HANDBOOK FOR SMALLER CHURCHES

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HANDBOOK FOR SMALLER CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

Churches with attendance of 140 people or less make up 80 percent of the congregations among churches of Christ. These churches are vital to the future of the church. Recognizing this fact, Oklahoma Christian University is determined to help such churches so they not only survive, but thrive in their work for the Lord.

To help us gather principles and examples that can help smaller churches, we have read books, held discussion sessions, and collected materials. As a result of this study, we have developed a one-day seminar for leaders and members of smaller churches that can both motivate and inform them about practical ideas they can find helpful. We plan to present this seminar in various locations where churches within a 50-mile radius can attend to listen, discuss, and share.

This book is a collection of information about smaller churches. It presents the basic outline the seminars will follow and has some of the material to be presented. With this booklet as a take-home from the seminar, the participant will be able to recall and utilize ideas presented. Those who attend can share with others, and from this, we hope many congregations will find ways to grow and prosper.

Stafford North, Kent Allen, Bob Rowley
Office of Church Relations
www.oc.edu/churchrelations
October 2, 2011
THE PRINCIPLES

The plan for the seminar is to present eight basic principles a smaller church (and even larger ones) should use as guidelines for their planning and development. The Handbook explains each of these themes and gives examples or illustrations of ways a smaller congregation can use each principle. We have collected many more examples of some of the principles in action than we have others, but all of the principles are equally important and all should be part of a congregation’s plan.

Principle No. 1
Enhance the Congregation’s View of Itself

The Bible teaches us to think well of ourselves, just not too highly (Romans 12:3). When God called Moses, for example, He had to build up Moses’ view of himself so he could face the Pharaoh. When Jesus taught about how to deal with worry, He taught that we should think highly of ourselves because we are worth more than the birds and flowers and God cares for them (Matthew 6:26). And when Paul met with the elders of the church of Ephesus, he encouraged them by charging them to care for the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them bishops (Acts 20:28).

So the Bible teaches that God’s people, in all congregations, should recognize that they possess the greatest gift ever given and that they are, therefore, an important tool in God’s hand for sharing the wonderful message of salvation.

Here are a few of the ideas we have gathered that the leaders of a smaller church might use to help that church have a good view of its own value.

1. Each congregation is part of the people of God and He has the power to sustain and build a church. We need to connect with Him through prayer about our plans and our work. We need to remind the congregation that we are His people and He cares for us. We need to lift the spirits of the church by helping them know they are part of His divine plan, which began before the world started, and which he unfolded through the ages until “through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known” (Ephesians 3:10).

2. Smaller churches are just as much a part of God’s eternal plan as larger ones. Just as each member of the body is critical to the function of the body as a whole, so each congregation of God’s church is critical to the function of Christ’s body as a whole (1 Corinthians 12:14ff).

3. Every entity, whether a person, a business, a school, or a church, needs to focus on its strengths. While we need to recognize our weaknesses, our focus should be on the good things we can do. The leaders of a church should help the members see the good things they are doing and, while sometimes learning from a weakness, help the congregation have a positive view of itself.

4. The leaders of a smaller congregation need to initiate programs that can give the congregation as a whole a sense of success. This may be a community initiative of some kind, an educational program, an evangelistic outreach, or an activity that draws everyone closer together. It may be a public event or it may be a youth activity. All of these are discussed under other principles, but the leadership of a smaller church needs to work specifically on activities that give the church a sense of achievement.

5. A smaller congregation’s view of itself can often be enhanced by joining with some other congregation in an activity from which they both draw strength. They can have a quarterly singing to bring several congregations together, have occasional joint men’s or ladies’ breakfasts or luncheons, or work together on an event such as a marriage seminar or financial seminar. Such events help each of the congregations feel stronger because they have been part of something larger than themselves.
6. A smaller congregation can develop a sense of pride in itself through a reminder of its history—celebrating key anniversary dates, a homecoming of previous members, publishing a booklet on its history, or doing bulletin boards that tell of its past. Occasional times to get together to make repairs on the building, to beautify the yard, or do other similar things that build pride in the congregation’s place to meet can be very beneficial. Some smaller churches have had a member will a rather large sum to their church that has enabled them to make substantial improvements in their facilities.

7. The leadership of a smaller congregation needs to focus on what it can do, not on what it cannot do. A congregation of 25 members can do many good things. They will not, of course, be on the scale of what a church of 500 can do, but they are no less important in the grand scheme of God’s church. So, the smaller church should keep its eye on the good it can do.

8. Having a good website can enhance the congregation’s view of itself and also provide important information for those who want to know more about the church.

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A Guide for Those Wanting to Develop a Website By Bob Young

The time is certainly here when every church needs a website, even smaller ones in rural places. Many people use a website to search for a church they want to attend and a website can be a great way both to provide information for members and as a way to attract outsiders to the church.

Dr. Bob Young, who has taught at two of our Christian colleges, Ohio Valley and Oklahoma Christian, and who has done located work in congregations, and who serves in an important way to help the work in Honduras, has a special interest in helping churches develop websites. He has posted on his website a guide for those wanting to develop a website or for those who would like to improve theirs.

You can get to his guide by going to: www.bobyoungresources.com/articles/use-internet-for-lord.htm

So, the leadership in a congregation should take appropriate measures to see that the members see themselves as useful and important in the Lord’s church.

Principle No. 2
Help members and visitors worship effectively.

1. A smaller congregation has a special opportunity to express friendliness and warmth to those attending their services. Members need to greet each other warmly as Paul suggests in Romans 16:16, where his underlying point is not about using “a holy kiss” as the greeting, but the warmth with which we should greet each other. Those who visit will see this close fellowship and be impressed, especially when they also are warmly greeted. Since in smaller congregations all the members know each other well, it is easy to tell when a guest comes in and so the congregation should be trained to greet those guests warmly and to get information that allows follow-up. A well-done packet of information about the congregation is a great item to give all those who visit.
2. The worship service itself should be scriptural and be done very well. Paul gives many instructions about this in 1 Corinthians 14. We should worship well for three reasons: (1) we are worshipping for God and He deserves our best; (2) those who are present to worship will enter into the worship experience more deeply if those leading do their part well; and (3) visitors are very observant about how well we do everything we do in worship. Well-chosen and well-led songs, a biblical message, thoughtful prayers, a carefully-conducted communion service, and carefully-done announcements that are not too long all make worship more effective and make the visitor more likely to return.

3. A smaller congregation can certainly train well those who will lead in worship. They can have a worship training class for younger men who need to learn to lead and for older men as well. They can also have special sessions to train the whole membership in what worship means and in how to participate in it as God commands and desires. Smaller churches can have good singing even if that means bringing in someone from the outside to help them improve, being sure to make good use of the younger members in the singing, and even replacing sound absorbent ceiling tile with more reflective tile to make the singing sound better.

4. Sometimes a smaller church can bring a group from a nearby church or a Christian college to lead a worship service. Their presence can give a good boost.

5. A congregation can be sure that the place of worship is conducive to worship. Everything should be clean and well kept. Get two or three to walk through the building and look at everything to see what needs upkeep, such as replacing stained ceiling tile, a bad place in the carpet, dusting the artificial plants, or giving attention to the pews and bookracks.

6. Some churches have a place in the foyer where members can submit prayer requests in writing so these can be passed to those leading prayers. Some churches plan for an elder to lead a prayer at the end of their morning service as a way both to have a well-led prayer and of being sure that important things are included, and so the elder can pray about spiritual matters in the congregation. Such a prayer also makes a good bond between elders and members.

One of our most important functions is to bring glory to God through our worship. We need to do it well.

**Principle No. 3**

**Provide One or Two Specific Needed Community Services**

Smaller congregations can make an important step forward by selecting one or two specific services to their community. Such services provide the following useful benefits: (1) they carry out the command of the Lord to be a good neighbor; (2) they gain goodwill for the church among those in the community; (3) they provide links between church members and outsiders that offer good opportunities for follow-up contact; (4) they put church members in contact with children and teens, which can offer opportunities to reach out to youth; (5) they provide a good service opportunity for members, which gives them a chance to grow and to feel good about the church.

Below are some examples of churches that have found ways to employ this principle. As you read these, look for ideas of things you might do in your church. While all communities differ, the type of activity that works in one place will often work, maybe with adjustments, in other communities.
Small Churches in Small Communities: What to do By Stafford North

Many churches are in small communities where the population is shrinking and where many of the young people are not staying. These churches are growing smaller and "grayer." Is there anything these churches can do to survive?

In most cases the answer is yes. This article will touch on just two. In future articles, we will hope to mention others.

1. The church should seek to meet one special need in its community that will create good will and connect it with the people in the community. They should probably focus their efforts on one thing to keep their energies fixed on making that one program work well and to make it highly effective. Here are some possibilities.
   a. Some congregations have developed a plan to care for children after school to fill the gap between when school is out and the time parents get home. The families that need this assistance are really glad to have it, and the time can be spent in Bible study as well as in other useful activities. And what a good way to open doors for people to come to your congregation!
   b. Do something to help with athletic activities at the local high school. Some invite people to the building for a gathering after home games. Others serve in useful ways at the games. Some provide assistance to the coaches. Some offer meals to teams at a time they work out with the coaches. Seek out what might be useful in your town and fill a need. Be sure that it gives you a chance both to serve and to connect.
   c. Serve local schools. Maybe the need is for home-room mothers, for teacher helpers, for chaperones on school outings, for assistance in the cafeteria. Talk with a local principal or superintendent and ask what you can do to help. Again, be sure that you are serving and connecting.
   d. If your community has a special event like a 4th of July Picnic or a rodeo, a fair, or a livestock show of some kind, see if there are needs with that event you can help meet. Be sure you can wear a church t-shirt or badge while you work so people will know whom you represent. Use this as a way to serve and connect.
   e. If there are older people in the community who need transportation to the doctor’s office, to the grocery store, and other places, set up a way to provide transportation for them. Even though this is reaching an older segment of the community, they will have children or friends who will notice and who will feel very favorable toward the church. And during the ride, there is time to talk with the person about the church.

Of course, you need to find ways to follow-up on the connections such activities bring you by having events to which you can invite people, doing mail follow-up, making house visits, conducting a VBS, and using other similar ways to get in a second step after you have taken the first.

2. Since one of the problems of smaller churches in smaller towns is that their youth move to the “big city,” start planting in your young people’s minds the need for them to stay in the community to help the church as their way of doing mission work. Such a thought will have to be pursued vigorously over time, but a few of the youth may decide to take the challenge and will make the future of the congregation their life’s work. Whatever young people you have, get them started early in the work of the church. Sell them on the need to have this congregation continue. Help them make the congregation a major
interest in their lives. Help them choose a profession that will give them a chance to move back to the community as their place to raise their families—in education, law, agriculture, business, medicine, etc.

Good News - Posted on November 16, 2010

Diabetes Support Group Connects with Community

Many churches have found that providing support groups for people in many different circumstances has been helpful both to serve the community and to acquaint people with the church. Ken Ellis, in Noble, Oklahoma (population of about 5,000), has found good success working with people who are diabetic.

Ellis, himself a diabetic, has been working in this way for 20 years. Each March, he has a seminar on diabetes in the local library to make the initial contact. The monthly meetings following are at the church building. Over half of those attending are from outside the church fellowship and some have been baptized as a result of this initial contact through the support group.

Twenty-three percent of those over 60, and 11 percent of those 40 to 59 have diabetes, with still more being pre-diabetic. Ellis has found this an important and growing group to serve. People from age 15 through 80 have attended his groups.

To stir interest in the initial meeting, Ellis advertises with attractive fliers distributed throughout the community. These give the time and place of the seminar along with cartoons that demonstrate the need for people to know more about diabetes and how to deal with it. He also encourages church members to spread the word among their friends. Doctors Sheri Colberg and Steven Edelman have called diabetes “the tsunami of the health-care system,” suggesting that the number of people needing assistance with the disease is a rapidly growing population.

Churches have found that helping community members with their needs in finances, marriage and divorce, parenting, and grief can all be ways to serve and connect with the community. A diabetes group is another good possibility among these services.

For information on starting a Diabetes Group, contact Ken Ellis in Noble, Oklahoma. Call 405-365-8259 or email kennethre@gmail.com.

Good News - Posted on December 14, 2009

Clinton Church Succeeds in Grief Support

The Custer Avenue Church of Christ in Clinton, Oklahoma, has developed a very successful effort in community assistance through a grief support group. Their preacher, Pat Peters, tells the story below.

We are convinced the most important thing we can do to grow is to care for people. There is not a more effective time to care for people than when they are hurting. When the hurt being suffered is grief, we know what to do.
Each October, we sponsor a Grief Support Group. Notices are sent to surrounding congregations, letters are sent to those in our community who have recently lost a loved one, and newspaper ads are placed. In spite of all this, though, the most effective advertising seems to come from word-of-mouth.

Eight sessions are scheduled, one each week and each about 90 minutes long. The sessions are made of personal, getting-to-know-you type conversation, a time of learning specific materials, and a time of sharing what is happening to us in our grief.

- Week One - "Why Does my Grief Hurt?"
- Week Two - Normal Grief Reactions
- Week Three - More Normal Grief Reactions
- Week Four - Handling Fear, Anger, and Anxiety
- Week Five - Handling Special Days
- Week Six - My Faith and My Loss
- Week Seven - Getting Back into Life
- Week Eight - Planning for the Future

The information given each week is relevant and meaningful, but the most important part of any session is the conversation that takes place. The key to progress through the grieving process is talking. We encourage each person to share something every week. If the group is too large, more than 10, we will divide into smaller conversation groups. The information sharing can be done with the whole group, no matter what its size, but conversation needs to be more personal and without the element of the fear that comes from speaking to a group.

We purposely schedule our group to lead up to the holiday season because that seems to be the hardest time of the year for those in mourning. Early in December, we schedule a Community Memorial Service where grieving families can come and directly include their missing loved one in the holiday season. The date, time, and place are announced and appropriate advertising is done. The people are encouraged to call and reserve an ornament for a Christmas tree. Our local funeral home sponsors this part by providing the ornaments and by writing the name of the loved one on the ornament.

When the people arrive, we give them their appropriate ornament and they hang it on the tree in the front of our meeting place (we use our local Senior Citizen’s Center). After a welcome, where we acknowledge their hurt and encourage their strength, we have a selected singing group sing a number of holiday songs. A short message is given to bring comfort and to allow the encouragement of the memories. We then read a list of all those loved ones we are honoring that day. The whole service lasts a little more than 30 minutes. Families are told to come and get their ornament and take it home, Refreshments are shared and everyone is encouraged to stay and visit for a while. Our refreshments are usually prepared by the people who have been in the Grief Group.

In recent years, we have found that 80 percent of the grief group is made up of people who are not a part of our congregation. Our reputation for providing this service, and for doing funerals, has earned much respect in the community. This, in turn, has given us many opportunities to serve hurting families, and has led to a number of conversions.

For more information, call Pat Peters at 580-323-1648.

Good News - Posted on January 20, 2010
Ladies Class in Kansas Makes Teddy Bears

For 20 years, the ladies Bible class at the church of Christ in McPherson, Kansas, has made teddy bears. Laverne Farrier, who has led the program all those years, got the idea from a speaker who came to the ladies class and told about the possibility.

Laverne cuts out the cloth by a pattern and sews up the edges. Then every two or three months, the women put in the stuffing. The bears have a cute face with a big smile. Each bear has a tag with the following inscription: Made with love by the Church of Christ at 700 E Avenue A, McPherson, Kansas.

Farrier distributes the teddy bears to the Memorial Hospital in McPherson. Every couple of months, she takes 30 bears to the emergency room and 20 to the OB ward where babies are born. Medical personnel hand out the bears to children and to new mothers. Some of the new mothers get the doctor and nurses to sign their bear as a memento for their new baby. Occasionally Farrier also takes bears for Alzheimer’s patients.

The hospital staff is very glad to receive teddy bears and to distribute them. They often tell about a scared child in the emergency room who has been calmed by the offer of a teddy bear.

The ladies themselves cover the cost of the material and stuffing for the bears, although occasionally Wal-Mart will give them $20 to apply on the material.

Over the years, the ladies have made more than 14,000 teddy bears to be distributed at the hospital. Although they don’t point to specific people who have come to church as result of their work, the ladies believe that the church has gained much good will from their work and that, in the long run, that is an important contribution to reaching the community.

For more information on the teddy bear project, contact Laverne Farrier at ffarrier@cox.net.

Churches Use Medical Clinics to Serve Their Communities

Churches in a number of locations around the United States, as well as in foreign countries, are using medical clinics as a way to serve their communities and to connect people with the church. This article tells the stories of three such efforts.

In 1995, in Duncan, Oklahoma, the Westside and Northside Churches of Christ merged into the Chisholm Trail Church of Christ and moved into the Westside building. This left the Northside building for sale, but they were not able to sell it. So, the brethren decided to put all their benevolent services under one roof—medical, clothing, and food.
Now, 15 years later, that program, under the name of the Compassion Center, is still operating and doing well. The medical clinic is open each Thursday afternoon at 2 p.m. Since they operate on a first-come, first-served basis, the church has built a facility adjoining their center where people can sit comfortably to get in line for service. Each Thursday, one or two volunteer doctors come to the clinic along with others who assist, such as nurses and people to work in the pharmacy, which is overseen by a registered pharmacist.

Twice a month, an optometrist comes to provide eye care. Other volunteers register people who come, input the information on a computer, and provide a print-out for the doctors or those dispensing the medications. An elder or minister is present to "work the waiting line" to visit and to pray with those who have needs. A lawyer is sometimes present to give advice to clients about legal matters about which they are concerned. In all, about 35 people are on hand to provide the various services needed each Thursday. On a typical day, if there are two doctors present, the clinic will serve about 70 needing medical care and another 35 who need prescriptions filled.

The church provides some funding for these services, but much of the support comes in other ways. Two large drug companies, many doctor's offices, and sometimes even nursing homes provide the prescription drugs needed for distribution. Many individuals also support the work as well.

On Wednesdays from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., the Compassion Center is open to distribute food to those in need, and on Wednesday afternoons, people may come to get clothing. Being able to provide medical, food, and clothing services in the same location has been a big help to this work in Duncan. Those wanting more information may contact the church at ctduncan@swbell.net.

Another congregation with an active medical outreach is the Alpine Church of Christ in Longview, Texas. Open now for more than a year, the Alpine Compassion Clinic handles dental emergencies and services for people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and asthma/COPD. They believe that treating these particular diseases is a good way to assist people with their long-term health. They focus on serving those with no insurance or who cannot afford the co-pay for physicians.

They ask the patients to make a small payment for the medications given them in order to give them more incentive to take the medicines and to instill a sense of responsibility. Patients with blood pressure and blood sugar problems must keep a log and bring it to their appointment. Providing diabetic test strips is one of the clinic's most expensive items.

Dr. James Woodson leads the work of this clinic. He gets volunteer doctors and nurses through his contacts in the medical community. Rooms in the Alpine church building have been remodeled and equipped for medical services. The clinic is open the first and third Wednesdays of the month from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Wednesday time enables Woodson to get church volunteers who are willing occasionally to miss their Wednesday evening Bible class. This time also means that before and after classes, church members are available to come by and visit with patients who are waiting to be seen. The clinic also has free Bibles and other literature available for those who come for assistance. To contact Dr. Woodson, write to acc@alpinecoc.org.

Another church connected medical service is the Lighthouse Medical Clinic operating out of the building of the Capitol Hill Church of Christ, an inner-city work in Oklahoma City. This clinic, managed by Beverly North, operates each Thursday evening from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. Patients begin coming to the church building about 3:00 p.m. to get an appointment for that evening. They are greeted by volunteers who sign them up for appointments, as well as the local minister, Pancho Hobbes, who prays with them, offers them information about the church, invites adults and children to Bible classes and, when appropriate, offers Bible studies. Several of those who have initially come for medical help have eventually been baptized into Christ and continue as members of the congregation there.
The clinic offers both medical and eye care services and provides necessary prescription drugs through its pharmacy program. So each Thursday, there are volunteer physicians, nurses, translators (since many of those who come are Spanish speaking), registration clerks, pharmacists, lab techs, and greeters. Each time the clinic is open, about 25 patients will see a doctor and an additional 25 will receive prescriptions. Since the church has its mid-week Bible classes on Thursday nights, those who come to the clinic can see the Bible classes meeting and sometimes become interested in attending.

When there are more serious problems that require specialists or even surgery, North locates physicians who are willing to provide these services at a small cost or, sometimes, even no cost at all. The clinic has received equipment, diagnostic testing, and lab work from hospitals, drugs from pharmaceutical companies and physicians, and donations from individuals, foundations, and churches.

This Capitol Hill congregation also provides food and clothing services, but has decided to link their services together so that, for the most part, those who receive medical help or who participate in other ministries of the congregation are the ones who receive food and clothing. This way, the church seeks to narrow the number on whom they have an impact in order to make that impact greater, thus offering more results on the spiritual side. The work at Capitol Hill is generally overseen by Memorial Road Church of Christ. For information on the Lighthouse Medical Clinic, contact Beverly North at bjsnorth@aol.com.

Jesus and the early church helped people physically to show compassion and to find opportunities to bless people spiritually. The efforts described above show that this combination still works.

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Good News - Posted on June 9, 2010

**Churches Find Different Ways to Serve by Filling Clothing Needs**

Most communities have those with clothing needs. Some of these communities also have people with clothing they wish to give away. Other communities may be mostly poor, and those who wish to serve them have to bring in clothing from other places. Whatever the situation, the Lord’s people have found ways to help.

The Luther Church of Christ is located in a community where many are poor. The church operates the Luther Community Service Center, from which they distribute clothing and food to residents of the area. At present, they use large two vacant buildings and a separate small building to store and distribute their items. These buildings have been made available without charge because of the good service they render for the community. A grant from a Christian foundation has recently provided an empty lot for a new building, and the church has raised funds to build a new warehouse on that space. The new building will, of course, allow the center to improve its services. Most of their clothing and food is donated by other congregations in the nearby greater Oklahoma City area.

Ruby Stahl, who directs the service center work, recently shared a story that illustrates how spiritual benefits can come from serving physical needs. Eighteen years ago, a woman in trouble came to the service center in Luther asking for help paying an electric bill. Stahl was able to find a source to provide the funds to pay this bill so help was given. The young woman, however, had other problems. Her estranged husband was seeking to harm her and Stahl became her friend to listen and counsel and teach. After a time, the young woman was baptized. Later, the woman’s parents moved to Luther and, because their daughter was attending church, they came with her. Eventually, they also became Christians. After this, the woman’s sis-
ter, an actress in Louisiana, came for a visit and during this time she was taught the gospel and returned to her home to be a faithful Christian. Only three months ago, the original woman’s brother became a Christian. From the initial contact of paying an electric bill, five have obeyed the gospel and been faithful. For information on the Luther Service Center, call Ruby Stahl at 405-277-3911.

The Poplar and Warner Church of Christ in Guthrie, Oklahoma, represents another way to do benevolent work. The church there had purchased a house next to their building to expand their parking area. Before they began that project, however, tornadoes struck their area on May 3, 1999. A member approached the elders to ask if the currently vacant house could be used to distribute clothing for those suffering from the tornado. Permission was granted and, thus, a new benevolence work, called “The House on Pine,” was begun.

Today, it continues to operate with about 15 members of the church serving 400 to 500 people each month. Other members give clothing or donate funds to purchase needed items such as socks and underwear. The congregation only pays the utilities and provides cleaning supplies.

The House on Pine works with many in the community. They partner with the local food bank as needed to provide assistance. Many individuals in the community donate clothing. Local groups like Kiwanis and the Lions Club have drives for school supplies and shoes, which they then provide to the House on Pine for distribution.

The Junior High Builders Club has an annual drive for coats, gloves, and hats. They also use the House on Pine for their distribution, which serves 300 to 400 each year. The school district sends home flyers with each child to inform those with needs about the coats. School counselors and teachers also refer those who need help to the church program.

Rob Lester, minister of the Guthrie church, says, “The House on Pine has provided our church with an opportunity to serve the needy and to make a real difference. The members take pride in the work and enjoy donating clothes, funds, and their time. The work provides a fertile ground for invitations to ladies’ classes and VBS, and the community knows about this work, which gives them a very positive view of the church. In a broader sense, this work has helped our members keep a tender heart for those less fortunate and has also opened doors for evangelism.”

For more information about the House on Pine in Guthrie, Oklahoma, contact Rob Lester at preachrr@msn.com.

The church of Christ in Minco, Oklahoma, where Jim Ross preaches, has two clothing giveaway days each year. Prior to these days, they get a story in the local newspaper about the coming clothing giveaway. The story reminds those with closets they need to clean out that this is the time to do it, and the church has people ready to receive the clothing. On those same two days, each on a Saturday, they also make clothing available free to people in need.

For 12 years, the church has been following this plan. They get clothing for children and adults and make the clothing available to those who need it. Ross believes their program has helped build good relations with the community, both for those who donate the clothing and those who come to receive it. To contact Jim Ross about this work, you may reach him at rossjmr709@aol.com.

These are three stories about churches with clothing giveaway programs, all different, but all successful. While the main focus of the church should be on bringing people into a saving relationship with Christ, we also want to show our concern for people’s physical needs. Often, through well designed benevolence programs, a congregation can demonstrate concern for helping people with physical needs while, at the same time, finding ways to interest those they serve in spiritual development.

*Good News - Posted on July 06, 2010*
Church Hands Out Bottles of Water at Football Game

The 500-member Westside Church of Christ in Norman, Oklahoma, handed out 760 free bottles of water to those going into the University of Oklahoma/Air Force football game on September 18, 2010. The community outreach ministry at the church has done a number of things to serve and to make the congregation better known in the community. They have given away backpacks, had a coat drive, and distributed Thanksgiving baskets. This is the first time, however, that they have given away free bottles of water before a football game.

Using their tailgate party as a base, they handed bottles of water to those who were coming by the northeast corner of the stadium. By keeping the bottles in ice chests before the giveaway, the water was cold when people received it. Both student members and others were involved in approaching people to ask if they would like a bottle of water. On the bottle was a professionally printed sticker that said Westside Church of Christ on one side and gave the name and address of the church on the other. The church purchased the bottles of water from a company that both sells the water and prints labels to the customer's specification. The cost was about $1 a bottle.

Philip Johnson, pulpit minister at Westside, reported that they had received a positive response and will likely do the same thing again next year. Churches need to find ways appropriate to their local community for gaining goodwill and making their presence known. The Westside Church certainly found that in Norman, Oklahoma, by giving out water at a football game.

For more information, contact Philip Johnson at pj@westsidechurchofchrist.org.

Good News - Posted on October 18, 2010

Mississippi Church Has Success with Clothing Program By Rick Benson, Minister

I believe one of the challenges a small congregation faces is how to motivate people to come into our church building, meet us, and hear the gospel preached. And, of course, to bring them in a scriptural way. By using the example of the early church in Acts, we were able to accomplish this goal.

On Saturday, October 9, 2010, the Union Church of Christ held an outreach opportunity called “Share & Serve.” The event, which took place in our church building, was to serve Union, Mississippi, a town of 2,000. Our congregation, with a membership of 50, had more than 30 participate in this work. They all were blessed in their efforts to serve the needy. I had encouraged them to take part by saying that “If we truly are the New Testament church in Union, then we should reach out to the needy.”

We advertised the coming event with flyers in local businesses and with a banner in front of the church for a week. We put up signs on the day we set for people to come. We wanted to make the opportunity known to those who needed help, but did not want to over-advertise and have more to come than we could help.
The congregation collected clothing, household items, and food. We had no idea how many people would come but were pleased that 31 families came, which represented 91 souls. All of them needed clothing, but we were surprised that not all needed food. We actually had some food bags left over. Each person was given an invitation to our upcoming revival series and information about the New Testament church.

Everyone that needed help filled out a form. We are in the process of following up on the requests. About 15 requested home visits and Bible studies. Many also have needs with which we can help in the future such as more clothing, G.E.D instruction, and job placement. All of these needs will open the door for us to visit them in the future.

Our revival began on Sunday, the day after our clothing and food distribution. Steve Kirby from the Hillsdale congregation in Clarksville, Tennessee, was our guest evangelist. Each of his messages focused on how to grow as a Christian. Some of his sermons were on prayer, evangelism and fellowship. Four who came to "Share and Serve" attended the meeting. Also, during the meeting, one soul obeyed the gospel.

This event taught our congregation how to work “day by day” as a congregation of Christians. As the minister and an elder, I was blessed and joyful to see the work we accomplished and am hopeful for more fruit in the future.

For more information about this program, email Rick Benson at unionchurchofchrist@yahoo.com.

Good News - Posted on November 16, 2010

Local Newsletter Serves Both Community and Church

Twice each month, the residents of Depew, Oklahoma, can pick up at their local stores a newsletter providing useful information about what is going on in their community. Since there is no local newspaper, Hoyt Beasley, preacher for the Depew Church of Christ, saw the need for disseminating local news and believed that filling it would be a good way for him and the church to be better known and appreciated in the community.

Beasley calls the publication Good News in Depew. Printed on two sides of an 8½ by 11 sheet, the newsletter contains information from the school system including dates of major events, reports on athletics, the student of the month, and school board meetings. It also provides articles about city government, the FFA, local weather, and community groups.

For each issue, Beasley writes an article about a religious topic with comments on a passage, discussion of a Bible topic, or information on activities of the church. Of course, each issue tells who produced the newsletter.

Beasley says his work with the newsletter gives him an opportunity to meet many people in town. He goes to the schools and local officials to get the news. He takes the papers to stores who are glad to have it so local residents can pick it up. For him to know local people, and for them to know him, helps the church to be better known as well.

Churches in small communities need ways to be in touch with local people and to find ways to serve them. Providing the local news is an excellent way to do this.
Shawnee Church Coat Program

The Central Church of Christ in Shawnee, Oklahoma, has developed a very successful program in giving away coats, caps, and gloves to those in their city who are in need. They typically provide this service on two days each year: one in late October and one in December. Deacon Ron Taffe and his wife, Debbie, organize and coordinate the event.

At various points during the year, the Taffes encourage church members to contribute to the program by providing them with information on the coat inventory along with a list of the needed sizes. The coat racks are organized in the fellowship room from infant to adult sizes. Women in the congregation assist with the “inventory” process.

To advertise the coat giveaway, the church does several things:
- put a flyer in the Wednesday “take-home folders” for all the Shawnee elementary and kindergarten schools,
- advertise on the back page of their House to House/Heart to Heart paper, which is mailed to all Shawnee homes a few weeks before the giveaway days,
- place an advertisement in the local paper.

On the morning of the giveaway, people come into the foyer of the church building where they go through a “registration” process to collect names, addresses, phone numbers, number of children in the family, and coat sizes. They are also asked if they would like a free Bible correspondence course or would like to speak with a minister for any spiritual concerns or special physical needs with which the church might assist. After this registration process is complete, a “coat evangelist” leads each person/family to the distribution area. This person has the registration information and, during this process, has an opportunity to visit with the people to provide a personal touch to develop a personal relationship.

After they have found their coat, cap, and gloves, and sometimes other articles of clothing, each person proceeds to check-out tables, where members note what the person has received and if they needed something that was not available. The church promises that each one who comes will receive the coat they need and, if it is not in stock when they come, the church will obtain one that size and provide it later. Also at the check-out table, those who come are offered tracts on Bible topics, Bible correspondence courses, a Searching for Truth DVD/booklet, or a free Bible. The children are all given a booklet about Jesus. At this time, they may also request prayers, indicate special needs, or speak with one of the ministers.

After the giveaway day, the church sends a note inviting all who came to attend services. In addition, a member will visit each one who came that indicated a special need, prayers, or who showed a genuine interest in attending church. Several have been converted though this outreach ministry and some unfaithful members have been restored. By placing those helped on their mailing list, the church has also contacted them about VBS and other special events at the church. Through the combination of all of these efforts, the church believes it is planting and watering the seed which will produce good fruit.
Robert Prater, minister at the church says, “This has been one of our best community outreach activities for teaching the gospel to the lost, establishing good will and relationships in our community and in helping encourage more of our members to be involved in service. The program has helped the congregation have the image and reputation as a church that not only says ‘God loves you,’ but which shows it in their actions.”

For more information on this program, contact Robert Prater at the Central Church of Christ, P.O. Box 1228, Shawnee, OK 74802, or email him at robprater@sbcglobal.net.

Good News - Posted on March 31, 2010

Wichita Churches Host Summer Work Camp

Each summer for the past two years, churches of Christ in Wichita, Kansas, have hosted a work camp to restore homes. During this time, they have scraped and repainted 11 homes. Workers have come from Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Kentucky. Those who come are asked to pay $50 to cover meals and supplies used.

In a typical day, the workers arrive at 9 a.m. and work for three hours. After lunch, they work until about 3 p.m. After work, the campers have recreational options such as bowling, laser tag, and mini-golf. Each evening, the hosting congregation provides a homecooked meal, and the group joins in a devotional after supper. The workers stay in church members’ homes.

Each year about 75 teen workers have been joined by about 60 adult volunteers to assist with the work and provide leadership. Homes to be painted are found through church members who know of those who need assistance. About half of the homes repainted have belonged to members of the church, with the other half coming from those without a connection to churches of Christ.

At the end of the week, the churches invite all those whose homes have been painted to a banquet where they hear an inspirational message and see a video of the progress of the work done through the week. Those attending are given information about the church, take home a gift, and are invited to attend worship and Bible class.

Toby Levering, from the Northside congregation, who works with the program, says that it has "made a huge impact on the local community." It was featured on the front of the local section of the Wichita newspaper, and was covered by a local television station.

To get more information or to register, go to www.wichitaworkcamp.org, or contact Toby Levering at tlevering@northsidescoc.org.

Good News - Posted on March 31, 2010
Oklahoma Churches Make Use of Local Fair

Lyndal Werner, who preaches for the 70-member church of Christ in Chandler, Oklahoma, tells of their use of a booth at the county fair held annually in their city. The church obtains space for three folding tables in an exhibit area. On the back of the tables they place two or three presentation boards—the kind having a main central space with two folding sides to hold them up and on which materials may be displayed.

On the boards, the church places pictures of the church building and of various activities of the church and services it provides. On the tables, they put tracts on various Bible topics for people to take. Also at the booth, a DVD with a Bible lesson runs continuously on a TV set.

Most of the time during the three-day fair, someone from the congregation is available at the booth to talk to people who want more information about the church or who wish to discuss a Bible topic. The church hopes to achieve two goals with the booth: (1) to interest people immediately in coming to church services or to have a Bible study, and (2) to create longterm goodwill and acquaintance with the church so they will be more responsive to other contacts the church makes.

Another Oklahoma church working a local fair is the 200-member church of Christ in Seminole, Oklahoma. Their fair, called “Made in Oklahoma,” offers the congregation a way to make the church better known in the community. At the one-day event, they have a 15’ by 15’ space with a table, banner, and signs to tell about the church. Their main way to attract people is to offer them a free bottle of cold water with a printed label containing the church name, address, and service times. They also offer post-it notes and pens with the church name on them, and distribute fliers with information about the church.

Those working the booth have learned that just putting the bottles of water on a table for people to take does not work well. If, however, someone stands in front of the table and hands the bottles to people, they will take them. The message for us about evangelism from this experience is that we have to push ourselves forward a bit in order to make a contact that can eventually help someone spiritually. Since the local high school colors are green and white, the church uses those colors for the labels on the bottle.

When the fair is held in April 2011, the church plans to add another feature. They will have DVDs with video information about the church, a presentation of the gospel message of salvation, and a two-minute audio answer to four frequently asked questions.

Those wanting more information about this work in Seminole may contact the minister, Chris Stinnett, at stinnettchris@hotmail.com.

In many places, a county or state fair is a major event, and a presence there can be beneficial. Some use such a booth as an opportunity to distribute the first lesson of a correspondence course. Others, as noted above, have a variety of “giveaways” to make a connection and create interest.

Probably the most noted contact from a fair booth came at the World’s Fair in New York City in 1965. Juan Monroy, an author from Spain whose books were on display at the Spanish pavilion, was walking among the booths when he came to one by churches of Christ. He asked lots of questions and came to the conclusion that the several churches with which he worked and the churches of Christ in America were on
the same track—seeking to follow New Testament Christianity. Since then, Monroy has been very active in preaching the gospel in many Spanish-speaking countries, not only in Europe and Africa, but in Central and South America, and in Cuba. He also has been associated with the Herald of Truth since 1967.

Churches need to be looking for way to create favorable impressions while also spreading the Word. Using booths in public places can be one way to do this.

Good News - Posted on November 16, 2010

Tulsa Church Has Successful Community Outreach By Stafford North, from information supplied by Johnny Hinton

Johnny Hinton, minister of the 29th and Yale Church of Christ in Tulsa, reports a very successful program of spreading the gospel in the community around their building. Planning began a year before their gospel meeting that brought Eddie Cloer to speak on April 7-10, 2011. The strategy for building attendance was to utilize a wide variety of methods to make contact with those living within a few miles of the building.

Their plan was highly successful, with attendance at the meeting running about 35 percent above their weekly attendance average. As a result of the meeting, they had seven baptisms—the spouse of a member, another with a family connection, and five from the community around the church. Studies with others are ongoing and the church has many contacts on which to follow up.

The church crafted its plan very carefully, and it can be a good example for others to follow. Listed below are the pieces of the plan that made the program successful.

1. The church strongly encouraged the members to be involved. Months before the meeting began, the preacher and those making announcements “talked up” the coming meeting. They used their church bulletin boards and their printed weekly bulletin to inform people about what was coming and how they could play a part.

2. The church developed a database of those who had visited their services in the past and who visited during the months prior to the meeting so they could send them information about the meeting.

3. Two months before the meeting, the church asked every member to turn in the names of their best prospects. First, each member was to pray for these prospects and then spend some time with them to strengthen the relationship. After this, they were to invite them to the meeting.

4. The church mailed fliers to all congregations within 50 miles of their building so other members of the church would be there to participate in the meeting and thus enlarge their base.

5. The church mailed letters and fliers to all in their database, including past visitors and names gathered from members of the congregation.

6. The church went door to door in the area around their building to hand out a series of newsletters prepared for this purpose by Glenn Davis of newsletterevangelism@yahoo.com. They concentrated on 3,600 homes and distributed six different newsletters over a four-week period. These newsletters had announcements about the meeting and developed a good impression of the church.
7. The church sent the House to House/Heart to Heart newsletter by mail to the three postal codes next to their building with information about the church and about the meeting.

8. The church put up posters in businesses within a mile of their building.

9. The church listed the meeting on the online calendar of the Tulsa World and on the online calendar of the Neighborhood Association of their area.

10. The church advertised the meeting on their website and on Facebook.

11. The church encouraged their members to text, use Twitter and Facebook, and send emails to everyone they knew to tell them about the meeting.

12. The church used their marquee creatively to develop interest before the meeting. Five weeks before the meeting, the marquee read “Eddie.” Each week they added a new word until it read “Eddie is coming soon.” Finally, the week before the meeting, they disclosed that Eddie Cloer was coming to preach April 7-10.

13. The church had a team for making phone calls to give a personal invitation to those in their database whose phone numbers they had.

14. During the days of the meeting, the church used an automatic phone message system to call all of their members in the afternoon to remind them of the session that night.

15. The church brought six effective, experienced people three days before the meeting to help in following up on contacts they already had developed. One of the local members was on each team that went out to follow up on contacts.

16. The church introduced each of the new members to elders, staff, and other members as soon as possible, and they immediately enrolled these new members in a new members/new converts class.

Obviously the 29th and Yale leaders gave great attention to developing a complete strategy for their meeting to ensure success and create maximum impact. And, as a result of using a good combination of activities, they had excellent results.

Every congregation should carefully plan a series of major events during each year and carefully develop a strategy to gain the most benefit from each of these events. Johnny Hinton says they got some of their ideas from a manual on how to have successful gospel meetings published by the Highland Church of Christ in Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

The bottom line of this story is to plan carefully, work hard, pray diligently, and involve the congregation deeply. For more information, contact j_d_hinton@hotmail.com.

Good News - Posted on May 17, 2011
Sayre Church Reaches Out to Children

The following report comes from Shane Coleman, minister of the Sayre Church of Christ in Sayre, Oklahoma, a congregation of about 200 members. If the old saying is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then this picture speaks volumes. Take a minute to look at each child in the photo. See the kids that are camera shy, see the kids that are making funny faces. Some of these faces you may recognize … some not. What exactly do you see? What we have is here is not just any group of kids, but our Wednesday Night Bible Explorers at the Sayre Church of Christ! How did they get here? Many were picked up by the church bus. They come to eat, learn, and grow. Oh, make no mistake … sometimes they can be a little rowdy, but they are all precious in the eyes of the Lord. They may disrupt our devotions once in a while, but they are getting better.

With the above picture in mind, I want to add Mark chapter 10, where we see the moment Jesus appeared in Galilee when the Pharisees go on the attack. They tested Him on marriage, divorce and remarriage. For some, these subjects are full of pain and anguish, to which some of these kids can attest. Jesus simply reminded them of the original design for marriage set forth in the Garden. In verse 13, Mark records that “people were bringing little children” to Jesus for a blessing. What a beautiful picture, little children at the feet and in the lap of God incarnate! You remember what happens next: His disciples (who were confused about God’s pattern for marriage) started to grumble at those pesky kids surrounding the Master Teacher. Yes, they were probably rowdy and jockeying for Jesus’ right knee, but He didn’t mind. As a matter of fact Mark records: “But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.’” Jesus was upset with His disciples, not the children or their parents. You see they are innocent and received the Lord’s blessing.

Our Bible Explorers are the same as the children in Mark 10. Some have both parents, some not. Some have parents that believe, some do not. They all eagerly attend, however, because they love the Lord and want to receive His blessing! They are blessed by the food, the lessons, and the guidance given because it is given in the name of the Lord. So, how do we do this? How does the Sayre Church of Christ continue this work week after week? How do we “rope” adults into teaching and corralling these kids weekly so they may receive a blessing? One word: dedication. Dedication to the Lord, dedication to the church, and dedication to the kids. It takes dedication to make a positive impact in the community by teaching Jesus. Everyone that is or will be involved in the work understands the commitment needed and the patience required. The goals set for this work are longterm. Transformation does not happen overnight; it takes time. Allow me to walk you through a typical two-hour trek we call “Wednesday Night Bible Explorers.”

You cannot have the work without children. In addition to the great kids of our congregation, we contact children of the community. This contact can be done by many different ways, but it is always through connections. Our members have connections to others in the community. Our members’ children have connections to others in the community. Our congregation as a whole has a connection with the community. One must use those connections, those relationships, to lead the lost to Jesus. You have to make contact with the potential Bible Explorer and then remind them of the program’s date and the time when we will pick them up. Yes, we pick them up. The non-member parents are not likely to haul them across town to the church for Bible study. Do not wait; go and pick them up. We are so fortunate to have a church bus. It requires upkeep, insurance, licensed drivers, and a regular cleaning. The church bus can be some additional work, but it is a great tool for the program and we are able to use it for other functions. So, the contacts
have been made, reminders have gone out, and the bus is warmed up, what then? Go pick them up! They will be waiting at the curb. Let me say that again: they will be ready to receive their blessing. Meanwhile, a meal has been prepared for the kids and for the teachers and others who come to help. That meal’s purpose is exactly what Jesus used during His ministry. The Wednesday Night Bible Explorers program runs from 6:20 to 8:00 p.m. That means people need to be fed supper. A full stomach is the gateway to filling the mind with the teaching of Jesus.

The kids are eating and teachers are prepared for class. Then what? The children clean up and get ready to sing. Thirty minutes have passed for supper and 10 remain for singing and Bible drills. We want to teach the kids that the program can be fun. I’ll borrow the slogan from Camp LU-JO in Lawton: “Keep It Spiritual and Make It Fun.” They will sing, learn, and grow! It is now class time and the teachers are ready. Forty minutes is plenty of time for the kids and especially the teachers. All ages are taught the same material each week. One reason for this is so they may discuss the lesson with their fellow Explorers. It may be on their way to the auditorium, on their way home, and maybe even on their way to school the next day. We want them to talk about it as much as possible.

So class is over and we have them come into the auditorium for the devotional and songs. Yes, they are kind of rowdy and restless, but plenty of adults are with them, and they are getting better every week. They can see what it is like to sit with adults in a short worship service and not swing from the ceiling. When the “Amen” has been said, the kids who have had their bellies filled with a good meal and their minds filled with great teaching are ready to be bussed home with a reminder for the next week. It is all about next week! They eat, learn, receive their blessing and leave ready to come again. Maybe they will encourage a friend to come with them and that system works. Some of the kids ‘come’ and ‘go,’ but the core remains.

We are making an impact on lives one at a time. God will give the increase (I Corinthians (3). We try to make contact with their parents and we encourage the children to come on Sunday. But, even if parents do not flood the church, and even if a large number do not come back on Sunday, other things are happening. These children are receiving attention, nutrition and instruction weekly. At a minimum, you can help them become better citizens of the community and of the country. But most importantly, you are helping them to save themselves (Acts 2:40) by responding properly to God’s grace.

I want to give credit where credit is due. This program rises and falls on the hard work of our membership. We have moderated some of the individual segments of the program such as start time, class time duration, class design, etc., but the goal remains the same. This program is a lot of work and will cost some money, but the impact is great and God will keep the blessings flowing. Forbid not a blessing!

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**Principle No. 4**
Involving Every Member in Evangelizing the Community

The purpose of every congregation of God’s church should be to bring more people to the knowledge of the truth, and then to encourage them to obey it. Whether large or small, we should be seeking to spread the word about Christ in every way we can and to get people to hear and do. Below is a list of goals toward which to work, and then a set of examples of ways congregations can reach out to their communities. In this work of evangelism, we must remember Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 about the church as a body.
There he teaches that not every member of a human body does the same thing to contribute to its success and, in the same way, not every member of the Lord’s body does the same thing to contribute to its success. We will do our best work in evangelism with a program that uses every member to do activities in which that member can be successful. The leadership in every congregation, then, should carefully develop a plan for evangelizing their community in a way that gives every member a part and that is successful in bringing people to Christ. Here are some principles to follow.

1. Do all you can to give the congregation a positive image in the community. This will come, in part, because of the service projects you do, as described earlier. The good image also comes, however, from getting articles in the local paper about what you are doing; a building and yard that are attractive from the outside; effective, up-to-date signage both at the building and around the community; having events at the building such as a financial peace or a marriage seminar; and by a good education program for children and youth.

2. Teach the members, including both young and old, that Christian living everyday should be one of our major attractions. Much of what we teach in the classroom and pulpit should be to train people on how to “let their light so shine” that others may see their good works and glorify God. (Matthew 5:16). The way we live in the office, on the athletic field or the stands, in the neighborhood, in a club, at the schoolhouse, or on or farm lays an extremely important foundation for reaching the community with the gospel. And, how well we get along at church is an important part of Christian living. No one is attracted to a church that fights among itself, but many are looking for a place to have fellowship with those who enjoy each other’s company.

3. Encourage members to talk about the church in their daily conversations. We all are in contact with those outside the church every day. We can mention where we go to church, something about our youth group, or a verse from Bible class to our fellow-workers, friends in our club or at our hobby, those living around us, people at the stores where we shop, or those we sit with in the stands at a ballgame. This way, we will help spread the word about the church. And this does not increase the budget by one dime. So, teach your congregation to do “conversational evangelism” and practice it on some Wednesday nights.

4. Help every member do friendship evangelism. This method is how most people are brought to Christ. One friend invites another to church, a Bible class, or a home study, or shares with them in a conversation. Each congregation, however, needs to teach its members how to reach friends and needs to provide them with occasional “friend days” and other events to which they can give their friends a special invitation.

5. Each congregation should plan some special outreach activities to give their members an opportunity to be involved. Marriage, parenting, and financial seminars are good events to which people can invite their friends, so plan some of these through year.

6. Some have had good success with “newsletter evangelism,” which is an easy way to make contacts with people in town to find out who is a good prospect for further work. For information on this plan, contact stafford.north@oc.edu. Others have had good success with a mail-out publication called “House to House and Heart to Heart.” You can Google this one. You might have a “gospel meeting” with some outside speaker and get another church to help you spread the word by leaving a brochure at every house in town, by increasing your attendance at the sessions, and in helping with your singing. Be sure you have an absolutely foolproof plan for following up with guests—a letter, a call, a visit, some hospitality like a pie or cake, and by continuing personal contact.

The following stories are from churches that have found interesting ways to implement this principle.
Gary Bodine, currently the minister at the Wellington Church of Christ in Wellington, Kansas, has developed a plan for involving more members in getting many good things done. He calls the plan "Monday Night for the Master," and it is in use in scores of churches around the nation.

The program is built on the assumption that many members would be willing to spend one night a week doing something for the Lord if: (1) they were asked to do things within their capacity; and (2) the work was easy because others had made the preparations for their work. Some members come every Monday night and others less frequently, but the program is designed so that whoever comes, they always have good things to do.

The plan at Wellington works like this. Cooks come in the afternoon to prepare the hot meal that starts at 6:00 p.m. About 6:40 p.m., the group gathers for a devotional and instruction period. Those present then choose from four different types of activities.

The first type of work is visitation. Teams go to see those who are recent visitors to church services, prospective members who have shown an interest in the church, new members to the congregation, newcomers to town, delinquents, shut-ins, the elderly, the recently bereaved, and others who may need a visit. Each team typically makes two or three visits during the evening. The person coordinating this aspect of the program has prepared information cards about the visits to be made so that those doing the visiting may select those they particularly want to see from the possibilities available.

A second type of work is writing encouragement cards both to members and non-members. The list might include the congregation's missionaries, recent visitors, shut-ins, those recently bereaved, people who have attended some church event or whose children were at VBS, those who are ill, and others for whom a card would be important. Some also may write appreciation cards to members who are serving well in the church and/or community and are not often noticed. The person coordinating this aspect of the evening's activities will already have gathered the cards to send and will have a list indicating the address and the reason for writing each card. Those wishing to do this activity may choose the ones whom they wish to write. All the needed materials are provided.

A third area of work is making phone calls to those who fit in some of the previously listed categories. And the fourth group makes deliveries using food left over from the evening meal at the church. They take food to shut-ins, the sick, the recently bereaved, the elderly, and others with special needs. Each of these four teams has a coordinator who gets everything ready for those who serve each night.

Other activities that could be included are a group that will pray during this time, a group that might work on needed repairs or other work around the building and lawn, and a group that would do some office work or mailings.

One of the benefits of the program is that people of all ages can participate. Childcare is provided for children up to third grade. Those from fourth grade up are included in the work. From pre-teens, teens, and singles to the elderly there is something for every person to do—visiting, writing, calling, delivering. Still others are part of the support staff who prepare the meal, clean up, and get things ready for others to do. In Wellington, a congregation of about 125, the average number of workers on Monday nights is about 50.
In addition to offering the opportunity for many to serve who might not otherwise get involved, the program offers an excellent time of fellowship for those who come. They eat together and they work together. The evening is especially encouraging to those who are older because it gives them an opportunity to be with other Christians and gives them a sense of being useful.

The cost for the program is relatively small for the amount of good done. The food is covered by the church budget since the group is gathering for important work. Some places, however, allow those eating to make a donation toward the cost if they wish. Other small cost items are purchasing cards to send, mailing, and other incidentals. Some congregations have chosen to meet on nights other than Monday, but that is the most common time for these work nights.

As Bodine points out, these activities go to the heart of the mission of the church—saving the lost and keeping the saved in the fold. The plan includes evangelism, edification, and benevolence. And, in the process, of course, those who participate are themselves strengthened spiritually.

For more information on this type of program, contact Gary Bodine at 620-326-7511 or at gb4jc@sbcglobal.net.

Good News - Posted on January 20, 2010

August-September A Good Time For Special Attendance Efforts By Stafford North

Many churches have recognized that September is a particularly good time to mount a special effort to build attendance. Often, people see the summer as a time to relax from responsibility, and during this time, even some members may have become irregular in attendance because of trips away from home. With the start of school in late August or September, many families are in a state of change and, at such a time, they may be more responsive to an appeal to attend church services. The East Lincoln Church of Christ in Mangum, Oklahoma, as a case in point, has begun a program they call VBS—Visitation Blitz in September. During this month, they have a special Friend Day around which to build their efforts.

Some church members are reluctant to commit to a longterm visiting effort, but are willing to participate in one only lasting a month. So, during September, Todd McRay, the minister, encourages the members to participate in a one-month visitation effort. He thinks many are more willing to participate in a short-term visitation effort than one without a specific ending point. McRay sells it as running a 100-yard dash rather than a marathon. A group of members prepares the visitation cards. Some cards are for prospects whose names have come from their having visited services or from names of prospects submitted by members. Other cards bear the names of members who have not recently attended, and still other cards have the names of members who are “shut in” or who otherwise need a visit. The members may visit these people personally, call, or send cards according to which best fits the situation.

Members of the congregation are asked to come out on specific nights to receive cards and to do their visiting, or calling, or writing, and the response has been excellent. The special push in September has proved to be an effective way both to get more people involved in visiting and to have a good impact on those who need attention. Many members have found personal benefit and blessing in being more active in church work, and they continue to make visits with these contacts even after the VBS program is over. Contact Todd McCray at tmac_1980@yahoo.com for more information on the Mangum program. Other congregations have different ways of making the start of the new school year a time of special appeal.
Some have special events that they advertise to which members invite friends. Others take advantage of new Sunday or Wednesday Bible classes beginning in September or October, and the congregation works to get members involved to seek both members who do not attend classes and those from the outside to attend this new “startup.” High school students can invite to youth events their friends whom they may not have seen over the summer.

If the congregation is near a college or university, the new start gives them a special opportunity to make their programs known to those on campus. Many of the students are away from home for the first time and are looking for ways to make friends and connections. Having special events for these students and making a strong effort to contact them through signs, personal visits to the campus, and other ways can pay big dividends in getting them started at church as the new school year begins. Other congregations use the back to school time as a special opportunity to serve their community by helping those who need assistance with bags, books, supplies, and even clothing. These efforts are coupled with information about the classes and services available at the congregation and with personal follow-up.

As with all efforts to get people to attend services and activities, follow-up is critical. The congregation needs a strong effort to get the name, address, email, and phone number of all who come to an event or who are served in some way. Immediate follow-up with calls, letters, and visits is vital to capitalizing on the first contact. Only such efforts can turn this initial effort into lasting good. The month of May or June is the time to begin planning for special attendance drives in August-September. To put all the pieces together is a large task, but good planning will make the dividends much greater. A group composed of people from education, youth, college, local outreach, benevolence, and the church staff needs to begin several months in advance to craft a plan that will involve many members and programs and which can pay big and lasting dividends.

Good News - Posted on April 28, 2010

Member Involvement

Leaders of the 250-member Britton Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City wanted to have a “friends and relatives” day that would draw a large number of visitors. To achieve this goal, they developed a three-part plan. First, they challenged each of their members to write down 10 names of relatives and friends whom they would be willing to invite to a special “Friends Day” service on a Sunday morning. Second, they asked that every member pray each day that those on his/her list would respond favorably. Third, they gave members three options for reaching out to those whom they wanted to come. (1) They could give the color brochures for the event to their friends and invite them personally; (2) They could send the brochures to those on their list through the mail; (3) They could turn in names and addresses of those on their list to the church office and the church would mail the brochures to those whose names were submitted.

Two weeks before Friends Day, as a way of drawing attention to the event, the preacher had each member write down and turn in an attendance goal they thought the church could reach on this day. The average of all these numbers, which was about 50 above the average attendance, was announced the next Sunday morning. The results of this “Friends and Relatives Day” effort surprised everyone as more than 100 visitors attended on this special day to hear a fine gospel sermon from a visiting preacher and enjoy a fellowship noon meal afterwards.
For follow-up, the church sent each visitor a letter to thank them for coming and to inform them of the various ministries and services of the church. From the guest cards completed, the church set up appointments with visitors who indicated they had special needs the church could meet.

The Britton Road story reveals several useful lessons about a “friends day.” First, such days can be very effective in getting those who do not usually attend to come to a service. Second, a strong build-up in advance is very important. Third, strong member involvement is the key to success in building the attendance. Fourth, giving the members some materials to work with and a careful plan to follow is essential. Fifth, a clear plan for follow-up is a necessity in order to capitalize on the good which the day has done.

For more information on the Britton Road plan, contact ronbever@cox.net.

Good News - Posted on September 13, 2010

Texas Church Uses Skype to Connect with Missionaries By David Chenault, Deacon, Broad Street Church of Christ

Although the 200-member Broad Street Church of Christ in Mineola, Texas, has funded foreign missionaries for several decades, most of the church’s members have never come face to face with the preachers they support. But thanks to a little modern technology, all that changed on a recent Sunday morning.

“Hello, my brothers and sisters in Mineola,” said Francis Agyare in heavily accented English as he waved to the Mineola congregation. Using the Internet to transmit his image and his voice from Africa to Texas, Agyare’s face was now six feet tall and being displayed on a large screen at the front of the church’s auditorium. As the entire American congregation waved back, their greeting was acknowledged by a huge smile across Agyare’s face.

Because they live in separate villages scattered throughout the western region of Ghana, West Africa, Agyare and three other missionaries got up early on a Sunday morning and drove several hours to Tema, a larger, centralized city where there was a better chance of getting a good Internet connection. Armed with a laptop, a video camera, a cellular Internet card and a Skype account, the four missionaries sat quietly waiting for the American congregation to call.

Suddenly, the connection came alive, and the men and the congregation that supports them, separated by 6,000 miles, worshiped together … digitally.

The four men took turns speaking, greeting specific members of the Broad Street church who have visited Ghana in the past and thanking the church for its support. The men then led the Mineola Christians in a brief, intercontinental worship service, complete with prayers and congregational singing from both sides of the Atlantic.

“This is a big deal to these foreign missionaries,” said Russell Reeves, a deacon at Broad Street and a member of the church’s mission committee, which organized the video conference. Nancy Gibson, another church member, offered her own opinion, “It is a big deal for us as well.” Gibson fought back tears as she watched the foreign faces on the screen. “It is so amazing to see these men. It is just so amazing.” But the virtual trip to Ghana was only the start.
After signing off with Agyare, a video call was made to Allende, Mexico. Once again, the screen came to life, this time with Cesar Galvan, a preacher in Allende. He was wearing a headset and sitting in front of a large group of Mexican Christians looking on from behind.

“We are very blessed,” Galvan said in Spanish, “that we can use this type of communication to visit with you in Mineola.” The two churches, joined by the Internet, prayed and sang together.

Galvan’s conversation was interpreted by Javier Vargas, who once lived in Allende, but is now a deacon at Broad Street. During the interpretation, Vargas looked at the screen, paused, then looked closely at the screen a second time as he realized that the Allende church had a surprise for him.

“The lady sitting directly behind Cesar,” Vargas explained to the Mineola audience, “she is my mother.”

“We didn’t know if we could pull it off,” said Reeves, discussing the doubts that the mission committee had in planning the day. Reeves had used Skype, an online video conferencing service, while traveling to Serbia a few years ago. He said it was then that he first saw the potential for a church-to-church connection.

“Here are people who have heard these men’s names for a very long time. They’ve contributed their money to these men. Now they can put a face to a name, and can actually hear their voices.” Reeves paused, then added, “I think it touched them.”

The video connection struck a personal cord for Glynis Good, who has traveled to Ghana twice. “I cried,” Good said reflecting on the video call. “It made me miss these guys that we got to know. I’ve heard people talk about seeing Tony’s dimples and Alfred’s smile. It was wonderful.”

Sunday’s session coincided with Broad Street Church of Christ’s annual mission emphasis month each September. The month typically ends with a special congregation-wide contribution specifically earmarked for mission efforts. The response to the video conference calls was so positive, however, Reeves said it may be done more than just once a year.

“I’ve heard some people say they’d like to do it every week,” said Reeves with a smile. “But I think that may be too much,” he conceded, hinting at the technical challenges of getting a reliable Internet connection to a third-world country.

Next Sunday morning, the church plans to hold its first-ever “Mission Fair.” Members will set up booths around the building to highlight many of the mission efforts the congregation currently supports, both in the United States and overseas.

For more information, email David Chenault at dhchenault@gmail.com.

Good News - Posted on October 18, 2010

“Friend’s Day” More Than Doubles Attendance

Over 25 years ago, the Church of Christ in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, began having a “Friends Day.” Through hard and consistent efforts over the years, this church of about 300 has an attendance of about 750 on
that day. In fact, to accommodate the numbers, they have to conduct two morning services. For consistency, the event is always the second Sunday after Easter. In addition to the two services that day, the church has a “potluck lunch” and, in the afternoon, offers young people a volleyball tournament on courts set up outside the building. They have found this activity is a good way to involve their youth group in inviting friends.

The congregation utilizes a host of ways to publicize the event. They know, of course, that for members personally to invite friends is the most effective method and, to help members do that, the congregation provides brochures and business cards for members to use as they issue an invitation.

They advertise in the local media and, in addition, they mail personal invitations to visitors from the previous year and to others whose names the congregation submits. They also use “Friends Day” as an occasion to reach out to former members who no longer attend. They even have t-shirts that members can purchase and wear to publicize the event.

By collecting information from those who attend, the church is able to make a list of visitors for follow-up purposes. They send a letter to all who came and, in addition, make a personal visit asking how they can be of further service. This list, of course, also provides a starting point for building attendance the following year.

By having “Friend’s Day” at the same time every year, the community of 6,000 people becomes well acquainted with the annual event, and members can be thinking about whom they will bring as the time approaches. An event where the visitors outnumber the members certainly gives the congregation a great lift and provides useful opportunities for contacts among those outside their congregation.

Kevin Rayner, minister of the church in Tecumseh, offers thoughts below from his experience about how to have a great “Friends Day.”

Communicating God’s love is one of the major goals of a Christian. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34). The privilege of telling others about God’s love is a vital and rewarding task. We must equip and disciple the church to share the love of God in both a kind and a persistent way.

Friends make life more fun: having friends is fun, and being a good friend is fun, too. While friendships start on a conversational level of common interests, people really long for deeper friendships with each other, and many desire a hopeful relationship with the Creator. The challenge is finding practical ways to communicate God’s love through our friendships. Since an extremely high percentage of conversions come through personal contact and friendship, a church needs to have events that build these relationships which, in turn, lead to sharing the gospel. A “Friends Day” is a practical way to accomplish this goal.

Here are a few helpful thoughts for a successful “Friends Day.”

• Help the congregation know its purpose. Mission churches grow because they recognize their purpose as helping people go to Heaven. Stagnant congregations, on the other hand, can be doing many good things, but may not be using these events together in a strategy to bring people to Christ. Benevolence, Bible schools, visitation, and other ministries can all be part of the package to make “Friends Day” a success. Be sure to keep the “main thing” the “main thing.”

• Select the right person to speak at your “Friends Day.” If you choose to bring someone in to speak, make sure the person fits your situation. Go for someone who will communicate well the message you want to convey, and who is someone your members will be excited about introducing to their friends.
• Advertise in a variety of ways. Advertising is most powerful when there is congruency between
your use of media and the reputation you have built. If your reputation needs improvement, make
that part of the goal as you work on the “Friends Day” effort. Be creative, but don’t be afraid
to use simple things like stories in the local media and attractive brochures. Use the power of
personal invitations. Jesus knew the power of inviting people. Your friendly invitation is extremely
powerful when it is sincere. Make the invitation non-threatening by asking friends to come to
meet your other friends, and to learn how your beliefs have shaped your life.

• Involve every member. The leaders of the congregation must work with every member to find
ways each one can use his/her gifts and talents to make “Friends Day” a success. The leaders
must communicate on a personal level the value each person can bring to the process, and they
must give the credit to everyone who participates. Of course, one way all can take part is to in-
vite not only friends, but relatives and family members who are not attending. Just as Paul taught
the importance of every member of the body, so must we. Focus on this event. Sometimes we
try to do so many good things we don’t do a very good job on any of them. Be sure to give your
“Friends Day” a high priority and let other activities work in conjunction with it.

• Involve food in the event. Nothing builds relationships and friendship like good food. Jesus real-
ized this powerful principle.

• Follow up and enrich the new relationships. Events can help connect your members to new
people and deepen relationships that are shallow. Events also can be a “fishing pool” for catching
new people. Don’t stop, however, at feeling good about a large number of people who came to
the event. Invest emotion, time, effort, and love in a strategically planned follow-up.

There is no better feeling than sharing the love of God as an ambassador of reconciliation. True friendship
isn’t about just being there when it’s convenient; it’s about being there when it’s not. Our love both for
God and for our friends allows us to be the bridge that connects these together. Our deep love for God
empowers us to express the love God has for humanity. Let this love impel your congregation to invite and
share. God made friends so we can extend His perfect love from our hearts to those we love and cherish.

For more information about the Friends Day in Tecumseh, Oklahoma, contact their minister, Kevin Rayner at
kevin.rainer@gmail.com. Or you may write to Highland Church of Christ, P.O. Box 129, Tecumseh, OK 74873,
or call 425-598-3514.

Good News - Posted on December 03, 2009

Newsletter Evangelism: A New Approach for Door-to-Door Calls

Glenn Davis of Buena Park, California, has developed a plan for door-to-door evangelism with a new twist.
The results of his “newsletter evangelism” indicate that the method brings greater receptivity at the door
and more beneficial contacts.

Those who study and participate in evangelism know that favorable, individual contact is one of the most
useful means for evangelism. For many years, churches have been going door-to-door in their search for
those who might be prospects for Bible studies or attending a church service.
Many such efforts are still effective, and newsletter evangelism has the potential for making such contacts even more likely to be successful.

Davis has developed a series of 25 newsletters he sells on a CD for congregations to use. Churches can add their own name, location, and service times. They can then print as many copies of each newsletter as desired. The newsletters are just one page long and have articles about spiritual matters such as dealing with grief, faith, finances, the restoration concept, current public personalities, and other similar topics. These stories are written to be interesting and helpful, but not controversial.

The plan for newsletter evangelism calls for a person or a couple to develop a “paper route” in which they select 30 or 40 homes in a neighborhood to which they will deliver two issues of the newsletter each week. They don’t knock on the door, but just leave the paper where people will find it. They continue with two papers a week from four to six weeks.

Then, after people have had a chance to read the newsletter, the person or couple will work the route again, this time knocking on the doors. When someone answers, they hold up a copy of the newsletter and say we are here to take a survey about this newsletter to see whether people are reading it. Based on the response the person at the door expresses about the newsletter, the visitors will determine whether to regard the people of this household as prospects.

If this response is favorable, then the couple will ask questions to capitalize on the positive response: “Is there is anything the church can do for you right now?” or “Is there anything we can pray for?” Davis thinks it is also important to ask, “If you were to die today or the Lord were to come right now, do you know for sure that you that you would go home to be with Him?” They may also invite the person to services, to a Bible class, or some other event at church. And, if appropriate, they will ask if the person would like to have a Bible study.

The strategy, of course, is that if the people of the household show some interest in the newsletters, then their response is more likely to be favorable to those who have brought the newsletter than if the call had been made without this preparation. And with the favorable response, it will be more likely that the person will accept an invitation to church or for a Bible study.

An example of using this method comes from the Cox Boulevard Church of Christ in Sheffield, Alabama. This congregation of about 600 has used several different methods of reaching out in its community. They urge their members to bring friends to church and have done door-knocking in various ways over the years. After hearing about the “newsletter evangelism” approach, they tried it in September and October of 2009. Several volunteers took routes, distributing two newsletters a week for four weeks to 260 homes. They used a local printing company to print the newsletters so they would have a professional look.

As a sample of their responses, on one day when people at Cox Boulevard made callbacks, they knocked on 195 doors and found 78 at home. Of the 78 they talked to, 20 agreed either to a Bible study or a callback, or requested prayers. The Cox members commented that this “is a 25% response rate. That is outstanding!”

Another congregation that has used this method is the Niceville Church of Christ in Niceville, Florida. After using the newsletters, they knocked on 180 doors, found 79 at home. From these they set up nine Bible studies, had 11 callbacks, and have baptized four.

The Niceville congregation commented that “The reaction to the newsletter has been overwhelmingly positive. While a few people have asked not to be bothered, many of those not interested in a Gospel presentation were complimentary of the newsletter. It builds a very positive image in the community.”
Churches Find Different Ways to Reach Community Newcomers

When families are at a time of crisis or a time of change, they are more likely to be open to contact about church. This means that when a family has moved to a new location, either from out-of-town or across town, they are more likely to be open to an approach about attending church. If, at that time, a congregation does something to welcome them, or to help them, or to invite them, they are likely to give a favorable response.

Many congregations urge their members to be alert to a moving van in their neighborhood so they can make early contact with a new family. When a new neighbor shows up with a cake or an offer to move boxes, he/she opens a door to give an invitation to church. Every congregation should train its members to be active in such ways.

Some congregations have developed a more formal plan for reaching out to those who have recently moved. The 600-member Robinson Street Church of Christ in Springdale, Arkansas, is one of those that has a way of locating and reaching out to newcomers to their community. Nick Poulos, who directs the program, says he goes to the local water department once a month to get names of those who have signed on for a new start on their water connection. Since the water department is a “public” service, rather than operated by a private company, their records are open.

Poulos selects about a hundred names from those on the list and has a group of more than 20 people who help him make the calls. They meet once a month to get their assignments, which Poulos develops geographically to be near the home of the one who will visit. A couple, either a husband and wife or two women, go to the house to deliver a welcome bag which contains brochures about various local attractions and a map of the city—all available at the chamber of commerce or from the local attractions. Printed on the plastic bag is the name and location of the church.

Those making the call welcome the person to the community and offer them the packet of information. They assure the newcomer they are not selling anything, but just want to provide some information about their city. They then ask if the person has a church home and, if not, they have a brochure from the church to give them. The front of this handout reads: “Now that the move is over, where do I find …” Inside, the brochure suggests that the Robinson Street Church of Christ is a place to find friendship, enrichment, and a good place to worship. On the back is a picture of the preacher and of the church building, a map about how to find the building, and the times of the services. If the person shows interest, they say more about the church and offer a Bible study.
The church has two main goals in providing the welcome service: (1) they hope those who do not have a church connection will come to Robinson Avenue to check it out and (2) they seek to make the church better known and appreciated so that, even if the family does not come to services immediately, they will have a good opinion of the church and, thus, be more responsive to a later contact.

Those interested in this approach should contact npoulos38@yahoo.com.

The Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, a congregation of more than 2,400 in attendance, also has an approach for reaching out to those who have recently moved. Their plan is to offer an annual class called “When Your Boxes are Unpacked—a Class for Women New to the Community.” The class meets once a week for six weeks, starting around the end of July, so that it ends before school begins. The church offers the program at their building at two different times: Wednesday nights at Bible class time, and on Thursday mornings.

Each of the six class meetings has two parts. First, a woman from Memorial Road tells of an occasion when she moved to a new place and what lessons she learned from that experience. Second, one or two members who are expert in a particular topic present information about subjects such as the local public schools, yard care, decorating the home, hospitality, and information on the Edmond/Oklahoma City area. The sessions are interactive and give an opportunity for questions and for fellowship. About three times during the six-week period, the ladies get together for a meal.

The church uses four primary ways to get women to come to the class. First, they advertise the program on a large commercial billboard near the church building. Second, they make contact with various real estate agencies and title companies who agree to give the message to those they have recently placed in homes. Third, the program is announced at church and put in the bulletin. And fourth, women who are members of the congregation are alert to watch for those who have recently moved into their neighborhoods so they can invite them to come with them to the classes.

In addition to the team that plans and presents the programs, six to eight other members agree to act as hostesses in the class. Their role is to take special interest in a few of those who come, seeking to develop lasting friendships with them. This relationship can give an opportunity to invite their new friends to other events at church such as the Thursday morning ladies class and quarterly evening events especially for women. They also can invite them to a Sunday morning Bible class and the regular services, and invite their children to Bible classes. Typically, about 15 non-members attend both the Wednesday night session and Thursday morning session.

While the six classes emphasize topics that are beneficial to women who have recently moved to the area, the church believes this plan offers good longterm spiritual possibilities. The fact that the program is held in the church building, that someone at the last session explains the special programs Memorial Road has for women, and that the hostesses get acquainted for longterm possibilities, give a good opportunity to interest those who come in to learn more about the church. They also believe the classes create longterm good will for the church.

Those interested in this approach may contact sally.shank@oc.edu.

Every congregation should think about how it can best work with those who are new in town. Whether churches are large or small, this approach has good possibilities. All members should be trained to watch for and contact those who move into their neighborhoods. The church should plan whatever program might work best in its community to reach out to newcomers so they can make contact at this important time in the life of a family or an individual. Through such a plan, many can be reached for Christ.

*Good News - Posted on October 18, 2010*
Little Rock Church Uses Sunday Seekers Class

More than eight years ago, soon after Chuck Monan arrived to be the pulpit minister at the 1,400-member Pleasant Valley Church of Christ in Little Rock, one of the members suggested that he begin a “seekers class” as part of the Sunday morning class offering. That member had recently seen such a class at the Prestoncrest congregation in Dallas, and thought the idea might work well for Pleasant Valley.

The group started with 15 members but, over the years, has now grown to a weekly attendance of more than 250. The hour of class time is usually spent with the first 15 minutes in fellowship to let people become better acquainted and to create a sense of friendliness. The next few minutes allows time to introduce visitors and to pray for special requests from the group.

Monan then spends about 30 to 35 minutes on the lesson for the day. Every two months, he asks the class to turn in questions or topics they want to consider, and he builds the lessons around what the class is interested in hearing about. Some of the questions he has dealt with are: What do we need to know about the Holy Spirit? Why are there so many different churches? Are angels real and are they among us today? Why doesn’t the church of Christ use instruments in worship? What is Scientology all about? Is the earth really just 12,000 years old or is evolution correct? What does the Bible teach about homosexuality? How do you know the difference between culturally-conditioned commands and commands for all times? Why can’t women preach and lead in worship assemblies? What is blasphemy and how do we avoid it? If I am divorced, is it OK if I get remarried?

This question format gives Monan an opportunity to deal with things in which the class is interested and allows the sessions to have a sense of openness and informality. He seeks to make the approach non-threatening while still presenting a clear, biblical answer to the questions asked. This plan also means that those who miss a Sunday are not “behind” when they return. While the size of the class does not allow for a “small group discussion” approach, the teacher does encourage questions and comments as the lesson proceeds.

When visitors come to Pleasant Valley on a Sunday morning, they are directed to this “seekers” class. When members bring a guest, they often choose to attend this class with their visitor, and a member studying with a friend or relative will often choose this class when they bring them on a Sunday. Others who attend are those in the congregation who have a husband or wife who is not a member and believe the atmosphere of this class works best for them in that situation. About three-fourths of those attending are members of the congregation who attend with a non-member or who come to get acquainted with non-members who are there. The remaining fourth are non-members who were invited by a member or who have come to visit for some other reason.

This “seekers class” has been the avenue through which many have learned and, thus, have decided to become members of the church. They often remain in the class because the contacts they have made provide an association that helps them feel included in the congregation. A class like this can be an important part of a congregation’s total plan in evangelism. For more information on this class, email chuck@pvcc.org.

Good News - Posted on October 18, 2010
Stratford Women

For the last six or seven years, a group of ladies from the church of Christ in Stratford, Oklahoma, a congregation of about 100 members, have met each Thursday morning at 10 a.m. to find ways to serve. Called the Ladies Visitation Group, eight to 12 women gather each week to consider those in the congregation who need help. As a starter for this, they review information in the weekly church bulletin. Each week they send 10 to 20 cards to those who need some assistance or encouragement, and sometimes plan visits to those with special needs. They share about topics of interest and enjoy the fellowship of being together. And, reports minister Bill Jones, “they laugh a lot.”

Each year, the group is active in handing out Christmas baskets to those with special needs, and they work among themselves to provide meals for those who are ill or who have lost a loved one. At one time, a member of the congregation was in a serious auto accident and they divided up the days so someone from the group went to care for the woman each morning. Some of the women also help in grading World Bible School lessons from the Philippians and Zimbabwe.

Some days, the women go out to eat lunch together, take a trip to some attraction in the area, or go shopping for antiques. Most of the women in the group do not have children at home and do not have jobs, thus giving them the flexibility to attend and to accept an opportunity to serve. While a weekly women’s Bible class certainly has its value, this meeting of women to serve also has much benefit. The concept would work for a group of retired men as well.

For more information about this program, contact Bill Jones at stratfordcoc@att.net.

House to House, Heart to Heart Nearing Three Million Circulation

Since its beginning in 1994, the bi-monthly publication called “House to House, Heart to Heart” has grown rapidly. Through its 16 years, the eight-page paper has gone through more than 100 issues, with a total of 100 million individual copies having been distributed. Currently, the distribution list is at 2.8 million copies sent six times a year to all 50 states and nine foreign countries. This number gives the publication a larger circulation than the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, or USA Today.

The House to House publication, produced in full color by a professional designer, is provided especially for use by churches of Christ. Through religious articles and information, HTH provides a useful service and presents a positive image of the church. The 1,100 congregations who use the publication can include their own worship service times and other information in a column on the front page and can include an article and advertisement of a forthcoming event at their congregation on the back page.
Typically, congregations select a community or area around their building and identify this location to the House to House staff, which then contracts for a saturation mailing to all addresses in that area. The cost for both printing and mailing HTH is 29 cents a copy with a minimum of 1,000 copies. With a single stamp now costing 44 cents, the 29 cents for printing and mailing represents a good savings.

Congregations also send HTH to their own mailing lists, use it as a handout in door-to-door work, send it to mission fields, or insert it with other materials they are distributing. Congregations, like the one in Harleyville, South Carolina, may also contract with their local newspaper for House to House to be an insert when it comes out every two months. The individual cost for printed copies for such local distribution is 13 cents each.

House to House is operated under the oversight of the elders of the Jacksonville Church of Christ in Jacksonville, Alabama, a congregation of about 200 members. Allen Webster edits the publication. HTH is a non-profit operation and does not solicit donations. It gives away copies freely to both non-members and members. The archived issues and related materials are available at www.housetohouse.com.

Congregations report conversions after each issue of House to House and Heart to Heart. One church, for example, reported, “We have had numerous visitors, Bible studies, and 14 baptisms within the past year due to HTH circulation in Crown Point, Indiana. Glory be to God!” The North Valley Church of Christ in Cave Creek, Arizona, wrote “We are beginning to get some visitors who received the HTH, and one Bible study has led to a baptism. We are very happy with this endeavor and believe it is a great tool for us and for the church everywhere.” Some congregations have reported success in mailing House to House as a prelude to a special event like a campaign or gospel meeting. Others have used it well to let a community know that a new congregation is being established there. Using the House to House publication obviously works best when done in connection with other forms of outreach like special public events, door-to-door contacts, and personal conversations in the target area.

The House to House website (www.housetohouse.com) not only has information about their bi-monthly publication, but has a media section with 500 videos and 5,200 audio items available. This site also has a question-and-answer section with answers to many religious questions people ask.

To learn more about House to House, go to their website, email Luke Griffin at luke@housetohouse.com, or call 1-877-338-3397.

Good News - Posted on July 6, 2010

Bible Language Courses Reach Outsiders

Charlie Powell, one of the ministers at the 250-member Britton Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, has had training in both Greek and Hebrew. Four years ago, he had the idea of making classes in these biblical languages available to the public free of charge. So he posted an invitation to the class on the church’s electronic sign, which is on a main street in north Oklahoma City.

During these four years, he has had 53 take beginning Greek, with virtually all the students coming from the community. Beginning Hebrew, offered for the first time in January 2011, has drawn 16, all of which were community people. He is just starting an intermediate Greek class and expects 12, of which all but one are from the community.
Six students have been with him through all four years. He is finding that there are many who have long wanted to study a biblical language, but never had the opportunity. Throughout the studies, Powell has the opportunity to discuss the meaning of Bible words and passages, and this often leads to a discussion of doctrinal issues. Some from the language classes have attended services or other special events at the congregation.

The only advertising for the class has been the church sign and word-of-mouth by the students. Powell says that he has an account with an online company called Phonevite. Through this service, he can call one number or go through the Internet and record a message that will be sent to everyone in the class with an email notice. This allows him to send reminders or messages about cancelling a class due to bad weather. The cost for this service is small.

Powell, an Oklahoma Christian University graduate, says, “It is evident that God is working in this effort. I have certainly been blessed to meet so many people who are eager to understand what the Bible really says and means. This obviously would not be a viable tool for everyone, but it certainly shows an interest that may lie dormant in many people outside our church doors that can be tapped into.”

You may contact Charlie Powell about his program at charliepowell286@gmail.com.

Good News - Posted on January 26, 2011

Principles No. 5
Offer a Strong Bible Education Program

Many people today are very interested in studying the Bible. Many community churches have drawn large numbers by saying they are just a Bible church. Especially families want their children to learn something about the Bible and are drawn to churches that offer outstanding programs for those from early childhood through high school. If a smaller church will concentrate on having an outstanding education program, they can attract many from their community. And what could be more in line with Jesus’ command to “make disciples” than teaching people the Bible (Matthew 28:18)?

An excellent program could be described as one that: (1) has clear objectives for each grade level; (2) trains its teachers not only through programs within the congregation, but takes advantage of bringing in experts from outside to train teachers, and sends teachers to teacher training events elsewhere; (3) provides excellent, well-kept facilities; (4) focuses its students on learning the Bible; (5) utilizes a variety of effective methods for helping students learn both in the classroom and in out-of-classroom experiences; (6) gives its students opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned both in the classroom and to parents; (7) uses good security measures to protect children; (8) has sufficient funding to carry out its mission; and (9) has good leadership to see that these criteria are met.

The development of an outstanding educational program will take careful planning and a determination to see the plan through. Someone will need to take the lead in this work, and that person will need a group that will work together to make things happen. They may wish to start their focus at a particular grade level such as preschool, elementary, or high school, depending on the number of students at each level and the availability of teachers and facilities. If the congregation has a youth minister to work with teens, then he should be charged with developing such an outstanding program of learning and spiritual growth activities that it will not only serve those in the congregation, but will attract those from the outside as well. Do not forget to make the adult program outstanding as well. People will invite their friends to come with them to class if they know that the class will be well taught.

Oklahoma Christian University has made available without charge lesson plans for teachers on a number of Bible books and topics. These materials provide not only an outline through which the teacher can con-
duct the class, but many of them also provide worksheets and, in some cases, PowerPoint slides. These materials are available at www.eBibleStudy.org. Another source for adult and teen classes is video classes prepared by those who are experienced and effective teachers. Publishing companies serving churches of Christ have available many sets of these materials, which a smaller congregation can use for their own edification and to which they can invite those from outside.

A well-done ladies Bible class also can be a good draw. Ladies can invite their friends and all can participate in a good Bible study and in fellowship. A vacation Bible school offers much the same opportunity. A smaller congregation can strive to have “the best VBS in town” and, through this good work, can not only educate its own youth, but can draw others as well. If needed, the smaller church can enlist the help of a larger church in the area that could provide some of the teachers and materials. Sometimes, a group can come to help canvass the town to advertise the VBS and then help conduct it.

While it takes time to build the reputation of having a top-notch Bible education program, this is a great goal for a smaller congregation to work on. Even a congregation that has only a small number in attendance can decide on a particular level at which it wants to excel and can start its efforts at that level. A great preschool program, for example, can begin to draw some children and their parents who will likely stay as the children grow older.

In sum, offering a strong Bible education program should be the goal of all congregations. Those who are smaller in number will find this not only a great way to teach their own, but also they will find that it offers important opportunities to reach out into their communities.

**Principle No. 6**  
**Draw Younger People**

Many small churches see their average age increasing, and recognize that if they are to survive in the long run, they must add some younger members. When their communities are aging, with many of the youth going away to college and not returning, this makes the problem for the church even harder to solve. So, are there measures they can take to reverse this trend by bringing in some who are younger? Here are some ideas.

1. **Study the composition of the community.** Where may young people be found? Are the young people drawn to FFA or other similar activities? How many in different age groups are represented in the local school system?

2. **Once you have learned something about the youth in the community and the activities in which they are involved, think of how the congregation can best approach and connect with them.** If you have only a few high school students, study various possibilities of building that number by contacts you could have with teens in the community. If your best area to start with is to build on preschool, then develop that area and find ways to connect. Find a need that you can meet such as some of those suggested below.

3. **Many families have a need for someone to care for their children between the time school is over and when parents are finished with their workday.** Some congregations have found that a great way to serve and connect is to have a late afternoon program that serves this need. They make arrangements with the parents and the school so they can pick up the participating children. They provide Bible activities and studies and may offer tutoring in some school subjects. These children become well acquainted with people at the church and feel comfortable going there. They become prime prospects, therefore, for attending Sunday or Wednesday Bible classes and VBS. Using this approach, a church can begin to build its number at the elementary school level.
4. Perhaps the church can connect with youth by involvement with a 4-H or FFA program, scouts, an athletic team, or a school activity. Maybe the group needs sponsors, leaders, a place to meet, transportation, or other needs that would allow members of the church to provide assistance. Through this contact, the members will have the opportunity to help young people know more about the church and what it offers.

5. There are church camps in most areas of the country, and the congregation can use these to good effect. They can send some of their own youth, who can then be encouraged to bring their friends. The church might even help financially if necessary in order for more young people to be able to go. Here, the youth can be strengthened spiritually and stronger bonds will be developed. Such connections could lead those not previously affiliated with the church to attend.

6. Some congregations have found a community need such as providing assistance in a public park, a school, or a family that cannot help itself. They plan a “work camp” and use their own resources and, if needed, resources from a larger church with whom they can connect. Those in the congregation who are involved, particularly the youth, can invite their non-member friends to take part in the “work camp” so their friends can get to know more people from the church and appreciate the service the church seeks to provide. Through this means, members can bring non-members to attend and learn the gospel.

7. An important possibility is for someone in the church to take on the responsibility of knowing what job openings may be coming in town—openings at schools, businesses, newspapers, medical facilities, engineering, or government positions. This person can make those openings known to the placement office at our Christian universities, seek to bring young couples to live in the community, and thus be a strength to the church. The person at Oklahoma Christian to contact is Mark Chan at 405-425-5960 or at mark.chan@oc.edu.

8. A congregation should begin early to help its young people know the important part they can play in the future of the church there. Start, even in the elementary years, to plant the seed of their making the future of this congregation something to which they wish to contribute. If they go away to college, they can study something that will allow them to come back to the community for their occupation and to help strengthen the church as well. Young people today like a challenge to be of service. See if you can help them take on the future of the church in their home community as their place to serve. Some may be willing to make your congregation their “mission” point, prepare themselves for this work, and return after college. A good plan would be for the person to major in some area that would allow him/her to have an occupation available in the area such as teaching, coaching, business, medicine, law, or some other field in which he/she can be employed. They can carry along with that major a vocational ministry major, which gives them extra hours in Bible that will make them a more effective teacher and worker in the church.

One of the most important things an aging church can do is to put into action some measures that can help bring some younger people into the church.

**Principle No. 7**
**Demonstrate Christian Unity and Fellowship.**

Many people today are looking for a place to connect. They want human contact, but feel isolated. Neighbors don’t sit on the front porch and visit with each other in the evening. We are inside our air-conditioned homes, watching TV. We may be connecting with people by Facebook or Twitter, but that does not satisfy our need for personal interaction with other people. We are busy and feel pushed, but there is still a desire to relate to others. A church can capitalize on this need if it develops the right plan.
1. There must be good unity and fellowship within the congregation. If there is division, separation, or bad feelings among some, the problem must be solved. No one is attracted to a church that has discord. Such matters, of course, need to be solved for the spiritual good of those within the church. And they need to be solved if the church is to attract those from the outside. If the church needs outside help to resolve some issues, then it should seek that assistance.

2. The congregation should purposely develop a plan for fellowship among its members. In many small churches, such interaction takes place naturally as people get together after church on Sunday night or meet in other ways. Some, however, may be left out of these natural gathering and, if so, a plan needs to be developed that includes everyone.

3. A wonderful way to build a strong bond between members is for ministers, elders, and others to send “thank you notes” to those who teach or help with youth activities or work around the building. Such notes are deeply appreciated and strengthen ties in the church.

4. Another way to strengthen bonds within a congregation is good communication. Everyone needs to be kept “up to speed” on plans for the future, on how the money is spent, and on activities the church is planning. Sharing what is going on is a great way to build unity in a church. This can be done by using the bulletin, announcements, and meetings of the church.

5. With a strong bond between all members of the church, those on the outside will notice. When they visit a service, they will note the warm greetings members give each other. If they share in a church service project, they will see how the members work together and enjoy each other’s company.

6. When someone in the congregation is ill or loses a loved one, as the congregation rallies around that person or family, those on the outside will notice and be favorably impressed. The food, the visits, and the care will be noticed. The young people can care for the yard of a widow in the congregation who can’t do the work herself and who can’t really afford to pay for it.

7. Ladies’ classes and men’s breakfasts are a good opportunity to invite outsiders to events and show them the fellowship and unity in the church. Again, such occasions can provide a springboard to get those who come to these events to come to Bible classes and services.

**Principle No. 8**

**Train Members to Be Effective in Their Roles**

Ephesians 4:11-13 says that God put various functions in the church such as evangelists, pastors (elders), and teachers “to prepare God’s people for works of service.” Leaders in the church are there to prepare (train) members to do their jobs in the church. Of course, such training includes teaching them the message of Christ, just as He told His apostles in Matthew 28:20: “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” But it means more than that. If we are to prepare members “for works of service,” then we must teach them “how” to excel in their work of service, whether that is teaching, visiting, caring for the needy, counseling, leading in worship, leading a small group, keeping class attendance, or serving as an elder or deacon. Whatever work of service church members do, they need to be trained in how to do it well.

The lack of training in the work we ask people to do leads to their being dissatisfied in doing the work. And not many want to take on a job for which they are not prepared or on which they will probably do poorly. The church needs to gear itself up to be the training institution Christ wants us to be. Here are some ideas to help in doing this.
1. Have a plan to be sure every member of the congregation has a useful work to do for the Lord. You may, for example, use a deacon to be an involvement chairman. He can develop a system for checking to see what role each member is filling. If there are those who need to find a work to do, he will help them to do that.

2. Another person, maybe another deacon, can be the training chairman. He will work to provide training for a variety of works to be done. He can, for example, have a training class for teachers, for those who do visiting, for those leading in worship, for greeters, for those who lead in various ministries of the church, and for those serving in other ways. He may want to bring specialists in various roles to conduct a workshop for members who work in those activities, and he can be aware of seminars at Christian colleges and at other congregations that provide training. He could even help the elders be aware of training opportunities for the work they do.

3. Some congregations arrange to visit with a more developed church to provide an opportunity for training. They may, for example, come on a Saturday for some training sessions and then stay over on Sunday to learn by observation. When they go home, they should have a time to share with each other what they have learned and want to implement.

4. The church needs to create a culture of training. If not much training has been done in the past, the training may have to start with some who are most in need or most willing. The idea of training can then be developed until all are being trained for their work. Those who do every work in the church can learn to do it better. A person may have been leading the singing for 10 years, but he might still learn to do it better. Just as businesses do training sessions for their employees, the church needs to train its members for their work. Often, people decline to take a role when asked to do it because they don't feel capable of doing the job. If, however, they are sure they will be properly trained in the work, they might accept and do well.

CONCLUSION

While what happens in every congregation of churches of Christ is important to the kingdom of Christ, the work of the smaller churches among us is certainly critical. Most of our membership is in such congregations, and it is in these congregations that many of the members in larger churches get their start. If the church is to prosper in coming decades, these smaller churches must thrive and do their work well.

By utilizing the principles suggested in this handbook, these churches can do well. We suggest that each congregation put together a group to study how these principles can best be utilized in their activities and then present that plan to the elders or leadership. The scriptures are filled with examples of God’s people planning for their work. God, Himself, delivered the precise plan for how the Israelites were to build the tabernacle and use it for their worship. Jesus spent most of his ministry on earth training the apostles to establish and build the church. Paul spent time in Corinth and Ephesus to convert and train those who could carry out the work of those churches, and he told the younger preacher Timothy to teach those who could, in turn, teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Let us, likewise, give ourselves up for the church, to make her all that Christ wants her to be.