

Make a Date

For many years, I've made it a weekly habit to take my bride out on a dinner and a movie date. It's helped keep our relationship fresh and vibrant. We've found that what's most fun of all isn't the movie, but the dinner conversation after the movie. Sure, we debrief the plot, cinematography, and character development, but what's most revealing is that even after over twenty-five years of marriage, we're still discovering new things about each other. "I didn't know that" is a regular comment in our conversations. The more we get to know each other, the closer we become.

There's something about being "out" with others that draws out the best in us. We tend to listen better, to ask better questions, and to be more attentive. Perhaps it's because we're on our best behavior, but regardless of the psychological or sociological reasons, there's nothing like getting out on the town for getting to know somebody.

So, two suggestions here.

First, if you're in a serious relationship and haven't been on a date in awhile, stop reading RIGHT NOW and set one up. Movie, theater, zoo, or just strolling hand-in-hand through some picturesque landscape will get you started. Then make a habit of it – your relationship will be all the better for it.

Okay, now for the second suggestion – the one that will help grow your church. Your church probably keeps track of first-time visitors, returning guests, new members and so on. Each person in each of these groups are especially vulnerable to drifting away from the church. In fact, studies have shown that the average church hangs on to less than 15 percent of their first-time guests by the end of six months. That's a troubling statistic, but you can help your church's track record by doing four things.

First, connect with the church office and get the contact information for visitors, guests, and new members. Let them know you'll be making connections with some of these folks and taking them "out" to lunch, dinner, for coffee, or ...

Second, scan the list for appropriate connections. If you're a married guy, it's not okay to invite another woman out for dinner, unless your spouse is going with you (probably a good idea no matter *who* you connect with). Of course, the inverse is also true. In other words, choose your "date" carefully, tastefully, ethically, morally, and acceptably.

Third, make the call. Introduce yourself, let them know you're from the church, tell them you'd just like to get to know them better, and that you'd like to meet them for [breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee, bowling, or if you've got seats for the Chief's game]. And, I've I mentioned above, it's not a bad idea to take your spouse with you.

[FOOTNOTE: There are, of course, opportunities to *not* take your spouse. If you're a woman and you're making a connection with another woman (or vice versa) it's totally okay to go to tea, coffee, etc. one-on-one.

Finally, once the date's set, go out and have a good time. Get to know them. Ask questions like "What keeps you busy during the week?" or "What brought you to the church?" Don't do small talk very well? Gary Poole wrote an excellent primer I've used in the past: *The Complete Book of Questions: 1001 Conversation Starters for Any Occasion*.

As the conversation blooms, so will the relationship. And even if you decide you'll never be *besties*, building a relationship with the visitor, guest, new member will help them put down some roots into the congregation.