

MISSION

Dave Jensen

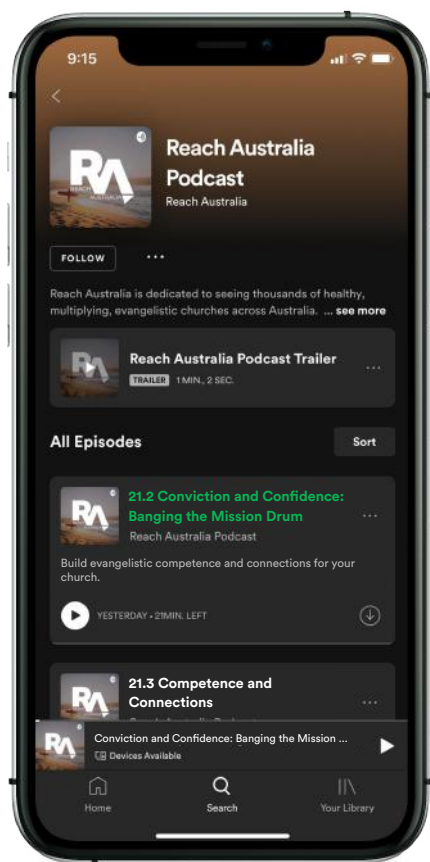
An accompaniment to season 21 on the Reach Australia podcast

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44 Margaret St, Sydney.

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PREFACE

There is a famous and often-told¹ story of a professor who placed a big jar on a table in front of him. He then set about a dozen fist-size rocks on the table and, one at a time, placed them into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

Everyone in the class said, "Yes."

Then he said, "Really?" Reaching under the table, he pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Smiling, he asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," one of them answered.

"Good!" he replied. Reaching under the table, he brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it fell into the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted.

Once again he said, "Good!" Grabbing a jug of water, he began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

Someone put their hand up and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit in something more!"

"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is this: if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

¹ This story appears in many forms, however its original source is unknown.

Church life is busy. No matter your church size, or how many staff you have, there is a seemingly never-ending list of activities that can occupy the time of a ministry worker. There is never a shortage of things that can be done with, to and for the saints to see them grow in their love for and trust in the Lord Jesus. While most of us have deep biblical convictions about mission and evangelism, matched with an earnest desire to see the lost saved to the glory of God, it's very common for actual missional thought and strategy to gradually be pushed to the side. Why? Because it's difficult to prioritise people who you can't see at the cost of the spiritual needs of the people who are right in front of you.

Yet we want to begin with an audacious statement and challenge: *if mission isn't first, it's last*. If the question 'how will we see the most people in our region converted to Christ?' is not being answered as a matter of priority in your church's calendar, staffing and vision for the future, then it will quickly slip into insignificance.

To put it another way: Mission has to be the biggest rock in your jar. If it's not, you'll never see your church flourish in evangelism. This is because conducting effective evangelism and mission requires a lot of energy and passion, and it's very difficult to maintain the energy required when there are competing priorities.

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTION

There's much more to the Christian life than 'read your Bible, pray and reach the lost'. The scriptures give deep and powerful reasons to shift from self-focus to others-focus. They talk in rich and varied ways about working alongside Christ in his great mission to seek and save the lost. Some of the key gospel convictions that drive our work at Reach Australia include the importance of the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58), the brevity of this life, the realities of heaven and hell, the honour of being God's fellow workers and the precious treasure which is the church of God. When churches fully grasp these convictions, it's only natural to live on mission.

God's great mission is to glorify himself (Ezekiel 36:20-23) and one of the ways he does this is by seeking and saving the lost. This is the reason that Jesus died. The Lord has called us as his people to be part of His mission. So Christians are to be motivated by two loves: the love of God's glory and the love of the lost.

All people are sinners against God and stand under His wrath. Jesus died to forgive people's sins and deal with the wrath of God that they deserve. People can only be saved from this wrath by trusting Christ and turning from their sins to live under His rule in repentance and faith. It is God's great desire and plan that the gospel be preached to all nations, and all Christians and churches are to be about this task. The work of mission is to seek and save the lost through the proclamation of the gospel, which is the power of salvation for all who believe.

Does this mean that caring for the saints doesn't matter? No. On the contrary. The Bible does not pit reaching out and building up as enemies. The great commission in Matthew 28 shows the priority of both reaching out and building up. Making disciples means both winning people from death to life and deepening them in their faith as we teach them to obey everything Jesus commands.

We want to challenge you to set your church's vision not by who is there, but who isn't there. Who is there is crucially important, because they'll be the ones

you partner with to reach those who aren't there. But you need to look outside your church to gain a proper vision for ministry. Set your vision by the fields, not the barns. Set your vision not by the 100 people in your building but by the 40,000 people around you in your region.

THE CHURCH ON MISSION

How can we effectively move those convictions into the day-to-day life of our churches? It all begins with conviction. As leaders and as the church, we need to believe that the gospel is powerful and can genuinely change present lives and eternal destinies. That conviction needs to be so embedded in our language and our preaching that it shapes our systems and decision-making.

The two most common questions that pastors ask about mission are: 'how do I get my church fired up for evangelism?' and 'how do we become a church where people become Christians?' These are excellent questions that cut right to the core of what it is to be a church engaged in effective mission. The answer is: you get people fired up for evangelism by becoming a church where people become Christians, and you become a church where people become Christians by getting people fired up about evangelism. But how do we actually do that?

Our aim is to help you form firm foundations for establishing and sustaining healthy mission strategy and practices. Reaching the millions of Australians who don't know Jesus with the gospel won't happen simply by the pastor door-knocking, or only through paid social media advertising (although under God these things may play a part). It must be the result of careful and thoughtful strategy and wise decisions. To that end, here are three principles for effective mission.

1. Three Conversions

Effective mission strategy needs to consider 3 major outcomes. We could call these the 3 conversions of mission.

Conversion #1 The Non-Christian's Conversion to Christ

This must be the primary goal that drives your mission inputs. We desire to see people come into a relationship with God and then deepen their faith in him through Jesus for the rest of their life.

Conversion #2 The Christian's Conversion to Evangelism

We often act as if Christians are automatically won to the urgency of evangelism upon conversion to Christ, but this is not the case. We need to continually pour energy into our ministry to the saints to see their conviction for evangelism deepen as they are captured by God's mission.

Conversion #3 The Church's Conversion to Effective Mission Strategy

Church leaders need to be won to the need to prioritise mission in the life of the local church. For this to be more than mere lip service, it must be matched with thoughtful, wise and effective mission strategy that will help Christians grow in their conviction and partner with them in evangelistic endeavour.

In order for these three conversions to occur, you need to flip them upside down. In order to see the first conversion occur, you need the second conversion to be constantly taking place. The best way of maximising and multiplying the second conversion is for the third to be put into place. While the first and second conversions can and do occur without this, we are convinced that when the third conversion happens, you will see a tangible increase in both the first and second.

2. Better Together

We're convinced that Christians do mission better together. By 'together' we don't mean a group of individuals getting together to put on an event at your church (although that may be a helpful part of your strategy). We mean 'together' like a family or a body. The body metaphor of church in the New Testament portrays church as a system where different parts do different things in a coordinated whole so that the people together achieve far more than they might on their own. This is a terrific illustration of a church involved in effective mission. Building teams, structures and systems to mobilise and multiply the efforts of a larger group is one of the best things we can do to see the most people saved.

Does this mean that personal evangelism is left by the wayside? No. Encouraging and equipping our congregations to be actively involved in personal evangelism is critical to missional fruit. But we also need to be realistic - in my experience across a number of Australian churches it's extremely unlikely that there will be a high participation rate in one-to-one evangelism, no matter what type of training and encouragement you give.²

However, it's still important that we continue to work towards everyone having a fire in their hearts for mission and evangelism, regardless of whether they are able to engage in personal evangelism. The more the individuals within the church love God's glory, love the lost, understand the need, grow in desire for others to experience the same grace and mercy and develop a passion to see the gospel bear much fruit, the more you are in a position to mobilise them together. In this way, we can make it easier for a group of people to achieve effective mission outcomes without demanding that they each operate as an enthusiastic personal evangelist.

² Reach Australia ordered a special report from the NCLS based on 2016 data. The report compared Australian 'Reformed Protestant' churches with 'all Protestant' and 'all NCLS'. On the question of 'readiness to share faith with others', only 19% of those in 'Reformed Protestant' churches expressed that they 'feel at ease talking about their faith and look for opportunities'. This compares with 20% 'all Protestant' and 18% 'all NCLS'.

3. Ecosystem Thinking

Churches engage most effectively in God's mission when mission is part of a healthy church ecosystem.³ Picturing your church as an ecosystem recognises that all the different elements of your church's ministries are connected. When the church ecosystem is working well, the fruit of each area benefits the others. A missionally effective church is not achieved through a quick fix or silver bullet, but by a church ecosystem that has mission woven throughout everything. Every part contributes to healthy mission and mission contributes to the health of every other part.

So how do you take these principles of three conversions, better together and ecosystem thinking and put them into practice? The key is to focus on your church's mission heat (getting people fired up for evangelism) and mission funnel (being a church where people get converted).

³ For more on the church ecosystem, see the Reach Australia framework [ebook](#).

MISSION HEAT



‘Mission heat’ is an expression which refers to the church culture we all seek, where people are truly gripped with a zeal for the glory of God. In a missionally warm church, people long for the salvation of the lost and are subsequently passionate about being involved in this mission. In short, it’s a church that is ‘fired up for evangelism’. You can build and sustain mission heat at your church by developing conviction, confidence and competence.

Conviction

By ‘conviction’ we’re talking about people being captured by God’s desire to see people saved. This is the core of mission heat. All churches desperately need their convictions repeatedly stirred by the truths of the Scriptures. Conviction-forming is an essential principle for any church that wants to be serious about God’s mission to save the lost. Conviction is established and deepened through a variety of means, including:

1. Word ministries

It is the word of God that creates gospel conviction and fuels mission heat. This is the critical input. Consider your preaching, Bible studies and one-to-one conversations (both formal and informal). Do they often address the biblical themes of mission? Are all the word ministries aligned towards fuelling a heart for mission among your people? For some of us, this will mean reviewing every sermon and Bible study resource to ensure your people are getting encouraged and challenged to be part of God’s mission to the lost on a regular basis. This might feel like overkill to some of your congregation, but persist! We all need to hear it.

2. Prayer

Praying for your region, the non-Christians within the sphere of your church, others not yet known, as well as courage and boldness in evangelism for the church is a terrific way of speaking to our Lord. Praying this way aligns our desires with his and also models and encourages others about what being deeply committed to the cause of the lost looks like.

3. Culture

Your church's culture will be shaped by the priority and emphasis that you, the leader, place on certain things. If mission is at the forefront of your mind, then that will flow down naturally. Work on talking about the lost at every opportunity. In staff meetings, make the first question 'has anyone become a Christian this week?' Let the urgency of mission burden every conversation - at prayer nights, social events, AGMs and eldership/parish council meetings.

4. Platform

Encourage your service and song leaders to think through how they can promote events, introduce songs, pray and summarise sermons in a way that points people to God's mission to the lost. This is a subtle but important way of drip-feeding a missional focus.

5. Calendar

Thinking carefully about your church's calendar is another critical principle of prioritising mission heat. A simple and helpful way to help create a culture of mission heat in your church is to put mission in your calendar first. After determining your mission strategy and all the events and courses you will run to reach non-Christians, place these in your calendar at the optimal times. Let other church events work around these. As you continue this practice over multiple years you will find that it shapes the culture of your church.

Confidence

It's possible to be deeply convicted of the need for the proclamation of the gospel and yet still say nothing out of fear. It's not only possible - it's common! One of the best remedies for this is confidence. Mission heat builds as the confidence of your congregation builds. You should be seeking to grow confidence in two areas: confidence that the gospel works and confidence that our church's mission strategy works.

Christians are often harassed by two unspoken yet ever present fears. Firstly, I am not good/competent/capable enough to be used by God. Secondly, the gospel is not powerful enough to save my friend. Because of these two fears, they won't engage their circle of contacts with gospel conversation because

they believe they will lose their relationship. Yet the Bible is clear that it is God who saves, not us, and that no one is outside the saving power of God. Our people need to be shown and reminded of this truth. We need to instill in our people the mentality that God uses ordinary people to be his instruments in this world, to call people to himself. God uses people like us, who are rough around the edges, full of doubts and fears. Feeling like that is okay because our confidence is in God. His gospel is the power that saves. So we need to build confidence in God's saving power.

At the same time, we need to build confidence in the church's mission plan. For a large proportion of churches, inviting people along to an event or church service will be how a Christian takes their first steps into the shallow end of evangelism. That's why it's important to have good events that our people can invite others to. If we say that an event will be appropriate for non-Christians, then we need to ensure we plan it thoughtfully, or we risk burning the people who actually did invite a friend.

How do we build confidence in God and in our mission strategy? It happens simultaneously. On the one hand, when people see or hear about people becoming Christians amongst us, it builds great confidence that the gospel really does work. When people hear that it was an ordinary person like them who said something or invited a friend, it is greatly impacting. Our people's confidence is bolstered, and they are encouraged to speak about Jesus and give themselves to the work of mission using their gifts. On the other hand, if we see fruit through our missional strategy, then it is also important that we (sensitively and with an eye to keeping descriptions broad and anonymous) celebrate the work God has done publicly.

You can assist with growing confidence in the way you speak about mission in a variety of places. Some of those include:

- Service leading
- Sermons
- Baptisms
- Interviews with people converted
- Interviews with people who invited someone to an evangelistic event
- Testimonies

- Public prayer
- Social media

Competence

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that Jesus has given the church evangelists, among others, in order to equip the saints for works of service. It stands to reason that personal evangelism is among these works of service that Paul expects the church will partake in. In the context of mission, 'competence' refers to the ability of the church to know and tell the gospel.

It's helpful to consider 3 different ways in which church members can increase in competence.

1. Training

Formal evangelism training is often considered to be central to the ability of people to evangelise, however, even though it can be helpful, it is usually the least effective of the competency-building principles we will discuss. At its best, formal training is important for giving our people the skills to engage effectively with friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances and people they meet. It enables them to give and answer for the hope they have and for some to share the gospel. It also builds greater confidence in having gospel conversations. However, it rarely produces an army of enthusiastic evangelists. So while it's a good thing to do, it should be considered lower on the priority list.

2. Watching

The most effective form of mission competence-building is often unrecognised. It is the training that takes place via modelling on the church's main platforms. As leaders who are proficient in speaking to others about Jesus answer tough questions, share their testimony, explain a Christian worldview and declare the gospel they are models to all the Christians present. This is a powerful form of training that can impact a significant proportion of your church. This modelling takes place primarily in preaching, or at the church's evangelistic course. As Christians are part of a evangelistic course they are being equipped (often unbeknownst to them) in evangelism.

3. Doing

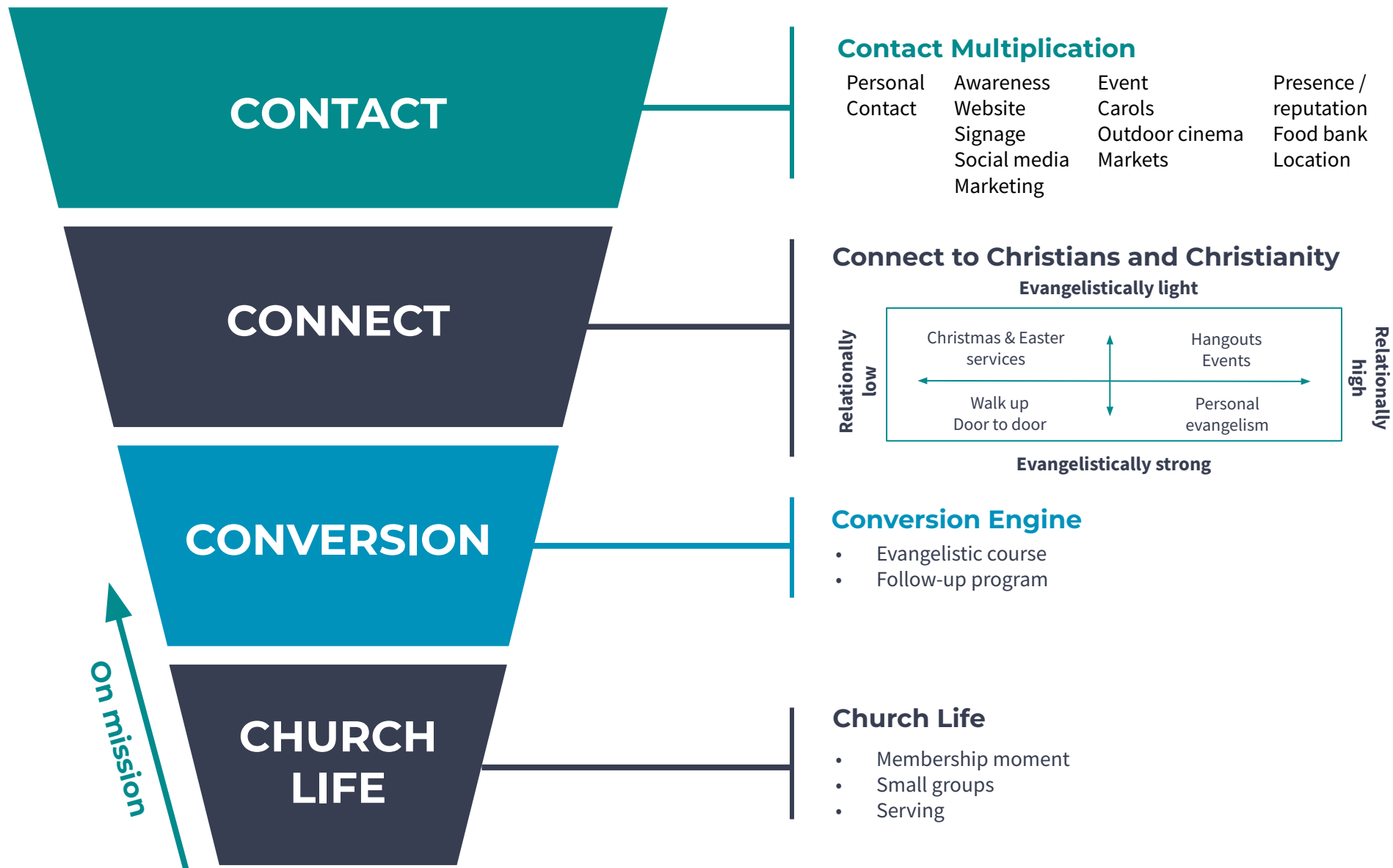
The other effective form of competency-building involves giving people the opportunity to be involved in evangelism. This happens primarily within the evangelistic course, but also through other missional activities your church may engage in like door-knocking, community surveys etc. Giving a small amount of formal training, followed by the opportunity to engage with non-Christians in a controlled environment, is an excellent way of building confidence and also sharpening skills.

MISSION FUNNEL

A large, bright bonfire is the central focus, burning on a pile of sticks and logs. Numerous sparks are being thrown into the air, creating a dynamic pattern of light against the dark background. The fire is situated on a dark, uneven ground. In the background, dark silhouettes of mountains or hills are visible under a deep, dark blue night sky. The overall mood is one of intensity and focus.

Every church has an approach to evangelism. Some approaches look haphazard and unintentional, some are described as 'organic and relational', and some are highly structured and directive. Whatever your church is like, you've got a process - you may just not know it. In fact, in the language we often use around mission, everyone has a mission funnel - it's just not always articulated, deliberate or intentional. This often results in churches having good intentions but being ineffective on the ground. So when we talk about a 'mission funnel' we're simply referring to a tool to help you consider the way in which your church engages with those who don't know Jesus.

The mission funnel refers to the way in which your church engages with non-Christian people. It considers how non-Christian people interact with individuals from the church, as well as the entity of the church. The funnel is separated into 4 distinct sections. Each section needs to be assessed and planned separately in order to best ascertain what's working and what's not working in our missional endeavours.



In a moment we will explore each section to add clarity. Before that, consider a few points as to why the mission funnel concept is helpful.

There are four areas to the work

This is powerful. It seems that often pastors have not teased apart these four areas in their minds and so the work of seeking to reach outsiders is all a bit confusing and shrouded in mystery. It also seems that people often collapse these three principles together in their thinking, but holding them distinct helps us greatly. This is because it becomes a diagnostic tool. We can more easily see where the blockage is for our church – is it in contacting, is it in connecting, or is it in converting? Sometimes you may find that you actually have more contacts and connections and people ready for the conversion engine than you thought.

The funnel gets narrower

The nature of a funnel is that it narrows from top to bottom. This indicates that the number of people engaged will reduce as you move down the levels towards the final outcome.

This is all about people

It's helpful to recognise that our work with outsiders operates like a funnel rather than a pipeline. People will often spend months or even years floating in and out of your church's sphere before coming to a Sunday service or evangelistic course. Even once they do attend, it will often take a long time to personally consider the truths of Jesus. All of this reminds us that it we must be deliberate about the people work behind the scenes as people circle around the funnel.

The funnel has an outcome

The funnel shows us that the goal is to have everyone who is converted established into the life of our church. The funnel reminds us that we are designing our church mission system so that there is intentional movement for outsiders (from contacted to connected to converted to church membership and joining us on mission). This gives us a very clear outcome to direct our work towards - we want to see people established in the faith by being part of

the church community. This means attending church, serving God's kingdom and being engaged in mission.

Now we can consider each section of the funnel in detail.

Contact multiplication

Contact multiplication is about warmly contacting as many people as possible in order to help them come to know and love Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It sits at the very top of the funnel because it represents the largest number of people possible. It is therefore essential that we seek to flood the top of the funnel with as many contacts as possible. The more people the better, as long as the rest of the funnel is functioning effectively to impact them.

Multiplying our non-Christian contacts in the community happens in a variety of ways discussed below. These efforts are designed for making contact with the community but will often also be an 'easy ask' for the people in your church to invite their friends to. Below are several examples of how you can seek to multiply contacts.

1. Personal contact

The personal contact of Christians from your church with non-Christians is the most obvious way to multiply contacts. Our people have unchurched contacts. Hundreds of them. Family, friends, neighbours and parents of their kid's friends. It is critical for us to think about how we can help our church members meet and build relationships with non-Christians, and to help them to move those people into connection with other Christians and Christian things.

Here are some key ways we can help our church members multiply contacts:

Help people see the opportunities that are before them with the people they already know. Although many Christians only have Christian close friends, most of the people in our churches work with people who aren't Christians, are at gyms with people who aren't Christians, have kids who are in sporting teams with people who aren't Christians, or at the very least they live on streets where

there are people who aren't Christians. We need to help them see that close friends and family aren't the only ones we can bring up the topic of Jesus with. We need to help our people see all those around them with the intentionality of the gospel. This can be helpfully done through prayer, informal conversations, sermons and small groups.

Encourage your people to view their world as a mission field at every opportunity. It is very easy to fall into the trap of getting lured into the momentum of life and work and family and church, so we don't stop and think, "Hang on! What am I here for? Why did Jesus save me? How can I live for his glory in this community?" We need to help people think of themselves as local or hometown missionaries, so they begin to look for active ways to connect with those around them. While some people find this easier than others, it's something we all need to be encouraged in.

Simultaneously, we don't want our people to think of themselves as solo local missionaries. This has two benefits. Firstly, evangelism is really tough. It's hard to maintain any level of momentum on your own. We need each other! We need to encourage each other, urge each other on, and help each other in our attempts to reach the lost. Secondly, together we can 'mix our worlds'. The more Christians a non-Christian meets, the more plausible the life transforming news of the gospel becomes. The more Christians a non-Christian knows, the easier it is to invite them to an event or gathering at church.

2. Events

Another way to multiply contacts is to run events that are designed to attract non-Christians who your church doesn't have contact with. Contact multiplication events are not to be confused with connection events (events that connect our non-Christian contacts with Christians and Christianity).

Just because your church runs an event, it doesn't necessarily mean that non-Christians will just turn up. It needs thought if we are going to run events that actually attract previously uncontacted members of the community. Having said this, it's possible and likely that many contact multiplication events are also great for inviting the non-Christians contacts we already have. They can therefore function as both contact multiplication and connection events

simultaneously. Here are a couple of examples of some events that are designed to contact un-contacted non-Christians:

2a. The weekly church gathering (on a 'non-event' Sunday)

By far and away the most commonly utilised 'event' in the life of any church is the church gathering on any given week. Church is a weekly event that continues to contact non-Christians (while obviously doing many other important things). This is not referring to what we will call 'special event Sundays' such as Christmas, Easter or in-service baptisms. Instead this is referring to the regular Sunday gatherings.

A large proportion (60-70%) of people converted in our churches had the church gathering as their first point of contact. Many of these were invited by a Christian friend. The church service is still the first place most non-Christians converted in churches come to. This means church is still a great 'event' to invite non-Christians along to.

Every single week our churches have non-Christians present. Some of these people are long term members who erroneously believe they are converted, or long-suffering non-Christian spouses of Christian believers. It is important we continually seek to win these people to the Lord. However, every week in churches all over Australia new people visit Bible-believing churches for any number of reasons. Most of these people are invited by your church members. Others just turn up. Whatever way they've arrived, to have people who are not Christians turn up to church is a great opportunity that we must consider thoughtfully.

'Special event Sundays' can be a very helpful way of multiplying contacts, but it's important to discern between the visitor you get at a 'regular' Sunday vs a 'special event' Sunday. Special event Sundays will see an increase in visitors coming through the doors, however many of those visiting will not be interested in what is being said at all. They may be attending for unhelpful reasons (tradition, guilt, etc). We will think about how to welcome those kinds of visitors in the next section, but it's worth saying here and now that these visitors are highly unlikely to return or accept an invitation to any kind of follow up. However, the visitors that have come on non-event Sundays are completely

different. The fact that they have chosen to come or accepted an invitation on a regular Sunday means that they are the type of visitor who is far more likely to return, or accept an invite to an evangelistic event!

Consider the following rule of thumb: if your church has a healthy 'front door', the number of first-time visitors per year will match the number of people who are members of your church.⁴ So, if your church has 150 members, you will see 150 visitors in a year. Data from our Reach Australia consultations reveals that, of these visitors, in a standard Protestant Australian church, approximately 10-20% of these will be non-Christians. A healthy but realistic missional goal, therefore, would be for 30% of total visitors being non-Christians.

Effectively welcoming new contacts and establishing deeper relational connection at the church gathering will be looked at in more detail within our next chapter. However, in the world of initial contact, it is helpful to remember two major concepts: firstly, first impressions matter. It is critical to remember that non-Christian visitors are not only listening (if they are actually listening) but also feeling. Visiting a church is an intimidating experience. It's vital that we have welcomers who are keeping an eye out for new people, that visitors are verbally welcomed from the front in the service, and that every effort in making them feel comfortable is made. If you have a welcoming team, invest in putting together some welcome bags, and a booklet of who you are and what you believe. Secondly, if possible, get their details and follow them up. The goal of welcoming a new contact is that they return the next week. This is greatly aided by getting their details, and thinking through what information they will receive from your church during the week.

2b. 'Special event' Sundays

Special event Sundays include Christmas, Easter, carols, and baptism services. For example, many churches run carols events to contact non-Christians (and often also to introduce non-Christians to Christians and Christian truths). For some reason, in many parts of Australia our culture still values gathering as a community to sing carols. Often their view of a carols event has changed (due

⁴ Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*.

to large secular carols events) but for many churches it's still an easy way to get non-Christians attending the event.

2c. Other events

Aside from regular Sundays and special Sundays, your church can run other events that multiply contacts. For any event, the success of how many people are contacted will be determined by both community marketing and personal invitations. The success of whether these contacts enjoy their time with us and return to this or other events will be determined by how good the event was and how people treated them. If we are able to identify and meet new people at these events (at some events the scale makes this very hard) then these contacts can be warmly followed up. When this sort works well, more contacts tend to flow through the funnel through connection and into our conversion engine and to conversion.

3. Community presence/reputation

Raising the community's awareness of your existence can be a useful, low cost way of seeing the multiplication of contacts. There are several approaches that can put the existence of your church into the eye of the community. Many cost money and all cost time, but good marketing and communications is key for any church's mission work. If you're concerned to see more people saved, you must have a concern for marketing and communications in church.

4. Online

Traditionally, churches have spent very little time tapping into online awareness building, but this area needs us to think out of the box (while always bringing our theological minds to bear in order to avoid error or compromise). If your church can draw together people with expertise in this industry and can both shape their thinking and draw from it, we will come up with some great ideas on how we can contact many more people.

5. General use of social media

It's very likely that most people who visit your church in person will have already visited your social media accounts (or web page). Social media is often the first 'front door' to your church. If your social media is nothing more than another means of communicating internal church information, it likely won't

be a very appealing front door. We would like to suggest an alternative approach. What if your social media presence was a bit like your Sunday gathering (focused towards the insider, but being aware that the curious outsider is looking in)? To see the vibrant, caring and hope-filled community of the church is powerful. If you are able to capture the sense of who you are as a community, then it can both demystify your church and also be incredibly appealing to outsiders looking in. This doesn't have to be polished and professional: often it's the unpolished stories and video grabs of church community in action filmed impulsively on your phone that are the most engaging.⁵ To see how Jesus has changed people's lives is powerful.

6. Targeted social media and search engine advertising

Social media and search engine advertising are powerful tools used by digital marketers to sell products. These can be effectively used in seeking to multiply contacts. Again, it is helpful to engage experts in this sort of advertising. They will help you think about how you use these tools to best market your events and your church as a whole. While this may seem foreign to ministers, search engine optimisation, content marketing, niche advertising are all familiar to experts. These tools (and new ones that will be developed in the future) can all be harnessed in appropriate and helpful ways to contact people who seem like they may be warm to the gospel.

7. Web page

Your webpage is the front door of your church for many people. It is important that it is attractive, easy to navigate, with clear information pointing to your in-person ministries as a matter of priority.⁶

8. Letterbox-drops/public stall

These are fairly old-school, but still bring some great benefits. For every 10,000 leaflets or postcards dropped, you may only get one or two people to come and stick at church through the event advertised. But that is still two new people who likely would not have come otherwise. A letterbox drop also raises the church's profile and presence in the community. If these letterbox drops are done regularly (though not too regularly as there will be a law of diminishing

⁵ Since social media algorithms and patterns are constantly changing, this may change over the coming years.

⁶ Reach Australia Digital can assist you with your webpage: reachaustralia.com.au/digital.

returns) they contribute to community awareness of church and a sense of what church is like. This means that what is being handed out needs to be top quality. Well-designed advertising materials will not only advertise the events well, but they build a brand in people's minds around your church. Poorly designed and executed flyers can actually hinder you. When done well, it can be powerful. We suggest getting your church's people (not a paid contractor) delivering the postcards or flyers. This builds conviction and confidence in your people and further shapes church culture around mission.

9. Street signage

Does your church stand out? Does it look warm and inviting from the outside? What signage do you have? What does it say? All these things say something about us.

10. Regular positive door-knocking

If your church is door-knocking your community in a regular or semi-regular manner and does it in a way that is positive, non-invasive, and yet keen to discuss the deeper issues of life (spiritual issues and eternity), it is impacting. This type of door-knocking creates a type of relationship between the person and our church - a relationship that is warm (even if they have not been keen to engage too deeply on their doorstep) and a relationship they know they can turn to if they want to talk about things that really matter.

Connect to Christians and Christianity

After contact multiplication, the next step in the funnel is connecting people to Christians and Christianity. The more non-Christian people connect with Christians and Christianity, the more likely they are to either want to look into what Christians believe, or respond positively to an invitation. Doing so also allows non-Christian people to feel comfortable asking questions and builds plausibility around the claims of the Bible. We want to aid our people in 'mixing their worlds' together - encouraging them to bring their non-Christian contacts into the realm of their Christian life. It is therefore extremely helpful for churches to build into their mission plan opportunities for Christians to invite their friends to easy-invitation events. Below are several ways this can happen.

1. The church gathering

Church is not only the biggest contact event, it's also the place where we have the greatest opportunity to achieve connection wins as non-Christian people get to meet and spend more time with Christians.

Key to the church gathering functioning as a helpful connection event is creating an environment that helps our non-Christian friends meet and get to know other Christians. A strong church community is crucial to drive forward this facet of church life as it creates a warm, welcoming and caring community.

There are several ways of intentionally seeking to increase the connectivity between Christians and non-Christians at the church gathering. To do so it may be helpful to break your Sunday gathering up into 3 parts:

- a. Pre-church: Welcome team, welcome bags, vibe, music, clear signage for kids.
- b. Church: Warm verbal welcome, brief clear explanations when necessary (especially around kids and where they'll have to go), opportunity to say hello to people around you, speaking directly to non-Christians within the sermon.

- c. Post-church: food, coffee, music, clear information with kids, activity for kids, lunch, team of people to invite others to their house.

2. 'Special event' Sundays

There are several events that occur within the church calendar that are naturally easier invites, as we discussed earlier. They include things like Christmas, Easter, Mother's and Father's Day etc.

3. Other connection events

These were traditionally called 'pre-evangelistic events'. The intent is to provide easier events for non-Christian people to be invited to, either prior to or after attending a church gathering. The express purpose is connection.

It's helpful to understand these events by utilising the sliding scale on the mission funnel diagram. On one axis, connection events can range from low to highly relational. On the other axis, connection events can range from light to strong in terms of evangelistic content. Some of these events may have a light talk or interview, while others may have nothing. The key outcome here is connection as a step towards conversion. You are not expecting people to be converted at these events. Kids music clubs, fitness clubs, men-and-meat nights or gingerbread house making are just a few examples of connection events. There are several important principles to remember with these events.

Next steps

It is extremely helpful to have some clear next steps for those who might want to ask questions about Christianity and explore Jesus. A good example of a next step is to attend an evangelistic series at church. As the year is planned it can be helpful to run many of these connection events in the lead up to conversion engine events.

Quality counts

It is important to nail these events. If you pull off a bad event you damage your ability to drag people into the next one. So it is better to do fewer events and execute them at a higher quality. It's worthwhile knowing that it will often take time to build momentum in getting guests along. The first few events might struggle to get guests, but don't

be surprised or upset. After all, we're asking our people to risk their relationships, and often to entrust their loved ones to us. So don't be discouraged, but work to make the events awesome. Aim that every event your people leave saying, "That was awesome. That would have been perfect for my dad/sister/neighbour/friend." Once that has happened a few times they might be willing to trust us with those they know and love. While it might take 2-3 great events to gain trust, one bad event that is awkward and uncomfortable may mean it takes years for someone to risk their relational credit again on something you run.

Context matters

Connection events need to be accessible and attractive to people in your context. It's not about what you are interested in doing but what will be appealing to people's contacts. For example, in a regional church you might run a chainsaw maintenance event, but this probably won't work in the city.

Facilitate conversation

Connection events need to facilitate conversations and the mixing of non-Christians with Christians. Because the aim is to give outsiders exposure to the Christian community, watching the State of Origin might not be the perfect connection event. Although it is an easy invitation, it is unlikely to really facilitate conversations or give a taste of the Christian community.

Common pitfalls

Whilst these events can be helpful ways of connecting with non-Christians, beware these pitfalls:

- The bait and switch: not being clear with your church that your seemingly social event actually has an evangelistic element.
- Missional distraction: pouring all your effort and energy into connection events but then spend no time planning the actual evangelistic event.
- Missional delusion: believing that because you have a lot of non-Christians on your church property or attending your

connection event you are seeing missional fruit. If over a period of years of trying you don't see a direct increase in conversions as a result of your event, then it's time to try something new.

Piggyback on existing events

One of the strategies you could pursue is simply encouraging your church to invite their non-Christian friends to any non-spiritual community events your church puts on. For example, if your church runs an event for dads and kids once a term, then – if there's no spiritual content – ensure people know they can bring someone along to just hang out. This has the additional bonus of being a community win for your church, without burning mission energy to organise.

Existing social structures

One of the most effective ways of deepening connections is through Christians partnering together within existing non-church social structures they are already a part of. Several examples of this are:

- **School groups**
Discover which members of your church have kids that attend the same school (if applicable), and gather them together once a term. During this time together they can pray together for the school and people they know. They can also receive some vision, thinking and training into how to best use their time at school to meet new people and make friends with them, and over time to introduce those friends to other Christian friends (particularly others from the school). They can also think together about what events they might invite people along to. This creates a team of people who encourage and help each other, and it also trains them for a lifetime of making the most of every opportunity with the gospel in love.
- **Sporting clubs**
Australia is a nation obsessed with sport. Many people in your church will most likely play some kind of sport in a local club or organisation. Encourage people who enjoy the same sport to

partner together and join the same club. Discourage your church from starting their own 'church brand' team to enter a local competition. It's far better to have pairs and triplets of Christians within teams full of non-Christians.

Conversion engine

The conversion engine is best understood as the ministry in which you hope to see most people converted. This is not the only place people will become Christians and this should not be the only type of evangelism that your church undertakes. However, it is critical that you give a lot of thought to how you hope to see the most amount of non-Christian people (in this case, adults) hear the gospel and, under God, be converted.

For most evangelical churches in Australia who witness a lot of people come to Christ, the most effective conversion engine in our tool box at this present time is an evangelistic course. 60 years ago, that was not the case. In other countries, it's still not the case. In the future it may change. But in 21st century Australia, evangelistic courses have proven to be an effective way of explaining the gospel to large groups of people, while having the added benefit of being an incredibly useful way of training your Christians in evangelism.

Evangelistic courses, when run effectively as part of the wider church ecosystem, have many benefits. These include:

- Presenting the gospel clearly and helpfully to enquirers.
- Allowing enquirers the time they need to investigate and consider the claims of Jesus in a helpful environment. People are often starting from ground zero, so extra time and space to investigate the claims of Jesus and the Bible is often very helpful.
- Building confidence among church members, leading to partnership and invitations.
- Providing a wonderful space to train your Christians in evangelistic conversations in 'real time'. Christians who attend are able to witness how to explain the gospel clearly and also have the opportunity to be intentionally evangelistic in conversations on the nights.

It's helpful to think of your conversion engine as having two parts: the initial evangelistic course itself, and then a follow-up program. Think into the timing of these two parts and how they relate to contact and connection events.

Conversion engine part 1: the evangelistic course

The great strength of evangelistic courses, outside of their clear explanation of the gospel, is regularity and predictability. Additionally, evangelistic courses can be easily scaled up or down depending on the amount of enquirers. Below are several key principles for evangelistic courses:

Planning

As you begin, consider the following principles:

- Proactive not reactive: put it in your church's calendar and run it, regardless of how many non-Christians you've spoken to.
- Predictable and reliable: habits help form culture. The same course at the same time every year is ideal.
- Scalable and sustainable: Don't start too big and then be crushed by the weight. Be realistic as you plan the first few years. Develop a plan that will make it simple to scale larger or scale smaller.
- 10 year plan not 10 week plan: Don't be forced into making rushed decisions. Instead, remember the 10 year plan and the fruit that may come through building congregational confidence in the one plan over a prolonged period.
- The next step is the important one: always be asking 'what happens next?' Have a plan in place for the next week.

Choosing a course

The key questions to ask when selecting a course are as follows:

- Content: It may sound obvious, but the course you choose should prioritise a clear and engaging presentation of the gospel to non-Christians. There are several excellent courses available that present the gospel from a biblical perspective.
- Context: The context of your church should be kept in mind when choosing your course. What is effective on a university campus may not be effective in a working class or multicultural suburban church.

- **Delivery:** Most courses offer two alternative methods - you can show a video or you can read the script of the video as a short talk. If your church has a gifted evangelistic preacher, then presenting live provides several advantages. The speaker is able to read the audience and contextualise the illustrations. It can also give the speaker more perceived authority in question time. However, many of the video options are excellent.
- **Length:** How long is the course? While many courses are longer than eight weeks, shorter courses tend to be easier to invite people to and also run on a regular basis. The course needs to be long enough to explain the gospel and provide opportunity for relational connection, but not too long that it is an unpalatable invitation. Four to six weeks seems to work well.
- **Location:** If at all possible, it is most effective to run the course at the building where your church meets on Sunday. This makes it easier to invite someone from the course to a regular Sunday gathering. It also helps demystify church buildings. If this is simply impossible, find a venue close to your Sunday location where people can sit in comfort, share food and hear the presentations clearly. A busy café that remains open for business has too many distractions.
- **When:** This will depend on your specific context. If you are a church, any mid-week evening time may be appropriate. If you serve dinner, consider starting at 7pm. If you serve coffee and dessert, consider starting at 7:30pm. Regardless, it's crucial that you start and finish on time.
- **Expectations:** Be realistic as to how many people will attend the course and become Christians. Don't plan for hundreds when it's only likely to be five people attending. But don't be content with five in the long term! Seek to build the ministry over decades, not months.

Preparing for the course

Once you have chosen when and where your course will run, it is time to carefully plan other details:

- **Structure:** What will your time together look like? Will it be an informal chat, gathered around a TV, with some questions afterwards? Will it be a

full-scale production with live music and barista-made coffee? Consider these courses as deeply as you would a major church event.

- Recruit a team: Often churches run evangelistic courses with only the presenter and an offsider to look after additional logistics. However, when it comes to evangelistic courses, the more people involved the merrier. Roles your team can fill include table talkers, caterer, MC, sound and tech, set up etc. Take every opportunity to communicate and celebrate with the whole team so they can spiritually grow through their serving.
- In-service advertising: How will you advertise your event? Most guests will attend through either personal invitation from a Christian or by hearing it advertised on a Sunday. So you should aim your advertising primarily at the Christian in the pew ('who could you bring?') and then secondarily at any non-Christians present ('perhaps you'd be interested in coming along yourself'). The people sitting in front of you every Sunday will bring the most guests along, so every opportunity to individually or corporately encourage them to bring people should be taken.
- Other advertising: Your preacher should also look for opportunities to encourage people to attend in sermons, perhaps after an explanation of the gospel. Your website should have updated and clear information. Your social media presence should also promote the course.
- Invite church members: Inviting a small selection of Christians in your church to attend and observe the course is a helpful way of adding 'critical mass' of numbers to the evenings, whilst also showing them that they can trust the course. It's important to not overwhelm the room with Christians, but a ratio of up to 3:1 (so long as many of those present are on the team) works well. The Christians who attend the course are not just potential inviters but also potential hosts. The week after the course finishes, follow them up and see if they'd like to get involved as a host in the next course.

Running the course

The evenings at an evangelistic course are filled with opportunities to thoughtfully encourage people towards Jesus and create a positive impression of Christianity. Below are several critical areas to consider:

- The space: Choose a space that is most suitable to the expected size of the group attending. It's far better to have a group that is bursting at the seams in a room, than the same size group in an enormous room.
- The vibe: Table-talkers should arrive 30 minutes before the course begins, prepared to chat to guests as they arrive. Upbeat, light music (not worship songs) can be played in the background. Have food and drink already set out and ready to go.
- The team: Have someone located on the front door as a greeter, and also potentially at the door to the room you're utilising to hand out pens, booklets, nametags, etc. Whether you're doing dinner or dessert will affect what happens next, but allow plenty of time for chatting prior to starting. Ensure that no non-Christian guest is ignored.
- MC introduction: If you use an MC, ensure this person is warm and friendly, and puts people at ease. It's best if this person avoids adding their own thoughts to the presented content. Instead, the MC's main role is to represent the guest and prioritise their comfort and enjoyment. Assure people that they don't have to talk or offer their opinion, but are welcome to simply listen.
- The talk: If you opt for an in-person talk, make sure the speaker is as well-rehearsed as possible. These talks are as important as any that will be given in their life. The talks should be given with every ounce of possible communicative clarity and skill. This can be tricky if you're using a script that has been written by someone else, however extra rehearsal should result in making the material your own. If using a video presentation, ensure the technology is working prior to the night.
- Q&A: There are several options for a Q&A or discussion time. You could split into tables, each with a host discussion leader reading through some pre-written questions, or perhaps come up with some group questions for open Q&A time. Alternatively, you could transition immediately from the talk to an open Q&A between the attendees and the speaker. Discussion would then be informally conducted by the hosts and attendees following the finish of the group time. A word of warning - don't allow Q&A go for too long. It's rarely as interesting as you think.

- Afterwards: Following the presentation and question/discussion time, light music should be played to make people comfortable to stick around chatting. Either the MC or the speaker should stay near the door as people leave, thanking them for coming and letting them know that they're looking forward to seeing them next week.
- Response/feedback: Following the course, offer the participants an opportunity to respond to the gospel. Most courses have an opportunity to pray a prayer of repentance and faith at the completion of the time together. Many courses have feedback forms which contain diagnostic questions that ascertain the attendees' responses, as well as a space to indicate if they're interested in being followed-up.

After the course

After the evangelistic course is complete there are several helpful steps to consider. Keep in mind that these are distinct from the follow-up course:

- Reflect: Provide a time to debrief with your team. Give everyone the opportunity to provide feedback, tell stories, and share what they might have done differently. This will go a long way to keeping your team motivated for future courses. This can take place late after the last evening or, even better, the week after at a special longer time together.
- Assess: With your team members, do an honest assessment of every element of the course. Consider having a meeting soon after the final week and write down your thoughts. What went well? What could do with improvement? Ensure you revisit these notes in the lead up to the next course.
- Celebrate: Celebrating the way God has been at work in the evangelistic course with the team and with the wider church family is a wonderful way of building mission heat and confidence. Whether or not people were converted, it's good to mention at the gathering what has been going on through the course. Be careful to do so discreetly and not to reveal the attendees' identities.
- Repeat: One of the powerful benefits of running an evangelistic course is repeatability. This allows you to tinker with the content and context continually, improving things all the time, while also building recognition and confidence in your church congregation. Evangelistic

courses aren't single events, but are best utilised as part of a longer-term missional strategy, building momentum and fruit over decades.

Other common questions

There are several other questions which commonly come up when considering evangelistic courses:

Q: Should we run one course multiple times or multiple different courses?

A: On the one hand, there are great strengths to having one single course as the only evangelistic course. It can become a well-established part of church life which your church members grow to trust. It allows you the ability to improve what you're doing because you can focus on it. On the other hand, multiple courses (i.e. running a different course each term) can contribute to enthusiasm levels. The multiple-courses approach can also act as an effective mode of follow up, in which course B functions as the follow up to course A.

Q: How many times per year should we run a course?

A: If you're starting from scratch, it's best to start slowly and consider running a course only twice (e.g. in term 1 and 3) for the first year. However, to reach the non-Christian visitors who are always in the sphere of your church at any moment, it's best to build to three or four courses per year.

Conversion engine part 2: follow up

Regardless of the response of the guests, having a follow-up structure in place is imperative. Many guests will have heard enough to be interested, but not yet committed to faith. Others may indeed have come to the Lord. Regardless, you must have a plan for what to do with these people. Resist the urge to crowbar them into existing small groups. They're not ready, and your small groups will suffer. Times of transition in evangelism are fraught with difficulty and are the easiest time and place for people to pop out of the funnel. The better prepared and executed your follow-up, the more chance of keeping your new people through the change. There are two key principles which are helpful to remember. Firstly, the follow up structure exists to serve the people, not the other way around. Give people as much time as they need. Secondly, the goal isn't just conversion, it's being both converted and becoming grounded in the faith. As the course finishes, inform the attendees about the next step and when it takes place. They can respond via a feedback form or direct conversation. Send a confirmation and information email to all responders prior to the follow-up course commencing. Below are four options for your follow-up structure:

1. A new Bible study every term

An effective means of follow-up is to form a 'non and new Christian' Bible study group out of the guests who have completed the initial course. This works best if the group meets at the same time and place as the evangelistic course without any gap in between. It's helpful if the leaders of this group have attended some of the evangelistic course (or at least the final week). This way the leaders are not strangers to the members of the group. Ideally, the speaker/MC of the course also attends the first week of the Bible study. The Bible study can meet for a term, or a year. It can turn into an actual church small group after a while. It's important not to push people out of the conversion engine until you're sure they're converted and grounded in the faith. These Bible studies are complex to run and require a highly competent leader.

2. A rolling and open Bible study

A second possibility is to have one or two open and rolling Bible studies continually running throughout the year (except for when courses are on). This Bible study only looks at content which is particularly outsider-friendly, such as a gospel or other evangelistic material. When a course finishes, anyone interested is invited to attend the Bible study the next week. If a non-Christian arrives at church and there's not another course for 3 months, they can be invited into this group easily until a course begins. However, the changing shape of this group can make relational connectivity difficult.

3. Another course

A third option could be to hold another evangelistic course immediately or quickly after the first one. Perhaps your church could run a different course each term. This certainly has organisational wisdom, as it means you can invite the person who did course A to course B, whilst also inviting the brand new person to course B without them knowing they've missed something previously. However, continually switching courses makes it harder to build confidence among church members in your church's evangelistic course. Additionally, improving the course becomes difficult as you're doing something different every time.

4. One-to-one

It may be that you don't have many people attending your course, or very few desiring to continue. In this case, meeting one-to-one with a mature and capable Christian can be an excellent form of follow-up. However, if you have the ability to form a group, this usually has better outcomes for introducing new people to the idea of small groups and the ability to discuss the Bible with others.

Whichever approach you choose, it's important to remember that this all takes a significant amount of time. There can, of course, be sudden conversion after a short period of time followed by rapid Christian growth, but this is the exception rather than the norm. Generally, people need significant time immersed in this totally new worldview. A conversion engine provides this opportunity. While some people become Christians at evangelistic courses and benefit from being established in the faith through the follow-up programme,

many others do not become Christians at the evangelistic course but are happy to continue on into the follow-up programme. A convert in the Australian scene generally takes a long time to process the implications of the life of Christ. Don't just get a tick on a box and leave the person to fend for themselves.

WHAT'S NEXT?

When a church focuses its energy and resources on developing mission heat and a mission funnel, this often provides the best possibility of seeing sustained mission fruit. As individuals within your church partner together with you and with one another, then you can expect to see non-Christians enter into the sphere of your church and hopefully into the kingdom of God.

So...what should you do next?

Start with the end in mind. The most important thing you can do is to begin to work on your conversion engine. Choose or improve your evangelistic course, then insert it into the calendar. There's no point having excellent contact and connect events if there's no conversion engine for people to come to. Simultaneously, work hard on thinking through how best to welcome and connect with non-Christians at your Sunday gathering.

RESOURCES

This ebook is paired with season 21 of the [Reach Australia podcast](#), released early 2023.

COURSES AND SOFTWARE

[Mobilising for mission course](#)
[Life series](#)

WEBINARS AND VIDEOS

[Theology of Mission](#) (Ray Galea)
[Practicality of Mission](#) (Andrew Heard)
[How Mission Builds the Church](#) (Grahame Fuller)
Mission in a Small Church (Liam Doyle) [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)
[Mission in the Church Ecosystem](#) (Grahame Fuller and Scott Sanders)
[Mission Workshop](#) (Dave Robertson and Josh Allen)



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