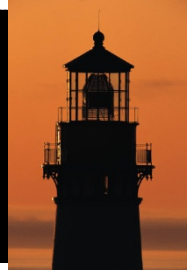


Lighthouse Keeper

Evangelical Congregational Church

June 2009



WANTED/NEEDED/DESIRED

The current issue of *The Lighthouse Keeper* will be my final issue. I have achieved that notable point in my life where I have too much on my plate, too many irons in the fire, too many balls in the air to continue a healthy race. I am stepping down, turning in my quill.

You are wanted/needed/desired to fill this vital position. *The Lighthouse Keeper* is a quarterly (mostly) e-publication designed to encourage, inform and instruct the people of the E.C. church in regard to evangelism. If you're reading this announcement, you already know what has been written before. Now, you're needed to take us along the next part of our journey.

Thank you for allowing me to serve you these many years as editor, researcher, and writer. It has been my delight to do so. Thank you also for the many conversations we have engaged over the years. I am better because we chatted.

Please contact Bishop Kevin if you are interested in this position.

Rev. Les Cool

RUNNING FOR THE EXITS

By Carol R. Cool

When I first when on Weight Watchers, it really worked for me. I lost 35 pounds, and felt great. I was enthusiastic about the program, even passionate.

But I'm afraid my friends may have used other words to describe me - obsessed, overbearing, obnoxious. Sure that I have found the answer to permanent weight loss, I wanted everyone to join, whether they wanted to or not. Friends began to avoid me. They didn't want their enjoyment of ice cream or a second roll with sinner spoiled when I spouted off the calorie and fat content or harangued them to eat healthfully.

Unfortunately, as Christians, we often cause the same reaction. Work associates run the other way when they see us striding toward them. They just know we're going to blast them for the four-letter word they just said,



criticize their voting choices or tell them why they need to believe in Jesus.

Sixteen years after my first Weight Watchers experience, I was back on the program. This time, though, I determined to lose weight without losing friends. I adopted a few guiding principles to ensure that result, principles I believe will help us as Christians impact our world as well.

Don't be a one-trick pony

The first time I was on Weight Watchers, I talked about it in every conversation that had to do with food. I even turned simple questions like, "How are you?" into opportunities to preach my new "gospel" of healthful eating. Friends winced if they made an off-hand comment about their own weight or how fattening something was, knowing I would soon be on my soapbox. When out to eat, I

chose low-calorie entrees and made sure everyone knew why. Needless to say, I was a bore.

As Christians, we can also be bores. When every conversation becomes a commentary on the evil state of the world and how opposed to God it is, people find us dull. Listen to yourself at the next social event you attend. Can you converse on topics that have nothing to do with Christianity? Can you relax and enjoy games, music or movies without a hidden agenda?

Often we cause others to cringe as they await our reaction to a casual remark containing a trigger word. See if people feel they need to watch their words with you by trying this: For a day or a week, go on a “social commentary fast,” refusing to make any comment that could be construed as Christianity oriented. Notice how people respond, especially if they mention something that would normally provoke a reaction. Do they wince, waiting for your diatribe to begin? Learn to let some comments go, to wait for real interest, to recognize what the person actually wants to talk about.



Get to know people for why they are

Shelia, a woman I knew casually, had many medical problems that could have been helped by losing weight. As my weight began to drop the first time, I found myself looking for

opportunities to be around her more so I could talk about how wonderful Weight Watchers was.

She wasn't fooled for a minute. She recognized that I had no sudden interest in being her friend; I just wanted to reform her. She would be my new makeover. She didn't pursue my friendship after that, and I'm sure my project hurt her.

Have you ever scouted out a new “friend” just because they seemed like someone you could influence to be a Christian? No wants to be our recruitment project. We need to build friendships based on common interests and work to accept people as they are, whether they are interested in our Jesus or not.

Even if I could have coerced Sheila into joining Weight Watchers, the program wouldn't have worked for her or, at least, not for long. She wasn't ready. She would have been going to please me, not because she believed it was right for her.

When we push others into the church or into lifestyle changes, they may do it out of guilt, respect or friendship or just to get us off their back. But it rarely lasts. In addition, we are asking them to live in a way that is not on a true relationship with Jesus.

Don't choose people as friends for the sake of changing them into what you want them to be, even if that is the worthy goal of becoming a

Christian. They'll see right through you and flee. And you may hurt them forever.

Live out our Christianity with passion and joy

On my first Weight Watchers go-around, I was focused on all the things I couldn't eat. I made sure everyone knew what I was sacrificing for my devotion to this good cause. Basically, I played the martyr. No wonder no one else wanted to join me on the program.

The second time, I set out to enjoy parties and meals out, to delight in all the good things I could eat, like seafood. I selected small portions of the sweets I craved and ate them, relishing every bite. To the casual observer, it didn't even look like I was denying myself. And this time, people have been more interested in what I was doing to lose weight.



Few people want to go through life miserable. If they perceive our lives as Christians as devoid of happiness, we'll find few takers. As we prayerfully make our choices in pursuit of Christ-like living, we need to exude joy. The casual observer should see us enjoying ourselves so much they don't even notice what we are giving up. Those who are closer will recognize that we're making different and deliberate choices, but celebrating as we do so. If we live joy-filled lives, others will be drawn to us, ask questions about our Christ and be more likely to join us.

Respond to the interest expressed by others

Remember Sheila, the woman I kept dropping Weight Watcher hints to? The hints didn't work; she never came. The second time around, I never brought up Weight Watchers to anyone. I waited for questions. When people asked how I was losing weight, I said Weight Watchers. If they ask no further questions, I left it at that. I tried only to give as much information as a person wanted to hear. I no longer offered solutions for them. I trusted that when they wanted to know more, they would ask.

As Christians, we should also let others determine how much we talk about our Savior. We can wait for them to ask questions, and then answer enthusiastically but without ranting, rambling or moving in for the kill. If we give people more than they're ready for, we scare them away. If we tell them more than they want to know, they may never ask again. We need to learn patience, to wait for God's timing. We should leave people always wanting more.



Pray and leave the recruitment to God

I still believe that Weight Watchers is a great way to lose weight and get healthier. There are even some friends I think could benefit from it. But God knows which of my friends would be helped by the program; and I can trust him to lead them to it.

The same holds true for Christians who are committed to seeing others come to know Jesus. Certainly, God desires to draw all people to Himself. That includes people we know. So let's pray that He will use the Holy Spirit to bring them to that point. We can trust Him for that.

The last time I was on Weight Watchers, a friend asked me about it and if she could go with me. "I've been watching the way you eat, and I think I can do that," she said. In the same way, I hope friends will be watching the way I live in relationships to Jesus Christ and begin believing they can do that too.

Learning from Experience

by Les Cool

I was staring into the refrigerator the other day, looking for something to eat, actually, something to munch on between meals (don't tell my "good health rep"). My recent health reading has begun the slow work of teaching me how to eat for a healthier future. But instead of obeying pages and pages of advice, I chose to follow experience: I ate ice cream, a full-fat and big-dish serving of chocolate marshmallow by Turkey Hill. And unlike my mother's years of warning, it didn't hurt my appetite for dinner. That could explain a lot about Les Cool.

Much of my life is lived in the same way, making choices and doing things, even serving Jesus, out of my experience rather than out of my book-learning. It's

nice to know stuff. But there is nothing like the KNOWING that comes with experience. And that is why I asked four simple questions of my ministry peers for this article.

Check out the life-experiences of like-minded witnesses for Jesus. You may find yourself encouraged, learning that others live where you live. You might find yourself challenged with new ideas for an age-old mission, telling others about Jesus. Enjoy the reading.

What is your best "personal" outreach activity? Tell us a little bit about what "you" do to create opportunities to talk about Jesus. (Names of the contributors, when known, are listed at the end of each item.)



Relationships! Build significant and REAL relationships, and watch for opportunities to speak your Jesus story into the lives of other people. These relationships could be with neighbors, the guy in the next cubicle, the girl who does your hair or the checkout clerk. The best thing about this kind of evangelism is that it is bigger than race, creed or culture. "It's my story." People may disagree, but they cannot deny "my story." It is also Jesus' story, a life-changing story enmeshed with our own story. That is what makes it so valuable as a witnessing tool.

Relationships for Jesus can be developed in almost any context. Sports fans can often use the common interest of football or hockey (playing together or watching) to build and deepen a relationship that might allow for a Jesus conversation. Hanging out with the guys over a meal is often a safe place to talk about serious topics. Walking in another person's life can also be helpful. Attending events (children's activities, award ceremonies, sports, etc.) that interest or involve your friends or their friends can lead to witnessing opportunities for the observant. And it is always good to deepen your fishing pool by meeting new people.

(Donald Kern, Carlos Kelly, Jeff Byerly, Al Giles, Harry Dow, Bishop Kevin, Pastor Dan, Pastor Dave)

What is your best "church" outreach activity? Tell us a little bit about what "your church" or another church does to develop opportunities to talk about Jesus.

Relationships! Church events that allow for people to meet people and to develop relationships seem to be the most common church tools for evangelism. It only makes sense, since the church consists of people, and people find relationships a helpful tool for witnessing. Check out the variety of events used to develop relationships with people who live and work and play outside of the church community:

- Adopt-a-Block and pray for the people who live on that block. This may be done through the vehicle of prayer walking or by the meet-your-neighbor technique of knocking on doors and soliciting prayer requests.
- Small groups, if appropriately designed to include non-churched individuals and families, can be useful tools for evangelism. The key is to begin with topics that are of interest to people who do not attend church and move into topics more likely to focus upon Jesus.
- Friends and Family Night Out . . . a response to the negative impact our economy has upon individuals and families. These events are about sharing what we have with others by providing a free meal, entertainment and fellowship. These stand-alone events also include drawings for gift cards for grocery stores, gas stations or restaurants. Each event is creatively designed so they don't all look the same (chili and soup suppers, focus on veterans, etc.).
- Financial seminars (Crown Financial, Dave Ramsey, etc.) for the community can be well-received. Good advertising is essential.
- Oil Change Ministry . . . offering free oil changes, either targeting people with need for this service or merely advertising and caring for whoever shows up. Hosts and hostesses, a lounge area for waiting and people to just hang out, make these very special events.



- Children and/or Teen Fear Factor Campaign . . . church-sponsored teaching event focusing on "fear" themes: fear of the unknown, fear of rejection, fear of man, fear of God, fear of death.
- Sales events that reach out and touch the community can be useful tools for evangelism. These events, usually fund raisers, can be chicken barbecues, incredible peanut butter eggs (Lititz E.C.), baked goods or just about anything that people might buy.
- Focus upon a special event (holiday, sports, elections, etc.) can be used to draw the community to the church. Invites can be personal, knocking on doors, or by direct mail. Relationships are developed and deepened, community is encouraged and Jesus becomes real in the midst of doing daily life.
- Sponsoring booths at community fairs are usually a good investment for Jesus. Giveaways are a good draw: bottles of water, balloon animals, wordless book bracelets for the kids, bikes and dinners. Keep everything free; the only request is names and addresses.

(Jeff Byerly, Donald Kern, Carlos Kelly, Al Giles, Todd Wolfe, Harry Dow, David Carr, Mike Snedeker, Bishop Kevin, Pastor Dan, Pastor Dave)

What is your favorite evangelism tool? What technique or hands-on tool helps you make Jesus more readily accessible to your friends and neighbors?

- *Evangi-cube*.
- The Bible.
- Backyard barbecues.
- Conversation.
- *The Bridge* illustration.
- *Roman's Road* with the *Bridge* illustration.
- *The Way of the Master* (www.wayofthemaster.com).
- *Two Worlds, One Way* (simple flip chart salvation Bible study).
- *The Big Story* (visual by David Choung).
- *Just Walk across the Room* (DVD/book presentation by Bill Hybels, Willow Creek/Zondervan).
- *Contagious Christian* (DVD/book presentation by Mittelberg, Strobel and Hybels, Willow Creek/Zondervan).

(Donald Kern, Carlos Kelly, Jeff Byerly, Al Giles, Todd Wolfe, Harry Dow, Bishop Kevin, Bob Mavis, Pastor Dan, Pastor Dave)

What is your favorite book on evangelism?

- *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church*, subtitled: Finding a Better Way to Influence Our Culture, by Dean Merrill (Zondervan).
- *The Gospel of John*. It is all about Jesus, faith and life.
- *The Present-Future*, by Reggie McNeal.
- *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, by Robert Lewis.
- *The Shaping of Things to Come*, by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch.
- *The Insider*, by Petersen and Shamy.
- *Lifestyle Evangelism*, by Joe Aldrich.



- *Simple Steps*, by Bill Hybels.
- *School of Biblical Evangelism*, by Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort.
- *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World*, by Rebecca Manley Pippert.
- *Lost In America; Missing In America*, by Tom Clegg and Warren Bird.
- *Share Jesus without Fear*.
- *Master Plan of Evangelism*, by Robert Coleman.
- *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, by Andrew Walls.

(Bryan Dever, Carlos Kelly, Jeff Byerly, Al Giles, Todd Wolfe, Bishop Kevin, Pastor Dan, Pastor Dave, Josh Reinders)

Lighthouse Resources:

Mission America Coalition (www.missionamerica.org; click "Lighthouse Movement") is committed to "Uniting Christians for Evangelism and Revival." The Mission America Coalition (MAC) is helping mobilize Christian leaders and individual Christians to collaborate together to reach America with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Their mission statement is "The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole Nation—and to the World." Through encouraging Christians to pray for, care for, and share Jesus Christ with every person, the Coalition emphasizes spiritual unity, evangelism, and revival. Check out its helpful website.