

**BEST PRACTICES FOR ESTABLISHING THE
UNBINDING THE GOSPEL SERIES IN YOUR CHURCH**

MAY 20, 2010

Summary of Series

Unbinding the GOSPEL/HEART are for the majority of mainline churches, where members would rather go get a root canal than think about evangelism. *GOSPEL/HEART* is what most mainline churches need: “*pre*-evangelism.” These resources help the whole church change its habits to reflect practices of members and leaders of highly effective mainline evangelistic churches. They begin to pray daily, to talk about their faith with each other & to take steps toward significant faith conversations with friends without a faith/church relationship. *Unbinding Your Church: Pastor’s & Leaders’ Guide* outlines process from the beginning.

Unbinding Your SOUL is for small groups that are ready to invite! Ask friends who don’t go to church to join you in an experiment in Christian prayer & community. Use *SOUL* in new churches, new members’ classes, young adults’ groups, churches that have done the full Gospel/Heart process, and for “on fire” groups in typical congregations.

**TESTED STEPS FOR USING THE
UNBINDING THE GOSPEL/HEART PROCESS**

1. Pastors – read *Unbinding the Gospel (red ribbon)*. Do you like it? Does it feel as if it will be a fit for your people? If you’re not sure, ask a key lay leader to read it and meet you for lunch in two weeks to discuss it.

*Martha Grace Reese may be available for a phone conference call
consultation with groups of pastors at this point.*

*To participate in a call, each pastor
must have read **GOSPEL** and liked it!*

Contact us through www.GraceNet.info to discuss a call.

2. If you read *Unbinding the Gospel* & really like it **PLEASE DON’T preach or do a newsletter article about it!** That:
 - A. doesn’t help &
 - B. creates resistance

(Preaching won't help. A newsletter article won't inspire. Be quiet. Operate by stealth. Let the group process and the Spirit start working with people. You're trying to help a lay movement emerge, not give them more information.)

3. Read the Introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 of *Unbinding Your Church (green ribbon)*.

4. Skim *Unbinding Your Soul (yellow ribbon)* to read 70 stories and quotes from churches that have worked with the Unbinding coaching process to see the typical trajectory of mainline churches praying, talking about faith and beginning to reach out beyond their walls. Quick version: (a) read the Introduction, (b) Read the last 3 pages of the book, the story of the *Unbinding Series* in the largest United Methodist Church in Illinois, (c) read chapter 7, (d) starting with chapter 1, read all the sidebar quotes.

5. Start a small group (8-10 people plus leaders) of your quickest adapters to do a test study of *Unbinding the Gospel*. Ask the key leaders you think will like it best. (Order one copy per person – they contain individual prayer journals.)

6. Do the study **for 8 weeks in a row (don't try it with your once-a-month church board)**. We're seeing that these studies are interesting, but result in disappointing statistical outcomes. This experiential process needs the intensity of weekly sessions.)

- a. Combine Chapters 1 & 2, then spend a week each on Chapters 3 through 8, combine Chapters 9 & 10.
- b. Begin the prayer journals at the back of GOSPEL the day *after* you discuss Chapter 3.
- c. Pastor should lead the first group.
- d. Select 8-10 of your most enthusiastic, strongest leaders for this first study - your quickest adapters for the first study. (This study trains co-leaders for any subsequent groups.)
- e. Support prayer journal engagement by:
 - i. opening each meeting with a 10 minute check-in, asking "How is your prayer going?"
 - ii. Let participants select prayer partners during the 2nd meeting
- f. Spend half the group time talking about prayer and doing the group exercises at the ends of the chapters. Spend the other half talking about the chapter content. (The experiential piece of this is crucial to actual change in churches.)
- g. Maximal group meeting time is 1 hour - 1.5 hours.
- h. Optimum group size is 8-10 participants with 2 leaders.
 - i. Order an individual book for each participant. We see that when married couples share, no one marks in the book, and they don't use the prayer journal.
- i. Pastors - please pray seriously for this group each day. Do the prayer journal with them. Facilitate the group (or co-lead it) as transparently as possible.

7. After the test study, read Chapter 2 of *Unbinding Your Church*. Discuss with the group

whether **GOSPEL** has been helpful with your people. If so, you could keep going.

Martha Grace Reese is available to help with your evaluation in another conference call with your group of pastors. If you are invited to form a coaching group (with church board approval), formal coaching would begin at this point.

8. Next steps are to do small group studies of **Unbinding the Gospel** with all of your functional leadership – at least 20% of your average worship attendance (include youth group leaders and teachers of all Sunday School classes and existing small groups). Large churches should do a staff study. Include the musicians *early* in the process.

9. If your 20% wants to keep going (keep giving them choice points!), you're ready to plan an "E-vent," our name for a six-week, all-church saturation study of **Unbinding Your Heart (purple ribbon)**. **HEART** is a 6-chapter version of **GOSPEL**, with a different prayer journal. Use **Unbinding Your Church**, the Leaders' and Pastor's guide, downloadable resources on www.GraceNet.info, including the *Unbinding the Gospel Community*.

10. Offer God your time and attention during the 6-week E-vent. Don't schedule other church meetings. Let this feel like a "Sabbath," a rest. During the six week, everyone junior high & older:

- a. prays individually
- b. meets with their prayer partner and with their small group weekly,
- c. worships weekly, with all of worship - sermon, music, liturgy - wrapped around the theme of that week's chapter. See **CHURCH** for all resources, including children's Sunday school lessons & music plans.

11. Congregations reach almost double the rates of congregational involvement with Lilly Endowment-supported coaching. Congregations without coaching average 45-50% of average worship attendance participation in the E-vent. Congregations participating in the *Unbinding the Gospel Project* average 85% congregational saturation. *The greater the congregational involvement in Unbinding Your Heart studies, the greater the chance of significant congregational transformation.* Contact Martha Grace Reese at www.GraceNet.info for more information about Lilly 2:1 matching grants for coaching.

12. Steps 1-11 can take 18 months. This process is organic. It's participatory. Facilitate. Support. DON'T teach! It requires a long runway. Don't rush it. The goal is not to "do a program." The goal is to support a lay movement as it develops.

Note: We see statistically significant, transformational changes in congregations in which at least 85% of their average worship attendance participates in a small group study of **Unbinding Your Heart**. The church in Story 4, chapter 7 of **Unbinding Your Soul** is the world record holder so far! The church had gradually declined in worship attendance from 275 to 110 over a 35-year period. The co-pastors are wonderful. They had served the church for five years, won trust, and they pray. They pray seriously. And they took this process very slowly, methodically, and with room for the Spirit! They began with 110 people in worship. 159 people participated in small groups. Average worship attendance for the same 3-month period a year later was 160. Ten adults were baptized. 145% of their average worship attendance participated in small groups. The

congregation grew 46% in average worship attendance over the previous year. This is a great example illustrative of the pattern we're seeing. Generally speaking, the higher the percentage of people who prayerfully study *Unbinding Your Heart* in small groups for six weeks, the greater the impact on the congregation.

INVITING: *UNBINDING YOUR SOUL*
(YELLOW RIBBON)

E-vent momentum. Our research shows that the more quickly you start your initial pastor-led facilitators' study of *Unbinding your Soul* after an E-vent, the greater the chance of a continuation of your E-vent momentum and significant numerical growth. Don't let things go back to normal - move right to ***SOUL!***

SOUL is the "unbinding" model for actual, invitational evangelism. Typical mainline churches get ready for ***SOUL*** with ***GOSPEL/HEART*** "pre-evangelism." ***SOUL*** helps them invite unchurched friends or recent visitors to try an "experiment" (some churches call it a "test drive") of Christian faith and community. (See www.GraceNet.info, then select *Multimedia / Videos / 1st Presbyterian, Gainesville Florida Unbinding Your Soul college group to see a very exciting video!*)

We are seeing exciting outcomes using *Unbinding Your Soul* with:

- Churches that have studied ***GOSPEL & HEART***
- New churches
- New members' classes (with church member mentors)
- Young adult, high school & college groups
- New visitors
- Members' friends without a church background, or "de-churched" Christians

Important Change!

Ignore instructions in intro & Facilitators' Guide to start church groups on the last half of *Unbinding Your Soul*. Beta testing shows that church people need a longer runway before they invite their friends into the "Experiment." Do a first study with church groups, straight through, Chapters 1-8. Then invite friends to do a 4 week Experiment. We are going to change the instructions in the next printing. Only instructions will be different - the chapters will be identical, so there will be no need to replace books.

CONCEPTS & STEPS:

1. Read the Introduction (pp. xi-xiii) & Facilitators' Guide (pp. 133-144). Ignore the parts about starting at Chapter 5 and the timetables on pp. 137-37. Pay attention to all the "how to lead a group" and process suggestions. We are publishing a 2nd edition of ***SOUL*** in fall, 2010. Chapters will be identical. *All essential changes are in this document.*

2. **Continue your intercessory prayer group.** Don't stop the prayer!

3. **First SOUL group: Pastor leads group of key congregational leaders - potential group facilitators.** Start as you started **GOSPEL** - with a small group of 8-10 key leaders, some of whom may want to continue leading groups. Study **SOUL** from chapter 1-8, working through the prayer journal and the exercises thoroughly.

4. **Church Groups: Pastor continues leading facilitators' group as facilitators lead church groups (chapters 1-8).** Some members of the facilitators' group may be led to form an intercessory prayer team. Pairs of facilitators lead church groups (see Facilitators' Guide, **SOUL**, p. 133 and following). Facilitators' group continues to meet weekly to talk about progress in their groups and to pray together for groups and the church. We find that continued pastoral leadership is crucial in support of the leaders. This is a leadership development group!

5. **"Experiment Groups:" church groups invite friends for the 4-week Experiment in Faith & Community (chapters 1-4).** Church members may invite unchurched friends, new visitors, new members. Some **SOUL** church groups (step 4, above) serve as mentors for new members classes, using **SOUL** as the new members' first class experience of the congregation. Remember: People may be intimidated by the idea of inviting friends, even after an E-vent! Some church group members may invite 3 friends to join the group. Others may invite none. Some invited friends may not accept; others may bring their *own* friends along! Don't worry about the outcome of invitations. Just try it. (See pp. 101-02 for invitation suggestions.) Groups with 14 members should divide, with one of the pair of facilitators going with each new group. Ask another member of each group to be a co-facilitator.

6. **"Experiment Groups" can opt to continue for another 4 weeks (chapters 5-8).** The groups should operate with strong 4 week commitments, but they can continue to renegotiate for more 4 week segments, alternating between the halves of the book. At the end of chapter 8, the group can keep going, with experiment group friends inviting *their* friends into the groups!

7. **Two suggested time-tables.**

Schedule A - For churches doing a Lenten E-vent:

- **Facilitators' Group** (led by pastor, ch. 1-8) - 8 weeks, Sept. 15- Nov. 15th of same calendar year
- **Church Groups** (led by pairs of facilitators - Nov-15-Dec 15th (chapters 1-4) and Jan 15th-Feb. 15th (chapters 5-8))
- **Facilitators' Group** continues meeting as a leadership/intercession group same weeks church groups meet
- **Experiment Groups** - members of church groups invite friends (chapters 1-4) - Lent
- **Experiment Groups could choose to keep going** (chapters 5-8) - Eastertide toward Pentecost
- **RENEWED Experiment Groups** - some members, especially the new ones, may want to keep going and REPEAT chapters 1-4 after Pentecost
- *Etc., etc. (there's no pre-determined end - groups may choose to continue at their own pace.)*

Schedule B - For churches doing a fall-E-vent:

- **Facilitators' Group** (led by pastor, chapters 1-8) - 8 consecutive weeks, ending just before Easter
- **Church Groups** (led by pairs of facilitators, chapters 1-8) - mid-Sept through mid-Nov.
- **Facilitators' Group** continues meeting as a leadership/intercession group - same weeks church groups meeting
- **Experiment Groups** - members of church groups invite friends (chapters 1-4) mid-Nov through mid-Dec.
- **Experiment Groups** could opt to continue (chapters 5-8) - mid-Jan, ending before Lent
- **RENEWED Experiment Groups** - some members, especially the new ones, may want to keep going and REPEAT chapters 1-4 during Lent.
- *Etc., etc. (There's no pre-determined end - groups may choose to continue at their own pace.)*

Supporting Sermons, Music & Resources: We are developing 7 sermons (by Dawn Weaks, who wrote the *Unbinding Your Heart* sermons) & music resources to work with the Church Groups and the Experiment Groups. Sermons will be available by fall, 2010, music resources by February, 2011.