

# Does event evangelism still work?

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Some observers of church life insist the day of event evangelism has passed. They point to one-on-one evangelism as the only effective way to reach non-Christians today.

But does that mean event evangelism is dead? Some evangelists are stepping forward to say otherwise. They declare it is alive and well—and necessary to fulfill a biblical mandate.

“A lot of churches look at evangelists in the past and how evangelists have let them down. And they don’t want to use them,” said Eric Fuller, a 26-year old evangelist and member of Normandale Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

But according to a listing of spiritual gifts in the New Testament book of Ephesians, the evangelist is God’s gift to the local church, Fuller insisted.

Evangelist Billy Graham has been leading large crusades throughout the world for more than 50 years. But Some observers of church life insist the day of event evangelism has passed.

“If these are gifts given to the local church and they are not used, then local churches are not able to be as strong and equipped,” he said.

Evangelistic events still are vital to church growth, said Jon Randles, veteran vocational evangelist and evangelism director for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. But they cannot be approached with the same methods used in the past, he stressed. American society in the post-World

War II years was a fertile ground for evangelistic events.

“There was homogeneity in the culture where an evangelist like Billy Graham could advertise a little and everyone would come” to an evangelistic crusade, he said.

But after Vietnam, Watergate, and increasing political and social polarization, “the culture is not united,” and the old methods need to be reconsidered, he said.

Because of this, evangelists are encouraging pastors to identify people groups in their community and connect with them through an event like a concert, youth camp, men’s retreat or marriage seminar. Church leaders have to know their culture and community before they can plan an evangelistic event that will work, Randles said.

“You can’t just throw together an event and expect people to show up. One-size-fits-all will not work anymore. Prepare your people to work hard to build relationships, and you will have people come to know the Lord,” he said.

The key to event evangelism is building authentic, trustworthy relationships months in advance to earn the right to invite those friends to go to the event with you, Randles emphasized.

“People respond to relationships,” he said. “They always have, and they always do. You will have a period of time building relationships. You are doing that with the understanding to culminate the genuine relationship.”

Eventually, Randles said, when the Christian and the non-Christian develop a real friendship, the Christian can say: “Now come. I want you to hear what Jesus Christ can do for you.”

Biblical evangelism also includes discipleship, he stressed.

“Evangelism is hard work,” Randles said. “If you lead a person to Christ, then that is just the beginning. That is just the start. Now you have several years of discipleship to help that person deal with their baggage.”

Church members have the responsibility of being involved in the community before and after the event, but the evangelist does also, Fuller noted.

“I see a great need to be actively involved in each community that invites me to their church for a revival meeting,” he said. “People need to know that we care.”

“As an evangelist, I am extremely concerned and passionate about disciple-making. When we go into a community, we stress this importance (of discipleship). We will follow up on that particular church and the progress of those who placed their faith and trust in Christ during the revival week.”

Mike Woods, pastor of Coronado Baptist Church in El Paso, uses a two-year process of event evangelism to make authentic disciples who will reproduce themselves. Every other year, the church holds a four-day revival so church members can invite non-Christian friends to the services. They have seen success with this because the members have earned trust through relationships they formed during the previous year.

“We try to do anything we can to have people understand and see the vision to reproduce themselves,” Woods said. “When people come (to the church), we have two years to cultivate people towards Christ. Then they want to bring their friends to the event (so they can) learn about Christ.

“In the off year, we have a meeting that aims at deepening the spiritual life in our church. We have (speakers) come in and challenge us about a deeper walk with the Lord. It helps us grow as a body.”

Making disciples and using event evangelism has resulted in “solid

conversions—people who don't just have a conversion but who walk with God," he said.

Another important aspect to event evangelism involves securing a speaker who has the spiritual gift of evangelism.

"How evangelistic events have failed in the past is that (a pastor) didn't bring anyone different" than himself in terms of style and emphasis, Randles said.

"He brought in another teacher and leader just like him and not someone who is gifted to draw the net (to share the gospel). A pastor can get a person to a certain level (of spiritual understanding) with his gifting, but if you can bring a person in that knows how to draw the net, that person may come (to accept salvation).

"I believe it takes the hand of several people and several different events to get the Holy Spirit to bring that person to understanding."