

PRESERVING THE FRUIT: FOLLOW-UP

Follow-Up *with new believers* Step-by-Step

For the follow-up with new believers coordinator

Thank you for committing to assimilate new people into your congregation. Over the course of the four weeks, September 19-October 17, **we are following up with every person across Montana who responded to an invitation to worship with a Montana Southern Baptist church on Harvest Sunday, both those who did not and those who did place their faith in Jesus.**

For the purposes of **ACROSS MONTANA 2010**, new believers are defined as those newcomers who made the decision to place their faith in Jesus. Follow-up with them is essential. New believers have become part of the family of faith; you definitely want to lovingly care for them.

- 1. Create a systematic, workable plan for follow-up.** The plan should include both (1) *immediate follow-up* and (2) an *ongoing process* of connecting them to the life and ministry of the church. The ultimate goal is to place the new believer onto a road of discipleship that will assist in developing him or her into a mature follower of Christ and a reproducing witness. Develop a simple, easily-understood plan that includes a time table and tracking of visits made. An effective follow-up strategy will provide realistic opportunities for church member involvement.
- 2. Involve many individuals from your church.** The most obvious church members to involve will be your pastor, and leaders and members in the small-group ministry of your church. Be sure that each person understands the importance and the goal of follow-up, as well as how his or her individual effort contributes to the whole.
- 3. Begin follow-up on Harvest Sunday.** Work with the Harvest Sunday coordinator to develop a simple process for collecting information from new believers when they pray to receive Christ on Harvest Sunday. The information will need to include home address and phone numbers; you may also want to get e-mail addresses.
- 4. Prepare gift bags or baskets to be used in follow-up visits.** Prepare a small gift—with church information and/or newsletter, snacks, tea or coffee, and a novelty item—for each person or family to be visited. In addition, be sure to give new believers a discipleship resource such as *Beginning Steps* (available from the North American Mission Board).
- 5. Train church members to make effective visits.** Prepare those who visit to rejoice with the new believers in their salvation and to introduce the discipleship resource. Use the visits to get acquainted, ask how you may pray for them, pray *with* them (as well as continue to pray for them in the days to come), and be alert to opportunities to minister to them. Be sure that church members can answer questions about the church and are prepared to give a testimony of what Jesus means to them.

PRESERVING THE FRUIT: FOLLOW-UP

Follow-Up Principles

For the follow-up with new believers coordinator

Before you begin, you may be asking the question, “**Why follow up and how do I do it?**” Here are some thoughts as you prepare yourself and others:

Follow-up is critical for newcomers who visit a church. Experience shows that the first four weeks following a non-churched person’s first visit to a church are critical. This is when he or she is most receptive to the church and to the Gospel. This receptivity gradually declines. If no contact has been made between the church and the newcomer in four weeks, the newcomer will become indifferent to the church again.

The small group is your church’s most effective evangelistic tool. A small-group, relationship-oriented ministry—such as your church’s Sunday School or Bible study classes, or outside-the-church discovery groups (see information regarding Discovery Groups elsewhere in this packet)—is the most effective venue for non-churched people to explore Christianity. In small groups, not only can they ask questions about Jesus Christ, but they see in others first-hand what it means to have a changed life because of the Gospel. Also, through small group connections, seekers experience Christian living alongside believers.

Research shows:

- A church will baptize one out of four hundred (1:400) people she tries to reach outside a small-group ministry.
- A church will baptize one out of two (1:2) people she enrolls in a Sunday School class, involves in a small-group Bible study, or engages in a discovery group.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) of non-churched Americans will attend a small-group Sunday School class, Bible study, or discovery group if invited.
- Only twenty percent (20%) of non-churched Americans have ever been invited to a small-group Sunday School class, Bible study, or discovery group.

The small group is your church’s most effective evangelistic tool. You want to connect newcomers to an age-appropriate or affinity-based small group as soon as possible.

Follow-up is one of the most important aspects of discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship are like two sides of the same coin. They are both necessary. The Bible calls a new believer a "babe" in Christ. As a baby, new Christians need much attention and care during their formative years. Those who place their faith in Christ must enter into an ongoing process of discipleship. Therefore, a concise, well-planned process for the purpose of growing and maturing believers is critical follow-up for new believers.

PRESERVING THE FRUIT: FOLLOW-UP

Sample Plan for Follow-Up *with new believers*

For the follow-up with new believers coordinator

Follow-up actually begins on Harvest Sunday, with greeting newcomers, gathering their contact information, and providing a high-quality worship service they will appreciate and enjoy. The immediate follow-up plan then continues for four weeks, with a variety of contacts from your pastor, small-group leaders, and others.

Also, the plan for *new believers* should include having church members pray for each new believer by name, matching him or her with a spiritual mentor, enrolling each one in an age-appropriate or affinity-based small group, and preparing for his or her baptism.

Week One

Goal: Connect new believers to the church

- On Monday morning, a welcome letter is mailed from the pastor to each new believer who prayed to receive Christ on Sunday. The letter is addressed to the new believer by name and personally signed by the pastor. In it, he celebrates their salvation experience and confirms a scheduled follow-up visit.
- On the scheduled day, the pastor visits, taking a discipleship resource such as *Beginning Steps* (available from the North American Mission Board) to review with the new believer. The purpose of the visit is three-fold: celebrate the new believer's re-birth, explain the spiritual disciplines that will enable him or her to grow in the faith, and introduce conversation about baptism.
- For the new believer who participated in a small group, the leader of the group visits, taking a gift (as described earlier), celebrating the salvation experience, and enrolling him or her in the small group; a member from that group contacts him or her by phone.
- For the new believer who did not participate in a small group but attended the worship service, someone from a small group that best matches the new believer's age or affinity visits, taking a gift, sharing information about the small group(s) available to the new believer, and inviting him or her to consider visiting one or more of them.

NOTE: In the event that the new believer is a child, the same careful attention applies. As the pastor and small-group leaders follow up, they address the child directly but include his or her parent(s) or guardian(s) in all discussions.

Week Two

Goal: Empower new believers as a part of the church

- On Sunday, greeters are on alert to spot new believers returning from Harvest Sunday. They have memorized their names in advance and greet them by name. Greeters are also prepared to show new believers to the age-appropriate or affinity small group in which they have been enrolled or to which they have been invited in Week One.
- On Monday morning, a second letter is mailed from the pastor to new believers. Like the letter the week before, this one is addressed to the new believers by name and

personally signed by the pastor. In it, he recognizes their spiritual commitment and invites them to complete a church evaluation form. If the evaluation form is enclosed with the letter, he provides a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which new believers can return it. By sharing their experience with the church via the evaluation, new believers are empowered and begin to participate early on in the church.

- For the new believer who participated in a small group on Week Two, the leader follows up with him or her by mailing a postcard of welcome from the group and inviting him or her to a coffee fellowship the following week, held in a location other than the church building. A second member of the group contacts him or her with a brief welcome.
- For the new believer who has yet to participate in a small group, the leader from the small group that best matches his or her age or affinity contacts him or her, sharing information about the group such as its purpose, general make-up, and value to the lives of those who participate, and inviting him or her to join them next week.

Week Three

Goal: Create a sense of belonging for new believers in the church

- On Sunday, greeters continue to call new believers by their names, as well as provide greeter service for them.
- On Monday morning, a third letter is mailed from the pastor to new believers. Like the letters before, this one is addressed to the new believers by name and personally signed by the pastor. In it, he recognizes their involvement in the church, expresses appreciation for their insights shared on the church evaluation form, and finalizes the details of the upcoming baptismal service. Printed invitations to the baptismal service should be enclosed with the letter; the new believer can use them to invite family members and friends to his or her baptism.
- Small group leaders host the coffee fellowships for new believers who are newly-enrolled in their groups. During the coffee fellowships, group leaders and members share the purpose of their group and brief testimonies of what the group means in their lives. If possible, the pastor also visits with the group leaders, members and new believers in these informal settings.

Week Four

Goal: Celebrate with new believers

- On Sunday, greeters continue to call new believers by their names, as well as provide greeter service for them. They congratulate new believers on their baptism and make sure that each one gets to the appointed place at the appointed time.
- Following the baptismal service, the church hosts a reception for the newly-baptized believers and their guests. At the reception, guests are invited to meet the pastor.
- Before the end of the week, a certificate of baptism and photo from the service is mailed from the pastor, celebrating with the newly-baptized believers.
- Small group leaders and members continue to make contacts with new believers. One or two weekly contacts with brief, welcoming statements are sufficient. The idea is to continue to engage new believers and answer questions they may have, thus making them feel more comfortable and heightening their sense of belonging in the group and in the church.