

**NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**  
*QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC VII*

SERMON DELIVERED BY PASTOR DEAN BYROM  
CORAOPOLIS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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**“NEED ORIENTED EVANGELISM”**

In Jonathan Kozol’s book, *Amazing Grace*, Cliffie, a 7 year old boy from South Bronx, was sent to the store for 3 slices of pizza – one for his mother, one for his father, and one for himself. On the way home the boy encountered a man who was so cold he couldn’t speak. The half frozen stranger pointed to the pizza; whereupon, Cliffie gave him some.

Mr. Kozol asked: “Were your parents mad at you?”

Looking surprised, Cliffie replied, “Why would they be mad? God told us to share!”

Today we continue our series by looking not at sharing pizza, but rather our faith. Hardly any aspect of church growth is as riddled with clichés and myths as the area of “evangelism.”

This is true of those who view evangelism with skepticism as well as those who have accepted it as their life’s calling.

Most discussions about this topic have blurred the distinction between “*methods*” of evangelism that have been used successfully by one or many churches, and true “*principles*” of evangelism which apply without exception to every church.

Unfortunately, “evangelism research” has usually limited itself to judging the effectiveness of individual evangelism “programs” (such as our church’s current “Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors”). Now, without a doubt, such research can determine the “success” of programs, but it cannot show whether or not they represent universal “principles”. Whenever a “successful program” is presumed to be a “church growth principle” (which unfortunately is a widespread Christian pastime), it causes tremendous confusion.

The Natural Church Development folks’ research has disproven a thesis commonly held in groups active in evangelism, namely that: “Every Christian is an evangelist.”

Now, there is a kernel of truth that can be demonstrated in this saying. It is indeed the responsibility of every Christian to use his or her own specific gifts in fulfilling the Great Commission which Jesus gives to all of us toward the end of the Gospel according to Matthew: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*”

But faithfully doing this does not make him or her an evangelist. Evangelists are only those whom God has given the spiritual gift of evangelism. In some of their previous research, they confirmed that C. Peter Wagner’s thesis that the gift of evangelism has been given to no more than 10% of all Christians.

We must distinguish between Christians who have been given the gift for evangelism and those whom God has otherwise called. If ALL Christians are evangelists, "...then there would be no need to discover the 10% who really do possess this gift."

But were we to make this mistake, then very likely the 10% who truly have the gift of evangelism would most likely be significantly under-challenged, while the demands on the 90% who don't have the gift would be too great. Obviously this is very frustrating to all concerned!

Their research shows that in churches with a high quality index, the leadership knows who has the gift of evangelism and involves them in an area of ministry in which this gift can be fully expressed.

Now, lest I be misunderstood, it is the task of each and every Christian to use the gifts which God has given them to serve the non-Christian with whom one has a personal relationship – to see to it that they hear the Gospel, and to encourage their contact with the local church.

The key to church growth is for our local congregation to focus our evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians. This need-oriented approach is radically different from any "manipulative programs" where pressure is put on non-Christians to meet our needs, not theirs.

It is particularly interesting to note that Christians in both growing and declining churches have exactly the same number of contacts with non-Christians (an average of 8.5 contacts). Challenging all of us Christians to build new friendships with non-Christians is most certainly not a principle of church growth.

The point is rather for us to use already existing relationships as contacts for evangelism. In each of the churches they surveyed – including those that lamented having little or not contact with "non-Christians" in the world – in fact, the number of contacts outside the church was already large enough so that there was no need to emphasize developing new relationships with the un-churched!

The fields are truly ripe for harvest – for each of us – but our approach must be to their needs and questions – those people we already know who need Jesus in their lives.

Maybe Cliffie was doing more than he knew – sharing his pizza with a poor man with great needs was sharing the faith.