



WWW.GRACENET.INFO

UNBINDING THE GOSPEL PROJECT
MARTHA GRACE REESE, DIRECTOR

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What's the Main Thing?

Q #1: What's your understanding of evangelism? What did you find in the Mainline Evangelism Project?

Q #2: What is the Real Life Evangelism Series?

Q #3: What is the Unbinding the Gospel Project?

Q #4: There are 3 books in the Real Life Evangelism Series. We're just starting using *Unbinding the Gospel* with our leadership. If I only read one thing to get ready, what should it be?

Q #5: How do you help leaders get excited about the study of *Unbinding the Gospel*? My people aren't exactly breaking down the doors to study evangelism!

Q #6: How long does it take a group to study *Unbinding the Gospel*?

Q #7: I'd really like our church board (elders, session, council) to read *Unbinding the Gospel*, but they only meet once a month. How can we do that without messing up our normal agenda?

Q #8: If we're in a coaching group, do we have to do an E-vent when everyone else does? [the "E-vent" is the 6-week, all-church saturation experience using *Unbinding Your Heart*.] Is this a rigid program?

Q #9: How big should a coaching group be? How do you do one of these studies?

Q #10 We're excited about being part of an *Unbinding the Gospel Project Coaching Group*, but \$800 to \$1000 each is a lot of money for us right now. If the Lilly Endowment gave a grant for this, why isn't it free? I understand that's only about a third of the actual

cost of the groups. When I explain this to our church board, what can I tell them that this money gets us? We're a big outreach church. Can I tell them this is not just for us, but is outreach, too?

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE MAIN THING: The Unbinding the Gospel Project exists to help churches become vibrant faith communities that reach out to new people. We believe that this can begin to happen when pastors and lay leaders do two things:

- (1) lead as spiritual leaders, and
- (2) follow a systematic, sustained, intentional process to help individuals and churches change long-standing habits of trusting their own plans and processes and increase our trust that God will lead.

This is hard work! Most of us have not yet learned to live this kind of faith, or to lead clearly out of that faith.

The coaches and the staff of the Unbinding the Gospel Project commit ourselves to work with churches that have chosen to do the hard work of change. We will ask a great deal of you: prayer, focus, organization, commitment to the research process, timely responses, leadership, courage to change, and real openness to whatever the Spirit is doing in your church. We will be in prayer with you. We will do everything we can to help your church reach more deeply into faith and prayer, to learn to articulate your faith more naturally, and to begin to take steps toward sharing that faith. We'll be with you every step of the way, cheering you on.

Q #1 What's your understanding of evangelism? Wat did you find in the Mainline Evangelism Project?

A: The Lilly Endowment gave us 4 years to snoop around great mainline evangelistic churches – to ask questions, to listen, to watch, to talk with the youth groups, the teachers, the elders, the pastors, the groups that were passionate about community service ministries. We interviewed over 1200 people. We found several really important things:

1. Great evangelism exists across the theological spectrum.
2. Evangelism is faith-sharing. It arises out of profound, personal relationships with Christ.
3. Mainline Christians that are doing significant faith-sharing are motivated by how much God means in their lives, and by their vivid sense that being in relationship with God and in a faith community would really help other people.
4. Faith-sharing is relational. It's just talking with friends comfortably and inviting them to church. It's NOT arguing people into positions or telling them a lot about the Bible. It's talking with friends about our faith. Even we shy mainline Christians can share our faith, once we get those old cartoons out of our heads!

Q #2 What is the Real Life Evangelism Series?

A: *The Real Life Evangelism Series* is based on the Mainline Evangelism Project, a four-year Lilly Endowment study of mainline congregations doing great evangelism. It is an integrated set of thoughtful, experiential resources that help normal churches move into authentic faith-deepening and faith-sharing. The basic book of the series is *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*, by Martha Grace Reese, JD, MDiv Reese has prepared two more books that expand *Unbinding the Gospel* into a faith and faith-sharing saturation experience for your whole congregation. (*Unbinding Your Heart* and *Unbinding Your Church*)

Unbinding the Gospel provides the fundamentals for clergy and church leaders. (Pastors and leaders of small groups for leaders should use *Unbinding Your Church* from the very beginning.

Use *Unbinding Your Heart* (a six-week version of *Unbinding the Gospel* with 40 days of individual prayer exercises) as a small group study for your ENTIRE church after your leadership is excited about faith and faith-sharing. The six-week saturation experience (we call it an "E-vent") has individual prayer, group study and all-church worship and activities components.

Unbinding Your Church helps you work with your leaders from the very beginning. It suggests ways to recruit groups, lead them, and how to pray for (and with) them. It furnishes the tools to tie all of the elements into one, seamless process. With sermons, fully integrated music and worship resources, organizational forms, lesson plans, prayer coaching, calendars, and more, you can help the Spirit jump-start faith-deepening and faith-sharing in your church.

Q #3 What is the *Unbinding the Gospel PROJECT*?

A: The Lilly Endowment has awarded a major new grant (2008-2011), with two stated purposes:

- (a) to support 1000+ churches to use the *Real Life Evangelism Series* (*Unbinding the Gospel*, *Unbinding Your Church* and *Unbinding Your Heart*) in the most systematic and effective ways possible to follow God in their own contexts, and
- (b) to help pastors and lay leaders in these 1000 churches work together as "communities of inquiry," in essence as field researchers, as they discover, evaluate and work with the dynamics of congregational transformation through faith development and faith-sharing.

Martha Grace Reese, Director of the original [Mainline Evangelism Project](#), the research project in which the *Series* is grounded, will serve as the director of this new research, the "*Unbinding the Gospel Project*." An extraordinary group of gifted [coaches](#) will work with Reese in this four-year project.

Q #4 There are 3 books in the Real Life Evangelism Series. We're just starting using *Unbinding the Gospel* with our leadership. If I only read one thing to get ready, what should it be?

A: I'm sure you've already read *Unbinding the Gospel*, since you've started it with your leadership. Even if you haven't finished *GOSPEL*, go directly to *Unbinding Your Church: the Pastor's Guide* (do not pass go, do not collect \$200) and read the Introduction and chapters 1, 2 and 4 for how to start well with your church, how to form groups and how to lead one of these study/prayer groups in the most effective way possible. Then skim the rest of *CHURCH*.

Unbinding Your HEART is a six-week version of *GOSPEL*, with the addition of an individual prayer journal. Get a copy of Heart to skim now, but you won't use it until 20% of your leadership has studied *GOSPEL* in small groups. Then you will use *HEART* for a six-week saturation study/experience for the whole congregation.

Q #5 How do I help our leaders get excited about the study of *Unbinding the Gospel*? My people aren't exactly breaking down the doors to study evangelism!

A: Start with yourself! This is about faith and faith sharing, so start with your own faith and your own prayer.

- (a) Read *Unbinding the Gospel* yourself, see what you respond to in it. What feels important? What motivates you? What makes you crazy? What makes you think? What makes you want to do something different? Then *YOU* pray daily that the right group of people will want to study it with you.
- (b) Give individual copies of the book to 3 or 4 of your most insightful leaders. Ask them to read it, mark up the parts that they love or hate, then meet for a long lunch one day to talk about it all together. If they like the book, ask them if they can think of 4 or 5 or 6 other people who might want to form a leaders' group to study it together. (If you have several groups, great!)

In most churches, if you start with the right people, once they have studied the book for several weeks, things start to take off. *Spend at least half of your GOSPEL study sessions doing the exercises at the ends of the chapters. People will want to avoid them, but be persistent – we see the real changes in churches that do the exercises, and don't just talk!*

Then you can all make plans together to help the rest of the church leadership get on board. I'd build it slowly and let your lay people be the ones who help others get excited. I would start with the people you think will be most enthusiastic and build from there. I cover this topic extensively in the introduction (pp 5-7) and chapter 1 of *Unbinding your CHURCH*. Take a look at that right away and I think it should help you discern what would be most helpful in your situation.

Q #6 How long does it take a group to study *Unbinding the Gospel*?

A: Spend 8 sessions studying *Unbinding the Gospel*. It's a 10 chapter book. You can combine the first two and the last two chapters for an 8-week study. (See chapter 1, *Unbinding Your Church* for the best ways to organize groups of leaders, and to lead them.)

Q #7 Q: I'd really like our church board (elders, session, council) to read *Unbinding the Gospel*, but they only meet once a month. How can we do that without messing up our normal agenda?

A: It's great if your church board, elders, session, council studies *Unbinding the Gospel* together – even better than if they each study it in separate groups. These are your real church leaders. Most councils and groups of elders want to be spiritual leaders, but don't quite know how. This can help them assume the mantle of real spiritual leadership and give them the sense of truly serving the church. Do an 8-session, monthly study. If you need to collapse it to a 7 month study, combine chapters 1& 2, 3 & 4 and 9 & 10. Spend a portion of your meeting time talking about the chapter for that month. Pray together. **Do the exercises with at least half of your time.** I urge you to use the exercise on page 129 of *Unbinding Your Church* to begin each meeting. (Again, see chapter 1 of *Unbinding Your Church*.)

Q #8 If we're in a coaching group, do we have to do an E-vent when everyone else does? [the "E-vent" is the 6-week, all-church saturation experience using *Unbinding Your Heart*.] Is this a rigid program?

A: We made a major discovery during the original Lilly Endowment study of great mainline evangelistic churches. There's no rigid model, there's no formula for becoming a church with great faith and wonderful, effective faith-sharing. We did see some essentials, and those are what we're trying to help ordinary churches replicate with the Real Life Evangelism Series.

The key is to pray, to deepen your faith and to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit. There are also some essentials and accountability structures that matter. Help people pray. Help them talk about their faith with each other. Use small groups so people have a feeling of closeness and safety. Go slowly, over time, and help Christ build layers of understanding (and experience) of deeper faith and people's desire to share their faith effectively. Involve everyone in the congregation.

First, work with key leaders. Then train more leaders including your teachers and youth group leaders. THEN you can be ready for the E-vent, the 6-week, all-church saturation study. If your church wants to slow down and do the E-vent later, SLOW DOWN AND DO THE E-VENT LATER! But be careful here. Sometimes the "Let's Slow This Down" noises come from those inner voices in all of us that resist change. Make sure it's the Spirit's timing, not your own resistance. Keep moving. Follow the Spirit. When in doubt, prayer more and talk with your coach.

Q #9 How big should a study group be? How do you do one of these studies?

A: The best group size is 8-10 people with 2 leaders (don't count the leaders in the 8-10). Be sure to do the essentials. Study the book slowly. Pray *for* the group. Pray *in* the group. **Do the exercises** at the ends of chapters – people will resist this! Please persevere! (See *Introduction of Unbinding Your Church*, pp. 5-7, “the essentials,” and chapters 1 & 4 for group leadership hints. If you don't have your copy of *Unbinding Your Church* yet, you can download the introduction as a sample chapter from our website at www.GraceNet.info. See the section labeled “Real Life Evangelism Series.”)

Q #10 We're excited about being part of an *Unbinding the Gospel Project Coaching Group*. We want to be part of it, but \$800 to \$1000 is a lot of money for us right now. I know that's only about a third of the actual cost of the groups. But when I explain this to our church board, what can I tell them that this money gets us? If the Lilly Endowment gave a grant for this, why isn't it free? We're a big outreach church. Can I tell them this is not just for us, but is outreach, too?

A: You're right - this coaching is both for you and your church AND it will help tremendously as an outreach to other churches. The best descriptions with lists are in the two attached documents: (Coaching Description and Get Ready for Unbinding Coaching). The coaching is incredibly reasonable, but it isn't free because the Lilly Endowment believes (and our experience has shown) that we don't tend to value what we get free. We need to pay something to believe this is an investment. The fee you will pay is only about a third of the actual cost of groups.

Your church's investment provides:

- a. 5 group coaching calls for the pastors and key lay leaders
- b. an individual coaching session between your pastor and your coach
- c. contact with your coach if you have questions
- d. a day-long prayer/planning day for pastors & 3 lay coordinators
- e. a day-long workshop for pastors, lay coordinators and every person in your congregation who has studied *Unbinding the Gospel* (the group will pay for the coach's room, board and local transportation).
- f. e-mail discussions between group and coach
- g. pastors and lay leaders will do reflection papers in advance of each conference call and written responses to phone calls afterward
- h. support and accountability to the group for working through this year-long process, and for individual prayer disciplines
- i. the opportunity to be a vital part of an important national study in church transformation
- j. after your E-vent, you will evaluate what has happened and where God is leading your church. We will host a group coaching call with pastors and two congregational lay leaders of the pastor's choice - it will be a future planning process, so bring your board chair elect, your chair of the elders, whoever is right in your church for institutional clout, consistency and continuity.
- k. a year later, a follow-up call for similar to the call in “j,” above, to provide accountability and to preserve momentum.

Everything we do during the coaching groups, particularly the written reflections, will, with your permission, be factored into the research into congregational transformation that we are beginning. We will be asking both you and your lay people for stories, perceptions and your strategic understanding of what is happening in your church, why you think it is happening, and what advice you would have for others. These perceptions will form the most critical piece of the research. We hope that all of this work on all of our parts will lead to a clear, nuanced understanding of a model of congregational transformation that will be available to churches in the future in the form of books like the Real Life Evangelism Series. So, the short answer to your question is: YES - this coaching/reflection process is for you. AND it will have an important and direct effect that could help thousands of congregations in the future.