

## The Church of the Reluctant Evangelists

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Visitors to worship at the congregation I serve, Old South, will generally find a warm and friendly group. Most Old South folk are eager to greet new people, to invite them to coffee, and to talk to them about the church. There are a few people in the congregation who are attentive to newcomers during worship as well, making sure they have a bulletin, know which hymnal is which, and to deliver children's materials to any kids. It's nice to see.

If you manage to get into the building, you'll find a nice welcome.

But, trying to get people to bring that friendliness and welcome a little further out, to engage in a little of the "e" word (*evangelism*) outside of the sanctuary, is a whole other thing.

One Sunday a few months ago, I handed out a small stack of sticky notes to each person in worship and asked them to find ways of using the notes to spread God's love—to write messages like "God loves you" and "Rejoice!" and "Show Kindness" and then to stick them somewhere, anywhere. I suggested sticking one on a neighbor's mailbox, or on a car parked next to them in a parking lot. They didn't need to sign the note or let anyone know that they had done it. They could even go out under the cover of darkness, if that made them more comfortable.

It's now a few days later, and I've found at least two sticky notes left for me on my office door. One of those who left a sticky seemed rather pleased with herself. "Did you find the note I left for you?" she asked. I told her that I had and then I handed it back to her and encouraged her to put it somewhere else, where a stranger might find it. She seemed not so happy.

It's the Church of the Reluctant Evangelists.

I know evangelism can be hard, and full of all kinds of hazards. A few years ago, a church member told me that he had been "working on" one of his neighbors, encouraging his neighbor to come to church. Finally, the neighbor agreed to come.

The man came with his family on Christmas Eve. The church member introduced us, very happy that his evangelism had finally paid off. The neighbor told me how much he enjoyed the service. He said that he would very likely come again . . . to next year's Christmas Eve service. It was a heartbreaking moment.

Evangelism is hard, and it seems even harder around here, where so many people don't go to church, where the tide has definitely turned, where church seems so counter-cultural, and out of the norm. It feels that there's a general sense in the community that those who go to church are either Roman Catholic and are compelled to attend (but really don't want to), or are there for cultural reasons (lots of French Canadian descendants in this part of the world), or they are closed-minded "born-again."

To say that one goes to church can be hard enough (such declarations can invite all sorts of responses), but to go the next step and actually invite someone to come to church is daunting. Yet, it's the only way the church is going to survive in these parts—at least the kind of church like Old South, where people are welcomed just as they are.

While it's a good start to feel comfortable in welcoming visitors who manage to get through the front doors, it's simply not enough—if we believe that this kind of church is a good thing and should be given a decent chance of surviving into the future. Offering welcome to friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and even other family members who aren't churchgoers, is critical to the well-being of the body of Christ—in all sorts of ways.

In these days in this little part of the world, faithful church members must channel their first-century counterparts, seeking not only to share the good news occasionally, but to think about the spreading of the gospel almost as a form of exercise—something that's best done often. Faithful church members must find the grace not to be discouraged by experiences where their evangelism is rejected, but to embody and live out Paul's exhortation, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I can even share a little word of God's love on a few sticky notes. It's at least a start.

*Originally posted at [Hope in the Wilderness](#)*