

IDEAS

FOR ANY CHURCH, ANY SIZE



A Culture of Urgency

Kentucky Church Renews Its Vision to Reach the Lost

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST

Burlington, Kentucky
Lead Pastor: **Darin Mirante**
Twitter: @DMirante
Website: **FirstChurch.me**
Founded: **1964**
Affiliation: **Independent**
Locations: **2**
Attendance: **2,379**
Growth in 2016: **+347 (17%)**
Fastest-Growing: **56**

When Darin Mirante stepped into the lead pastor role at First Church of Christ in 2016, he found that the Burlington, Kentucky, church had become complacent.

“We had lost energy and that sense of urgency to reach the lost,” Mirante says. “So our biggest challenge over the past year has been to re-create that culture of urgency, to restore the reason why we as a

church exist in the first place. The goal isn’t just to put on church and have programs—we need to look outward, not inward.”

Renewing that dedication to share the gospel with those who don’t know Christ was like an injection of energy into a stale culture—and it turned out the people of First Church were primed for this revived focus.

“They were ready—they just needed a sense of direction to grab on to and leadership to point them in a purposeful direction,” Mirante says. “We had some of the things in place, but now we provide easy ways to connect and be involved. We also give people a sense of ownership. It’s not like, ‘Hey, this one core group of people is doing this.’ No, we need everyone to understand the part they can play.”

As the church began to connect with the community, attendance numbers started to climb. “When you have more excitement among the people, they start to invite more people to church,” Mirante says. “When you create a can’t-miss-church culture, more people come. Now people are attending more consistently.”

Barry and Millie Becker, who have attended First Church since 2013, lead Bible studies, work on the homeless ministry team and volunteer in a weekly outreach to a low-income community. They believe positive word-of-mouth has also led more people to First Church.

“[We’re excited for the church] to continue leading more people to know, worship and serve Jesus Christ by expanding and growing current and new community outreach programs,” Barry says. “It’s what our congregation does so well.”

One popular outreach is the Whiz Kids afterschool tutoring program.

“The students who have been attending

the Whiz Kids program all improved in their test scores,” Millie says. “Our Union campus is looking into being able to provide a Whiz Kids program for another Boone County school or even help another church start up a program.”

“Half the volunteers at Whiz Kids are retirees,” Mirante says. “They are a great example to the rest of us of serving and generosity. This intentional time of tutoring and relationship building is a great bridge builder to the community.”

The church also has a strong small-groups program.

“We’ve seen a higher connection with small-group involvement,” Mirante says. “If you are going to grow as a church, you need to be relationally connected. The more people in small groups, the more people who are going to stay at the church. We stress that it’s important to be in purposeful relationships in terms of small groups.”

Located 20 minutes south of Cincinnati, the church has seen an influx

of young families, which has added to the rich worship experience in the church family, Mirante says. “We have a lot of people under age 40 and a lot of people over 65,” he says. “Our church reflects the community.”

To equip people for ministry, First Church has partnered with RightNow Media to offer an online library of more than 10,000 Bible studies and Christian training and leadership videos available for free streaming. Becoming a better leader is important to Mirante, who stresses the importance of when to say no.

“One thing that surprised me when I became pastor was how easy it is to be spread too thin in my responsibilities,” he says. “I’ve learned the importance of narrowing my focus and helping others on the team narrow theirs for the sake of accomplishing more of what matters most—reaching others for Christ. In short, we are becoming ‘efficiently urgent.’”

—Lora Schrock





Rural Expansion

Small Church Thinks Outside the Tech Box

THE CHURCH
The Rescue Church in Flandreau, South Dakota

THE CHALLENGE
Multiply a small church in other rural communities.

ONE BIG IDEA
Find creative ways to use technology to connect rural campuses.

When Pastor Jon Sanders founded The Rescue Church in 2004, he knew only that God had called him and his family to plant a church in the tiny agricultural community of Flandreau, South Dakota. Sanders, who also works full time as a Sioux Falls firefighter, couldn't have known that by 2009 that vision would expand in a big way. That's when he says God called him to use technology to multiply The Rescue Church in other rural communities.

"That left me with way more questions than answers," Sanders says. "I didn't know anything about video, it sounded expensive and we didn't have any resources."

Soon, however, he began learning about multisite strategy. Of course, most multisite churches are larger, better resourced and usually not rural. But Sanders and his team pressed on.

Now, after 14 years, The Rescue Church consists of five locations, including a campus in the rural Jamaican town of Deeside, and a small, deaf congregation in Peoria, Illinois.

Creative use of technology has allowed all the campuses to share the same DNA. One example is the way they transmit Sanders' sermons. He records his message earlier in the week to an empty room, then drops those files into Dropbox so they're ready for each campus to download and play on Sunday, when Sanders preaches the same sermon live at the main campus.

To reach the deaf congregation in Peoria, Sanders sends his recorded sermons to his mom, a professional sign-language interpreter, who interprets them on camera. On Sundays, they sync the two videos so the congregation can see Sanders preaching and watch his mom interpret.

In 2014, Sanders used tech in a whole new way: He began hosting his own podcast, *Small Town Big Church*, where he speaks on issues that matter to fellow small-church leaders and offers wisdom from his own experiences. The podcast has not only connected Sanders with other small-church leaders doing ministry well, creating a shared knowledge pool, but it's attracted attention to his own church and has even brought people to him who eventually became part of his staff.

Sanders' church is also engaged in community events, is generous to help those outside the church and provides community resources where they're lacking. Most of the staff is bivocational and made up of volunteers, which helps the church budget, frees up Sanders' schedule and keeps the team plugged in to the culture they're trying to reach.

"We serve a God who loves to do big things in small places," Sanders says. "We keep believing him for big things and stepping out in faith, and it's just amazing to see what he does."

—Jessica Hanewinkel
TheRescueChurch.com



In April: National Library Week

Thank a Librarian

This year marks the 60th anniversary of National Library Week, April 8-14, which was started to promote reading and a strong and healthy family life. Celebrate the week—themed "Libraries Lead"—by making a special delivery to your local library of doughnuts, coffee, cookies or cupcakes. Thank the librarians and give them bookmarks with your church's name, logo and information on them.

Plan Now Gifts for Mom

Calvary Church (CalvaryChurch.us) in Roseville, Minnesota, invited dads and kids to church on a Saturday morning a few weeks before Mother's Day to make gifts for Mom. At various stations, dads and kids could pot succulents in mugs, get a picture and use it to make a card, color a pretty picture and fill a bag with different candies and chocolates. Dads connected over doughnuts and coffee, kids had fun and moms got thoughtful gifts on their special day. And it provided Calvary the perfect opportunity to invite the family to Mother's Day services.



Community Outreach Spring Into Action

The days are getting longer, and the weather's getting warmer. It's cause for celebration and connection.

- **Rummage sale.** Host a community-wide sale at your church. Advertise in local stores, gyms and restaurants as well as on your website and Facebook page. Accept donations from the community. Engage your entire church—youth, small groups, etc. At the event, hand out coffee, water, cookies, etc.; wash shoppers' cars; give away small tote bags printed with your church's name and logo for easy shopping and church marketing.
- **Spring fling carnival.** Invite your neighbors over for a free cookout complete with a bounce house for the kids, live music and family games.
- **Community cleanup day.** After getting permission from the appropriate city officials, hit your local parks, sidewalks and public areas to pick up trash. Have teams wear church T-shirts.

May 3 National Day of Prayer

The National Day of Prayer was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman; every president since has signed a National Day of Prayer proclamation. This year the National Day of Prayer is May 3 and the theme is "Pray for America #Unity."

How to participate:

1. Pray corporately and individually.

2. Host a prayer gathering.
 3. Start a Bible study or a sermon series on prayer.
 4. Text daily prayer requests.
- For more information on hosting an event or volunteering, ideas for your congregation, prayer requests, study guides and curriculum, visit NationalDayOfPrayer.org.



One Heart, One Church

Two Churches and an Outreach Center Merge to Better Serve and Unite a Community

THE CHURCH
Word of Life Church in Rock Island, Illinois

THE CHALLENGE
Bring down barriers that keep communities separated, and increase the serving power of a community's ministries.

ONE BIG IDEA
Merge two ministries so their strengths are bolstered, resources shared and diversity celebrated.

Word of Life Church of Rock Island, Illinois, had hit a growth plateau. The 125 or so regular attendees—mostly white—were good people, says Pastor Tanner Payton, who assumed leadership of the church in 2012, but outreach to the urban neighborhood wasn't a priority of the church. Payton wanted to change that.

Nearby, Heart of Hope Ministries Church was smaller, at about 25 attendees who were mostly African-American. The church was linked to Heart of Hope outreach center, both founded by Pastor Linda Sargent, an African-American woman several decades older than

Payton. They were doing good things in the community, but Sargent was struggling to operate both the church and the outreach center on her own.

So when the churches merged last July and became Word of Life Church, both Payton, who serves as senior pastor, and Sargent couldn't have been more thrilled.

"This is a natural fit for us to combine our resources and do more for the building of the kingdom of God," says Sargent, who still heads up the outreach center, which retained its Heart of Hope name.

The congregations' differences, especially those around ethnicity, have been the catalyst for embracing diversity and encouraging connection. The outreach center gives members the opportunity to serve their neighbors, and people from a wide variety of backgrounds are finding their way to the church. Despite losing some members to the merger, the new congregation has grown in both attendance and diversity.

"We look at this as an opportunity to bring down barriers and to allow the love of God to be our guiding force at a time that is very vital in our nation," Sargent says, citing how the church was a united front during the Charlottesville, Virginia, rally last August.

"Pastor Linda and I got up together in front of the church, and we were able to discuss what Jesus says about racial reconciliation," Payton says. "We had an arm around each other, and I feel like that brings validity to the conversation. We're not just standing around talking about reconciliation. We're actually practicing it."

—Jessica Hanewinckel
WordOfLifeQC.com



Try These Four Tips

Use Google to Grow Your Church

Jake Kurtz is a digital marketing expert in Tampa, Florida (IAMJakeKurtz.com; @iamJakeKurtz). Here he shares how he helped a church startup begin using digital marketing to spread the word about its ministry—without spending any money.

The church I worked with was going through a website redesign at the time, which was good timing for what I was recommending—setting up a paid search on Google for advertising—because you want to have a good landing page for any ad.

Geographically the church was located in an area where there weren't many other churches, so I geo-targeted the campaigns to their immediate surroundings. The lack of competition made the campaign more affordable. On top of setting up Google AdWords for search ads, I set up Google Analytics to track user behavior, which is a key tool for small businesses.

I used four buckets of search terms.

- 1. Tampa searches**
The church was located in Tampa, so I used search terms such as "churches Tampa," "churches in Tampa FL," "Church Tampa," "Tampa churches," "Tampa Christian Church," etc. That way when people searched for churches in the Tampa area, this church would show up in the results.

2. Channelside searches
Channelside is the area of Tampa where the church was located. Because no other churches were located directly in Channelside, this was a huge advantage. I did have the terms "Channelside churches" and "Church in Channelside" targeted, but I also targeted "Channelside." I wanted people who were broadly searching for Channelside to be aware that a church was located in the area.

3. Branded searches
I used the exact name of the church as a keyword to make sure that any

time somebody searched for the specific name it was always the first thing that popped up. This move is key for brands, especially those who are not showing up well organically. It is inexpensive because it is rare that somebody will type in the exact name of your church if you're not well-known. But if they do, it'd be nice to show up first for every search.

4. Near-me searches
Because of how people search on their phones, I wanted to make sure we were showing up for "church near me" or "churches near me." It was one of the keywords that generated the most clicks.

And the best part? I didn't spend \$1. Here is where things became a win-win for everyone. Google AdWords has a nonprofit marketing program where certain nonprofits can get anywhere from \$10,000 to \$40,000 per month through a grant that allows them to do Google AdWords—billed directly to Google. Essentially, it's free advertising. The catch is you have bid restrictions of \$2, and you have to have somebody actively managing the campaign.

You also have to apply and make a case for how the money will help your organization. Go to Google.com/grants to learn more about this program.

The church grew to about 40 attendees, in part due to the Google ads. People said they found the church online, or they just searched for churches and ended up on the website.

While you can't say "Ten people walked into my church from a paid search," you can say, "Ten people walked into my church, had an amazing experience and will tell five or 10 other people."



when Lisa Simmons suggested that LifeSpring Community Church raise fish to help the less fortunate, McCloy was intrigued. Because the church meets in a former farm store, it had a greenhouse out back that was going unused.

“Lots of churches do food pantries, so the challenge for the poor is to find fresh vegetables and meat to supplement what is available,” McCloy says. “Aquaponics fit with our resources, skills and goals of serving the community physically, relationally and spiritually.”

Aquaponics—the combination of aquaculture (raising fish) and hydroponics (growing plants without soil)—uses one integrated system. The fish waste provides an organic food source for the plants, and the plants naturally filter the water for the fish.

J.D. Scritchfield Jr., who spearheads the project with Simmons, has built one system and hopes to add another three.

“As we are able to bring on additional systems, we will have more to give away,” he says.

LifeSpring, which averages 25 people on Sundays, is partnering on the project with Comunidad Nueva Esperanza, the Hispanic congregation they share the building with. Last year they raised lettuce and cilantro; this year they will harvest their first tilapia.

The church offers the food to the community without any stipulations, but recipients are encouraged to help with planting seeds and picking vegetables.

“Time spent together in the greenhouse is time that we can use to develop relationships and show them the love of Christ,” McCloy says. “Ideally, we would like to incorporate them into the life of the church and help them to begin their own personal journey of faith in Jesus.”

“We aren’t big, and we don’t have a lot of resources,” she adds, “but we have people who are willing to step out in faith.”

—L.S.

LifeSpringJackson.org

Reaping a Harvest

West Virginia Church Uses Aquaponics to Feed the Needy

Rev. Mary Beth McCloy had heard some out-of-the-box outreach ideas at church leadership meetings before, but

Accessing Leadership

Senior Pastor Steve DeWitt and Executive Pastor of Ministries Brad Lagos Discuss the Importance of Connecting With People

BETHEL CHURCH

Crown Point, Indiana

BethelWeb.org

Launched: **1937**

Average Weekend Attendance: **3,120**

Connection Points: **Pizza at the senior pastor’s house; home visits**

2017 Outreach 100 Church No. 90 Fastest-Growing

Bethel Church has four very unique and diverse campuses. Do you have an overall philosophy on retention?

DeWitt: The people who are attracted beyond a first visit tend to be people who are attracted to a Bible-based, proclamation-of-Jesus-type church. We’re not gimmicky. I’ve been here 20 years, and it’s been a steady pull in the same direction. We’re not trying to jump on the latest philosophical bandwagon. We’ve had the same general guiding principles for a long time.

As we try to get people to stick, we’re not as much using some program to sell them on our overall vision—summarized by “it’s all about him”—as we are tying the ministries of our church and the vision of our church to an overall desire to make Jesus famous in our region.

Lagos: There are four things we try to emphasize in retaining people. They need to feel connected to the ministry of the church, which basically means they’re feeling blessed—there’s a value added to them

personally by being here. Second, they need to feel connected to leadership. Third, connected to peers. And lastly, connected to responsibility. That’s the volunteering piece. Generally, we find that if people are checking all four of those boxes, they’re 100 percent here.

Does one of those come first?

DeWitt: I think we put a little more weight on people feeling connected to leadership. That has more of an immediate impact on retention than if they get connected in a small group. Programmatic retention strategies are different in each spot, but the value of being known by a leader and knowing a leader is universal.

Lagos: I have people in my home. It’s kind of like a pizza party. We have an opportunity for them to ask questions. Last Friday night at my house I had 22 brand new people to our church. There’s some kind

where that location is?” At our Gary, Indiana, location, for example, the expectation of the community there is that our pastor does home visits. He follows up with people in their home. You don’t do that in suburban America in the same way—it feels intrusive. But in that community there’s more of an expectation that the pastor will come see me at my house.

What are your challenges in prioritizing access to leadership?

DeWitt: Many of the people who come, they’ve never been in a church our size. I had a woman tell me yesterday, “I’ve never been in a large church.” Generally, they come with experiences in smaller churches, where there was more access to key leaders. We have to work hard to have access but to not let it dominate. I can say that better than I do it. It’s a reality of large-church ministry. There are just so many people. You can’t have the same level of time with everybody that you can in a smaller context.

Lagos: We talk a lot about how our pastoral staff needs to be out there in transitions between services, shaking as many hands as they can, being present. We have a guest reception after services some weekends, and a high number of staff is present so people can feel a connection with leadership.

—Heather Schnese

“We’re not trying to jump on the latest philosophical bandwagon. We’ve had the same general guiding principles for a long time.”

of connection they feel being in my home. I wouldn’t know the percentage, but it’s really high—if I can get someone new in my home, they tend to stick. Many of our leaders—their first step was coming to my house for pizza. It’s been helpful.

DeWitt: We also have to ask, “How do you adapt your systems and ministries to be relevant in the context



Conversation at The Feast

Building the Church Through ‘Theology Chats’

THE CHURCH

The Feast Church in Providence, Rhode Island

THE CHALLENGE

Reach one of America’s most post-Christian cities with the gospel.

ONE BIG IDEA

Promote conversation and encourage difficult questions in a culture of intellectual honesty.

The Northeast isn’t known for being a hotbed of thriving Protestant churches. But in the West End neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island—a city that regularly finds itself near the top of Barna’s “least Bible-minded cities in America” list—The Feast Church is connecting a highly post-Christian community with the gospel. Its secret? The art of conversation.

“Non-Christians have very little interest in being preached at,” says Caleb Borchers, who planted The Feast in 2014 alongside his wife, Fran, in partnership with the Kairos Church Planting network.

“But they are often excited about having give-and-take conversations.”

The Feast holds a series of recurring events called “Theology Chats,” in which Borchers and his team meet in homes with members of the congregation to discuss topics like the problem of suffering or the historicity of the resurrection. Participants are encouraged to ask hard questions and wrestle with their doubts in a nonthreatening setting. Borchers also follows every sermon with a Q&A session to foster dialogue with his listeners.

“Our approach means we have to come from a position of humility, admitting the challenges of faith and the failures of the church,” Borchers says. “We desire to position ourselves not as an authoritative voice, declaring dogmatic truth, but as a conversation partner, sharing the benefits, beauty and truth of following Jesus.”

This willingness to embrace the messy side of faith has resonated with The Feast’s primarily young congregation, who are mainly highly educated, building families and careers, and almost all finding Jesus for the first time.

In line with its name, The Feast calls its discipleship track “The Menu,” which consists of four “main courses” that offer members a holistic spiritual experience and invokes Jesus’ parable of the feast in Luke 14:15–24.

Borchers implores his fellow church planters and pastors to engage the non-Christians in their communities with steadfast honesty. By acknowledging the challenges of faith and refusing to shy away from tough questions, church leaders can meet skepticism with the goodness of the gospel.

“You have to be transparent about everything. You can’t cut any corners,” Borchers says. “The moment today’s non-Christians smell even a hint of clandestine behavior, they assume the worst. We have to prove that Jesus-people can be trusted to benefit the communities we live in.”

—Taylor Bird
TheFeastProvidence.org

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Going Where the People Are

Church Under the Bridge Has Served Waco's Homeless for 25 years

"It was kind of this raw, crazy thing."

That's how Pastor Jimmy Dorrell describes the beginnings of his unique ministry, Church Under the Bridge in Waco, Texas. Nearly 300 people gather each Sunday beneath an Interstate 35 overpass. As cars speed by overhead, the sounds of

praise resonate through the concrete pillars.

The church celebrated its 25th anniversary last September. It began when Dorrell and his wife, Janet, returned from an overseas mission stint and agreed that they needed to find a ministry for the poor. They

settled into an inner-city neighborhood of Waco. For several months they prayed and planned how they could minister to the "least of these."

"One morning in September of 1992, Janet and I were having breakfast at the Taco Cabana, across the street from the interstate," Dorrell

says, explaining that they saw a group of homeless men under the bridge and invited a few of them to come over to talk.

"We bought them breakfast and listened for a couple of hours.

It was a great time and we said, 'Let's do it again next week.' [The men] showed up again and brought a few more people. The third time, breakfast cost me around \$250. They said, 'Hey why don't you come under our bridge where we live and do a Bible study?'"

The next week Janet brought her guitar and led in music. Jimmy brought some folding chairs. Soon the number of attendees grew as the Dorrells brought breakfast and engaged the group with the Bible.

Dorrell stresses that Church Under the Bridge is not an evangelist outreach. "We're not a church for the poor people. We are a church *with* the poor people. We have everything churches do. We have communion and baptisms, funerals and weddings. You name it—it all happens under that bridge."

He says that attendees come from all walks of life, from a Baylor student to an accountant to a person who calls the bridge home. They begin at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays by feeding the congregation through a ministry that is now run by other churches.

"Some of these churches drive from as far as 100 miles away to come feed our people and be a part of what we're doing," Dorrell says.

Service begins after the meal. No one is made to stay, but most do. The church also has 12 small groups that meet in a variety of locations on subjects that reflect the diversity of the church's people.

Dorrell does the bulk of the preaching from a stage that is

loaded with folding chairs and rolled into place. The people participating in the service are often from the streets. "We have broken people read the Scripture. We have

"We're not a church for the poor people. We are a church with the poor people."

lots of creative things like skits or testimonies or whatever we need to do to engage the people. On Palm Sunday we have one of the homeless guys dressed as Jesus and we have a donkey."

He points out that seven other churches in Texas operate under bridges, and similar ministries have opened in Mexico, Haiti and India. Mission Waco-Mission World, a nonprofit Dorrell runs, has developed training sessions so others can learn about the Church Under the

Bridge model, but Dorrell stresses, "What we did in Waco is unique. Parts of that can't be replicated. God put his fingerprints on what we're doing. The same principals exist, but where it ends up is going to be a little different in every community."

"God's fingerprint" was recently seen when the state of Texas needed to upgrade the bridge the church meets under. The architects actually called in church leaders for input on the best use of the space. While they have no plans to remove the church, the renovation will require a temporary relocation. As Dorrell sees it, the church is getting a free remodel courtesy of the Texas Department of Transportation.

—Jeff Chaves

ChurchUnderTheBridge.org





A Special Place for Special Needs

Iowa Congregation Develops Sensory Learning Space

THE CHURCH

Open Bible Church in Waterloo, Iowa

THE CHALLENGE

Help families with special-needs children feel welcomed.

ONE BIG IDEA

Provide a learning space for autistic and other special-needs children.

Bre Riley and her 4-year-old autistic son, Shunye, attended multiple churches in hopes of finding a place where Shunye would feel comfortable. Loud music and other random things bothered him. Plus, he has to move around a lot.

“Even though people would offer to help during the service, their lack of knowledge or training with autism made it hard for them to know what to do,” says Riley, who struggled to concentrate at church because she was so focused on her son’s needs. Then she found Open Bible Church in Waterloo, Iowa.

Aaron Keller, pastor of the church, knew just how Riley felt. He recalls the stamina it took to venture out in public with his three autistic sons (now ages 15, 13 and 10).

“Autistic kids look normal so everyone expects them to behave socially, but they can’t,” says Keller, who couldn’t get his boys to sit through church. Two years ago, he had an epiphany.

“I’d been ignoring the very thing God had given me,” says Keller. “I had the tools to lead a church designed for special-needs children.”

So that’s what he did. At the time, the 70-member congregation had four families with special-needs children, but since the church relaunched in October 2017 with their new focus, a new family has come every week. The

church offers respite care for children age 12 and younger, enabling parents to attend worship knowing that their children are in good hands.

“I’m thankful for this ministry so that parents can form a relationship with God and feel worry-free doing it,” says Riley.

The church’s large sanctuary has a space in the back that is set up like a family room for those who need to pace. In addition, the church provides noise-canceling earmuffs and weighted blankets to calm those with sensory issues. Keller has also adjusted the way he delivers messages.

“The Bible is full of abstract thought, so I make things more concrete, sometimes in the form of an illustration,” explains Keller, noting that the key to running a successful special-needs ministry is making it inclusive. “Parents of special-needs kids want that peer-to-peer interaction, and normal learners enjoy befriending special-needs kids. It’s mutually beneficial as everyone experiences the joy of being a minister of the gospel.”

—Christy Heitger-Ewing
OBCWaterloo.com

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Gospel Block Parties

VBS Goes Mobile for Greater Reach in Kentucky

THE CHURCH

Rose Hill Baptist Church in Ashland, Kentucky

THE CHALLENGE

Find a new way to introduce the gospel to children and their families outside of the church.

ONE BIG IDEA

Host vacation Bible school block parties throughout the community.

Shortly after Matt Shamblin started his new job as Rose Hill Baptist Church's senior pastor in 2015, Angie Vanover, the church's director of children's ministries, approached him with an unusual idea: She wanted to host VBS block parties to reach children throughout the city.

Shamblin said yes.

"[As we see it,] VBS isn't to reach out to the kids you already have in your church," says Shamblin, "but to reach out into your community."

The church, which averages a Sunday attendance of 400, held its first VBS block party in 2016 with more than 70 volunteers, a block-party trailer, inflatables, games, crafts, music and popcorn.

"It's kind of like a carnival on wheels," says Vanover. "We roll in and take over an area. That in itself creates excitement."

Besides hosting fun and games, the volunteers teach the gospel. Attendees as young as 3 up to adults attended the two-hour evening events. In 2017, Rose Hill held six summer VBS programs in its hometown of Ashland, Kentucky, in addition to its regular church VBS.

Planning the block parties begins early in the year, says Vanover. They target neighborhoods where children and families live. Then, on the day of each VBS, volunteers canvass the neighborhood to distribute flyers. Once the program begins, they divide attendees by age for the Bible lessons.

Nearly 1,000 people showed up to the VBS block parties last year, Shamblin says. Several families even joined the church after attending VBS.

Last summer, Rose Hill expanded its operation with a VBS for 14 children with autism led by congregants with expertise in special education. Vanover recalls how a 10-year-old girl expressed her excitement for attending VBS for the first time by crafting a smiley face in clay.

"She said, 'This is how I feel because I get to come to VBS.'"

—Gail Allyn Short
RoseHillAshland.NextMeta.com



Plan Now for Summer Ministry

VBS: 10 Safety Concerns

Parents are not going to drop off their children without being satisfied that you have spent significant time developing and carefully implementing a solid safety plan. Now, as you plan for VBS, begin developing your policies and procedures concerning safety.

Here are the top VBS-related safety concerns that most parents share.

1. Who is caring for my child?

Begin with what criteria you use for choosing teachers and volunteers. A good application and interview process is a great start, but the screening process should also include reference and criminal background checks.

2. Volunteer training and orientation

You've chosen some great volunteers, but that doesn't mean they are all trained child care professionals or child safety experts. Proper training and orientation on safety procedures for each volunteer is a necessity.

3. What is your transition protocol?

It's one thing if you are going to leave the children in the same classroom the entire time, but if you are moving

them from classroom to playground to group hall, etc., how are you going to get a group of distracted kids to their next destination?

4. What is your bathroom policy?

Whatever your restroom policy is, under no circumstance should a volunteer or teacher be alone in the bathroom with a child. *No exceptions.* This rule protects both child and volunteer.

5. What is your daily check-in and checkout system?

A unique identification to match child with parent or authorized adult and an ID card for one parent or authorized adult will help maintain order at pick-up time and ensure that the right child goes with the right authorized adult.

6. How do you handle kids with allergies?

Whether it's with an armband or a distinguishing feature on their name tag, properly "label" each allergic youngster with some kind of an alert; and of course, the method you choose means

absolutely nothing if volunteers and other staff are not aware of them.

7. How do you handle medical issues and accidents?

Be sure you are familiar with any relevant medical issues prior to receiving the child along with any activity restrictions. As with allergies, these concerns should be included on their person, and volunteers need to check on the child. Be sure to collect emergency contact names and numbers.

8. What is your emergency plan (campuswide)?

You should have an emergency plan in place to be used for all children and youth ministry events—a comprehensive plan that will address evacuation, natural disasters and what to do in the event of an intruder. Make sure you go over this information with your staff and volunteers.

9. What is your well-child policy?

Include in the registration packet a document that lets parents know that children with certain symptoms must stay home, and if they are observed to have any of the listed symptoms after drop-off, the child's parent or authorized adult will be contacted to pick them up. This communicates to the parents that you take great care to protect well children from getting sick—another huge relief.

10. How do you handle discipline issues?

Communicate to the parents that you do not use physical discipline and that you have a fair and consistent plan in place to help children understand what is expected of them in your care.

—Kristi Winkler
ShareFaith.com

A Safe Haven

Michigan Church's Youth Ministry Offers Teens Support

THE CHURCH

Crossfire Church in Cedar Springs, Michigan

THE CHALLENGE

Introduce local youth to Jesus.

ONE BIG IDEA

Start a weekly meeting where teens can feel safe and appreciated.

Madison is a high school sophomore in Cedar Springs, Michigan, who comes from a family life most would describe as difficult. When she first started coming to Crossfire Church's Refuge Youth Network Michigan, Madison came across as distant, perhaps because of her speech difficulty. But since then she has come out of her shell.

"She likes to hang out and is very affectionate where there was no affection before," says Keith Hemmila, senior pastor of Crossfire Church. "She won't miss [a meeting] because it's a support group for her."

Refuge Youth Network Michigan began weekly events last August that have become a safe place for area youth to connect with caring adults, form important friendships, learn about the Bible and have a great time. They first met at a local sports complex but recently moved

to a public school with the support of the school district superintendent.

Lasting two and a half hours, the weekly meetings include a time of "table talk"—purposeful interaction with volunteers from the church, brief and engaging lessons from Scripture, and fun time that includes food, crafts, volleyball, basketball and other games.

Refuge began with Hemmila praying together with youth evangelist Randy Don Giovanni and others, including the mayor of nearby Grand Rapids, to reach today's youth. In believing that our culture is at a tipping point and that "kids are really empty and something needs to fill that void, the place to start is with young people—changing their hearts and growing a generation," Hemmila says.

"At ages 13 and 14, kids are dealing with broken homes, identity problems, cutting, bullying and the inability to know what it means to achieve," Hemmila says. "The church needs to bring them to an identity in Christ and support them. It's not a question of, 'Is this a good idea?' This is something we have to do."

—H.L. Hussman

Crossfire-Ministries.org



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Breaking Through

Las Vegas Area Churches Aim to Spiritually Liberate Juvenile Offenders

THE CHURCH

Hope Church in Las Vegas, Nevada

THE CHALLENGE

Reach incarcerated and recently released juveniles to give them hope and share the gospel.

ONE BIG IDEA

Partner with local facilities to make connections with jailed and rehabilitated youth.

Heads down, eyes toward the floor, a single-file line of teenage boys and girls walks somberly into a makeshift sanctuary at Caliente Youth Center (CYC) in Caliente, Nevada.

Assembled there is a group of volunteers from six to eight Las Vegas Valley churches who have united to bring light and hope into a very gloomy place. Included in that group are Anthony and Kisha Langerica, leaders of Hope Church's Break Thru Ministry, an outreach for incarcerated juveniles within Nevada state facilities.

Once a month for the past 10 years, anywhere from six to 20 volunteers have

been making the 300-mile round trip to CYC to host worship services for the youth there. The gatherings include what Anthony Langerica calls "God-driven spoken word" and hip-hop videos designed to capture their attention, followed by a Bible-based message.

"We want to meet them where they're at," Anthony says. "We find ways to engage them but also give them a glimpse of what to expect with traditional worship once they're out."

Although facility regulations limit their interactions with the youth, volunteers often get to speak with them and pray. Anthony says the emotional reactions from the kids can be very moving.

"We've had teenagers cry, and stand up and start shouting that they need God in their life and that they want change," he says.

Kisha states that their goal is to have a point person at each of the area churches who is ready to connect with the youth and get them plugged in and disciplined once they're released.

"On average we will have three to four kids a year who will contact us. One young lady accepted Christ three years ago, is now doing well and wants to go back to CYC with us to talk to the kids," she says. "Because she's been there."

—Meredee Berg
HopeChurchOnline.com

HOST YOUR NEXT WOMEN'S EVENT WITH VIRAL SENSATION CANDACE PAYNE



CANDACE PAYNE is a viral sensation whose video of trying on a Chewbacca Mask became the most-viewed Facebook Live video to date (175+ million views). She has been featured on major media outlets such as "Good Morning America," "The Late Late Show with James Corden," The New York Times, PEOPLE and Cosmopolitan. Candace is not just an overnight video sensation though. She released her first book, *Laugh It Up: Embrace Freedom and Experience Defiant Joy*, in the fall 2017. Candace lives in Texas with her husband, two children, and ornery pugs.

"CANDACE PAYNE is authentic, relatable, and has a great message shared with some humor thrown in. Our women were at the edge of their seats listening to her message of hope. If you're looking for a speaker who can relate to the everyday girl and has spiritual depth, Candace is your girl! I would definitely use her again!"

—Jodi Ruch, Women's Ministry Director
Emmanuel Christian Center, Minneapolis, MN



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Invite Candace to speak for your next women's event or conference.

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Lunch With Friends

Giving Seniors a Place to Belong in Southwest Florida

THE CHURCH
Family Church in Marco Island, Florida

THE CHALLENGE
Help seniors make friends and connect with the community.

ONE BIG IDEA
Give older adults a free meal, fun and fellowship.

After having her parents live with her for five years, Nancy Kot realized that much of their social life consisted of doctor’s appointments and lunch outings. Since Marco Island, Florida, lacks a senior center, Kot talked with Liz Pecora, community affairs coordinator for Our Daily Bread Food Pantry at Family Church. They wanted to find a way to unite seniors, many of whom lacked advocates, and help them mingle and be a part of the community.

“Socialization is so important as you age,” says Kot, who began chatting with Allyson Richards, the Greater Marco Family YMCA representative. Richards suggested using food to bring folks together, and a partnership birthed a ministry.

“Who doesn’t like to eat?” she pointed out.

In August 2017, the trio of women launched Lunch With Friends, a ministry for any person 60 years or older. The ministry hosts free catered lunches on the third Thursday of the month with Family Church and the Y alternating hosting duties every three months.

When the event first launched, seniors kept to themselves much like shy students at a middle school dance. As familiarity has taken root, however, meaningful

friendships have sprouted.

“This ministry builds relationships and creates belonging,” says Kot, who serves as volunteer coordinator for the ministry. “It’s an opportunity to put woes aside and laugh together.”

Typically, 60 to 80 people attend the lunches; volunteers pick up guests who are unable to drive. Adding to the fun, the event features door prizes—everything from flashlights to chocolates to gift cards from Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts. Following the meal, seniors are invited to “shop” the church’s food pantry.

At one meal, Pecora noticed a gentleman in a Hawaiian shirt dancing around. She later found out that he has Alzheimer’s and had struggled emotionally with his diagnosis. His wife had been unsuccessful in getting him out of the house.

“She told us that this lunch group has been an answered prayer,” says Pecora.

She’s not the only one. Attendee Jennifer Reilly says that the luncheons have reintroduced her to the social scene.

“Whenever I’m out and about on the island now, people say hello to me by name,” says Reilly. “I now feel special.”

—C.H.E.
FBCMarco.com

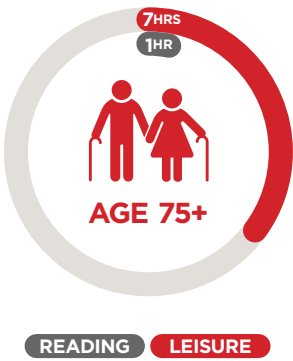
Read and Discuss Host a Monthly Book Club

- Hold the meetings on your campus or at a nearby assisted-living facility.
- Advertise the event online and throughout your community.
- Select all of the books in advance, and post the reading list online so people can read ahead and/or decide what months they’d like to participate. This also gives seniors time to buy the book or get it from the library.
- Find out if any authors may be speaking in your community in the

near future. Consider choosing their book, and make the speaking engagement an event that book club members can attend.

- Read a book that’s been made into a movie. Watching the film as a group could be a supplemental event.
- Start a multigenerational book club. Pick an enjoyable book geared toward high school students or one that is required reading for school. Invite both seniors and teens to the discussion.
- Spend time at the beginning of each meeting letting people introduce themselves and share a little bit of personal information.
- Break up into small groups for discussion if your book club is large.
- Provide coffee and light refreshments as well as information on your seniors ministry, regular services times and locations, and upcoming events.

- Have your lead pastor or other church staff members stop in for a quick hello.



DID YOU KNOW?
On average, retired adults aged 75 years and older have more than seven hours of leisure time every day. They spend nearly an hour of that reading.

—American Time Use Survey



Try This Rides for Senior Citizens

According to the AARP, adults ages 65 and older who have stopped driving have also stopped engaging in

important activities. They go to the doctor less, shop or eat out fewer times and participate in social,

- family or religious activities less—all things that keep individuals healthy, sharp and typically happier. So, be a friend and offer a ride.
1. Solicit names of older adults who may be in need of transportation.
 2. Sign up volunteers (or small groups) willing to drive.
 3. Conduct background and driver record checks for all drivers.
 4. Consider the size of the vehicle against the older adults’ needs (walker, cane, wheelchair, etc.).
 4. Pair older adults with volunteers (or small groups) based on schedules and/or location.
 5. Host an event (bingo, dinner and a movie, a speaker, concert, etc.) at your church specifically for these older adults; provide transportation to and from the event.
 6. Invite them to your worship services and offer regular rides.