

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 10, Year 2

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 10, Year 2

Date Completed

____/____/____ Mission History, Missiology [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Teaching Others Personal Evangelism: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments

____/____/____ Ministry to Members of the Opposite Sex: [Estimated time: _____]
Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I: Mission History/ Missiology

Most of us give very little thought to the reality of global Christianity and its roots. Most of us, and most of the people we minister to imagine Christianity to be primarily what we experience in American evangelicalism with some attention perhaps paid to Roman Catholicism. These are the two groups that we have the most experience with and that tend to dominate network news coverage. The truth of the matter is that Christians in what we call the developing world far outnumber Christians in North America and Europe and that as the twenty first century marches on the weight and influence of Christians from Africa and Asia will increasingly grow and impact church history in our lives more than Christians in Europe and North America. The seeds of the explosive growth of the gospel in Asia and Africa were sown during the modern missionary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries and have matured into indigenous churches that increasingly send missionaries to Europe and America to the degree that by the end of the 21st century those two places will likely be considered by Christians Asia and Africa as mission fields rather than mission senders.

Christianity has always been a sending religion ever since Jesus selected the twelve to be his disciples and apostles. Christianity has often in its history seen periods of explosive growth. The early church evangelized the Roman empire and it is possible that the Apostle Thomas in fact made it as far as India. With the dismantling of the Roman Empire the monastic movement would evangelize pagan barbarian tribes to Christianize Europe. The truth is, however, that for most of the first 1500 years of the church's history its boundaries were limited to Europe plus the lands formerly claimed by the Roman Empire. The age of discovery and the colonial period would extend the gospel to the Americas, the French and Spanish bringing Roman Catholicism to indigenous peoples while English Puritans made mostly futile efforts at spreading the Protestant faith for reasons I won't go into here. The Roman Catholic Jesuits established missions around the world, often following Roman Catholic colonial advances. Protestant missions wouldn't really take off until its birth which you should read chapter 38 in Bruce Shelley's Church History in Plain Language. For a much fuller treatment of the history of missions you may also want to look at Stephen Neill's A History of Christian Missions or Ruth Tuckers From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya.

The result of the Protestant Missionary movement would be the establishment of churches in Africa and Asia. At the same time it is quite likely that the future of Roman Catholicism will also be found in leaders coming from Africa and Asia instead of Europe.

Whereas most of us celebrate the numerical growth of Christianity in the developing world, few of us ponder the changes that this will bring to the shape of Christianity in the world. One of the key learnings the Protestant church grew into through its missionary efforts was the dynamic relationship between the gospel and culture. Most Christians experience their faith within the confines of their culture. Many people in Europe and America have limited in-depth cross cultural experience and easily assume that their basic assumptions about reality are shared by all.

Missionaries who attempted to evangelize people from radically different cultures soon found a host of surprises they were not prepared for.

The Protestant missionary effort, as had the Jesuit efforts, tended to follow or accompany colonial efforts. Much missionary effort has been marred by efforts to “Christianize” which were really attempts to “westernize” peoples from other countries. These missionaries were seriously devoted and sacrificial yet in their ignorance established a church which would prove to be weak and dependent. In most cases we didn’t see the explosive growth of the church until indigenous leadership emerged who could embrace the gospel in the terms of their own culture, sometimes in rebellion and to the horror of their former missionary patrons. The greatest example of this is of course the growth of the church in China. Chinese mission work bore limited fruit after centuries of missionary labor until the time of the Communist revolution at which point the missionaries were expelled. Many predicted the collapse of the Chinese church due to the departure of the missionaries and Communist persecution. The opposite of course happened. The church indigenized and spread at a rate unheard of in the West. That isn’t to say that the Chinese church is perfect, it’s just better suited to China than the church the missionaries could establish.

I strongly recommend picking up a copy of the great missiology classic Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours by Roland Allen. Allen was a missionary at the turn of the last century who struggled (like most missionaries) with little fruit. This fruitlessness drove him to re-examine the New Testament to see how the Apostle Paul did missionary work. What he found shocked him and the prescription he wrote for missions shocked and appalled many. His recommendations were radical and often not followed but his perception on what is often wrong with missionary efforts was on target and prophetic. I first read this book when I was a missionary in the Dominican Republic and it completely changed my orientation and goals for my work there.

Assignment: Read Chapter 38 in Shelley’s Church History in Plain Language and if possible try to take a look at Roland Allen’s Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours. The easiest place to get it will likely be Amazon.com or another online book seller. Allen will give you both a glimpse at how much missionary work was and is done today as well as helpful perspectives on missiology. Many people with mission hearts have found it to be a very helpful book, even if you never minister outside of North America.

II. Teaching Others Personal Evangelism

The more people I watch find faith in Jesus Christ the more convinced I am that conversion is a mysterious turning that only God's Spirit can produce. At the same time it also seems that on many occasions the Spirit of God enjoys using people to help cultivate this fruitfulness. Many evangelism programs are designed to be sure fire formulas to getting people to pray a sinner's prayer or some such thing. The "sinner's prayer" is really a declaration of intent made by a person to start something they probably haven't a clue about. For some this is the first step on a life long journey, for others it is a middle step, end step, a false step or not really a step because they just found themselves believing quite unintentionally.

The fear surrounding methods of personal evangelism is ironic. Chances are, most people who want to learn methods and techniques for evangelism have themselves been evangelized but might be hard pressed to describe exactly what happened in their case. That is an instructive point to make. The Spirit calls us, prepares us, and captures us so often in ways that we can't really pin down. There may be key moments and events but almost everyone realizes that these are just things we can point to and so much other stuff had happened that we were not conscious of. This reality should give everyone comfort because ultimately it is the Holy Spirit that is in the driver's seat, if we are blessed we get to play midwife and catch the baby Christian.

Most methods of training in evangelism are really about clarity and language. The heart of Christian evangelism is really truth and love and hopefully mature Christians will have a more instinctive ability to convey those things. Evangelistic methods really are ways to present the mystery of the Gospel in a culturally appropriate shorthand. Most convey key aspects of the gospel in ways that many people (within a cultural frame of reference) can grasp quickly and simply. Acceptance then should be celebrated but understood to be the first step in an ongoing relationship with Christ's church where the real growing and maturing should happen. In some cases the person receiving the presentation may already be some kind of Christian but just hasn't been given the language or key concept to really clarify what it is they are already falling into.

Assignment:

1. Does your church do any training of its members in personal evangelism? Contagious Christians is a popular one often used today. There are others as well.
 - a. If so, ask for permission to teach this course, seminar or class to gain some experience in the program.
 - b. If not, talk to your senior pastor about starting something. It doesn't have to be weeks long, it can be a class, series of classes, sermon or series of sermons, etc. Once you've got some agreement from your Senior Pastor go ahead and impliment.
2. Report back to your mentor on how it went.

III: Ministry to Members of the Opposite Sex:

People come in two genders, male and female. This is obviously a blessing of creation but in a broken world it can also become a difficult complexity. Ministry can be a powerful and intimate experience for people both on the giving and receiving end of things. Human sexuality is also a mysterious and powerful force within us that is always present. Unmet needs and deep desires can drive people to do things even they themselves wouldn't have imagined. All of us have heard stories, some of us can tell some. Most people who are wise and experienced in ministry have rules they live by regarding ministry to members of the opposite sex for their own protection. Development of these rules and the discipline to live by them are key elements for long term ministry success. In recent years the stakes have been raised in this area both because of high profile cases of sexual abuse and misconduct as well as litigation revolving around such charges. Discuss the following things with your mentor:

1. Does your church have recognized, mature and equipped staff and/or volunteers of both genders able and willing to work with members of their same gender? Regardless of where your church comes down women serving in church office, every church should have godly and mature women who can minister to other women at times and in ways that men are just not able to accomplish. There needs to be a place in every church where groups of one gender can get together and minister to one another in ways that can't or shouldn't be done across the gender divide.
2. There will always be times when you will have to meet and minister to someone of the opposite sex alone. The challenge is to find safe places and situations where all parties are safe from accusation or temptation. Talk to your mentor about their strategies in this regard. What are the "rules" that they live by. How have they determined these rules? What exceptions exist?
3. Does your church have formal guidelines regarding these issues for staff or office bearers? If so, learn them and learn from them.
4. If you are married talk to your spouse about this issue. Spouses often have concerns, possibly even concerns about particular individuals in the church.