

Making Friends for Jesus

Initiating and Maintaining Relationships for Evangelism



by

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with Pam Bridgehouse

for

Lutheran Latino Ministries

2021

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Lutheran Latino Ministries is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and a registered tax-exempt organization.

Introduction

Deaconess Marta Luna, has worked with Lutheran Latino Ministries as a missionary evangelist since 2003. She is a gifted evangelist, and has been since childhood. At age 10 she began attending a local church in her home town of Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. Her skills at evangelism bloomed. By the end of the school year many students in her class and even her teacher were pursued by the Holy Spirit through the testimonies that were shared and some started attending the church. Many are still Christians today.

During her years with Lutheran Latino Ministries Deaconess Marta's work has resulted in the establishment of three Spanish-language worship groups that are members of Trinity and Ascension Lutheran Churches in Portland, Oregon, and Hope Lutheran Church in Woodburn, Oregon.

In this booklet we have attempted to capture some of Deaconess Marta's wisdom. We pray it will be helpful to you as you share the Gospel and make disciples.

When you first meet someone how do you approach the subject of church/God?

Helping people with daily needs opens a door to start a friendship. If we want to bring God's message to them, we first have to bring them God's love, not ignoring what has happened in their lives.

In the first place, when I meet people, I talk with them in a friendly manner. A simple, natural conversation can break down any barrier. Usually, they bring up different things to talk about and I try to stick to topics that interest them. We talk about simple everyday things like personal problems family. This helps me know a little more about their needs, giving me the opportunity to introduce myself, letting them know about my service of spiritual help in the community. When they share with me about something that's not going well in their life, I provide information about some resources that can help them and immediately I share the gospel message, the love and goodness of God toward them. After that, I give them information about the church's weekly programs. I invite them to come to the church and its events. I give them my phone number in case they want me to visit them or if they have questions, and ask them if they would like to share their phone number with me so I can stay in touch.

Having this connection with the people is not always easy. It's not the same with every person I meet. It all depends on what's happening in their life. Although the people seem to be very religious and have their own faith backgrounds, I avoid any discussion about religion and I focus on the universal love of God for all people. Religion and spirituality are integrated into the life of the Latino culture. Of course, everyone has their own understanding and practice that depends on how they have been taught, or what they have heard from parents, relatives, friends, etc. In order not to offend them I give them a tract, not as people who are new to faith in God, and this helps us to open this conversation a little more.

It's not the same with everyone I meet. Sometimes these steps take time. It doesn't take too long to introduce God into the conversation. Every person is different and as God's servants, we always have to ask for the Holy Spirit to guide us to the right moment to introduce them to God's Word.

The first time you visit a home, what do you do? What do you say?

When I visit a home, it's not always a formal visit. It may be that I am just passing invitations to a church event. I just greet people and say just a few words about the program, but I really take the opportunity to greet them personally, in case they have more questions. That way they can get to know me. That helps me with the second time I come to pass invitations; they will be more familiar with me.

When I meet people for the first time, I don't ask if I can visit them. We need time to get to know each other. Customarily I don't talk about religion. This is a topic I prefer to avoid in order not to make anyone feel bad. They almost always have their own religion. If I talk about religion, they will think I am trying to convince them to abandon and change their faith. My purpose is to bring them to faith and a relationship with the Lord. Through a normal conversation on any topic, I can focus on God's love and provision for them.

It is unusual for someone to invite me to their home. If I am serving in a Christian community program (like Love INC), sometimes people can ask me to visit them. They already know it is a Christian program that gives the volunteers like me the freedom to pray for them. I can ask them if they need pastoral care, or if they need help finding a church. When they ask me to visit we check what date and time work for them.

When I work independently of those programs, always I always ask for God's guidance. I try to make the visit a little differently. I give people time to build a friendship. Then I can speak more openly about God. When I visit them in their home, I ask if we can have a devotional and a prayer. When I have a devotion we talk about the Bible. I give them the opportunity to comment about the topic and read part of the Bible reading.

When it is time for prayer, I ask them what they would like me to pray for. Depending on how flexible the person is, I invite them to church; if they are not ready, I continue with visits and devotions in their home to avoid scaring them away.

What do you say on the next visits?

We continue with devotionals and prayers in their home. After a while I have been visiting them for a certain time, I try to help them come to church. Once they start coming to church, I stop the devotionals in their home because they can have the study and devotions at church.

How do you get someone involved in helping at church?

People don't easily understand what it means to help at church. I try to be an example for them. When they need some favor from me (transportation, information, etc.) I help them. I take them to church. They see that I am helping them and sometimes they ask me if they can help. For example, some families, when they hear me say I will clean the church, they say, "I would like to help, too. Let me know when will come to clean the church and I can come with you." Sometimes when we already have established a relationship and they are attending church I ask them for help. What I see is that they are happy to do it.

People are grateful when I have helped them in their life. They respond by saying, "If you need help, let me know."

Consider, for example, a lady I visit. Helping at church makes a difference in her way of thinking and acting, and her attitude about church. The first time she came to church she stayed outside. She didn't want to come into the building. She sometimes came just for help from the clothing from the shed. If there was a Bible study, she didn't come into the building. That happened as many as four times.

She and her mother saw that people are happy to be there and were getting familiar with the others. I never insisted that they come inside. I spent time with them outside while the Bible study was going on inside. We talked about different topics, also related to God's Word. When I saw that they didn't want to come into the building to be with the other people during the Bible study, first, I knew God put me there to bring them the peace knowing that He is with them. So now, how am I going to help these people when they don't want to talk about church? I spent time with them outside in the yard, and let them decide when they wanted to go in. It's important for people to feel they are the ones deciding to go or not to go.

Days, weeks, or months later, after I had helped them with different things and in different ways like taking them to get medicine, taking them to doctor appointments, etc. I knew what their situation was. When I called them for the first time, I asked how they were. Now the young lady asked on her own initiative to come to church.

I took her to apply for a job. I had a friend at that place. When I talked with that friend, she was happy to help the young lady and recommend her to her manager. Now she has a job. This will really help with their needs, to support herself. Now she has money for rent, etc. That's really big. That is something really positive for her after all the crisis she has experienced. That is a really big thing.

We continue in relationship with them, and praying for them that they keep walking with the Lord.

What scriptures or devotional materials do you use for home visits?

For my family visits I focus on bringing and leaving a positive message with God's Word, helping them recognize Jesus as their Savior.

I want to keep the message simple and short.

The devotionals I use most of the time are easy to handle.

Keep the message simple and easy to understand, and lead easily into the Bible reading. They contain a simple message for those who want to study the Bible.

There are great Christian resources that are very useful and accessible either in books or by online available as devotionals. Some of those I use for many years are: *Our Daily Bread*, *Portales de Oración* (Spanish version is out of print). This material can also be used for Bible studies. Other materials that are very useful are those from Lutheran Hour Ministries in English and *Cristo Para Todas las Naciones*. I have other excellent materials for Bible study but the time for visits is limited.

Honestly, I try to be careful not to use more time than the family has for my visit.

Link to Lutheran Hour Ministries: paraelcamino.com

When you pass flyers inviting people to events at the church, how do you approach them? What do you say?

The Hispanic community is friendly however when it is time to give them flyers with a religious purpose, I try to do it in moves them to see the benefit of the information on the flyer and not scare them away or ignore me. If I make them feel safe then they will give me a chance to share the flyer and the information. I identify with them as a neighbor, mother, immigrant, religious, etc. When they feel well treated, not judged, they themselves help pass the information on to others.

I approach their house or apartment door and introduce myself saying that I am sharing information about an event at church or the community. I try to make them feel comfortable asking me questions. I answer them as best I can. I mention the availability of transportation in case it's necessary and tell them they can call if they have questions.

How do you keep yourself safe when you are visiting an apartment complex or a home for the first time?

With most of the families I visit, my connection is directly with the women. When I meet them and we build a friendship, the husband of the woman will also be friendly.

When visiting a couple, I communicate through the woman so no one gets the wrong idea about the relationship.

When I need to visit a man, I take someone with me, preferably a married couple, to avoid any appearance of impropriety and to make the man more comfortable.

How do you maintain relationships once they have been established?

Once the people consider themselves part of the congregation, meet other people and understand the calendar of seasons and activities in the church, then I begin to let them walk by independently. It is the moment for the Christian to be at the stage of formation that they would take the steps to be an adult Christian, participating on their own initiative to be involved in the congregation and put their talents to use in serving God and others.

Once they have arrived at this independence, I let them know that they can count on me. They call me to talk or pray together. I tell them what is happening in the work I am doing, the projects and needs, and I ask them to help and work together with me. It might be in prayer or in helping with the needs of people in the community. Usually, they respond very willingly. It fills them with happiness that we would count on their help in the ministry that has been a help to them and still helps them.

Prayer:

O God, You desire that all people would believe in Your Son Jesus and have eternal life. Send Your Holy Spirit to open the hearts and minds of the people I will visit. Give me Your words of love and comfort and truth, and give them faith to believe. Give me compassion and patience, and give me strength and energy to do the work that You have prepared for me to do. May every word I say and every act of service bring honor and glory to Your holy name and the spread of Your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.