

## **STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY MINISTRY:**

*By Randy Nabors*

There are many ways to reach out to a community, usually only limited by our imagination and faith; and only to some degree by our resources. One person with faith and an idea can still be used by God to be a light and a witness to a community, and be used by God to draw people into a congregation. Resources do limit us, but they do not hinder us in trying something, or some things, at some times. If there is a will to reach out to the community within a congregation there will be some resources available, and maybe more than you hoped or knew. Some of the limitations in community outreach come from our own attitudes, point of view, and possibly from a lack of vision.

We might start with some **QUESTIONS:**

1. Why do we want to reach out to our community?
2. What does our church have to offer to the people in our community?
3. What do the people in our community need?
4. What are the good things in our community which we should help celebrate or enhance?
5. How do we envision the people of the community responding to our efforts?
6. If the people from the community came into our congregation, how would they be received: Do we want them here?
7. Suppose a whole lot of them came, how would it change our congregation?
8. What are the cultural, racial, and socio-economic obstacles that hinder the inclusion of community people into our congregation?
9. Are our strategies for outreach combined with our strategy for inclusion?\*

There are some Christians we call Evangelicals, maybe even Fundamentalists, who believe that the Bible teaches that people need to be “saved,” that they need to believe in Jesus and be converted. Some of these folks believe that the Bible also teaches that Christians should go to the “lost” and tell them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and call on them to believe in Jesus. This usually means among modern day Evangelicals that we want them to pray the “sinner’s prayer” and ask Jesus into their heart. This has resulted in various kinds of “witnessing” and evangelistic type outreach, quite often to total strangers. Some of this evangelism is opportunistic, even arbitrary, and does not seek to lead the newly converted into a relationship with the evangelist or into a new church directly.

The author of this little paper is someone who believes in the necessity of belief in Jesus for salvation, in the need of the lost for conversion, and in the responsibility of the Church and the Christian to Gospelize the nations. However, to set evangelism apart from the community of Faith, to make it individualistic, to make it a mental transaction after a few minutes of information sharing without relationship, carries certain negative results.

While we do not deny God can still save total strangers, with just the Word being used by the Holy Spirit, in a few moments of discussion or listening, we look to avoid the dangers of making salvation just a sales pitch.

It is not healthy for the evangelist to look upon people as objects or numbers without individuality and needs. It is not healthy for the individual who comes to believe to not be taken into the community of Faith, for God meant it to be in the local church that people would grow into disciples. To evangelize without the immediate desire to take people into the Christian community

is not healthy for the person who rejects the witness, as it makes them cynical about people of Faith. It is not healthy for the local congregation because it sees little real growth from this kind of information dispersion.

Yet, we as Christians have often been taught that the lost need our witness and that they need to be converted, and we sometimes feel guilty that we do so little about it. Our message, we believe, is Life so wouldn't it be loving to share it with those who don't have it? Certainly, but the method of sharing the message and the message itself are often integrated together, so if there is not love in the method the message can be seen as another sales pitch, as propaganda, even as manipulation. In short we short circuit the message even as we share it.

What follows is a list of community outreach strategies. This is only a short list of possibilities, mostly limited to things that we have tried at New City Fellowship or learned from other churches. Some have been more successful than others, and we are always looking out for new or better ideas, or reshaping old ones. These methods begin with some assumptions, beyond the ones already mentioned about our concern to see people saved. These methods in a sense imply a love not just for individuals, but for a community, a neighborhood. That we (because God does) care about groups and not just individuals. That in loving a whole community we bring to focus our light and our salt into the culture, and that people begin to see us as players in the broader world and not just as a self focused group behind the walls of our church building.

### **OUTREACH IDEAS:**

1. **Neighborhood Bible Clubs** –going into neighborhoods, laying out a tarp on the ground, putting up a paint board or easel, singing songs, giving a Bible message, crafts, games, refreshments (whatever you have time and people for) and doing this for a few days in a row. Possibly take children on a picnic at the end of the week (with their parents permission of course.) Gather the data from the children so you can go visit their homes, explain who you are to the parents, invite to other activities. At New City we invited mission teams from around the country to come and help us. We do these clubs for eight to ten weeks over the summer, sometimes during Fall or Spring break.
2. **Growth Club** – following up on children who profess faith by gathering them once a week through the summer for a Discipleship Bible study.
3. **Urban Camp** – we call it that because we deal with urban children, but we take the children we have met during the summer to a week of camp, using lots of music and vigorous activity, and Bible training.
4. **Block Parties** – targeting a housing or apartment complex, getting permission from management, setting up teams to produce the various segments of activities: work project (such as fixing playground equipment, fixing bikes, planting trees, etc.), children's carnival with games, medical and health tent (blood pressures, other screening) Cook team (enough food for all residents and volunteers), logistics team (tents, equipment, transportation, porta-potties, set up, take down) clean up team, prayer team, visitation team (knocking on every door and inviting folks out for the food, asking if there is something they prayer about-praying right at the door for them), music (band, choirs, sound equipment). You will need leadership, and possibly security depending on the site.
5. **Tutoring Programs** – GLAD, which is the tutoring program we have at our church during the school year, targeting elementary school children in the public schools. This program needs professional leadership with a strong cadre of faithful volunteers. Tutoring is also possible by sending our church volunteers to area schools.

**6. Day Camp** –usually a summer program for three to five days a week, wherein staff and volunteers are secured to run a program of learning enhancement, Bible stories, crafts, recreation, meals, etc. This can be self –supporting and can grow as large as secured staff and students allow.

**7. Sports Leagues**-Some churches have sports teams that recruit neighborhood folks in various leagues (YMCA, City Recreation) but one approach is like our Chattanooga Sports Ministries (a registered non-profit) whereby we hire coaches to work full time in the summer to recruit, organize, train, mentor, and teach middle school girls in soccer and in spiritual life skills. We run a league with practices, games, and a tournament. Another approach is to have a staff member serve as a volunteer coach for one of the school teams in your area. If your staff member is an athlete, and certified to teach, this can be a very open door in an inner city school.

**8. Job Training/Mentoring of Youth**-If you are able to raise the budget you can hire neighborhood youth to help run a Day Camp, and then organize them into a learning cohort where you can mentor them through the summer in spiritual issues, work attitudes, etc.

**9. Enrichment Program/College preparation**-If you have a cohort of youth that work for you, or that you can organize, you can put together a program with an area college whereby they get to take a class or two each week from the institution, get lunch, use recreational facilities. The college gets to recruit and the kids get challenged to think of higher education. Weekly programs can be offered for S.A.T. or A.C.T. preparation.

**10. Moms Day Out**-offered to neighborhood mothers with child care provided at the church. This depends on volunteers, facilities, etc.

**11. Mothers Of Pres-School Children (MOPS)**-sometimes used as a co-op for church or neighborhood mothers as a mini-pre-school and social time for mothers who deal with small children all day long.

**12. Medical Clinic**-depending on the medical practitioners who can volunteer (or raise funds and create a non-profit clinic) or organize place, schedule, equipment, policies, etc. to provide either free or very low cost medical care to the community. Some of these can grow to be huge programs.

**13. Parish Nurse**-trained R.N. in community health, health education, prevention and wellness programs run at and through the church and available to the neighborhood. Sometimes a hospital will cover the cost, sometimes the local church will have to do it.

**14. Medical Fair**-As host or in combination with other neighborhood organizations, having medical professionals come and give screening and information on medical issues, usually with things or information to give away and referrals.

**15. Smoke Alarm-Safety campaign**-going into the neighborhood with a team ready to give each house a smoke alarm, install it, and distribute fire safety information.

**16. Car Clinic**-providing monthly or periodic oil change and maintenance check for single moms, elderly, poor, etc. Using volunteers from the church who know what to look for to maintain a vehicle.

**17. Neighborhood Organizing**-Some neighborhoods are not organized as a community. A church can provide a skilled neighborhood organizer to bring the neighborhood together to give it unity and political power. Once organized neighborhoods can apply for community block grants.

**18. Neighborhood Chaplain**-putting someone on staff who will have as their main focus a “parish” approach to the neighborhood. This person meets everyone they can, every institution, learns neighborhood resources, walks the streets, connects solutions to problems, represents the church and Christ.

**19. Food Pantry/Food Bank**-Many churches have a “food closet” that makes food available to either church members or walk-ins. This can be done internally only, or in connection with area wide food bank with food vouchers. Communication, intake of food and resources, storage, distribution, policies of such have to be put together.

**20. Christian Community Development Organization-**In the area of mercy ministry there are two main components; charity and development. Charity is for immediate relief while development seeks to help people be able to help themselves through acquiring skills, resources, etc. that will make them stable. Putting together a registered non-profit that can engage in development strategies can be very effective. Churches can create such organizations, decide on how much support or control they want to have on the Board, and create more systemic solutions to neighborhood problems such as housing, job training, job and business creation, G.E.D. programs, etc. Such organizations mean hiring staff, fund raising, grant writing and foundation requests, etc. It is a great way to engage neighborhood folks economically.

**21. Shelter/ Hospitality-** this can either be a provision for short term transients or long term homelessness depending on resources. A church can purchase an apartment building or large house, provide either staff or volunteers to give 24 hour coverage, and network with other community resources to help those who are homeless.

**22. Staff Counselor/MSW-**Intake process-if a church is engaged in “helping” people you will need either a part time volunteer available to hear requests for help or staff person to handle cases. The more professional the training and hours available to receive people the more people you will meet. Depending on resources this might be a “full time Deacon” or social worker. This requires the ability to counsel, list of resources to use or to which to refer, data collection and follow-up. It is good to develop church volunteers to form a team around “cases” or families to provide continuing help.

**23. Community Seminars-**creating, advertising, and providing various training to church members and community folks in the areas of such things as budgeting, marriage preparation, marital communication, child raising, anger management, financial literacy, protection from scam artists and loan sharks, etc.

**24. Gym/Community Center-**if the church has such facilities, setting up staff and volunteers to provide open hours to neighborhood and engaging area residents. To simply open a gym doesn’t equate to ministry.

**25. Thrift Store-**providing a shop whereby people can come and buy used clothing, adding resource racks for Christian material, setting up additional ways to engage people such as coffee time, tea time, sewing class, etc.

**26. Used Books/Coffee-Tea shop-**securing place or property to have a neighborhood used book store, coffee shop, tea room and engage area residents.

**27. Aerobic/Fitness Classes-**(Karate, Yoga, Pilates) if church has facilities using room to include neighborhood folks for an organized fitness class.

**28. Alternative Education Resources-**creating financial resources or securing contacts with institutions that can provide such to scholarship children into other avenues of education (remedial, alternative for discipline, Christian, boarding, etc.) and identifying neighborhood children who need those resources. Being an advocate and intermediary with parents and institutions will give you credibility with neighborhood folks.

**29. Addiction Ministries-**providing A-A or Christian curriculum and meeting strategy for life controlling problems. Weigh Down or weight control groups and sexual addictions are included.

**30. Big Brothers-Big Sisters (BASICS)-**partnering with local BB/BS agency to connect families with neighborhood children. Brothers and Sisters In Christ Serving is our discipleship partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Usually requires a diligent volunteer or staff member to connect families and to maintain relationships.

**31. Neighborhood House-**purchasing or building a house in a part of the neighborhood that your church has adopted and then programming it and staffing it so there can be meaningful things going on to attract neighborhood folks. Tutoring, Bible Studies, recreation room, movie nights, cook outs, cooking class, counseling availability are all possible ideas.

32. **Internship Program**-raising up indigenous leadership is always a challenge. One way is to provide summer or short term internship programs whereby you hire local youth and train them in your community ministries. Mentoring time is essential.

33. **ESL**-English as a Second Language classes are great ways to make cross cultural connections and provide a real help to immigrants and area business. Don't hesitate to make this an evangelistic opportunity.

34. **Holiday Fiestas**-if you have a cultural community you are trying to reach learn holidays and seasons and find out how to celebrate them. Use the church building to host such activities.

35. **Community Expo** or InfoFest-(as from Calvary Gospel Church) taking the leadership to invite and include all community resources to provide information to neighborhood residents, making it fun with food and music and hand outs and prizes. Most institutions and businesses are open to such activities, even ones hosted by churches.

36. **Community Bible Studies**-asking Senior Citizens, handicapped or shut-in residents if they would like a Bible Study on Sunday morning in their homes. This is good to do during the Sunday School hour by church members, usually in groups of two.

37. **Planting Relationships**-Spring time visitation of homes by church members bringing plants for community residents, saying it is simply an act of love in Jesus name and to help beautify the neighborhood.

38. **Using radio and media**-producing a local radio show geared to youth, possibly using Hip Hop, discussing teen issues. This is more inclusive and participatory by youth than a sermon format.

39. **Home Repair**-targeting widows or elderly who own their own homes which are deteriorating. Organizing a team of skilled volunteers who take a Saturday to come and repair a bathroom, paint, roof, or do carpentry repairs. Good for the organizing of mission teams, or program for men to do things together.

40. **Widows or Senior Socials**-using seasonal events to gather area widows or seniors for outings, teas, and social events.

41. **Community Newspaper**-if there is no local coverage of the neighborhood a community newsletter can be generated and circulated, including general community news and events, along with church sponsored events.

42. **Start to School Resources**-distribution of back packs, or children story books, especially Christian children's books that can be given as a gift to parents of school age children.

43. **Playground**- if the neighborhood has no children's playground or basketball court the church can build one. It is suggested that volunteers or church staff spend some time at the court to make relationships.

44. **Bus Stop**-sometimes the public bus stops in the neighborhood of the church. Some of these stops have no bus shelter. A church, in cooperation with the city and bus company, can build a shelter and put the name of the church on the shelter. Use art and slogan to make it attractive.

45. **Neighborhood Art Fair**- Hold a neighborhood art show and sale, let all residents participate, set up policy of what is acceptable.

46. **Neighborhood Flea Market/Yard Sale**-have an annual neighborhood yard sale on the property of the church, include a fish fry or cook out, get teens involved, even a car wash. The more activities and the more festive the better.

47. **Christmas Store**- asking church members to donate new toys, using community data list of poor families with small children to invite them to come and purchase the toys set up in the church on display. Toys sold at 10% or less than original purchase price. Have teens or seniors supply a wrapping service. This allows parents to bless their own children, and the church to bless the families.

48. **School Presentations**-use church band or musicians to supply public school assembly for musical presentations on culture, holidays, or musical history. In turn ask the schools to do an annual music presentation to the church and at the church.

49. **Adoption Fair**-use church building to host adoption agencies, classes on registering to be foster parents, advertise to community and church members.

50. **Use Your Building**-get agencies to use your facilities for community meetings, such as NAACP, Police-Community relations meeting. Let residents know they can use certain spaces at reserved times for family reunions or funeral repasts. Make sure you have a church representative available during the event.

### **SOME TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

1. Think success, you want to do things well, not haphazard, so make sure whatever you do you think through the details. It is better to start small and short term and be successful than to start and not finish, or attempt too big and not be able to complete the project.
2. Seek to make things a church wide effort, not that of a few noble and energetic (or even wildly radical) people. Get the pastor, leadership, and membership to buy into the project.
3. Seek to set aside the funds necessary to do the job well. Put it in the church budget, take special offerings, ask particular people who can make a significant donation, ask area businesses or institutions to help pay for it if it is a community project.
4. Make sure you have an engine. Some person who has the vision, and will provide leadership, is usually necessary to make things work. A committee or, even worse, simply a written church goal, will not get things done. The pastor cannot be the main engine for any of these things, but he can certainly be an idea person and a great cheer leader. He must feel involved, but if he is left to lead too many things can interfere with him getting it done.
5. Get neighborhood input and involvement if you are going to do something for the neighborhood. Ask permission when you invade an apartment complex or community center. Clean up your mess.
6. Participate in neighborhood activities such as clean up days. Be a player and others might play with you.
7. Use good management skills: recruit, train, motivate, delegate, plan, inspect what you expect, don't make assumptions-communicate, encourage, give others credit, don't waste the time of volunteers with too many or too long meetings.
8. Evaluate, de-brief, use lessons learned, give testimonies, praise and reward those who did the work. Tell the story to the church, let the success belong to them. Keep tying the activity to the vision and mission of the church. Give glory to God.

• At New City we have a strategy to “socialize” children from the inner city by a series of ministry to them, in their neighborhoods, before bringing them into the Sunday School or Vacation Bible School of the church. We have a “culture” class, we have a “cross-roads” program, we try to tie kids to mentors so the entry into church culture can be as smooth as possible.

### **PRINCIPLES:**

A. Remember the spiritual aspect of every event, never try to hide being from the church, cover events with prayer and pray publicly to start events.

B. Remember the relational aspect of each event, so preaching or witnessing directly is not our objective. Once relationships are established take every opportunity in conversation to share testimony or faith stories.

C. Name recognition of the church is a positive thing, if it comes from positive experience. The more the church does in a neighborhood, that benefits the neighborhood, the more the name of the church will be warmly received.

D. Remember to refer, when opportunity arises, to other church programs or church staff. Make sure volunteers know the programs and activities that are available.

E. It is fine to become allies with other churches or secular organizations to fight community problems, but be aware of how connected you are, when the name of the church might be compromised, when your association might be harmful. Share the credit with others when you do work together. Let others praise you, and not your own mouth.