

Story #1. This happened when I was about 30 years old, and my wife, Deanna was 27. (This was before I was exposed to Evangelism Explosion, which came along a few years later.) We had just relocated from Fremont, CA to Alexandria, VA and moved into a rental house four blocks from our new church home, Immanuel Lutheran. Our house was right next door to a home occupied by a couple in their 60's, Stan and Lulu Belle Curran. They were not attending any church, but he had been a Lutheran at one time. Stan and Lulu became instant grandparents for our two young children, first and third grade respectively. The kids walked by their house for school each day, plus on Sundays with us and also for choir, etc. We lived in this rental home for about three months, celebrating Christmas and birthdays together, etc., before we moved to a home we purchased about one mile away. Not a day went by without some exchange of conversation with one or both of them.

We had been in our new home about two weeks when Lulu Belle called us and was checking up on how we were doing, etc. Lulu Belle was an old Virginian speaking person, which is something along the lines of a Canadian speaking with a southern accent, if you can imagine that. After a few minutes of chatting she let me know how much she missed having us for neighbors. I stated that other than distance nothing has changed, we will still do the celebrating together for holidays and birthdays, etc. Then after a short pause she exclaimed, "I don't know what you two have, but I want some of it!" I was of course taken aback by this but quickly recovered and said that I could help solve that problem and would you like me to have our pastor call on you. She agreed.

Things worked out well, she was baptized and confirmed and he did a profession of faith, thus becoming faithful members of Immanuel until death for Lulu Belle came along and Stan was confined to a nursing home for some additional years before death took him as well. We had moved to WY eight years after our arrival in Alexandria, but we always kept in contact. Some years later we moved to Annapolis, MD for eight years and then visited with them several times while they were still in their home. It was a friendship like no other that we had experienced in our lives.

This, I believe, is the natural way to do outreach, especially since I was not even aware what was going on until her bold statement. We were merely practicing our vocations as neighbors; the Holy Spirit did the rest.

Story #2. In 2009 I was teaching an Evangelism and Outreach seminar for CLCC, in a small farming town in MN. At the end of the seminar I opened up the floor to comments and questions. A 40's something man injected into the discussion that he was disappointed in the seminar. He asked what right I had to come in here and tell them that what they had been doing in the evangelism area for the past 30 years was wrong. Further, what he was expecting

was a presentation showing him what scripts to use in different situations when talking to unchurched people. He felt totally unprepared to deal with strangers, etc.

At this point there was a clear challenge that needed to be dealt with. I started with the history of evangelism from the early 70's when Evangelism Explosion was the hit of the day using Presbyterian theology. This then morphed into the Lutheran version (the name escapes me) of the late 80's and 90's. This then morphed into Ablaze! at the turn of the century, all based on the wrong theology where man makes the decision for Christ. Decision Theology is not Scriptural, what I have been teaching you today is. I don't think the man making the remark was too thrilled with my answer, but it needed to be said.

Finally, in 2016, Synod began developing a Scriptural based evangelism and outreach model after a span of over 40+ years of getting it wrong. There will be a lot of effort required to undo the harm that has been done. That effort has now been field tested and implemented under the name Every One His Witness. Contact the LC-MS website for more info. The contact person is Rev. Wood.

Closely following the evangelism project, Synod has come out with a congregational renewal program called ReVitality. You might want to consider that effort as well, depending on the Spiritual health of your congregation. Contact the LC-MS website for more detail.

A general observation was the need for teaching the Doctrine of Vocation before Evangelism and Outreach so people could understand their role in primarily serving their neighbors within their vocations. They do this task as sowers, not reapers, which is the task of the Holy Spirit.