

# STRATEGIES FOR INVESTING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

How Externally Focused Churches are  
Leveraging Their Impact

*by Krista Petty*

## **Article Summary**

This concept paper exposes many of the stresses and struggles that next generation pastors are dealing with, and opens conversations to creating a balance between the demands of a busy schedule and growing congregation and maintaining spiritual vitality.

## **Further Reading**

[Making Good Ideas Happen: How to Help Your People Unleash Their Best Innovations](#)

By Krista Petty

[Church to Church Collaborations on the Rise](#)

By Krista Petty

[How Externally Focused Churches Minister to Children: The Power of Serving Kids in Your Community](#)

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**EXTERNALLY  
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COMMUNITY.**

When a congregation invests in the community, it can yield powerful results for both the people in the community and people in the church. Externally focused churches are those that take what they have inside the church—funds, time and people—and pour them out into the community to have a transformational effect on the community. The churches profiled below show effective ways to invest those resources and meet immediate needs. They don't pour out these precious resources carelessly, however. Finding

solutions to community issues today are often complex, diverse and immense while church staff time, volunteer and dollar resources are limited. Externally focused churches are constantly weighing and measuring the risks and rewards of working in the community. Churches must invest prayerfully, strategically, and compassionately and make wise plans that yield results. Jesus described

the rewards of wise investing in Matthew 25:20-23<sup>1</sup>, "The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.'"

The following investment basics provide a map for how externally focused churches leverage resources to bring hope to the impoverished, honor to God, and positive impact in their communities.

**Investment Basic #1: Build and maintain a reserve to meet emergencies.**

After a church has established and communicated an externally focused vision through teaching, preaching and service projects, church leaders often find that opportunities for community engagement come quickly, sometimes even unexpectedly. How do churches respond to emergency needs? Many externally focused churches are ready and prepared for disasters—whether they happen on a national, local or

even personal scale. A wise strategy is to build and maintain a variety of reserves to meet these emergencies. Money is one obvious reserve, but churches also build reserves of motivation and preparedness.

**Hope Church**, Oakdale, MN (<http://www.hopechurchoakdale.com>) has built a healthy network of community partnerships, service opportunities and a church-wide vision for externally focused ministry. All of that builds a reserve the community can count on in an emergency. When vandals set fire to a local school playground in 2006, the people of Hope quickly sprang into action. The Externally Focused Leadership Team took \$3000 from their externally focused budget to replace some of the charred and damaged playground equipment. When the decision to replace the equipment was announced during Sunday morning worship the congregation spontaneously broke into applause. Within days Hope volunteers came forward and completed the installation of new parts. Because of their existing relationship with the school and aiming the heart of their church towards community, the people of Hope maintain a reserve of finances and manpower they can look to when a need arises. Church members are motivated to respond—both with financial and volunteer resources because they have been serving the school through tutoring and special projects throughout the year. To the people of Hope they were simply helping a friend.



Volunteers from Hope Church restore the playground at Oakdale Elementary School.

**First Baptist Church**, Elk Grove, CA (<http://www.fbceg.org>) doesn't just build a reserve to respond to community needs and emergencies, the people of First Baptist are helping their entire community prepare for disasters. In an effort to be a good neighbor the church hosted Community Disaster Preparedness Training in cooperation with the Elk Grove Police Department, Fire Department, Community Services District, and



Members of the American Red Cross participate in the Community Disaster Preparedness with First Baptist Church of Elk Grove.

the American Red Cross. “The idea simply came from our externally focused ministry team, which happens to include the local Red Cross director, assistant chief of police, and a manager in the community service district,” says Mary Holochuck, externally focused ministry team member.

Over 200 people attended the seminar and participating agencies brought response equipment including police units, ambulances, fire engines, water rescue boats, and the Red Cross Disaster Center mobile unit. “It was quite impressive to look out and see all that equipment poised and ready,” says Mary. The agencies also brought 40 volunteers to support this seminar while church volunteers handed out 200 donated disaster preparedness backpacks.

The training covered basic disaster relief skills so that fewer people would be panicked in the event of a crisis—enabling them to help others. Mary describes the event, “They talked about everything from earthquakes and floods, to bird flu, and homeland attack. We gave people pertinent information on how to prepare and protect themselves as well as their neighbors.” Mary adds that using their campus for the community in a way that was “spiritually non-threatening” was another positive benefit of the training.

**LifeBridge Christian Church**, Longmont, CO (<http://www.lbcc.org>) is also preparing for emergencies by offering the church facility as an

evacuation site to the American Red Cross in the event of a large disaster. They are also working with local schools, a nursing home, and hospital to be an evacuation site in the event one of the facilities needs to temporarily relocate. Gordon Holman, director of Facilities and Campus Operations for the church, is a former emergency medical technician. He has a vision for how the building is used by both the church and the community and he serves as the primary contact for building usage. “We have performed drills with the local schools for evacuation and would help gather supplies, making the best out of a potentially difficult situation,” says Gordon.

Although he does have to worry about liabilities when other groups use the church facilities, he always keeps an externally focused perspective in mind. “Every time we open the doors of our building, we are open to liabilities, but our vision is to be a place where people can find God in many different ways. Opening up our facilities is one piece of the overall vision of being externally focused. The door into LifeBridge and finding God is not always the door to the sanctuary. In the state of an emergency, what better place to be than the church?” says Gordon.



LifeBridge keeps an external focus by offering their facility as an evacuation site for the American Red Cross.

Externally focused churches not only prepare to meet these large disasters, they also prepare to meet the every day disasters people face. **Bethel Church**, Richland, WA (<http://www.bethel-church.org>) has taken their benevolence ministry to a new level. They have developed a strategic benevolence system that not only meets the short-term needs of people but they help with long-term solutions as well. The goal is life transformation through drawing closer to God. Bethel’s benevolence committee screens applicants for material assistance. All applicants receive at least some financial, spiritual, and life skills counseling and advice, and Bethel works with many partner organizations to make sure no

applicant goes without shelter, food, or clothing. For those who seem likely to need long-term assistance the church often helps with rent, utility bills, costs of medication, detailed financial counseling and education, and so forth. The benevolence committee refers other applicants to a Bethel group called Nehemiah's Network, which helps with home repair, lawn work, relocation assistance, etc. Bethel has established a nonprofit corporation called Elijah's Pit Stop, which repairs cars for single moms and other church neighbors in need—helping them better avoid a vehicle failure through ongoing maintenance. "At this point, Elijah's Pit Stop has a board of eight people, officers, about thirty-five active volunteer mechanics, other volunteers who keep the books, transfer cars, buy parts, or provide food, and a professional garage with six bays to work in," says Merle Johnson, a volunteer member of Bethel's Community Service Commission. Elijah's Pit Stop has also received about fifteen donated vehicles, and has given away or sold about eight of them.

## Investment Basic #2: Develop an overall investment strategy.

What do externally focused churches aim for—both internally and externally? Can a church have an internal focus on some things while maintaining and external focus on the community as well? Bethel Church found that a church can have both an internal and external focus—even during a capital fundraising campaign. Through their 2006 NOW Campaign, the church simultaneously raised awareness and funds for children's ministry, their externally focused community ministry, and world missions. NOW stood for: Next Generation, Our Community and Worldwide. This innovative campaign provided a cohesive and balanced platform for investing church resources and focusing communications.

When Bethel's children's ministry experienced rapid growth, Bethel leaders began looking at a capital campaign to raise funds needed for expansion. As a growing externally focused church, some wondered if this capital campaign would divert the attention of the church inward. In a leadership team meeting, the question was posed, "Are we spending more money on ourselves than we are spending on the needs of

the community?" That question sparked great vision for measuring success differently. It also caused a change in direction for the campaign. "What started out as a building campaign for a gym and children's ministry wing grew to be so much more," says Bethel Outreach Director, Dave Dawson. The building campaign expanded to a focus on the three major initiatives mentioned above. Along with vision casting on weekends, the church web site offered the congregation inspiration and greater explanation for the three areas of NOW. Below is how they organized and explained the campaign:

1. **Next Generation:** The things we learn as children often drive our most important decisions later on. What are we doing to "pass the baton" to the next generation? Our children's ministry area is bursting at the seams, with



up to 600 kids attending each Sunday and not enough space to accommodate them. It's time to expand the children's wing as planned in the original phased design to serve at least 300 more children, while adding much-needed classroom space for adults upstairs.

Sports can involve entire families while building character and leadership. Bethel's first soccer, basketball, and cheer clinics this past summer used 200 volunteers to reach more than 270 kids. About 20% of participants were unchurched. At least four children made decisions for Christ, and three new families chose Bethel as their church home. We have the coaches, skills, and property to continue these kinds of ministries year-round, but not the facility. A separately located sports/recreation facility will enable us to offer a secure, appropriately designed space for recreational fitness outreach for all ages, including community use.

2. **Our Community:** Bethel is becoming more visible outside its own walls and it's making a difference in our communities. Now God

is showing us how we can serve effectively, with heart-changing results.

*Cultural care.* Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the Tri-Cities. Low wages, transient work that separates families, and lack of access to basic services cause many to live on the edge. Most don't have access to culturally relevant, Bible-believing churches that could help meet spiritual, relational, and physical needs. Bethel's vision is to work with local Hispanic ministries to plant a new Hispanic church in the Tri-Cities.

*Shine on.* Over the past year, Bethel's *Let the Light Shine* community projects have ranged from donating supply-filled student backpacks to building five Habitat for Humanity homes in Pasco. Projects like this could have even greater impact as part of an ongoing, coordinated program. NOW will fund a staff person to better coordinate activities and spend time in the field on projects. Additional funds will be reserved for one or more large-scale community projects as God directs over the next three years.

*How the West was won.* West Pasco is the fastest growing area of the Tri-Cities, but no churches exist in the area north of the freeway. This represents a tremendous untapped growth opportunity. Some of Bethel's 80 families from Pasco could form the core group of a "starter" church there, reaching out to surrounding neighborhoods. NOW funds will help support a pastor in the early stages, and eventually, a facility.

- Worldwide.** How do you reach people in isolated or hostile parts of the world? One way is to tap into the ministries of people who can enter places we can't. We also have people whose skills and backgrounds make them welcome guests in certain host countries. Through partnership with others, the church will accomplish work in Zambia, Asia and Iraq.  
*Special work in Mexico.* The *Operation*



Through partnerships with other churches Bethel is accomplishing work all around the world.

*World* handbook calls six specific states in west-central Mexico the "Circle of Silence" with fewer than 2% born-again Christians. Many Tri-Cities Hispanics come from this region, which ties into "Our Community" outreach activities. Bethel is exploring ministry opportunities with native pastors, mission groups, and individual involvement.

The total amount to be raised for these initiatives is estimated at \$6 million—with \$2.5 million for the Children's Wing/Adult Ministry area, \$2.5 for the Sports/Recreation Facility, and \$500,000 each for community and world outreach programs. Bethel had \$1.2 million set aside already leaving \$4.8 million to be raised from individuals. They are well on their way to reaching these financial three-year goals, but the success of the campaign is measured in more than dollars. "This campaign has really brought our ministry areas together. It has broken down silos and we are not competing for funds and attention. NOW has also captured the imagination of people," says Dave. This campaign not only aimed people's pocketbooks, but their hearts as well. The church began asking every small group to have an outward expression of

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DAVE DAWSON

service and evangelism. “We ask every small group to participate in a ShareFest service project annually and invite the unconnected and unchurched to work with the group in a project. We also ask each group to participate in new evangelism training annually. Groups were very willing and now most are doing it,” says Dave.

### Aim for Deep and Wide

Children in Sunday School often sing, “Deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.” Is it possible to have both depth *and* width in externally focused ministry? Without a focused mission for community involvement, the local church could be seen as a mile wide but only an inch deep. Can that be avoided?

According to Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, co-authors of *The Externally Focused Church*, leaders often discover more opportunities than there is capacity to fill. They offer the following ideas for narrowing the selections and clarifying how wide an externally focused ministry will be: “First, you may want to draw a geographical radius around the church in terms of miles or driving time. Second, establish some engagement criteria that can be applied to every opportunity. These are the things that matter most to your church... eventually all visions and missions must come down to real work being done by actual people in real time.”<sup>2</sup>



RICK RUSAW

One way churches clarify how wide their scope of externally focused ministry will be is to have clear expectations with partnering organizations. Rusaw and Swanson also give the following advice: “Make sure that the church and the community organization both clearly understand each other’s needs and expectations. Begin slowly, if possible. Ensure that one person with passion for the project is responsible for it. This must be true on both ends of the partnership. Finally, no matter what hurdles you face along the way, remain committed to finishing what you start.”<sup>3</sup>

### Be Willing to Go Deep

Jay Van Groningen, in his community development tool, *Communities First*<sup>4</sup>, suggests that churches have the responsibility to get to the root causes of individual or family needs—they should go deep. “We are called to be compassionate, which literally means ‘to suffer

with.’ Providing relief for immediate needs is not a substitute for being available and entering into the life of a broken and hurting individual,” writes Jay.

He defines three levels of ministry: relief, betterment and development. “Relief ministries tend to provide temporary assets without much of an effort to determine if the need is temporary or permanent, if it is eliminated or still present, or if the served person’s life is substantially impacted.” Examples of some these types of services include one-time projects such as bringing a meal, painting a fence or paying a bill.

“Betterment ministries tend to create positive, caring, beneficial environments and relationships that offer participants respite or positive experiences,” writes Jay. Providing temporary housing, giving someone a used car or helping create a budget are good examples of this level of ministry.

Finally, development ministries are those that focus on increasing the knowledge, skills, abilities, or condition of the participants. “Normally these changes are measured in some numerical way and are bound by a time frame,” writes Jay. Good examples of development ministry might be increasing the reading ability of a student, helping someone save \$20 per month for 12 months or helping someone stay drug or alcohol free for a certain period of time.

When a church goes deeper in its personal involvement to meet needs, Jay writes, “Word and deed combine to bear real fruit and church members begin to simultaneously transform.” While relief ministries address crisis and event-oriented situations, development ministries can address the chronic problems and are driven by relational transformation.

Jay’s home church, **Harderwyk Ministries**, Holland, MI (<http://www.harderwyk.com>) operates a development ministry called Neighbors Plus (<http://www.neighborsplus.org>). One of the many programs offered to low-income families is called the IDA program. Jay explains, “Individual



A real need is met as this student’s reading ability progresses with help.

Development Accounts (IDAs) are matched savings accounts that help low-income families save for one of three asset goals: first-time primary home purchase, post-secondary education, or small business start-up or expansion. IDA participants attend 12 financial management classes and participate in advanced training on their asset goal." Through this development ministry, families find long-term solutions to financial problems and the church goes deeper into solutions to the root causes of poverty. The families also meet Christian mentors and often find a relationship with Christ at the same time they are learning to meet their financial goals.

### Investment Basic #3: Invest in markets you know.

Financially, it is always good to know where the money is going. Externally focused churches find the same to be true in their community service work. The following churches recognize, select and gather people and partners that they already know to produce a great return of their investment of time and funds.

A key success factor for **Hope Church's** external focus has been developing the right partnerships and relationships. To start their externally focused ministry work, leaders examined their assets and tried to capitalize on current relationships. "We had a pre-existing relationship with a local pregnancy center and a contact with the transitional housing program," says Todd Christianson, externally focused team leader for the church. Those were naturally among the first community partners the church chose to invest time and money into.



TRUDY AND TODD CHRISTIANSON

They also paid attention to another great asset of the church: the passion of the people in the pew. "We have a lady who was very passionate about getting the blood mobile on our church site. She is now a liaison and

building our partnership with the American Red Cross," says Todd. Hope calls these liaisons "dock builders" and taps into the power of those individual networks, experiences, knowledge and relationships. "The role of a dock builder is to establish, maintain and grow our partnerships," says Todd.

Every good businessman knows that success can also happen because of "location, location, location." Hope chose to help those nearby. Two vital community entities were in close proximity to the church—an elementary school and a nonprofit serving the mentally ill. People coming to and from church each week not only pass the church, they often pass the place of service as well. One of the recent results of helping those close to home included a successful Summer of Service campaign (2006). Hope's leaders had a three month goal to see 250 people give four hours each of service to the community through raising funds for backpacks, washing windows and painting door frames at the local school. They exceeded their goal as 306 people participated and 1,355 hours were served.

Ian Vickers, Director of Community Relations at **Christ Community Church**, Omaha, NE (<http://www.christcommunityomaha.org>) suggests that the public school system is one of the most effective connection points for a church. He shared his passion for connecting churches and schools in an article for Outreach Magazine. Ian writes, "So many people are connected with schools—kids of all ages, families, teachers, principals, school board, etc. We've seen how coming together to serve our schools, specifically teachers, gives us the opportunity to meet and get to know our community."

Christ Community participates in a program with other area churches called Embrace Teachers. Throughout the school year, this program reaches out to teachers at 48 area elementary schools in the heart of Omaha with gifts of appreciation and classroom supplies. "We do all these acts of kindness without a budget. We tell our congregation and God does the rest," writes Ian.<sup>5</sup>



Christ Community forms a cheer line for the Embrace Teachers program participants.

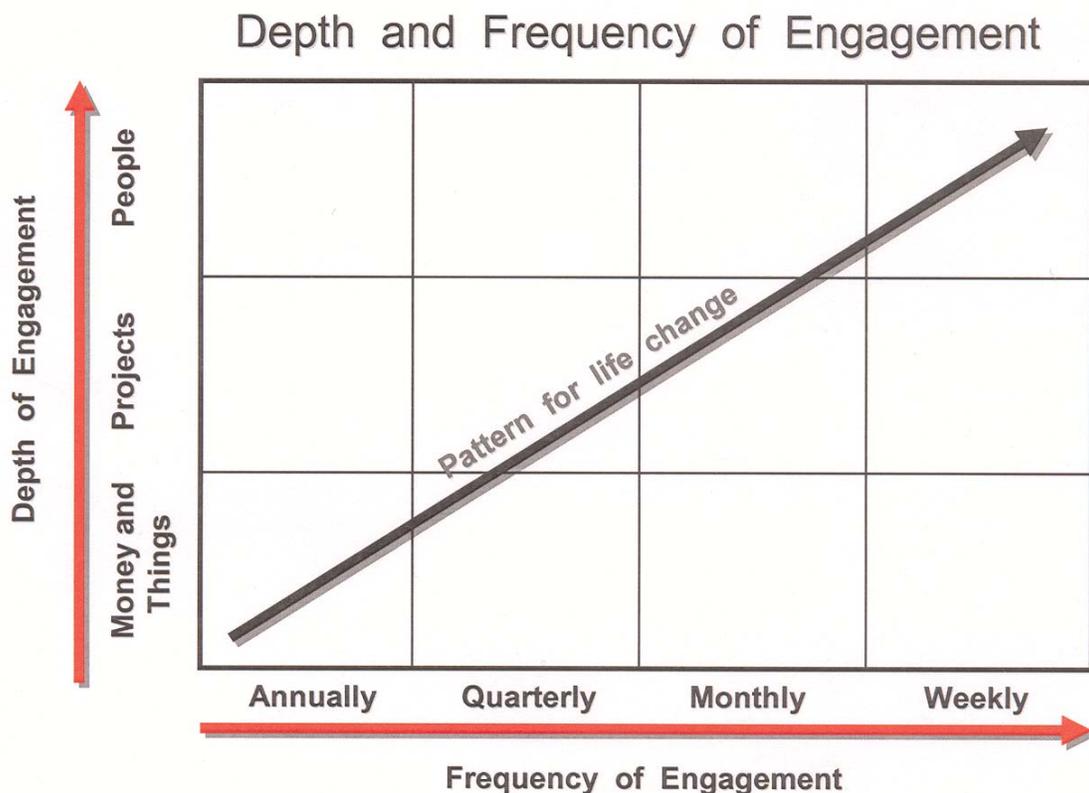
**Investment Basic #4: Diversify. Balance your investments between safe, low risk opportunities and more aggressive, high-risk strategies.**

Just as the old saying goes, “Don’t put your eggs in one basket,” many churches do not invest in only one type of community service. Why? Because they find volunteers are unique and typically at different places in their ability, heart and passion to serve. Simply put, some are more aggressive than others. Many externally focused churches find that a good strategy is to maintain a well-balanced menu of service options for

people. A one-day service event might be perfect for the first-timer, getting his or her feet wet, but a young man who just returned from the Peace Corps may be ready for consistent, challenging community service opportunities. Other volunteers are ready for even greater steps of community service, such as starting and leading a new ministry initiative or starting a nonprofit of their own.

When deciding where to invest time, money and other resources, Eric Swanson, director of Leadership Network’s Externally Focused Churches Leadership Communities says it is wise for churches to use a strategy that meets needs in the community and at the same time grows volunteers from one level of service to another. In his work with Leadership Network, Eric teaches church leaders about a concept he calls “the depth and frequency of engagement continuum.”

“Most activity in the church can be pretty random and for the most part it is focused on engaging people to give money and things annually,” says Eric. For community service to impact the lives of volunteers and help them spiritually grow, he advises churches to provide opportunities for



people to stretch beyond giving *things* to giving their *time*. “Special projects provide that for people, such as a school painting project or sorting cans at the local food bank,” says Eric.

But as helpful as money and projects can be, the place where lives are most likely to be changed is when people engage with people. Eric says, “People feel their worth only when affirmed by other people. Good deeds can be done from afar but good news can only be shared up close. Engaging with people might include helping third-graders to read, youth mentoring, job skill training, or working with orphans on a mission trip. Part of the path of spiritual formations is to move from giving money and things, to engaging in projects and sharing your life and love with people.”

Ultimately, the goal of an externally focused church should be to make serving a natural reflection of every person’s faith showing up in personal relationships weekly. Eric says, “If giving of your resources, talents and love is beneficial to you and those you serve, it could also be argued that greater frequency would increase the benefits to those serving and those being served. In other words, if engaging in giving, serving and loving once a year is beneficial, wouldn’t five times a year be even more beneficial?” By offering different commitment options, externally focused churches help people start serving and then mature in their engagement with others.

Omar Reyes, community development director at **NorthWood Church**, Keller, TX (<http://www.northwoodchurch.org>)

understands the value of moving people from giving things to giving time and friendship. He also knows it doesn’t always happen unless he intentionally leads people in that direction. “There was a woman in my church who loved to shop and she came to me asking if she could do more than contribute during the clothing drive once a year. She wanted to shop more often for children’s clothes because it was fun for

her,” says Omar. Rather than give her a list of sizes and be the middle man between the woman and a needy family, he helped move her one step closer to personal life change. “I connected her directly with a single mom with four children. Now there is actually mentoring taking place on both sides,” says Omar. Leaders, like Omar, invest in growing individual hearts and challenging them to move out of their comfort zones.

### Growing People’s Hearts

Jack Jezreel, executive director of **JustFaith Ministries** (<http://www.justfaith.org>) believes growing people’s hearts is essential work for every leader. In the fall of 2006, Jack spent three days teaching leaders how to expand people’s capacity to love at one of Leadership Network’s Externally Focused Churches Leadership Community gatherings. In his work with the externally focused churches and other congregations across the country, Jack teaches about *agape* love described in Matthew 5:43, 44: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

“Based upon the text, God has loved Mother Theresa and Adolf Hitler the same. God’s love does not get extended based upon pre-existing conditions. There doesn’t have to be something in place for God to love us. It is given. God’s love is vast and expansive, boundaryless love,” says Jack.

He also teaches about another Greek word for love: *philia*. “This is the love of your own group, gang, and tribe. Jesus had a very low regard for this kind of love. He said that even the tax gatherers loved others in this way. The mafia and even terrorists love each other in this way. We define who our people are and who they are not. *Philia* without *agape* is the love of the Hatfields for the Hatfields. *Agape* is love of Hatfields and the McCoys,” he says.

Externally focused churches desire to move people from a small love, *philia*, to the great love, *agape*. “When we talk about a spiritual journey, we are talking about how we move toward greater intimacy with God. The journey is a movement from conditional love to unconditional love. Our journey is to a big love that is expansive and all-

*JustFaith, started in 1989, is a program designed to empower and expand parish and church commitment to social ministry. This year, almost 300 parishes and churches and 3,000 people across the country are participating in this rapidly expanding program.*

inclusive—literally loving in a way that is geographically larger, where everybody matters and has dignity,” says Jack.

When love gets big, what does it do? “When love gets large it angles in the direction of the greatest need,” says Jack. Luke 15:4-7 says, “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of

them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be

more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Jack believes the church should invest in teaching people about love and then growing their hearts through opportunities to serve others. “Sometimes the church is guilty of the tyranny of small expectations. You want people to be loving and serving others in a place where they would not have loved just one year before,” he says.

### **Investment Basic #5: The minimum initial investment you select will set the goal that you are trying to achieve.**

2 Corinthians 9:6 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” To reap greater rewards, some churches have sown an external focus into the fabric of every ministry area of the church. They wanted their initial investment to have a big impact.

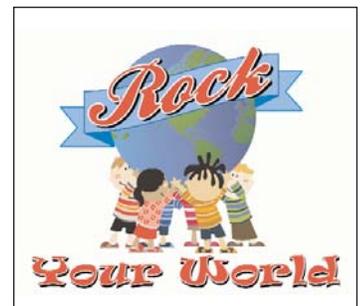
When **LifeBridge Christian Church** wanted to be more externally focused, they didn’t simply start another ministry that would create additional competing programs to its existing ministries. They made it an emphasis area of the church and asked each ministry to teach it and reflect it in their programming options. The church’s organizational structure has four emphasis areas:

Worship, Spiritual Development, Outreach and Involvement. These four emphasis areas are to be represented in each of the various “departments” such as student, women, men and children’s ministries. “We have a number of ministry areas meeting specific needs in different stages of life. Our involvement emphasis works with each of these various ministry departments, helping people get involved in serving both in the church and in the community,” says Tricia Richardson, director of involvement.

Under the emphasis area of involvement, Tricia co-leads a community involvement leadership team. This team aids each of the various church ministries into externally focused ministry. The team helps keep awareness of community involvement high for the entire church and helps ministries establish and maintain community partnerships. The LifeBridge children’s ministry serves as a good example of how this investment philosophy works. The ministry has a director and has several part-time coordinators who oversee the various emphasis areas for children. There is a worship coordinator, curriculum coordinator (helping with spiritual development), a special events coordinator (concentrating on evangelistic events), and an outreach service coordinator.

Stacey Applen serves as the children’s outreach service coordinator. She plans service projects that children can get involved in, both in the church and in the community. On October 7, 2006, Stacey coordinated a Saturday morning project called Rock Your World. “Thirty kids in 3rd through 6th grade served the community by raking and cleaning out weeds from a local elementary school. They came not because they were forced to, but because they wanted to. Kids are so eager to help when they know they can make a difference,” says Stacey.

One of the more difficult tasks for these young servants was contending with the dreaded “goat heads”—a painful little sticker that flattens bicycle tires and sticks in your shoes. “There are millions in the gravel at the school and the kids were well aware of their hazards. Several sat in



## **THE CHURCH SHOULD INVEST IN TEACHING PEOPLE ABOUT LOVE.**



JACK JEZREEL



These children from Hope Church helped to collect money for back packs during their Summer of Service campaign.

the gravel and picked them out by hand,” says Stacey. The principal of the school, Brian Childress, says, “Every little bit helps and we appreciate it!” Allison Switzer, 4th grader at LifeBridge, participated in the day of service and has dreams of becoming a missionary someday. She says, “It was good to do this because it was hard and I know being a missionary will be hard, too.”

LifeBridge has developed a culture and system by which each ministry area has a responsibility and desire to facilitate externally focused ministry. They work hard at ‘sowing’ community service in every aspect of their ministry, creating not only a vast array of projects, but building a legacy of service through even their children.

### Systems to Accomplish Goals

According to Eric Swanson, structure and systems are important to successful community involvement. “Systems help us accomplish externally focused goals, and without them, you will have no means of measuring results,” he says. How does a church go about creating systems that produce results? The following two scenarios show the difference between a system that creates sustainable results and one that does not.

*Scenario #1:* A church begins a mentoring program. There are a few churches in partnership with the program and advertisements for mentors are placed in bulletins and newsletters. There are a few who respond and the program begins. More

and more children are coming to the program, but volunteers are scarce, so the church (which has a grant for this program) decides to offer incentives for the mentors and begins to pay them \$25 hourly for their work (that’s \$1,560 annually per mentor). A few more people become interested and the program continues, but still cannot grow to accommodate the number of children in need of a mentor.

*Scenario #2:* Another mentoring program begins and also has a grant to fund it. Each participating church is given \$5,000 annually for their participation in the program to use as they see fit. Many of the churches use the money to hire a part-time director/recruiter to invite and train people in their church to become mentors. Some of the churches use the money to send their potential mentors to training, and use another portion of the funds for appreciation gifts for the mentors. They maintain a relatively balanced number of mentors to children.

Both of these scenarios are true examples of mentoring programs that exist in the United States today. Which program will have long-term success and gain the most church involvement and mentors? In comparing the two, the biggest difference is not the amount of money, but using the funds to invest in leadership and partnerships. Scenario #1 is a church doing a good work, but continually struggling to meet all of the needs of children in the program. Scenario #2 is a program run by One-By-One Leadership (<http://www.onebyoneleadership.com>). They are facilitating a very successful mentoring program for children of prisoners in Fresno, CA in partnership with numerous local churches. These leaders have learned the value of creating a system that consistently visions, recruits, trains and appreciates the mentors.

### Investment Basic #6: Don’t agonize over small deviations from your overall plan and remember the power of compound interest.

Externally focused churches learn to expect the unexpected and often see interruptions as opportunities. “I think God loves the game of chess!” laughs Omar Reyes of NorthWood Church, because finding a chess coach took some divine intervention to get his attention. Olga is a

community volunteer who works with him in an after school program. “One Friday morning, she asked me for a chess coach to teach the children. I immediately thought to myself ‘there are bigger issues I am dealing with here in the inner city like daily life, poverty, health care and hunger.’ I quickly stored that request into the deep recesses of my brain—the trash bin, of sorts” he admits.

The very next Sunday, as he went about his duties as a church staff member, someone called his name and said, very unexpectedly, “Hi, Omar, my name is Tom and I am a chess coach and I have a desire to teach children. I was told to connect with you.” Omar says, “God reminded me that day that he was interested and fully capable of meeting needs and desires at every level, from the smallest to the largest.”

### Don't Be in a Hurry

According to investorwords.com, compound interest is “interest which is calculated not only on the initial principal but also the accumulated interest of prior periods.”<sup>6</sup> The secret to getting rich isn't the lottery. Financial experts say it is patience and the exponential power of compound interest. Just as making money normally takes time, so do results in externally focused ministry.

**Mariners Church** in Irvine, CA (<http://www.marinerschurch.org>) and their local

outreach called Lighthouse Ministries (<http://www.marinerslighthouse.org>) had over 4,000 volunteers serving in numerous community ministries during 2006. Laurie Beshore, outreach pastor for Mariners, says it wasn't always that way. Fifteen years ago, when the church first decided to explore serving the poor and needy in their community, they started rather quietly. “Lighthouse Ministries had a somewhat unique

beginning. It began with a group of people who did nothing for an entire year; or, it seemed like nothing. There were no programs, no big bang budgets, no outreach opportunities, neither a mission statement nor organizational structure. For the whole first year of what was to become Lighthouse Ministries, the leadership team immersed itself in the study of God's Word, supplemented by reading many Christian and secular books on reaching people who are poor and in need,” says Laurie.



LAURIE BESHORE

Then, after several years of assessing the community's needs and looking at the people in their congregation, a seed project emerged in the form of an after school ministry. “In truth, it was a matter of seeing where God was already working and joining him there,” says Laurie. A group of dedicated volunteers had begun a homework club in an inner-city area near the church. That simple homework club is now a thriving Learning Center that is working with the residents of Santa Ana to restore this at-risk community. The center is building relationships that work to educate, empower and develop leaders. “As the longest-running ministry of Lighthouse, the Learning Center has been a learning ground for other ministries, helping us to develop and share best practices,” says Laurie.

### Kingdom Efficiency

Since 1976, Robert Lupton and his family have lived and worked in one urban Atlanta neighborhood, seeking renewal and transformation. Robert is president and founder of Family Consultation Service (<http://www.fcsministries.org>), a coalition of community services. He writes about his experiences in urban ministry in his book, *Theirs is the Kingdom*. Over the years, he has found God's view of time and success is almost always different from his. Robert writes, “If efficiency is a value in God's kingdom, surely it has a different definition. The one who orchestrates history doesn't seem to be in a hurry. God doesn't seem to need closure at the end of each day. Perhaps if one has an eternity in which to accomplish one's work, it's not so important to handle every urgent detail that arises. Kingdom efficiency must have an eternal perspective.”<sup>7</sup>

### Investment Basic #7: Invest in people, not programs.

Have you ever received a really hot investment tip—one you wish you had taken, like “buy Google?” Sometimes tips are worth pursuing and sometimes they aren't. Here is one investment tip that always produces a return for the externally focused church: invest in people, not programs. The Navigators, a discipleship and ministry organization located at the Glen Eyrie estate in Colorado Springs, CO, has made it their mission to invest in people. Over the course of 70 years, this worldwide ministry has more than 4,000

Navigator staff of 64 nationalities serving in more than 100 countries. Tens of thousands of people worldwide are coming to know and grow in Jesus Christ through their various ministries.

T. Max Melonuk, Navigator staff member serving in Seattle, Washington, writes about the importance and the biblical basis for investing in people, “Moses made many contributions to the people of Israel. Certainly his teaching and leadership were great, and his transmission of the law from God to men has been a great benefit to all mankind. But another great contribution from Moses, often overlooked, was Joshua, the man who led Israel into the Promised Land, into victorious battles, into a faithful walk with God. Without Joshua’s leadership after Moses’ death, Israel might have disappeared and, with it, the law...Investing in people is the essence of Christian ministry. In his daily ministry Christ did two things: he walked obediently to God and he invested himself in others.”<sup>8</sup>

After telling the parable of the good and faithful servant who was commended for investing wisely, Jesus tells the crowd of followers very clearly what kind of personal investment he wants to see them make. Matthew 25:35 says, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

But sometimes investing in people is difficult, especially in ministry to the homeless, orphans, and prisoners. Leaders in long-term community ministries have found it beneficial to support and train church members how to effectively extend compassion and build successful relationships with those they serve. Dr. David Apple is director of Mercy Ministries at **Tenth Presbyterian Church** in Philadelphia, PA (<http://www.tenth.org>). After 18 years of serving the city’s homeless and hurting people, he trains other ministers, churches and Tenth Church volunteers how to avoid burnout and reduce risks when working with people in need. Through formal training as well as articles in the church bulletin and web site, he teaches how to deal wisely with desperate and sometimes manipulative people.

In his training resource called *Setting Limits in*

*Ministry*, David writes, “Setting safe boundaries is a priority for those of us who work with at-risk people. Otherwise we will burn out. We must learn how to fulfill our needs on a daily basis through a healthy balance of giving to others while also receiving affirmation and support from others and from God. People who are involved in mercy ministry make mistakes and learn from those mistakes...In order to love ourselves; we must set up reasonable boundaries. Our Lord tells us to do our best and to serve in a way that is pleasing to him (1 Corinthians 10:31) and that means being realistic and having common sense.”<sup>9</sup>



DR. DAVID APPLE

David offers the following advice to volunteers for how to assess and meet needs for people they have yet to build a rapport with:

- *Don’t work harder than the person asking for help.*
- *Don’t give money. Pursue every means to avoid giving cash.*
- *Determine the need. Is it spiritual? Material?*
- *Seek to set up an appointment. Those with real needs will return.*
- *Don’t act impulsively or give into “the tyranny of the urgent.”*
- *Determine what the person has done to help him/herself in the last day.*
- *Don’t duplicate services that others (churches/social service agencies) provide.*
- *Be wary of people who want to “get out of town.”*
- *Don’t take too much responsibility for solving people’s problems. Keep track of all area resources and social services and empower people to make good use of them. Help them explore solutions.*

Probably the most important advice David shares in his training of church volunteers is to remember who really changes people and causes transformation. “If your efforts to aid someone appear to be unsuccessful in that he or she has not changed, remember that God is not done working in that person’s life. Mary was a drug addict who attended our Bible studies for ten years. We sought to get her real help but never saw her cooperate, never saw any fruit. All she wanted from us was material goods. All we got from her was grief. We finally asked her not to come back. A few years later, I met her—clean and sober and a new person in Christ. God hadn’t given up,” says David. “Knowing he is in charge of the ‘transformation timetable’ takes a great burden off our ministry team and makes our work with the broken and brokenhearted much easier.”

### **With Wise Investments, How Big Can This Get?**

What makes some ventures successful, while others fail? Author and New Yorker columnist, Malcolm Gladwell wrote about the phenomenon of success in his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. At the moment an idea or a product goes from obscurity to overnight success, Gladwell says that it has reached its tipping point, much like a disease becomes an epidemic. “The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips and spreads like wildfire,” he writes. Gladwell offers a number of suggestions as to what causes things to “tip” over into success. One of his theories is that there are certain types of people, called connectors, who are well-networked with others and cause trends to tip towards enormous success.

Omar Reyes of **NorthWood Church** believes that church leaders and their various networks can cause tipping points in ministry and should see themselves as entrepreneurs in leveraging their networks and resources for Kingdom impact. “How many projects and works are sitting out there waiting for us to come and *create* a tipping point by getting involved? If we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our steps, he will use us to be intercessors and catalysts for change, investing in the growth of his Kingdom.”

As NorthWood Church has gotten a reputation for serving in the community, Omar is often solicited

to begin new community programs through the ministry of the church. The Birdville School District asked NorthWood to help remodel a building that would be used for a health clinic in an under-served area near Keller, TX. The agreement was that John Peter Smith Hospital was willing to staff it and provide all equipment and medicine but not the facility. That would be the school’s responsibility. The School had a portable building they would donate to the cause but it needed massive repair and they did not have the funds to do it. The project was going to suffer an early death. Omar’s response was, “The church is not in the business of remodeling either and we certainly did not have the money.” The project cost was about \$60,000. While “No” seemed to be the obvious answer to the request, Omar didn’t shut the door, but said that he would pray about the opportunity.

Later that same day, he went with the small group pastor to lunch with a local builder who wanted to help with a Habitat for Humanity project. Omar had the opportunity to share with him the earlier phone conversation with the hospital. When all was said and done, the building was refurbished through the partnerships of two churches, the builder and others. Omar says that situation taught him a valuable lesson, “Lead with big vision. Don’t get caught into leading with provision. When the Lord is with us, partnership is not  $1+1=2$ , but  $1+1=10$ .” Jesus’ disciples learned that lesson as they watched two fish and five loaves feed 5,000 with twelve baskets left over.

When investing in the community, Eric Swanson encourages church leaders to make mission-based decisions over permission-based ones. He says, “Permission-based is man-sized and leads with questions like: Do we have enough money? Do we have enough time? Do we have enough people? Mission-based is God-sized and asks, ‘With God, just how big can this get?’”



KRISTA PETTY

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*\* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all Scripture is taken from the NIV translation

<sup>2</sup> Swanson, Eric and Rusaw, Rick. *The Externally Focused Church*, Loveland, CO.: Group Publishing, 2004. p. 168

<sup>3</sup> Swanson, Eric and Rusaw, Rick. *The Externally Focused Church*, Loveland, CO.: Group Publishing, 2004. p. 96

<sup>4</sup> Van Groningen, Jay, Editor. *Communities First: Meeting Needs Workbook*, Grand Rapids Michigan, CRWRC. 2005. p. 4. You can access these materials at:  
<http://shop5.gospelcom.net/epages/FaithAlive.storefront/4526a10403de6c57271d45579e79065e/Product/View/800620>

<sup>5</sup> Vickers, Ian. "Church-Teacher Friendships," July/August 2005. Vista, CA: *Outreach Magazine*

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.investorwords.com/1013/compound\\_interest.html](http://www.investorwords.com/1013/compound_interest.html)

<sup>7</sup> Lupton, Robert D., *Theirs is the Kingdom*, New York, Ny.: Harpercollins, 1989, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Melonuk, T. Max, "Investing in People," *Discipleship Journal*, Colorado Springs, Co.: NavPress, Issue 24. <http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/DisplayArticle/1/1.24.9.html>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.tenth.org/fileadmin/files\\_for\\_download/ACTS\\_articles/Setting\\_Limits\\_in\\_Ministry.pdf](http://www.tenth.org/fileadmin/files_for_download/ACTS_articles/Setting_Limits_in_Ministry.pdf)