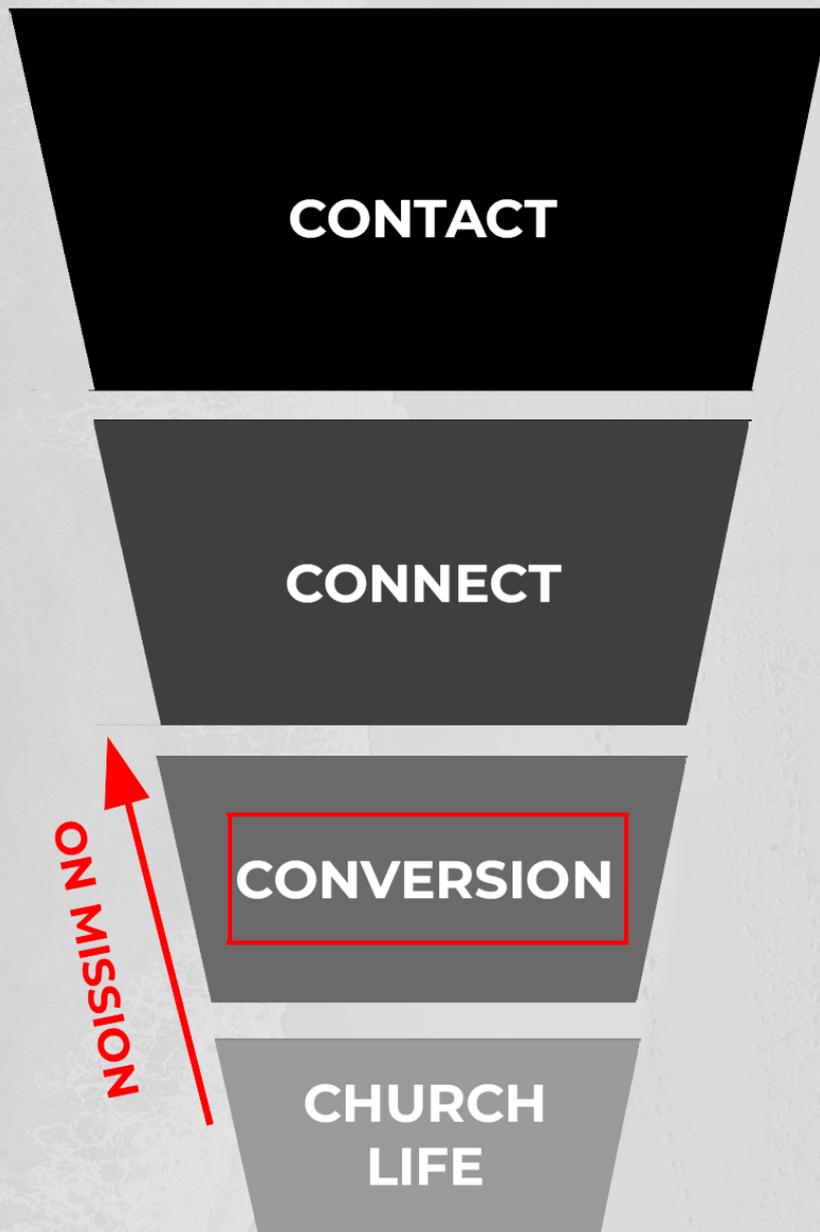




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CONVERSIONS



As we think about how to move people from being interested in knowing Jesus to investigating and eventually coming to repentance and faith, there are three areas to consider.

- 1) Main Gatherings
- 2) Evangelistic Courses
- 3) Small Groups.

1. Main Gatherings

Even in an increasingly secular age where church attendance has rapidly declined, for so many people their first contact with Christianity is still by attending church. What's more, when people within your church want to introduce their friends to Jesus, the first event that comes to mind is your main gathering. So, we need to think about how we make these main gatherings both accessible and engaging to those inside and outside the church. Regardless of what your philosophy of church is, consider 1 Corinthians 14. The Apostle Paul says:

"If the whole church assembles together and all are speaking in other tongues and people who are outsiders or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all are prophesying and some unbeliever or outsider comes in, he is convicted by all and is called to account by all. The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, 'God is really among you.'"

At its most basic, Paul is saying here that he wants anyone to be able to walk into Christian gatherings and not be freaked out by what's happening, to hear the Gospel, and recognise that God is at the center of what's happening - not us.

Prior to launching your church plant, think about your gathering. Work with your launch team to determine the negotiables and non-negotiables to build a gathering that leads regulars to think "I wish I'd brought my friend to this" and leads visitors to think "I understand who Jesus is, and I know what he expects of me." This isn't always easy but it's definitely worth the effort. It's not about professionalism. It's about prayerfully anticipating and shaping what we do each week around the assumption that church members will have brought their friends or family who they've been praying for and witnessing to (sometimes for years).

If you've ever invited someone who isn't a Christian to church, you'll know how nerve-wracking it is. You'll see every weird thing that Christians do, like the insider language and the things that don't go smoothly. Some of those things we don't want to change and some things we just have to live with, but there are many things in our control that we can do to make the Gospel clearly heard, and make Christian community attractive.

Here are 9 guidelines MBM Church in Sydney uses as they think about building a culture of mission in their main gatherings:

Music and sound. Our teams work really hard to lead our churches with a quality of music that is both accessible and engaging. This can be done with a one-man band, and it can be done with a team of musicians. Whatever you've got in your church, we just want what happens with music to contribute to everything else that'll happen that day.

Venue. Wherever it is, it's got to be clean, presentable and warm. Get your set-up teams there early to make sure everything's in order, so you can be ready to engage with guests half an hour before the start of church.

The service leader. They need to be friendly, warm and engaging. This doesn't always come naturally to people, so you're going to need to work with them so they know how to relate to your people from the front. Again, it's about being accessible, relational and engaging.

Kids. They can never be an afterthought. If you do kids' talks, they need to be engaging and relevant to the parents as well as the kids. Kids programs need to be clearly explained and accessible for the whole family, and the leaders need to be willing to engage with parents in a way that reassures them that their kids are in a safe place.

Church notices. Keep them tight and to the point, no more than 3, have something visual to complement the announcement, and always be clear about the one place to sign up or get more info.





Make sure your up-front ministries like Bible readers, prayers, service leaders **reflect the ethnic and cultural demographic of the area**. If, for example, your community is primarily from the South of Europe, but all you've got up front are white anglo males it's not a reflection of your church. People are more likely to invite friends along when the people up front reflect those in attendance. Plan ahead for this.

Morning tea or supper. We can do better than a packet of biscuits and cheap tea and coffee. If we have a special guest coming to our house, we'd make sure to serve something fresh. It doesn't have to be expensive, but bite-sized pieces of fresh fruit and vegies, homemade cakes, or a well presented platter will go a long way. There will be people in your church who love serving in this way, so equip them and unleash them to provide food that, again, represent the culture that you're in. This tells the visitor that they are worth the effort, and it motivates the church to invite people along to experience a unique kind of generosity, that is itself a reflection of the generous nature of God.

Preaching. Whoever's preaching needs to work hard at being as clear as a bell. If you want people to invite family and friends along to church, complicated concepts need to be unpacked. It's got to make sense to someone who doesn't have a background in church. It's not about making the Word of God simplistic, it's about clearly articulating the good news of our Lord Jesus, so everyone can understand why he is worthy of their life.

It's all about words. Remember that Christians use phrases, terms, expressions and words that people outside the church have never heard before. So everyone up-front needs to work at using culturally appropriate language to express Biblical truth. Words build worlds, and they also build confidence when they're clear, accurate and culturally appropriate. So, for example, don't refer to newcomers as 'non-Christians', call them 'guests' or 'visitors'.

Every single one of those nine guidelines is size independent. Start this church plant the way you want to continue. Set the tone by working through these principles with your launch team prior to launching.



2. Evangelistic Courses.

Evangelistic courses don't replace our desire to train people to share the Gospel - they sit alongside it. They're an essential part of helping everyone in the body to introduce their friends to Jesus and build a culture of mission. It's not just about running them - although that's a good start. They provide an amazing opportunity to train and mobilise people as we plan for them, talk about them, advertise them, equip people to invite their friends, have people see and experience positive Gospel conversations, and helped in how to follow people up afterwards. It's relatively easy to run these courses, but it's not necessarily easy to run them well.

As you think about your church plant's evangelistic courses, consider the following:

Which course will you run? Keep in mind how hard it will be for people to commit, and therefore how hard it will be to invite someone. An invitation to a course that goes for 10-12 weeks is a big commitment. You're better off finding one that goes for between 4-6 weeks. People can commit better to that timeframe, and you should be able to run this many weeks in a really engaging way.

How will you run it? It's a huge effort to run these courses. But they're crucial to run. When you run it, make it as inviting, comfortable and hospitable as possible. If you can run it in someone's home, brilliant. As you run it, keep thinking through how you engage the gifts of the whole body.

How often should you run it? Evangelistic courses are resource-intensive, and so it's not going to be realistic in a new church plant to run four per year, as well as the other parts of your plumbing you've got in place. But it's generally good practice to run them at least twice a year, and in the alternate terms (if possible) run something that helps those who are keen to keep asking questions and engaging with Jesus. However often you decide to run it, the key thing is to set a date, make it clear, advertise it well and then you absolutely have to run it. Evangelistic courses are one of the hardest things to get RSVP's for, because people may delay committing until the last minute, or may pull out on the night. There's nothing you can do about that. But you still need to run it. So when you're planning the event, invite Christians along. They'll not only make non-Christians feel more comfortable (as they won't feel like the only ones there), but you'll also be able to build confidence in the Christians as they see the course run.

What are people's next steps? Not everyone who comes along is going to want to keep exploring, but you want to have a plan for those who do. Alongside this, it's very rare for people to become Christians in those first 4-6 weeks. Even if they do, they need to be disciplined through their early months of being a Christian. So running the event isn't enough. You need to consider where to next. Have someone lined up who can keep meeting with them, and consider what material they can use next as they keep exploring the Gospel.

So they're the things you need to consider:

What will you run?

How will you run it?

How often will you run it?

What are their next steps?



3. Small Groups

You need to instill in people the biblical truth that God uses ordinary people to be his instruments in this world. People like us, who are rough around the edges, full of doubts and fears. Feeling like that is OK! Our confidence is in God and His Gospel. One of the key ways we can help people work through these doubts, and grow in their confidence of being a disciple who is passionate about making other disciples, is through the small group (or whatever we call it) structures within our churches. Small groups are a natural 'glass house' for growth. Utilise them to build people who encourage each other to become those who cannot help speaking about what they have seen and heard, having confidence that God is with them as they do it.

The small group structures within our churches will be instrumental in helping foster a culture of care for one another and building mission heat. They're not the only place this happens, but they're an important piece of plumbing in the life of the church. Amongst other benefits, small groups allow us to:

Strengthen and reinforce the vision and DNA of the whole church in a more intimate, relational setting, allowing for prayer and sharing around how each person is going in their relationship with Jesus, and in praying and sharing Jesus with their friends and family.

Provide a natural place for interactive learning, leadership development, and pastoral care. There are things that can be asked and done in smaller groups that can't be done in the whole, particularly when hospitality sits at the center of a small group.

Invite not-yet-believers to social events in people's houses, increasing the opportunities for further conversations and a glimpse for the outsider into Christian community.

Some small groups drive towards **innovative and missional endeavours** that engage with the community at large, and which the whole church will be able to get on board with. Small groups, by nature of being smaller and more relational, are able to try things more easily with less risk.

As we think about mission in our church, we need to keep considering how it is that we nurture that culture of mission within all aspects of our church life - Sundays, preaching, our evangelistic courses and our small group structures - all the while reminding people of the need for mission and, simultaneously, that they don't have to do it alone.



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