A Memorial Gift Brings Bethlehem Youth Together Through Fun and Games

By: Bruce Pokarney



It's sort of like the old playground game of four square—except there are nine squares. It's sort of like volleyball—except the ball is hit over bars instead of a net. Step inside the front doors of Bethlehem on a Wednesday evening and you are likely to hear loud cheering, laughing, and the general sounds of physical activity coming from the Re-Creation Center, where kids are enjoying a game of 9 Square as part of the church's High School Youth Group. The game brings young people together in an activity that doesn't require all players to be agile or athletic. They just need to like having fun.

High schooler Tucker Reyelts loves to play 9 Square and sees it as a great way to connect with other youth.

"Absolutely," he says. "A lot of young people who don't usually participate in group stuff will play this game."

Raylee Zimmer, another Bethlehem teen, agrees and says nearly everyone is smiling and laughing when they play 9 Square, but admits that most everyone else is taller, which makes the game challenging.

"My lack of height is very much a disadvantage," she says. "They will spike the ball on me, but that's okay. I can take it because we all get to play together and have fun together."

News of the game's popularity among Bethlehem's youth brings a smile to longtime congregation members Gary and Dlon Kvernevig. **With a generous gift in memory of their son, Mike, the couple made it possible for the church to purchase the portable, high-quality components of 9 Square.**

"I know this would make our son very happy," says Gary.

Mike Kvernevig passed away in early 2025. Gary and Dlon wanted to use proceeds from a memorial fund for what they knew their son would want—something for youth.

“Our son wanted something for children, and we decided to use funds for something that would cover a lot of kids of all ages,” says Dlon. “We then put it all into Stan’s hands.”

Stan Jung, Bethlehem’s Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, took it from there. He had become aware of a game invented by a pastor to get kids involved. That game was 9 Square, and Stan knew it would be popular with Bethlehem youth.

“We use it a lot,” says Stan. “It’s been a great addition to our Wednesday night High School Youth Group. It brings kids here and gets them engaged. Athletic and non-athletic types can play and have fun. It’s a fast-moving game, so when there are more people than squares, nobody sits out for more than a minute or so.”



The three-dimensional squares can be set at lower heights for young kids and as high as 7 feet for the big kids and young adults. At first, just a few youth showed up to play. Quickly, as many as 30 started showing up for the new and exciting game. It’s been a good bonding experience.

“It’s a great way for kids from all different schools and ages to get to know each other,” says Stan. “And they get to burn off a bit of excess energy.”

After spending time in fellowship and playing games, the youth normally engage in Bible study, a service project, or engage in discussion on a topic they want to talk about.

With all the fun kids are having with 9 Square, Stan always remembers who to thank.

“We couldn’t have brought in 9 Square without the gracious donation from the Kvernevigs. They wanted to donate money to youth, but they didn’t want it to go to just a few kids. They wanted something that could touch all kinds of kids now and into the future.”

Gary and Dlon like the idea of Bethlehem having something that keeps youth engaged and coming back to the church. They also know what response their son Mike would have if he could see how much joy the kids have when they play 9 Square.

“I think he would be smiling and cheering,” says Gary. “Because that’s the way I feel right now just thinking about it.”

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