

NET Fishing

Weaving a Network of Evangelistic Teams

by Philip M. Bickel

© 2008 Philip M. Bickel

Contents

1. You Made the Team	3
2. Evangelism Is a Team Sport	13
3. Fishing with a NET	20
4. Door2Hope	29
5. Weaving Your NET	38

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Bickel is Missions Pastor at St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota. He has served as a church planter, missionary, media producer, professor, writer, consultant, and publisher. He earned the Doctor of Missiology degree at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author of over 100 titles on evangelism and missions. He can be contacted at pbickel@smlcb.org or 952.931.5276.

CHAPTER 1

You Made the Team

The purpose of this book is to help you, your family, and your church to share the love of Christ more fearlessly, fervently, and effectively than ever before. The strategy for accomplishing this lofty goal is called NET Fishing. NET stands for network of evangelistic teams.

In John Stott's book on preaching, *Between Two Worlds*, Stott asks, "How long does it take to write a sermon?" His answer: "All your life." Stott is right. Every sermon is the culmination of everything God has taught a preacher up to that moment. In the same way, if you asked me, "Phil, how long did it take you to think up the idea of NET fishing?", I would answer, "It is something God has been teaching me all my life, and I still have more to learn."

A decade ago, I would have described my philosophy of Christian outreach in this way: "Use multi-pronged evangelism. Have as many kinds of fishing lures and bait in the water as possible." I still believe in a multi-pronged approach, but I now unite all the varied methods of outreach under a single theme: "Fish with a NET."

Chapters 1-5 of this book present the foundational principles of NET Fishing and report how they have developed into a ministry called Door2Hope. Chapters 6-14 describe evangelistic opportunities and methods that can be used in nine different areas of congregational ministry. In conclusion, Chapter 15 contains a series of questions to help you develop your network of evangelistic teams on three levels: personal, congregational, and regional.

Not only is NET Fishing something God has been teaching me all my life, but he is still teaching me. NET Fishing is a work in progress. Therefore, this book also is a work in progress. I update it every year or so as I dialog with four sets of people.

1. The staff and members of St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota, where I am privileged to serve.
2. Other church workers, congregations, and ministries in the Twin Cities and Minnesota.
3. Students in the Master of Arts in Christian Outreach (MACO) program and the Doctor of Ministry in Christian Outreach program at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN.
4. Pastors, missionaries, and lay people in other parts of God's mission field.

I am grateful to all these folks for how they have helped develop NET Fishing as they put it into practice. I welcome your input as you experiment with NET Fishing wherever you may be. You can write me at partners@door2hope.org to let us know what is happening, what you are

learning, and the partnerships you are developing.

Teams Need Players

This book is all about people working together in teams and teams working together in networks. But you can't have a team without players. So, this chapter focuses on you and other individuals who make up a team.

Do you know what it's like to be chosen last — or nearly last — to play a game? Have you ever been cut from a team? Have you ever wanted to join a club or group and been snubbed? Sooner or later all of us experience rejection. We draw negative conclusions about ourselves.

- I don't have what it takes.
- I'm not good enough to make the cut.
- I'm always a day late and a dollar short.

Many Christians feel the same way about sharing their faith in Christ the Savior. When it comes to the "game" of witnessing, many of us doubt that God wants us blundering around out on the field. So we sit on the bench.

Let's try an exercise. Read aloud the sentence below seven times, loudly and proudly.

God chose me
to be a gifted, valuable member
of his team of witnesses.

How do you feel about voicing this declaration? Did you have trouble getting the words out? Could you believe what you were saying? The purpose of this chapter is to convince you that every word of that statement is true.

You Have Been Chosen

We who believe in the Triune God and believe that Christ is our Redeemer and Savior, have indeed been chosen by God. No doubt about it! Our certainty is based on promises like this: "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

"But"—you may object—"I don't doubt that God chose me for salvation. What I question is whether God has chosen me to be a witness." I invite you to open your eyes to a parallel truth: Just as surely as God chose you and me to be saved, he has indeed chosen you and me for his witnessing team. The Bible tells us so in verses like these.

Jesus said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

Peter declares: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The Lord has not left you straggling on the side lines while other kids get to play. These promises are the equivalent of God looking you in the eye and saying, “I pick you!” He wants you on his team. He has chosen you. He leaves no Christian behind. He needs every single one of us in the game. Claim the above promises as your call to the team. When Satan accuses you, “Who do you think you are to speak for God?”, throw God’s Word in his face: “Jesus chose me to declare God’s praises and to bear fruit!”

You Are Gifted

When I was a kid, there was a baseball game in the vacant lot behind my back yard almost every evening of the summer. Although I loved baseball, it was intimidating to go out there and play, because, compared to the ball players in my neighborhood, I was short on athletic prowess. When we chose up sides, I was often among the last ones chosen. Many times I went home at dusk feeling like a klutz and a failure. Eleven years old, and I was already a has-been.

This is exactly how many of us feel about witnessing: “God may have chosen me for his evangelism team. But gifted? That’s not me. I have no witnessing prowess. If I’m on the team, I’m only a bench player, at best. God would only send me out on the field when he’s desperate, when he’s got no one else available.”

Such pessimism comes from the Enemy of our Souls, who is also the Enemy of God’s mission. Have you noticed how so many Christians define witnessing or evangelism as something that they can’t do? For example:

- My sister Cheryl visits sick people in hospitals and points them to Christ. I can’t do that. So I’m not an evangelist.
- My pastor preaches Law and Gospel clearly and expertly. I’m not trained to do that. So God can’t use me.
- My neighbor Bruce witnesses to people coming out of bars at 2 AM. I’m not comfortable doing that. So I can’t witness.

Satan uses our narrow thinking to bind and contain us and keep us sitting on the bench. I’ve made this mistake. I bet you have too. Meanwhile, God defines evangelism and witnessing as the things that you can do, the very things that you like to do, and even those things that you long to do, but wonder whether you’re able to do them.

Peter Drucker said, “Effective management is the productive use of strengths.” What makes a manager or coach of an athletic team truly great, is the ability to recognize the strengths and limitations of each player and then to place them in the very situations where they are most likely to succeed. This is what the Lord does with us better than any human coach can do. The Lord Almighty is not only our Coach, he is our Creator. He designed and hand-crafted every single one of us. You are a gifted player on God’s witnessing team, because he has gifted you

with strengths, and he calls you to play the “game” of witnessing in the very situations where he can use you best.

Here are some ways to discover the strengths which the Lord has given to you.

1. Spiritual Gifts

We are gifted players on God’s witnessing team, because he has made us all members of the Body of Christ, endowed by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:4-8).

The Body of Christ is God’s team of witnesses, and each of us is a player on the team. The Holy Spirit gives to every Christian one or more gifts. None of us sit on the bench. Whatever we have is to be used for the benefit of others, both Christians and not-yet-Christians. Here is a list of the spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:7-13 and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Helping	Intercession	Faith (forward-thinking vision)
Knowledge	Hospitality	Administration
Exorcism	Shepherding	Exhortation (counseling)
Mercy	Evangelist	Serving
Teaching	Generosity	Discernment
Missionary	Leadership	Speaking in tongues
Proclamation	Wisdom	Interpreting tongues

Perhaps five to ten per cent of Christians have the gift of evangelist, the Spirit-given ability to declare the Good News in ways that deeply touch an unbeliever’s heart. We should praise the Lord for granting this gift to some of us. However, many people jump to an incorrect conclusion, “If I don’t have the spiritual gift of evangelist, I’m not good enough to play the game of witnessing.” With such pessimism we bench ourselves. Paul warned us about this mistake.

Now the body is not made up of one part but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not cease to be part of the body....

But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be....

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Cor. 12:14-16, 18, 27).

What does this mean translated into our team analogy? A baseball team with nothing more than center fielders is going to lose. All nine positions on the team are of equal importance. All are needed. If the Church had nothing more than people with the gift of evangelist, it would be ill-equipped to fulfill its global evangelistic mission. The gift of evangelist is not the only gift needed to share the Gospel with our lost world. God designed every single spiritual gift to help bring outsiders into his Kingdom.

All the spiritual gifts are needed—including yours. How can you identify them?

1. Ask other believers what they think your gifts are. Their objective viewpoint may give you new insights into yourself.
2. Fill out a Spiritual gifts inventory which asks your opinion about various ministry areas. If you have never taken a spiritual gifts inventory, ask your pastor for one or use the one at www.door2hope.org/partners.

2. Skills and Motivated Abilities

Over the years, all of us become skilled in various ways. When you identify your skills, you are finding more ways in which you can play the game of witnessing.

- Some of your skills may be hobbies, like playing an instrument, painting, photography, quilting, collecting, and the list goes on.
- Some skills may be related to your vocation: like accounting, carpentry, plumbing, web site design, manipulating machinery, cooking, engineering, computer savvy, etc. The list is as long as the number of occupations there are on earth. Some job skills are more general in nature, such as time management, risk management, self-motivation, teamwork, and leadership.
- Some skills are mental skills, such as reading, researching, logic, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, verbal communication, listening, writing, and even crosswords and sudoku.
- Some skills are athletic or physical, like dancing, gymnastics, playing a particular sport, knowledge of the rules of a game, etc.

Identifying your skills will help you see more clearly how God has made you a gifted member of his outreach team. These questions can help you identify your unique set of skills.

1. What are my favorite hobbies?
2. What skills have I learned on the job?
3. What mental skills do I enjoy using?
4. What physical or athletic skills do you I using?

5. What skills do I have in the area of innovation and creativity?
6. How might God use my skills to open doors to exhibit the love of Christ and to speak his saving word to unbelievers?

Even more important than skills are your motivated abilities. What are motivated abilities? In a typical day you use a wide variety of skills and abilities. However, you don't find all of them equally engaging. Why not? Your skills can be divided into two categories: 'can-do' skills and motivated abilities. Can-do skills are the skills you are capable of using with some competency, but they don't give you personal satisfaction.

Motivated abilities are the abilities and activities that you are drawn to, that you love to do, and that reveal you at your best. You find them so absorbing and engaging that you lose track of time when you are using them. You gravitate toward your motivated abilities without even thinking about them. They come to you so naturally that you are hardly aware of them. You think of them as 'common sense', but they are not mere common sense. They are the uncommon and unique way the Creator has designed you. They are the very things that God created you to do.

As far as I know the person who discovered motivated abilities is Arthur F. Miller. In 1961, he founded People Management, Inc., which recently was renamed SIMA International. SIMA® stands for System for Identifying Motivated Abilities. I have used SIMA for over twenty years to help people identify their preferred way of doing things. Knowing your motivated abilities will help you discover how God has gifted you to play your unique role on his witnessing team. To encourage you to look into this matter, here is a thumbnail sketch of SIMA.

Step One. Take an hour or so to review your entire life, looking for ten or more personal accomplishments that you really enjoyed doing and that you believe you did well. Focus not on what happened to you (Example: "I attended my high school reunion."), but on things that you did ("I took photos at the reunion, sent them to my buddies, and they all raved about them.").

Step Two. From the achievements you identified in Step 1, select about eight that give you the most satisfaction. For each one:

1. Write a one-line summary description.
2. In a sentence or two, explain how you got involved.
3. In one to three paragraphs record the details of what you did, step by step.
4. Describe what was particularly satisfying to you.

Step Three. Examine your achievement summaries, looking for patterns and data that reveal the information listed below. This info is your Motivated Abilities Pattern, your MAP.

1. Your four to seven motivated abilities, your favorite ways of getting things done.
2. The two or three types of subjects or materials with which you are motivated to work.
3. The two or three optimum circumstances that motivate you.
4. The one or two ways that you prefer to relate to other people with whom you work.
5. Your central motivation: the one result you habitually attempt to attain by your actions.

I have taken many kinds of profiles and tests intended to identify my skills or personality traits. All of them have some benefit, but in my opinion nothing has been more accurate and more helpful than SIMA. If you want to know your role on God's team of witnesses, there is nothing more worth while than discovering your MAP, how your Creator has designed you.

Here are ways to learn about and use the System for Identifying Motivated Abilities.

1. Read *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado (Zondervan) and follow the SIMA materials included in it.
2. In a small group setting, use *Cure for the Common Life Small Group Study*. This is especially beneficial if you prefer to talk about your achievements rather than write about them.
3. Visit www.simainternational.com to learn more about what they to offer individuals, churches, ministries, and businesses. The above books can be ordered from them or from Amazon.

3. Passions and Areas of Woundedness.

Passion refers to a need or cause that touches your heart so fervently that you must take action. As I look around my congregation the passions of some members are quite evident.

- Vi and John have dedicated many years to Lutheran Braille Workers.
- Alan started his own business to do household repairs for the elderly.
- Brian and Kristen feel most alive when hanging out with international students.
- Barb likes nothing more than teaching English to Somali women.
- Tom and Stacy actively participate in Lutherans for Life..

You get the idea. Most of us have a topics, need, or cause that for one reason or another burns in our hearts and moves us to action. Passion is beyond mere caring. One can care about an issue without getting personally involved. Your passion is like a magnet, tugging at you until you pursue it. And when you pursue it, you have a great sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. Some folks are aware of their passions. Others are not. Some who know their passion are

actively involved in it. Others have not yet found the way to pursue their passion.

Often, but not always, our passion is related to the trials we have endured. Have you heard the phrase “walking wounded.” When a community disaster occurs, medical and rescue personnel apply triage: sorting the victims based on the severity of their condition and providing them treatment according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors. The lowest category of severity is termed “walking wounded.” These are folks with lesser injuries, whose treatment can be put off for a time. In dire situations the walking wounded are enlisted to assist in the disaster recovery efforts. Though hurting, they are able to help people worse off than they are.

The Church has its wounded as well. Some of the wounded can't walk. People gravely wounded by a physical, relational, emotional, economic, or spiritual trouble are too weak to help others. Those in great pain find it difficult to serve others or to witness. I know; I've been there.

Some of the wounded in the Church are walking wounded. The Lord has provided them enough healing that they can now focus on the needs of others and serve them. One of the most underused resources in our churches is the walking wounded. Many of the walking wounded can serve effectively as wounded healers. Due to their own trials, they have innate compassion and patience for others going through the same problems. Having personally experienced how the Lord's works good out of bad situations (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28), they know how to express hope to the hurting.

We are talking about wounds, because they can be closely related to passion. In many cases, a person's passion arises from the trials he or she has survived. For example, I was thrilled years ago when Lutheran Hour Ministries asked me to write a booklet on time management. *A Matter of Time*, is one of the most autobiographical pieces I've ever written, because I am a recovering workaholic. Because of my wounds, I have a passion to tell readers, “I've been down that dead end, and God provides a way out.”

You can identify your passions and wounds with questions like these.

1. What have been (or are) my major areas of personal pain and disappointment?
2. How has God provided me healing, strength, or patience to endure them.
3. For what kind of people do I have great concern or sympathy?
4. When watching or reading the news, what topics or incidents rankle me?
5. What situations or events cause me to complain, “That just shouldn't be!”?
6. What charity or ministry do I not only support but I love to read its publications?
7. If I could fix one specific problem on this earth, what would it be?
8. How can my wound or passion be harnessed to sharing the Gospel with people?
9. What would I attempt to do for God, if I knew I could not fail?

God chose you to be a gifted member of his witness team. Look at all the ways he has

gifted you: spiritual gifts, learned skills, motivated abilities, your personal passion, and the healing of your wounds. You are gifted, even though perhaps you haven't unwrapped all the gifts yet. I'm inviting you to tear off the wrapping paper, open the box, and discover how God has designed you to make a difference on his witnessing team.

You Are an MVP

God chose every Christian to be a gifted and valuable member of his team of witnesses. We have learned that God indeed chose, not just some, but all of us. We have explained how the Lord has gifted us. In closing, let's explore the word "valuable."

As a kid, I compared myself to the ball players in my neighborhood and concluded I was a lousy athlete. When I was in my thirties, I had some wonderful experiences playing softball and volley ball—not as a superstar, but as a competent, contributing member of the team. "How could that happen?" I wondered to myself. After pondering this question, I realize that my neighborhood just happened to be stocked with outstanding athletes. Joe became the star catcher of the high school team. Mike wound up playing on my town's first State Little League Championship Team. No wonder I was over shadowed.

That's our problem too. We're so busy comparing ourselves to others that we fail to recognize how valuable we are. We malign ourselves with thoughts like, "Bill, talks about Jesus to every person he meets on an airplane. I've only done it a few times. So I'm worthless."

Hold on a minute there. God doesn't make junk. He makes us all MVPs on his witnessing team. But how can that be possible? How can everyone on the team be a Most Valuable Player?

I didn't say we all were Most Valuable Players. Instead, on God's witnessing team we are all MVPs – Messiah's Valuable Players. A highly gifted baseball player is called a five-tool player, which refers to: hitting for power, hitting for average, running speed, arm strength, and defensive ability. These five skills make a baseball player valuable. Similarly, all of us who confess the name of Jesus are five-tool players. The Messiah generously gives his players:

1. Spiritual gifts.
2. Learned skills.
3. Motivated abilities.
4. Passions.
5. Healing for our wounds.

With these five tools we are all Messiah's Valuable Players. As you discover your five tools and align their use, you will find out that the Lord has gifted you to play the game of witnessing well. Evangelism does not mean doing things you are not able to do. Personal witnessing does not mean forcing yourself to do what you find uncomfortable. Evangelism is putting into practice the five tools he has given you. When you do so, your teammates will value

you and you will value them. You will thrill at what God does when he puts you and your teammates in the very situations where you all can utilize your strengths.

God chose you to be a gifted and valuable member of his team of witnesses. So, don't bench yourself. Instead, just yell, "Thanks, Coach!" as he sends you out on to the field, the mission field all around you.

Digging Deeper

A. What more do these Scriptures teach you about being chosen and equipped for God's witnessing team?

1. Psalm 139
2. 1 Cor. 1:26-29
3. Ephesians 2:8-10

B. Make plans for how you will explore, discover, and use your five tools.

1. Spiritual gifts.
2. Learned skills.
3. Motivated abilities.
4. Passions.
5. Healing for your wounds.

C. Try prayerfully singing this song. It's simple, but oh so true.

Jesus chose me this I know
For the Bible tells me so.
I'm equipped to sing His song.
Though I'm weak, He is so strong.
Yes, Jesus chose me.
Yes, Jesus chose me.
The Bible tells me so.

Jesus chose us this we know
For the Bible tells us so.
We're equipped to sing His song.
Though we're weak, He is so strong.
Yes, Jesus chose us.
Yes, Jesus chose us.
The Bible tells us so.

CHAPTER 2

Evangelism Is a Team Sport

Rock Climbing and Evangelism

Over twenty of us were gathered at my parents' home in Ohio, overlooking Lake Erie. Soon we would be sitting down to Christmas dinner, 1986. I was relaxed and comfortable. Then my brother-in-law Craig asked, "Phil, would you like to go rock climbing tomorrow at Thompson Ledges?"

"Do you mean like scaling-a-cliff rock climbing?"

"Yeah."

"I've hiked at Thompson Ledges lots of times," I said, "but why would you want to climb seventy feet of limestone?"

"Because they're there," Craig laughed. "I learned how to climb last summer. It's fun!"

I couldn't imagine anything less fun. My stomach—that had been anticipating my mom's cooking—turned into a knot. You see, I have a phobia thing with heights. Get me anywhere near a drop-off, and my legs feel wobbly, the earth feels like it's tipping toward the abyss, and I imagine myself crashing to my death. Heights give me the creeps!

That's not the only reason why Craig's invitation was ruining my holiday. I've got weakling arms. I couldn't do three pull-ups if my life depended on it. And if I was crazy enough to go rock climbing, it might. My biggest embarrassment in high school gym class occurred the day the coach ordered us to climb a rope up to the top of the gym. After watching twenty guys attempt this feat, most of them successfully, it was my turn. I jumped on the rope and struggled up a foot or two. Looking straight up the rope, it seemed like a good mile to the roof. After exerting lots of energy but not getting anywhere, I dropped to the gym floor defeated. My weakling arms had let me down again.

"No thanks, Craig. Risking my life on a cliff is the last thing I want to do!"

Before he could harass me further, we were called to the table. "Saved by the dinner bell," I thought.

But Craig wasn't done. As we ate, he told me about his summer vacation in the Appalachians where he had learned to rock climb and—surprisingly—had come back alive. He described in detail the safety precautions, the equipment, and the strategy of rock climbing. By the time we were enjoying pumpkin pie, I told him something I never, ever, thought I would say: "Okay, I'll try it."

What changed my mind? Until that Christmas dinner conversation, I had pictured rock

climbing as hanging by my fingernails from a sheer, thousand-foot cliff, without equipment, without a clue what to do next, and without anyone's help. Craig taught me the advantages of rock climbing.

1. Teamwork, providing safety, advice, and encouragement.
2. Multiple safety precautions that reduce the risk to nil.
3. Equipment that lightens the work, even for the weak-armed.
4. Reachable goals, like starting with only a twenty-foot ascent.
5. Strategies for the best way to climb different surfaces.

These factors convinced me to accept Craig's rock climbing invitation.

Solo or Team?

Many Christians know a fear similar to what I experienced that Christmas day. Coming to church helps them relax and feel comfortable. But then someone—sometimes the preacher, sometimes a friend—says, "Would you like to do some evangelism or witnessing?" A chill runs down their spines. Their mouths are suddenly dry. Their minds fog up. They can't imagine what they would say. They picture themselves getting stuck in a worst-case scenario, without equipment, without a clue what to do next, and without any one to help them.

In theory, they want to share Christ. He's the most precious friend they have. The grace, forgiveness, and eternal life God offers is the greatest treasure anyone could ever receive. But witnessing gives many Christians the creeps—just like rock climbing gave me the creeps. What would ever change their minds? The very things that convinced me to go rock climbing.

1. Encouraging teamwork.
2. Safety precautions.
3. Proper equipment.
4. Reasonable goals.
5. Effective strategies.

The number one rule of rock climbing is: Never climb alone. An encouraging team helps you to take safety precautions, use proper equipment, aim for reasonable goals, and find effective strategies.

One of our main obstacles to witnessing is that we think evangelism is an individual sport. It's not. Picture a girl alone with a soccer ball. Can she play soccer alone? No. She can kick the ball all over the field. She can practice deft movements with her feet and head. But these actions are not soccer. They are only shreds of soccer, because soccer is a team sport.

Or imagine a solitary runner trying to compete in a 4 X 400 meter relay race. To whom is he going to pass the baton? How will he ever have the energy to sprint all four legs of the race? He won't, because relay racing is a team sport.

Many Christians think witnessing is an individual sport. They assume they have to think of everything, do everything, say everything, solve every problem, and endure every difficulty. No wonder they wind up saying, "I don't want to play this dumb game!"

But wait. Aren't we called at times to witness all on our own, with no other Christian present? Of course. During a basketball game, at times a player must dribble the ball and shoot solo, but all of a hoopster's individual actions occur in the context of a team.

Premise No. 1 of this book is: God chose you to play the game of witnessing. Premise No. 2 is: evangelism is a team sport. The individualistic culture common in North America opposes this premise. We are taught to stand on our own two feet, earn our own keep, blaze our own trail, paddle our own canoe, hoe our own row, pay our own way, and tote our own load. This attitude creeps into the Church, causing us to think that living the Christian life is an individual activity.

But that's not what the Bible says.

The Power of Y'all

The limitations of the English language cause us to read the Bible with a bias toward individualism. Consider the word "you." It has two meanings.

- You singular—all by your lonesome
- You plural—in community with others

When North American Christians read the word "you" in their Bibles, they tend to assume it refers to you-solo, rather than you-together-with-others. Consider this familiar verse.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15).

How have you understood this verse in the past? Have you heard the advice addressed to you-solo or to you-together-with-others?

Luckily, the New Testament was written in Greek, not English. Greek uses separate words for you-solo and you-together-with-others. Folks in the southern United States have something like this. They say, "y'all" or even "all y'all" when referring to a group. If Peter had been a Southerner, here's what he would have written.

Y'all always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks y'all to give the reason for the hope that y'all have.

A team perspective changes everything about witnessing. You don't have to prepare all by yourself. You don't have to give an answer all by yourself. You don't have to explain your hope in Christ all by yourself. Peter is telling us evangelism is a team sport. So let's stop trying to play it alone.

Groups Ablaze!

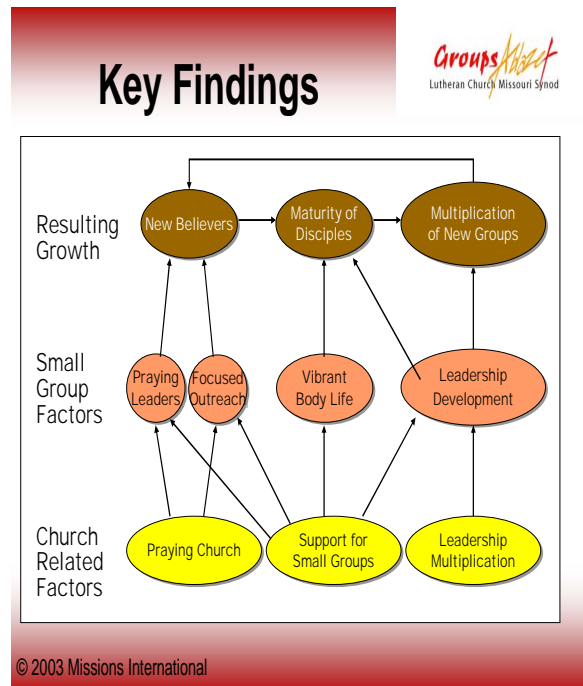
At St. Michael's we decided to call the team approach Team Discipleship. In the LCMS this same approach is called Groups Ablaze! Many excellent resources on team evangelism are available at www.groupsablaze.com. Other very helpful resources on team evangelism are:

- *Cell Church Solutions* by Joel Comiskey with valuable insights and info about churches across North America (www.cellchurchsolutions.org).
- *Living Proof* by Jim Petersen, an excellent book and film series (NavPress).
- *Seeker Small Groups* by Garry Poole, how to start and lead a group for unbelievers with a million questions (Zondervan).
- *Making Room for Life* by Randy Frazee, advice on how and why to find time for small group outreach (Zondervan).

Team evangelism need not be complicated. Imagine what God could do through you and a few Christian friends if you practiced five outreach habits.

1. Keep a list of not-yet Christian friends who need the love of Christ in their lives.
2. Pray daily for your friends by name, asking the Holy Spirit to bring them to faith.
3. Build friendships with your one or two on your list, spending time with them regularly.
4. Share Christ, asking the Spirit to open doors for tactful and fruitful conversations.
5. Work together, involving all team members in befriending and witnessing to others.

The major consultant to Groups Ablaze! is Dwight Marabel who has done extensive research on this question: Why do some small groups multiply while others do not? His findings are summarized in the diagram below. Read the diagram from the bottom up. Evangelistic groups are more likely to multiply in a congregation to the degree that the church is active in prayer, supportive of small groups, and dedicated to multiplying leaders. In the center of the diagram are four essential small group factors. Here is a brief description of each of them.



A. Prayer Life.

1. We recognize all accomplishment comes from Jesus, who is the Leader of our group.
2. We spend daily personal devotional time with God.
3. We pray daily for not-yet Christians in our collective network.
4. We pray daily for team members and for our united witness to not-yet Christians.
5. We don't just talk about prayer; we pray. We don't just pray; we talk about our prayers.
6. We engage in spiritual warfare for the sake of our team and the lost.

B. Focused Outreach.

1. Our group does not exist for ourselves, but to love, serve, and witness to others.
2. God's Word—especially Gospel promises and outreach promises—deepens our mission vision.
3. We trust the Holy Spirit to provide us courage and guide our every effort to seek the lost.
4. We spend time with non-Christians. We create events for them, so they know each other.
5. We build our skills of friendship building, inviting, giving our testimony, and witnessing.
6. We encourage one another both when we succeed and when we fail.

C. Vibrant Body Life.

1. We are family, as Jesus and His disciples were family, experiencing authentic community.
2. We hear God through His Word, which is our supreme authority.
3. We expect God to forgive us, heal us, and transform us to become more like our Savior.
4. We pray for each other. We celebrate blessings together. We bear burdens together.
5. We disciple seekers one-on-one. We welcome them into our group's community.
6. Despite the discomfort of forming a new group, we gladly start one after another.

D. Leadership Development.

1. Jesus disciplines and unleashes each one of us for team discipleship.
2. We mesh our gifts and abilities for the sake of team discipleship.
3. Leaders are respected. Leaders delegate as much as possible.
4. We are all links in a mentoring chain. We teach by modeling. We learn by doing.
5. We constantly improve and expand our leadership, for the sake of raising new groups.
6. We structure our church to multiply evangelistic leaders and groups, for the glory of Christ.

According to Dwight Marabel's research, wherever the three church factors and four small group factors are strong, the Holy Spirit and God's Word accomplishes four results.

1. New believers are converted to Christ.
2. Disciples—new and old—mature in faith and action.
3. New groups multiply.

Find Your Team

When we try to play the game of witnessing all by our lonesome, the results are likely to be meager. When we practice team evangelism, the result is multiplication of believers and of evangelistic teams. That's groups ablaze! The goal of Chapter 1 was to convince you that God has chosen you to be a gifted, valuable member of his witnessing team. The goal of this chapter has been to convince you that witnessing is a team sport, and to motivate you to form your team.

The variety of teams that can exist in a church is endless. The primary evangelistic team is the family. A father, mother, and children can work together to witness to the people in their wider family, their neighborhood, school, and workplace. Families ought to see themselves as evangelistic teams. But how many families view themselves that way and act accordingly?

Another kind of evangelistic team is formed when two or more people agree to support one another in their witnessing efforts. Often teams of this kind meet once a week to encourage one another and pray for the lost people they know. Such groups often plan events to which they can invite their not-yet Christian friends.

Some evangelistic teams function as a task force focusing on outreach to a particular target group. Their target could be their neighborhood or a particular ethnic group or the people in a local prison, nursing home, or other institution. Maybe they focus on people with a particular need, such as divorcees, drug addicts, rape victims, or cancer patients.

Other evangelistic teams may carry out their witnessing through a particular ministry within a church, such as Sunday school, youth ministry, a food bank, etc. Virtually any kind of church-based ministry can touch not-yet Christians with the Gospel, if we are willing to redirect the ministry from serving "members only" to serving people outside our walls who need the love of Christ in their lives.

Find your team and enjoy the game—together.

The Triune Team

Working in teams is not something we humans made up. The prototypical evangelistic team is the Holy Trinity.

- God the Father created all the nations of the earth. In Scripture He is often referred to as the Savior God. He makes covenants with people and keeps them. The plan of salvation is His plan. The mission is His mission.

- The Son of God was sent to earth as an incarnational missionary. Jesus Christ—fully divine and fully human—bridged the cultural chasm between heaven and earth in order to redeem the human race by His sacrificial death in our place.
- The Holy Spirit calls people to faith through the proclamation of the Good News of Christ. The Spirit motivates, empowers, and directs teams of believers to the people and places where Gospel witness is needed. He networks all the mission efforts across the globe.

The Triune God thinks team. So should we.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Ponder these Scriptures in light of team evangelism and the power of Y'all.

1. 1 Kings 19
2. Nehemiah 3
3. Jeremiah 36
4. Daniel 3
5. Luke 5:1-11
6. Luke 10
7. John 15:1-9
8. 2 Cor. 2:12-1
9. Colossians 4:7-14
10. 1 Peter 2:9-12

B. The 2008 USA men's basketball team was nicknamed the Redeem Team. A small group of people who support one another in witnessing could also be called a Redeem Team. Dream a bit about your Redeem Team.

1. Considering my spiritual gifts, skills, motivated abilities, passions, and areas of woundedness, what unique features do I bring to a team?
2. Considering the kinds of teams on page 18, what kind of team is best for me?
3. Who are a few people I know that would make good teammates?
4. How and when can I invite them to form an evangelistic team?

C. Prayer: Holy Spirit, although at times You lead me to share my faith one-on-one with others, never let me be content to do witnessing all alone. Open my eyes to start seeing the opportunities and advantages of playing on a team. Lead me to my teammates and teach us the power of y'all. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Fishing with a NET

Nets Work

Joe and Charlie were fishing. They could see fish in the water, but they weren't biting. So Joe and Charlie took out a net and threw it in the water. Minutes later they pulled in a haul. They were so busy laughing and tossing whoppers into their boat, that they didn't hear the game warden's boat pull along side.

"What do you think you're doing?" the warden asked.

After a long pause, Joe said, "Ummm... playin' volleyball?"

"Yea, I'm ahead 12-10," Charlie added.

Why is that story funny? Recreational fisherman usually fish with a pole or two. Against a baited hook, fish have a fighting chance. Against a net, fish will lose big. That's why in many places it's against the law to fish with a net.

So, when Jesus said, "I will make y'all fishers of people," did He mean fishing with a pole or fishing with a net?

The answer may be both. From the story in Matthew 17:27, we know Peter knew how to fish with a pole, but commercial fishermen on the Sea of Galilee usually fished with a net. It took two boats to haul in the loaded nets in the miraculous catch of fish reported in Luke 5:1-11. When people fish with a net, the catch is greater than what they could have attained individually.

Consider the average church. How is the fishing for people going? In churches where the catch is small, you will find several deficiencies.

1. Individual believers are not teaming with God, asking Him to lead them to witnessing opportunities.
2. Individual believers are fishing alone, not teaming up with fellow Christians.
3. Where believers do team up, they tend to fish with poles, rather than weaving their different strategies into a net.
4. Where a church does have multiple teams fishing with a net, the teams rarely coordinate their varied team activities into a network.
5. Where a church has become a network of evangelistic teams, they rarely have learned to network with other churches and para-church groups.

Over the years, I have been involved in a wide variety of witnessing and evangelism strategies. As I look back on it all, I'm convinced that the most effective fishing occurs when Christian witnesses work in teams, and when these evangelistic teams organize themselves into a network. The fishing is exciting and the catch is large wherever Christians and their churches have learned to—

- Think evangelism in all their ministries
- Think team in all their evangelism
- Think networking between all their teams and even between congregations

I believe multiple congregations can learn to unite their efforts so that collectively they become a regional network of evangelistic teams. I'm not talking about networks because it's a buzzword in the business world today. I'm talking about networks because nets work. Allow me to tell you how I discovered this.

What I Learned in Venezuela

One career experience in particular led me to this strategy—serving as the Writer/Producer for the Spanish Lutheran Hour office in Caracas, Venezuela from 1982-86. When I arrived at that position it was already a thriving evangelistic media ministry. With the help of Ken Peterson, the Director of our office, and my successor Marcos Kempff, we were able to take the ministry to an even higher level of effectiveness. Here is a brief synopsis of the Venezuela media strategy.

1. We produced Christian radio spots for broadcast on secular radio stations. Our goal was to be heard between a hit record and a Pepsi commercial. We also received thousands of calls per month on a telephone answering machine.
2. We assumed the listeners knew nothing about God or the Bible. We started where they were and did not talk over their heads. Since Ken Peterson was an adult convert, he knew how to spot anything I wrote that failed to communicate clearly to unbelievers (Col. 4:5-6).
3. Our programs mostly dealt with the felt needs of the populace. While we addressed many thorny topics, we always related the Gospel of Christ to them.
4. The brief programs were linked to further options. Each program invited listeners to request a free booklet on the same topic as the program. Each booklet shared the Gospel of Christ and then invited readers to enroll in our evangelistic Bible correspondence course.
5. We sought personal contact with our respondents. When possible, we delivered the booklets to their door. If invited, we studied the evangelistic Bible course with them. In several cities we set up branch offices of our media ministry, so

the unchurched could get to know us at a neutral, accessible site rather than a church building.

Ken, Marcos, and I, were eager to share the Venezuela media strategy with other Lutheran Hour offices, especially in Brazil and the USA. At first the Brazilians were reluctant, but after Ken and Marcos went and spoke to them, they finally retooled. Ken told me that before long, the mail from Brazilian radio listeners showed a dramatic change. Previously, 90% of the mail had come from believers. After the retooling, 90% of their mail came from unbelievers.

In the late 1980s, Ken Peterson moved from Caracas to the St. Louis headquarters of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) to direct their overseas ministries. Together Ken and I continued to urge LHM to utilize the Venezuela strategy in the U. S. After I ran a small pilot project in the Chicago area where I was pastoring at the time, LHM leaders finally started to listen to us. Ken and I were both called upon as consultants as LHM developed what eventually came to be known as "Living for Tomorrow."

Launched in the mid-1990s, "Living for Tomorrow" consisted of a two- to four-week media blitz in a particular city. The media blitz focused on one topic, such as stress or family communications. Members of churches in that city were trained to follow-up the people contacted during the media blitz. Usually one to two thousand people requested the booklet or recording that was offered. Then church members would try to deliver these items personally. After the media blitz ended "Living for Tomorrow" would leave that city and move on to another location. In some cases, churches asked for "Living for Tomorrow" to return a year or two later. "Living for Tomorrow" met with moderate success, until it was discontinued in 2005.

So were Ken and I pleased with "Living for Tomorrow"? Nope. Although it bore some resemblance to what we did in Venezuela, key components were missing. The Venezuela model isn't perfect. It has some flaws. We had hoped that "Living for Tomorrow" would improve on those flaws.

The more I thought about it, I was sure there was a better way to do regional or city-wide evangelism—better than "Living for Tomorrow" and better than the Venezuela model.

Developments in Minnesota

In 2002, I shared my ideas with the Directors of Christian Outreach (DCO) in the Twin Cities, hoping that some of them would help me design a metro-wide network of evangelistic teams. Two people agreed to join me and we met together for a year and a half. Much of what I present in this chapter grew out of our discussions.

My partners on our ad hoc task force were Phil Johnson and Dan Haupt. Phil Johnson is on staff at the Oswald Hoffmann School of Christian Outreach and is the Coordinator of the DCO program at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. Phil had participated in two "Living for Tomorrow" events in Denver and thought the strategy could be improved.

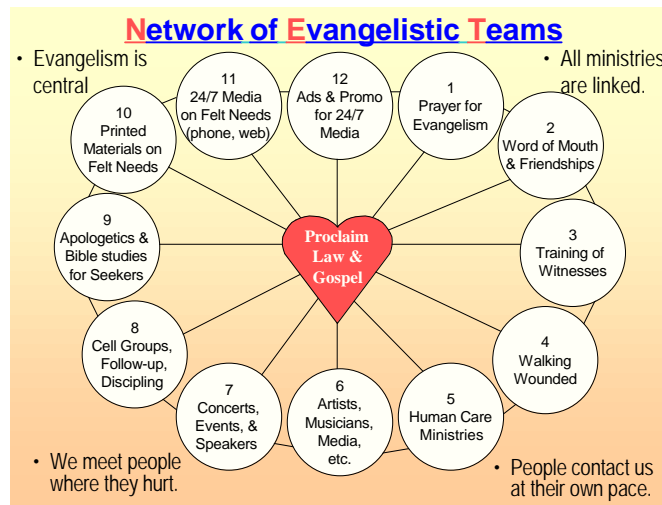
Dan Haupt was in charge of discipleship and evangelism at Trinity Lutheran Church in Waconia, Minnesota. At our first meeting, Dan explained why he joined our task force. "In the church we often make plans within our reach, plans so small that we are likely to accomplished them on our own power. But as I listened to your dream of regional outreach, Phil, I saw that only God could accomplish such an extensive plan. So, I had to join the task force to see how God was going to do it."

When Phil, Dan, and I began to meet, we thought we were designing a media outreach strategy. The major weakness of the Venezuela strategy was that there were only a couple thousand Lutherans in Venezuela, and similar small Lutheran populations in the other Latin American countries where our programs were broadcast. This meant that we lacked the human resources to do effective follow-up. Meanwhile, here in the States we have millions of Lutherans. Theoretically, we should be able to follow-up much more effectively.

As Phil, Dan, and I thought about how to better use lay people and their congregations, we changed our idea about what we were designing. It's not a media strategy, per se. What we want to construct is a network of evangelistic teams, a network that unites electronic media as well as the human resources available in our congregations.

After Dan Haupt took a call to Wisconsin, in 2006 Phil Johnson and I formed a new task force. It has included pastors Keith Brutlag, Gene Bunkowske, and Jake Gillard and DCO's Heidi Breitbarth and Faith Rattei. Our mission is: To make disciples through a regional network of ministries working in unison to proclaim Law and Gospel, address human needs, and provide personal follow-through.

To weave a NET in the Twin Cities, we figured we would need the participation of at least six churches spread out over the metro area. In early 2007, we presented our idea to sister churches using a PowerPoint presentation. Below is the main diagram. The entire presentation appears on the next two pages. (Also at <http://www.csp.edu/MACO/Courses/581/index.html>.)



What is NET Fishing





Because God's mission is accomplished more effectively when His people work together, NET Fishing links believers and their God-given strengths and passions into a **Network of Evangelistic Teams**.

Jesus said:

"I will make you fishers of people."

- How many fish can be caught with a pole?
- How many fish can be caught with a net?


Tired of fishing alone?

- Do you want to network with those who share an outreach vision?
- Would you enjoy linking strengths with other believers and churches?

If we weave together our:

- Passions and Interests
- Abilities and Spiritual Gifts
- Resources and Strengths



We get a NET—
a **Network of Evangelistic Teams**.

A Network of Evangelistic Teams includes:

- Prayer for the Spirit to work
- Friendship building
- Verbal witnessing
- Answering the questions doubters ask
- Teaching the Bible to seekers

Prayer, Witnessing & Evangelism

Apologetics & Bible Studies for Seekers

A Network of Evangelistic Teams includes:

- Print & media aimed at felt needs
- Promotion and advertising
- Artists and musicians
- Concerts, events, speakers, & worship
- "Walking Wounded," survivors who help others with similar difficulties
- Human care ministries

Media, Music, Arts, Events & Worship

The Walking Wounded & Human Care Ministries

A Network of Evangelistic Teams includes:

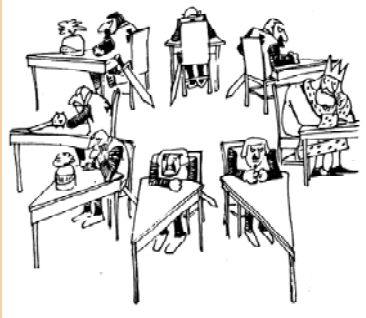
- Church planting (same culture & ethnic)
- Leader development
- Discipleship training
- Cell groups
- Membership class

Church Multiplication & Leadership Training

Discipleship, Cell Groups & Membership

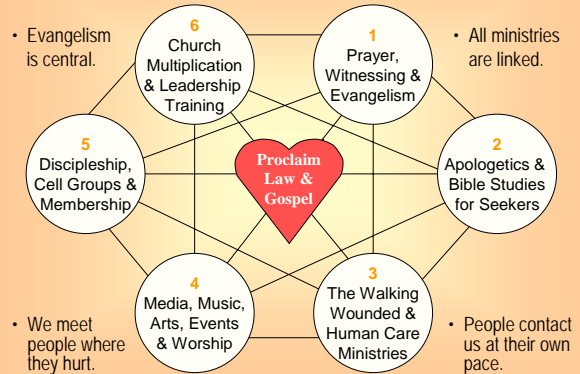
NET Fishing PowerPoint (continued)

The catch is small when Christians fail to work together



Consider this alternative

Network of Evangelistic Teams

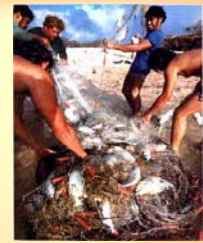


A Scenario of how the NET works



Long-term Impact of NET Fishing

1. More and more evangelistic teams reach out to various groups of needy people.
2. Synergy of gifted volunteers.
3. Growing sense of purpose.
4. Converts participate in the outreach.
5. Increased rapport with the community.
6. NETS designed for different ethnic groups and target audiences.



Needed: An Army of Volunteers

- Pray-ers, survivors of life problems
- Writers, graphic artists, media experts
- Researchers, counselors, theologians
- Witnesses, care givers, group leaders
- Director, supervisors, grant writers
- Data processors, volunteer coordinators



God will weave the NET, placing each one of us in our key position for the benefit of lost and hurting people.

Discover Your Place in the NET

1. What is God calling me to do?
2. What are my spiritual gifts, abilities, and skills?
3. What human need do I long to address with the love of Christ? What is my passion?
4. What is my church or small group good at doing?
5. Who could I invite to fish with me?



Core Values

We believe regional NET fishing should be founded on the core values listed below.

1. Evangelism is central. Our congregations already do a vast amount of things. What we need to realize is that virtually all our existing ministries can be used to reach out to people outside. Participating churches must take their eyes off of themselves and look at the lost. As this vision grows, church members will be less concerned about their own wants and turf wars and more concerned about the fact that people are living and dying without Christ's love in their lives.

2. The best medium is people. Mass media alone will not reach the world, or your community. What not-yet Christians need most is not a radio spot or a tract or a lecture. They need to meet Christians who live and speak their faith. Perhaps the Christians most capable of earning a hearing from unbelievers are the walking wounded, those whom God has healed enough so that they can serve others with the same problems that God has helped them recover from (2 Cor. 1:3-11). For example, Christians who by God's help have survived and learned to cope with eating disorders, will be highly motivated to unite their forces to reach out to unbelievers struggling with eating disorders.

3. Use mass media strategically. Lacking megabucks for television and radio, we will focus on low-cost media, especially websites, telephone messages, and perhaps new technologies, such as podcasting and whatever else appears in the future. Unlike television and radio, these media are available 24/7. People can receive the message at any time of day, even in their pajamas. Perhaps best of all, the web surfers and phone message listeners are free to remain anonymous until they trust us enough to make themselves known to us.

4. Provide multiple entryways and options. Virtually every activity in the NET diagram can serve as an entry point for a not-yet Christian. Some will first enter the NET through a friend, some by a concert, some by the 24/7 media, some by a small group, and so on. Once they are in contact with the NET, they hear about other options of how to learn or participate. Each person decides if and when and how fast to proceed. No pressure is necessary. We trust the Holy Spirit to lead them from option to option.

5. Networking of efforts for maximum results. As much as possible, the different parts of the NET communicate and work with one another. Each part has a strength, but that strength can only be maximized if it is united with the others. This is synergy in the best sense of the word.

6. Ongoing presence. A here-today-gone-tomorrow approach like "Living for Tomorrow" fails to build rapport with the community. The true potential of NET fishing won't be realized until we have been operating for five years. After ten years of faithfully serving the community, doors may open that are tightly closed at present.

7. Think multi-ethnic. NET Fishing isn't just for Euro-Americans. By working with

believers from immigrant communities, evangelistic networks can be created for various ethnic target audiences. Here in the Twin Cities we have the largest concentration in the U. S. of Hmong people from southeast Asia. As we are designing a NET for the general populace, we could create a parallel Hmong version of the NET. Likewise, if we are creative NET fishing can work in different socio-economic levels and also among people in different environments, such as prisoners, the deaf, sports fans, gays and lesbians, etc.

Great Expectations

What might we expect from a regional network of evangelistic teams? Here are some possible outcomes.

1. Lost people saved. In many cases the converts will be people we never would have reached otherwise, because we were not previously involved in their lives. Many of the new converts will be eager to share their faith and contribute their energies to the NET. Through them the Holy Spirit will add new blood, new perspectives, and new energy to the network of evangelistic teams. God only knows how this will improve the NET.

2. Mission groups formed. The groups of believers addressing different felt needs will start functioning as mission societies dedicated to reaching the people troubled by a particular felt need. Each society will be highly motivated, because they will be made up of the walking wounded. Having experienced God's care and healing, they will long to share Him with others enduring similar trials.

3. Old churches revived and new ones started. Christians who participate in the NET will catch a vision for outreach. Churches that were focused on themselves will enlist in God's mission adventure. Churches that had always worked independently of their sister congregations will discover the joy of working with other Christians for the cause of spreading the Gospel. The Holy Spirit will raise up entire new church plants as the number of converts grows and as different target audiences are addressed.

4. Expansion will occur. If a network of evangelistic teams reaches lost people, fosters local mission societies, and revives churches, then expansion will occur on several levels. Other cities as well as rural areas will want to develop their own regional NETs. When this occurs, a NET in one area can assist NETs in others. For example, perhaps the NET in San Francisco will design strategies and resources for outreach to homosexuals. These strategies and resources could then be used in other places. Another example: Imagine that five cities had developed mission groups for people dealing with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. If one of these mission groups has an excellent speaker, all five groups could arrange a speaking tour that would bring that expert to all five cities. Expansion will also occur as the NET targets other immigrant ethnic populations. And hopefully, the idea will spread overseas. Perhaps it will even go back to Venezuela—in an improved and expanded form.

In all likelihood, some readers will consider regional evangelistic networking a pipe dream. They see several obstacles that could derail the strategy.

- Where will we get the money?
- How will we motivate and recruit the scores of necessary volunteers?
- It's too complicated to ever be properly administrated?
- How will we ever convince independent congregations to work together?
- If it ever did get off the ground, how would we ever maintain it?

Each of these questions is valid. A regional network of evangelistic teams can only be built at great cost (Luke 14:25-33). We will have to focus on evangelism rather than just doing church as normal. We will have to pool our resources, especially our volunteers, for the good of the church at large rather than our own local congregation. In order to reach not-yet Christians, we will have to let our parish ministries be transformed for evangelistic purposes. Some of our pet ministries will have to be put to rest, so that resources are available for outreach.

Most people aren't going to recognize the advantages of NET Fishing until they see it in action. So we at my church decided to run a pilot project in 2007-08. That is the topic of the next chapter.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. At first glance, what aspects of NET Fishing sound right and doable?
2. At second glance, what aspects of NET Fishing sound wrong or impractical?
3. To what extent does my church seek to evangelize through everything that we do? Where do we need to improve?
4. To what extent does my congregation utilize teams in all our evangelism efforts? Where do we need improvement?
5. To what extent do we network our church's efforts with other evangelistic teams? Where do we need improvement?
6. What will it cost to build a Network of Evangelistic Teams in my personal life, my church, and my region?
7. What will it cost us not to build it?

CHAPTER 4

Door2Hope

The Birth of a Ministry

NET fishing at St. Michael's began in February 2007 with a sermon about it. To help the message stick we printed up a four-page folder summarizing the strategy. Every month or so, we would reiterate the vision. In addition, we held several meetings for members to come learn more. The attendance at these meetings was never over twenty people, but the idea was starting to take hold. Several lay people expressed interest in bringing their skills to the table. This group included two artists, an evangelist, a counselor, a volunteer coordinator, and a self-trained apologetics expert. The core of a team was forming.

Someday NET fishing will address many topics, but to run a pilot you need to start with just one. After discussing the matter with many people we decided our first topic would be "Depression and Hope." We defined depression very broadly, not just clinical, chronic depression, but also the occasional depression that can arise from a personal problem, tragedy, or setback. Related topics include grief, fears, anger, low self-esteem, etc. Since depression and hope would be a relevant topic during a frigid, overcast Minnesota winter, we decided to run the first pilot from December 2007 through March 2008.

From September to December, I lead a Sunday morning class called "NET Fishing." Here is what happened at the first session. I asked the fifteen attendees, "If someone asked you to define NET fishing in twenty-five words or less, what would you say?" Over half of them answered with an accurate, insightful summary, and each response focused on a different strength of NET fishing. Their grasp of the topic assured me that the months of casting a vision for NET fishing had paid off. Then I told them, "This class will be different from any Sunday morning class you have ever taken. We aren't just going to learn in theory. We're going to take action. We will build something together—a Network of Evangelistic Teams. Our goal is to launch a NET fishing pilot by December 1. Although I am the leader of this class, I have to admit that I don't know precisely what we will build, because I've never done this before. What I did in Venezuela was something like this—that's why I'm confident it will work—but this new strategy is much broader than what we did in Venezuela. As a result, you will probably find this to be the most nebulous course you have ever taken. But God is leading us, and wherever He leads is always an adventure."

My brave friends accepted the challenge. What a team they made. Among them we had at

least one person representing all but one of the twelve ministry areas in the main NET fishing diagram. Week by week we pieced together what we would need to run a pilot. In the opening weeks our conversations were pretty formal as we discussed advertising strategies, websites, and other technical issues. Then one Sunday a woman named Deb showed up at class. She represented the one missing area of the NET fishing diagram among our group—the Walking Wounded. I knew Deb from counseling her. She had quite a story to share with the rest of the class. As Deb concluded her heart-wrenching story of wrestling with depression for decades, she wiped a tear from her cheek and apologized, “I’m sorry. I hoped I could get through this without crying.” I assured her, “Deb, look around the room. Who isn’t crying?” This courageous lady brought a sense of reality to the class. Deb exemplified the kind of people we wanted to help and introduce to Christ. She has been a solid member of the NET fishing team ever since that day.

Our team realized that when we went public, we would need another name besides Net fishing. “NET fishing” describes the strategy well. Although Christians can understand the term, we needed something meaningful and appealing to non-Christians. After much discussion and investigation of available names, we settled on one that works well with the topic of Depression and Hope, yet also fits other topics we intend to address in the future. We call the ministry—



Both “door” and “hope” have positive connotations. We added the “2” for a touch of whimsy, to sound modern, and to make it easier to remember. We also appreciated the parallel to biblical uses of “door” and “hope.” Finally, “door” allows us to use both visual imagery and word pictures. This is evident in our logo, designed by Deb Nesheim. When we added the tag line “We’ll meet you at the door”, we knew God had led us to an inviting and caring identity.

Then we tackled the development of a website, which would be our major public presence during the pilot. Surely, the person who invested the most hours in the pilot is our media techy and webmaster, Mike Timmerman. Rather than describe the website, it’s best if you just go see it for yourself at www.door2hope.org. Lutheran Hour Ministries has been a welcome partner in the Door2Hope pilot. They permitted our website to provide downloadable versions of many of their booklets. The site is still not all we want it to be, but we’re proud of what we have so far. We are open to submissions from anyone who has a personal story or information that will add depth to the site.

When you visit the site, you will notice two features. First, we approach the subject of depression from several angles, even using the arts and humor. Second, we are upfront about being Christian. No one can accuse us of “bait and switch” tactics. We designed the website for not-yet-Christians by applying the Fragrance Principle, based on 2 Cor. 2:14-16.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.

We wanted everything at door2hope.org to carry the fragrance of Christ, but we didn't want the aroma to be the same strength in every part of the site. Our hope is that unbelievers who are far from the Lord will feel comfortable in and keep returning to the places where the aroma of Christ is slight, even though, to them, other parts of the site may reek of Jesus. As we build trust and rapport with unbelievers, we hope they will become less offended by the stronger aroma present in some sections of the site. We pray that eventually they even will be attracted to the strong fragrance in the "Spiritual Resources" section, which explains in detail the hope we have in Christ.

November 2007 was a zany month as our team raced to prepare everything needed to launch the Door2Hope pilot. During September and October, I had tried to stay one step ahead of the people in the NET Fishing class. In November I told them, "Everyone is working so hard that I feel like I am standing in the middle of a tornado watching all the activity swirl around me." Then one of them reminded me: "Step out of the tornado, Phil, and you'll see the marvelous power of God at work." We were all highly motivated to see what God would do.

The "Depression and Hope" Pilot

By God's grace, we actually launched the website a day on November 30, 2007, the first day of our Christmas Pageant, which attracts a couple thousand visitors. The back of the pageant bulletin told about Door2Hope and our website. That weekend we distributed 750 Door2Hope business cards to pageant attendees. Another one thousand business cards disappeared by the end of the month.

Web sites can accomplish a lot. But what about the people who lack access to the web? We also need to create an audio component of Door2Hope. Various businesses have automated telephone systems for callers to learn about their products. Want to hear an audio review of movies at area theaters? Just dial a number and, using a touch-tone keypad, you can listen to as many reviews as you like. Want to learn about a house that is for sale? Just call a phone number, dial in the code for that house, and you'll get the scoop. Some components of what we have available at door2hope.org could be produced in audio form and made available through an automated telephone system. Like a website, this resource is relatively inexpensive and available 24/7. And after the initial start-up investment of time, it will run with minimal maintenance. Telephone is a great alternative media to reach out to people who choose not to own a computer or cannot afford one. To date, we do not have these audio resources, but they are on our To Do

List. In addition, any audio messages developed for telephone can also be used for high-tech purposes, such as audio streaming or podcasts.

Another key component of the pilot is preparing events for the public to attend. Church workers and dedicated lay people already have too much to do. They don't need someone saying, "You need to add NET Fishing events to all your present activities." As we developed Door2Hope events, we discovered that we already had several events on our calendar that could work as Door2Hope events. Our 20-somethings ministry, which meets on Saturday evenings, had already planned to address depression on December 29. With little extra effort, we transformed it into a public event for Door2Hope.

When I approached Erin Sieveking, who directs our youth ministry, about focusing on depression for one of her regular Sunday youth evenings, she and I designed an event called "Depression Among Our Teens." Erin emceed a discussion by two teens and two adults. About sixty attended, half teens and half adults. Most of them were our church members, but we did get some folks from the community.

Later, our DCE Jim Anderson told me about our members' response to a marriage counseling video seminar by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, entitled *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*. We had offered this as a 13-week course in the fall of 2007, with an attendance of over fifty. Jim ran the course again this winter, and amazingly another forty are attending. In addition, Jim scheduled for all the videos to be shown as a weekend marriage workshop on Feb. 15-16. Then it hit us. Why not advertise this event at door2hope.org as a Door2Hope event? After all, marital problems can be a major contributor to depression. Eighty-six people attended, and a dozen of them were from outside our church.

The biggest Door2Hope event was a Depression Resources Open House, which we held twice on Saturdays from 10 AM to 2 PM. When you stepped into our Fellowship Hall you were greeted by friendly people, the smell of delicious food, and soft, uplifting music. You were handed a brochure with a map that located all the different ways we were addressing depression. Then you could browse to whichever section appealed to you. Similar to our website, every section at the Open House smelled of Christ, but not at the same intensity. The sections included:

1. Depression screenings
2. Grief
3. Exercise and massage
4. Domestic abuse
5. Art therapy
6. Music therapy
7. Nutrition
8. Stress-relief freebies: squeeze toys, slinkies, etc.
9. Aging
10. Prayer ministry
11. Print materials from Lutheran Hour, et al
12. Comfort food: soups and desserts

Our second Depression Resources Open House drew about eighty attendees. Half were members of our church or another area Lutheran Church. The other half were the very audience we were aiming for: unchurched folks who were willing to darken the door of a church because we were addressing their need. Some people stayed for over two hours enjoying all the resources and reassuring conversations. As they grew to trust us, some people started inquiring about our church.

- “I need to find a church. What is this one like?”
- “My sixth grade daughter has been bugging me to allow her to attend a confirmation class. What classes do you have for children that age?”

After the Depression Resources Open House, our thirty volunteers debriefed about the experienced. They were astounded that so many unchurched and not-yet Christian people had come. A couple attendees had even admitted upon their arrival, “I’m here for the depression event, but I don’t buy any of this religion stuff.” They were delighted to discover we accepted and loved them as they were. Our thirty volunteers marveled that they had had several opportunities to display Christ’s love and share their faith in a natural way that matched their gifts and abilities. Finally, our greeter made a significant observation: “I noticed the body language of people as they entered the building. Some almost backed in. Most hung their heads. Few could force a smile. But when they exited, most were smiling, their heads held high, because God had met them here.”

NET Fishing was working.

Other churches have gotten into the act too. Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Paul offers topical events to their community. On January 17, they had lined up Pastor Peter Preus to speak on Suicide and Faith. With Bethlehem’s approval it was also advertised at our website as a Door2Hope event. Our Savior’s in St. Paul runs a cancer support group, which is advertised as a Door2Hope event. We also promoted a divorce recovery discussion group started up by another Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. They had the sense to host this event at a Starbucks in the middle of a new urban condo neighborhood that has no churches. Brilliant!

What event is your church planning that could be promoted at door2hope.org?

After we completed the Depression and Hope pilot of NET Fishing, what conclusions did we draw?

1. Christians will unite around this strategy and such a topic. God-willing, a solid core of volunteers will continue to work together to further develop the Depression and Hope component of Door2Hope.

2. Not-yet Christians will respond to caring attempts to meet them amid their trials. Even individuals far from the Kingdom of God will draw near if our concern for them is sincere.

3. Publicity makes a difference. For our early events we depended on word of mouth and

the Door2Hope business cards to get the word out. This brought meager results. For our later events we have placed ads in the local community newspaper at a cost of about \$450 a pop. But many of the outsiders who attended came due to the ads.

4. We still have a lot left to build. During the pilot we only had time to build some components of NET Fishing. We focused on the website and the events. Many other areas are worthy of attention, and when they are added the whole network will be more effective. But if it functions this effectively with a minimal network, we think it will work much better as the entire strategy is implemented more fully.

5. We need to develop support groups for depressed people. We have had professional counselors at most of our events, but when we meet hurting people, we need to provide them an on-going support system.

6. The NET fishing team and I are still learning what it means to implement this strategy. It was one thing to theorize about doing this. It is another to actually do it. We learn something new every week.

7. It takes time for a single congregation to catch the vision and come on board with NET Fishing. Even after eight months, the majority of St. Michael's members probably are still fuzzy on what NET fishing is.

However, there are signs that people are getting it. For example, after only one month of the pilot, our church library volunteers visited door2hope.org, found the books recommend there, purchased them for the library, and wrote an article for the church newsletter about the books. They did this entirely on their own initiative. In addition, they provided books at our Depression Resources Open Houses, not just to look at, but allowing attendees who are not church members to borrow the books.

Ruth Townsend was developing a quilting and knitting group for our women's ministry. At the same time, she got involved organizing refreshments for our Door2Hope events. She had been viewing the quilting and knitting as an activity mostly for our church's women. Now Ruth says, "I hadn't realized it before, but quilting and knitting groups are a part of NET fishing. So many depressed, lonely, and grieving women need an activity to occupy their hands and take their minds off their troubles. And they need a small group where they can make significant friendships, friendships that can lead to knowing Christ."

Expanding Door2Hope

Door2Hope is not restricted to "Depression and Hope." We can address scores of topics. We dream of the day when the homepage of door2hope.org will look like a scene from the animated film *Monsters, Inc* — many doors with the title of a different topic on each door. Just click on the door of your choice.

However, the doors/topics will need to be built one by one. So, what will we do for an

encore to Depression and Hope? Due to the success at St. Michael's of various classes on marriage, we decided to ride this wave and make our next Door2Hope topic Love and Marriage. We picture this topic like a constellation consisting of many stars: dating, relationships, marriage, sexuality, divorce, remarriage, and so on. Or tentative kick-off date for Love and Marriage is Fall 2008.

Do you remember the folk tale of "Stone Soup"? When everyone adds the little bit of food, you wind up with a great pot of soup. NET fishing is stone soup evangelism. When individuals, small groups, congregations, circuits, and districts pitch in the limited outreach resources they have available, the Holy Spirit combines all the ingredients to provide a nourishing evangelistic broth that none of us could have created on our own.

You don't have to live in Minnesota to participate in NET fishing. Here are some ways to participate in Door2Hope and help it expand.

1. **Web resources.** Joining Door2Hope is simple. Just start using the resources at the website, create your own events, and invite others around you to do the same. We have developed a set of materials to inform people about Door2Hope and recruit participants, whether they are individual Christians, families, small groups, church workers, or entire congregations. You can access this information at www.door2hope.org/partners.

2. **Evangelistic teams.** People can form their own teams to develop a new topic. For example, I know someone in Chicago who is passionate about helping aging adults. With a few more like-minded people to help him, they could develop a lot of the resources needed to create the Maturity and Aging door. The instigators don't even have to live in the same place. With modern communications technology they can work as an evangelistic team even if they each live in different states or countries.

3. **Congregations.** For churches to get involved, they don't need to add more to what they are already doing. For example, a church near ours has Stephen Ministers. When they learned about Door2Hope, they contacted us to discuss how they could partner with us. Now some of the events they hold also serve as Door2Hope events open to the public. Some churches are very strong in their ministry to people with addictions and compulsive behaviors. With minimal effort they could develop a new door on that topic—especially if they linked their efforts with a few other churches that possess the same strength. Such churches could help train other churches to do the same. It's all a matter of each church using its strengths and pooling their resources with other churches. That's stone soup evangelism.

4. **Districts.** Every year, districts of the LCMS hold conferences for their pastors and other church workers. Often the events are on a topic that could be used at Door2Hope. For instance, the topic for the Minnesota Pastoral Conference in May 2008 was cohabitation and marriage. Our presenter, Pastor Bryan Salminen of Emmanuel, Cadillac, Michigan, did a marvelous job. He is a wealth of information and priceless counsel on the topic. Many other

pastors who were in attendance also have a lot of material to share on this topic. Some pastors and church staffers have designed their own counseling methods. Others have resources that they have found useful. In every congregation Christian couples have experiences to share from their own lives. If we organized all this material around NET fishing principles, we could create an amazing web site on the subject of Love and Marriage. Then, if each circuit in Minnesota planned events, support groups, and follow-up Bible studies and discussion groups, we would impact our whole state as never before.

Your district, city, or region could do the same. I will be speaking about NET Fishing in the Southeastern District in September 2008, and again next summer. I'm hoping we will find ways to initiate Door2Hope in Maryland, Virginia, DC, and the Carolinas. I have another speaking engagement for November 2009 in the Rocky Mountain District. District Presidents and other district staffers and committee members are invited to visit www.door2hope.org/partners, consider the strengths and resources in their district, and then contact us.

5. Cross-cultural. Here in Minnesota we have hundreds of thousands of Africans, some Christian, some Muslim. As we develop the Love and Marriage door, we will invite the African Immigrant Lutheran Churches to get involved. They will be motivated to do so, because adjusting to life in the U.S.A. puts a strain on their marriages and families. What ethnic groups in your area would benefit from NET fishing? Long-term, I would love to see a distinct Door2Hope designed for every ethnic group in North America.

6. International. In November 2007, I contacted my friend Ken Peterson about NET fishing. Remember, he was the Director of the Lutheran Hour office in Venezuela. Today he holds a similar position in Panama. Ken was excited to hear about NET fishing, and has already sharing the concept with other Lutheran Hour Office Directors in Latin America and in Africa. In particular, Ken observed: "The NET fishing concept gets back to what the 1st century church really was, a network, a group of people held together by common vision and goals that they share with one another. I also like it because it is expandable and can be as big, or as compact as the available resources can support."

Wow! This is exciting!

The Network Already Exists

When I told my cousin, Kurt Bickel, about NET Fishing, he replied, "Phil, the network to do this already exists. You only need to bring it in line with your purposes." Kurt is right. Christians are already connected. They already desire to witness. They just need to become connected for the purpose of NET fishing.

Learning to fish with a regional network of evangelistic teams will not be easy. But the benefits will far outweigh the costs. Although the difficulties will be many, I'm willing to make

the sacrifice. I'm eager to dedicate the remainder of my professional life to developing networks of evangelistic teams in the city where I live—and beyond. I believe this is the career goal toward which God is calling me to strive.

Am I crazy? Will I be wasting my time? Back in the 1920s, a Lutheran pastor had a dream—to use the radio airwaves to proclaim Christ in North America and beyond. His name was Walter A. Maier. His nickname was WAM. Never wavering from his goal, WAM sought the help of like-minded Lutherans. His idea caught fire and became a movement called the Lutheran Laymen's League and Lutheran Hour Ministries. Thousands of lay people participated in WAM's dream. A similar revolution will need to occur for the Church to learn how to fish with a NET.

Can it happen? God did it in the 1920s. Surely He can do it again. He can teach each of us to fish with a NET—in our own small group, in our church, and in our city or region.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Consider these texts in light of the concept of regional NET fishing.

1. Exodus 18
2. Luke 14: 25-33.
3. Acts 1:14.
4. Acts 19.
5. 1 Corinthians 12.
6. 2 Corinthians 1:3-11
7. Ephesians 6:10-20.

B. Ponder these questions.

1. Have you been involved in anything like the Venezuela media strategy or "Living for Tomorrow"? What was it like? What do you think of it?
2. In what area of need are you one of the walking wounded? What would it be like to unite with others who have survived by the grace of God and to proclaim the Gospel to others in your region struggling with the same issues?
3. Watch the PowerPoint presentation on NET fishing. List the pros and cons of attempting to design such a NET in your region.
4. Give your opinion of Dan Haupt's assessment: "Only God could accomplish such an extensive plan. So, I had to join you to see how God was going to do it."
5. Start to dream. What would a network of evangelistic teams look like in your congregation and in your region?

C. Prayer.

Read Matthew 11:28-20 while taking into account that Christ's invitation is not written in

you-solo but in y'all. Then pray through this text slowly and often.

CHAPTER 5

Weaving Your NETS

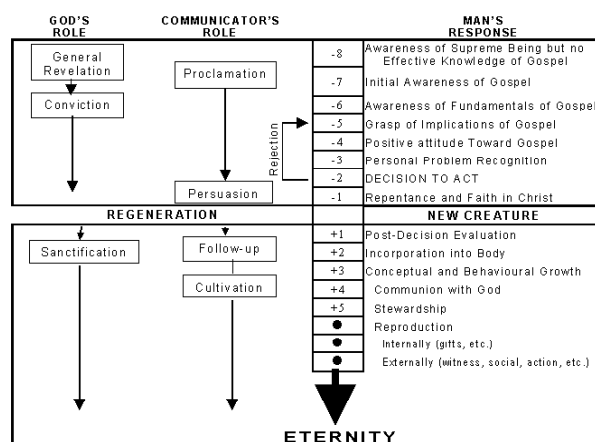
The purpose of this book is to train and organize people to fish with a Network of Evangelistic Teams on three levels: personal, congregational, and regional. This chapter consists of three sets of questions and tasks to help you weave together your own network of evangelistic teams. The teams you design will differ from those of other people, because each of us lives and serves in our own unique setting: family, workplace, neighborhood, community, and region.

Level 1: Your Personal Evangelistic Team

1. Describe yourself: spiritual journey, abilities, spiritual gifts, and passions.
2. Describe your personal evangelism setting: family, friendships, workplace, neighborhood, community.
4. What Christians around you are (or could be) on your personal evangelistic team? What strengths and weaknesses does each of you bring to the team?

5. What steps can you take to be more intentional about being an evangelistic team?

6. What persons around you stand in need of Christ's love? Where do they stand on the Engel scale? (From *What's Gone Wrong With The Harvest*, James F. Engel, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, p. 45.) →



7. What other not-yet Christians are known by the other members of your team? Where do they stand on the Engel scale?
8. Depending on the Holy Spirit, what could your team do to help move your not-yet Christian friends one step closer to repentance and faith in Christ?
9. How might your team change when unbelieving friends confess Christ and join your team?
10. With God's help, what outreach strategies do you envision your team using 5 years from now?

Level 2: Your Congregation's (or Ministry's)

Network of Evangelistic Teams

1. Describe your church or ministry—its history, community, ethos, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, resources, and passions.
2. Identify and describe the various teams (groups carrying out a ministry of any kind) that are already functioning.
3. Describe the target audiences of your congregation's or ministry's outreach efforts.
4. To what extent do the team leaders and members acknowledge outreach and evangelism as an essential purpose of their team? What stands in the way of this understanding? What promotes this understanding?
5. Where among the teams do you see evangelism happening?
6. Where among the teams does evangelistic activity need improvement?
7. To what extent do the teams network their efforts for greater impact? What is working well? What improvements are needed?
8. What steps can your teams take to be more intentional about networking their efforts for evangelistic outreach?
9. Looking ahead, how might your teams change as some converts start to participate on your teams?
10. As the Holy Spirit transforms your church or ministry into a network of evangelistic teams, what evangelism strategies do you envision using five years from now?

Level 3: Your Regional Network of Evangelistic Teams

1. Describe your community, region, or the wider setting within which you seek to proclaim the Gospel. Consider its boundaries, history, target audiences, needs, advantages, disadvantages, and challenges.
2. Identify and categorize the evangelistic partners and potential partners in your region—congregations, parachurch ministries, and other entities.
3. Describe the partners strengths, weaknesses, personnel, abilities, resources, connections, etc. What unique features can each church, ministry, or other entity contribute to the regional network of evangelistic teams?
4. Where do you see evangelism happening?
5. Where does evangelistic activity need improvement?
6. To what extent does each church, ministry, or entity acknowledge outreach and evangelism as an essential purpose of their existence? What stands in the way of this understanding? What promotes this understanding?
7. To what extent do the churches, ministries, and other entities already network their efforts for greater impact? What is working well? What improvements are needed?
8. What steps can be taken to be more intentional about networking their efforts for evangelistic outreach?
9. Looking ahead, how might the regional network of evangelistic teams change when a number of converts are participating in the concerted evangelistic effort?
10. As the Holy Spirit develops a network of evangelistic teams in your region, what new evangelistic goals do you envision addressing five years from now?