

## OCCG-007 Close the Back Door by Keeping the Saved, Saved— Maturing New Converts

Larry Keele, minister, church of Christ in Champions, Houston, Texas

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

As Christians, not to mention church leaders, we must realize that we have a mandate that concerns our responsibility to our new converts. While the first part of the Great Commission emphasizes going into all the world, teaching and baptizing those who are taught, our obligation does not end there. There must also be an emphasis on the second half of the commission—that those who are baptized must continue to be “taught all things” that Christ has commanded. (Matt. 28:19–20). Actually, the case could be made that even more emphasis should be given to keeping the saved in light of such passages as 2 Pet. 2:20-22, *“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”* (NASB95). The inspired writer’s use of intensely graphic language points to the inescapable horror awaiting those who remain in that condition.

What can be done to prevent such a horrible fate to new converts in your congregation? What can you as a leader and the congregation do for that young Christian to help them grow strong in the faith? Are there ways to help and encourage new converts to

help themselves? This paper advocates that a congregation whose leadership has a specific plan for new converts will be much more successful in “closing the back door” than one in which no such plan exists.

### **KEY WORDS:**

New converts, discipling, evangelistic teaching, self-paced study, mentor

### **GLOSSARY:**

New converts—those who recently, (here, within a year), completed initial obedience to the gospel by baptism into Christ, thus being added to His church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

Discipling—concentrated effort to help new converts grow in the Lord and His service.

Evangelistic teaching—teaching the first principles of obedience to Christ.

Mentor—a volunteer advisor who, with no authority over the new convert, encourages his or her growth and assimilation into the congregation. Regular progress reports are shared with the elders.

### **REPORT:**

In current times, the church is slow in making significant inroads into the kingdom of darkness by teaching and evangelizing in order to bring the lost to Christ. Conversions are far too infrequent or almost nonexistent in many of our congregations as indicated by an estimated 2.1% growth in membership between 1980 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, this presents a grave and serious problem. As

there are so few conversions, then it is imperative that each convert is given every opportunity, encouragement, and advantage to remain faithful to the Lord.

The new Christian is announced to the congregation. He or she is asked to stand up or even be greeted in a “welcome circle.” Hugs are shared. Handshakes abound. Songs of joy are sung and prayers of thanksgiving are offered. What a glorious day of rejoicing when the lost comes to the Lord! Yet how often, within a very few months, does the new convert’s name appear on the absentee list? Or even worse, the new convert just disappears without being noticed at all. This does not have to be a typical scenario within our congregations.

**IN SETTING FORTH A SPECIFIC PROGRAM FOR NEW CONVERTS, WE CAN ENVISION THE SOLUTION BY PICTURING TWO “ARMS” WITH WHICH TO EMBRACE EVERY NEW CONVERT.**



**ONE ARM IS THAT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR NEW CONVERTS.** This is *not just knowledge for knowledge sake, but a knowledge bringing one closer to the Lord* (Eph. 3:16-19). In each phrase of the education of new converts, there must be an emphasis on *applying* the things learned. Following are 7 suggestions to consider as part of this arm of continuing education.

**1) Be sure that the evangelistic teachers within the congregation are very aware of the necessity of the continued teaching**

**of their students once they are baptized (Matt. 28:19-20).** Too often, one who is committed to evangelism feels that their job is finished when one arises from the baptismal pool. When that is the case, the teacher is often quickly off “to save another soul,” and the new convert is neglected. Without killing their evangelistic spirit, such teachers need to remember that the work in helping that soul to be saved is not over. This is not to say that they should stop evangelistic teaching to focus on one convert, but there should be a desire to be sure of the convert’s continued spiritual growth.

**2) Elders, those who serve as shepherds of God’s people, (1 Pet. 5:2) know that the new convert has become a lamb in the flock for whom they will one day give an account to God (Heb. 13:17).** Taking this responsibility seriously, a chart (such as Addendum A), or some other record-keeping method should be maintained and regularly forwarded to and reviewed by the elders to ensure that progress is being made which will help keep the lamb from wandering away or being devoured by those perverting the truth (Acts 20:28-30).

**3) An enriching, soul-developing program should be made available specifically for new converts.** These follow-up studies can be conducted in various formats.

a) Through a New Converts’ class. These classes provide a great opportunity for new converts not only to grow in the faith, but to grow with others. Often such a class is less intimidating for new converts than beginning in a regular Bible class as other attendees are often biblical novices as well. Special emphasis on attendance-keeping will help elders keep up with the new convert’s status.

b) Through booklet-studies. A

team of mature Christians, perhaps couples, will make an appointment to visit each new convert with the goal to read and discuss the material contained in a pre-selected booklet. Some well-written, beautifully illustrated materials, covering a wide range of spiritual topics, are available from *House To House/Heart-To-Heart*.<sup>ii</sup> Over several weeks, different couples can be assigned to meet and study with the new convert. This method not only helps new converts get a basic yet broad spiritual education, it also allows them to become acquainted with other Christians. When the scheduled studies end, a list of additional booklets may be offered to the student for their own continued study.

**4) Specifically encourage attendance in regular Bible classes.** Often class attendance is taken for granted with leaders assuming that new converts will automatically start attending. Often nothing is specifically said about either the opportunity that Bible class provides or the responsibility of attending. Here again, good roll keeping can help keep the elders informed of the new converts' attendance in a Bible class. While attendance does not necessitate either spiritual growth or active participation, non-attendance may indicate a lack of knowledge about the program, a lack of commitment, etc.

There are two distinct advantages to the new convert's regular attendance in Bible class. First, is the obvious—the growth of the individual. Secondly, there is the great potential of this new convert to participate in an evangelistic outreach. Often most of the new convert's friends and acquaintances come from outside the church. Inviting those friends to Bible class can become an initial step in reaching them with the Gospel. According to Flavil Yeakley, most of the converts in

growing churches are those who either before or during their evangelistic Bible studies attended Bible classes.<sup>iii</sup>

**5) Use Bible correspondence courses. There are several Bible correspondence courses that could be of significant value in the spiritual growth of the babe in Christ.** Some of them are relatively simple and short such as the John Hurt 8 or 12 lesson Bible Correspondence Courses.<sup>iv</sup> There are also a number of different studies such as the World Bible School courses that could be given to new converts. Encouragement should be given in helping each student maintain a schedule of completion. Grading of the questions can lead to beneficial additional study and discussion. At the conclusion of the study an attractive certificate could be awarded. .

**6) Online Bible studies of an in-depth nature are becoming more available and cost efficient.** One such effort is *ThroughtheScriptures.com*, a brotherhood school offered through *Truth for Today*. Eddie Cloer, a professor of Bible at Harding University has founded the school. For \$35 a course, the student will receive both a hardback and the online version of the *Truth for Today Bible Commentary* for the book being studied. Six online tests complete each course.<sup>v</sup> These studies can be either self-paced or incorporated as a congregational study.

**7) Help them begin their own Christian book library.** Some congregations give each new convert a Bible, Concordance, and/or Bible Dictionary. While there are many Bible programs and materials available on cell phones and computers, there is also something to be said for a printed book inscribed by the elders or leaders of the congregation. Many

congregations share the aged, but still helpful booklet, "Now That I'm a Christian." Note: A volunteer "mentor" could be assigned by the elders to keep in touch with a new convert assisting them in becoming acquainted, involved, and comfortable in classes, etc. This mentor would share information of progress with the elders on a regular basis. These reports will be a great help as the shepherds keep up with their flock.

**THE SECOND ARM TO WRAP AROUND NEW CONVERTS IS THAT OF ASSIMILATION INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST.** While the addition to the church of Christ occurs when the Lord adds the baptized believer (Acts 2:38, 41, 47), there is also to be a sense of *belonging* to a local congregation as well. Here are three ways to encourage this.

**1) *Within the first month of a convert's new life in Christ, an introduction to the elders, deacons, ministers and staff would be most appropriate.*** (New members by transfer would also benefit from this meeting.) There is a benefit in taking time to do more than make the basic introduction of "I am 'so-and-so' and this is my wife." With a little thought, a few questions could be asked of each of those in attendance, leadership as well as new converts, that would be a possible means of forming bonds of like experiences, hobbies, etc.<sup>vi</sup> When everyone, beginning with the leadership, participates in the sharing of information, new converts do not feel "put on the spot." All of these are opportunities to reach to a different level to build ties and strengthen bonds. This also is an opportune time to work with new converts in completing an "Involvement Questionnaire" identifying their desired

areas of work and Christian service. Notice of their preferences would be shared immediately with the deacons or others in charge of those programs and activities chosen.

**2) *Help them connect with someone within the congregation in addition to the leadership.*** It is said that if a new convert does not make at least six or seven relationships within nine months of their conversation, the chance of them staying faithful drops drastically.<sup>vii</sup> Some congregations place their new converts in a special small group to enable closer relationships to form. Other congregations have various congregational groupings to allow its members to be a part of smaller units. New converts are assigned to one of these groups. Notice should be sent to the group leaders to make special efforts to assimilate the new converts into the group.

**3) *Friendships and the sense of belonging often come about during service (work) activities that are in addition to worship.*** In such service, not only do the new converts receive the benefit of developing comradery and fellowship with Christian co-workers, but they also find the inner satisfaction that is brought about by true service to the Lord.

As the church of our Lord, we must never forget our mandate to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Let us have a mindset to "bring them in." However, once "in," let us be just as mindful to be sure new converts remain faithful and active in the Lord's service. We can do so by having a specific plan to "***Close the Back Door by Keeping the Saved, Saved.***"

## **Addendum A**

### **New Convert Information**

**(Updated at 1<sup>st</sup> of each month for first year for Elders by Mentor)**

Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor's Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor's E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of baptism: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**Biblical Education:**

New Convert's class       Booklet-Study program       Other Bible Class

Bible Correspondence Course       Online Self-Paced Study       Books given

Additional information:

**Body Life:**

Regular attendance     Sun AM     Sun PM     Wed. PM     Other? \_\_\_\_\_

Leadership "Greet and Meet"     Member involvement form completed

Area of service                       Small Group Assignment

Additional information:

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**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>i</sup> Flavil R Yeakley, Jr., *Good News and Bad News: A Realistic Assessment of Churches of Christ in the United States 2008*, pg. 11. [pureheartvision.org/resources/docs/yeakley](http://pureheartvision.org/resources/docs/yeakley) The Center for Spiritual Leadership The Flavil Yeakley Research Library

<sup>ii</sup> House to House/Heart to Heart tracts are available at [Housetohouse.com](http://Housetohouse.com). A wide-variety of tracts suitable for spiritual growth and encouragement are available. They are Scriptural in nature and very attractively produced.

<sup>iii</sup> Flavil R Yeakley, Jr., "Adult Bible Classes and Church Growth" [www.cbti.faithsite.com/content.asp?CID=11534](http://www.cbti.faithsite.com/content.asp?CID=11534)

<sup>iv</sup> John Hurt Courses can be purchased from One Stone Biblical Resources for \$4.50 per set. [onestone.com](http://onestone.com)

<sup>v</sup> More information and/or registration for these courses can be found in: *ThroughtheScriptures.com*

<sup>vi</sup> Questions should be easy and, obviously, non-controversial in nature. Such questions could be: Where were you born? Where did you attend school? What would you like to tell us about your family? What is your occupation? What is your favorite sport or hobby? What brought you to this congregation?

<sup>vii</sup> "How to Keep Those we Reach." (Author Unknown), Preach It Ministries Newsletter Jan. 22, 2011 @preachIt.org

Reviewed by: Kent Allen, Vice-President, Oklahoma Christian University, former minister and elder.  
Philip Bailey, Executive member, O.C.U. Church Growth Think Tank, former elder