

# **Small churches build on their strength when they build relationships with lost, Ray says\_12604**

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**By Ken Camp**

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RICHARDSON—Small churches become motivated for evangelism when leaders help members shift the focus from visiting prospects to building relationships, according to a Bob Ray, director of bivocational and small church development with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“Relationships are key,” said Ray, who also serves as bivocational pastor of Fairy Baptist Church near Hico.

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“A small church acts as a committee of the whole because of relationships.”

Small churches tend to be driven by a passion for relationships and compassion for other people, rather than by vision or challenges, Ray noted.

Pastors of small churches can build on this strength by guiding members intentionally to develop relationships with non-Christians, he observed.

“Everybody develops relationships differently. Give people permission to do it their own way,” Ray said.

Community events such as athletic booster club fund-raisers and local parades provide opportunities for church members to build relationships.

“If there's nothing going on in your community, maybe you need to start something as a church,” Ray added.

“At our church, if we can't find a holiday to celebrate, we make one up.”

Church-sponsored events such as Super Bowl parties offer church members a chance to invite unreached acquaintances to a place where relationships can develop.

“We have a New Year's Eve party every year, and we don't do anything religious there except pray,” Ray said.

But through that event, non-Christians have developed strong friendships with church members, and eventually they have become open to the gospel message.

“Every time you win somebody to Christ, they have a whole new set of people they know,” Ray said.

Those constantly expanding networks of relationships provide new opportunities for evangelism.

Small churches grow when they redefine their field in terms of relationships instead of geography, Ray added.

“Change your radius. It's not five miles from the church building, but the field within the radius of all your relationships,” he said.

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