

INTEGRATING APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM TRAINING
AT LONGVIEW POINT BAPTIST CHURCH,
HERNANDO, MISSISSIPPI

A Project Proposal
Presented to
Dr. Adam W. Greenway
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by
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PROJECT PROPOSAL

Integrating Apologetics and Evangelism Training at Longview Point Baptist Church, Hernando, Mississippi.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to equip the members of Longview Point Baptist Church in Hernando, Mississippi, to be more effective in personal evangelism by integrating apologetics training with evangelism training.

Goals

There are five goals for this project that will serve to evaluate its effectiveness. The first goal is to increase the confidence of church members for personal witnessing. One of the survey instruments will measure the confidence level of members concerning personal evangelism. It is the thesis of this project that one of the primary reasons people do not witness is fear that they will not have the appropriate responses to questions or objections. The training events will be designed to instill greater confidence in this area.

The second goal is to equip members to answer questions from a postmodern culture. Our current evangelism training falls short. We teach an outline with accompanying Bible verses. If a conversation deviates from the outline, our members are ill equipped to keep the spiritual conversation going. Spiritual conversations, not canned presentations, are becoming increasingly important in the postmodern age.

The third goal is to engage lost people with a cogent presentation and defense of the gospel. Once our people are equipped with more confidence and answers to tough questions, they will be better prepared to enter witnessing conversations. This project will afford people opportunities to practice personal evangelism.

The fourth goal is to engender in church members a desire for further study in the area of apologetics. One class cannot fully prepare someone, but it can be an effective introduction to the discipline. I hope to train a group of people who want to pursue more knowledge in order to be effective witnesses for Christ.

The fifth goal is personal. I hope as a pastor to become more effective at personal evangelism and biblical communication. One of the major roles of a pastor is to lead by example. This role is true in many areas, and especially in personal evangelism. A greater focus on apologetics will sharpen my public proclamation of the gospel as well as my personal witnessing encounters.

Ministry Context

Longview Point Baptist Church is located in Hernando, Mississippi, the county seat of Desoto County. Desoto County is growing explosively and has been listed as one of the fastest growing counties in the United States.¹ In 2003 there were 45,733 households, and in the United States Census Bureau projects that in 2008 there will be 59,374 households,² a growth of 2,700 households per year.

¹Les Christie, "100 Fastest Growing Counties," CNNMoney.com, March 16, 2006 [on-line]; accessed xx/xx/xxxx; available from http://money.cnn.com/2006/03/15/real_estate/fastest_growing_US_counties/index.htm; Internet.

²U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing. ESRI Business Information Solutions, Inc. forecasts for 2003 and 2008.

The population is projected to increase from 125,215 in 2003 to 159,402 in 2008. That is growth of twenty people a day moving into the county, which breaks down into 7.5 family units a day.³ Desoto County is experiencing remarkable growth.

Six years ago, Longview Heights Baptist Church had a vision to be involved in church planting. Longview Heights is located in Olive Branch, Mississippi, in Desoto County. The congregation recognized the explosive growth that Desoto County was experiencing and learned that the county seat town of Hernando was poised to be a part of this growth.

Many members were making the twenty-minute drive from Hernando and could serve as the core group for a new church. In 2001, the decision was made to plant a new church in that area. They hired me as a church planter, secured funding from the local association and the state convention, and began to publicize their intentions.

Approximately thirty-five people committed to be a part of the core group for the new church. The core group prepared for launch Sunday by securing a facility, advertising, and preparing for different ministry areas. On September 8, 2002, Longview Point Baptist Church was launched with 124 people present for worship.

From the beginning, Longview Point had to deal with space issues. Members met in a converted hardware store on the downtown square, a facility of about 6,000 sq. ft. that seated about 150 for worship and provided six rooms for education. The decision was made to provide small group opportunities on Sunday mornings for all ages, comparable to the Sunday School format. These Connect Groups had to be creative in finding places to meet because of space limitations. By the time Longview Point left the downtown square for its first new facility, classes were meeting at a local funeral home, in restaurants, and in office buildings.

³Ibid.

As the church made decisions to provide more space, they saw steady growth. They went to two worship services on Sunday mornings in the spring of 2003 to provide needed space. There was an instant increase in attendance from about 130 people on average in worship to 170 people. By September 2003, one year after the launch, worship attendance was consistently over 200. By the end of 2003, small group attendance averaged over 150.

In the fall of 2004, the decision was made to provide three morning worship services and two small group hours to provide more space. A year later worship numbers were inching above 300. In November of 2005, Longview Point moved into its first facility. This building is multi-purpose with worship space for 500 people and about eighteen spaces for education. Upon moving into the new building, worship attendance immediately jumped up to over 400 on average. Currently, an average of 300 people are involved in Sunday morning Connect Groups.

Membership has grown as quickly as attendance. Since 2002, Longview Point has added 581 members. Most of these have come by transfer of letter from another Baptist church. Many of these were members of other churches but not active members. They could be classified as Christian unchurched. Many of the transfers have moved into the area and sought a church family. Some of those who transferred their letters of membership came from other churches for a variety of reasons.

Of the 581 new members, 93 have come by baptism and 54 have come by statement of faith. In observing these numbers, it is obvious that the church has grown mainly through transfer growth. Longview Point is reaching unchurched people, but most of the unchurched are Christian unchurched. It is evident from these patterns of growth and membership that Longview Point has sought to make growth decisions, but needs to place more emphasis on conversion growth.

Longview Point has the potential of relating well to the Hernando community. The age group breakdown of the congregation resembles the age group percentages of the area. For example, in a ten-mile radius from the church's physical address, the largest age group is 35-55, which makes up almost 30 percent of the total population. This age group at Longview Point makes up 29 percent of the total congregation. Also, Longview Point is predominantly white in its ethnic makeup. The Hernando area is over 82 percent white.

The largest segment of the population is the 35-44 age group, 15.8 percent of the total population inside the ten-mile radius surrounding the church property. The next two biggest age groups are 45-54 at 14.5 percent and the 25-34 year olds at 13.7 percent.⁴

The median age of the population is 36.5. The median household income is \$52,713.⁵ Again, the church reflects a very similar makeup, so the members ought to be effective in reaching their neighbors. Longview Point is a middle class church with a majority of median adults. Based upon these numbers, the makeup of Longview Point closely resembles the makeup of the community.

Longview Point has tried a variety of approaches to evangelism. From its inception the church has maintained an ongoing outreach program with the primary purpose of following up with visitors to the church. The overwhelming numbers of visitors combined with the lack of substantial participation have rendered this outreach of marginal value.

⁴North American Mission Board Center for Missional Research. *Hernando Demographic Information*. Prepared August 21, 2006.

⁵Ibid.

Attempts have been made to engender more involvement from church members. The night for follow-up has been moved from Monday to Tuesday to Sunday and then back to Tuesday. None of these options has proven effective at involving more people.

Longview Point has also attempted servant evangelism approaches. They have tried to engage the community in many creative ways, including chocolate give-a-ways, passing out popcorn packets in neighborhoods, and giving out light bulbs. These servant evangelism approaches have not yielded much in the way of conversion growth. A residual effect of this approach to evangelism is the visibility that it gives the church in the community. This visibility is difficult to measure, but anecdotally seems to be a positive result of servant evangelism.

Another approach to evangelism is event evangelism. The church has also tried to engage people with the gospel through big events. From block parties, to VBS, to Fall Festivals, Longview Point has made a concerted effort to draw people, with the intention of sharing the gospel. These events have allowed the church to share the good news with many people, but again the number of people saved as a result is relatively small.

In 2005, the church had the opportunity to begin a ministry at the local county jail. This ministry involves Wednesday night worship services and Saturday morning discipleship. Around 25 men made professions of faith in 2006 through this ministry and 75 men in 2007. An encouraging development is the number of men who have left jail but are involved in the life of the congregation. Five or six men have either joined or are actively attending Longview Point after their release from jail. This ministry is being used by God for the authentic life change of many troubled men.

The most effective way the church has found to involve the congregation in evangelism is by emphasizing relational evangelism. The 2006 church-wide theme was *Share*

Your Story, Tell His Story, our emphasis designed to equip church members to develop their personal testimonies and to share the gospel message. The challenge was issued for every church member to share his or her testimony and the gospel with at least two people during the year. Not every church member responded, but seventy-five cards were turned in, indicating that an attempt to share Jesus was undertaken. Again, the church has not seen many saved, baptized, and assimilated through this approach, but the evangelistic consciousness of the congregation was heightened.

If the church is to pursue a personal, relational model of evangelism model, more extensive training will be needed. Learning to defend the faith must be a part of the training. This apologetic component will instill more confidence to share the gospel and more knowledge to share the gospel effectively.

The strengths of Longview Point are many, including land, facilities, and location. The church owns about fifteen acres on a very visible corner of Hernando. On this valuable piece of property the 25,000 sq. ft. facility was completed in November of 2005. The church is easy to find, and its new facilities appeal to many people.

Another strength is the mission's emphasis of the church. Longview Point has attempted to model an Acts 1:8 focus in ministry. This focus includes giving over 25 percent of the budget for missions. Some members have taken short-term mission trips to numerous places including Myanmar, Uganda, Toronto, Beirut, Paris, Rome, Montana, and Arizona. Many are active in church planting locally. On Easter of 2005, Longview Point launched its first church plant in the neighboring community of Senatobia, Mississippi. That congregation, Lifepoint Church, is running an average of 500 people in worship. In 2007, Longview Point launched another church in the area around the community of Tunica, Mississippi.

One of the weaknesses of Longview Point is the lack of congregational involvement in ongoing evangelism efforts. Again, this issue has been confronted in many ways, but securing lasting involvement from more than just a few has been a definite challenge, evidenced in part by the ratio of transfer growth to conversion growth. A related matter is the weakness of follow-up after an evangelistic encounter. The fact that 75 people turned in *Share Your Story, Tell His Story* cards but almost none of these evangelistic encounters led to baptisms demonstrates a concerning lack of follow-up.

Rationale

In 1 Peter 3:15, the Apostle Peter exhorts the churches he is addressing “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” This admonition addresses an area lacking among our church members. Peter does not encourage his audience to present a canned, memorized outline; he instructs them to have a ready defense. Apologetics training will equip our people to fulfill this admonition.

Another aspect of evangelism implied in this verse is the need to carry on spiritual conversations. This verse teaches that Christians are to be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks, which necessitates spiritual conversation. If people ask Christians about their hope, Christians need to build those relationships that will lead to those kinds of discussions.

Most of our members are not prepared for or confident about prolonged spiritual conversations. Additionally, the climate of the Bible Belt is changing because of the influence of postmodern thinking. If we are going to reach people with the Gospel, our members must be equipped to share the gospel and defend the faith.

The method to be pursued is to provide a training environment focused on apologetics,

showing how this discipline relates to evangelism. The training will focus on building relationships in order to engage lost people with substantive, spiritual dialogue. The training will also introduce people to some of the basics of apologetics. Finally, the training will actually be field tested as class participants are sent out to share Christ.

Definitions and Limitations

The purpose of this project is to integrate apologetics training with evangelism training to produce more effective witnesses for Christ. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 defines evangelism as follows:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.⁶

Apologetics is the branch of Christian theology that seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith. Its goal is to demonstrate to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith.⁷ Evangelism declares a message; apologetics demonstrates the veracity of that message. These two disciplines then go hand in hand, especially in prolonged spiritual conversations.

The limitations of this project are as follows. The length of this project will be fifteen weeks, two weeks to research attitudes towards evangelism and proficiency in apologetics, a

⁶The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "The Lausanne Covenant"[online]; accessed 18 February 2008; available from <http://www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html>; Internet.

⁷William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994).

nine-week class that integrates apologetics with evangelism, two weeks of engaging lost people, and two weeks to evaluate the project.

The second limitation deals with the participants in the project. The number will be limited to twenty people. To be involved in this training, participants must have prior evangelism training. The material will build on evangelistic techniques in which participants need to be versed because time will be inadequate to lay an extensive witnessing foundation. Most of the time will focus on the apologetics element.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this project is to increase confidence for personal witnessing. At the beginning of the project, class participants will complete a survey to measure their level of confidence in sharing their faith. After the project the same survey will be given, and the two sets of results will be compared.

The second goal is to equip our members to answer questions from a postmodern culture. During the first two weeks, class participants will be sent out to do “Man-on-the-Street” interviews designed to illustrate the prevalence of postmodern thinking in our community. This approach will help class members better understand personal witnessing. It will also give anecdotal evidence as to how pervasive postmodern thought is in our area.

The third goal is to engage lost people with a cogent presentation of the gospel and if necessary, a ready defense of the gospel. This goal will be realized by sending class participants out to conduct spirituality surveys with the intention of sharing Christ, a practical application to help them to put what they have learned into practice, which would also have the residual benefit of increasing confidence.

The fourth goal is to impart into the participants a desire for further study in the area

of apologetics and how that study will relate to evangelistic efforts. Introducing them to many helpful materials and offering follow-up training will achieve this goal. These avenues will be an outlet for those wishing to build upon the material learned in the class.

The fifth goal, personal improvement in the area of apologetics and its application to personal evangelism and preaching, will evolve during the preparation stage of the seminar. As I study and build the curriculum, I expect to grow in this area. As I develop proficiency, I will have ample opportunities to put truths into practice through preaching and witnessing.

Chapter Outline

Chapter

- I. Integrating apologetics and evangelism training (20-25 pages)
 - A. The purpose of the project is presented.
 - B. The four goals of the project are outlined.
 1. The first goal is to increase the confidence of church members in the area of personal evangelism.
 2. The second goal is to equip church members to answer questions from a postmodern culture.
 3. The third goal is to engage lost people with a cogent presentation of the gospel with a ready defense of the gospel if necessary.
 4. The fourth goal is to engender in church members a desire for further study in the area of apologetics.
 5. The fifth goal is to grow personally in preaching and personal evangelism through this study of apologetics.
 - C. The church and community context are described in detail.
 1. The history of the Longview Point Baptist Church is given.
 2. The current status of the church is described.
 3. The context and demographics of Hernando and Desoto County are given.
 - D. The rationale for the project is explained.
 1. The cultural climate is being shaped by postmodern thinking.
 2. Many evangelistic training models do not deal with skeptical responses to evangelistic presentations in a substantive way.
 3. Our members feel ill equipped to hold prolonged spiritual conversations that deal with the issues a skeptic might raise.
 4. This project will seek to prepare members for evangelistic effectiveness in a postmodern climate by integrating some basic apologetics material with evangelism efforts.

- II. A biblical and theological basis for integrating apologetics and evangelism training (20-25 pages)
 - A. The New Testament has several passages that speak of the importance of apologetics when seeking to share the gospel.
 - 1. First Peter 3:15 is a standard text that is appealed to in support of the integral role of apologetics. This passage presents the need for apologetic readiness in the midst of a hostile culture.
 - 2. In Philippians 1:7, Paul teaches the vital relationship between defending the faith and sharing the gospel.
 - 3. Acts 17 contains the sermon from Paul on Mars Hill. In this passage a model of apologetic understanding, philosophical awareness, and cogent gospel preaching is presented.
 - B. What areas of apologetics should be studied first? The Bible presents different elements as crucial in understanding the message of redemption. Effective witnesses need to learn how to articulate and defend these elements.
 - 1. Paul's sermon at Mars Hill presents the existence of an eternal Creator in his gospel presentation. In light of this emphasis, the training time will focus on the Intelligent Design argument and the cosmological argument in defense of the existence of God.
 - 2. Paul's sermon at Mars Hill, Peter's sermon on Pentecost, and many other passages present the resurrection as the central element of the gospel. Thus, another aspect of training for this project will focus on historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:16-21 defend the divine inspiration of the Scriptures thus demonstrating their reliability. The gospel message depends on the authority of Scripture. Members will be equipped to defend the reliability of the Bible as the source for truth.
- III. Theoretical and practical issues in integrating apologetics with evangelism training. (20-30 pages)
 - A. Contemporary and popular evangelistic training methods and programs will be evaluated as to the amount of attention given to defending the faith.
 - B. The importance of apologetics will be explored.
 - C. The best apologetic approach in relation to evangelism will be discussed.

The goal of this project will be to incorporate offensive and defensive apologetics. These will be employed based upon the issue that is at stake.

IV. The methodology used to execute the project (15-20 pages)

A. Two-Week Preparation

1. Participants will be recruited based upon certain criteria.
2. Participants will be surveyed as to evangelistic confidence, involvement, and effectiveness.
3. Participants will conduct “man-on-the-street” interviews to illustrate the changing philosophical environment in which we live.

B. Nine-Week Training Class

1. There will be a review of basic evangelistic training.
2. This will be followed by apologetics training, highlighting three key issues. These issues are the arguments for the existence of God, the historicity of the resurrection, and the support for the reliability of the Bible.
3. The class will end by teaching how to integrate apologetic elements into sharing the gospel.

C. There will be two weeks of practical application of the material as members are sent out to engage people with the gospel.

D. The last two weeks will be spent in evaluating project effectiveness by surveying the participants in the class. The survey results will be compared to the results from the same survey given during the first two weeks. This comparison will help to measure confidence levels and understanding of basic apologetic elements.

V. A final analysis, evaluation, and reflection on the project’s effectiveness will be presented (10-15 pages)

A. Introduction

B. Evaluation of purpose

C. Evaluation of goals

D. Evaluation of methodology

- E. Strengths
- F. Weaknesses
- G. Theological reflection
- H. Personal reflection
- I. Conclusion

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 describes the ministry context of Longview Point Baptist Church. This description includes a history of the church and the present situation of the church. It also includes a detailed demographic analysis of the community of Hernando, Mississippi. This chapter will also list the goals for the ministry project, which come from the rationale for undertaking this attempt at integrating apologetics with evangelism training.

Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological basis for this project. It examines in detail 1 Peter 3:15, Philippians 1:7, and Acts 17, these texts that highlight the importance of the discipline of apologetics in undergirding the task of world evangelization. Evangelism is defined as sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ and apologetics as defending the veracity of that message.

Chapter 3 interacts with the theoretical and practical issues concerning this project. This chapter demonstrates the shortcomings of different evangelistic approaches if a conversation deviates from the outline taught in the training. It also deals with the importance of apologetics and offers arguments as to the best approach of apologetics to use for different stages of evangelism.

Chapter 4 will outline the methodology used during the course of the project. A detailed account of the entire process will be shared. The point of this chapter is for someone to be able to use it to duplicate the project in a different setting.

Finally, chapter 5 will vigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The survey instruments in particular will indicate if people grew in confidence and skill in presenting the claims of Christ. This evaluation will help determine whether this project is a success that can be helpful for other churches and church leaders.

Research Instruments

I. Pre and post-seminar questionnaire for class participants

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your confidence level and your knowledge level relating to sharing your faith. This research is being conducted by Wade Humphries for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply answer the questions before we begin training and you will answer the same questions after we complete the training. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information about the people taking this class:

1. Please write your name: _____

2. Circle the number of years since you came to faith in Christ:

1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 20+

3. Age

___ Less than 20

___ 20-30

___ 31-40

___ 41-50

___ 51-60

___ 61+

The second section of this questionnaire deals with your confidence in sharing your faith:

1. How many evangelism training courses have you been through? _____

2. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lowest, 10 being highest) how confident are you in sharing the gospel with people? _____

3. Please circle the following that best indicates how often you share your faith.

2-5 times a week 1 time a week once a month once a year almost never

4. Put an X by the primary reason why you do not witness more.

___ Fear of hostility

___ Laziness

___ Worry that you do not have sufficient knowledge if challenged

5. Have you ever had a class that taught you how to defend what you believe?

Using the following scale, please write the number that best corresponds to your feelings in response to the following statements:

1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Uncertain	4 Strongly Disagree	5 Disagree
___	1.	I feel confident in sharing the basics of the gospel message.		
___	2.	I feel confident sharing my personal testimony.		
___	3.	If someone has the desire, I have the knowledge to lead them to faith in Christ.		
___	4.	I feel comfortable initiating spiritual conversations with people.		
___	5.	I feel confident that I can share why I believe God exists.		
___	6.	I can explain why I believe the Bible is the Word of God and is a reliable source of truth.		
___	7.	I know how to defend the reality of the resurrection of Christ.		
___	8.	I am intimidated by skeptics of the faith or those that are hostile to Christianity.		
___	9.	I am interested in learning how to defend the faith.		
___	10.	I worry that my lack of knowledge will affect my credibility when I try to share my faith.		
___	11.	I believe the more difficult issues that arise should be handled by pastors or theologians.		

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Calendar

Date to submit chapter 2	September 2008
Date to submit chapter 3	October 2008
Pre-Training Questionnaire	January 11, 2009
Begin Training	January 25, 2009
Conclude Training	March 22, 2009
Send out witnessing teams	March 28, 2009
Send out witnessing teams	April 4, 2009
Post-Training Questionnaire	April 12, 2009
Submit chapter 4	April/May 2009
Submit chapter 5	May/June 2009
Revised copies sent	August 2009
Oral examination	October 2009
Graduation	December 2009