

— Our Pastors Speak —



"MAKING EVANGELISM RELEVANT"

by Rev. W. C. Burbury

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Our previous articles have dealt with some of the various aspects of Evangelism. They were: Its force, Personal Preparation, the Importance of Laymen. In our final writing we feel burdened to deal in the area of our title: "Making Evangelism Relevant." This is in quotes because it is borrowed, January 8-10, I was privileged to attend the New England Evangelistic Association's Annual Conference on Evangelism. This was their theme and it being tremendously important to us, I am echoing it, along with some of the observations noted at the conference. Perhaps it would be well to give some definitions of Evangelism to get us started. Dr. Howard Keeley, said it was "So to present Jesus to the world that men will come to put their trust in Him". Another, "So making Christ known that people must say yes or no."

Somehow we must confront people with the necessity of making a personal decision for Jesus. This occupies much of our thinking and prayers but in order to do the job it takes action. We are plagued with the idea that God wants much activity. Let us however, not be deceived into thinking that a continual round of activity is really doing the task. Dr. John Heuss said, "The Church . . . has a constant, uncritical tendency to mistake its promotional activity for religious accomplishment. "Others feel that building, redecoration, raising budgets, having lots of meetings is evangelizing because it is something the local church is doing. This is good but it is not Evangelism in the strictest sense. Alan Redpath was heard to say before leaving to return to his native Scotland, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." We are all busy these days. Laymen and preacher alike have countless demands made upon their time. The great problem is to make the time mean something and make our work count for souls. We are accused of being "irrelevant" by a great deal of the world, not by using this word but by the absence of its people in our pews. Our task then it seems to me is to put forth every effort to make our contribution be all it can, whether we are a lay person or preacher. Let me suggest a few ways that may help us to become more "Relevant." First each church should have a strong Evangelism committee. In many respects we are already organized enough, but there are not too many of these committees functioning among us. It would be the task of this group to best plan the action to be taken in each department of the church work so that it will all point in the same direction. The committee will also need to arrange and maintain a list of prospects for visitation. After a good list is drawn up, then enlist the help of the church people to make calls on those designated for them. The committee should not put people on "cold" contacts at least until some experience is gained or discouragement will follow. A good follow up plan will be necessary too in order for this type of work to be done efficiently. This can be accomplished with good sound literature. Right here it would be well to point out that there is a

tremendous ministry that can be performed in the field of literature; tract distribution for example. Each caller must be armed with good tracts that are pertinent to the local situation. **Second, Each Church Should Have a Men's Group.** Many of our churches already do and this certainly is no new thing. However, allow me at least to suggest a pattern for action in this group. First of all for the type of fellowship in my mind, let the preacher keep his ecclesiastical hands off. I don't think he should be a member. Let me tell you why: The average unsaved man thinks of the church in terms of its clergy. If a minister is known to be present in these meetings that man will be absent. Another thing, the laymen themselves will usually clam up and not do too much talking or sharing because everyone expects the preacher to do most of it. This has been tried, by the way, and found to be true. It was not in our parish here but one that I have reliable information on. When the men meet together in one of their homes (not the church) the agenda should include Bible Study. Men need to study the scriptures by themselves without the benefit of clergy. If the preacher is worried that this might get out of hand he is worrying about his own effectiveness as the pastor. It would be alright for the group to call the pastor in on certain occasions, but let him make sure he keeps hands off. One such group that I know of that is functioning successfully is carried on in the home of Overton Stevens of Toronto. Brother Stevens is a soundly saved Anglican layman. A medical doctor by trade, he has as high as thirty-five men come to his place every second Monday to study the Bible and pray. Many of the men are unsaved and come from every walk of life. Already a great many have been won to the Lord. Out of this number four have been called to preach and many more have entered other phases of full time christian work. Incidentally, this man's spiritual father was Canon Warner whom we know as a godly man who served in Yarmouth for some years. Now you will be tempted no doubt to say that this is an ideal situation. Maybe so, but this is one of the last things I heard Dr. Stevens say, "Why, I feel terrible, I haven't won anyone to the Lord for two weeks." Before we leave this section it could be said that laymen find it much easier to invite and get outside men to come to a group of this nature. Why? It is not run by a preacher or held in the church. After a man gets saved then he will want to get in the church; hence Evangelism. **Third, Each Church Should Have Christian Cells.** The men's group we just discussed is a Cell in one sense. The kind meant here however will want the pastor in it or in one of them. Our churches could have more than one. In fact some could maintain a dozen or more. In the very small works let the pastor find one faithful man to meet with him, preferably early in the morning, for prayer in the interest of Souls. Before long others who hear of it will desire to join with you. When the group gets to be seven or eight strong, start another Cell. The women not to be left out will want to get in on the act, so let them get started on a Cell for themselves. Needless to say this would have a terrific effect on the church's ministry. In this connection let me quote Dr. John Heuss again, "It is a growing conviction of mine that no parish can fulfill its true function unless there is at the very center of its leadership life a small community of quietly fanatic, changed and truly converted christians. We do not want ordinary men. Ordinary men cannot win the brutally pagan life of a city . . . for Christ. We want quiet fanatics, men who will outlive and out-suffer the worst sufferings of the slums and within their little community reveal to others a christian relationship that is so different and so accepting that it cannot be resisted. "In closing we might say trying to Evangelize

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