

# Nurturing the Conversation of Evangelism in Your Church: A Local Church Discernment Process

by Todd Blake and Rendell Hipps  
*Church Leader Guide*

## The CBFNC Evangelism Taskforce

The Coordinating Council of CBFNC listened to churches and began to hear a common concern or need among N.C.'s Fellowship churches.

*Need:*

*The individuals and churches within our fellowship believe in evangelism and feel called to share the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ in our communities and around the world. Some methods of evangelism no longer seem to be effective in reaching our neighbors and other methods are not consistent with who we are and what we believe.*

They responded by putting together a Taskforce to talk about, pray about, and look for the best ways to help churches who want evangelism to be a more important part of who they are and what they do. The specific assignment for the Taskforce was this:

*Action:*

*The Faith Development Ministry Council will appoint a task force to explore evangelism needs, to develop a healthy philosophy/theology of evangelism; to develop a strategy for congregational evangelism; and to explore the relationship between being a missional church and evangelism.*

From these conversations came a process that would help a church discern a unique definition and calling for evangelism. This process can help a church get beyond just talking about evangelism to actually living out a call to share the transformative Gospel of Christ Jesus.

## The Process

This is a “coaching” approach. As a leader, you will act as facilitator, guiding the group through the process. The intent is to help a church better understand its own evangelistic make-up. This process does not attempt to put forth a “program” for evangelism. As coach, help your group understand the difference between program and process. Here are some thoughts on you might explain this nuance as you orient your group:

- In the past, so many churches and denominations have too heavily on a program approach to any problem, obstacle, or challenge for a church. This approach is often too general. This program approach does not take into account the unique character of the local church.

- This is a process which our church can utilize to move toward a healthy and effective self-understanding of who we are and who we are called to be, evangelistically.
- Our goal should be to understand ourselves and what we believe about evangelism. This will require asking provocative and difficult questions. Honest answers are necessary. As we move this process, we should be listening for (insert church name)'s unique calling to evangelism and then do whatever it takes to live out that calling.

## Goal

Throughout the process, you will need to articulate and assist your church in addressing the following issues (a definition of, call to, and strategy for evangelism):

- **Individual and Corporate *definition of evangelism*** – What for me and my church defines evangelism?
- ***Call to evangelism*** – Each church is unique. What is our specific God-given call to evangelism?
- ***Strategy for evangelism*** – What strategies will we need to employ and what change must be made to fulfill our specific calling?

## Two possible options

### OPTION 1: Multi-staff congregation (larger church)

#### **Who to include?**

All of clergy staff should be involved in the initial sessions. Church leadership (sessions 6-10) should include formal and informal leaders, and others with an interest and passion for evangelism.

#### **Schedule and pace:**

In a multi-staff congregation, clergy staff will do sessions one, two, three, four, and five. Afterward, church leadership with minimal staff representation will do sessions six, seven, and eight. Then, clergy staff and church leadership do sessions nine and ten together.

#### **Clergy Staff Sessions:**

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|------------------|---|
| <b>Session 1</b> | Introduction of process, including goals and schedule<br>Assign and explain “Individual Identity” questions |
| <b>Session 2</b> | Discuss results of “Individual Identity” questions<br>Assign and explain “Corporate Identity” questions     |
| <b>Session 3</b> | Discuss results of “Corporate Identity” questions<br>Assign “Discernment Paragraph”                         |
| <b>Session 4</b> | Discuss responses to “Discernment Paragraph”  |

**Session 5** Discuss “Call” and “Strategy” questions, but wait on outcome from church leadership participants

**Church Leadership Sessions:**

**Session 6** Introduction of process, including goals and schedule  
Assign and explain “Individual Identity” questions

**Session 7** Discuss results of “Individual Identity” questions  
Assign and explain “Corporate Identity” questions

**Session 8** Discuss results of “Corporate Identity” questions  
Assign “Discernment Paragraph”

**Church Leadership and Clergy Staff Combined Sessions:**

**Session 9** Discuss results of “Discernment Paragraph” from clergy and from leadership  
Discuss “Call” questions

**Session 10** Discuss “Strategy” questions. Use these to form and clarify your church’s “Evangelism Strategy”

**OPTION 2: Small-staff congregation (smaller church, one or two ministers on staff)**

**Who to include?**

For effective discussion to occur in the small church setting (one to two ministers on staff), participants will need to include the minister(s), formal and informal leaders, and others with interest and passion for evangelism. As minister or lay leader, you will need to determine who these persons may be. After enlisting particular people, you may also want to offer an open invitation to the congregation.

**Schedule and pace:**

For the small church, five sessions are suggested. These sessions would be approximately one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes in length. These sessions should occur every one to two weeks. Here are the issues that should be addressed in each session:

**Session 1** Introduction of process, including goals and schedule.  
Assign and explain “Individual Identity” questions.

**Session 2** Discuss results of “Individual Identity” questions.  
Introduce and explain “Corporate Identity” questions.

**Session 3** Discuss results of “Corporate Identity” questions.  
Assign “Discernment Paragraph”.

**Session 4** Discuss responses to “Discernment Paragraph”.  
“Hearing God’s Call and Visioning God’s Future”.

**Session 5** Formation and clarification of your church’s “Evangelism Strategy”.

## Leader Helps and Strategies

As you guide others through this process, consider what methods will be most helpful as participants answer these important questions. The suggestions that follow are ideas that may help you as you guide participants through this process.

### **Individual Identity:**

Whether guiding staff, laity, or both, an individual's story can be a powerful tool in sharing the gospel. After participants have the opportunity to think about their faith journeys, allow them to share their stories either with the entire group or in smaller groups. Not only will this contribute to discussion about the definition of evangelism, it will help prepare participants to share their stories.

### **Corporate Identity:**

After participants have the opportunity to answer these questions individually, divide participants into groups. In these groups, ask them to share their responses and draft group answers to these questions. As groups share their answers, the group will develop a foundation for a corporate identity, and provide a foundation for the discernment paragraph which comes next.

### **Discernment:**

Ask participants to share their discernment paragraphs with the whole group. As participants share, take note of common themes that are repeated among multiple participants. These common themes provide insight into a corporate understanding of evangelism, and provide a basis for calling and strategy.

## Additional Questions and Assistance

If we can be of further assistance in this process, please feel free to contact us.

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## Discussion Questions for the Process

### Individual Identity:

1. Write out your faith journey and prepare to share with the group. What were the key points along the journey? Who were the key individuals involved?
2. How, if at all, does the word “evangelism” relate to your own faith journey? That is, how and by what individuals or groups of individuals was the “Good News” shared with you? Why did you respond to the “Good News?” Was your response natural and progressive, or was it rather sudden and definitive? That is, did you come to faith in Christ over time as the most natural next step in your faith journey, or do you recall a clearly-definable moment and event that marks your conversion to faith in Christ?
3. What does “sharing” the “Good News” look like to you? What do you believe is your individual role in “sharing” the “Good News” with others? Are there ways you are doing so which are patterned after your own experience of receiving the “Good News”? Are there ways you are doing so which are *not* patterned after your own experience? List them.

### Corporate Identity:

1. What are some possible definitions of “evangelism?” Which definition(s) is/are the primary definition members and guests at your church would think of when they hear the word “evangelism?” Which of these definitions is your church most likely to embrace? Why? It might be helpful to think of some “pictures” of the church at work that display “evangelism.”
2. What are your core *theological* beliefs as they relate to the idea of “evangelism?” How do these core theological beliefs shape the way you define and practice “evangelism?” (*Note: you may want to touch on concepts related to Kingdom of God; eternal destiny; personal relationship with God/Jesus; God’s mission in the world; saved/lost; sin/judgment; God’s holiness, love, wrath, forgiveness; God’s justice in the world; purpose of the Church; discipleship; exclusivity/pluralism; etc.*)
3. How do the following often-used phrases/ideas relate to your definition of evangelism? That is, does your definition of evangelism include or exclude these concepts? If so, how?
  - “sharing your faith”
  - “telling others about Jesus”
  - “spreading the Good News”
  - “being/getting saved”
  - “giving your life/heart to Jesus”
  - “becoming a Christian”
  - “joining/entering the Church”
  - “born again”
  - other
4. Is there something *at stake* when it comes to the idea of evangelism (either for *individuals* or for the *world*; either for the one *doing* evangelism or for the ones *receiving* evangelism)? If so, what is *at stake* for the individual? What is *at stake* for the world?

5. What is your church's history as it relates to "evangelism?" Has it changed over the years? If so, how? Why? What is relevant now? What is not relevant now?
6. Are there any ministries in your church which you would consider primarily and intentionally "evangelistic?" If so, which ones, and what about them makes them "evangelistic?"

**Discernment:**

Based on the work you have done thus far in the discernment process, summarize in one paragraph your church's definition of evangelism.

**Call:**

1. Based on the evaluation of your personal identity and that of your church (see above), do you believe God has a plan/desire for your future and for the future of the church that involves evangelism as you have defined it?
2. If so, what might that plan/future look like at its best? What might your church look like as it fulfills that call?
3. In what ways might/must your current identity be reshaped as you move toward the plan/future God has for you and your church in evangelism as you have defined it?
4. In what ways might/must your definition and understanding of "evangelism" need to be reshaped, broadened, refined, or focused in order to fulfill the purpose for which your church exists?

**Strategy:**

1. Determine if your church will need to make some strategic plans in order to fulfill the purpose for which your church exists as it relates to your refined understanding of "evangelism" as you have discerned it for your church.
2. Select resources (list provided by CBF) to move your church toward fulfilling God's plan/future for you. Be sure to work through them first as staff, second with lay leadership, and then third with the church in general.
3. Help your church catch a vision for where God is leading and where you are heading. Paint a picture of the outcome and impact. Prepare the church for being open to the work of the Holy Spirit in determining the ultimate outcome.
4. Help your church with "spiritual formation" during this entire process. *Do not make "evangelism" the sole focus of this strategy.* Make "evangelism" an outgrowth of the spiritually formative movement of the church.