



**MEETING YOUR
NEIGHBORS
WHERE THEY'RE AT**

IN HIS LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS, PAUL ENCOURAGED CHRISTIANS TO DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO WIN PEOPLE TO THE GOSPEL (1 COR. 9: 22-23). HOW IS YOUR CHURCH GOING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY? DO YOU KNOW THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO REACH—NOT JUST THEIR DEMOGRAPHICS? HAVE YOU WORKED HARD TO SEE WHAT THEIR LIFE IS LIKE? THEIR FEARS, HOPES, DESIRES—THEIR HOBBIES, EVEN. ONCE YOU’VE BEGUN TO UNDERSTAND YOUR NEIGHBORS BETTER, YOU CAN TAILOR YOUR CHURCH’S OUTREACH EFFORTS TO MEET THEM WHERE THEY’RE AT—PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO GET STARTED...

WHERE TO GO

First, you've got reconnaissance work to do!
Hit the road and get to know your community
better. Where should you go?

JUST AROUND THE CORNER

Get in the middle of the action. Where are people on a week day morning? If they're at the local coffee shop, go there. Buy someone a cup of joe, start up a conversation, introduce yourself, or just bring your computer and work. Get your run in at an area gym. Grab a drink with a friend at the local hip eatery. Or take public transportation. Go cheer on your local high school's football team. You'll be surprised by the things you learn in overhearing conversations and watching people. You'll discover what your neighbors are thinking about, listening to, struggling with, and wondering.

ONLINE

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. They're there. So you better be, too.

On average, Internet users have seven social media accounts, and the number of social media users grew by 320 million between 2017 and 2018! Even if you're not a regular on social media, chances are many of the people you're trying to reach are. They're "liking" companies and products, posting photos, sharing links, giving on GoFundMe, or struggling through something tough on CaringBridge. For those who remember when email was the fastest way of communicating, sharing and connecting via social media may feel weird or inauthentic, but for many, it's the norm.

YOUR KNEES

So, actually, you don't have to go anywhere for this one—pray. You can do it behind the desk, at home, or as a staff in your meetings. Just regularly pray that those you're trying to reach will “grasp how wide and long and high and deep Christ's love is,” (Eph. 3:18). Ask that your church would be shown where to go and how to find common ground with those who aren't entirely sure about your church, let alone Jesus and Christians.

WHAT TO DO

Now, armed with nuggets of insight about your community and God's guidance, start intentionally tweaking your outreach efforts. Because you've been listening, you know what the needs, likes, and desires are. You know that some ways of communicating will likely not be heard, while others will for sure generate a "click". You know some of the things you've been doing for years are outdated, and unless you change, you're missing opportunities. So, begin to use your knowledge. What should you do?

PLAN EVENTS AND MINISTRIES ACCORDINGLY

- If your town throws a huge Halloween bash and everyone goes, don't do a Trunk or Treat. No one will come! Instead figure out how to get involved.
- Lots of low-income families? Maybe a back-to-school event to hand out donated backpacks filled with school supplies works.
- Located in a college town? What would help students the most? A ride to worship services and maybe the nearest Target? Free food during exams?
- Maybe you're across the street from a large senior facility, so hosting monthly classes designed for older adults—how to use the Internet, aerobics, painting—makes sense.
- Perhaps you've recently had an influx of refugees to your areas. How can you make their new environment feel more like home?

CRAFT SERMON SERIES

It's dark out there. Shine a light right where people in your neighborhood need it: marriage, parenting, stress, anxiety, and depression, etc. Yes, of course, preach the Gospel, but the implications of Jesus dying for us should permeate all aspects of our lives. Also, begin and end your series based on the rhythm of your community. You might be located near a large military base. Starting a new series a week before deployment isn't smart planning. And if you don't see an increase in the number of people in front of you on the first day of a new series, you probably need to take another look at your timing, topic or advertising (or all of them!).

ENGAGE ONLINE

Post pictures of your church ministries in action on Instagram, invite people to an upcoming event via Facebook, provide a quote or Bible verse that's actually worth pinning. Make comments, ask questions, and "like." Don't fear the time commitment—even five minutes every other morning will get you started. Slowly, your church can become a regular in peoples' newsfeeds. #YouCanDolt!

ADVERTISE IN THE RIGHT PLACES

A sign in front of your church may not work—you're not on the busiest road anymore. But getting something in front of people on their phones will! This will take some budgeting and forethought, but it'll pay off. Services like Outreach Everywhere, that combine social media ads and postcard mailings, can help. You can run ads directly from your church's Facebook page and Instagram—even if you don't have an Instagram account yet. Ads will lead people to your website, and you can get reports on how well it's working.

TURN YOUR BUILDING INTO A COMMUNITY CENTER

This idea may not work for every church but a lot of churches don't have that many events going on during the week. Opening your rooms up to local organizations for meetings, letting kids come study after school, hosting senior activities during the summer or winter so the elderly can enjoy the heat or air conditioning, are all great ways to make your church more visible in the community. Plus, people are more likely to come on Sundays if they are comfortable in your building on Thursday afternoons.

PAUL WENT ON TO TELL THE CORINTHIANS THAT WE SHOULD RUN THIS RACE TO WIN! THE PRIZE AT THE END WILL NOT FADE AWAY LIKE THE MEDALS AND TROPHIES OF THIS WORLD. OUR PRIZE IS ETERNAL, HE SAID, “SO I RUN WITH PURPOSE IN EVERY STEP...I DISCIPLINE MY BODY LIKE AN ATHLETE, TRAINING IT TO DO WHAT IT SHOULD.”

1 CORINTHIANS 9:25-27