

CONDUCTING YOUR OWN CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

We want to give you some ideas about having your very first conference.

How is a conference going to help you build a Discipleship ministry in your church or province? So, you say:

. In order to have a successful Church-Based Training ministry that is going to work for a few years or more you need to have some local organizers. Therefore, with the permission of the Province Superintendent, Small Group Leadership Training has been organized.

I am sure that some of you have heard about the *Basic Christian Life lessons*. Well, we are already teaching some higher-level Mentoring materials and courses also.

So, this conference has been organized to give you an idea of how God is using the church-based training in other areas, and how we expect God to bless our churches if we faithfully use this opportunity that has come our way.

I. BENEFIT TO YOUR MINISTRY

A. It will help you to better understand your ministry.

You are going to work as a group of people at this conference, so you are going to really build something together. You are going to teach the same lectures that you received from New Life. That means you are going to understand them better. And it helps you to sit down with the other church leaders in your area and say, "What are we doing? Why are we doing it?" So, it will help you to better understand your ministry.

B. It will help you to better understand the problems your churches are facing.

Very often we think, "Oh, I am the only one that has that problem." And then when you talk about it you find out everybody else says the same thing. You also discover how you can help each other with some of these problems. So, it will help you to better understand each other.

C. It will help you to build skills as a leader.

You really have to organize something. Either it is going to be a good testimony, or it is going to be a bad gossip situation. It will be one or the other. And so, here you are going to really use some other skills on a bigger scale than you have been using with just your local bible study group. It will give everybody an opportunity to evaluate you and to begin to believe in you as a fellow Christian worker. It makes you known among other people and lets them see that God is using you in His service.

D. It will help you to build your ministry.

There is a group of people at the conference who are discovering, "Oh, he is also doing this and someone else is also doing this. How many Bible classes are going on already?" And you have an opportunity there to explain that Church Based Training is now used in your province.

E. It will reinforce your people's confidence in your leadership.

You begin to believe in each other. You are beginning to see; God is using us. God is really doing something through us, and leaders are coming to the foreground. Maybe somebody that you thought was going to do

a beautiful job just totally messed it up. And then you find out that there are two or three others that you did not know about who are doing a beautiful job.

As an example, here is what happened to some very young men in Ukraine. Because they were working very hard for the Lord leading Bible classes, they were asked to become members of the provincial church council. All these men are in their early twenties. It happened through their spiritual ministry, leading Bible classes.

II. WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

The whole church team:

- pastors,
- elders,
- the church board,
- leaders, and
- maybe the preachers.

possibly other spiritual workers.

If you are in a province where there is a lot of opposition, write letters to individuals. Not just to the church leaders, but to different individuals, inviting them to come individually. Here is what you say: *“Dear brother, a few of us have been especially blessed by God and we want to share some of these blessings. On such and such a day we have a conference. We know you are a wonderful Christian brother, and as we were praying about this conference that we are planning, God laid it on our hearts to give you an invitation to please come. We would be very honored if you would be willing to come.”*

III. LOCATION

A. Do not conduct it in your own church

There are several reasons for that.

1. A change is good.

It is good to be with other people in another situation.

2. It will require better management skills for you to go to another place.

It helps you to grow.

3. It will portray to the people you are inviting that you place value on it.

It is not just some activity in your church, but this is really a well-planned, well-organized event.

4. Sometimes you just need to get away from the forest to see the trees.

Does that make sense to you? You will find afterwards that you will be very happy about having gone to another place.



B. Economical Budget: Small Group

If you have a small budget, it is possible that you could use somebody's home, and it would cost hardly any money. I have been in homes where they could seat maybe thirty-five people in a room. Now let us say you have a few friends who are helping to organizing this.

Each of you may already be leading a bible study group or doing a similar activity. That means you may have 30 or so students. Thirty people / students that need to be encouraged to do something for Jesus. Could each of them bring $\frac{1}{2}$ kilo of potatoes and a $\frac{1}{2}$ cabbage? That is already 15 kilos of potatoes and 15 cabbages. And everybody is working together. You see? Some of your students want to go along to the church and peel potatoes while you are giving your lecture. Somebody raises their hand, "I work at the meat plant. Do you need any meat?" Somebody else says, "I work in a store. Could you use five jars of cucumbers?" There are all kinds of different opportunities. The secret is to give people a chance for Jesus. People want to give an offering. People are always wondering, "Why am I studying this material ? Oh, here comes an opportunity to use what I have been studying."



C. More Expensive: Large Event.

Now, if you want to get a little bit more expensive, maybe you can go to a large church. Maybe for a small fee they will prepare the meal for you, and you will have nothing to prepare. That is one possibility. It is also possible that somebody wants to donate money.

Example: a story that happened to a brother a few years ago. They needed money to start a discipleship ministry . This man went to see the president of a factory and the man said, "Come in. What do you want?" "I want to start a discipleship ministry ." "Well, how can I help?" "Well, we need money for materials." He said, "Well, how much do you want?" He did not know because he had not thought about that yet. Well, this was in the early nineties when there were still Rubles, so he thought, "Well, maybe 100,000." The president said, "Okay," and gave him the money." So, he said good-bye, and he went out the room thinking, "Why didn't I ask for 200,000?" It really happened in Ukraine. God does miracles.

IV. PREPARATIONS FOR THE MEETING

A. Get an accurate count of attendance in advance.

About two weeks before the meeting you should pretty well know how many of the people you have invited will come. You need to know that in order to prepare food. If you do not know, you may need to phone some of the people and simply say, "Are you really planning on coming next week?" Or "We would like you to come. Because we are preparing the food now, is it possible to tell me whether you are planning on coming?" You must find out how many people are really going to come. It needs to be a fairly accurate number. That is important.

B. You must plan your appearance.

Make sure you have your nice clothes on. If you are a lady, make sure you do not wear a see-through blouse, because you will be standing in front of people. I know sometimes ladies just forget about that, but it can be a distraction from the lecture you are giving. Also, as a lady, wear business attire. Wear an outfit like a school principal does. If you wear a lot of frills and fluffy things, it looks like you are going to a party. So dress like a businesswoman dresses.

If you are a man, make sure you have a suit on . In your pocket, in a plastic bag, have a little cloth so that when you arrive you can just clean your shoes a little bit.

Men, **two** weeks before you have the conference, get a haircut. Some of you have feathers sticking out everywhere. Many men get a haircut just before an important meeting and they look like a chicken that has lost all its feathers. It is true. You may think it is funny. When people come through the door, their first impression is, "Oh, what is this?"

Since you are working with a team, discuss your appearance together. Maybe it is not real nice for one lady to wear red, another one white and another one purple. Make sure your colors match and not clash.

Plan not only your own appearance; plan the appearance of your building. If they just had an occult film the night before in the hall you are renting, maybe there are a number of dirty things on the wall. All it takes is a little bit of elbow grease—work. Get it off; get it cleaned up.

C. Visit the facility and think through problems.

At least one week before the conference, go to the facility and take a look.

How does the toilet smell? I once had a team of people that went all over Ukraine checking on toilets in the schools. And because we complained about it, some of the schools built new toilets. Clean toilets are extremely important. You use your bed only one time a day, the toilet probably about eight times. So, it is very important.

What about the chairs? I went to one meeting one time, and all the people had to share a chair. Two people had to sit on half a chair each, and every thirty minutes, they had to change positions. I have been to places where the furniture was totally broken down. I am reminded of one man who came for a visit to somebody's house. He was a little bit round. As he sat down the seat broke, part of the chair went around him, and when he stood up the chair was just hanging around his waist. It was terrible.

Many places have lamps with light bulbs missing. If you are going to have a conference you need to make it good. If people cannot see to write, it is terrible for them.

You would be surprised how many people want to criticize you. In Timothy we read that a church leader should be above reproach. When the conference is over, and people go home, they may say, "I did not agree with it", or "I did not like it, but I must admit, they sure did their best. They really tried hard." That is extremely important.

D. Build a positive relationship with the team in that place.

This will take time and money, but develop positive relationships with the management, the caretaker, the cook, and the other people. If you want a good meal, you have to sweeten up the cook. Take a big jar of honey and sweeten up the cook. The young girls here already know that. "You win a man's heart through his stomach." If you are going to have a conference, you are going to need a good lunch. The pastor is there, other church leaders are there, and they say, "Not a bad conference." It is true. If they are hungry, if they go home on the bus, and they run in the door from their apartment and they say to their wife, "Do you have something to eat?" Then the wife asks, "How was the conference?" He rubs his stomach and says "Oh, well..." If he goes home and he feels full and well, it was good. It is important. So, it is your responsibility to ensure the cook prepares a good meal.



Now what happens when you want a cook to make a good meal? Nine out of ten times the good meal will be an hour late. You will have to prevent that. You will have to make sure a few days before that there is coal, that there is wood, that it is all organized. Early in the morning, you make sure that everything is prepared for the cook. During the morning you keep checking. "Are you ready to start cooking?" "Yes, it only takes thirty minutes." "Could you maybe start forty-five minutes early because if you cook a big meal, it takes a longer time?" Maybe she wants to do it quickly, but she does not have enough helpers to do it. So, you really need to check the day before with the whole team there.

People will come with the keys. Then you find out that the person with the key only comes on Sunday and they cannot open the big door, only the little door. You need to check on that before time. Who has the key? What time will he come? He says, "Eight o'clock." But what does he mean. He means eight thirty. He does not mean eight o'clock. You need to be there extra, extra early. So, you ask, "Brother, is it possible for you to come at 7:30?" "Okay." "Is it really possible?" "Okay." "All right, let us shake on that."

So make sure you build a good relationship and a good team spirit with the people of that building.

E. Preparation of materials

To make your conference both professional and interesting to your attendees you want to prepare a variety of additional materials that help people to concentrate, learn more and spell "quality."

You are going to want to make some photocopies of some of the lectures you received at New Life. Maybe you will make some of your own notes and prepare them in advance for people to have. Otherwise many people will come to the conference and just sit there while you are talking and doing your best. The whole conference goes in one ear and out the other.

Example: I will tell you what some others have done. They set a table by the door, and they got a hundred pencils and a bunch of little notebooks, and when people came through the door they said, “Do you have a notebook and a pen?” “No,” “Here, you better take one.” It was a super success. Other people wrote in their invitation letters, “Please bring a notebook and a pencil.” Still others passed out sheets of paper to people.

Some people had apples for break time. For many people that was too expensive, but they gave out a nice cup of warm tea in the morning, before they began. When people arrived, they were cold from the bus. A warm cup of tea was quite enough. In some of your bible study groups there are a number of ladies who like to bake. They can bake some nice home-style cookies. So you can have a break and people can get some hot tea to drink and a cookie.

Let us say you bake lots of cookies and only a few people came. It is now three thirty, it is almost four o'clock, and it is almost time to go home. You say, “Brothers, we have prepared something special for you today. We know that your wives have missed you and so we have prepared for each of you a nice plastic bag full of cookies to take home.” Oh, who has ever heard of a conference like this? So you turn a negative thing into something positive.

Make sure you prepare all kinds of materials. Do not just stand there, “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” Do not do that. You can easily prepare an outline like we did with the “*Biblical Principles of Management*” lecture. A similar outline can be used for any topic, and it is easy to make. It does not take a lot . You can do it with a computer and then make photocopies. It is something new that people have not used. It shows that you have really prepared in advance.

F. Consider adding something special.

1. Talent.

In some places there was an expert in their province whom they invited to lecture.

2. Special music.

In some places they invited a guitarist to lead some new songs and have some good music.

3. Decorations.

There are several things that can be done to make it extra pleasant.

V. SELECTING YOUR MATERIALS

A. From the New Life website .

Select a number of lectures that will be particularly suitable to the audience you have chosen to come. That is the very best thing to do. If you have a team, talk about which lectures you want to use and which ones you do not want to use. Adapt your material! You do not have to use every single point of the NL lectures. Condense some of your notes so it will just fit those church leaders from that region. Make it applicable for your province, or that church, or those small group leaders. Prepare an outline and fill in the ideas. Make sure every member of your team has a copy of the topics. Make sure everyone is agreed.

B. Topics

You can use some parts from your Basic Christian Life lessons . For instance, about prayer, the tyranny of the urgent, or how to have a whole day of prayer in the forest. There is a lecture on having a clean house for God. And what you say is, “Today I want to share with you some of the lessons we are teaching to your church members because we want you, the pastors, to know what we are teaching. We do not want to do anything behind your back. We want to serve you and your church. So we want to share this part of one of our lessons that we lead in our groups.

C. Select 3-4 lectures to use.

You can use a few New Life audio or video lectures.

Select the most suitable lectures. Do not use those designed only for administration purposes.

VI. INTERRELATE YOUR ACTIVITIES DURING THE DAY

A. You have to interrelate the breaks.

You have to interrelate it with the length of the lectures, with when you are going to eat lunch, and maybe with some other things.

B. You want to interrelate your oral lectures and your discussions.

C. You want to fill in with something.

Sometimes something goes wrong, and you need something to fill in. Maybe a lecture somehow ended up being shorter than what was planned. So what do you do? You can say, "Well brothers and sisters, I don't know either. Right now we have nothing more to do, so I suggest you just take a little break and wait till we have lunch." That is not a very good option. You should have something better. Maybe you have a musician who could lead some songs or sing a special number. Have some questions, a short lecture, or some announcements ready to use at any time.



D. Plan variety.

Plan some changes—something that makes sure there will be a high interest level. We had a long lecture about "Leading A Small Group" and we broke it up in several sections and did other things in-between so that it was an interesting day for all.

E. Plan meaningful openings and closings.

Know precisely what you will open with.

"Oh, maybe we should sing something. Do any of you know what we should sing? Is there a good song leader here? Oh, there isn't. What are we going to do? I guess we won't sing." You need to plan which song you are going to sing and to have a good song leader. If your song leader loves to direct and he says, "Now we are going to sing this." "And now we are going to do this and this." "And now we are going to sing a cappella." "And now we are going to do one more." "Oh, that was very good, let us do one more." That is NOT what you wanted. You need to plan exactly which songs and how long. Begin with a song that everybody knows.

F. Plan accurately what you will do:

1. in the morning,
2. after lunch time,
3. and how to close properly.

G. Plan how people are going to get from and to the bus, and when the bus or train leaves.

Okay, you have made this beautiful plan and you have a nice schedule. All the lectures are prepared. It has been announced that you are going to go till five o'clock and then you are going to close. And there it is four fifteen and all of a sudden people are standing up, putting their coats on. What is happening? "The train goes at five o'clock; the bus goes at five o'clock. We need to leave now to get to the bus station and train station." Whoops. Maybe it was not a very good schedule. So you have to know when the buses and trains go.

VII. MAKE A DETAILED TIME SCHEDULE

What we mean here is, what are you going to teach, and how and when? In other words, a detailed and accurate outline of each activity you will be doing that day.

Write down precisely the time you will begin, and you write down something for every half hour or forty-five minutes, or every hour. You write the topic of each lecture and the name of the person who will be giving the lecture. You write in precisely how long the break will be. So you have a precise schedule of the whole day. This will require a 3-column sheet of paper. In the first column you write the time, in column two write the topic, in column three write the responsible person.

A. Make a list of all the topics on a separate sheet of paper.

Oh, you have twenty good topics. Fantastic! But how are you going to teach twenty topics in six hours? Ha, ha, okay, it's impossible, right? That means you're going to have to delete some.

B. Carefully categorize, interrelate, and schedule your topics.

Example: Do not teach about a monthly calendar unless first you have taught about a weekly plan. So, organize it so it flows together. What do you want for your first lecture? Oh, here is a good boring lecture. Okay, let us get it out of the way first. The man starts, "Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah." And pretty soon somebody says, "Why did we come?" I have seen it happen.

Example: I saw one man who was preaching. They were doing evangelism. They had a large group of people in a hall. In twenty minutes he was finished and one third of the people had walked out.

You had better not start with a lecture like that. You say, "This morning we have something exciting from God. Brothers and sisters, look at this verse." So you get a good exciting start on the day. What is going to be your last lecture? "Well, folks, we have had a long day. I am sure you are all tired. I know that I am tired." And everybody says, "Yes, I agree." That is not what you want to do. You say, "All right, folks, now comes the grand finale. I know you have already had so much today. I know some of you are tired. Some of you are thinking about going home, but let me tell you something. We have saved the best for last. All right, brother Paul, please begin," and introduce the speaker. If you have a difficult lecture, you give it just before lunchtime. People are going to say, "Whew, I am glad that is over. Hum, but the food smells good." After lunch what happens? They have sugar in their blood, and they will fall asleep.

C. Plan the number of sessions.

How many sessions are you going to have? Six, seven, nine? What are you going to have? First plan how many and later you will plan who will give these lectures.

D. Plan the length of time needed for each subject.

For some lectures you only need forty-five minutes, for others you need an hour and a half. Also plan if you're going to have a discussion at the end of the lecture. Sometimes you get some negative questions and comments. If you are scared of that, do not have a discussion. But if you have a good discussion leader helping, you can have a discussion for some of the topics.

E. Prepare a schedule and fill in the details.

Include the type of break, snacks, type of outline/lecture notes to be passed out, discussion questions to be asked, etc.

F. Make sure every member of your team has a copy. Make sure everyone is agreed.

VIII. LAST MINUTE DETAILS

What do you need to do the day before? Here is a checklist:

1. **You need to make sure there is wood and coal already.**
2. **You need to make sure the person who has the key does not forget to come extra early.**
3. **You need to make sure there are enough people to cook the food** and then to decide if you need to have extra people helping.
4. **You need to go and visit the place the last day before the meeting to see that everything is okay.** You may want to phone some of the guests and check whether they need extra help with transportation or other things.
5. **You need to double-check with your helpers** to make sure that they know where to meet and how they are going to travel there. Interesting things happen. One person is at the bus station waiting, and nothing happens, nobody comes. Another person is at the bus station, also at the same time, but does not see anybody and leaves.

Example: It happened to me. I was waiting for two hours in the train station. Now this was under communism. We could not talk. We could not do anything. It was very quiet. The man who was picking me up was also at the train station. But through the translator we had not understood each other. I was waiting outside in front of the train station, and he was waiting in the train station. He was walking so the KGB would not notice that he was waiting for somebody. I was walking outside, hoping nobody would see that I was a foreigner and I had strange clothes on. We never did find each other, and we were at the right place and at the right time.

These things happen, so there are all kind of last minute details you need to check on. On the day of the meeting, be there at least an hour early. You can relax, you can help with a few things, you have time to pray together, and you can move some chairs around—anything that needs doing.

CONCLUSION

Holding your own conference may seem overwhelming at first, but the benefits are too great to miss. Benefits of learning organizational skills for you and your team, of reaching out to help other leaders grow and learn, and of bringing unity to your area because others will begin to understand who you are and what you are trying to accomplish.

Example: Years ago I had my first conference in Kiev. I was there, Sasha was there, we were all there. We had a big hall for two hundred people. One came, three came, and we waited some more. Well, eventually there were seventeen. The next month there were thirty-four. It had doubled. That was about all the students we could expect. Once we had forty-two or forty-five coming, but most of the time it was between twenty-four and thirty. Three years later we had two hundred. God is blessing me and I believe God will bless you. AMEN!

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

Practical assignment

Completed

- Conduct your own "Conference" for general church leaders

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- Not in your home church.
 - Do this twice; one day each - minimally 6 hours.
 - Show how you promoted it, type of preparation,
 - Report: Topics, length, number of instructors & names, number of attendants.
 - What did you do to make this a very outstanding conference?
 - mark results, 1,2,3, 1 disappointing, 2 normal, 3 really very good
- Conduct your own “Sunday School Teacher’s Conference” (twice as above).

