

IDEAS

FOR ANY CHURCH, ANY SIZE



Back to Basics

Accountability and Intentionality at Southern California's Eastside Christian Church

Eastside Christian Church in Anaheim, California, has adopted a vision that is easy for churchgoers to digest. The goal, according to Executive Pastor Tim Bond, is for the congregation to reach at least 1 percent of the roughly 5.8 million people who live in a 20-mile radius of the church.

"Our mission is to transform our homes, community and world by

pursuing God, building community and unleashing compassion one neighborhood at a time," Bond says.

This mission, the simple strategies used to fulfill it and the accountability the Eastside staff faces for getting results has helped the church community transform and expand. Bond says the church has gone back to basics, investing in

what the pastors care about most—saving souls. Each year, the team breaks the calendar year into two six-month seasons to plan how it will accomplish this mission. Each weekend, the staff plans the best way to attract and retain visitors.

"We put a lot of time in creating relevant weekend experiences for people who are unchurched and

dechurched," he says.

Norm Hamre, pastor of Eastside's La Habra campus and a church member before that, says the worship services are accessible to newcomers, who include a wide range of people in diverse Orange County—home to a large population of whites, Asians and Latinos.

"Eastside is very sensitive to how someone receives the things we're going to say," Hamre explains. "If someone comes to us and they have no church or faith background, [the message] doesn't need to be pulled back. We still worship, and we still have some pretty deep messages. Our language is always intentional."

In addition to sermons, Eastside also builds community through the small groups it offers throughout the week. The church calendar routinely includes ways for people to help the less fortunate as well, Bond says.

"All of our ministry is aligned around those important things, and there's accountability for alignment and also accountability for results," he says. "We actually have score cards. If you're saying you're going to get something done, that person's supervisor will say, 'How did that go? Did we do what we said we were going to do?'"

Hamre says Eastside has been purposeful about "staff alignment," which means ensuring the staff communicates effectively and tackles challenges as a group. For instance, the team has made a concerted effort to make the church more racially diverse over the years. Just a decade ago, it was primarily white and blue-collar. Today, "every single one of our campuses has become more and more diverse," Bond says.

As a spiritual leader, Bond has learned to expect the unexpected and has seen how God is greater than any barriers the church faces.

"We would have never guessed that the things that have happened in the last five years would happen," Bond says. "It's almost hard to believe. It's been an incredible ride. We've grown so much larger than we would have ever planned or budgeted for five years ago. It's kind of a reminder of how big God is."

—Nadra Kareem Nittle

EASTSIDE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Anaheim, California

Lead Pastor: **Gene Appel**

Twitter: **@GeneAppel**

Website: **Eastside.com**

Founded: **1962**

Affiliation: **Independent Christian Churches**

Locations: **3**

Attendance: **7,183**

Growth in 2016: **+1,979 (38%)**

Fastest-Growing: **2**

Largest: **66**





Bridging the Divide

Kentucky Churches Build Racial Harmony

THE CHURCHES

Washington Street Baptist Church and Heartland Church in Paducah, Kentucky

THE CHALLENGE

Tear down racial stereotypes and promote friendships.

ONE BIG IDEA

Two churches combine congregations once every five weeks to encourage empathy, understanding and love.

In the wake of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014, Senior Pastor Nathan Joyce of Heartland Church—a predominantly Caucasian congregation in Paducah, Kentucky—felt God pulling him to do something positive.

“The riots were happening two hours away, but it felt like it was in our backyard. It hit home,” recalls Joyce, who stopped by Washington Street Baptist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation, to see Pastor Raynaldo Henderson, a community leader for over 25 years. “We decided to do something to break down racial barriers.”

The ministers committed to doing more than merely coming together for a reconciliation Sunday.

“We weren’t interested in doing a worship service, followed by tea and crumpets,” says Henderson. “We tend to put all white folks in a box and all black folks in a box and we make assumptions about who they are. When you spend time in fellowship together, you learn your assumptions are often false.”

The ministers began combining their congregations once every five weeks to facilitate interaction and connection “and to tear down erroneous perceptions and stereotypes,” adds Henderson.

They alternate services—one month having it at Washington Street Baptist, which typically attracts 150 people each Sunday, and the next time holding it at Heartland Church, a 2,000-member congregation. Following the first blended service, Joyce recalls how a Caucasian member approached him with tears in his eyes, shocked by how deeply God had touched his heart.

“Being face-to-face washes away the stereotypes and rhetoric that divides us,” notes Joyce, who uses a biology class as an analogy for God’s teachings. “The preaching is ‘classwork’—the informational stuff. The worship services are the ‘lab’ where preaching is put into practice.”

Though news stories and political viewpoints serve to polarize the population, Henderson and Joyce have witnessed how this outreach has healed hearts and bridged gaps.

“People feel the tension in the world and want to do something to improve it,” says Joyce. “This gives them a proactive outlet to do so.”

—Christy Heitger-Ewing
HeartlandWorship.com
WashingtonStreetBaptist.org

Website Checkup

Get Ready for Easter

If you’re planning on more people walking through your front doors on Easter, are you also ready for more people to Google your church? Set aside time to update, double-check and refresh your website—particularly your home page—to prep for the extra traffic you’re likely to see in the weeks ahead.

• **Make Easter events obvious.** Your Easter worship service dates and times, along with the theme or message title and childcare availability,

should be front and center—big and easy to read. Consider making it shareable, too, via Facebook, Twitter, email, etc.

• **Map it.** You might already have a Google Map embedded on the page where you list your contact information, but consider including it on your home page, right next to your Easter info—and make sure it works.

• **Check links.** You wouldn’t send a friend to an empty worship service, so don’t send them to a blank

webpage. Make sure the information first-time visitors need is readily available by double-checking all the links.

• **Share what’s coming up.** As long as you have guests checking out your Easter information, take the opportunity to tell them about upcoming events, sermon series, new ministries, etc. And it’s never too early to share when and how to register for future events, like vacation Bible school.

Take Note

Post Events on Your Website

Your online upcoming events calendar is more than just a list of dates and times; it’s an opportunity to better inform and reach the people in your community. Here’s why:

1. It’s good for your congregation. Your calendar provides all the information your community needs, all in one place. It makes it easy for them to be in the know. And it gives them a place to send people they invite who want more information.

2. It’s good for visitors. When guests visit your site, you want them to not only find out what you’re doing on Sunday mornings, but also what you’re doing that’s out of the ordinary. That’s part of what makes your church special. Having your upcoming events listed on your site shows potential visitors that your church is

an active, energetic community. Get in the mind of a potential visitor for a moment—how much easier would it be for you to attend a cookout than a Sunday morning service? Would it be less intimidating to show up at a Christmas service than a Bible study? If new people see those events listed online, they may be more willing to walk through your church’s front door.

3. It optimizes your outreach. What better advertisement for the heart of your church than to show the ways in which you’re serving, loving and opening your doors to others? People searching for a food drive in their community or an Easter program for kids are more likely to find your church in their internet search when those events are listed on your site.

4. It helps form partnerships. Local schools, community organizations, charities, nonprofits, even other churches, are always looking for ways to come alongside each other. Your church events are great opportunities to do just that. Having a back-to-school party at your church? Local schools can find that information online and invite their students. Doing a service project in a local park? That neighborhood’s committee can point to your site for more information. Getting involved with a local nonprofit? See if another church wants to jump in with you and link to their church website on your upcoming events page.

—Samantha Decker
CloverSites.com



Full Hearts

California Church Remembers the Elderly on Valentine's Day

THE CHURCH

Shoreline Community Church in Monterey, California

THE CHALLENGE

Reach out to the community on Valentine's Day.

ONE BIG IDEA

Make cards for residents of convalescent homes.

"I made this card for you. Happy Valentine's Day."

A middle school student gave a hand-made card to an elderly woman at a local convalescent home. She smiled, happy to receive the card—and the visitor.

For the last several years, the middle school youth group at Shoreline Community Church in Monterey, California, has crafted Valentine's Day cards to deliver to two local convalescent homes and a home for the intellectually disabled.

"One Saturday, we make the cards and another Saturday, we deliver the cards to the different care centers," says Shannon Krueger, a volunteer who has led the event.

The church ensures that the card-making day is a fun event for everyone. "The middle school director brings refreshments and I get the supplies to make the cards," she says. "It's not just for the students. We've had many families come, as well as adults who enjoy crafts. People enjoy getting to know one another better as they make their cards."

Additionally, Krueger chooses Bible verses to write inside the cards to remind the recipients of God's love for them.

As enjoyable as making the cards is, Krueger says the best part is delivering them. "We go from room to room and hand-deliver the cards," she says. "We visit with the people and explain who made the cards and we pray with the people. People want to know that they are seen, that they matter. When we deliver the cards and pray with the people there, it is encouraging for the recipients and the volunteers alike."

"Most of the people we visit aren't able to leave to attend church, so we bring church to them," Krueger says.

—Gail Allyn Short
ShorelineChurch.org

says Pastor Jay Jones. "They were being overlooked and we wanted to change that."

The idea for the Hug Grand Rapids campaign was born. Each year, church members put together about 2,000 sandwich bags filled with a few Hershey's Hugs chocolate candies, confetti and the church's business card that reads, "You've Been Hugged!"

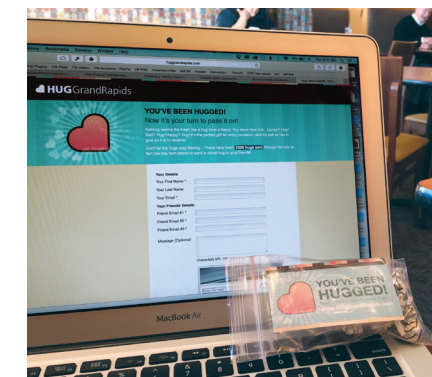
"Around 90 percent of our 200 regular attendees participate in packaging the Hugs and distributing them in our community," Jones says. "This outreach shares the love of Christ, mobilizes our church into the community, advances our church's mission and meets people's felt needs."

He notes that the church experiences a significant increase in visitors during the outreach. Jones says church members who participate benefit as well. "Our volunteers are deeply moved by the heartfelt responses they receive, and they are encouraged in their own personal evangelism."

The business card in the bag also lists the website for the Hug campaign where users can send a virtual hug to a friend. That site, HugGrandRapids.com, is linked to the church's website, which invites users to attend a weekly service.

—G.S.

MyPentecost.com



Valentine's Day

Heart-Shaped Love

Get creative in your Valentine's Day outreach. Host a new event for your community or give a valentine to someone you don't know—or who doesn't know your church. Here are a few ideas you can try:

- Manna Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, sorted, wrapped and delivered more than 300 bundles of carnations to workers at local gas stations and convenience stores. MannaChurch.org

- Christ Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota, has held a Father/Daughter Valentine's Ball for 20 years. Now a popular community event, the ball draws nearly 2,000 people. CLCDuluth.org

- New Life Bible Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, hosts a dinner for military wives whose husbands are deployed. The evening includes dinner, entertainment and free childcare. NewLifeBibleChurch.org

- Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Plainview, Texas, sets up a salon in the church basement, and with the help of local barbers and beauticians who volunteer their time, offers manicures, pedicures and haircuts to area senior citizens.

- Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, puts on a Valentine's Day luncheon for widows and encourages women to invite their neighbors and family members. Stonebriar.org

Sharing God's Love

Michigan Church 'Hugs' Its Community on Valentine's Day

Every Valentine's Day for the past 14 years, The Pentecostals of Kentwood church in Kentwood, Michigan, have been "hugging" their community with Hershey's Hugs, reminding recipients that they are loved and appreciated.

"We have always looked for creative ways to make connections with people in our community, and we realized that the waiters, waitresses and other service workers were not able to enjoy [Valentine's Day] like other people,"

THE CHURCH

The Pentecostals of Kentwood, Michigan

THE CHALLENGE

Reach out to service-industry workers on Valentine's Day.

ONE BIG IDEA

Church members hand out candy and an invitation to church.



April and June each year: Appalachian Trail “thru-hikers.”

“We’re a quarter of the way up the trail from Georgia, so by the time hikers get to us, the fun is gone,” Ashworth explains. “Out of nowhere, an unexpected kindness comes. The hikers call it trail magic. We call it God’s love.”

Appalachian Trail Outreach Ministry (ATOM) began small in 2002: The church placed a trash can on the side of the trail, then a picnic table. Next, volunteers offered rides to hikers who wanted to go into town. The church wanted to learn hikers’ specific needs, and it turned out, they wanted a good, hot meal.

So ATOM evolved. New Hope began feeding hikers breakfast at the church every Monday during the season. Each spring before the first hiker arrives, Ashworth hikes to Jenkins Shelter about five miles south of the trailhead, where he posts a flyer advertising the meal.

Then on Monday mornings during the season, volunteers in matching T-shirts team up from New Hope, Pine Grove and even the larger nonchurch community. Some people shuttle hikers between the trailhead, the church and town. Others prepare breakfast at home and bring it to the church to serve: homemade apple butter, jellies, maple syrup and cane molasses, pancakes, biscuits, scrambled eggs.

“Hikers are notoriously hungry, and we could serve prepared foods that are cheap, but we decided we were going to do this right,” Ashworth says. “A lot of attention—and I’d like to say a lot of love—is given to this.”

This is New Hope’s way of meeting not just physical needs but emotional ones too. And though the church isn’t pushy, they’ll share their faith if they’re invited.

“Conversations take place that we know impact hikers’ lives,” Ashworth says. “We get cards and letters from hikers telling us what that day meant in their lives. There are always blessings that come from serving God and his people.”

—Jessica Hanewinckel

Happy Trails

A Rural Church on the Appalachian Trail Serves Hikers

THE CHURCH
New Hope Union United Methodist Church in Bastian, Virginia

THE CHALLENGE
Develop an effective outreach to a transient population.

ONE BIG IDEA
Serve breakfast to hungry hikers.

There are small churches—and then there are small churches. New Hope Union UMC—a church of 19 members with an average attendance of eight—is tucked in to the rural, unincorporated Appalachian community of Bastian, Virginia.

The church’s building sits on a dead-end road and has no indoor plumbing. The space is cramped, and the congregation shares Rev. Alan Ashworth with his other small church in Bastian, Pine Grove UMC. New Hope has lost many elderly members over the years, and it’s struggled to rebound.

Despite these challenges, New Hope, located just a few miles from an Appalachian Trail trailhead, has found a creative way to serve a very specific community of people who pass through Bastian between



After Easter

Follow-Up Game Plan

Easter is one of your busiest days. How can you ensure first-time visitors return? This follow-up communication plan isn’t rocket science, nor is it foolproof if you don’t stick with it. But when done consistently month after month, you’ll be amazed at the improved results you’ll see over time. And why not start on Easter Sunday? Be diligent. Work the plan. God will bring the increase.

- Day 0** (Easter Sunday): Send a “thank you for coming” text message.

Day 1 (Monday morning): Send a welcome email and guest experience survey.

Day 3 (Wednesday): Deliver cookies to their home or send prepackaged brownies to arrive by Saturday.

Day 6 (Saturday morning): Send an email invitation to Sunday service.

Day 6 (Saturday afternoon): Send a text message invitation to Sunday service.
- Day 8** (Monday morning): Send an email invitation to your next welcome dinner or lunch. Also include a couple of links to your church’s most popular sermons.

Day 13 (Saturday morning): Send an invitation email to Sunday service.

Day 20 (Saturday morning): Send an invitation text message to Sunday service.

Day 24 (Wednesday): Send an email that asks, “Do you have any questions about the church? How can we help you?”
- Day 52** (Wednesday): Send a follow-up email that includes an invitation to Sunday service and/or other upcoming events, links to church resources and an invitation to the next welcome dinner or lunch if they did not previously attend.

—*Leaders.Church*

Did You Know?
More Americans search Google for “church” around Easter than any other time of year, with the Christmas season ranking second.

—*PewResearch.org*



Third Saturday: Jesus and Groceries

Delivering Hope and Help to ‘Adopted’ Neighborhoods

THE CHURCH

The Springs Church in Jacksonville, Florida

THE CHALLENGE

Connect with local low-income communities.

ONE BIG IDEA

Adopt a neighborhood to build relationships and meet physical and spiritual needs.

On the third Saturday of each month, volunteers from The Springs Church in Jacksonville, Florida, go to an apartment complex in their community to offer bags of groceries, fun and companionship—and most of all, the love of Jesus.

For a period of six months to one year, The Springs “adopts” a neighborhood.

Once a month volunteers give bags of groceries to needy families in the area through the church’s More Than a Meal ministry. Concurrently, the church may put on a block party, offer practical help and host a “Sidewalk Sunday School” for area children.

“We hand out flyers telling the neighborhood kids to meet us in a nearby park

or open field,” says Outreach Pastor Tim Veldhuizen. “We play games together, make crafts, host a cookout and share the gospel.”

He explains that the church chose to deliver food on the third Saturday of the month, because by then, many people’s food stamps have run out.

“The goal is to meet physical needs and build relationships with people who are unable to attend church,” Veldhuizen says. “We want to reach out and remind them that God loves them.”

In addition, on Tuesday nights, Veldhuizen runs a youth group in the adopted neighborhood where they play basketball and talk about spiritual matters.

Although The Springs doesn’t keep records on how many families have joined the church as a result of their Adopt a Neighborhood ministries, Associate Pastor Mat Pace says, “At least 15 families have connected with our church after we’ve adopted their neighborhood, and more than 100 families have attended services.”

“We want our church’s outreach to be a bridge for people to get from wherever they are in their lives to a relationship with God,” says Veldhuizen. “We just want to point them to him.”

—Diane Stark
TSCJax.com



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Prayer on the Go

A Colorado Church’s Drive-Thru Prayer Lane Offers Community Connection

THE CHURCH
City on the Hill Church in Boulder, Colorado

THE CHALLENGE
Find a novel way to reach people.

ONE BIG IDEA
Pray with passers-by.

Volunteers manning a drive-thru prayer lane in Boulder, Colorado, offer those seeking prayer not only convenience but also personal encouragement. According to Steve Shank, senior pastor at City on the Hill Church, it was his wife, Chanler, who first presented the idea of drive-thru prayer at an elders meeting. At the time, the church’s outreach team was already setting up prayer booths at local festivals and visiting laundromats to pay for users’ loads of laundry while sharing the gospel.

However, it took a year for the prayer-lane idea to catch on.

“She just kept bringing [the concept] back,” says Shank. “Finally, I said, ‘Let’s do this.’”

Today, the church, which averages an attendance of 150, hosts its drive-thru prayer lane from 1-2:30 p.m. after church services on the second and third Sundays of each month from mid-May to mid-October. On those days, the outreach team directs people driving along busy 75th Street and Arapahoe Road into the church parking lot where volunteers are available to pray. The person doesn’t even have to get out of their car.

“We average four or five cars,” says Shank, “but have had as many as 17.”

Volunteer Lisa Price says people have come with prayer requests for jobs, healing and direction, but others pull up because they are just curious. She recalls a humorous moment when one man rolled up on his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

“He said, ‘Prayer is something that should be on my bucket list,’” Price says. “Being prayed for was a new experience for him.”

About half who drive up are Christians, says Price, but many are not. Once she prayed with a couple that had gotten lost on their way to a marijuana clinic.

“The young man said, ‘It’s the weirdest thing. I put the clinic’s address in my phone, but the GPS sent us to your church,’” Price recalls.

Shank says drivers regularly express their gratitude, and one woman who received prayer in the parking lot even attended a church service.

The outreach team benefits, too, Price says. “It gives us a sense that we’re doing what Christ would do if he were here, sharing, loving people, restoring hope.”

—G.S.

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“People wouldn’t come back. Not only that, but sometimes folks would leave during the service,” recalls Lamb.

As time marched on, the congregation continued to dwindle until there was practically no one left.

“We were this amazing social club for ourselves, but who does that serve?” asks Lamb. Church business meetings turned ugly with lots of tears, raised voices and heartache because nobody wanted to budge on their agendas. Ultimately, they

“We’re all owners, not attendees. We’re all followers, not fans. We’re spiritual contributors, not spiritual consumers.”

decided to shut the church down and start fresh.

“There comes a time when you can’t adjust. You have to completely change,” says Lamb.

In 2009, GracePoint church started out with just 24 people, then dropped to 18. As they infused high-quality music with heartfelt teaching, the numbers quickly began to grow. Now Lamb guides an average of 1,000 worshippers each Sunday as GracePoint’s lead pastor. He attributes the booming growth to the fact that the church encourages people to come as they are.

“There are so many churches in our town, but there wasn’t one that felt comfortable for unchurched people. We feel like Jesus’ heartbeat is for the unchurched,” says Lamb, who estimates that 87 percent of the people in his community don’t attend church. “That’s 146,000 who are unchurched.”

Lamb and his staff focus on the people they’re trying to reach rather than those they’re trying to keep.

“Pastor Craig Groeschel, senior pastor

of Life.Church, said, ‘To reach people no one is reaching, we have to do things no one is doing,’” says Lamb. “We agree with that philosophy.”

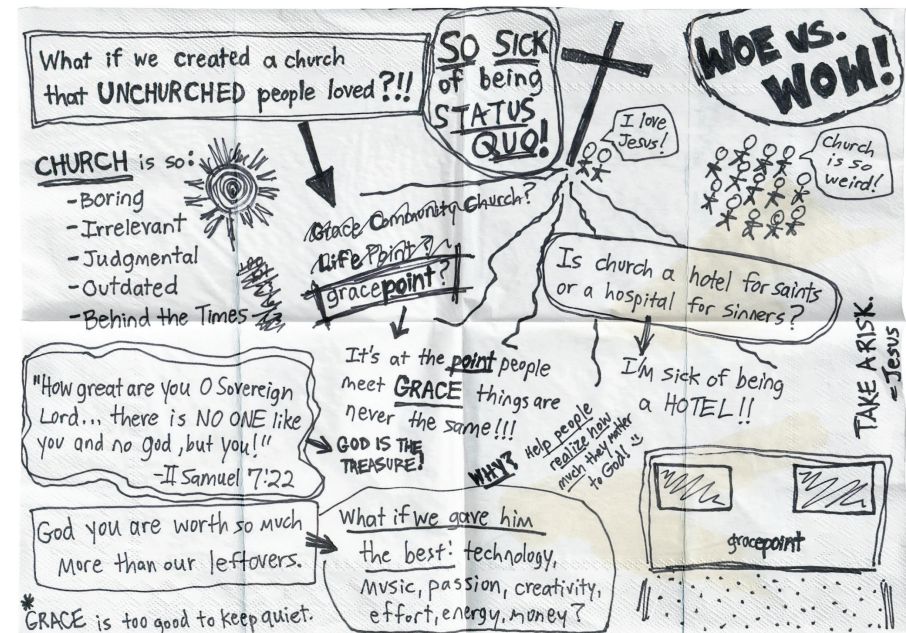
Therefore, on Sundays the congregation rallies to create a comfortable environment. That means intentionally not looking or sounding like a church. It also means expressing genuine love and acceptance for all who enter, and creating a casual atmosphere so that everyone can feel relaxed and welcome.

“We don’t think we’re *the* church. We’re simply *a* church,” says Lamb. “Traditional churches in the area

“On Sundays the congregation rallies to create a comfortable environment. That means intentionally not looking or sounding like a church.”

send people to us. We send people to them. We want folks to find the right fit for their needs.”

For eight years, GracePoint operated out of an elementary school, which required more than 150 volunteers to show up each Sunday at 4:45 a.m. to transform it into a



worship and Sunday school space.

“It goes to show the ownership our folks feel,” says Lamb. “Here are people who weren’t even going to church and now are willing to give most of their Sunday to serve.”

A man named Cyrus knows firsthand what that evolution feels like. His story is the reason GracePoint exists. He was completely unchurched and had been battling drug use, depression and addiction when three years ago, he received a DUI. Sentenced to perform community service, Cyrus began coming to GracePoint to help with morning setup. Over time he developed a brotherhood with his fellow volunteers. Touched by the love and lack of judgment, Cyrus began attending church at GracePoint and even got baptized. He now leads a men’s Bible study and serves as a volunteer team leader at church.

In November 2017, GracePoint opened the doors of their brand-new building. Though it’s wonderful to no longer be operating in a

mobile capacity, some members were sad to give up their Sunday morning bonding time.

After the disintegration of the first church, Lamb knew the importance of having his team unite around one common vision and set of values. They also made a conscious choice not to offer a membership class because

they didn’t want church to feel like an exclusive club.

“We’re all owners, not attendees. We’re all followers, not fans. We’re spiritual contributors, not spiritual consumers,” says Lamb. “Church isn’t a spectator sport.”

Even though GracePoint targets unchurched people, a number of church people enjoy being a part of the fabric of the church. They also love having a place where they can comfortably invite their friends. Lamb admits that it can sometimes be tough to move forward, especially when faced with harsh criticism by naysayers.

“It’s all good,” he says, “because in the end, Jesus will say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

—Christy Heitger-Ewing
GracePoint.me

THE CHURCH
GracePoint in Valparaiso, Indiana

THE CHALLENGE
To be a place where Christians grow and the unchurched are welcomed and loved.

THE BIG IDEA
Create a church that shares one common vision and set of values.

Followers, Not Fans

Indiana Church’s Rebirth Draws the Unchurched

In 2000, Ben Lamb was a student pastor at a traditional church in Valparaiso, Indiana, where he had worked for almost nine years. Over time, Lamb noticed that the return rate on visitors was zero.

Investing in Kingdom Expansion

Washington's Resonate Church Equips College Students to Start Churches

THE CHURCH

Resonate Church in Pullman, Washington

THE CHALLENGE

Find a way to involve young adults in growing the church.

ONE BIG IDEA

Train local college students to launch new churches.

When Emily Gehlkin started school at the University of Idaho, she had never attended church. She was away from her “anti-church” family and thought, “I wish someone would invite me.” Soon after, a student from Resonate Church in nearby Pullman, Washington, came to her dorm and did so. Her response? “Yes. I was waiting on someone to ask.”

She began attending services, joined their setup team and had coffee with another student who asked if she was interested in following Jesus. Her response was the same: “I was waiting for someone to ask.” Today, Gehlkin is “pointing her life toward the same kind of students.” She is on staff at Resonate

and in the next couple years will plant a collegiate church.

Ten years ago, Keith Wieser, Resonate’s lead pastor, was a parachurch minister at Washington State University when he felt the overwhelming lostness

“Students are the most reachable, trainable and sendable people on Earth.”

of the campus. He converted the campus ministry to a church and used students as leaders with the goal of reaching others with no church background and training them as church planters.

Today Resonate offers nine weekly gatherings on six school campuses to 1,200 people, 80 percent of whom are students. They are moving toward planting 21 collegiate churches by 2021.

Brian Frye, national collegiate strategist of the North American Mission Board, describes Resonate as part of a growing movement of like-minded multisite churches.

“If you can introduce the gospel before students have marriages, money or managers, they are more likely to invest in kingdom expansion,” Frye says.

“Students are the most reachable, trainable and sendable people on Earth,” Wieser says. “They believe they can actually do something to bring change. They don’t have to wait until they get older, and there’s a sense of can-do mentality that could ignite every church if we’d give them a seat at the table.”

—H.L. Hussman
Resonate.net



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Sherri S. // Denver First Church

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Common Table, Common Goal

Ohio Church Introduces Different Cultures by Way of Food

THE CHURCH

Faith United Methodist Church in North Canton, Ohio

THE CHALLENGE

Highlight commonalities among cultures, and appreciate the differences.

ONE BIG IDEA

Use food and fellowship to bring together disparate cultures.

When Donna Benzing joined the Welcoming the Stranger ministry at Faith United Methodist Church in North Canton, Ohio, she noticed fear in the eyes of those who attended. The group, which began in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, was well-intended, but given the number of negative refugee stories in the media, folks were hesitant to engage with other cultures.

“It’s such a treat to meet people from all walks of life,” says Benzing. “I wanted the North Canton community to get the chance to interact with other faiths and cultures.”

Benzing and two friends from other area churches—Ursula Marrero and

Karyn Talbot-Russ—decided to use food to encourage cross-cultural interaction.

“Jesus knew that wherever we share food, something wonderful happens,” says Cara Stultz Costello, pastor at Faith United. “We become more pliable with one another, intrigued to learn more.”

In May 2017, Faith UMC launched Common Table: A Cultural Cooking Experience, a mission-oriented event that brought people together from different backgrounds for a night of fellowship, fun and ethnic foods. Immigrant cooks from Syria and Morocco shared their recipes with those who came. A \$30 donation from each guest paid for the ingredients as well as an honorarium for the cooks. A tasty meal and good conversation followed.

“As we gather around the table, we find we have more commonalities than differences,” says Benzing. “The Common Table is more about opening people’s minds than changing them. A lot of people didn’t know where Morocco was before the last dinner. Now they’ve shared a meal with Fatima Mardi from Casablanca.”

Marrero notes that the shared cooking experience enriches lives. “If people walk away with more understanding and [fewer] misconceptions, that’s a win for them.”

The church plans to host the Common Table quarterly, infusing other cultures with future meals. At one event, Marrero brought a large map of the world and guests placed a pin in the spot where their ancestors originated.

“That visual reminded us that we’re all immigrants,” says Benzing. “And we’re all God’s children.”

—Christy Heitger-Ewing
www.FaithUMChurch.org



Appealing to Families

Lead Pastor Jason Britt: Faithful Follow-Up and Life-Changing Stories Work for Young Families

What does the makeup of Bethlehem Church look like?

About 35 percent of our attendees are middle school or younger. We’ve got about a 2-1 adult-child ratio. So we are largely made up of young families, mainly younger than 40.

What’s your strategy for retaining this demographic?

We’re really dogmatic about follow-up. We’re not going to be overbearing, but we’re going to be very

“We’re going to be very intentional about personal contact on multiple layers—just to say you matter.”

intentional about personal contact on multiple layers—just to say you matter. It’s a handwritten note from a person. Truthfully, it matters to millennials. We think it matters that they see it’s not just a pastor reaching out to them—it’s somebody from the church. There’s no commitment we’re looking for when we follow up. There’s just, “Thank you. Any questions, let us know. We appreciate you.” Just letting them know we remember them.

What’s the mechanism for engaging them with the church?

We have a newcomers gathering every six weeks. There can be 10 to 80 people depending on time of year. It’s just a 45-minute lunch with me

after morning services. Instead of putting you through step 1, step 2, step 3, step 4 and so on, we make it really clear that the very next step for you after this gathering is serving, small groups, connecting with things we’re doing in the community. Everything’s open to you at that point. It’s important because the pace of life is a challenge. This is a one-stop shop and then you’re released into any other avenue of life in the church.

And people are jumping into your various avenues. About 65 percent of your people are involved in a small group. What’s been the most effective way to organize small groups?

We’re between Atlanta and Athens—where the University of Georgia is. The school calendar rules life. You can predict church attendance based on the school calendar. So, we’ve learned that a new school year, or a new semester, is the best time for getting people back into the rhythm at church, too. So in August we do sign-ups. In September we launch. We run 12 to 15 weeks of

sermon-based groups. And then we do the same thing January through May. We’ve also learned that one’s stage of life is more of a draw than geography. Two things that connect people are which night of the week that works for them and their stage of life. They don’t care about curriculum. They’re asking, “Is this going to work for my schedule, and are people going to be like me?”

How are you conveying that people are like them?

We’re always trying to connect the story of people’s life change with methods and systems of Bethlehem. Every baptism we tell a little bit of their story—how their story connected to church and how it got to Bethlehem. We’ll do 25 baptisms this weekend, and we’ll have a longer service to try to connect all their stories with what God’s doing here at Bethlehem.

And just this past Sunday I had a guy who walked down at the end of the service and shook my hand and said, “I wanted you to know, my first Sunday was three Sundays ago. I’ve visited a bunch of churches, and I’ve never gotten a handwritten card from anybody. On Tuesday I got a handwritten card, and I just appreciate you guys thinking of me.” That’s a big deal. You live in a day of texts, tweets, quick communication. So we share those stories with the team of volunteers who are writing those notes. —Heather Schnese

BETHLEHEM CHURCH

Bethlehem, Georgia

BethlehemChurch.us

Launched: **1904**

Average Weekend Attendance: **2,426**

Connection Points: **10 to 80 people attend regular newcomers gathering; 65% involved in small groups.**

A 2017 Outreach 100 Church No. 85 Fastest-Growing

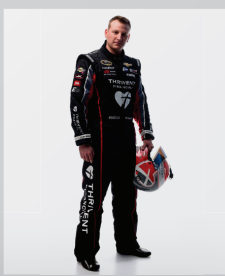
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MLB legend with a powerful Christian testimony



MICHAEL FRANZESE
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MICHAEL MCDOWELL
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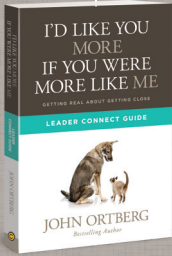
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Small Group Connection Kit



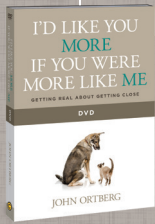
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Body and Soul

Missouri Church Gives Needy Kids a Meal and the Gospel

THE CHURCH

House of Praise Church of God in Desloge, Missouri

THE PROBLEM

Area children were going hungry physically and in need spiritually.

THE IDEA

Provide transportation for kids to come to church for a meal and a Bible lesson.

When you see a need, you meet the need. Maybe that's the greatest motivation for starting any ministry. That was true for Amber and Richie Young of Desloge, Missouri. Richie is the youth pastor with House of Praise Church of God and Amber is a teacher in the local school system. Together they lead a thriving kids' outreach.

When Amber discovered that many children in her district receive their only hot meal of the day at school, she told Richie they needed to change their Wednesday night ministry.

"She said that if we start feeding [the kids], they'll start showing up, and she hit it right on button," says Richie. "We had 20 to 30 kids when we started. Now we're running over 100."

"Fun, Food, and the Word" began just over a year ago, and within weeks the church had to add more tables and chairs. They also were blessed to be able to step up the church's 22-passenger van to a

57-passenger bus that was donated specifically for this ministry. Richie, who is also a bus driver with the school system, picks up the kids for the Wednesday night ministry and takes them home. He says it takes about an hour to make all the runs.

In addition to feeding the children a home-cooked meal, the church is also feeding their souls. After the meal and a few games, the Youngs divide the group of 2- to 19-year-olds into age groups and have a Bible lesson. They conclude with a wrapup that often includes an opportunity to respond to the gospel. They have seen many decisions for Christ made.

"That's what we're here for," says Ritchie. "Just watching Jesus work is a true blessing."

The children also are great evangelists and tell their friends about the program. Because the numbers keep growing, the church has plans to expand the ministry with a larger youth building.

—Jeff Chaves

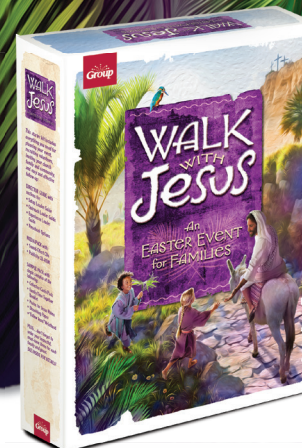
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The funny thing was, Tyler didn't attend First Baptist Church (FBC).

He is one of 18 teens registered for FBC's Kids in the Kitchen, a free educational program that not only teaches young people basic life skills but also includes service projects.

"Most of these kids are unchurched," says Christine Keddy, FBC associate pastor of family education and outreach. "But some kids consider it their church. My goal isn't just to teach them how to bake—it's to have them here for fellowship and community."

Located in Westwood, Massachusetts, FBC averages nearly 60 people each Sunday, but over the years the number of young families in attendance has dropped.

"Church leadership wanted to bring youth and energy into the congregation," Keddy explains. "So they asked the community what they needed and learned that schools released children early every other Wednesday. Many of these kids didn't have anywhere to go."

As a result, the church created an afternoon sewing class, and a surprising number of young people signed up. When Keddy came on board, she changed the sewing program into a class that alternates baking—which is her expertise—with service projects.

"It's organic and natural to talk about biblical values when you're helping those in need," she says.

The class has made 30 fleece blankets for Project Linus and created bags for homeless children. Going forward, Keddy wants to further involve the community by inviting various speakers to teach different skills, such as a cake decorating class for the kids and their parents.

Keddy adds, "I want them to have the opportunity to be exposed to a positive experience of church."

—Lora Schrock
FBCWestwood.org

Back to Basics

Outreach Program Teaches Life Skills

Along with the 13 boxes of supplies his group had collected to send to a church in Puerto Rico, 15-year-old Tyler included a card that read: "Your Friends From First Baptist Church of Westwood."

THE CHURCH
First Baptist Church of Westwood in Westwood, Massachusetts

THE PROBLEM
Early-release days leave kids without a place to go after school.

THE IDEA
Offer a program that gives youth life skills and a heart for service.

Got Snow?

4 Winter Fun Ideas for Kids



Make the most of the winter cold with the children (and families) in your community. Parents can invite other parents and children can bring their friends.

Host a **sledding afternoon** for families on your campus (if you have a small hill) or at a nearby park. Finish up with hot chocolate for the kiddos and coffee for the parents.

Hold a snowman contest. Have families work together to build creative snowmen. You provide the props—scarves, pieces of coal, carrots, buttons, hats, etc. Then judge them and

award the top three winners.

Invite families to church one evening for **board games and pizza**. Be sure to have a wide range of games and puzzles available. Have your kids' ministry team present to mingle and introduce themselves to guests.

If you have a gym, let kids get their bikes out of hibernation. Host an **indoor bike ride**—kids bring their bikes and parents can hang out. Consider blocking off a smaller area for younger children to ride trikes and strider bikes. Families can come and go as they please.

Try This ...

Youth Set Faith-Sharing Goals

Challenge your students to write down their faith-sharing goals, specifically in introducing their friends and family to church and Christ. But don't stop there—check in with them once a month to find out how they're doing, what's been tough, what is easy, etc. Regularly ask if anyone has stories to share. And be intentional about making youth group, outreach events and mission trips easy to invite guests to.

- I will pray for _____ and _____ regularly—that they would have open hearts to learn about and accept Christ.
- I will invite ____ (# of) friend(s) to youth group (include names if you know who).
- I will invite ____ (# of) friend(s) to church (include names if you know who).
- I will invite ____ (# of) friend(s) to a youth group event via Facebook (include names if you know who).
- I will strengthen my faith by reading the Bible _____ (every morning, five times a week, etc.).
- I will serve by _____ (short-term mission trip to specific place, regular volunteering, etc.).

Storyed Lives

Connect Seniors and Youth

Through the free Storyed Lives Program—started by a high school junior in 2012—youth partner with local senior citizens to record the older adults' life stories. Teens get to hone their writing skills, and the seniors enjoy the company and having their stories told.

Once partnered, the teens and seniors usually meet several times over the course of 10 weeks. A formal closing ceremony—perhaps at your church—provides an opportunity to share the completed stories with friends and family.

To learn about starting a program, visit StoryedLivesProgram.org.
—Heather Schnese



Hope for Helpers

Refreshing Springs Cares for Caregivers

THE CHURCH

Refreshing Springs Church of God in West Chester, Ohio

THE CHALLENGE

Help caregivers in the community.

ONE BIG IDEA

Organize workshops and a support group for people who provide care for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

"Caregiving is the most difficult thing I've ever done," a woman said. "It's just such a lonely, often thankless job."

The other people in the room nodded in empathy. They also were caregivers.

"You're not alone," said Cheryl Lander, one of the group's facilitators. "We're all here for you."

Refreshing Springs Church of God in West Chester, Ohio, offers this monthly support meeting for people who provide care for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

"We all need to have a place where people understand what we're going through," Lander says.

The group also provides important and helpful information to its members.

"We sponsor workshops where medical professionals, social workers, therapists and attorneys come in to speak to our group about the issues we may face in

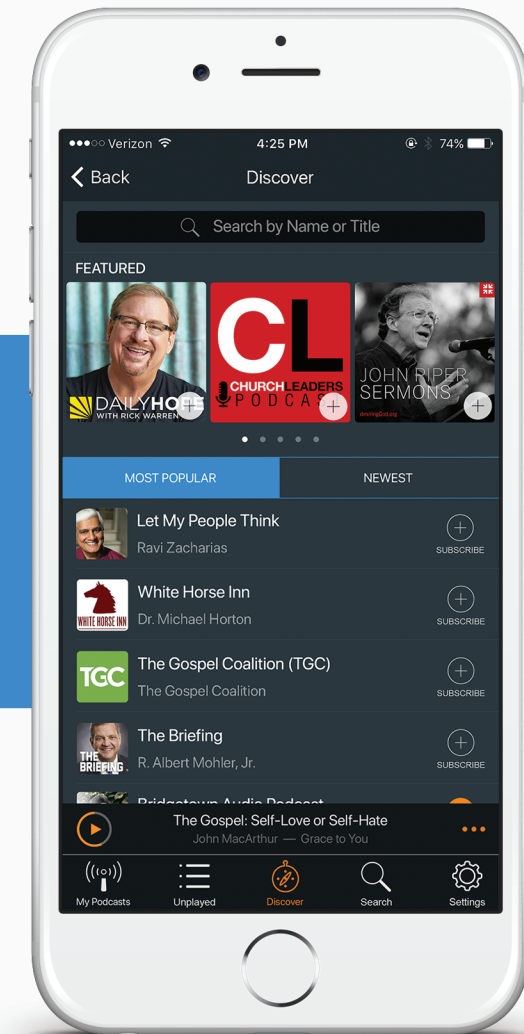
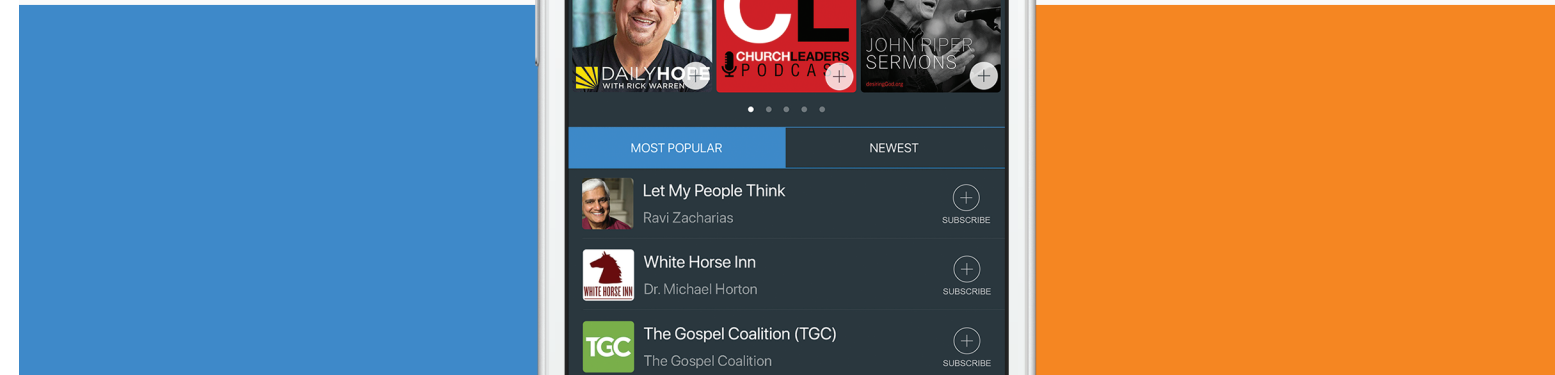
our roles as caregivers," explains Lander. "Some of the workshops focus on helping the person with the disease, and sometimes we focus on supporting the caregiver."

Lander and Donna Jackson, the other program facilitator, work closely with the Greater Cincinnati Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

"When we want to have a speaker at our meeting, we can contact the association and they will put us in touch with the right person," Lander says, adding that the association also includes Refreshing Springs in a database of support groups on its website. "That's how many people find us."

About half of the group's participants already attend Refreshing Springs. "A few people have attended services at our church after coming to the Alzheimer's Care Ministry," Lander says. "We just want to be a light to people who are going through a dark time."

—Diane Stark
RefreshingSpringsChurch.org



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