

A History of Evangelism in the 20th Century *by Harold Comer*

There have been three significant periods of evangelism in churches of Christ during the last century. The three periods mark the effectiveness of “the cottage meeting,” “the gospel meeting,” and “the visitor or contact meeting.”

The Gospel Meeting. From 1900 to 1950 in America the Lord’s church had many rural congregations and few preachers. Members were free in the evenings and non-members would attend. People were more direct and at ease with confrontation so direct preaching was effective. Many were brought to obedience during gospel meeting efforts during this time period.

The Cottage Meeting. From 1955 to 1970 people were at home with their TVs. Weak brethren were missing worship services to watch favorite TV programs, but people were still curious about the Bible and knocking doors was still an effective way to find interested prospects. Cottage meetings (the 50’s term for Home Bible Studies) were held with table top charts, filmstrips, question sheets and open Bibles.

The Visitor or Contact Meeting. From 1980 till today people have become more urbanized. We eat out more, recreate and travel more, work more hours, participate in more school activities, and don’t respond well to people at our door. As people fill more of their time with empty secular activities, deep spiritual needs have more and more gone unmet. Yet, they remain. What can be done to reach these people?

There is a pattern that has emerged for reaching out to our culture today that we can learn. 1) Most converts today are first impressed by the good life of a religious member of the church. 2) Second, they accept an invitation to a worship service and then return a few times until they are comfortable enough for a home study. 3) They are baptized after four to ten studies.

There are other approaches that will touch the spiritual needs of people today if we will keep looking for them, but presently, the above pattern works and we should be following those things that work, while experimenting with many other methods and options that may be Biblical as well.