



IDEAS THAT WORK

Our favorite practical ideas from around the ministry world.

from
**Leadership
Journal**

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Ideas That Work features innovative practices from around the ministry world that have actually worked. They demonstrate that churches are fully awake and creatively responding to needs and opportunities in the church. These innovative practices are fresh ideas - or interesting twists on old ones. Be inspired to think creatively!



Marshall Shelley

Editor of Leadership Journal

Shoot a Two-Minute Message

■ Daniel Fusco, pastor of Crossroads Community Church (Vancouver, Washington), has found a unique way to engage his audience through social media. Fusco posts two-minute mini-devotionals to his Facebook page on a semi-daily basis. Each “#2MinuteMessage” provides a pithy encouragement or life lesson. Unlike two-minute sermon clips, these videos are intimate and conversational, filmed with a smart phone.

Fusco’s first message was shared 100 times and reached 7,000 people. After that he was hooked on the idea. Since he started posting these messages, Fusco said, “I have been constantly meeting new people at Crossroads who have been listening to the two-minute messages and decided to come to church. Many for the first time.”



Fix Cars for Single Moms

■ A couple of Saturdays a month, Christ Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska, does oil changes, basic car maintenance, and repairs for single mothers, widows, and others in need. While volunteers with experience as mechanics work on the cars, other volunteers sit down with the women being served and get to know their stories over a cup of coffee.

“A majority of the people who come for the oil change have no affiliation with our church or any church,” said Darrell Bush, who coordinates the ministry. “Many women have mentioned that they would have no other means to get basic maintenance taken care of if it weren’t for this ministry.”



Host “Midnight Basketball”

■ On Friday nights during the summer you can hear the sound of basketballs on the black-top outside Christ Temple Community Church in the heart of Oklahoma City. For the past 15 years, the church has been inviting kids to get off the streets and play “Midnight Basketball” at the church from 7 p.m. to midnight (and sometimes until 1 a.m.) in a safe, adult-supervised environment.

“It gives them a chance to play without dodging bullets and to have a sense of belonging. It lets them know that someone cares about them,” Marvin Sampson, an off-duty sheriff’s deputy who provides security for Midnight Basketball, told *The Oklahoman*.

The church also provides food and drinks and fun alternative activities for younger children. Volunteers do everything from refereeing games to leading group prayer at dusk with the participants.

Local school teacher and church member Bobbie Dailey who leads the group prayer told *The Oklahoman*, “For some children, this may be the only way they get to know God ... This is a way to keep them motivated in a spiritual setting. It’s getting them off the street.”

The event draws kids and volunteers from all over Oklahoma City and surrounding cities, and many who participated as kids come back as adults and bring their own children to participate.



Split the Tithe

■ In an effort to cultivate a more hands-on approach to missions, Colorado Community Church has come up with a new take on tithing. Instead of giving a full 10 percent to the church, members of CCC are encouraged to give half their tithe to the church and half to missions. They are further encouraged to volunteer five hours a month (or one hour a week) with a missions organization or strategic partner of the church.

To make the process simple, CCC provides a vetted list of suggested missionaries and organizations to which congregants can give. “It’s a way to get more than just dollars to missionaries. We want our people’s hearts there too,” said executive pastor Doug Carlsen.

The program has been in place since the founding of the church and has seen the start-up of at least five to ten 501(c)3 ministries birthed from congregants using their 5 percent to seed new ministries. Congregants who responded to an anonymous church-wide survey self-reported giving \$1.5 million total to missions compared to the church’s \$3 million in receipts.



Hold a “Gas Buy Down”

■ First Baptist Church of Marlow, Oklahoma, holds an annual \$1 gas buy down. Volunteers stake out a local gas station from 8 a.m. to noon and buy down the price of gas to \$1 per gallon for up to 20 gallons. Each patron also receives a window wash, information about the church, and an offer to pray for them—with no strings attached. The outreach event is about building relationships with people in the community surrounding the church.

“People are developing a different attitude about our church,” said senior pastor Joe Ligon. “I think they are learning to trust us. I heard a lady who is not a church member and probably not a Christ follower tell her family that we were doing what the church should be doing.”



Host a Red Carpet Event for Special Needs People

■ For the past couple years, North Jacksonville (Florida) Baptist Church has been hosting a free formal event called the “Best Night Ever” for special needs kids and adults from the church and its surrounding community. The night begins with a red carpet entrance complete with “Paparazzi” photographers. Each attendee is paired with a volunteer date who accompanies them through the evening’s festivities, including a makeover, a photo booth, a dessert buffet, a dance, and a show with a local illusionist.

The event has garnered a lot of community support, and the local chapter of the Down Syndrome Association has recommended it to its member families. “The families who participate always respond that they are overwhelmed that something like this is being offered, especially for older individuals with special needs,” associate pastor Josh Revis said, “It has been a wonderful witness in our community for our church.”



Provide Short-Term Housing for Homeless Pregnant Women

■ Just outside Seattle, Overlake Christian Church provides short-term housing for homeless pregnant women between the ages of 18 and 25. Through a ministry called Special Delivery, up to 10 women at a time are able to stay in a large house in Woodinville, where they receive the support and encouragement needed to develop an independent living plan. Lauren, an alumna of the program whose sister was also in the program, said, “I remember feeling so safe and warm. It’s the biggest blessing I’ve ever experienced. [Special Delivery] gave us the hope [that we can be self-sufficient, and] it’s gonna be OK.”

The program includes individual counseling and classes on life skills, parenting, and childbirth. In addition, Special Delivery partners with other agencies and programs addressing substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, and transitioning out of the sex trade, as well as access to government assistance and longer term housing resources. Xandy Codrington, the director of the program said, “More than anything, our desire is to show the women God’s outlandish love for them and have them come into a relationship with Jesus that will alter the trajectory for them and their children.”



Try Sketchnote Preaching

■ If you’re looking to spice up your sermon preparation, try sketchnote outlining.

Draw images of the key ideas —connected by lines, symbols, and arrows—to lay out your sermon spatially on a sketchpad. This allows you to visually represent and organize the content of your sermon.

During a bout of writer’s block while writing his dissertation at Fuller Seminary, C. Wess Daniels adopted the sketchnote technique and not only broke through his writer’s block but has been using it almost exclusively to outline his sermons over the past year. He said that since he has adopted sketchnote preaching, his study has been “more focused” because he has to slow down in order to figure out how to visually represent concepts. His memory of his outline has improved, his sermon illustrations are more vivid, and it has “energized” his preaching overall. He explains his practice in a blog post on Patheos.com.



Offer Prayers To-Go

■ Keys of the Kingdom Church in North Tulsa, Oklahoma, started offering a prayer drive-thru with “menu items”—healing, faith, salvation, etc.—for which community members can request prayer. After receiving prayer, donated clothing and food are made available to participants. Myechia Love, who organized the event, told an ABC affiliate, “The whole idea is to be able to spread the love of God. And prayer works. People are hurting ... I just felt I had to bring some good news to people.”

Additionally, as Lent approaches, a growing number of churches are offering “Ashes to Go” on Ash Wednesday. Volunteers set up shop in high traffic areas of a city and offer Ash Wednesday liturgy to passersby. It’s a quick but meaningful way to make a connection and show compassion to members of the community. “People are regularly astonished and grateful that the church would come out from behind the walls and meet people where they are,” Emily Mellott, coordinator for AshestoGo.org said. “Most encounters are brief ... but sometimes bringing the church out into the world creates the opportunity for deeper healing, with conversations about the pain in people’s lives and a chance to offer individual prayer and comfort.”



Write a Note to Guest Families in Your Children's Ministry

■ Making connections can be a daunting task for families visiting a new church. Dale Hudson, director of children's ministries at Christ Fellowship Church in Palm Beach, Florida, found an effective way to welcome new families. The church has a separate check-in area for new families, manned by enthusiastic volunteers. After the volunteers have registered a new child, they walk the family to their child's classroom. The volunteer then immediately writes a postcard to be mailed to the family that week, noting particular details about the family and telling them how good it was to meet them and how they look forward to seeing them again. The child also gets a postcard from one of the children's area leaders.

These deliberate, personal connections speak volumes to the visiting families and give them a reason to return. Hudson also notes in a column for *Ministry Today* that this practice has boosted the volunteers' enthusiasm, because they've made an investment in guest families and can't wait to see them come back.



Give an Invitation to follow Christ on Funeral Cards

■ Funerals are events when those normally closed to the gospel can be uniquely receptive. Clem Walchshauer, pastor of Three Rivers Church in Plainfield, Illinois, discovered a simple, effective way to present the gospel to funeral attendees. He provides small prayer cards with biographical information of the deceased along with an invitation to trust in Christ, and a salvation prayer the attendee can pray.

Before he began this practice, he felt his gospel invitations at funerals were falling on deaf ears. But when he printed funeral cards, he discovered that they were rarely discarded and often opened up opportunities for follow-up with funeral attendees. The widow of a man for whom Walchshauer recently performed a funeral said the funeral cards provided a natural opportunity for her to share her faith with those in attendance.

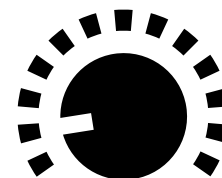
Funeral cards can be an effective way to honor the deceased, provide comfort and support for those who are mourning, and share the hope found in Christ.



Gentle Worship Services

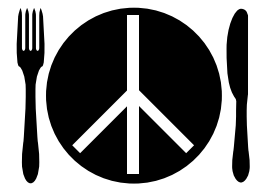
■ On the fourth Sunday of each month at 1:30 p.m., Emanuel Lutheran Church in Marion, Ohio, holds a half-hour gentle worship service geared toward people with disabilities—autism, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Down's—that make it difficult to attend a traditional service.

The lights are dimmed and volume toned down to accommodate the sensory needs of attendees. A sign-language interpreter is present for the duration of the service. Simple, familiar songs like "Jesus Loves Me" are sung, and the bulletin is printed with large text and helpful icons. Molly King, who started the ministry, said, "I could see the difference in my son with autism when he attended this quieter, shorter service. He was less fidgety and felt comfortable participating."



Organize a Peace Feast

■ Jim Mullins, pastor at Redemption Church in Tempe, Arizona, is a foodie. He particularly loves trying different kinds of ethnic food. When he noticed that several of his favorite ethnic restaurants were struggling, he figured suspicion of other cultures was the culprit. So, Mullins and some friends decided to organize a “Peace Feast.” They get together at an international restaurant with the dual goals of financially blessing the restaurant and encouraging dialogue between people from different cultures.



Free Up Sunday Morning for Outreach

■ Moving a church’s worship time to reach new people is not a new practice, but Dave Barnhart, pastor of Saint Junia United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, has seen several benefits come from moving his church’s main service from Sunday morning to afternoon. One of the biggest benefits is it frees his congregation up for service projects on Sunday morning.

While most churches are conducting their services, the members of St. Junia can be seen out in the community sharing the love of Christ in tangible ways with the unchurched. Often members will even invite unchurched friends to serve alongside them. Barnhart notes that on occasion, members of other churches will bring their unchurched friends to St. Junia following their own services.

In a blog post for MinistryMatters.com, Barnhart writes, “Being out in the community on Sunday morning helps turn the church inside-out in their eyes.” It helps make the church more inviting to those who wouldn’t normally attend. Another church leader noted, “It helped us ease into going to church after having been out of church for a long time.” Though meeting on Sunday afternoon sometimes creates scheduling conflicts, Barnhart says, “For us, it’s really a choice about our mission and the people we’re trying to reach.”



If the Mountain Cannot Come to You

■ What motivates someone to take a 2,000-mile walk? Typically they are looking for something. Southport Presbyterian Church (SPC) in Indianapolis, Indiana, likes to be there along the way to help them find it.

The people of SPC have a heart for ministering to the Appalachian Trail (AT) hikers. Their problem is that they are in Indianapolis, over 500 miles away from the nearest point of the trail.

The solution is an annual mission trip in July to Caledonia State Park in Pennsylvania, along the AT. Reserving several campsites adjacent to where the trail bisects the park and planting their own hikers up and down the path to offer invites, they spend a week camping and sharing.

They provide medical assistance, transportation into town to get needed supplies, and rest for weary souls.

Scott Watson, who has been leading this outreach for the past 13 summers, writes, “Over the years, so many cool stories have emerged! Not just people willing to explore biblical faith but stories of forgiveness, acceptance, entering substance abuse treatment or healing from loss, grief, small traumas, or limiting beliefs about themselves. A byproduct has been hearing from God and working with our team.”



Blessing of the Bikes

■ Few are more aware of their own mortality than bikers. Riding motorcycles develops a holy fear.

Pastor Randy Schoof of the Warehouse Church in Aurora, Illinois, addressed this reverent respect by organizing Motorcycle Sunday. Each May at a local park, thousands of bikers line up for a blessing, to see what's new with the vendors, and hear the live music.

"Motorcycle Sunday," according to Schoof, "is all about building bridges of friendship and faith in Jesus. Relationships and faithfulness are key to seeing people open up to God's love. Motorcycle Sunday kickstarts interaction with riders throughout the year. There's nothing better than to see tough bikers lifting their hands in prayer and surrender to Jesus. We've seen God answer many of those prayers, not only for protection as they ride, but for God's continuing work in their lives"

After the festivities, just after lunch, the bikes rumble out of town for a 60-mile ride together. By God's grace, before they head off into the sunset they are riding with Christ. For more info: motorcyclesunday.com



You've Got Mail

■ People love getting letters, and in the digital age, this ancient treat becomes rare. Many churches, however, have fostered old-fashioned interpersonal communiqué among the members by installing church mailboxes.

What began as an annual yuletide event to help distribute Christmas cards has found a permanent home with some congregations. Placed in the narthex, the rear of the sanctuary, or a side hallway, alphabetized boxes allow for exchange of greeting cards, notes of encouragement, bulletins or newsletters, and giving statements. It also allows the church staff to pass on mail without having to hunt for people on Sunday morning.

"We have several saints which are faithful to send birthday, anniversary, get well wishes . . . so we made it easy," notes Gerrard Fess of the Bonnie Brae Church of Christ in Henrico, Virginia.

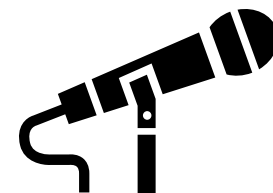
Inexpensive designs include rescued and recycled mailboxes, literature sorters from just about any office supply store, or shoe storage racks from IKEA.



Host Homeless Karaoke

■ Karaoke Coffee Club has been going strong for 18 years in the heart of Los Angeles' Skid Row. The ministry of Central City Church was organized by Pastor Tony Stallworth, who was once homeless, to offer a reprieve from the harsh realities of the streets. Starting at 7:30 every Wednesday night, participants can slough off their troubles by taking the stage to sing.

A man named Robert was formerly homeless and credits Karaoke Coffee Club for helping him make crucial changes to get off the streets. He said, "When you're living on the street, you're continually trying to protect yourself, not opening up to anyone, trying to stay hidden, and that can be a deeply isolating thing. But I knew that there would always be a safe space [at Karaoke] on Wednesday night where you could let down your guard, laugh, sing, and basically just be human for a while."



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