



Just Walk Across the ... Foyer –November 08

Interview with “Advance Scout” Imogene Gilbert

Bill Hybel’s book, *Just Walk Across the Room*” encourages believers to step out of their comfort zone into the “zone of the unknown” that could point someone to faith. Our church is beginning to share “just walk across the room” stories and it has been inspiring! One of our men, who didn’t care much for Hybel’s philosophy of church ministry, reluctantly read the book and was moved to tears. He caught Bill’s heart for evangelism and God broke him.

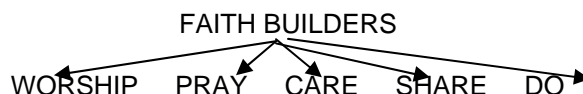


Imogene Gilbert has been practicing this principle of walking across the room within the walls of Hope Church for years! We kind of think she walks across the “foyer” to help people attending Hope Church feel welcomed and if they have not found a place to belong in a people group such as a midsize group or small group or one of our serving teams, she then invites them to her multi-generational midsize group, the Faith Builders ... and some come! I look at Imogene as an “advance scout” for the Faith Builders community. An advance scout represents the group and intentionally searches for potential members.

I asked Imogene some questions to help understand her heart and passion for people at a deeper level.

Tell me about your Faith Builders community.

To me Faith Builders is my “little church” within the “big church”. We are a group that cares for one another, we pray for one another, we socialize and have fun with one another, but most importantly, we worship God together. In Faith Builders we are encouraged to ask questions and share our own interpretations about the Bible. Right or wrong, we are made to feel that what we have to say is important. We are blessed with having a group of people who are capable and knowledgeable enough about the scriptures to teach others. As a group, we have a giving and loving spirit to do God’s will both at Hope Church and also in our support for our many outreach programs.



You have had a unique ministry of meeting people, before and after church services, and inviting them to your community, what led you to do this?

Even as a teenager, and throughout my adult life, I have always liked to make new friends and build relationships. When most teenagers want to distance themselves from family and family get-togethers, I always enjoyed being with them.

I have a genuine liking for people and God has given me a gift for remembering (in most cases) the names of those I meet. I am not hesitant about approaching visitors to church and, with a smile on my face, begin talking to them and trying to make them feel welcome.

How do you pursue people to invite them to come? (What do you say? Are there any cautions to consider?)

I first introduce myself and then tell them we're glad they have visited Hope Church. I ask them if they live nearby which can lead to more conversation – be it their hair, dress, or their family members that arrive with them. I do NOT invite them to community first – maybe later depending on how the conversation goes. People are wary of getting involved too soon so I just “play it by ear”. I love this aspect of my volunteer work at Hope because, once again, I am dealing with people and I am a “people person.”

I try to remember and associate something with the people I talk to - either their jobs, their family, their previous church or their activities. If I can remember what they have shared with me on their previous visit, and if I can remember their names, they will respond to me. I also tell them, depending upon their response and my gut feelings about them, that I may call them the following week. I try not to push myself on them or put down the other church they may have attended. I try to accept them as they are and avoid being “holier than thou”. The serious talk can come later when and if they continue coming to Hope.

Any other advice? Dos or don'ts? Etc.,

Try to be genuine and friendly. Try to be helpful when they ask questions. If I don't know the answer, I will direct them to the right person/place. Don't tell people what they “should” do. Try to get them to “suggest” what they would “like” to do and move in that direction. Of course I eventually brag about Faith Builders and what a good community it is. Be a good listener!

Share some success stories

“I” do not have any success stories. The glory belongs to God!! If I ever reach the point where I start patting myself on the back, then I should let someone else do this work. I do get teased a lot by other Faith Builders when a new couple attends our community. They make a joking comment that “Imogene twisted their arm and invited them”. I do have several couples who thank me for directing them to Faith Builders. I am most grateful for those comments.

Share about a person who hasn't taken you up on your invitation, but you sense they might need to

I have been in touch with a lady and invited her to church and some of our social activities several times. She professes to be a Christian and I believe her – I just can't understand why people like this (a Christian) won't attend church somewhere. She doesn't want to commit herself to making the effort to attend. She lost her husband about 2 years ago and this may be a factor - she doesn't want to take that first step to attend ALONE. I will continue inviting her and to pray for her.

What advice would you give to people who might consider doing this type of “inviting” ministry?

Pray first of all that this is God's will for you. We each have been given gifts by God to succeed in some type of ministry. If you feel that you don't have the courage or the personality to talk to first time visitors, then perhaps there is another area of ministry for you. Don't be discouraged or impatient if you don't have prompt and successful responses. Continue your prayer life and let God lead. If we succeeded 100% in inviting people to church on the first try, our church would not be large enough to accommodate all the people.

Final Thoughts

I believe there are lots of “people persons” who love God and if challenged to a mission to reach others as an advance scout for their midsize group, they would do it! They just might need that direction and permission to go for it. Who might be that person in your community? Pray, go, and challenge someone to accept this mission.

Rumor has it that if you Google the name “Chuck Norris” it will tell you that you cannot find Chuck Norris, he will find you. Well, if you visit Hope Church you will not find Imogene Gilbert in the foyer ... she will find you!

By Steve Lizzio, Pastor of Adult Ministries at Hope Church in Mason, Ohio and Director of ABF Resources.