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ENCOUNTERS

WITH CHRIST

GEOFFREY HUNTER

THIS BOOK is one of the resources in the Christian Life Curriculum for use in Methodist, Presbyterian, Churches of Christ, and Congregational Churches in Australia and New Zealand, and the Anglican Church in New Zealand.

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ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

Bible Studies On Evangelism

by

Geoffrey Hunter

ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST is a study commissioned by the Committee on Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales. It is also the 1975 Lenten study of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

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INTRODUCTION:

ABOUT EVANGELISM AND ABOUT THIS BOOK

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF ATTITUDES about evangelism in the church.

- Some stress worshipping and serving the community
- Some stress the communication of the news of forgiveness and freedom in Christ
- Some express dissatisfaction with the present level of outreach, coupled with a willingness to re-evaluate both the thinking and the practice of evangelism
- Some reveal a negative response even to the word "evangelism", indicating a rejection of much that has been called evangelism in the past.

These studies are designed to help you evaluate suggested approaches in evangelism for your congregation. They may be used by responsible people of the church to evaluate and choose a strategy for evangelism. Groups who may use them are local church governing bodies, study groups, and those who gather to plan and act in Encounter '75. Each study session is designed for a 1½ hour period, although some studies could involve two sessions. If you have less than 1½ hours per session, you will need to limit some of the suggested procedures or extend the study to two sessions.

These studies will help you to look at the effect Jesus had on people he met; they invite you to develop criteria for evangelism relevant to the seventies and to plan an approach appropriate to your neighbourhood.

This study book is aimed at drawing out the God-given resources which we each have. It is not intended as a pep-talk to bolster previous strategies, but as a guide to our potential for evangelism. The book makes some assumptions about what is intrinsic to the task of evangelism. It is obvious that a sense of trust in the good news in Jesus must be with any evangelist, as are also dependence on the presence of his Spirit, continued link in prayer, and study of his revelation in scripture. However, what may not be so obvious is the dependence which God makes on fragile humans to spread his good news of love, and his expectation that we will use our twentieth century intellect in its contemporary situation. It is to this less obvious aspect that emphasis has been given here.

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STUDY 1:

MEETING JESUS

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE in the good news in Jesus, but many do not. We who have accepted that good news as most important for our lives are grateful for the love of Jesus and want to share this good news with others. Hence there is evangelism. What evangelism means and how we can best go about it are questions to consider in planning for our task of sharing the good news.

One way to start is to look at the way Jesus evangelized mankind. The best documented example is that of Peter. In this study, there is emphasis on Peter's experience from the time of his call until after the ascension of Jesus; we will explore how he gained complete faith in Jesus. The test of that faith came when Jesus was no longer physically present. Simon the fisherman became Peter the rock. Although Jesus named him Peter (John 1:42), the reality of that assurance was not evident until some time later, until Peter grew in faith to where he could stand alone for Jesus. The evangelism of Peter was going on from the time of that initial call by Jesus, and we can gain help from this case study in constructing a criteria of evangelism for today.

Study Procedure

Group members will be looking for clues to significant changes in Peter, so it is important that every passage be considered by all or part of the group. The deciding factor for procedure is whether you want everyone to study each passage. You might divide the passages up between the working groups (three to five passages per group) and allow 20 minutes for research. Then in Step 2, have each working group

share the results of its study. Alternatively, you may choose to use the material in two sessions, with Steps 1 and 2 in a first session and the remaining steps in a second session. A final possibility is to have one session of at least two hours.

Step 1. Divide into pairs or threes to use the worksheet (page 6) for research on Peter's life. The passages provide a biographical sketch and the worksheet helps you chart the significant factors in Peter's growth in faith.

Step 2. Report the findings briefly so that members can compare and complete the data on the worksheets.

Step 3. Using the data gathered, discuss the following questions:

What changes occurred in Peter's attitude?

What changes occurred in Peter's actions?

When did these changes occur?

What caused the changes?

What was the message of good news in each instance?

How was the good news portrayed?

What was the atmosphere in which the message was offered by Jesus?

What examples were given by Jesus that the good news was to be trusted?

At what point did Peter completely submit his life to Jesus as Lord?

Step 4. Discuss what it means for you to be in relationship to Christ in the following areas:

a. decision-making

b. relation to others

c. coping with problems

d. life style.

Talk in terms of your own feelings, rather than about theories of theologians or other people's experiences. Give examples from your own life. Begin with phrases such as, "I find in my experience . . ." or, "I feel . . .", or, "When I have to decide about . . ."

Step 5. At the end of every session, you will be asked to add to a list of criteria for effective evangelism, beginning with this step. **THIS IS A MOST IMPORTANT STEP.** To review the study, and for use in future studies, complete the following sentence:

"People come into relationship with Christ when . . ."

WORKSHEET
ON
PETER'S LIFE

Write a clue word or phrase which indicates a significant change from Peter's previous behaviour.

Write a clue word or phrase which indicates a significant change from Peter's previous attitude.

Write a clue word or phrase which indicates why Peter was able to act consistently in a new way.

Matthew 4:18-20

Luke 5:1-11

Luke 9:18-21

Matthew 16:13-20

Luke 9:28-36

2 Peter 1:16-18

Matthew 26:31-35

Matthew 26:36-44

Matthew 26:47-56

Matthew 26:69-75

Luke 24:33-34

John 21:3-19

Acts 2:1-16

Acts 3:1-10

Acts 4:8-13

Acts 4:23-31

Acts 5:27-32

STUDY 2:

NEW ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

LET US FIRST RECOGNIZE that God created each of us with many talents, and it is obvious by the call to mission with which Jesus left the disciples (see Matthew 28:18-20) that he has a task for us using these talents. There is also an assurance of the presence and support of the Spirit, such as promised in the account by John (John 15:26) and Luke (Luke 24:47-49). Simply to say that we leave the work to the Holy Spirit is to opt out of the responsibilities given to mankind by God. The task in this chapter is to identify factors which enable evangelism to be effective.

Changing Attitudes and Behaviours

The challenge to accept the Christian gospel is a challenge to the basic attitudes and behaviour of a person. When we evangelize, we expect that those we confront will make some basic changes in attitudes and behaviours, with an emerging belief and trust in Jesus. If this is so then the task is not simply a matter of enabling a person to hear about the message, rather it involves an approach which affects the whole of the person in ways which may be quite traumatic.

For many people, evangelism seems to consist simply of telling the good news and then waiting for the good news to work. To do only this is to run the risk of creating a response which lacks a faith. A person may hear and even accept the good news, to the point of commitment, and yet find himself at a "half-way house" along the road to changing attitudes and behaviours. As so many before him, he may find it difficult and lonely attempting to develop a new life style of commitment to Jesus. In Peter's experience, there seemed to be stages where he was at a "half-way house" in the effects of commitment to his Lord. If you follow the lives of the disciples, you see their steps seem to falter until well after the crucifixion and resurrection. From the time of their call to follow him, there was an affirmation of Jesus, yet they still lacked a full assurance in their actions until Pentecost. (See Matthew 16:21-23; 17:14-20; 26:31-35, 56; Luke 24:6, 10-11.)

The Movement In Personal Change

In the New Testament accounts, there are three stages in the response to the good news in Jesus. One example of this is the Emmaus road story. These same three stages must be experienced today. At one stage, we HEAR the good news. At another stage, we desire or WANT the good news to be true for ourselves. But until we move to the stage where we TRY new attitudes and behaviours which reflect an acceptance of the good news, it is not our good news.

1. Hearing.

I hear many ideas, and often understand their complexities, but I may never want to try them myself. I hear ideas in the mass media, and I hear them from other people.

2. Wanting.

Often the ideas I hear become those I seek and desire, perhaps because they are seen to be working for others. They can become a model, ideals which for me are not only desirable but also possible. However, whether I want to respond because of a model or because of the spoken idea, I may never move to try the new thing.

- I may have *doubt* which prevents a *trust* in trying a new attitude or behaviour
- I may have *fear* which leads to a *withdrawal* rather than letting the new idea become a *strength* in my life
- I may have a feeling of *impotence or inability* which limits the discovery of *power or confidence* in my new life
- I may have a feeling of *isolation* from others which prevents the discovery in a *community* that there are others who felt like me yet found these new attitudes and behaviours possible.

Many people have heard the gospel message and responded to it, but their experience in church life has left them feeling disappointed and unfulfilled. Some are still waiting, hoping the good news is true, but afraid to let go to the experience of it. Others have turned their backs on the church, disappointed that there is no truth in the promise.

3. Trying.

I fear trying new attitudes and behaviour, and that is a very human response. I fear that those who are my friends will no longer accept me and that I will have no friends. I am willing to risk new attitudes and behaviour when I am assured that if I fail, someone will still love me, when I trust that someone will still be my friend whatever happens.

By the way in which people care for me as I risk new styles of behaviour and attitudes to life, I discover that these new ideas are possible. In a similar way, when I discover that these people trust in

God's forgiveness and presence, I too can risk that possibility. This is the nearest that I can come to the experience which the men of the road to Emmaus had. Both in their situation and mine (and yours), it is the affirmation by others which enables the full commitment to the good news in Jesus. Then, when I have risked trusting in the presence of God, I can know the assurance of that presence.

To Move Through These Three Stages, I Need People

- I need people to help me HEAR the message by *sharing* it with me
- I need people to help me WANT the message by *showing* that it is possible and desirable for them
- I need people to help me TRY the message by *caring* for me.

I need to hear the message in an atmosphere which reflects that message of love and forgiveness. I need people to reassure me that the message which I trust is the message they trust, too. I need people to confirm the reality of the presence of God for them as for me. I need a gathered community of God's people to share the above experience with me — I and any other person who is being told the good news in Jesus.

Study Procedure

In this session, the Emmaus road story will be used as a case study to identify factors which help new attitudes and behaviours to develop, which enable a person to change.

Step 1. Divide into groups of three to study Luke 24:13-35. (If there is time for longer discussion in this step, some small groups may explore additional passages suggested in the preceding article.) In examining the Emmaus road story, use the following questions:

- a. What was the attitude of the two men as they commenced the journey? How did they feel? Did they still believe in Jesus?
- b. When did they trust the message of Jesus? What are the incidents on the road which indicate a trust or lack of trust?
- c. What factors helped trust to grow?

In examining the Emmaus road story and other passages on the experiences of the disciples, this question may be helpful:

- d. What indications are there of a change in attitudes and behaviour?
 - From doubt to trust
 - From fear or withdrawal to strength
 - From impotence to power or confidence
 - From isolation to community.

Step 2. After about twenty minutes, groups should report their findings. Each group in turn may state one important finding until all feel their results or questions have been listed.

Step 3. In the preceding article, reference is made to the three stages or levels through which one must move in the process of adopting new attitudes and behaviours: Hearing, Wanting, Trying. Look at the listing from Step 2 and discuss these questions:

- a. Can you identify any of these stages in the passages?
- b. What are the factors which help the three stages to be experienced in the passages?

Step 4. Recall and share times when group members experienced the "gift" of moving to discover new attitudes and behaviours. Encourage each to identify their feelings before, during and after such a change. Summarize these on a chart headed as follows:

BEFORE CHANGE		AFTER CHANGE	
Attitudes and Behaviours	Feelings	Attitudes and Behaviours	Feelings

Step 5. Add to your list of criteria for effective evangelism from Session 1, by completing this statement:

"People can desire change and be willing to change their life style when . . ."

STUDY 3:

WHAT MESSAGE?

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE MESSAGE hinges largely on the extent to which our common life reveals Christ present among us as Lord. Unless we are a community of worshipping, praying people, in whom the Spirit dwells and in whose lives his power is clearly visible, our evangelism will involve no more than platitudes.

Again, when we proclaim the good news, it is not simply to achieve the intellectual acceptance of a set of ideas. We preach to bring men to a total commitment to Jesus Christ, whereby they accept him as Lord and find in him the forgiveness of their sins and the freedom to adopt a new life style, centred in obedience to him.

To achieve this fully, we as the church must be a warm, accepting community, actualizing Christian standards in our daily lives and welcoming and encouraging new disciples. Obviously the quality of our obedience to Christ is a vital part of our evangelistic impact in the community.

At the same time, the New Testament continually reminds us that to evangelize is to communicate, and that means ultimately to say something to someone, to convey a message. The New Testament use of *euaggelizomai* (to evangelize) owes much to its use in the common Greek translation of the Old Testament, particularly in passages such as Isaiah 40. The New Testament usage of *euaggelion* (the gospel) reflects its growing use to describe the official pronouncements of the Roman emperors. This background gives breadth to both the ecclesiastical expression "to preach the gospel" and the popular term "to proclaim the good news". In the New Testament, the focus of evangelism is certainly in the area of verbal proclamation, proclaiming what God has done in Christ for our salvation and calling on men to repent and acknowledge him.

What is the content of that message?

Any statement we make about the gospel must grow out of a deeper study of scripture. The apostolic *kerugma* (gospel message), which is reflected in the preaching in the books of Acts, shows:

- a stress on the plan of God for the salvation of man
- the identification of Jesus as the long-promised Messiah
- the historical reality of his life, death and resurrection
- the conviction that there is salvation in him alone
- the challenge to all men to turn away from their rebellious rejection of him in order to submit their lives to him as Lord.

Jesus confronted men during his earthly ministry, graciously meeting them in need, healing, restoring and forgiving them, and making them disciples.

The nature of Christian salvation was recently focused in the Bangkok conference on the theme "Salvation Today", and further discussion has emerged from the International Congress on Evangelization, Lausanne, July 1974, as it will also from the July 1975 Assembly of the World Council of Churches on the theme "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites".

In all such discussion we do well to keep in mind the New Testament stress that our salvation is in terms of "by grace alone", "through faith alone", and "in Christ alone". In the New Testament, men entered this salvation as a direct response to Christ personally, or as he was presented to them in the authoritative proclamation of the good news.

What message do people hear?

"The medium is the message" (or message, to quote or misquote Marshall McLuhan) reminds us that the way things are communicated is often more significant than what is actually said. We communicate both verbally and non-verbally; sometimes we say one thing but act differently, thus conveying the wrong message. For example, it does not seem very convincing to tell a person that you love him or her very much while remaining with your head buried in a book or newspaper. The record of events in the scriptures confirms that the message was in both word and action. In formulating and presenting our "message", our good news, we must keep the verbal and non-verbal aspects in mind.

"The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14 TEV) John reminds us of the way in which the message of God's love and forgiveness became credible to man: through action and language. As we study the Bible, we should look for the two aspects of the "message" as clues for our own approach to evangelism.

Study Procedure

Several experiences of preaching and conversion are to be studied, seeking to identify what message was proclaimed and responded to.

Acts 16:23-34	Jailer at Phillipi
Acts 2:1-47	Pentecost
John 3:1-21	Nicodemus
John 9:1-41	Blind man with Jesus
Acts 9:1-22	Saul's conversion

If you have less than 1½ hours, you may choose to divide the task among group members, with pairs looking at one or two of the passages, and then reporting back. If you have more time, you may work through all the passages together.

Step 1. Study the passages listed above, seeking to answer the following questions about each passage:

What was the message proclaimed in words? In action?

What promise was conveyed to the hearer?

To what words and action did the converted seem to respond?

What evidence is present in the "message" to suggest to the hearer that the message is to be trusted?

Are there identifiable factors which seem to be present or in the background which were important in helping the conversion experience to happen?

(Note that the evidence is incomplete for some questions in some passages.)

Step 2. Compare the evidence from each of the events. Then discuss one of these questions:

What do these passages suggest is essential in the "message" if an effective and permanent conversion experience is to occur?

What aspects of the "message" seem most important in our task of evangelism?

Step 3. Individually, think of times when you heard the gospel message with power. Share these experiences with others in the group by answering these two questions:

What was the message heard?

What made the occasion memorable?

Then think of times when you were aware of the gospel being shared with you without words, and tell about the experiences using the same two questions.

Step 4. Continue to develop the list of criteria from Studies 1 and 2 by completing this sentence:

"People still respond to a message which tells them . . ."

STUDY 4:

EVANGELISM FOR TODAY

YESTERDAY ...

AS YOU WALK down the street, people greet you and you know each one, their attitudes and habits, including those they would prefer not discussed. The year is 1875, and you are on your way to church. The church seems to be the place to gather and meet others on "the day of rest". Some don't come, but most do.

Everyone knows when a stranger comes to town, and he's welcome providing he minds his own business. You have never travelled further than two days journey in the horse and buggy, though you know some who came out from "the old country" with a months long sea trip.

This week, the December 1874 issue of the English magazine *Punch* arrived with news of the continued domination of Europe by the German tyrant, Bismark. However, more conversations will focus on news in the local newspaper.

You proudly watch your son run ahead of you, and dream of the day when he will join you in

the same occupation, as has been the tradition in previous generations.

You feel obliged to attend church although there is never any question of doing otherwise; anyway, you look forward to the long chats afterward. As you enter church, you not only know everyone present and where each will sit, but also the joys and sorrows of each.

As you wait during the prayers for the sermon, a mind-stretching exercise in your routine world, you are aware of the trespasses of those present as you recite the words, "forgive us our trespasses".

AND TODAY

AS YOU DRIVE to church, you wonder where all those cars are going in the other direction. You remember that friends from work, who drove 50 kilometers for an evening last night, said they were going up country for the day. You

are on your way to church, after another hectic week of wondering if anything will remain stable at the end of 1975. The Elders are complaining that attendance is dropping off, but you wonder if you can get a parking spot with all those cars cluttering the street as parents wait to collect their children from Sunday school.

* * *

You've been away for three weeks, on a caravan holiday where you covered 5,000 kilometers; you wonder how the Jones family are enjoying their six-week package tour of England and Europe. You must remember to invite them over when they return, for you haven't had a chance to get together for months. As for the neighbours, you all seem too busy to do more than exchange casual greetings since you moved in eighteen months ago. Fancy not realizing that Mrs. Brown next door was sick all week!

* * * * *

What has happened to the attempts of the church to be the focal point in people's lives, giving values and perspectives on life in 1975 as it did in 1875? The present structures and methods of the church to evangelize too often seem to be designed for the needs of the people of another time.

One of the important educational discoveries is that if a person is to learn a new idea, you must start and build from the ideas which that person already has. In a similar way, you may help a person see his deeper needs by satisfying his immediate felt needs. For example, if a person's felt need is for someone to listen to his problems, then you will have great difficulty trying to tell him your "good news" while he is too preoccupied with his problems even to hear what your "news" is about.

A common criticism of the church is that it is no longer relevant to the needs of people today. What truth is there in this? How does this

The violence and turmoil of the smallest corners of the world are piped into your lounge room daily. The children quote the newest fad that "everybody" is doing. You have no idea what occupation your son or daughter will want, if any.

Today as usual there are many other possibilities besides going to church, and most people you know choose otherwise. Man today, in his strength and self-sufficiency, is generally unwilling to acknowledge any need of God and of other people.

As you enter church, you look to see who you may know and wish you could catch up on how they are, but find yourself sitting near those people whose name you still can't remember although you met them last year. As you wait during the prayers for the sermon, another monotone discourse in contrast to the stimulation of your mass media week, you wonder if anyone else feels as confused as you do when you mouth the words, "Thy will be done".

warn us in our planning for evangelism? D. T. Niles has said that evangelism is "one beggar showing another beggar where the bread is". But today's myth is that there are no beggars in our society. Everyone has the world at his feet, so they say. There is the expectation that each has independence and sufficient means for strength and support. We live by the myth that everyone around us is doing okay and that we should pretend this is so with us. I fear the possibility that others may sense my feelings of inadequacy, for then I would seem a lesser person.

Today man idealizes himself as strong and self-sufficient. This may not be a new phenomenon (reference is made more than once to it in the Bible) but it is reinforced greatly by today's cultural environment. It follows that man-in-his-strength and self-sufficiency will be unwilling to acknowledge the reality of his need for God and other people. How the evangelist should approach contemporary man is one of the vital questions for those planning for evangelism today.

Study Procedure

Steps 1 and 2 may be done in pairs or threes, bringing the results onto a wall chart or blackboard in a group session; then proceed with Step 3 as a group. If time is short, allow a maximum of 20 minutes each for Steps 1 and 2.

Step 1. List some of the many pressures on both individuals and families today. What are some of the "binds" which those present feel in daily living? To what degree do these limit your available time for the church?

Step 2. Make another list of some of the desires or felt needs which you suspect many people have (e.g., youth, adults, parents, families). In what ways do these needs conflict with the present programs of the church, both in terms of times and types of activities? What does the contrast in the article, "Yesterday and Today" suggest about the current strategies of the church?

Step 3. It is often difficult for people to acknowledge their own or other peoples' needs. To what offers of help will people respond today? Make a list.

Step 4. Continue to list criteria for effective evangelistic strategy by completing these two sentences:

"People still have felt needs and longings for . . ."

"People still respond to offers which . . ."

Step 5. Read through the description of some approaches to evangelism (Appendix, page 23). Identify strategies which best fit your listed criteria for evangelistic approach.

STUDY 5:

EVANGELISM IN OUR CONGREGATION

IN THE PRECEEDING STUDIES you have been doing research on the dynamics of the process called evangelism. This session is planned to help you choose a strategy which is appropriate for your own local situation. The task is to choose an approach which will communicate the gospel of Jesus, as we understand it, to others.

Study Procedure

This study may take two sessions to develop if all steps are followed. If divided into two sessions, conclude the first session at the end of Step 2 and start the second session with a review of the check list in Step 2.

Step 1. TO WHOM? In order to consider a realistic approach for your situation, think of some of the people whom you would like to have discover Jesus as Lord of their lives. It may help to think of specific people, keeping their names anonymous. Make a list of some of their attitudes and behaviour, apparent needs, and activities, which seem to be there to give satisfaction in daily living. Then make another list of the difficulties you might face in seeking to confront these people with the good news of Jesus.

Step 2. WHAT APPROACH? Take the list of criteria for effective evangelism which has been developed in the previous study sessions and choose or construct an approach or strategy for evangelism which fulfills the criteria. (See the list of possible approaches to evangelism in Appendix A, page 23.) In selecting a strategy or approach you may choose one or more of those in the Appendix, or construct combinations of approaches, or develop something completely different from your local situation.

A Check List For Assessing Your Strategy

- 1. Who will be involved as workers in the evangelistic task?
- 2. What resources will be needed?
 - Will you need training?
 - Will you need the support of others?
 - Will you need materials for use?
- 3. Will the approach or strategy cope with the difficulties listed in Step 1 above?
- 4. What will be the reaction of those whom you will be seeking to reach?
 - What would be your reaction if you were they?
 - Will this be seen by others as a confrontation or as a friendly approach?
 - To which of the "Hear, Want and Try" steps will the others be likely to respond?
- 5. Does the method utilize only talking or is there also showing by action? List the proportions of both word and action.

Step 3. Having selected a strategy, you may like to simulate the real thing by having a "dry run". In any case, you should try some ways to examine your plan critically.

One way to test out your plan is to try a simulation or some role play situations with members of the group. A role play is a short drama which is ad-libbed, each player taking on a role and acting as you feel a person in that situation would. The leader stops the play after a few minutes, when the issue seems to be clearly focused in the emerging drama. Then the players tell how they felt and what they were thinking in the role. The group discusses the drama and the issues raised, but does not criticize the performance of the actors.

Think up situations where you may be confronting others and role play them, with some taking the roles of church members seeking to evangelize those who are taking the roles of the others. To take a role of one of the others, a "hearer", act out some of the characteristics listed in Step 1.

At least one person should be an observer who calls a halt to the role play when it has focused on an issue or is not getting anywhere. Do not let the play drag on, but allow enough time to experience the confrontation. Then the observer offers feedback and observations in an evaluation segment. Those who played the roles should also share their feelings and understandings gained through the role playing.

Role plays can be a lot of fun. Do not feel that it must be an expert acting job; just play the part as you feel the person in the role you are taking would. Let yourself respond naturally to the feelings you experience as the person in that role.

Step 4. Once you are satisfied with your choice of strategy, resolve to try it out. Using the check list in Step 2 as a help, make detailed plans.

- WHO will we need to involve in the task?
- WHEN will we carry out the strategy?
- WHAT resources do we need?
- With WHOM do we need to consult or cooperate?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT SESSION. In the review and summary next session, you will need a report on each session. Ask for volunteers now to plan the summaries; one person might do one or more studies. A good way to look at what happened each session is to use the summary statements compiled into the criteria for effective evangelism. The reports should be very brief — four or five sentences per session.

STUDY 6:

CELEBRATING AND DEDICATING

*"Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his greatness,
and make known to the nations what he has done!
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell all the wonderful things he has done!
Be glad that we belong to him;
let all who serve the Lord rejoice!
Go to the Lord for help;
stay in his presence always."*

Psalm 105:1-4 (T.E.V.)

Singing praises; restating our faith; joining with others in reaffirming our beliefs — these are important dynamics in the regular gathering of Christians for worship, dynamics echoed by the psalmist. It is appropriate that in these studies we have been helped to make decisions, to state them clearly, and to be encouraged to do this in fellowship with the gathered community of faith, the body of Christ.

Out of this study series, what do we have to sing praises about, what do we desire to proclaim to the nations? And what help do we need from the Lord and his people? First, you should be able to state clearly what you have learned. Some of the learnings will be about the message of the good news, and in this study there is a Bible passage which may bring this into focus. Some of the learnings will be about the method of sharing the good news, and this also is reviewed. Second, you should be able to say what this means to you; this session will help you to affirm this in dedication and celebration.

Preparation for the task of evangelism is only complete when we share our plans and hopes with the whole congregation and dedicate our study, planning and commitment to God. It is essential that evangelism be seen as an integral part of the congregation's life and mission, a distinctive emphasis within all that the church is and does. If evangelism is not given this wide perspective, there is danger of its be-

ing seen as only a part of the congregation's task, or the responsibility of a few. It is the church, the body of Jesus Christ, who evangelizes, who takes the message of good news to the whole world. The worshipping community must constantly be faced with its task, and continually strengthened and prepared for its responsibility to a waiting world. These sessions have probably involved only a small proportion of your congregation. Now you must share with them your understandings about the task of evangelism in your community, ask for their help, and together dedicate yourselves to the proclamation of the good news in Jesus Christ.

Study Procedure

A passage from John's gospel will be studied to discover what Jesus says about our task in evangelism. When this has been related to the criteria listing from earlier sessions, and the specific plans made in the previous session, the group and its work can be offered to God.

Step 1. Individually, read John 12:20-33. Then reread it, answering these questions:

- a. What is Jesus saying to you about your relationship to him?
- b. What is Jesus saying about evangelism in the twentieth century?
What should be its focus?
What should be its message?
What should be the life style of followers of Jesus?

Step 2. Share answers to the questions above in groups of six to eight. Each of these sub-groups should prepare a large sheet giving their *brief* descriptions of focus, message and life style.

Step 3. Put the report sheets up before the whole group. Refer to the list of criteria for effective evangelism developed over previous sessions and see if there are any additions to make as a result of this study. Then consider the plans made during the last session. Should any changes be made as a result of this study?

Step 4. Read the suggestions in Appendix B: "Commitment and Dedication" (page 27) for making the entire congregation a part of the commitment made by the participants in the study group. Decide how to share the results of the study with the rest of the congregation, and plan how and when you will do it.

Step 5. Ask those who have volunteered to do so to review each study briefly. (One way to do this is to look at the unfinished questions used in each study to develop the listing of criteria for effective evangelism.) As a group, answer these questions:

- a. Has any clear mandate for the task of evangelism become apparent for this local congregation?
- b. What is that mandate? (Briefly describe this on one large sheet of newsprint.)

Step 6. Gather together all of the sheets of newsprint, study books, Bibles, and other resources used during the studies. Place them on a table around which you all stand or sit. The statement of mandate should be on top, or on the wall, where everyone can see it. One or more group members may lead in prayers of commitment and dedication, or you may read this prayer together:

"Accept, O God, these symbols of the work and study we have done together in Your Name. Help us to confront people with the good news of Jesus Christ. Help us to demonstrate that good news in our lives. Help us in the plan for evangelism we have made for our congregation. Bless what we do and use it for Your purposes. We dedicate our study to You and commit ourselves to spreading the good news throughout our community and world. We make our prayer in the Name of the One whose life and death is the basis of our good news, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen."

Step 7. Have each member stand in the middle of the group and state his commitment to the task of evangelism while the remainder gather in a very close circle, embracing that person to show support and offering prayers aloud for him. Some people may have very significant commitments to share while others may feel that their call is rather unimportant. Remember that the tasks for the members of Christ's body vary, each with differing importance but all interdependent (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Each person should be encouraged to stand in the centre for this experience, even if he feels that his commitment is not very sizeable. A designated person may close the session with a blessing.

APPENDIX A:

SOME APPROACHES TO EVANGELISTIC STRATEGY

ENCOUNTER '75 — A joint initiative in evangelism.

The focus of this concept is on united interdenominational evangelism within each local community, so far as local congregations are willing and able to be involved. The local interdenominational grouping (Council of Churches, Ministers Fraternal, etc.) is invited to adapt a loosely-framed program to the needs of its own situation, planning such activities as it sees relevant and practicable (from the basic program or otherwise), financing them from its own resources and carrying them out as it sees fit.

State committees see their role in providing publicity, seeking to coordinate a large number of community groups "doing their own thing" in such a way as to achieve maximum impact on the community at large.

It is central to the concept of ENCOUNTER '75 that the autonomy of both local groupings and denominations be maintained. Churches participating in the program undertake:

- to do things together as much as they are able
- to do simultaneously whatever they are unable in conscience to do together
- to do independently whatever else must be done
- to refuse at all times to judge one another.

* * * * *

Some approaches to evangelism. Strategies for evangelism can be grouped into three areas, depending on the degree they are seen to be "within" the church structure.

A. Meeting People On Their Own Ground

1. *Home visitation.* This is a program of visitation to the homes of the less committed who seem to be on the fringe of the church, or to potential members, such as parents of children in Sunday school or clubs.

Following a period of training of visitors, visits are made in pairs to homes in evenings and weekends. Sometimes the training is done during the evening meal, immediately before going out visiting. In conversation at the home, endeavour is made to lead such people to seek and to accept Christ as their Lord, and to participate more actively in the fellowship of the church.

Among the skills the visitor needs are an ability to relate a personal testimony, and an assurance of concern and ongoing fellowship for these people. If desired, printed resources may be made available as well.

2. *Coffee Pot Evangelism*. A training program for individuals to share themselves and their good news over the coffee pot in their own home. The program was prepared by the Lay Institute of Evangelism, 133 Bathurst Street, Sydney 2000.

3. *At Work*. Evangelism often occurs in very informal relationships developed over a period of time. The witness of the Christian attitudes and actions in work and in relationships with others becomes an assurance of the verbal message of good news. In the book "A Second Touch" (Word Paperback, 1967), Keith Miller gives numerous examples of the fruitful result of his witness at work.

4. *Through Mass Media*. Use of television and newspapers has a great deal of potential. During 1975 there will be a co-ordinated effort by ENCOUNTER '75 to use the media, seeking to produce a climate of interest about Jesus in the community.

B. Creating Common Ground For Meeting

5. *Dialogue Evangelism*. Christian people invite their non-church going friends to their homes to hear a short talk on the nature of Christianity and to discuss it. This is an evangelistic method to use with neighbours, relatives, workmates, university and senior school friends, social and sporting clubs. The invitation makes it clear that Christianity will be discussed.

People who are "shy" of church buildings are more likely to attend in a friend's home. The atmosphere is informal and relaxed and therefore conducive to fruitful and honest discussion in a prolonged fashion. The groups are small enough to allow maximum participation. There is time and opportunity to correct wrong and misleading concepts of Christianity. The gospel of Jesus Christ is presented in a way that people hear and understand, in terms free of jargon.

For further information and materials, contact Church of England Department of Evangelism, 91 Bathurst Steet, Sydney 2000.

6. *Lay Witness Weekends*. This is essentially a small group approach to evangelism linked with parish level meetings in which trained lay witnesses illustrate the Word of God from their own experiences.

The parish invites a group of lay people, who have been trained to conduct the weekend. In the supper meetings in homes on Saturday evening, after a brief rally at the church, lay witnesses share their faith and discuss the Christian gospel and relate the Word of God.

The Sunday activities involve the team in worship services, adult and youth dinners. In the worship services, the sermon consists of the testimony of four lay members of the team illustrating how a scripture passage has been true in their day to day living. The weekend climaxes with an evangelistic rally on the Sunday evening, which is followed by supper and an opportunity for local people to share their reactions to the weekend.

The manual "Lay Witness Teams" by John Mallison documents this approach. Lay Witness Teams also overlap with Area C, *Meeting In The Church* (see below). For further information including a manual, training guide, overhead projector transparencies and cassette recorded guidelines, write to Mr. L. Death, 25 Rhodes Avenue, Guildford NSW 2161.

7. *Small Groups*. These are occurring in many and varied contexts and it may not be realized that they are an evangelistic tool. Groups may meet weekly or fortnightly, usually in homes, often with an expressed concern for the well-being of each other and of others. They may gather for study of set material, or to share in day to day issues. Christians in the group witness by their action and attitude and by the confession of their faith.

8. *Worship-in-the-Round*. Some churches offer an alternative venue for worship and face-to-face fellowship for all ages. One of its great strengths has been the meaningful participation of children and adults in the same worship experience.

In reporting on one venture in Blackburn, Victoria, the following was said: "The most successful sessions have provided an activity or discussion which included everyone . . . the children have participated fully when miming, acting parables or making posters was for everyone rather than children while adults 'discuss' . . . We have found a form of worship which makes Christian commitment challenging and invigorating, and it is in touch with the realities of our lives."

Many families and individuals, who in the past had been absent from church life, have become involved in this time of worship.

9. *Coffee House*. A setting of informality is created carrying the suggestion of an open house or drop-in centre for youth. A trained team are able to share their Christian faith in a personal way while adopting a serving role towards the patrons. The setting provides an atmosphere of warmth and openness, and gives opportunity for communication with those who would be unlikely to come into more structured meetings such as church services or evangelistic rallies. The success of such projects depends on a trained team supported by a prayerful church.

C. Meeting In The Church

10. *Revival Weekend or Parish Life Conferences*. These events may occur under a variety of titles and seek to bring a spiritual rededication in the congregation, through study and rallies. They are an attempt to help people understand their missionary and evangelistic task more clearly.

For further information, contact The Institute for Church Revival, P.O. Box 91, Essendon, Victoria 3040.

11. *Bible Study Programs*. Opportunity is provided for neighbourhood gatherings to share in a short Bible study series. Using planned Bible studies led by Christians in their own homes, they are designed to deepen understandings and to confront people with the claims of Jesus Christ.

12. *Mission Week or Rally*. An attempt is made to confront church members and non-church members with the good news of Jesus Christ. A traditional method relies on people being invited, brought or attracted to large meetings. At the meetings, people are encouraged to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Trained counsellors seek to help the "converts" to join in ongoing fellowship with other Christians, as they seek to live and grow in their new faith. It is the behind the scene support and care which enables the up-front confrontation to be more effective.

FURTHER READING: For further examples, and fuller descriptions, of approaches to evangelistic strategy, see the resources listed in Appendix C (page 28).

APPENDIX B:

COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION

There are a number of ways of involving the entire congregation in your study and plans which resulted from it.

1. Reports

Make a written or oral report, including specific plans, to your local church governing body.

Make written or oral reports to the various organizations in your congregation.

Make a report through the church newsletter or notices.

2. Church Meetings

Have a congregational meeting on the subject.

Have a special church family night on the subject.

Involve other denominations locally in joint planning.

3. Worship Services

Make a display of the study group's findings and dedicate as a part of the weekly offering.

Plan a special worship service which reports to the congregation, invites their participation, and dedicates the venture to God.

Ask the minister or group members to preach on evangelism, using results of the study group's work.

Make a dedication of the plan for evangelism a part of a service of Holy Communion.

SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Key '73 Congregational Resource Book. Published by Concordia Publishing House, 1972. American price \$3.00. (Order from Key '73, 418 Olive St., St. Louis, Mo. USA 63102).

Evangelism: Planning Together. Published by the Victorian Churches' Consultative Committee on Evangelism, 1974. Price \$1.00 plus postage. (Order from Victorian Council of Churches, 100 Flinders Street, Melbourne 3000.)

Encounter '75 Resource Book For Congregations. Published by New South Wales Executive Committee of Encounter '75, 1974. Price \$2.00 plus postage. (Order from the above, 133 Bathurst St., Sydney 2000.)

Jesus Christ Frees And Unites. Published by SCM Press, 1974. Preparatory book for the July 1975 World Council of Churches Assembly at Nairobi. Price \$1.40. (Order from church bookshops.)

An Alternative Approach To Evangelism by J. Arthur Blanksby and David Woodhouse. Published by The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1974. Price 40 cents. (Order from church bookshops or The Joint Board of Christian Education, Room 470, 147 Collins St., Melbourne 3000, payment accompanying order.)

Visitation Evangelism For The 1970s, by Norm Hayward. Published by Norm Hayward, 1974. Price \$2.00. (Order from church bookshops.)

On The Move, Issue 6, November 1974. A special issue on evangelism. Published by The Joint Board of Christian Education. Single copies priced \$1.00. (Order from church bookshops or from The Joint Board of Christian Education, payment accompanying order.)

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