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# 101 WAYS TO REACH YOUR COMMUNITY

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
LET'S CHANGE THE WORLD!	7
THE NUTS AND BOLTS	12

## LEVEL 1: THE BLITZ

1. Soft Drink Giveaway	27
2. Gasoline Buy-Down	29
3. Donut Giveaway During Morning Traffic	30
4. Assorted Giveaways	31
5. Dollar Drop or Quarter Drop	32
6. Dollar Tipping of Restaurant Servers	34
7. Trash Pick-Up with "Kindness in Progress" Signs	35
8. Twenty-Dollar Outreach Experiment	36
9. Newspaper Giveaway	37
10. Coffee/Hot Chocolate/Cappuccino Giveaway	38
11. Stamp Giveaway in Front of Post Office	39
12. Business Blast	40
13. Grocery Bag Packing	41
14. Grocery Cart Escort and Return	42
15. Popsicles/Ice Cream Giveaway	43
16. Ice Cream Coupons	44
17. Hand Cleaning Towelettes	45
18. Vinyl Gloves at Gas Stations	46
19. Windshield Washing	47
20. Parking Meter Feeding	49
21. Drinks at Biking Trails	50
22. Pen, Pencils, and Post-It Notes Giveaway	51
23. Photocopying	51
24. Computer Diskettes Giveaway	52
25. Drinks at Intramural or Greek Events	52
26. Breakfast Toaster Pastries Giveaway	52
27. Exam Answer (Scantron) Sheets Giveaway	53
28. Phone Cards for Long-Distance Calls	54
29. "Biggie Size" Food Orders at Fast Food Drive-Throughs	54
30. Suntan Lotion Giveaway	55
31. Surf Wax	55

32. Mother's Day Carnation Giveaway	56
33. Church Match Book Giveaway	56
34. Watermelon/Pumpkin/Cantaloupe Giveaway	57
35. Boxes to Merchants	58
36. Scotch Tape Giveaway at Christmas	58
37. Flower Seed Packet Giveaway	59
38. Golf Tee or Golf Ball Giveaway, or Golf Ball Cleaning	59
39. Glow-in-the-Dark Necklace Giveaway	60

**LEVEL 2: CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY**

40. Totally Free Car Wash	61
41. Interior Car Cleaning and Vacuuming	63
42. Oil Changes for Single Parents	64
43. Car Drying at Self-Serve Car Washes	65
44. Windshield Washer Fluid Fill	65
45. Windshield Ice Scraping	66
46. Windshield Washing at Self-Serve Gas Stations	66
47. Bike Fix-Up Clinic	67
48. Restroom Cleaning	68
49. Umbrellas Escort	69
50. Neighborhood Food Collection and Distribution	70
51. Business Window Washing	71
52. Polaroid Photos	71
53. Shoeshines	72
54. Helium Balloons and Balloon Animals	73
55. Dog Washing	73
56. Doggie Dirt Cleanup	75
57. Dorm Move-In Help	75
58. Coffee, Tea, and Lattes During Late-Night Study Sessions	76
59. Soft Drinks, Gatorade, and Lemonade at Class Sign-Up	76
60. Pizza on Move-In Day at Dorms	77
61. Christmas Gift-Wrapping	77
62. Meal Purchasing at Restaurants	78
63. Door-to-Door Sunday Morning Paper and Coffee	79
64. Filter Change for Air-Conditioners and Heaters	80
65. Garage Cleaning	80
66. Leaf Raking	81
67. Lawn Mowing	82
68. Roof Gutter Cleaning	82
69. Address Number Painting on Curbs	83

70. Garbage Can Return from Street	83
71. Tulip Bulbs and Potted Plants	84
72. Snow Removal from Walks and Drives	84
73. Ice Melting for Sidewalks	85
74. Window Washing	85
75. Light Bulb Replacement	86
76. Fireplace Ash Removal	86
77. Smoke Detector Battery Replacement	87
78. Library Fines Payment	87
79. Winter/Summer Survival Kits	88
80. Christmas Tree Giveaway or After-Christmas Tree Collection	89
81. Laundromat Washer and Dryer Payment	89
82. Cocoons on Good Friday	90
83. Friendly Pet Outreach to Convalescent and Retirement Homes	90
84. "Free Prayer" Table at Fairs	91

**LEVEL 3: INVESTING IN THE CITY**

85. Matthew's Party	92
86. Block Party	93
87. Lamb's Lunch	94
88. Parties of Appreciation for Police Officers, Fire Fighters, EMTs	95
89. Accident Scene Cleanup	96
90. Single Parent's House Repair	97
91. Blood Pressure Screening	97
92. Tutoring	99
93. School Supplies for Needy Families	99
94. Dorm Room Cleaning	100
95. Shopping Assistance for Shut-Ins	100
96. Apartment Move-Out Help	101
97. Birthday Party Organizing	101
98. Memorial Service for the Unchurched	102
99. Move-In Welcoming Party	103
100. Pool Party with a Purpose!	104
101. Birthday Cards	104

<b>WHAT TO SAY</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>TEN BEST PROJECTS TO GET YOU STARTED</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>TOP 10 WORST OUTREACH IDEAS</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>	<b>112</b>

# INTRODUCTION

AS A CHILD I was intrigued by cookbooks. I enjoyed paging through them to see what could be done when a few simple kitchen elements were mixed together and cooked properly. Even as an eight-year-old, I took on some pretty ambitious cooking projects. Usually, the cookbook picture looked a lot nicer than my finished product, but the practice was exciting just the same. I always had fun. No matter how the dish turned out, I gained confidence as a chef in progress.

## AN OUTREACH COOKBOOK

Think of this book as an interactive cookbook. The concepts outlined here are designed to be first read and then done by you with a few friends, with your small group, or perhaps with your entire church. This is a read-and-do book. If you only *read* this book, you'll miss the point. That would be the equivalent of seeing a photo of a dish in a cookbook, saying, "I like that dish," then eating the picture! So first you should *read*, then *do* these projects. The concepts in this book won't make sense unless you live them out.

I encourage you to take this book along as you cook up each outreach. In fact, get it dirty! Wear it out! Let's make some forward progress for God's kingdom.

# LET'S CHANGE THE WORLD!

## AL

In a heartfelt note to me, Al described himself as a "former highly driven, money-motivated entrepreneur." He usually worked sixty hours a week at his consulting business. Though he was raised attending church, he says he "evaporated" shortly after his first communion service as a teenager. And while he had possessed a childhood faith, he had long since forgotten God by the time he got into his late thirties. Looking back now, he says, his spiritual condition was as cold as the blustery winter night when he ran into some people from our church doing a coffee outreach.

Along with several hundred other moviegoers, Al was waiting in a long line on the opening night of a popular movie. The frigid weather made the wait downright painful. To his surprise, a number of people were making their way through the crowd offering hot drinks to the movie fans as the line snaked its way into the theater. He was more curious about these people than just the free drinks they were offering. When they came up to him, they offered him a hot chocolate or coffee to show him "God's love in a practical way." He said no thanks to the drink but took the card, which had information with the church's name, phone number, and location. His skepticism came out immediately: "Oh, I get it, you're doing this so I'll come to your church, right?" He wasn't ready for their response.

"We'd be thrilled if you came to our church, but no, we're not doing this for that reason. We're here because it's cold and you look like you could use some warmth! Besides that, God really loves you!" He could have fended off about any other response than that. He said he was so moved by their compassion, authenticity, and dedication that he could scarcely enjoy the movie! He did come to church the following weekend and the weekend after that and so on. It's been three years since that winter night, and Al has not only come to Christ, he also has grown immensely in his Christian life. He is now one of our most prolific leaders in reaching out with servant evangelism. In fact, he travels to other cities to teach churches how to do servant evangelism!

**CHUCK**

Chuck was an alcoholic for years. Like many veterans of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), he had an experience with his “Higher Power” and thankfully stopped drinking. “But there is a difference,” he says, “between stopping the negative patterns and filling yourself with something positive. I was no longer drinking, but I was empty inside.”

An outreach team from my church met Chuck one Saturday afternoon at a soft drink outreach. As he came into the stadium, like hundreds of other fans he received a drink with a small card that read, “You looked too thirsty to pass up! If we can be of more help to you, please give us a call.” A few weeks later Chuck used the card as a map and made his way to church. Within a month of hearing about the love of God he decided to take the plunge—he received Jesus. That inner emptiness began to be filled with the presence of Christ.

Not long after coming to our church, Chuck heard about servant evangelism outreach opportunities. One of the principles from AA that he had never really worked on was “You get better as you serve others.” He told me, “I don’t know if I can do this stuff. I’m not much of a talker.”

I encouraged him: “Why don’t you come and just carry things at first. We’ll take it a step at a time.” So Chuck began to attend our Saturday outreaches faithfully and to carry what we were using in our outreach projects. Over the past six months he’s gotten more confident. On a recent Saturday morning I asked him, “Are you still having fun?” I loved his response:

“Now I’m *showing* and *telling* people about the love of Christ.”

**BILL**

I met Bill at the mall at our church’s Christmas gift-wrapping outreach. He was the leader of the crew of twelve. I’d never really talked with him before, so to break the ice I asked, “How did you find your way into our church?” He explained that the church had literally come to him a couple of years back while he was busy at the engineering firm where he works. An outreach team met Bill one day as they were doing a restroom cleaning project. He was a bit taken aback when they offered their introduction: “Hi, we’d like to clean your toilets for free—just to show you the love of Christ.”

“That’s kind of a polarizing opener,” Chuck says. “You tend to either laugh, thinking this must be a joke, or you just recoil in shock. Personally, I was totally surprised by the offer.”

He was so moved by the project that he decided to check out

what kind of church would clean toilets. The minute he walked into our church, he connected with what we’re all about.

“I had always had a concept of God, but it was kind of vague,” Chuck says. “Your outreach got me hooked enough to come and check out what was going on. I received Christ, and my life has changed in some amazing ways since then. I mean, look at me—I’m helping lead the charge now by wrapping presents at the mall. I know it doesn’t take an engineer to wrap presents, so hey, I get the job done.”

**YEAH, BUT CAN ANYONE DO IT?**

Al, Chuck, and Bill have all come to Christ through a simple approach to outreach called servant evangelism. This is an approach to sharing Christ that anyone with a heart of availability to God can do.

I didn’t always think of evangelism as such a doable task. As a new Christian I was highly motivated to see my friends and family come to Christ. I was madly in love with Jesus, and more than anything in the world I wanted everyone else to have that same love in their hearts.

Though I had a great heart motivation, at times my methods left a lot to be desired. I was willing to try any evangelistic approach at least once. As I look back now I shudder at some of the shenanigans I pulled. Don’t get me wrong—I’m all for any approach that will get the good news out to people, but I went a bit overboard at times. For example, when invited to a friend’s house for dinner, sometime during the evening I’d excuse myself to use the bathroom. Then I’d unroll the toilet paper several feet, place in it a frightening gospel tract, and roll it back up. (I called that a “gospel time bomb”—in about twenty-four hours, *boom!* they’re going to get it!) I’d go to restaurants and stuff all the menus with tracts. For years, anyone who got a Christmas present from me was sure to receive some sort of study Bible as a gift. (Now I think, *Why would a not-yet-Christian want a study Bible?*)

Anyone who has spent time in the church has probably been exposed to a variety of approaches to evangelism. In my twenty-five years of following Christ, I honestly haven’t yet found an approach to evangelism that I don’t like. As a pastor, one of my frequently repeated teaching phrases is “Any evangelism is good evangelism.” More than anything, it’s faithfulness that counts. I think we should be all for any approach to sharing Christ with our lost and sin-entangled world.

However, the older I get as a leader in the body of Christ, the more I ponder the question, “Is what we’re doing with evangelism transferable enough that others can also do it?” Effectiveness in accomplishing the goal of leading others to Christ is only part of the equation for consideration. Here’s a second, and equally valid, question for all leaders to ponder: “Is what we are doing sustainable by the common follower of Christ?” Far too often, the way we construe evangelism is off-putting—as something only those gifted as evangelists in the body of Christ can pull off.

It was one thing for me to be a little wild in my approach to evangelism, but leading others down a similar path proved to be difficult. A few years into my stint as a pastor, I took an assessment of my leadership effectiveness in the area of evangelism. While I was excited about seeing others come to Christ, I’d never enlisted more than a handful of die-hards in the regular action of evangelism in our church. Try as I did in message after message, I was never able to get more than 1 to 3 percent of my church to be actively involved in evangelism. In my travels to other churches, I find a similar pattern of leadership—pastors who long to see their congregations involved in vital evangelism but who are somehow unable to muster more than a trace of their troops.

So, if there’s a desire among pastors and leaders and a commitment of some sort in the hearts of the people, then what’s the problem?

#### SERVANT EVANGELISM: IT’S AN ADJECTIVE THING

A few years ago I began to ask myself, “How can I accomplish a couple of goals: (1) include a much higher percentage of Christians in the action of evangelism, and (2) reach out in significant ways to a lot of people in my city?” As I prayed and pondered and talked with others, it occurred to me that part of the problem was the words I was dealing with.

“Evangelism” is what I call a biblical bipolar word. In other words, it both excites and depresses us when we hear it. It’s something we all feel called to do because the love of God compels us and the Word of God commands us to do it. As disciples we are thrilled with the idea of seeing others come to Christ. But on the other hand, we’re depressed when it comes to the outworking of that value. We don’t have a clue as to how we can realistically pull off that task. So there’s a big “Yes, let’s do it,” but also a big “No, let’s not do it the way we’ve been doing it” going on in our hearts.

I began to experiment some years ago with evangelism projects

that were based less on speaking gifts and more on serving gifts. At first, I enlisted a few people and attempted a totally free car wash. Because people are by nature a bit skeptical, the signs read, “Absolutely Free Car Wash!” Those who were served almost insisted on giving us a donation—in spite of our signs. When we refused to receive their donations, those we served were so stunned that they asked, “What’s the catch?” We said, “God’s love is free, so this gift of service is totally free in the same way.”

That first project was so exciting it led to another one the next weekend. Within a month another group of a few guys got the idea that they could expand our serving to include a windshield washing outreach at a local grocery store. This time we were able to touch several hundred with just one small group who masterfully wielded squeegees as they roamed the parking lot. After they cleaned each windshield, they left a card that explained their project.

Those two projects snowballed into a soft drink giveaway, where one team touched several hundred people in just one outreach. I was amazed by this approach we’d stumbled on. After one of our early outreaches, I asked one of my leaders why he thought this was an effective way to do evangelism. I found his response memorable: “It’s just two words: Simply effective.” To put it another way, by adding the adjective “servant” to the noun “evangelism,” the average person was activated.

The adjective “servant” empowers the “common” person in the body of Christ. While only a small percentage of us may picture ourselves as prototypical evangelist types, 100 percent of us have gifts of serving. How do I know that? The Spirit of the Servant dwells inside of us. As we encourage and unleash the gifts of serving present in each believer, and then aim those gifts toward the world, powerful forces for good begin to draw those we serve into a relationship with Christ.

# THE NUTS AND BOLTS

EVERY SMALL GROUP OR church needs to have some form of evangelism going on in order to maintain health. But because this can be difficult to pull off, we need to explore some of our motivations for becoming outward people.

**Survival:** For a group to vitally endure, it must have an explicit outward component. Our church has defined “normal” as one outreach activity every other month. Over the past few years we’ve learned that this seems to be a reasonable, sustainable balance. Groups that reach out in service will have a healthier atmosphere in the short run and will likely have a much longer life cycle.

**Relevance:** If we hope to operate in the real world, we must be practically involved in the lives of outsiders who have real problems. The watching world around us will respect our efforts as followers of Christ if our aim goes beyond serving ourselves only.

**Fun!:** Committed group members will do many things in the name of discipleship and sheer commitment to the cause of Christ, but enjoying themselves is sometimes another question. One of the outreach mantras we often repeat is “A great time was had by all!”

It’s tremendously fulfilling to get involved in the life of a community in a practical way. I’ve found that groups that reach out have no trouble motivating their members to attend group meetings. Why? Because there is a spirit of life in those groups.

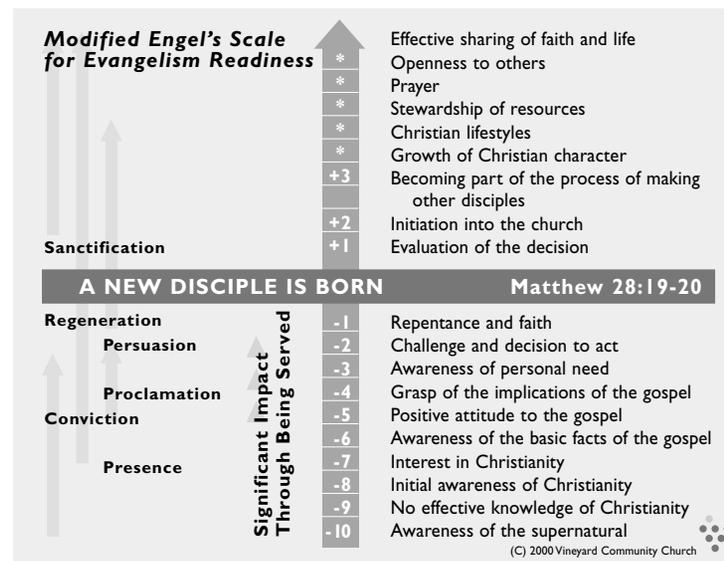
**Biblical basis:** As followers of Jesus, we’ve all been called to bring the good news to our world (see Matthew 28:18-20). Many Christians experience significant guilt around the topic of evangelism because they know God wants them to tell others about Christ, but they feel a gifting handicap. Be encouraged. You don’t have to operate at a phenomenal level of skill to be effective. God isn’t looking for heroes with great levels of gifting. Rather, he’s looking for available followers who are willing to serve faithfully.

**Outwardness:** If groups are to be healthy, they need to have an inward-focused component to meet the needs and circumstances of their members. While inwardness is part of the Christian community experience, an outward focus creates balance in the life of a group. Going out is simply healthy and invigorating to the spiritual life of

small groups. The good news is that it doesn’t take an amazing skill to do significant works of outreach ministry. In fact, it only takes small things—faithful acts of outreach done again and again—to begin to make a difference.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE REACH OUT?

I find Engel’s Scale a helpful tool for explaining how someone is progressively led to Christ. Author, teacher, and marketing researcher Jim Engel devised this graph (which I’ve heavily adapted) to depict the relative level of “lostness” of people before they come to Christ. Someone who is far from beginning a relationship with Christ is at the minus-10 level. As that individual moves forward toward a relationship with Christ through what I call a “nudge of kindness,” he or she progresses to a minus-9. Through acts of kindness shown by Christians, conversations they might have with Christian friends, and life traumas (losses in life such as divorce, loss of health, loss of a job), that person progresses toward the positive scale. This trend continues slowly and consistently by the oversight of the Great Spiritual Usher, the Holy Spirit, until that person ultimately comes to Christ.



Looking at all the steps in Engel’s Scale, the question naturally comes up, “How many ‘nudges’ does it take for someone to come to Christ?” This is not an exact science, but I believe a pretty close guess,

in our day, is it takes between twelve and twenty God-empowered nudges for the average person to come to Christ.

### **We're Escorting People Forward**

Our job isn't to see everyone we encounter come to Christ on the spot. Early in my Christian life I was so enthusiastic about leading others to Christ that I was often overly aggressive with people. The pressure I put on myself was enormous. It was up to me to make something happen.

The movie character I came closest to emotionally was karate king Bruce Lee. His expertise allowed him to grab someone by the hand and, with a quick flick of the wrist, flip him across the room. Before I was introduced to Engel's Scale, I suspect I would have described my job as "to karate flip the unbeliever into full faith in one convincing conversation."

I had no patience for any sort of process of evangelism. But people simply aren't suddenly catapulted into a relationship with Christ. Rather, they take small, progressive, steady steps. The Scriptures say that we are like sheep. Sheep nibble their way from one point to another. If you watch them, they never go anywhere very fast.

The apostle Paul said we are to plant and water seeds (see 1 Corinthians 3:6), but ultimately God is the one who does the harvesting work. Paul also said there is great power unleashed as we plant deeds with the power of Christ's kindness—that this kindness, in fact, leads others to repentance (Romans 2:4). Paul's encouraging view is that there is value in the entire process of evangelism—in the planting, in the watering along the way, and in the final harvesting at the very end of the long process.

### **We're Answering Their Questions**

As we serve people who don't know Christ, they're automatically curious. It's only natural for them to ask, "So, why are you doing this?" In this age of selfishness, it's startling for someone to do a deed of kindness with no apparent strings attached. After we serve, we simply answer the natural questions that come up. I think this is what Peter had in mind when he wrote:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15)

I've found that while most Christians don't see themselves as experts in the realm of apologetics (defending the faith), most are

able to answer the typical questions that people ask during servant evangelism projects.

### **We're Loving Them into a Relationship with Christ**

There's been a lot of emphasis the last few years on mission statements. Of course I think there's value in focusing the train of attention of an organization. When the church I lead tried to craft a mission statement, we found that we were just too complex in our wording. I believe in simplicity, so we kept working on our mission statement until it became as sleek as possible. It took us a dozen years of thinking, praying, and discussing to boil down our reason for being to the simplest statement possible, but I think we finally got it right:

*We exist to love our city into relationship with Jesus Christ.*

As I mentioned before, I believe it's the nature of most small groups to move inward upon themselves. I call them "inwardly focused." When we gather, it is only natural to ask each other, "How am I doing? How are you doing? How are we doing?" Clearly, there's a time and place for us to ask those sorts of questions. Without tending to these issues, we have no community and the church can't grow into the kind of people God wants us to be.

However, God's plan has a side B—as outlined in the Great Commission texts. In our quest for personal healing and wholeness, we can't forget about the world that God so loved that he sent his Son, Jesus, to die for it. God also has in mind to build "outwardly focused" groups. Side B is what this book is about. We are putting into action an approach to encountering our city—one person at a time. With each act of love and generosity, we can make a difference.

### **SOME PROJECT GUIDELINES**

#### **What If Things Go Wrong When We Are Doing Our Outreach?**

Being a veteran of outreach projects, I believe that question is best answered by quoting Tarzan: "What mean 'if'?" In other words, a few things will definitely go haywire when groups begin to do servant evangelism. While the projects outlined in this book are, for the most part, pretty simple, something can go wrong. My church has been doing outreach projects for many years. We highly value planning, yet almost every time we go out, a little something goes a little wrong. Here's the lesson to learn: It's best to have a flexible, teachable attitude as you reach out. And don't forget to practice smiling as you do it!

**Where Should We Go?**

Your choice of location will be determined by the flow and type of people you're trying to reach. In most cases I like to touch as many people as possible, so I usually choose high-traffic areas. It's feasible to go door to door in your neighborhood to offer a serving project; just be careful not to come back too often or the residents will begin to feel harassed.

Go to where the people are who you feel led by God to reach. That's campuses for college students; that's bike trails for recreational types. But keep in mind there are some subtler areas of town that need to be discovered by your group. For example, certain apartments are filled with single-parent families. Or your group may feel led to get involved in a mercy ministry to the poor. A great place to find needy people is in the government-subsidized housing areas in your city as well as in certain parts where the elderly are living on fixed incomes. The key is to go out and take notes as you do. Return to the most fruitful places. I've found that those locations where people don't respond well during the first outreach or two tend not to get better in the long run. Don't waste your time on a bad location.

**What About Kids? Can We Bring Them Along?**

Kids can make a great addition to the serving team, provided the projects match their maturity and skills. For example, children can do aspects of a car wash (like washing wheels). Some projects described here definitely don't work well with children, but a patient parent with a little creativity can involve a child in just about anything. My hope as a parent is always to give my children a positive experience with servant evangelism, so I always make it part of the routine to take them to McDonald's afterward and treat them to a Happy Meal.

**How Often Should We Go Out?**

The frequency for outings needs to be worked out with your group. Your group may be filled with extroverts who are dying to get out on the streets. On the other hand, maybe you have a fairly introverted bunch that would rather conduct a Bible study. Both need to get out with some regularity for the sake of the group's health. With outreach, it's always a matter of how much, how often.

I suggest that a group go out to do a project at every fourth meeting. Some of our groups meet weekly, while others meet

every other week. In the first case, the groups would go out every month; in the second case, the groups would go out every other month.

Before coming to a hard-and-fast decision about how often you will do outreach, venture out a few times with these projects. Be experimental. See what works and what doesn't and how your group responds to the flow of the outreach. If your group finds tremendous affinity with these projects, consider doing them more often.

**How Long Should We Go Out?**

While it can be a lot of fun to do servant evangelism projects, you need to monitor just how long you work at them. It becomes difficult to maintain the energy of the group if you make outreach too long. In our history of doing these projects, groups at my church have found that most people can't sustain a high level of enthusiasm on a project for more than about two hours. While the first time or two out doing these projects may well be exciting (and even thrilling if you have been stuck with an inward focus as a group), don't make the mistake of taxing your group with more ministry than it can sustain. Two hours is plenty of time for doing an outreach—including gathering, giving instructions, traveling to the outreach site, doing the outreach for a little over an hour, and reconvening to share stories.

**What's the Most Important Practical Point to Keep in Mind?**

Be organized. If you make your people wait because you're not prepared, you'll waste their time and diminish their zeal for future outreaches. If you're the leader, do your behind-the-scenes preparation plenty in advance so that when your people arrive, everything is ready to go. Make sure you have permission (if necessary) to be where you're doing the outreach. Provide twice as much material as you think you'll need. Your people's time is your most valuable asset. Let them know that you value them by being ready for them long before they arrive to reach out with Christ's love.

**What's the Best Way to Make Your People Feel Successful?**

Tell success stories. Keep track of the good encounters that take place with your serving outings. It's easy to get caught up in the practical matters of planning and executing a project and then, once it's over, to busy yourself with putting away equipment and so on. Don't forget to reflect! Your people need to have a time of storytelling

to solidify what just happened in their hearts. These stories will become a part of the larger history of your group. In the months and years to come, your people will reflect back and say, “Remember the time we did that for those people? That was a great time. We really did something significant when . . .” Your people won’t forget these events in the years to come. Every group needs a history. Outreach is a strong history-making activity.

### What Do We Say When Interacting with Those We Serve?

When asked, “So why are you doing this?” teams from my church often say, “We’re here today doing a community service project to show you God’s love in a practical way.” That simple statement has enough content to spark further conversation about the love of Christ. It has worked for us thousands of times. I recommend you memorize it and use it as a standard response line when serving.

Sometimes I say to people, “If Jesus were in town today, walking about, I think he’d be both saying things and doing things. This is the sort of thing he’d be doing for people.” That usually makes sense to totally unchurched people.

At other times I say, “We’re here today living out what the Bible says. Instead of handing people something and saying, ‘Here, read this,’ we’re here saying, ‘Here, experience this.’” (For more ideas, see “What to Say” on pages 106-107.)

### What About Verbalizing the Gospel with Them?

Be ready to respond to people based on wherever they are spiritually. The key is to pay attention to their signals. In my experience, I’ve found it’s a mistake to attempt to share the same exact thing with every single person we serve. When it comes to verbalizing the gospel, your teams may fall prey to two different dangers: saying too much too soon (sE—a small amount of “s,” serving; a large amount of “E,” evangelism); or serving too much and forgetting to evangelize (Se—a large amount of serving, “S,” while minimizing the message of the gospel, “e,” by missing opportunities to verbalize the good news).

Sometimes, by being overly aggressive, we inadvertently communicate to people a message of conditional love, that is, “God loves you only if you agree with us.” What’s the balance? I think we need to be trained in both traditional evangelism approaches as well as the servant evangelism approaches outlined in this book.

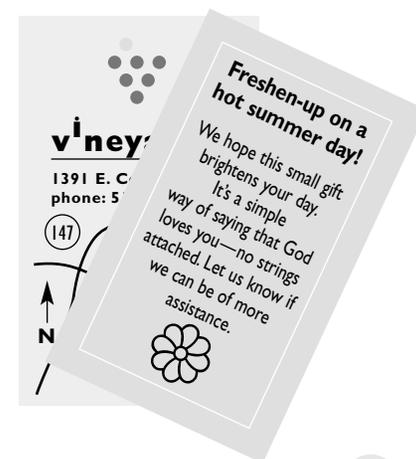
When I’m out doing servant evangelism, I bring along gospel

tracts to share with those who are “ripe” and responsive—certainly there are many of those we encounter along the way. I liken the process of evangelism to the game of golf. In golf there are long shots made with wood clubs. There are medium shots made with iron clubs. But those shots that are up close to the hole are made with a putter. People tend to be at different distances from the hole, or to the point of declaring faith in Christ. Some we meet will be in greatest need of a wood shot to bring them toward Christ from quite a distance. I think those people will be most vulnerable to the power of kindness. Those who have found their way partially forward have questions about the faith; they need the iron shot of an apologetics conversation. That is, they need some conversations before they can make further progress forward. Finally, those near the hole only need someone to help pray with them—to apply the putter and sink the ball in the hole.

As you go into the community, steadily encountering people at different levels of receptivity, you need to be sensitive to where they are in their progress. If you’re going to be effective in outreach, your goal must be to serve. Memorizing a pat response to use with everyone you encounter will not work. Share your faith in a spirit of servanthood.

Throughout this book you will see references to “connection cards.” These cards, which are given to those you serve, explain what has been done to them. The act of servant evangelism outreach projects is a rather hit-or-miss affair. That is, sometimes you will have complete conversations with those being served, and other times you will simply not have the opportunity to converse adequately. It is important that those being touched with these acts of kindness have some means of getting back in touch with you if they so desire.

Here is an example of a connection card my church uses. Feel free to use it exactly as it is printed, or play with the wording and graphics as you see fit. (Our card wording and graphics are also available as downloadable files at our website, [www.servantevangelism.com](http://www.servantevangelism.com).) In essence, you need to briefly explain what you are doing, then offer a phone number, address, website, and so on for follow-up.



### Are There Any Secrets to Making This Work?

Do as good a job as possible. Let's leave everyone we touch with a positive impression of both the love and the quality of Christ.

Smile while you serve! A cheery face is incredibly disarming, not to mention that it keeps everyone up emotionally.

Don't be distressed when you're denied the opportunity to serve. I've found that the real power in our serving projects is in the *offer* to serve, even more than in the *action* of serving. Inevitably, you will be denied when you offer to serve others. Not to worry! Those you touch with the offer will leave emotionally and spiritually curious about your generosity.

Learn to tell your own story about how you came to know Christ. You need to have a few versions of your testimony: a short one that can be conveyed in a minute, a longer one of three minutes, and a more extensive one that can be given over a cup of coffee. Most of the conversations you'll have with people connected with servant evangelism projects will only allow for one- to three-minute interactions. No matter what the specifics are of your story, it's powerful. Look for opportunities to share it. When someone asks an open-ended question like "So, what motivates someone to come out on a day like this to clean toilets?" (I've gotten that question dozens of times!) That's someone who is saying, "Please give me your testimony."

In short, your testimony should include these basic elements:

1. I used to not have a relationship with Christ.
2. Something happened and I began to believe.
3. That faith in Jesus has made all the difference in the world to me.

### Will This Be Any Fun?

Sometimes in the course of pulling off an outreach we can forget the obvious—to enjoy ourselves. I live by the adage, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is fun!" (a near-quote of 2 Corinthians 3:17). I've found that to be true throughout my Christian life.

The inverse is true as well: where there is true, good, clean fun, usually the Spirit of the Lord is found as well. I think that one of the most compelling reasons for doing servant evangelism projects is the fun factor. This stuff of going into the community to serve our way into hearts just makes for an incredibly good time.

If you aren't enjoying yourselves as you reach out with the kindness of God, you'll come across oddly to those you serve. It's

out of place to say with your mouths, "Hi, this is to show you the love of God," but to show a lemon-sour frown on your faces.

### How Should We Debrief as a Group?

After an outreach, it's a good idea to have a time set aside to do some downloading. Gather back where you started and share over a cup of coffee or a hamburger what happened. The stories will mostly be very positive. Occasionally, someone will have a bit of a challenging outing. But this storytelling time is a great opportunity to encourage everyone onward in his or her experience. The ones who had a slam-dunk positive experience have a need to share that story with others so that they might be encouraged. The positive stories will also allow the timid people to reinterpret their experience in the safety of the larger group.

You might even bring along a video camera to capture some of your outreach experiences permanently. Many of the projects outlined in this book come across very well on video and make for encouraging, fun viewing later. We often tape an outreach and then show it immediately afterward, during a brief downloading time, as a way to consolidate the time with the participants. It may be corny, but people love to see themselves on video.

### How Do We Pay for These Projects?

I abide by a particular principle when it comes to starting out with outreach: If you wait until you have all the financial questions answered before you go into action, you will never go into action.

For this reason I've adopted the operational credo, "Ready, Fire! Aim." When we take a Ready, Fire, Aim approach to ministry, we're more apt to move by the power of faith rather than sight. From the beginning of our outreach orientation we have followed the adage, "Money follows momentum." You may be a small group of just a few individuals. Pray, then look for what God provides, but know for certain that he will provide. He is certainly interested in reaching your city. He'll make provision.

As you progress in your outreaches, I recommend you make the commitment to reach your city a priority within your church's budget. My church has given at least 15 percent of our income to local evangelism since the beginning of our church's launch. That number would be difficult to jump into for most existing churches. A more realistic, yet significant enough amount to start with is perhaps 5 percent. I'm confident that as you faithfully do these projects you'll generate enough positive fruit that the money spent will be an obviously good investment.

**Pray**

The servant evangelism approach to outreach is action-oriented, but as we reach out we dare not underestimate the importance of prayer. As you step out to serve, you'll be naturally inclined to pray for God's blessing as you serve. Only those who have stood on a traffic island with a box of donuts while waiting for the traffic light to change can relate to the truth of the statement "We need God's blessing for this to work." As you serve, do it with a spirit of humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit's power for success. Without his blessing on us, we simply are pleasant people doing nice things for others.

I always react when people call what we do "random acts of kindness." There is nothing random about what we are doing. We move in "empowered kindness," and we change people's lives as we touch them in significant ways by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 2:4 couldn't be more clear on this point: "*the kindness of God leads you to repentance*" (NASB).

I make a habit of gathering the team to pray briefly before going out on an outreach project. I encourage team members to pray all the while they are serving—to pray for success, to pray for those they are serving, to pray for open doors of opportunity, to pray for the right people to come along as they serve. And then, upon returning from serving, we pray for those we touched—that Christ will have his way in each of their lives and that they will come into the family of God.

**Keep on Praying**

The concepts of "prayer walking" and servant evangelism go hand in hand. (In fact, I recommend the book *Prayer-Walking* by Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, Creation House, 1993.) My church has often seen areas where we would like to do outreaches closed to us for one reason or another—liability concerns, safety issues, or the age-old "Gee, we've never done that before" response. Many times, after we have done on-site prayer (low key, as modeled in the prayer-walking concept) we've seen the doors of ministry open amazingly wide to us.

We tried for twelve years to get our foot in the door to do Christmas gift-wrapping at one of the largest, nicest malls in our city. Each of our attempts was met with a cordial but firm no. Finally, we began to prayer walk that mall each week. Within six months, out of the blue, they called us and asked if we would like to do a gift-wrapping outreach! In this one mall alone, we can serve

more than one hundred thousand people each holiday season. That's quite an answer to persistent prayer.

**Go Out**

The projects outlined in this book are not complicated. I call them the "classic Volkswagen Beetle of evangelism"—that is, it's pretty simple, and there aren't that many moving parts.

Begin to experiment with these concepts by putting them into practice. Honestly, there isn't a lot that can go wrong with the projects outlined in these pages. The rejection you might face is minimal. When we go out to give away soft drinks, for example, about the worst we hear is someone getting mad because they want a Pepsi when we're giving away Cokes. You can handle that level of rejection!

Get a couple of friends, pick a level 1 project that looks interesting, and just get started.

**Keep Going Out**

If you hope to make an impression on your neighborhoods, you need to consistently connect and then reconnect through serving projects. In other words, make a commitment to your community for a set period, and follow through on that commitment before analyzing the apparent results. I recommend you mentally sign up for six month's worth of outreaches to begin with. During this time you'll experience at least a couple changes of seasons and hopefully a dozen or so of the projects listed in this book that fit your situation.

As I mentioned, you will have a mixture of mostly positive and a few negative experiences as you reach out. Don't let the highs get you overly excited and don't take the negatives too close to heart. I've found that if a group commits to going out to do outreach monthly for six months, they'll see enough encouraging fruit from their efforts to keep doing outreach over a longer term.

**Leaders Take the Lead**

Before you go out as a group, I recommend that the leader(s) of your group go out first to get the ball rolling. Look over the list of beginning projects at the end of this book (pages 108-110) for some starter projects to ponder. The idea here is to experience it first before leading the others into it. Like it or not, people do what their leaders do, not what they say. Begin to do what you want the people you lead to emulate. They'll follow your lead.

**“COME AND SEE” OR “GO AND DO”?**

As you read Scripture, you can find two equally biblical slogans: “Come and see” and “Go and do.” Many churches like to quote what Philip said to skeptical Nathanael: “Come and see” (John 1:46). That phrase has been so popular that it is posted on the welcome signs of many churches. It’s not a bad slogan. “Come and see” what the Lord is doing in our midst. “Come and see” the love of Christ that’s present here.

I remember the first time I saw those words on the side of a church. I was in high school. I was not a Christian yet, and the idea intrigued me. I wondered, “What’s going on in that place?” For whatever level of effectiveness that phrase may have had at one point, I believe it is a mistake to use it as a guiding philosophy these days.

Author and statistician George Barna writes that those who don’t attend church are no longer so much unchurched as they are dechurched. They have, at least in their minds, checked out the church. They’ve evaluated it and found it irrelevant to their lives and needs. “Come and see” is not going to connect with people of our age.

Also, I believe that phrase subtly builds a mindset that is dangerous to our people. It implies that something wonderful is going on here that is just so great that if the people of our city could just see it we’re sure they would want to join us. I suspect—as a leader in the body of Christ, I hope—that there is something wonderful going on with most churches and most small groups. Sure, if our cities could experience the wonder and beauty of the fellowship we experience, they would very possibly want to join us.

But, to quote Joan Rivers, “Can we talk?” Most people aren’t going to just stumble across our door. They aren’t going to, by happenstance, “come and see.” If there is any hope of our city coming to know Jesus, we must adopt in a wholesale way the motto “Go and do.” Our only problem is, “How in the world can we do that?”

**PLAY SAFE**

Two smartly dressed businessmen sat across the restaurant table with forlorn looks on their faces. Judging by their earlier phone call to me, I felt they were like most small group leaders I know—frustrated with outreach. They knew that reaching out beyond themselves was vital for the health of their groups, but they didn’t have a clue as to how to do that in a healthy way. However, these two were at least stepping out to try to do something with outreach. Their long faces

were begging the question, so I had to ask, “What happens when your groups try to do evangelism?”

“It’s weird—every time we schedule an outreach event, none of our members show up.”

“Well, what sort of outreach events are you attempting?”

“Every month, on the first Saturday, we drive around looking for hitchhikers. When we find one, we give them a ride, buy them lunch, and share the gospel with them. Then at Christmas we do an outreach to the homeless who live down by the river. We buy them food and blankets, then we pray for them.”

Sitting in the restaurant I had to admire their sheer guts. They were certainly getting out of their box! They had great hearts and even the right idea. Outreach is vital to the health of every small group. Their problem: they were going about it in a scary way. Let’s face it, not many average suburban small-group members will jump at the chance to go into a crack neighborhood at Christmas!

The enthusiasm level of their groups was beginning to dwindle because the groups were only inwardly focused. Like most small groups, they were naturals at nurture, but lacked an outward, practical reason for their existence. In my twenty years of leading and coaching small groups, I’ve come to conclude that one constant is present in all groups that remain healthy, reproduce, and stay viable for the long haul: they regularly reach out beyond themselves.

**HOW CAN WE REACH OUT?**

My business friends had the right idea in going to the homeless; it’s just that they were biting off more than they could handle. A catch phrase I hear a lot these days is that we need to set “big, hairy, audacious goals.” Well, big goals are fine, but there is such a thing as *goal overload*. Going to the homeless was a good idea, but it was too much.

I encouraged these leaders to be strategic. That is, I suggested that they start doing outreach in small ways that will give people in their groups successful experiences at first. Once those group members have had several small positive experiences with outreach, then the elements of depth, risk, and complication can be added as the groups grow in faithfulness and confidence.

**THREE LEVELS OF OUTREACH INVOLVEMENT**

Well, this book isn’t really about small groups. It’s about one aspect of small-group life—reaching out in servant evangelism as an important way of keeping the overall condition of the group in good health.

So let's talk about servant evangelism and outreach. The progression of outreach looks like this:

## Blitzing > Connecting > Investing

All three of these approaches and their levels of outreach have their place. However, to build success you need to be aware of your group's skill, confidence level, and resources. My recommendation is that, as you read and apply this book, you start with the blitzing level projects to gain momentum. If your group is like most I've met, you probably have little forward progress going right now with evangelism. Get the ball rolling in the right direction with a few of the level 1 (blitzing) projects. Then progress to the level 2 (connecting) projects. As you feel adventurous, go on to the level 3 (investing) outreaches.

## LEVEL 1 THE BLITZ

EVERYBODY NEEDS A PLACE to start—for small-group outreaches it's the Blitz. These adrenaline-pumping projects are designed to touch a lot of people in a short time. They're a great way to involve team members in reaching out together to touch the community in simple yet meaningful ways. This level of outreach usually involves some products, so there is a financial cost involved, but nothing that your group can't afford.

Blitzing projects are great for the following:

- getting your people involved with an *action* orientation
- doing something that doesn't take a long *time* to pull off
- creating quick *momentum* (In about six months, your church or small group can become quite well known for its blitzing visibility in the city. Many will think you are larger in number than you actually are because of your many outreaches.)
- building initial evangelism *confidence* (You can always try more risky projects later if you feel led.)
- expanding *vision* (All of these projects are a great place to get more ideas for outreach.)
- seeing the *potential* for reaching out to the entire city with outreach projects such as these

### SOFT DRINK GIVEAWAY

(5+ PER TEAM)

ON A HOT AFTERNOON, there's nothing like a cold drink to soothe people's thirst. A Diet Coke may not be exactly what Jesus had in mind when he spoke of giving away a cup of cold water (Matthew 10:42), but at least it's cold!

Do this in an area with a lot of traffic, either on foot or by car. Set up on a busy corner with a stop light. When the light turns red,

with a couple of drinks in hand your team can ask motorists, “Would you like a diet or regular?” That simple introduction often becomes additional conversation regarding why you are doing this project. Answer by saying, “Jesus met practical and spiritual needs. It’s hot today, so we are here doing what he would do in a modern package.”

If the idea of locating at an intersection sounds too risky, try the entrance of a grocery store during a high-traffic hour. You will need to contact the manager in advance to explain your project. Customers are more chatty and easygoing on their way into the grocery store, and are typically in a rush to get to their cars on the way out. Therefore, you will have more success setting up at the entrance of the store.

You will need several signs that read, “Totally Free Drinks!” Ice the drinks down an hour or so before the outreach so they’re refreshing when given away. You’ll need a prep table to set the drinks on once you’ve taken them out of the coolers. In case you don’t get adequate time to explain your project to shoppers, place a card explaining the project under each can’s tab.

(Ours say, “You looked too thirsty to pass up! We hope this drink brought some relief to your day. If we can be of more help, please give us a call.”)

The drink giveaway is one of the most expensive projects you can do, but it’s great for getting started and having a high-energy experience. If you buy the drinks in quantities, you can probably negotiate a discount. Our small groups typically give away about two hundred drinks at a single outreach. You’ll need to experiment with the brand of drinks you offer and the percentage of diets to regulars. Some parts of town might even prefer bottled water or juices to carbonated drinks.

When approaching those you are serving, don’t ask, “Would you like a free drink?” That phrase gives people a chance to quickly brush you off. A much better, more positive way to talk to people is to smile, with a diet in one hand and a regular in the other, and

## WHERE TO GO

- Campuses
- Parks
- Neighborhoods
- Sporting Events
- Downtown
- Commuters
- Shopping Centers

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- Soft drinks in cans
- Ice
- Coolers
- Three to four signs: “Totally Free Drinks!”
- Folding table
- Towel (for drying the drinks off before attaching the connection cards)
- Connection cards

to ask, “Would you like a diet or a regular? It’s free!” Be irresistible as you approach people.



**IN ACTION:** On Election Day in South Africa, a church in Johannesburg did a gigantic soft drink outreach to voters as they stood in line to cast their votes. The voting lines were enormous—voters waited for up to three hours to use their newfound privilege. This simple act of generosity was greatly appreciated by these voters. The color barriers came down quickly, and some great conversations took place between blacks, whites, and Asians—all because someone offered a stranger a free soft drink.

## GASOLINE BUY-DOWN

(10+ PER TEAM)

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE to do an outreach that will get so much attention you might even create a traffic jam? When you lower the price of gasoline for a couple of hours, you’ll attract no small attention to your act of generosity. You might even make the evening news!

This project needs to be set up a week or two in advance by connecting with the station manager first. The essence of the project is this: Lower the price of gasoline for a set time (usually an hour or two). If it’s normally \$1.50 per gallon, lower it to \$1.25 for that time and pay the difference to the station at the end of the time. The key is to lower the price to the point that it will get the attention of passing motorists.

Provide services to the customers during that time. Offer to wash their windshields while their gasoline tank is filling. If time allows, check the oil levels.

Provide signs during the set time with the “new and improved” prices. Put a big sign over the normal price sign, but also have some people holding hand signs that read, “\$1.25 Gasoline!” to get people’s attention.

## WHERE TO GO

- Campuses
- Parks
- Neighborhoods
- Sporting Events
- Downtown
- Commuters
- Shopping Centers

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- Signs stating the price of gasoline
- Connection cards
- Squeegees (one per person)
- Towels (one per person)

While doing the serving, explain what you are doing and why you are doing it, and give out connection cards explaining the project.

Big national chain stations are usually bound by organizational policy and are not able to participate in projects like this. These stations tend to be fearful of liability issues. However, locally owned ones are usually very open to the idea. If you're turned down at the first place or two, persevere; the idea is worth hanging in there with.

You might wonder, "But doesn't that cost a lot?" It costs less than you might think. The total usually adds up to two or three hundred dollars for a two-hour project. Considering the dollar amount and the manpower needed, this is an outreach that's best taken on by more than one group at a time.

When the generosity of God is demonstrated, people take notice.



**IN ACTION:** The first time we did the gasoline buy-down we made it onto a big AM radio station's traffic report. The helicopter DJ came on and said, "I don't know what's happening down on the corner there, but there's a significant traffic jam. Someone just called in to the station and said something about gasoline twenty-five cents off the regular price. Something about showing God's love in a practical way. If I were you, I'd get in my car and get over there."

## DONUT GIVEAWAY DURING MORNING TRAFFIC (5+ PER TEAM)

WHO CAN RESIST A pastry at the stop light on the way to work? Buy a few hundred glazed and chocolate donuts (get the quantity discount; glazed donuts are about the easiest for motorists to handle while driving). Set up at a freeway off ramp, on a traffic island, or at a long traffic light—anywhere that affords enough time to step into traffic with your box of pastries. Don't handle the donuts with your hands.

As with the soft drink giveaway, don't ask, "Would you like a donut?" Rather the question is "Which would you prefer, a glazed or a chocolate?" They get a donut, a connection card, a very brief explanation of what's going on, and something to ponder on their way to work.

If you find evening outreaches difficult for your group, this one fits the bill. If your typical 8 to 5 business people can go to work just a little late, they will be able to pull this one off with no trouble and touch a hundred or so people—all before the beginning of the workday.

This is a very quick, high-volume ministry that is full of little

ten-second conversations. You'll have to be brief with your comments—you're in traffic, after all. A word of caution: In your enthusiasm, watch the traffic signals. Designate someone on your team as a traffic person to keep an eye on the changing traffic lights.



**IN ACTION:** Donuts are not as popular in Kenya as they are in the United States, but people still eat breakfast. A group of creative Christians there came up with the idea of giving away bananas during morning drive times. They attach a connection card to the banana with a rubber band. The outreach is so popular, they are becoming known in their city as the "banana Christians"—a name that doesn't sound so nice in English, but fits the Kenyan culture just fine.

## 4 ASSORTED GIVEAWAYS (5+ PER TEAM)

EVERYONE LIKES TO GET something for free, especially if it can be eaten. Our church has given away different kinds of treats over the years, and they all seem to work well. The key to doing a giveaway is to locate somewhere with a high traffic flow. In Cincinnati, we frequent Reds baseball games where we make several thousand "touches" with incoming fans in the hour before the game.

One summer we gave away literally hundreds of thousands of pieces of taffy—something that is popular and very affordable. To bring the price down we approached an area candy manufacturer and explained our outreach concept. He gave us a great deal.

Chewing gum (by the pack) can be purchased in large quantities for a reasonable price. Large versions of a single piece of candy (for example, one-inch diameter LifeSaver candies in the single pack) can be purchased at Sam's Club stores nationwide. Attach an appropriate connection card, and you're on your way.

It's difficult to determine how many items you'll need when you first begin with giveaway projects. It will take a few trial runs to determine

WHERE TO GO

- Campuses
- Downtown
- Commuters

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Folding table
- Donuts
- Pastry wax paper (for handling donuts)
- Connection cards
- Wet naps (to clean up after—you'll get sugar on your hands)

LEVEL