

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **Youth Evangelism**

**School Evangelism**

**Infants**

**Primary**

**Secondary**

**University**

## SCHOOL EVANGELISM

What follows are some observations, suggestions and Golden Rules for communicating the Gospel in High Schools.

### The Program

**Seminar Length** - often schools offer seminars of double period length (80 min or 100 min) in length. In my opinion, this is too long for the younger years. If possible you should request single period seminars with Years 7, 8, 9. It is better to leave them with a "short and sweet" experience than confirm their suspicions that Christian activities are boring. Yrs 10-12 should be able to cope with double period sessions. However, it is good to give them a break of about 5 min in the middle (remember, they'd normally get a break in between classes).

**Seminar Audience** - an audience of less than 100 people makes it harder for a student to feel the anonymity needed to loosen up and enjoy the program. On the other hand, an audience of over 400 provides too much anonymity and invites trouble from the class clowns. Unless you are very, very good, 400 people or more can be a disaster. I suggest you aim to have about 200 people in each session. This is usually one or two year levels. If you negotiate early enough, schools are generally pretty happy to accommodate. NOTE: if you combine year groups it is best to have years that are close to each other in age, i.e., not Yr. 7 and 11 together. This can invite trouble at both ends (fear and condescension respectively).

**Variation** - unless you are a rock band or visiting basketball legends, you must have variation in your program and lots of it. Much, much more than a church service. This doesn't mean a new face every five minutes (actually, a groovy MC throughout the program is a good idea). It means that the activities must change a lot. In a single period seminar this is not as big a deal but in a double it can be determinative.

**Multimedia** - this picks up the last point. Obviously high schoolers live in a multimedia world. They are very used to going from radio to magazine to TV to computer, all in one afternoon. If you can mix the media of your program it can actually help the learning process for them. This means having a combination of music, drama, speech, video, discussion etc. Video is actually very useful and not too difficult. You need a screen, a projector, a PA, and some of the latest video clips and scenes from movies that will raise the theme of the program. In addition to showing known videos, it is worth getting your hands on a normal home video camera and getting some "vox pops" (comments from the students themselves) to show the audience. This means getting permission to interview students on Monday lunch time, editing Monday night (which is dead easy), and then showing it during the seminars later in the week.

**A Single Theme** - having gone on and on about variation and multimedia, it is still valuable to have a single theme throughout the seminar. This may be a world theme like, beauty, sex, suicide, heroes, media rip-off etc., from which you can show how the gospel relates to them; or else it may be a gospel theme like, death, science v's God, Jesus himself, suffering etc. If there has been no regular Christian input in the school previously I'd suggest the first option. But if you are part of an ongoing seminar ministry in the school, the second option is far better. NOTE: you don't need to tell the audience "today we'll be looking at suffering . . . Jesus . . . sex . . ." Just get into the program. They'll work it out.

**Seams** - a minor suggestion with a good result is to make your program seamless. That is, you do not have to introduce each segment of the seminar by saying for example, "Now we're going to have a talk from John about Jesus." This is completely unnecessary and even detrimental. A young audience likes surprise not obvious movements. This also means that every new item on the program should start immediately after the previous one. When the speaker wanders from his/her seat to the mic you are giving a 20 sec (a very long time in school seminars) invitation to the students to talk to each other.

**Drama** - using drama is an odd medium for most teenagers. It is very confronting and immediate, and for this reason can be embarrassing to watch if it is not done well. If done well, drama is a very potent piece of communication. Don't try it if you've not done it before. Use it lots if you're very good at it.

**Music** - you can get away with heaps if you're a loud, viby rock band. So if you can get one together, go for it. If you can't, use music sparingly. Remember, they listen to world class music recordings every day. They can spot the "not real thing" a mile away.

**Small Groups** - some time in small groups toward the end of a seminar can be a good idea but in my opinion not crucial. Small groups led by strangers is a very confronting experience and students will often respond with the eyes-to-the-ground communication technique. However, if you can do it well (ie, have a confident group leader who won't embarrass or be embarrassed easily) it is a good way to clarify the issue raised in the seminar and also find out how the seminar was received. Don't bother having small group work in a single period seminar. In a double period give 15-20 mins (max) to it. Although logistically difficult, it is usually best to end as a whole group with a great wrap-up video, drama, MC spot, or song.

## The Talk

**Bible** – It is important to use the Bible as many teenagers may never have been exposed to it previously. However, use a short passage, or a narrative that can be referred back to. By using the Bible, you will show them that you believe the Bible to be true and relevant to our lives.

**Stories** - please, please use stories. The length of talk you can get away with will nearly always correspond to the number and calibre of your stories. Life stories are the best of course, but a well told third person story is still very valuable. This is really important. Don't let our "sola scriptura" principle turn us into "non comunicados."

**Length** - it is a myth that teens only have an 8 min attention span. Whoever invented that idea has never seen a 15-year-old on a Nintendo. If you are not good at speaking publicly, don't even try it on high schoolers. If you are good, you can easily get away with 10 min. If you are very good, they will easily allow you to speak for 15-25 min.

**Culture Aids** - in preparation for doing a seminar talk I suggest you read some popular magazines, like Dolly, Rolling Stone, Triple-J, Cleo (if you can bear it). This will not only help you with ideas and illustrations from popular culture, it will also give you an idea of the level/pitch that communicates with teenagers.

**Notes** - the Golden Rule here is "**never use notes, never.**" Speaking from notes appears (to many unchurched teenagers) insincere, unrehearsed and unworthy of serious attention. This is where stories also come in handy. If your talk is built around a Dolly article, linked to a life story, linked to a third person story, linked to a story from Jesus' life and ministry, you don't need notes.

**Jesus** - this might sound a bit obvious but a focus on Jesus the man is very important. If you can leave students with an image and impression of Jesus' power, forgiveness and relevance to their life, you will have accomplished a great thing.

**Humour** - being funny means being heard. This can be helpful, particularly in the first few minutes of your talk. If you're not comfortable using humour, that's fine, their salvation isn't dependent on it. I'm simply saying if you are able to tell stories (not jokes or gags) that are humorous (particular where you are the butt of the humour) you're on a winner.

## General Tips

**Don't act like schoolteachers** - this is important. We are not their teachers and must not appear to take on that role. Even if they begin to stir you, try not to come down heavy like a teacher. Be chummy, and try to roll with their jokes at your expense.

**Do it well or not at all** - if a part of your program doesn't appear to work either in rehearsal or in the first seminar, drop it. Don't do things just because you have to fill the time.

**Connection with on going ministry in school** - most of our opportunities in schools are in contexts of ongoing ministry in the school. Be sensitive to this. Ask the locals what they have tried before. Build on it. See yourselves as part of a bigger program that you are serving. This means you don't have to sign, seal, and deliver the kingdom in one seminar. Remember that the locals have to pick up the pieces after you've gone.

**Atmosphere** - think about the feel/ambience/atmosphere of the entire seminar experience. In the end, most student will go away with an *impression* of the seminar, you, and Jesus things, rather than a distinct "teaching point." Simple things make all the difference here - the way you speak to students as they come in to the hall, the music (their sort) that is playing softly through the PA as they come in, and your final remarks and the conclusion of the seminar

School ministry is very difficult. But God has given us an open door to do it in state schools that does not exist in New Zealand, America or England. If we work hard at it, this open door can be the turning point in students' lives. Students all over Australia do become Christians as a result of seminars in their schools.