

Follow Up in Today's Mobile Society

TEN PROVEN METHODS YOU CAN USE

By Lorella Rouster

I have long been plagued by the question, "Have I done all I can to help those I've led to Christ get started in their new lives? Or have I left spiritual babes alone before they were able to walk, or even eat on their own?"

To compound the problem, many have moved away soon after their conversion, and I've lost contact with them forever.

Through grappling with these problems, I've found some methods of follow-up that have helped me nurture babes in Christ in today's mobile society.

1 -IMMEDIATE VISITATION

Most important is at least one face-to-face visit with the convert soon after conversion. Satan seems to delight in using the next day to plant doubts; therefore, an immediate visit can be crucial in establishing the convert's faith. I discovered this principle while teaching children in suburban United States. Interestingly enough, it has been found to be a primary principle in other cultures as well.

During my term as a missionary in Zaire, a mission showed a film in local villages, resulting in many converts. The short-term missionaries who showed the film told me they had discovered the most crucial part of follow-up was the day-after meeting with those newly saved.

In addition to offering assurance of salvation and clearing up any confusion or problems, this meeting can accomplish several other important aspects of follow-up. It is an opportunity to make sure you have the convert's complete name, address and phone number, and parents' or guardian's names. It is a time to make sure all previously gathered information is correct. I try to find out whether the child lives at the same address all the time. If he visits another parent on weekends or during part of the year, I try to get that name, address and phone number, too. I also ask whether the child is planning to move in the near future, and if so, to what city. These facts make continued follow-up possible.

By giving your full name, address and phone number to the convert, you make it possible for him to get in touch with you, even if he moves away and you lose track of him. You can have inexpensive business cards imprinted with a Bible verse and an encouragement to keep in touch, especially in time of need. If you keep a supply of cards on your person at all times you can slip one to a convert even in the most hurried circumstances.

Encourage a child to get in touch with you by writing a warm greeting along with your name and address in his Bible (or in a Bible you might give him). Ask him to send you a picture of himself. If possible, promise him you will answer with a picture of yourself. Most children will be delighted with this promise. Their pictures give you delightful prayer reminders which you might put on a

bulletin board or in a special compartment of your wallet, to be used for prayer during times of waiting.

2 -FAITHFUL PRAYER

The idea of prayer reminders brings us to the second method of follow-up prayer. Paul, the great missionary, prayed regularly for his converts. Samuel, a great Old Testament teacher, said he would consider it a sin if he should ever cease to pray for the people he was teaching (1 Samuel 1:23). Sometimes prayer is a companion to other methods of follow-up. At other times it is the only method available. Prayer releases the fullness of God's power in the convert's life, as well as guiding you, the counselor, in all your contacts and efforts with the new believer.

3 – ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLING

Discipling is a third form of follow-up. This involves you or another Christian continually interacting with the convert on a one-to-one level. You may meet regularly for informal Bible study, encouragement, reporting progress, answering questions and dealing with problems. As you become the convert's friend you can interact with him on many levels. You may take him to church or other times of fellowship.

We can often encourage more outgoing Christian boys and girls to get involved in discipling with a little encouragement and checking on our part. Personal attention is undoubtedly one of the strongest methods of follow-up.

If a convert lives too far away for regular personal follow-up, there are still many methods of encouraging and helping him in his new faith.

4 – REFERRAL

Referral is a fourth follow-up method. When a convert is moving, try to think of any Christians, good churches or Christian organizations near his new location. Other believers in your local church or your local CEF director may be able to give you such information. Write to the contact in the area to which the child is moving and request help in nurturing him.

5 – INFORMATION FOR THE CONVERT

Providing information for the family of the convert as he moves is another approach to follow-up. Instead of contacting a local church and asking them to call on the convert, give information to the family about local churches. Bible study groups, Good News Clubs, radio and TV programs or stations in their new location. This makes it possible for them to find individual Christians or other sources of spiritual nourishment more readily, with less danger of becoming involved in cults.

Try to make such information as complete as possible – not just a church name, but an address, phone number and directions on how to get there; for a radio or TV station give the number on the dial. Don't say, "Mrs. Jones has a Good News Club," but indicate when and where if possible.

6 – PHONE CALLS

If the believer lives too far away for frequent personal contact, a short call with a word of friendly encouragement, a verse and any information about other fellowship possibilities may help him go on

with the Lord. Where local dial-a-story programs are available, put the story number on the back of your calling card and encourage the children to call regularly.

If you or your group has a regular ministry to children resulting in many converts, you may want to consider two phone numbers with separate stories. The first would be an evangelistic message for general audiences. The second phone number would be a short follow-up message of assurance and teaching concerning one aspect of the Christian life. If the tape is changed once a week, children may call back regularly for a mini-course in Christian living. If a time is also provided for the child to respond, he can leave prayer requests.

7 – VERSATILE MAIL

Children love to get mail. Why not use letters to help follow up converts? Either form letters written to interest children or personal letters may be used. A short friendly note, a simply postcard, or a longer, more personal letter. Keep a small pouch or packet of note paper, a Testament for finding verses, a few children's tracts or story papers, and a list of convert's names and addresses in your car, briefcase or purse. There are many odd moments when you can write an encouraging letter if you plan ahead. You might also ask your church for any leftover Sunday school take-home papers and send them out regularly to your converts.

8 – CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

Many children who accept Christ are not able to attend a Bible-believing church regularly or as often as they'd like due to parental pressures. Correspondence courses often provide a way of helping these children get regular Bible teaching and encouragement. Child Evangelism Fellowship has several appropriate follow-up courses.* Another course I have used and recommend is The Mailbox Club.® (Write The Mail Box Club at 404 S. Eager Road, Valdosta, GA 31602 for a sample of courses)

It does not take much investment of time to run a correspondence ministry. Senior citizens greatly enjoy the ministry of checking lessons and answering the children's questions.

9 – CASSETTE TAPES/DVD'S

Recordings are relatively inexpensive. Record a lively story or lesson for the convert. A 30-minute cassette can contain a good amount of teaching as well as personal greetings. Give it to the child with an appropriate self-addressed return envelope. (Use your own judgment about whether to ask him to provide postage.) After he has listened to the cassette several times, he returns it and receives another by return mail. This can be done effectively up to six times with messages designed to help the child in his Christian walk. Returned cassettes can be reused for newer converts. Cassettes can also be used to keep in touch with those who have moved.

10 – WEEKDAY CLUBS

The final method of follow-up I recommend is weekday clubs. The Good News Club ® , a ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship Inc. is a powerful tool for building up new Christians as well as evangelizing. Most CEF material prepared especially for five to ten-minute discipling sessions. Through a weekday club program children from broken homes and children whose parents block church attendance may be reached more readily.

Are these ten methods all we can use to help and encourage young converts? Probably not. However, there has never been more material available for this ministry. I suspect that makes us accountable to do better, don't you?