

PULPITS OF HOPE

by Robert Costa

INTRODUCTION

Pulpits of Hope is a simple, flexible and effective initiative that every preacher may adopt in his or her church. It is part of a comprehensive evangelism plan, and part of the five universal keys of successful soul winning and evangelism based on the book of Acts.

THE FIVE KEYS OF SUCCESSFUL EVANGELISM

Key 1 - REVIVAL. Churches grow when there is a genuine spiritual revival in the spiritual life of the members. Three ways to have a spiritual revival:

- Churches are revived when there is a renewed emphasis on the study of the Bible. 2 Peter 1:2-4, John 17:3.
- Churches are revived when there is a renewed emphasis on intercessory prayer. Colossians 1:3, 9; Philippians 1:3-5.
- Churches are revived when there is a renewed emphasis on witnessing. Acts 1:8.

Key 2 – TRAINING AND EQUIPPING. Churches grow when every member is trained and prepared to serve. Ephesians 4:11, 12.

Key 3 – COMMUNITY OUTREACH. Churches grow when there is a planned process of outreach that meets the physical, intellectual, social and spiritual needs of people. Matthew 4:23. *“Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” Ministry of Healing, p. 143.*

Key 4 – HARVEST. Churches grow when preaching the Word of God through evangelistic proclamation.

Key 5 – FOLLOW-UP AND NURTURING . Churches grow when members and new converts are nurtured and trained to testify.

Jesus surprised Nicodemus with the statement: “You must be born again” (John 3:7). Churches are BORN AGAIN when they teach, follow and implement the five keys:

1. The strategy of prayer, Bible study and witnessing for REVIVAL.
2. TRAINING and preparation of church members to reach out to the community through Bible-based ministries.
3. COMMUNITY OUTREACH programs.
4. HARVEST through evangelistic meetings.
5. Events for NURTURING new believers and transform them into disciples.

PULPITS OF HOPE

Transform the pulpits of our churches into centers of evangelization through the “Pulpits of Hope” plan, or “Sabbath Morning Evangelism.” It is costly to bring people to the doors of our churches. And while this method has an important role in the church sometimes we overlook the fact that every Sabbath thousands of visitors pass through the doors of our churches many times unnoticed. Many leave without having been invited to accept Jesus and His teachings. That’s why the evangelistic sermon is important and appropriate to make an appeal or call. It is possible to do much more of what we are doing from the pulpit on Sabbath morning. Every pastor and elder who is called to preach may use and follow this flexible, low cost preaching plan, that is giving amazing results in churches that are practicing it.

To support this concept, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference is developing a Christ-centered evangelistic series of sermons in PowerPoint and Keynote, with prophetic doctrinal topics professionally illustrated. This plan, among other things, offers the following advantages:

- Accustoms the ear of members to evangelistic preaching on Sabbath morning.
- Exposes members and visitors alike to the whole Biblical message, including the distinctive doctrines.
- Helps believers to establish their faith on solid biblical foundation, avoiding apostasy.
- Helps each pastor prepare and submit to the local church or to the district a preaching plan quarterly, semiannually or annually.
- The entire Biblical message can be presented within one calendar year.
- Members and visitors may know in advance the topics to be presented. This will encourage them to bring friends and family to worship services on Sabbath.
- Develops and promotes a “culture evangelism” and the rise of more pastors and lay evangelists.
- Is a highly flexible plan that can be adapted to churches of any size. It doesn’t interfere with the plans of the higher organizations of the church and can be started on any Sabbath of the year and continue for long as needed.
- It can be used in a single church, or simultaneously in districts with multiple churches since the pastor can assign the same sermon to all the elders.
- It is the most economical and effective method of evangelism.
- Helps many to decide for Jesus and the truths of the Bible. The direct result will be an increase in attendance every Sabbath and in the number of baptisms throughout the year.

“Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). The pastoral task is closely related to evangelism. Both are inseparable. The expansion of the church through personal and public evangelism, the preparation of people for baptism, planting new congregations, and developing new disciples should be the primary emphasis of each minister.

Evangelistic churches are growing churches. The New Testament church gave priority to evangelism. It shared the Word of God full of confidence, anticipating the blessing of the

Spirit. Acts 4:31, 5:42; 8:4.

Evangelism must be viewed as a process leading to discipleship, not just an event that leads to membership. While increasing membership is a by-product of evangelism, the great commission envisions each believer becoming a mature, disciple-producing minister. The task of evangelism is not finished until new believers are nurtured, trained, deployed, and winning souls themselves. Disciple-making must be viewed as an integral part of the evangelistic process, not just an appendage or “follow-up” after the main evangelistic event. Winning members without discipling them is ultimately self-defeating.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy must regain primacy in every pastor’s life. The Word of God must be the best source for sermons. It is the message that comes from the heart of God to the heart of every person. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been given a special end-time message to proclaim (Rev. 14:6-12): the present truth within the context of the Gospel message. The inspired writings of Ellen G. White, especially The Acts of the Apostles, Evangelism, Gospel Workers, Christian Service, and The Great Controversy, should be a must-read for every pastor to help keep the vision alive while accomplishing the mission of the church.

“Evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God's servants”-- Review and Herald, Aug. 2, 1906.

“The Lord designs that the presentation of this message shall be the highest, greatest work carried on in the world at this time” -- Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 11. (1900).

There is a revealing study by Thom Rainer, a Protestant pastor and author of several books, he is considered by many to be the father of post-modernism. He and his team carried out an extensive ten year study of the fastest growing churches in the United States, to learn how they are reaching out to the post moderns, and why their members were motivated to stay in the church and return every week or. These statistics are taken from Thom S. Rainer’s book , “Surprising Insights From The Unchurched, And Proven Ways To Reach Them”. They speak volumes about how we relate to the post moderns and what keep them coming back.

- **Pastor/Preaching 90 %**
- **Doctrines 88 %**
- **Friendliness of Members 49 %**
- **Someone from Church Witnessed to Me 41 %**
- **Family Member Attends 38 %**
- **Sensed God’s Presence. Atmosphere of Church 37 %**
- **Relationships Others than Family Member 25 %**
- **Sunday School Class 25 %**
- **Children’s Youth Ministry 25 %**
- **Other Groups/Ministries 12 %**
- **Worship Style/Music 11%**
- **Location 7 %**

CONCLUSION

As we near the end of time, God is preparing a final harvest from people around the world with honest hearts. Thousands of pastors and laymen are cooperating with God in His final work. Now is the time to focus our vision on what Christ is doing in the world. This is the time to experience a renewed sense that God is reaping His last harvest now. God promises His Holy Spirit right now if only we seek, ask and believe.

“Take your Bible and open before the people its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart.” GW 193

“Never should a sermon be preached, or Bible instruction in any line be given, without pointing the hearers to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. Every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words.” 6 T 54.

As we testify to people in our sphere of influence, be it in church, at home, at work, at school or in our daily activities, God will bless our efforts. As we plan to reach our neighborhoods, towns, villages and major metropolitan areas, God will bless our work. As we sow seeds, God will give us a harvest. He will bless in a special way each Bible study we give.

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.” Revelation 18:1

“I saw jets of light shining from cities and villages, and from the high places and the low places of the earth. God's word was obeyed, and as a result there were memorials for Him in every city and village. His truth was proclaimed throughout the world. Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families, and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence.” Evangelism, p. 699

You are part of the fulfillment of this prophecy. You are one of God's beams of light. Every child of God is a light. We are engaged in the most exciting and lasting work in the world: soul winning. There is power in the Word of God. Study it! Share it with others! It will bring results that will last forever. As leaders and church members, we have an awesome responsibility that comes with a stunning promise, summarized on the last page of the book Evangelism.

“Our watchword is to be, onward, ever onward! Angels of heaven will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the regions beyond can never be laid down till the whole earth is lightened with the glory of the Lord.” Evangelism, p. 707.

What farmer would plant a crop and not expect a harvest? In the same way that farmers eagerly await a harvest, the winner of souls longs for a harvest. He longs to see won for the kingdom of God those for whom he is praying for and with whom he is studying the Bible. We should embrace the promise of God: “...*for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*” (*Galatians 6:9*).

The most glorious chapters of the book of Acts of the Apostles are soon to be written. The disciples did not have all the means available to us today, but one thing made the difference with them in the first century, and the same will make the difference for us today: to be baptized and possessed by the Holy Spirit. Very soon, the world will be illuminated by the glory of God.