



## Releasing the Outreach Network of Your ABF – May 08



Want a simple and fun way to reach out with the Gospel and invite people to church? Cultivate the incredible network God has given to your ABF. Relationships are the 21<sup>st</sup> Century key for reaching people for Christ. The “hidden” potential of your church is: active participants x the sum total of their friends, relatives, neighbors, and people with whom they work or go to school.

Here’s how it works in your ABF.

1. Give everybody an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper. Print these sheets with a circle in the middle. In the upper, left-hand corner, provide a number of lines under the title “Friends.” In the upper, right-hand corner, provide a number of lines under the title “Relatives.” In the lower, left-hand corner, provide lines under the title “Neighbors.” In the lower, right-hand corner, provide lines under the title “Friends at Work/School.” Now draw an arrow from the center circle to each of the corners, pointing both ways. This is called a sociogram.
2. Hand these out at your next ABF gathering. Provide a teaching on how the New Testament Church grew primarily through web relationships. Today we would call them networks. Focus on the evangelistic potential being among those we already know. They are our friends, relatives, neighbors, and people at work or school. They are people with whom we have a relationship. Because of that relationship, we carry some influence with them. Teach your ABF members how to identify when a person is receptive to faith matters: when they have a crisis or challenge; when they discuss spiritual issues; when they have a major transition in life (divorce/death of a loved one/birth of a child/retirement/etc.).
3. Ask those people in your ABF to put their name in the circle and the names of the people in the four categories on the lines in each corner. Ask them to list people they know who are functionally unchurched. This includes people who say they belong to a church but don’t know the name of their pastor or priest. Ask them to limit it to those people who live within a 20-minute traveling distance from your church. Also, limit the list to those people who they see at least once every two months. Give them enough time to carefully think through their list.
4. Have some fun! Provide them another piece of paper where they can put their name on it, and then ask them to guess how many people, collectively, the members of your ABF will mention, totally, among their collective network of people they know who are functionally unchurched. Have them turn in that separate piece of paper with their best-guess figure on it. Provide a prize for the one with the best guess. I know of one ABF where the leader offered a free meal for the person and their spouse at a restaurant of their choice, within 50 miles of the church.
5. Ask them to post this sociogram somewhere they will see it almost every day. Ask them to glance at it as often as they can and pray for those people. Underscore the fact that you are not asking them to evangelize these people or preach to them, but just pray for them. Let them know that if there is any change in the spiritual status of any of these people in the future, you would like them to report it during the ABF sharing time.

6. Then, on another piece of paper, ask them to provide the e-mail (or mailing address) of each person they listed. Promise you will not contact them and use their name. Instead, tell them that every time there is a special event the church will send a general letter of invitation to all those in this collective network. Invite people to worship services, especially at Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. If you have any other special events at church, like a hog roast, invite them to that, too. Whenever the letter is going out, remind the members to pray for these people in the network, to receive this invitation with interest. Don't be surprised if some of the members of your church personally invite these people—even though you have never asked them. After all, they pray for them almost daily!
7. As for the collective network of people over whom your ABF has influence, and, for that matter, all the ABFs at your church—most people will be totally blown away by what huge potential God has already put in place through relationships that already exist!

**Submitted by: Kent Hunter**

Kent Hunter is a consultant to churches and leads Church Doctor Ministries ([www.churchdoctor.org](http://www.churchdoctor.org)). He is also the author of *The Jesus Enterprise: Engaging Culture to Reach the Unchurched*, where the network idea is explained further, along with over 200 other ways to reach unchurched people.