Outreach Ideas for Smaller Churches

COMMUNITY RESPONSE - Pre-launch Buzz
Two weeks prior to its launch date of Feb. 21, 2010, Celebration Church gave away $4,200 in free gas and groceries at local gas stations and grocery stores. Church volunteers stood in front of the participating businesses and passed out $15 gas cards and $30 grocery cards with a note: “Compliments of Celebration Church of Lawton” and the church’s website address. “Our town has 50,000 homes. We launched in the cold and rain with 143 people in attendance, including 30 children,” says Brandye Goudeaux, founder and lead pastor with her husband, Steve. “It was a great day!” Celebration Church, Lawton, Okla.

School Partnering
In late 2009, Restoration Church began engaging with a nearby elementary school. So far, volunteers have provided a Christmas breakfast for the school and given small Christmas gift cards to the faculty and staff. “We look forward to serving them in many similar ways in 2010,” Pastor Tim Culling says. “This connection has resulted in other ways to impact the community and make the church’s presence known.” The church also works alongside a tuition-free preschool and local shelter to provide repairs, childcare and sports mentoring. Restoration Church, Long Beach, Calif.

SEASONAL THINKING - Fourth of July Parade
“One of the most effective outreaches for us has been our town’s Fourth of July parade,” says Pastor Shane Frazier. “Here in our county of 55,000 people, the parade is a big deal, and 25,000-30,000 people attend. Knowing this, our church goes all out and participates in the float-decorating contest, tying it in with an upcoming message series. For a $10 entry fee and the cost of the giveaways we pass out, we’ve seen a lot of people give church a try. Last year, the parade theme was ‘Lights, Camera, Boone County,’ and we just happened to be launching a new series called ‘At the Movies’ the following Sunday. We made a huge rotating movie reel that showed what looked like movie scenes, which actually were pictures of Freedom Church attendees. We attached a large popcorn box imprinted with the date of the message series. About 50 volunteers passed out microwave bags of popcorn with an insert in them about our church and the new series. It was a huge hit! We won first place in the overall floats.” Freedom Church, Lebanon, Ind.

Back-to-School Bash
“Our Back to School Bash had the largest turnout of everything we did all year,” Senior Pastor David French says. “We had a cookout, provided worship and gave backpacks filled with school supplies to every child. We are a new church of 80, and we had about 115 there.” Freedom Fellowship Ministries, Paris, Tenn.

Summer’s End Jam
“We are a six-year-old church plant and have done a multitude of outreach events. One of the most effective community engagement events has been what we call Summer’s End Jam,” says Pastor John Mackall. “It started as just a community carnival with a moon bounce and games but took on new purpose when we began to raise money for our local food pantry. We moved the event from a field at a local private school somewhat hidden in our community to the parking lot of a grocery store. We added live music from local artists willing to donate their time and asked community businesses to provide door prizes and raffle items. We also ask local school principals and teachers to go in the dunk tank and raise money. We have added vendor tables and community groups and asked other churches to join in.  “Our church budgets more than $1,000 to run this event, but we’ve been able to partner with our Baptist associations and other local organizations to help offset many of the expenses. Each year, we see 800 to 1,000 people come. We load a pickup truck full of donated food each year and over the past four have raised more the $14,000 for our local food pantry to help those in need. By the way, our average church attendance is about 65.” CrossLife Community Church, Elkridge, Md.

Thanksgiving Meals
“We contacted a local elementary school in a very low-income area near our church, and the principal agreed to give us 10 names of families she knew were in need of assistance,” says Pastor Troy O’Quin. “A week before Thanksgiving, we took a basket filled with Thanksgiving meal items and a Bible to each family. We also began a bus ministry and started picking up kids from that local project community and brought them to church.” River Oaks Community Church, South Holland, Ill.
Christmas Eve Generosity
"At our Christmas Eve service, we gave away just over $6,000 to local widows, single moms and others in need," says Lead Pastor John Weisman. "Not only was it a joy for the recipients, it also broke open our hearts as a church family to be more generous, especially in tough economic times." Pleasant Valley Evangelical Church, Niles, Ohio

VBS Community Day
Host a mini-festival community day at the end of VBS week to display the accomplishments, songs and crafts the kids have worked on throughout the week. Provide free hot dogs and soda, popcorn and inflatables. Post kids’ pictures and crafts throughout the area and host a talent show where kids sing the songs they learned at VBS. "The turnout of parents, friends and family was just tremendous, and the positive comments received from the community folks were the greatest I have ever experienced," says Rev. Victor Correa. "We are a Hispanic church of 35 with no budget or staff, and we reached over 250 people in the community." Pentecostal Union Christian Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

Neighborhood VBS
"Over the years, our VBS attendance has declined, and there is a growing reluctance in the community to participate in activities at the church building," says Pastor Ken Lovelace. "So now we go to them." Neighborhood VBS is held Sunday through Tuesday evenings at the home of a member or neighbor willing to host the outreach event. We set up tented areas and canopies to help lessen distractions and provide shade, including spaces for gathering and singing, sharing the Bible story, crafts, snacks and playing games. We rotate several groups of kids through the stations over the course of the evening. Because we may only have one shot at these kids, we lead them through the life of Christ during the three days, highlighting the important events and explaining the way to salvation. "We also offer a simultaneous basketball tournament for teens and host a cookout for all the kids and their families. Near the end of the meal, we tell them how happy we are that they came, present trophies to the winning basketball teams, share the Gospel and give an opportunity to respond." First Baptist Church of St. John, St. Louis, Mo.

Sports Inroads
Leverage a local love for the outdoors by offering a spring archery league. Meet for a few months and wrap up with a banquet and Christian speaker. The church also offers spring and fall soccer for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds. Saturday morning "games" focus on beginning soccer skills and offer opportunities for volunteers to interact with hundreds of parents from the community. Volunteers teach kids the rudiments of soccer, pray with them and invite them to Columbus Road Baptist’s children’s programs. "We’ve seen whole families start at KidZone Soccer and end up making Columbus Road their church home," says Pastor Bob Cowman. Columbus Road Baptist Church, Quincy, Ill.

Ladies’ Day
Part of Derby Friends Church’s vision statement is to become a “leader in meeting community needs.” In 2008, volunteers canvassed the community with yard signs to get the word out about a new Saturday event the church called “Ladies’ Day.” Volunteers provided free car washes, car maintenance (fluids check, oil change) and refreshments in the church’s Bistro while women waited for their cars. The church targeted single moms, but serviced any car that came in. The event has become a locally known biannual outreach, with the last Ladies’ Day including a kids carnival and complimentary hair styling. Derby Friends Church, Derby, Kan.

Desperate Housewives Bible Study
“We used the first season of Desperate Housewives as an inroad for a seven-week introductory women’s Bible study,” says ministry leader Krista Thomason. “After watching an episode, we discussed the characters’ situations and read Scriptures providing instructions for a ‘nondesperate’ life. We also found Bible stories that matched the characters’ situations and underscored the need for repentance and relationship with Christ.” Lifetrack Church, Frontenac, Kan.

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Keith Lowry
Baptist General Convention of Texas
Bible Study/Discipleship Team
www.texasbaptists.org/biblestudy