

Quality characteristic 7: **Need-oriented evangelism**

"We must distinguish between Christians gifted for evangelism and those whom God has otherwise gifted."

Hardly any aspect of church growth is as riddled with clichés, dogmas, and myths as the area of "evangelism." This is true of those who view evangelism with skepticism as well as those who have made it their life calling. Most discussions about this topic have blurred the distinction between *methods* of evangelism that may have been used successfully by one or many churches and true *principles* of evangelism, which apply without exception to every church.

Unfortunately, "evangelism research" has limited itself to determining the effectiveness of individual evangelism *programs*. Without a doubt, this research can determine the "success" of such events, but it cannot show whether or not they represent universal *principles* (compare pages 16-17). Whenever a "successful program" is automatically presumed to be a "church growth principle"—a widespread Christian pastime—it causes tremendous confusion.

Every Christian an evangelist?

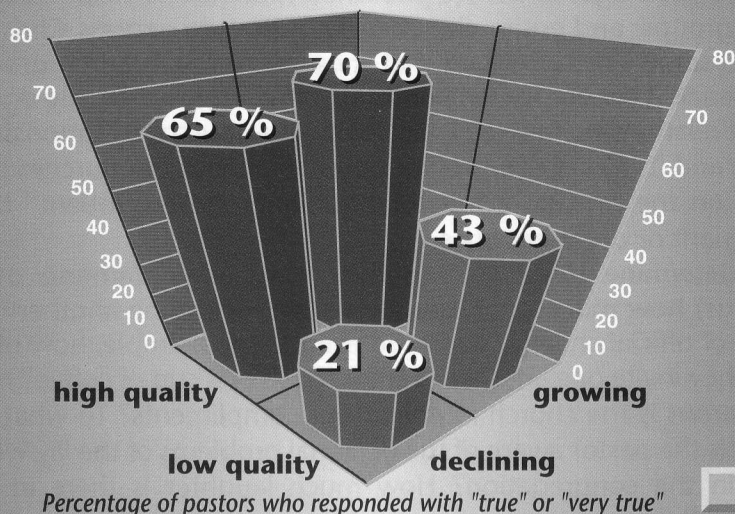
Our research disproves a thesis commonly held in evangelistically active groups: that "every Christian is an evangelist." There is a kernel of (empirically demonstrable) truth in this saying. It is indeed the responsibility of every Christian to use his or her own specific gifts in fulfilling the Great Commission. This does not, however, make him or her an evangelist. Evangelists are only those to whom God has given the corresponding spiritual gift. In one of our previous studies, we confirmed C. Peter Wagner's thesis that the gift of evangelism applies to no more than 10 percent of all Christians.

Who has the gift of evangelism?

We must distinguish between Christians gifted for evangelism and those whom God has otherwise called. If indeed "all Christians are evangelists," then there is no need to discover the 10 percent who really do possess this gift. In this way, the 10 percent with the gift of evangelism would be significantly under-challenged, while the demands on the 90 percent without the gift would be too great. This is a rather frustrating—and very technocratic—model. Our research shows that in churches with a high quality index, the leadership knows who has the gift of evangelism (see diagram right) and directs them to a corresponding area of ministry.

The gift of evangelism

Pastor: "I know which members of our church have the gift of evangelism"



Part 1: 8 quality characteristics

One of the most important principles of evangelism: Distinguishing between those Christians who have the gift of evangelism and those who do not have this gift.

It is the task of each Christian to use his or her gifts to serve non-Christians with whom one has a personal relationship, to see to it that they hear the gospel, and to encourage contact with the local church. The key to church growth is for the local congregation to focus its evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians. This "need-oriented" approach is different from "manipulative programs" where pressure on non-Christians must compensate for the lack of need-orientation.

It is particularly interesting to note that Christians in both growing and declining churches have exactly the same number of contacts with non-Christians (an average of 8.5 contacts). Challenging Christians to build *new* friendships with non-Christians is most certainly not a growth principle. The point is rather to use *already existing* relationships as contacts for evangelism. In each of the churches we surveyed—including those that lamented having little or no contact with "the world"—the number of contacts outside the church was already large enough so that there was no need to emphasize developing new relationships with the unchurched.

**What every
Christian
should do**

**Making use of
existing
contacts**