

(UCC Regional Conference at Indianapolis)

Outreach -- What the Local Congregation Can Do

Conference Presentation by Dale Schurter

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This is a wonderful opportunity to get together and visit in an atmosphere of unity and harmony, knowing that we all have experienced so many of the same things. These experiences unite us. We have heard that there are rough roads in many places, but there always will be. We all have our local fields to tend and harvest in our local church areas. We all have a part in that harvest.

I want to start with a disclaimer - what we are covering is not intended to make you feel you should be doing all of these things. Nor should you feel that there are things we may be doing which would not be good for others. We want to use this session to share information. We want this session to be "iron sharpening iron". We want to share what we have been doing which have been helpful, and build stability in local areas. We want to know what others have done which has been successful and works.



Dale Schurter

I'd like to begin in Rm 12.1. It says we are to present our bodies a "living sacrifice." We sometimes read through this quickly, and feel the living sacrifice means we are to die a little every day. Rather, it means that we are to be a sacrifice which is live, vivacious, and giving off energy to all around us. The energy comes back to us. To be a sacrifice is to participate, so that the energy we put out produces good fruit. As that is done, there is a satisfaction which is done in reaching out to others. Happiness is the result. Happiness cannot be our goal; it is the byproduct of reaching out to others.

One thing we have focused on is Rm 12.9-18. These verses tell us what it is to behave like a Christian. If the attitude taught to the brethren has these points of character, it helps them to have the attitude to launch out and serve others. "Avoid what is evil, be kindly regarded one to another, give preference to one another, etc." In view of recent events, we have had to build walls around ourselves. Outreach to others removes these walls and barriers. Like Patton, we must not "dig foxholes". We must keep moving forward. Outreach must be in our hearts in order to serve others.

As we look at what can a local church do, there is much outlined in these few verses in Romans 12. As we do these things, we WILL be reaching out within and without the church. Our experience is that we must focus on local church, local community, nation, and international areas. We must have our minds on all these things. We must go to "all the world."

The first world in which we work is the local church. We must recognize and use everyone's talents. We regularly ask people to submit a biographical summary which tells us about their talents. Like to ask them about hobbies. People's hearts are in such things. It is very fulfilling for individuals to be able to work in such areas. We need to know our troops, what we have to work with. Then you design the plan to use your resources, allowing for changes as people grow and acquire new abilities.

I'd like to tie in with Mr. Fahey's lecture yesterday. You can be a peacemaker when you learn to recognize people's needs. You learn about their needs when you learn about their hobbies, and what they are interested in. Recognize what other people's

needs are.

We have found the best way for people to prepare for the Kingdom is to put them into a position to teach. People learn up to 95% of what they have to teach; just hearing about it, we learn a fraction of that amount. As we put before people that they are to be teachers, kings and priests, in the kingdom, they become energized. Once people have the opportunity to teach what they know, they see that they know more than they thought they knew.

We keep centering around, "What are the needs of the brethren?" This is to demonstrate love, and Christ's life, in action. So much which a local church should be practicing as a fundamental foundation is to have a right attitude. There must be a right attitude underlying a local outreach program.

The goals in Romans 12 not only are good, they are task-oriented. They provide an outline for local congregations to conduct a successful outreach program. It allows us to do what we can, with what we have, where we are. As my dad put it, "Stir the pot you have." Don't worry about what should be done elsewhere, until you are doing what you can in your own area.

We want to motivate our people. We want to teach them how to teach, and then give them the opportunity to teach. We are using "Men's Clubs" in our area to prepare people to serve in specific jobs. If we are not practicing what we learn, what good does it serve?

Js 1.27 says, "Pure religion is to visit widows and orphans ..." Want to summarize what God has laid out for the local church to do. As we teach, who learns the most? It is the teacher. Mt 25.34, "Come you blessed of my father, inherit the Kingdom ..." Who are these, and what were they doing? Are these just the firstfruits? Consider that out of 6,000 years of human history, we who are called to be teachers and kings and priests, have opportunity to be one his very firstfruits. This is a humbling and awesome thought. At the same time, this is a motivating thought.

What are we in the local church doing to prepare those whom God has chosen to build his government at the commencement of the Kingdom of God? God will know what each of us will go for eternity BEFORE we are made God's spiritual children. It is how God really KNEW about Abraham after he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. In each of our lives, there comes the point where God says about each of us, "Now I know ..." We see a little better why people in Bible rejoiced in persecutions and beatings. Each of the 12 Apostles passed the test which Abraham passed. What does God KNOW about us? Our job is to help our parishioners to come to the state where God can say about each of them, "Now I know ..."

Outreach is a bedrock need to help our brethren make the grade, to come to the place where God can say about us, "Now I know." There must be the motivation from the heart to do what it says in Matthew 25 because it is the right thing to do.

Acts 9.36. Dorcas was an example of what can be done in the local churches. Acts 10. - Cornelius. He was generous to those in need, and praying always to God. God always was first in his life. Acts 11.27. Agabus - when he prophesied about the famine, people immediately acted to meet those needs. This determination was made by each member on his or her local initiative. Sometimes, one group will organize the ability to help others, and allow the rest of us to participate. We fulfill the needs within the structure of God's law.

Within the United Church of God, the structure allows pastors to reach out to others with the gospel, to help and serve others. The May 27, 1997 Council resolution recognizes the need to reach out both locally and centrally. It expresses the Council's desire to advance multiple efforts to preach the gospel.

1 Cor 16.15. Household of Stephanas. 1 Co 8.1. Macedonian churches reached out to do what they can. They "stirred the pot they have." Their attitude was to be freely willing to do what they did.

I have worked with sheep all my life. You cannot drive sheep. You must get the ones who are the leaders to follow you, and others will step in right behind them. Vv. 5 -8. Finishing what we start, and having feedback on what we do, is very important. It is encouraging to finish things; it is discouraging to just get started, and then NOT finish things. Everyone can be involved in prayer; members should be involved in that.

2 Cor 9.2. Achaia stirred up Macedonia. The zeal of the few can stir up the zeal of the many. Takes just a little to prime the pump. v. 7. It must be from the heart. What we must give is to be from the heart, or we just don't "get the picture." V. 13. What you want to do is proven by doing it. Faith without works is dead; unless we DO something, there is no good result. Generosity and liberal sharing must be from the heart.

At one time, we thought we needed to really protect the world from the church. Was God protecting the world from us? God is preparing to expose us to the world. Did we at time overlook the reality that Jesus grew in favor with both God and man? As we are going to the world more directly, living our faith, do we not experience growing more in favor, with God and man? Being involved in outreach programs produces those fruits. Jesus himself "earned the right to be listened to", due to his miracles and good works. Some projects earn us the right to be heard. Then, as we live the gospel, what we do speaks louder than what we say.

Our local area started with 70 in attendance; we now are up to 120. We serve 150 - 200 with outreach and tape program.

True outreach program brings glory to God, not to the people doing it. What we do and how we live demonstrates God's way. Jesus was the light, his life was the light of men. Respect is an honor received by living the life of truth. God's life take on "arms and legs" as it is lived through us. We are the salt of the earth - Mt 5.13-16.

There is a dichotomy we need to overcome. We have understood over the years that "we can never be perfect". Yet, we are to strive for perfection, and it creates discouragement and doubt in people's mind. Must not worry about that; we work at becoming perfect. We know that none of us deserve eternal life. Jesus pays the price for our sins, and we must have faith in that. We march in faith toward the Kingdom of God, strong and firm in that hope. We must have a "New Beginning" every morning. One of the best ways to help people see this is by involvement in outreach activities.

I want to read some excerpts from Mr. Armstrong's last member letter. "It may be that my work is finished, but the work of the church is not finished until Christ returns. The greatest work is yet ahead. ... The fields are white for the harvest. Never before has it been possible for the church to reach so great a harvest. This is due to means of mass communication and rapid transportation."

What have we done in local areas? What are we doing, and what can we do? I have handed out a list of what our local church is doing; and what can we yet do. People had two weeks to prepare to come back with feedback to suggest what can we do. I am giving you this list to ask for other ideas as to what we can be doing. Many of the activities which we do internally for ourselves reach to those outside of the church, and affect them as well. This then allows people to be teachers outside of the church. I'd like you to return with more ideas, and return with ratings given to what you would consider to be the top ten or twelve activities. This helps brethren to realize

that what they are doing is important and appreciated.

Appreciation is important. Pastors can get so busy, that we do not take time to give the thanks which we should. People must know that what they do is valued. I communicate such things in an occasional newsletter called, "Fireside from the Pastor". Personal messages with anointed cloths are important for people to know you are praying for them, personally.

I write an annual letter, acknowledging what the church and its members have done. It helps people to feel and know that their involvement and participation is valued. It talks about the specific accomplishments of the church over the last year. Also, it talks about what the local funds have gone for. This letter goes out with acknowledgment of annual receipts for donations. This is a "little" thing, but it carries a lot of meaning for the members. People respond with energized participation in the things we are doing.

Going through some specific items on the handout.

- Local assistance
- Guyana. We are making follow up with church in Guyana. It is not associated with any of the organized groups. Some are starting to receive the Good News. What kept them in touch was physical outreach, and works of charity.
- Ukraine. I had a great opportunity over a year ago to travel there. We held many seminars, and met with heads of regional agricultural development. We held a seminar at local agricultural university. Even though most of people we met with were atheists, we presented them with information and literature. Since it is of value, they treat it as something of value.

When I give them a Good News, I point to something in the magazine which addresses a need which they have. This resulted in a national press conference. I was able to give a 45 minute national press conference. This allowed us to receive very favorable publicity on a national scale.

Each of us has some opportunity to do something like that. We went not knowing what to expect. We did not even know the language, but left feeling a real camaraderie and brotherhood. The host of the TV show said, "being around this philosophy energizes those who are there."

We need to be about our Father's business in the world into which God sent us. This is not about personal recognition. This is about to good we do, out of a pure heart. Our motivation is to be about our Father's business.

- Brochure program. We use extra brochure cards in GN to give them to people who have a real need for something which they will receive through the magazine.
- Children's Corner. Teens participate in teaching the little children. It's exciting that visitors have kids who want to come back to participate in the children's program. Our children and teens are our most important outreach group.
- National Brotherhood Program. This is a national program, headquartered in Dayton, which seeks to overcome racial differences. We had an opportunity to preach the gospel in a way which would help them to be better, more moral, people. Take advantage of such opportunities in your local area. We take Good News along with them. Have gotten various people onto the GN subscription list with such activities. Things like this can translated into tens of thousands of subscriptions in the course of a year, nationwide. We need doctrinal unity in all of these things. We all have the same *Good News*. At the same time, we must address the needs in each area, as they different. Our attitude is alike. Our doctrine is alike.
- Choir. It sings at the National Brotherhood Program, and at nursing homes.

Were ready for such opportunities to present itself.

- Sunwatch Indian Village. We built a deck at a local museum. It resulted in being able to use their auditorium for meetings.
- Good News Advertising. Do any others have ads which are working? We run different ones, as we can afford it, and see what works best in our area.
- Nursing Home Program. We had the goal for one club year to train men to speak at nursing homes. Now they speak once each month. We sent tapes to a third nursing home. We have 20 to 40 come in. Many of these are people who are quite cogent and aware. We have been told that "Our residents like to have you come more than any other group." It affects the entire nursing home - people get along better with each other afterwards. We present a 1 hour service, with a 30 to 45 minute message. We have hymns, a songleader, and special music. What this is doing for the brethren, is that they are learning to do, by teaching. It is voluntary - no one is forced to teach. Nursing homes requested tapes for those who could not attend. These are going to another 18 - 20 additional rooms. Many people can be helped with a lot of small efforts. They have the same needs and feelings, as someone who is in robust health. Perhaps God will call them now. The bottom line is that, when their time comes, none of them will be "lost". It will be very helpful; when God deals with them, they will be further along.
- Prayer and Fasting. We all do this. It is at the top of the list. If we do not do it, then nothing else works.
- Personal Enrichment. Help people refine their personal goals and direction.
- Local Council. Looks to the physical matters of the church. It frees the pastor to work on spiritual matters. We don't always agree. If we always agreed, there would be no need to have a council.
- Sabbath Snacks. These are wonderful for fellowship, especially visitors and new people.
- Social Activities. We have at least three annually, at which people from various fellowships (Global, United, Worldwide, etc.) feel welcome and comfortable. They meet a need people have to retain their social ties.
- Tape Mailings. We send out about 27 weekly. They go to one group which meets monthly. If we can serve and feed them, that's great. This, like so many others, was at the initiative of members. We don't know where these things will end up, how God will use them to help and reach out to people. It was individuals responding to the imperative to feed the hungry, clothe the needy, etc. It is a way for people to feel connected and be a part of something. People feel that they belong, have value, and are a part of something. The feedback is helpful for the members to see their work is of value. We can help people with whom God is working, even though they are not (nor may they ever be) a part of the United Church of God, an International Association. We are not happy that "all this stuff happened". But, we can be happy at what God has been able to make out of it.
- Tel-Care Program. This is something else important, which ties things together. It shows how much you care. People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. We call people who are gone, or missing from church. It is organized. We let people know we care about them. This also is part of a neighborhood structure. We call to find out how they are. Call out to people on the outreach program. Some people live in other states. They get calls every week or two. Calls help supplement contact with local shut ins. Calls are helpful - sometimes people feel more comfortable just speaking on the telephone. They like the chance to communicate. The key to all of this is to keep people connected to others. Build and strengthen personal relationships.
- 'United Men's Club. This is a key to train leaders. We plan to use them to start more nursing home teams.

Suggested Things to Do

Ask for some input.

Q & A

Q How do you deal with the tendency for a few to do most of the work, and become overextended?

A We have been successful in spreading the work around to many people. We have organized people in teams. We expand to do things as people become trained, or available to do things. We have to keep asking people if they are overextended, and need a break.

We have some outlying Bible Studies. We have some men who are trained to be able to help bring these.

Q What you can do depends on the size of your group.

A Important to be able to support with follow through. Do what you can, with what you have. We have a very cooperative church area, which wants to do a lot of things. We started with a few who want to do a lot. This limits what you can do. We worked it out so that more are involved. As people see broad involvement, people become more supportive.

Q How do you finance this? Do members have many out of pocket costs?

A We provide for in our budget. Presently, 60 - 65% of our budget goes to the Home Office. The rest of the budget finances our local activities. Some things, people are willing to pay for, because it satisfies a need they have. They are willing, and desire to underwrite it financially. Once a budget has been approved, we give the manager the freedom to serve within his/her budget. We try to meet the needs which are present, without hindering the needs that are within the local churches. People in the local churches know what the needs are. People are eager to spend God's tithe properly.

Q You have both audio and video libraries. How much do you make use of video?

A We do very little video ourselves. This is mostly for materials we receive from the Home Office. We do local videotaping only for special programs and messages. We use videos in the Men's Club.

Closing

The harvest is great, and we have been praying for laborers. Everyone benefits which this kind of local administration and organization. It also helps free up a lot of the pastor's time.

Ps 68.11 - "The Lord gave the word. Great was the company of those who proclaimed it."