

Rural Evangelism - What Works?

I am regularly asked "What works" when it comes to rural evangelism. It would be so nice if there was a single answer, or even a simple list, that would work in every situation. But the reality is that it just isn't that simple. There are many factors that might make any method of evangelisation either effective or ineffective in any particular village. The size, shape and nature of the village, the size and nature of the local church are just some of the factors. But there are many others.

An appropriate evangelism strategy for any village should take account of the social context and the church context. It is also helpful if there is an ability to sense what God is saying and doing within the church and the local community. Rural Sunrise offers affordable courses to help churches work through these stages.

There are three stages within the process of evangelisation. Each one needs to suit your context.

The first of these is engagement. If we wish to communicate to a particular section of a community we need to understand something of their culture and values. In some locations an activity in a pub might be an ideal point of contact. In one small West Country village where apparently almost every household owned at least one horse or pony we suggested that recognising this fact pointed logically to using key people from the equestrian world as a point of contact. There are Christians in the world of jumping, racing, training, veterinary work and more.

The second stage is sharing the story. This can be done in so many different ways today. In some situations written communication is used. In others a helpful talk might be used. In another situation art could be used. Videos, films, drama, music... there are so many possibilities. The important thing in a village situation is usually to avoid a presentation that is too much in your face, too heavily laden with evangelical or other church jargon. At the same time the message should be clear and plain. But with Jesus the message was not always the same. With those who felt their need he seemed to be gentle and assuring, while with others he was more challenging. You may have heard it said that you need to be winsome to win some.

Getting back to the horsy village mentioned above we suggested a cheese and wine evening with a guest speaker who would be a Christian from the equestrian world. Find someone who is a good interviewer and then interview the guest about his her life and work - and ensure that this includes reference to his or her personal faith and how that relates to their work. Allow questions. Incidentally Rural Sunrise also provides training in interviewing skills.

The third stage is encouraging a response. We never recommend inviting any kind of open response within a village setting unless there is a very strong reason for doing so. However, to share the good news of Jesus without providing an opportunity to respond is to miss a valuable opportunity. There are a few ways that we know work well.

A short prayer might be said in a form that would be appropriate to anyone wanting to discover a personal relationship with God. Afterwards in a moment of silence people who have said their "Amen" to such a prayer might be encouraged to silently say something like "Dear God, I'm [their name] and I really mean that prayer".

An untidy table with helpful booklets or response cards could be placed near the door and EVERYONE asked to take one on leaving. The Christian Enquiry Agency has helpful resources that people can use to send for more information. You can use CEA with confidence. Asking everyone to take a booklet or card avoids embarrassment. Established Christians can always return their copy later. If the table is too tidy people are less inclined to take something from it. You can also design your own response card for your event. Rural Sunrise can help you with ideas and production.

Identifying a point of contact is also sometimes helpful. For example, "Can I just point out Joan and Bill? [get them to stand and smile] If anyone prayed the prayer/would like more information please feel free to speak briefly with them before you leave. But if you do this do not have them standing at the front or by the door! Let people make contact more discreetly.

I hope these few notes are helpful pointers for you. Remember that the best thing to do is to tailor something for your own situation. Rural Sunrise specialises in doing this.