

## Dialogue for Getting Member Referrals

As a missionary you're always told that the key to success is working with the members. This is absolutely true. But I remember how frustrating it was sometimes. We would visit a family and teach a spiritual lesson. Everything would be going great, and then the dreaded question: "Do you know anyone who we could teach?" You get the same answer 99 percent of the time: "Um. . . . you know. . . . I don't really know anyone right now, but I'll be looking for opportunities."

I remember that some missionaries would get so frustrated with the merry-go-round that they would give up working with members. "The members don't want to help in this area," they would say. "I'll just wait until transfers."

As a missionary it's not your job to blame, criticize, or pressure members to help with in missionary work. They know missionary work is important. They've heard all the talks. They don't need more guilt. They need someone to make it easier for them. That's where you come in.

President Chavez, one of my stake presidents in Tegucigalpa, taught this dialogue for referrals to me. As a missionary he used it with great success in his mission in Guatemala. One time he went to do splits in an area where the work had been struggling. His companion was an elder who had been in the area for four months and couldn't wait to get out. He hadn't had any baptisms and was openly negative about the members. "They don't care about missionary work. No matter what we do, they never will give us a referral. I've been here for four months, and I know how they are." Elder Chavez took this as a challenge. Using this method throughout the day, they got over thirty solid referrals. As they left the last house, having received seven referrals from them alone, the doubting elder burst into tears. He couldn't believe it.

If you've ever struggled to get referrals from members, this might be worth trying out. Here's the process. Your first task is to set the tone. You want them to feel the Spirit and remind themselves of the importance of missionary work. There are a lot of ways to do this. I liked to ask them about their background with the Church. If they weren't first generation converts, who was? Their parents? Grandparents? Where did it all begin? I would help them see that they were in the church because someone did some missionary work. What blessings had they received as members? Why was it important to them to be



members? What would they be missing if they weren't? Questions like these are great because it gets them talking; it's always better to hear yourself say, "I'm grateful for . . ." rather than hearing "You should be grateful for . . ."

To help set the tone, you can also share a scripture. I loved to share the classic, Doctrine and Covenants 18:10–18, because verse 18 ties in nicely with a later part of this method. There are many scriptures that can apply, so it doesn't really matter which you use as long as it communicates the value of missionary work.

You can also watch a movie. There's a great one in Spanish called

*Por Cosas Pequeñas y Sencillas* (By *Small and Simple Things*) that has interviews with recent converts talking about how they joined. Your family's own conversion story and other personal experiences are always powerful. Teaching the Principles of the Restoration, lesson 1, is also great. President Chavez liked to teach about the priesthood and the necessity of being baptized by the proper authority to enter the kingdom of God. Whatever works for you. As I mentioned, it doesn't matter how you go about setting the tone; it just matters that you do so, without taking up too much time. This part should not take more than 15 minutes

Once they are in the missionary mind-set, you pull out a piece of paper for everyone in the family, including small children. Make sure to get everyone involved. Explain that you're going to play a game. Ask the family how many of their neighbors are not members of the Church. Then how many classmates. Work associates. Family members. The guy at the local café. Keep mentioning other types of people to get their brains going. Tell them that you and your companion are going to sing a hymn, and while you sing, they are going to see who can write down the most names of people that are not members. As soon as the singing stops, time is up and they can't write anymore.

Before you begin, assure them that this isn't a trap in which they have to give a referral for every name they write down, or else they may limit themselves. It's very important that they engage. Try to make it fun, ask them who they think is going to win; make it a little competitive. This works especially well with kids. I've had times where they write down as many as eighty names.



This method is far superior to the blunt question, “Do you have any referrals?” because it gives them time to brainstorm about all the people they know instead of putting them on the spot. It allows the Spirit to touch their minds and reveal who is ready to receive the gospel. Many times you’ll see them having an “aha” moment as they remember someone they could talk to. They’ll often surprise themselves by how many people they know.

I love what it says in *Preach My Gospel*: “You are surrounded by people. You pass them on the street, visit them in their homes, and travel among them. All of them are children of God, your brothers and sisters. God loves them just as He loves you. Many of these people are searching for purpose in life. They are concerned for their families. They need the sense of belonging that comes from the knowledge that they are children of God, members of His eternal family. They want “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:23), but they are “kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” (Doctrine and Covenants 123:12)” (*Preach My Gospel*, 1).

Try to pick the most spiritual, beautiful hymn possible. “Our Savior’s Love” is preferable to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” as you really want to bring the Spirit into this part.

When you finish singing, tell everyone to put their pencils down. Give time for everyone to compare, see who “won” if you turned it into a competition. Then explain that all of these people that they know might not be ready to receive the gospel. Most probably aren’t. But there are a few that have been prepared and have been placed in your path so that you can help them. But how can we know which ones are ready and which ones aren’t?

We can’t always discern very accurately, but someone can and that is God. He can reveal this knowledge to us through the Spirit, speaking to our mind and our heart (Doctrine and Covenants 8:2). Ask them if they have faith that God can do this. Then ask a family member, preferably the head of the household, to offer a kneeling prayer to ask for guidance.

This will often be a very spiritual moment. After the prayer it’s okay to linger on your knees for a second. Then ask family members to look at the list of names that they had made and seek inspiration to know who is ready. Tell them to put a star next to these names. It could be one name or five.



Then have each member of the family share the names that they felt prompted to mark. Having received a spiritual impression they will feel strongly about doing something to share the gospel with them. Help them know what they can do. It's usually great to plan a MIRTH family night, in which they can be casually introduced to the missionaries. Individual plans can also be made. If the eldest daughter felt strongly about her friend Kate, she can set a goal to give her a copy of the *New Era* or a Book of Mormon. If she's nervous you can coach her and practice how to do so, though usually in a future lesson, as you don't want to drag this out too long. It's important not to get bogged down in this part as you don't want to lose the Spirit. But make sure to set a few clear, actionable commitments of what the members will do before you leave the home.

The next step is the most important. Follow up. Without follow-up it is very unlikely that they will get much done. Sharing the gospel is important to nearly all members; it's just not always pressing. They have many other things that take their attention, so it's your job to keep reminding them how important missionary work is. Make it seem pressing. And then treat the references you receive as gold. Make sure to hang on to the lists of names that they created. After you have taught the people that they felt prompted to work with as the most ready, you can branch into the other names on the list. This can be a treasure trove of future investigators.

**In short, the method for receiving referrals is . . .**

1. Set the tone
2. Hand out papers, explain game
3. Sing hymn while they write
4. Seek guidance through prayer
5. Identify names
6. Make plans
7. Follow up, follow up, follow up

