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## **Year #2- Year of Invitation Leaders' Guide**

Dear Unbinding Pastors and Lay Leaders -

You've finished your all-congregational study of Unbinding Your Heart and we pray that the Spirit has created a real sense of momentum, creativity and new hope in your church! The church, like a ship, has turned. You now face an enormous challenge to hold the new course.

*Our research is dramatic. This new growth will fade if you don't consciously integrate your new habits of prayer, discernment, conversations about faith and focus on people outside church walls into the institutional life of your congregation. One pastor called this dynamic "the dreaded snap-back." If you keep going, the new patterns have a chance to remaining open to Christ's leadings, responsive to the needs of people beyond church walls. Your church can reach new people and grow.*

This Year of Invitation Leaders' Guide will help you. Please follow it to help your people move the Unbinding prayer and outreach into your committees, task forces and church board, and *out into the neighborhood.*

**Pastors** - We have identified two critically important practices that will help you become more like the pastors of the most highly evangelistic, mainline congregations in the U.S. We ask you to: (1) pray daily and (2) pray for specific people who do not attend your church, with the intention of being open to faith conversations with them, and to openings to invite them to church. We include a covenant here to help you with these practices.

**Church Council** - Please appoint a small Year of Invitation Team, with a team leader who is a member of (and responsible to) your church's governing body. S/he will oversee your work with the Streams of Invitation, and make certain that committees, task forces, the small groups and the council itself are continuing in the practices of prayer and outreach. The prayer team **MUST** continue.

It will be so exciting to see the miraculous changes that God and you help bring into being this year. THIS is the year when the rubber hits the road!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt. Grace". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "G".

P.S. **Caveat:** Our 5 years of research with thousands of congregations shows that a failure to move forward at this point will lead to tears (and the congregation moving from the heights of the E-vent back to the flesh pots of Egypt rather than on to the promised land!). Here are the most typical ways that resistance to change shows up: “We should spend a year really learning to pray before we try to reach out to others” *or* “We’re tired. We just need a little break and then we’ll come back to this Unbinding stuff.” Please! When these thoughts echo inside your head, or when someone says them out loud in a council meeting, let the warning bells peal! Now is the time to embed practices of outreach and invitation into your life and into the daily workings of your church. Be brave! Keep going!



**UNBINDING  
THE GOSPEL  
PROJECT**



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## YEAR OF INVITATION OVERVIEW

### YEAR #2, UNBINDING THE GOSPEL PROJECT COACHING

The **key** to the Year of Invitation (“YOI”) is to help God move your Unbinding practices into the existing structures of your church.

The **goal** of the Year of Invitation is to bear fruit - to reach new people.

You’ve finished your E-vent and the Spirit has created all sorts of momentum! The goals of the first Unbinding year were **pre-evangelism**, designed to help members:

- move into a deeper relationship with God
- learn to articulate their faith more comfortably
- start thinking about people beyond church walls

Our research with thousands of congregations shows that **you must keep going** immediately from the E-vent into your Year of Outreach and Invitation or these changes will fade and not result in faith-sharing fruit. This is a less structured year, because you’re now ready to let these newly formed practices take hold in the quirky, individualized structures of *your* church - your governing board, the committees, task forces, classes, small groups. We want Christ’s Spirit to have free reign to work through you - but you’re going to have to pay attention and experiment with some new ways of operating before it begins to feel more natural.

#### **Establish these practices and structures for your entire Year of Invitation:**

1. **Individual, Daily Prayer** - pastors, leaders, this means us too!
2. **Your Prayer Team** - pray for the church and organize all-church prayer disciplines
3. **Prayer Triads** - begin every council, team, committee meeting all year (p. 26, *Unbinding Your Heart*)
4. **Organize a Year of Invitation Team** to meet monthly, consisting of at least
  - one pastor
  - one designated representative from your church council/board
  - leader of your evangelism team
  - leader of your prayer team

Members of the Year of Invitation Team will design and implement your 4 Streams Plan

**Action Steps for Beginning the Year of Outreach & Invitation:**

1. 2-4 weeks after the Event, hold an all-church “Unbinding Your Year of Invitation Retreat” (see attached plan)
2. Following your Unbinding Your Year of Invitation Retreat, your YOI Team formulates your own “Four Streams Plan” that you’ll work with and implement all year.



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## UNBINDING YOUR YEAR OF INVITATION RETREAT PLAN

*(FORMERLY "UNBINDING THE FUTURE" RETREAT PLAN*

*A FOUR-HOUR LEADERSHIP PLANNING EVENT FOR AFTER YOUR E-VENT)*

**Focus:** To begin this next year's work. We want to begin to let the church's increased openness to prayer and invitation flow into the institutional structures and daily functioning of your church. This time should be a strong beginning to your year of outreach and invitation. How will you *organize yourselves* so that you can most effectively invite others into the great things God's doing? Your Year of Invitation work will focus on four streams of invitation:

- A. Personal**
- B. Functional Committees/Teams/Task Forces**
- C. Small Groups** (*you can use Unbinding Your Soul for small groups*)
- D. Whole church**

**Who's Involved?** Plan a Saturday morning for everyone in the church to pray and strategize. Invite not only all of your committees, teams, task forces, youth groups, choir, small groups leaders, but *everyone* in the church! This is a prime opportunity to involve new people in leadership. Saturday afternoon, key leaders will take what everyone comes up with in the morning and articulate clearly two or three steps you all feel Christ is calling you take as a church in the next year.



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## UNBINDING YOUR YEAR OF INVITATION RETREAT SPECIFICS

**Set this date early and communicate it clearly, *before* your E-vent!**

**Purpose of the *Unbinding Your Year of Invitation Retreat*:** to plan for your Year of Invitation. Start doing normal church business in an “unbinding” way. (You don’t want to go back to “business as usual”! Make specific plans to move people’s readiness to invite into actual invitation.

**Place:** Your church’s building (that’s easy, cheap, accessible and *normal*)

**Who attends? Time frame?**

*9:00 - noon* for everybody

*Lunch* for those who can be there

*1:00 - 3:00* Strategy group who will come up with plan (pastors + whoever makes sense for your church - board, executive committee, futuring team, an ad hoc group of leaders)

**Who leads?** Pastor or lay leader will provide main leadership for full retreat. Work in the morning will be done in the normal groups that do the work of your church. Whoever normally leads is the leader! It’s business as usual, but do it in an “unbinding” way!

**Room Set-up:** Round tables and moveable chairs

## SCHEDULE - UNBINDING YOUR YOI RETREAT

- 9:00 - 9:15 worship, singing. Let everyone be seated anywhere they want, without designating tables or assignments.
- 9:15 - 9:30 prayer triads, use exercise on page 129, *Unbinding Your CHURCH (use this at every church meeting all year)*
- 9:30 - 9:35 *Written Questionnaire: (only if you haven't done this as a congregational survey)*
- Give each person 5 minutes to answer the questionnaire attached as the last page of this plan.)*
- 9:30 *people stay in seats. Committee chairs/group leaders stand up and move to edge of room, holding large signs naming their ministry group*

*Pastor to people (say this, and you can use the first paragraph to invite people to the Retreat):*

1. “We’re ready for our ‘Year of Invitation!’ The Spirit and a lot of great, hard work by [name some of the great leaders], has led us through the E-vent. [Yea!!!] We’ve seen amazing things and heard stories of God changing lives. The Spirit has created momentum, opened a ‘door’ in our church where we can see all those people outside. Right now we are more ready to invite people into a life with Christ and into our church than any of us can remember in years. We’re halfway there. We **want** to invite. But it won’t happen just by wishing. We can’t stop this wonderful process of prayer and study just with ourselves. We’re now ready for our Year of Invitation. We’ve already done some amazing inviting. [Name a couple of examples.] Now, how can we do *more* of that? Prayer will get help us be responsive to the Spirit in the moment, **and** we can help with prayerful specific ideas and action plans: individually, in our teams, and as the whole church. That’s what we’re going to do here today. Pray and ask for God’s guidance with some of those plans.

2. “***Unbinding Your Soul*** will help us in our Year of Invitation. That’s a small-group ‘backbone’ for our Year of Invitation and we’ll all get a chance to do that [next Lent... next fall]. This is not as involved as the E-vent - it’s just a small group experience. We’re already comfortable with being part of a small group. We’re comfortable with an Unbinding Prayer journal. ***Soul*** isn’t about churches - it’s about key themes of our faith journeys, **and** it adds invitation. We will each get to invite a friend who doesn’t go to a church to be part of that. We’ll have opportunities for those of you who want to be part of the leadership to join in [next fall... next Lent]. The small group part of our Year of Invitation is in place. You’ll hear more about that later. This morning is about prayer and asking God to inspire some specific ideas to invite some of the people right outside that door to get closer to Christ or to connect with our church. We’re going to think of four ‘streams’ of invitation: individual, for ministry teams, in small groups, and as a whole church.’ [For ***Soul*** planning options, download *Best Practices for Starting the Unbinding Series in Your Church*, from bottom of home page, [www.GraceNet.info](http://www.GraceNet.info)]



3. “Remember the day during the E-vent when we let the Spirit tell us what to do for a whole hour? Okay, we’re going to do something equally fun right now! Let’s pray silently for 3 minutes. Ask God which committee/task force/ministry team God wants you to work with today. So what if you’ve been on the education committee for 11 years? Ask yourself if you’d like to try something else for just this morning. Ask God where God wants you this morning. (Perhaps team/committee leaders should stay with *their* groups!)

*(Note to Leader: You may end up changing ministry team membership based on this after today. That could spark a little bit of chaos, and an enormous amount of creativity!)*

Pray. After 3 minutes, people stand up. Committee chairs, with signs, move to their tables, and people go where the Spirit’s told them they get to move!

9:45 -10:30 Working session in ministry groups

With the ministry team leader facilitating the discussion, and with a designated secretary to take notes of the discussion, ministry groups work on these three questions:

- What is the big idea you, personally, have taken away from the whole *Unbinding the Gospel*/E-vent experience?
- What are you going to do in your own life to keep the prayer/Scripture/faith-sharing momentum going?

10:30-10:40 Break

10:40-11:30 Working session in ministry groups (cont.) Make sure each group has a recorder.

Go back to your ministry group, and think, for that ministry, what God is calling you to do, practically, specifically, now. Take the first 5 minutes to pray in silence and ask God that question. Let people take notes on 3’ x 5” cards for note-taking during prayer. *ASK GOD! THEN DISCUSS THIS QUESTION:*

What 2 or 3 specific things might Christ be nudging you to do together as a team this year? *(At least one of these ideas must involve some kind of invitation* - how can you include some people not involved in the church? This is easy for mission groups. Finance committee - you may have to get creative, but what about an outreach to friends of the congregation or at the high school - a class on money-management/saving/giving?)

- What will you need to **stop** doing in order to free time to do what you feel Christ is calling you to do?

- What will you do to keep the prayer momentum in your meetings? Will you covenant to open meetings with prayer triads (p. 129, *Unb. Your Church*)? Some other spiritual discipline?

11:30-11:50

Each group reports to the whole group a summary of their answers. Present a written report, give a short oral summary to the whole group.

**Pray in your groups** for those you (individually, in your team, and the whole church) can reach this year, and for your openness to follow Christ to do your part.

LUNCH

**Planning Group after lunch:**

**Summarize answers.** Pray. Planning group (see description above, but tailor for your church) puts together a summary of the groups' answers to the questions.

**Think strategically:** are there 1, 2, 3 specific things that you feel Christ is calling you to do as a church? Pray before anyone speaks. Ask God what the main themes are in two areas:

- a. Practical ministry initiatives?
- b. Practical steps to help embed your prayer/Scripture/sharing momentum into your church's habits?
- c. Practical plans for invitation?

**Pray.** Ask the Spirit to help you discern a plan for the next year.

**Reduce plan to writing.** Over the next week, review and pray about it. A week later, finalize the plan and distribute it to each functional group in the church and the whole membership. (Use the "*Four Streams Plan*" in this *Year of Invitation Guide*)

## FOUR STREAMS PLAN

YEAR OF INVITATION

*Unbinding Action Steps for the Whole Church*

After your *Year of Invitation Retreat*, let the *Year of Invitation Team* come up with a first draft of your *Four Streams Plan*. All church teams will bring the Four Streams Plan to the first YOI call, re-vamp it as necessary, then take the draft to the church council for further discernment, prayer, discussion, reformulation. This is your ongoing action plan (flexible and dynamic) for helping people move into actual outreach and invitation, not just talking about it. Remember: Pray!

So, how's the Spirit nudging your church to help increase each of these 4 streams of invitation and outreach? What are you going to DO?

**First Stream: *Personal Outreach and Invitation*.** We all need to be asking ourselves three questions daily:

- Who am I praying for?
- With whom am I having significant faith conversations?
- Who am I inviting to a church event?

*What will you do as a church to help each member, starting with the pastor, the YOI team and the Council, to keep asking themselves these questions and moving toward action?*

**Second Stream: *Ministry Team Outreach and Invitation*.** Ask each functional, working group in the church - all committees, teams, the council - to do one outreach/invitational project that reaches out to people beyond the church. The youth group may plan a party for unchurched friends. The mission team might do a Habitat Project where everyone brings a friend or neighbor who doesn't go to church. The Stewardship committee could teach a family budgeting class at the apartment complex, with lunch. Get creative!

*1. How are you going to help all your committees get excited about this and come up with their own plans?*

*2. How will the teams report out to the congregation? Videos for worship? Testimonies?*

**Third Stream: All Church Outreach and Invitation.** Review the effectiveness of your all-church outreach, invitation, welcoming and new member integration patterns. Team - go back and look at what members came up with when you studied Bandwidths, Barriers & Bridges in chapter 5 of *Unbinding Your Heart*. (ch. 7 of *GOSPEL*).

1. *Who will do these reviews of your Bandwidths, Barriers and Bridges? What actions steps emerge from these reviews? How will you make sure the best suggestions are implemented?*

2. *What all-church events will you plan (or reshape existing ones) to reach into the community and invite more effectively, less threateningly? A party for children? A golf initiative?*

**Fourth Stream: Small Group Outreach and Invitation.**

Unbinding Your SOUL is designed for your Year of Invitation. Make SURE you use it to invite friends who don't go to church, not just people already inside the church. INVITE!!!

*What's your plan for using Unbinding Your SOUL? (Refer to "Best Practices" document)*

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRAYER TEAM & SMALL GROUPS IN INVITATION**

*Cathy Townley, Coach*

In the first year of UBG, we lay a strong foundational structure for year two, most notably, the prayer team and small groups.

THE PRAYER TEAM is the heart and soul of UBG and also of invitation. Invitational churches are praying churches. Keeping the prayer team going into year two and beyond is critical to the success of the invitational process.

The role of the team leader is to identify, pray for and recruit new persons to the team. The team is always growing and evolving. Just as with UBG, it's not "y'all come." It's finding those who are called to serve in a ministry like this.

The role of the prayer team is twofold, with both functions of equal importance. One is to pray. The prayer team continues to pray for the church, for hearts to soften for God, for the leaders, for invitation to take root, and for God's message of love in Christ to be known in the world.

The other role is to lift up the role of prayer in the church, since it's *everyone's* job to pray, not just the prayer team. This will happen in a number of different ways. One is to "report" at every opportunity the miracles that they see as a result of prayer: in newsletters, at meetings, and especially during worship. One is to pray publicly for people, for example, after the worship service, or at meetings, or spontaneously, when it seems appropriate. One is to keep doing prayer exercises, like the prayer triad exercise at meetings, or to keep engaging people in prayer partnerships. And one is to grow the prayer team, by listening for God to identify new persons who might want to be part of such a ministry.

One thing I have observed is that people on the fringes of church life tend to "wake up" when something deeply spiritual like this begins to take root. Those who are called to prayer may be a surprise. The prayer team leader must pay attention to those signs.

Therefore, the role of the leader is not only to pray and to make prayer visible and integrated in church life, but to continue to organize this ministry, particularly as it grows. Most prayer ministries start very small, sometimes with just two or three persons. It's the consistency and trust that keep them going, and the diligence in prayer and due diligence to the process that allows them to continue even when it doesn't seem like much is happening. It takes time, and God does show up.

The small group structure is also very important in supporting invitation. Most people in today's unchurched world will participate in a smaller, relational, often social venue before they'll come to a worship service. Learning to start and multiply small groups will serve all churches in the invitational process.

## **THE PASTOR'S ROLE IN PROMOTING INVITATION**

Cathy Townley, Coach

Without the pastor and his or her networking, churches have no hope of becoming invitational, no matter how much structure we put into place. In year two of UBG, we stress the role of the pastor in leading invitation.

We live in a very, very unchurched culture. The church has lost relevance. The pastor leads the way to giving the church a voice and new meaning in our postmodern world. He or she spends time getting involved in various community organizations where he or she can talk with others about faith and also do pastoral acts ... like be a chaplain for Rotary, for example. He or she can say grace, and network with others to find out how the church can fit into the culture.

The pastor also must invite. Using the small group structure already in place from year one of UBG, the pastor can start and hand off various small groups based on personal affinity, like sports, as well as more spiritually oriented groups, like *Unbinding Your Soul*.

The pastor also must bring ministry partners from the church with him or her when doing some of these things. The pastor raises up inviters, so that others will do these things in their own circles of influence.

The pastor also influences the body by talking about the mission field during sermons, at meetings, in one to one conversations with others. It becomes a way of life, and the driving force of the pastor's ministry.

I recently heard a new start pastor say that he had reached his goals and is no longer out inviting. This is the gravest mistake pastors can make ... thinking that invitation is over. Invitation is a way of life for Christ followers, and this is the heart of what the pastor must promote.

Of course, all of this begs the question, how does the pastor have time to invite? It's critical that laypersons in the church support the efforts of the pastor by helping see what the pastor can hand off in ministry that someone else can do. Additionally, churches have to make hard decisions about what is no longer a viable ministry to keep doing, but which is taking time from the pastor that he or she can be using to spend in the mission field.

The pastor must free up 25 to 30% of his or her schedule to pursue networking, prayer and work with visitors and new members.

*Additional Resource: Networking to Reach Your Mission Field, Webinar on [www.GraceNet.Info](http://www.GraceNet.Info) / Public Downloads:*

<http://www.gracenet.info/video/ubg%20Networking%20To%20Reach%20Your%20Mission%20Field%204-11%201%202.mov>