



The siders

GOING OUT AND LOVING IN

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The Outsiders Going Out and Loving In

God declared to Abraham in Genesis 28:13-14, “And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I am the LORD God of Abraham, your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The Old Testament gives a great narrative of the word of God spreading and the number of the followers increasing within the world. Fast forward to the New Testament and God is still proclaiming that His word should be proclaimed within the world and that he desires to draw all men unto Him. In the New Testament after the life, death and resurrection of Christ, believers are fully commissioned to be the messengers of Christ forevermore. Matthew 28:19-20 states, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The mantle has been passed and we now have the charge to go and share the good news of the gospel. Acts 1:8 implies that to do this the church should always be on the move, out among the people and witnessing to those who have not heard – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” If, as believers, we are only going into the physical church building and waiting for visitors or guests to come, we are failing to do the command given to the church. This approach is leaving far too many people outside the body of believers. It is time for believers to be the Outsiders, going out and loving people into the family of faith.

Being the Outsiders is not just global missions and traveling to far away lands. There are so many opportunities right within the communities where we live and worship to witness to the goodness of God, to share the good news of Jesus Christ and be in relationship with the non-believers, unchurched, dechurched and the unaffiliated. It is time for the local church to move beyond internal programmatic ministry to intentional external relationships that lead to discipleship. The harvest around the local church is great and for too long the laborers have been too few. There are simple ways to become an effective local church that is outside making disciples for Jesus Christ. If we are willing to be The Outsiders, we can use the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us in creative ways to build relationships with the people in our immediate community. By focusing, or in some cases re-focusing on our neighbors we can build community and relationships that foster opportunities to share the gospel with all. We have to get to know our neighbors, invest in our neighbors and build relationships with our neighbors where they are before we even begin to invite them into our local churches. We have to prove that our love and concern for them is genuine and not about growing the number of people sitting on our pews. As The Outsiders we will explore some of the ways to reach the typical neighbor who is not the stereotypical or typical attendee in the local church. By focusing on two areas within the United Methodist four areas of focus, ministry with the poor and creating

new and renewed congregations, The Outsiders can fulfill the charge given unto us to make disciples and make them right in the communities where we have been planted.¹

¹ <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/four-areas-of-focus-overview>

BE THE OUTSIDERS

ENGAGING IN MINISTRY OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF
YOUR CHURCH

TO THE COMMUNITY AROUND YOU

Be Outsiders Engaging in Ministry with the Poor

Homelessness is an ongoing and seemingly endless problem across our entire country, and Greater Atlanta is by no means an exception to the issues and problems facing this group of people. What can we do to help solve this problem? What should we do? How do we approach the problem of homeless in the most effective way as to help the greatest number of people? How do we raise enough funds to accomplish these objectives? All valid questions, which many seek to answer. **The bigger issue is how we as a Church, as Methodists, as Christians, reach out to these outsiders to not only help them out of their current situation, but find a way to make them Disciples of Christ?**

For a better understanding of the issues facing the homeless, and after an in depth study and review of the homeless, I would start by **dividing the homeless into two major groups**. The **first group of homeless is the typical stereotype individual**. They are those who are homeless because of mental illness, addictions, or an array of bad choices. This is the group of homeless individuals that makes the news. This is the group we normally think about when we hear about or picture a homeless person. The individual living on the street, dirty, ragged clothes, hungry, sleeping under a bridge. **The second group are homeless because of circumstances**, mostly beyond their control. Divorce, abuse, loss of a job, sickness, and the list could go on and on as to the cause. They may be living in someone's basement, in a shelter, in their car, and yes even on the streets. They consist mostly of families, women with children. The second group is less visible and does not receive the level of attention or publicity as the first group. This second group makes up the majority of the homeless population. Two different groups, two different approaches, two different ways to reach these outsiders.

Let's start this discussion by reviewing **the number of homeless in the Greater Atlanta area**. One set of statistics shows that the number of homeless has dropped in Atlanta from 4,317 individuals in 2015 to **3,017 in 2018** (drop of 29%), there are still thousands of uncounted still in need.² One might attribute this drop in homelessness as a true success, others see the drop as merely the homeless being relocated to other areas.

Another set of statistics shows that the problem in Greater Atlanta is even worse, with over **7,000 homeless; of which 2,000 sleep on the streets** at night.³ More than **100,000** metro Atlanta family members **lose their housing each year**. Most must seek shelter with family and friends, find temporary housing in extended stay hotels, live in

² Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Alexis Stevens, Oct 22, 2018

³ Atlanta Mission, Atlanta, GA web site, January, 2019

their cars, or worse.⁴ The exact number of homeless in Greater Atlanta is fluid and hard to measure in precise numbers. The numbers are large, heart wrenching, and disturbing to say the least. It is a real problem, of real concern, and in need of real solutions. Homelessness is a tremendous need that cries for help!

Group One, the typical stereotype homeless is the group whom we traditionally minister to as a Church. The Monthly Mission Trip is usually on a Saturday when several individuals get together to prepared food and drink, hygiene kits, clothes, blankets, etc. for a journey downtown. Usually several stops are made, as most churches know the locations of the various groups of homeless and where on the streets they live. After several stops, and everything has been distributed, the journey back home to the suburbs begin --- mission accomplished. Everyone on the Homeless Team feels good; after all they have spent the day helping and serving the homeless.

I have served on just such a team for several years. The planning, the preparation, the number of individuals supporting the ministry, the work involved is amazing. Good sincere people, serving others, and trying to make a difference doing ministry with the poor, the homeless. I recall, on one of my first trips to minister to the homeless in downtown Atlanta, meeting an individual who was served for 15 years by ministry teams like the one I was on this day. My first impression and thoughts were how wonderful that for all these years we have been able to serve and help this individual. But the more I thought about it, the more disturbed I became. Why was the person still homeless? Had we, as a church, really helped this individual? What impact or difference were we really making in this person's life, and others just like him? Were we doing this ministry to help these people get out of their homeless situation, or are we merely enabling them to continue in their current state? Were we merely doing all of these good things so that we could go home and feel good about ourselves that we had served the homeless? As I looked around on these monthly visits, I notice many other churches doing the same type of ministry. At times we were competing elements trying to serve the same homeless. There was no coordination between the various churches on how best to feed, clothe, and minister to these various groups. We all just went about doing our good deeds for the day. But at the end of the day, they were still homeless. A disturbing thought!

It was then that I was introduced to **Rainbow Village, Inc.** They, along with many other similar type ministries, serve **Group Two.** Group Two are those individuals, typically family units, who are homeless because of circumstance. Having contacted Rainbow Village, my partner in this research project, Hope Kaupe and I scheduled an onsite visit to their campus. We met with Elizabeth Hewell, Volunteer Coordinator at Rainbow Village. For the next couple of hours, she was able to explain who the homeless were that they served, how they met their needs, and their success rate. They were well organized, everything was planned out, and they had goals, processes, limits, rules. It

⁴ Rainbow Village Inc., informational - promotional brochure, 2018

is a ministry run in the same manner as you would run a successful business. It has a business model run by a board of successful business people. They only serve family units, primarily single female heads of household with at least one child. These heads of household are required to have some type of job, any type of job, full or part time. They must have some type of transportation to access even if it is public transportation or Uber. They are provided fully furnished apartments to live in. Thirty apartment homes are available for use and located on their campus. They are able to stay 1 to 2 years, with most needing an average time of 16 months. There are daycare services, preschool facilities, after school programs, mentoring programs, summer/holiday camps and evening empowering training classes for the parents, all located on their campus.⁵ Rainbow Village is a beautiful campus, with first class facilities. Driving by, no one would ever know that homeless families are living there. They have a structured environment, rules to follow, a well-planned and properly organized mission. Their success ratio is over 80% ---an amazing record!

The Choice! How best do we serve the homeless? Where do we invest our time, effort, talents, resources, and our monies? How do we best serve this entire segment of our population to effectively resolve the never-ending problem of being homeless? The fact remains, homelessness will always exist. There will always be homeless individuals and families either in **Group One or Group Two**. Sometimes we do things the way we do them because we have always done them that way! Tradition plays a large part in our approach and in our thinking.

Group One is the typical stereotypical homeless individuals and we continue to serve and minister the same way we have done for years. The results continue to be the same, ineffective. So why do we continue down the same path with the same results? Perhaps we do so because we do not know, or are totally unaware, of better more effective ways to accomplish the mission. It is the way we have always done things, so we will continue to do things in the same way. I would purpose we merely do not know a better way, or we are closed to the idea that after serving and ministering to the homeless for so many years, that there might be a better more effective way. Perhaps others can begin to model the approach of Rainbow Village and achieve similar results.

Group Two is the single female head of household. Could places like Rainbow Village be on to something? A model to serve the homeless that has a proven track record of effective and measurable results. Should we not place our time, energy, resources, and our monies with those who are on a daily basis serving those homeless in need? It would seem reasonable to assume that any program that obtains such success should get our attention. Rainbow Village is a new ways of thinking, new ways of operations and better methods to obtain positive results. Wow! What a novel way to help solve the homelessness in the Greater Atlanta area.

⁵ Rainbow Village Inc., informational - promotional brochure, 2018

So back to the original question. **How do we as a Church, as Methodist, as Christians best minister and serve the Homeless population of Greater Atlanta?**

We need to increase our knowledge, our understanding, and review our results of how we approach this problem. We must be flexible and open to realize that maybe, just maybe, there are better and more effective ways to help the homeless. Times change and so must we. Placing our resources, including our time and money, with organizations and programs that are obtaining measureable and effective results would seem a logical path to follow.

As a United Methodist Conference, as Districts within the Conference, as Churches within the Districts, we need education, training, workshops, and seminars, on how to effectively minister and serve the homeless. The need is great. The number of homeless here in the Greater Atlanta area and in the North Georgia Conference continues to increase. We need a study group to dive deep into this problem. This group would be charged to come up with a focused plan on how best to meet the needs of our homeless population. We should involve and incorporate within that plan many of the successful organizations already meeting the needs of the homeless. A successful plan should include details of how best to approach this problem, the resources needed, timelines and measurable results. In a changing world, with so many homeless, we need to be open to better and more effective ways to minister and serve this group of people.

Our Mission as a Church is to reach outside the walls of our churches to those on the outside. John Wesley, our founding father, realized and promoted a holistic approach to minister and to serve mankind. In that same spirit and thought process, we must as a church reach outside the church walls to those in need. We must engage in the ministry with the poor. It is hard to receive Christ and become Disciples of Christ, when we have no roof over our head, clothes on our back, no food to eat and work is only a dream. Meeting the homeless where they are and helping them find a way out of their hopelessness is key. Then and only then can those who are homeless truly understand the deep love Christ has for them. Then and only then can we help them become His true disciples. Are there other Ministries and Outreach Programs in the United Methodist Church that need to be reviewed, refocused, and redirected? Are there better, more effective, more efficient ways to serve those on the outside?

Be Outsiders Engaging in Ministry with the Precariously Housed

In September 2008, HUD expanded the definition of homeless to include people who are doubled up with friends, family or living day to day in motels.⁶ These families include babies, young kids, teens and adults. Some are doubled up with other families in the

⁶ <https://www.planetizen.com/node/35084>. Expanding HUD's Definition of Homelessness - News | Planetizen. Sept 2015

same small one-bedroom motel room. They are going to school, to work and/or trying to maintain a somewhat normal lifestyle. Most of them have no cars, no jobs and no hope. Their children go hungry, have few, if any, toys and fall victims to predators on a daily basis. These individuals and families are referred to as “precariously housed”.

The main problem with “Extended Stay Hotels” is that they cost as much as a three-bedroom apartment, leaving little money left to save for a down payment on an apartment or house. There is only a microwave and a small refrigerator forcing the occupants to turn to eating out on a regular basis. There is usually one bed and a hideaway bed in a couch. Children wind up sleeping on bare floors or in tubs.

In addition to the problem, for thousands of families who spend months and sometimes years in cramped, crime-ridden hotels and motels, prospects of finding a better place to live are growing dimmer every day. An improving economy is actually making things worse. Room rates at even the region's most run-down motels have escalated sharply in the past two years. Developers are starting to buy up the distressed properties and destroy them for redevelopment. And thanks to a Great Recession boom in foreclosures, the rental market is tighter than ever.⁷

What can we do as a church? We can bring them hope. We can bring them food, toys and God’s love. Not once, not twice but on a regular basis. Jesus did not sit around the church waiting for the homeless, broken or unloved people to come to Him. He went out into the communities where they lived. He went to their homes, their jobs and where they would hang out. As a church, we are called to do the same. This is not a once and done ministry. In this ministry, it takes consistency, dedication and perseverance. One such example is the Bowery Mission in New York. They tend to their physical and spiritual needs with food, singing and storytelling. Jesus did not preach at the people; he told them stories with meaning.

“He that oppresses the poor reproach his Maker: but he that honors him hath mercy on the poor.” (Proverb 14:31).

Here is what we can do as a church:

1. Find a meeting place convenient to the extended stay hotel
2. Plan a meeting that includes, but not limited to, storytelling, singing and food
3. Make it a weekly meeting
4. Bring presents for the adults and children such as gift cards to fast food restaurants, grocery stores, toys, hygiene products, etc. Make the gifts appropriate for the season, such as gloves and scarfs in winter and clean t-shirts in the summer
5. Most importantly bring them God’s love.

⁷ <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/os-homeless-families-motels-20151005-story.html>

Search for ministries already going in your area to see if you can help. One such ministry is in Loganville, GA.⁸ It is called The Ministry Village located in Loganville, GA. They offer counselling, job placement and more. Another very good one is the Rainbow Village in Duluth⁹. They also offer counselling, job placement as well as a 2-year program which include a home, tools to survive, childcare and much more.

Care Tips for the Homeless¹⁰

Tip #1 - Acknowledge & Engage

“Homelessness brings a sense of loneliness that erodes the core of a person’s self-value. When you are homeless, a simple smile and a word of kindness can make a big difference in a day full of hardship.”

Tip #2 - Be Prepared to Help

The homeless just need help to get through the day. You can provide practical and immediate help such as gift cards to fast food or local grocery store. Also bring items such as granola bars, protein snack, and bottled water, etc.

Tip #3 - Keep in Mind

Always offer help first. It is better to ask someone if they actually want or need anything. Most of the time, your neighbors in need will be grateful for your offer of food or water. However, you may also encounter someone who is having a really rough time and may be unable to appreciate your help at this time.

Tip #4 - Enquire About Their Story

Every person living on the streets has his/her own story. Ask them about their story. Be interested in their adventure before jumping to conclusions. There are many different paths that lead to homelessness. Some are very educated and just down on their luck or refuse to work. They may also be struggling with addictions. Others lost everything to bills, job loss or other circumstances. Many of them suffer mental illness with no hope of help.

⁸ <https://www.hopehousecounseling.org/services--programs.html>

⁹ <https://rainbowvillage.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.bowery.org/homelessness/tips-help-homeless/>

Tip #5 - Invite & Pray

Homelessness is very complex. It leads to a vicious cycle that is hard to break. However, there is hope! Help them find programs in their area. Obtain resource cards and brochures to give out as well as a way to get to the resource such as a bus pass. Finally, pray with your homeless neighbors, but always ask permission if you pray for them, first. You should also continue to pray for them with friends and family, later. Pray that God will provide for their physical, their emotional and spiritual needs. Pray that they will seek a recovery program and the help they need and desire.

It does not matter how much or how little you do; it just matters that you do.¹¹

Be The Outsiders Engaged in Ministry with Immigrants

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Mark 16:15 (NIV)

In July 2017, the US Census estimated that 10% of Georgia's population was foreign born. They are our neighbors, our co-workers, our neighborhood business owners, parents of our children's friends, the person behind the cash register, etc. that make up our diverse community. The world is coming to us! Our immigrant community represents the world, our parish.

Ministering and discipling to our immigrant community is an intentional focus on building lasting relationships based on mutual trust and love. Our intentionality should be fueled by Habit 5 of Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* - Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood®.¹² As we work to build meaningful and lasting relationships, we are calling attention to acculturation more so than assimilation.

Through the Eyes of Our Immigrant Neighbors

Our immigrant neighbors face many challenges as they seek a new life in a new land. Some of the challenges we share in building relationships are:

- language
- culture
- traditions
- lack of trust (safe environment)
- theology
- proximity to schools, doctors, stores, parks, and places of worship (many immigrants can't drive or afford a car)
- available and safe childcare services

We must "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (Stephen Covey) by sitting with our neighbors, sharing meals with our neighbors, and sharing stories with our

¹¹ anonymous

¹² Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. New York: Free Press, 2004

neighbors so we begin to see circumstances through the eyes of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Outsiders in Jesus' Lineage

The lineage of Jesus paints a picture of an all-inclusive Messiah. Matthew 1:1-17 traces the genealogy of Jesus who was born into a society where women had no status and hence could be considered “outsiders”. Yet, Matthew includes four women in Jesus’ lineage in addition to Mary, his mother.

- Tamar - a Gentile
- Rahab - a prostitute
- Ruth – a stranger from Moab
- Wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) - an adulterer

Jesus Shows Compassion for Outsiders

Jesus himself in many situations was considered an outsider. Hebrews 13:12-13 gives a metaphorical example of Jesus suffering “outside” the gate symbolic of Jesus’ death outside Jerusalem. The Gospels provide us with many accounts of Jesus hanging out with “outsiders.”

- The diseased - Matthew 8:1-4
- The poor - Luke 14:12-14
- Tax collectors and “sinners” - Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10
- Women - Luke 7:36-50; John 4:1-26
- Children - Mark 10:13-16
- Gentiles – Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28

Moving from Hospitality to Relationships

A resource for building hospitality skills in our congregations is the UMC General Board of Church and Society - *Immigrant Welcoming Communities*. What does the Bible say about hospitality? One account from Leviticus 19:33-34 says, “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as: native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” So how do we build lasting relationships based on mutual trust and love? How do we put our faith into practice through acting out our hospitality? We engage with others (individuals as well as community organizations) that have a passion for demonstrating God’s love through hospitality and relationships. Meaningful relationships take time to establish. However, a plan can be developed for a bible study or book study on hospitality and immigrants; and researching the demographics of your community.

Conclusion: Our Christian Response

We must build ministries that “push out” as oppose to “pull in.” Some ideas include:

1. Host celebration event for Hispanic Heritage Month
2. Host an ESL class/frequently sit in on the class
3. Members of the congregation learn language of the immigrants they serve
4. Host chat sessions for immigrants giving them a chance to practice their English
5. Offer US citizenship test preparation
6. Provide translator for worship service
7. Visible welcome signs in the languages prevalent in your community
8. Partner with immigrant rights advocate for your area
9. Visit establishments of immigrant community e.g. restaurants on a regular basis
10. Host soccer watching events (off campus)
11. Investigate weekly community food truck night (on campus)
12. Display flags of countries represented in your community
13. Volunteer at organizations that support immigrant and refugee communities
14. Strategically use social media in multiple languages

BE THE OUTSIDERS

ENGAGING IN MINISTRY OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF
YOUR CHURCH

CREATING NEW AND RENEWED GATHERINGS OF
BELIEVERS

Be The Outsiders Revitalizing Your Neighborhoods

Discussion is key when looking to do new ministry. While serving sack lunches to children at an apartment complex during the summer, a conversation with a fellow church member became the starting point for a new ministry at a trailer park near our church. The students here feed into the high school that is right next door to our church. The church member had started a similar ministry at a different church several years ago and it has grown and continues to serve that local community.

After contacting the owner and manager of the trailer park for permission, we came up with plans on how to build relationships with the children and their parents. We started with a block party one Saturday including a bouncy house, games, hotdogs from the grill and other food and drink. Invitations had been passed out earlier in the week when we went through the community passing out an invitation and candy to everyone we saw, particularly the children. About 8 children from our Children's Ministry participated in this along with 4 adults. The invitations were printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other. We were pleased with attendance of more than 25 people at the block party.

Our ongoing ministry occurs on Wednesday evenings. The children and their parents were invited to come to the gathering area for games, snacks and a devotion. We were astonished that more than 80 people came to that first gathering! We continued to meet on Wednesday evenings until the time changed and the weather started getting too cold. We are looking forward to getting this gathering going again in March of this year. In the meantime, the main organizer has visited several of the key youth she identified and let them know we are continuing this time of fun for them.

While we started this ministry with just a small group of people who normally are a part of our missions' outreach, it has grown to include the Children's and Youth ministries, their leaders, and those who work with them. We did not want to have more church participants than community participants, but they quickly outnumbered us. It's wonderful to see the relationships building already. We have discussed with some of the older children about the projects we want to do with them – tutoring, summer sack lunch program, mentoring, and they are very receptive.

We are planning to do one family activity each month beginning with a Taco Party. Then we will follow with an Easter egg hunt, Cinco de Mayo, and outdoor movies during the Summer. There are so many possibilities with this ministry, and we remain open for the Lord and the families to guide us in serving the needs that exist.

Currently, we are requesting donations whenever we have an event. As this ministry grows, we will need to investigate fundraising so we can better serve this community. We will also look to include more members from our church as we do more activities.

Be The Outsiders Revitalizing Your Congregation through Dinner Church

Many of us are comfortable reaching people outside of our walls by donating items for the needy or writing checks. We're willing to bring food, clothing, toiletries and money to give to those in need. But is this really showing the love of Christ? Are we willing to invite these people into our church? We say we are, but what if a group of people that didn't look like us showed up at our doors and wanted to join our service. How welcoming would we really be?

Most people aren't going to just come to our doors. Perhaps those who are already churching and are just looking for another place might stop by on a Sunday. But what about those who have been burned by the church or have never gone to church at all? Why would they want to come in? We need to think of different ways to meet them outside the church doors that can be so daunting.

I was given a book called, *Dinner Church*, by Verlon Fosner.¹³ What an eye-opener this book was! What a new way of looking at church! This is a very doable way of reaching our neighbors without them going into a formal church setting. The basis of dinner church is going back to the way Jesus met with people – around the table. Acts 2:46 says, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Tertullian further describes these early church meetings, called Agape feasts, all based on the idea that Jesus' Last Supper was intended to be a model for how Christians worship together.¹⁴ We have taken Jesus's idea of sharing the Word with people and expanded on it to the point that many people don't want to be a part anymore. The dinner church model is very inviting for all people. It's a great way to start and build relationships and begin the talk about Jesus in a comfortable setting.

There are many different versions of dinner church throughout the US. In 2009, St. Lydia's Lutheran church in Brooklyn started holding a weekly service over dinner. The founder, Emily Scott, modeled her service around the early church practice of having a meal together as Eucharist.¹⁴ Other churches from various denominations began springing up in small towns and big cities and most did not know about the other communities. Assemblies of God "Community Dinners" in Seattle, Washington, the Disciples of Christ "Potluck Church" in Madisonville, Kentucky, and the Episcopal "Southside Abbey" in Chattanooga, Tennessee, were among the first congregations in this movement. Now, there are hundreds of congregations in North America and Europe using this format for their churches.

Other than the premise of meeting with others the way Jesus did, over a meal, the congregations are completely different. Some meet in a church basement, some in a rented space, others meet outside. The settings can be rural, urban or suburban, but the tables are the same – composed of a diverse mix of generations and ethnicity – all

¹³ *Dinner Church*, Verlon Fosner

¹⁴ "Dinner Churches Spring Up Nationwide," Christian Food Movement, January 13, 2017

creating unity. The table setting gives those from various backgrounds the opportunity to discuss the scripture while they share a meal. Some of these communities meet monthly, while others meet bi-weekly or weekly. Any schedule will work, if there is consistency.

Most of these variations have an opportunity for children to start out at the table with their family and then have time for kid-friendly learning time away from the adults. There always needs to be an informality that we do not usually have in a sanctuary. People need to feel that they can participate at the level they are comfortable, move to a different table, find someone to have a more personal discussion with or whatever their need is for that time.

This discussion is the sermon! This format does not need to be led by clergy, but it does need several people who are well-versed in scripture and who are mature Christians. The table discussions can be centered around a short story at the beginning of dinner and then attendees are invited to discuss a topic, have questions and answers, or consider scriptural references related to that story.¹⁵ Instead of listening to someone talk or sing for 60 minutes, dinner church attendees are an important part of the format. It is the interaction between people at the table and all those attending that works toward building relationships and considering the needs of those at the table.

“Dinner church ‘has the highly relational nature of early Wesleyan movements,’ said Rick McKinley, the director of congregational development for the UMC in New England. ‘People were face to face. It wasn’t about consuming a particular product in the way that modern churches consume Sunday morning worship or consume the programming that we’re offered. Simple Church is going back to this understanding of living into a relationship that starts with God.’”¹⁶

There is Holy Communion at these gatherings. Most articles mention bread and wine (or juice) being a part of the dinner, but it is not distributed as it would be in a formal setting. Some dinner churches start the meal by passing the Lord’s Supper bread to one another and then end with everyone raising a glass of wine. Usually there is a short prayer to close. Alex Raabe, pastor of Table of Mercy in Austin, Texas, says “All of our physical eating becomes spiritually nourishing, and our spiritual nourishing becomes physically fulfilling even outside of church.”¹⁴

Mark Cyderman, a pastor from Detroit, Michigan, says that “Dinner Church is effective evangelism. Trying to verbally convince an individual of his or her need for Jesus today is a difficult intellectual exercise, but showing people who Jesus is through meals, stories and love has led to many conversions and baptisms. He said that those

¹⁵ “What is Dinner Church,” Paul Nixon, The Epicenter Group

¹⁶ “Simple Church blends dinner, worship and enterprise to create a new model,” www.faithandleadership.com, June 13, 2017

connected to Dinner Church start to volunteer and serve like any other established local congregation.”¹⁷

Quotes from attendees:

“I came here last week, and I never felt so much like walking into a family,” said Marty Pelham.¹⁶

Sue Novia says, “It’s not like a regular church where you go, sit there, just listen and don’t talk. We talk here. People can open up. Feelings come out about religion, about sharing your life’s experiences with somebody else and hearing theirs. That’s what makes it grow.”¹⁶

What makes this model work in so many varied contexts?¹⁵

- People naturally gather around tables with food and drink, in all cultures
- The format is customizable
- It doesn’t take a lot of work
- It doesn’t take a lot of money

Can your church take on a dinner church model? Find 4-5 people who are passionate about serving your neighbors and plan a dinner church that suits your community. Consider other events that already draw people to your church – other ministries, movies on the lawn, youth, Wednesday night supper. You might add the “dinner church” as an addition to these events and extend the relationship time together. Look at the communities in your area with the greatest populations – apartment complexes, townhome communities. These sometimes have a community room that you could use for a dinner church.

Imagine what our world would look like if every formal church added a dinner church format! How many more people could we reach? How many more lives could be touched by Jesus?

Be the Outsiders Revitalizing Your Community

As disciples, our basic responsibility is to spread the word of God to all people, which means to ALL people. (Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19)

So, we must come up with a new idea or spark on how to reach others. But before we talk about this new idea on how to reach others, allow me to present a small picture of the area that we are going to talk about and the church that is going to present their Christian culture outside the normal trend. Let me start on who we are and where we are located. Salem UMC is located in Dearing, Georgia, a small rural town. Dearing is located thirty-five miles west of Augusta, Georgia. It is a very small church with a super

¹⁷ “Dinner Church: An old model may be the answer to church renewal,” Home Mission Societies, May 11, 2018

big heart. We have a small population within the church as well. We will be celebrating our 200th birthday in 2021. As a church we have some established goals in place, things that we want to achieve in God's will. But our main goal is to increase our church population. We currently have about 16-18 members, mainly senior citizens, attending church each Sunday.

Our first task is to survey the surrounding area of the church on how many residents are in a five-mile radius. The purpose of the survey is to find out what material we are going to need to bring our church culture outside to others. Outside the box. Salem is my wife's childhood church, which is the church that she and her family attended when she was a child and young teenager. And now, we are members of the church where her ancestors and family members have attended past and present. My wife came up with the idea of presenting a loaf of bread and greeting cards with church information to the families that live in the surrounding of the church. Even though there are two other churches in the area, Salem is the one that is going to initiate the movement of the church culture outside the surrounding of the church.

When Jesus chose his disciples, their purpose was to help spread the gospel, the plan of salvation, and the forgiveness of sins (spread to all four quarters of the earth). In our case, my wife and I (and any members who wish to join us) will be those two messengers spreading the word of Jesus Christ throughout the surrounding of Salem UMC. Using the example of a loaf of bread, which is a supplement of food and nutrition to our bodies, when we visit the residences of the surrounding homes, we will present the loaf of bread with an invitation to our church. In conversation with each resident as we visit, we will mention that bread is the nourishment of food necessary for growth and health for our earthly bodies but the Bread of Life, Jesus, is necessary for eternal life. (Very truly I tell you that, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. John 6:47-48 (NIV)) Then we will invite them and their families to join us at Salem UMC where you will find the nourishment and spiritual growth for your soul and learn about the true Bread of Life, Jesus and his teachings. Also, we will provide information about our small church and its activities.

In conclusion, please pray for my wife and I as we embark on the journey that God has put in our hearts to do, allowing His Holy Spirit to lead us in his word.

Be The Outsiders Revitalizing Church and School and Community

Putting this report together has been a challenging and exciting "WOW" project. I now know more than ever that we must get outside our church walls and "BE" disciples for Christ. There are several areas I found to be in great need. To my delight there are also wonderful opportunities for great success in meeting these needs with programs already in place. Here are a few effective models of success as well as opportunities within your community.

- School and Church Partners
- Community and Schools
- *God has not been taken out of schools*

SCHOOL AND CHURCH PARTNERS was initiated by our local community and our School System. Every school in LaGrange is adopted by a church. Churches of all denominations can be and are partners.

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOLS

SUCCESS BY 6 is United Way's early learning community impact initiative

- It is the nation's largest network of early childhood coalitions
- If children don't know how to read by 2nd grade, they will be lost throughout their continued school career

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF GEORGIA

- A state program. In Troup County they work full time inside K-12 schools
- They build relationships to empower students to stay in school and succeed in life
- Promote life success by working with youth most susceptible to school dropout; within the school setting, program addresses critical issues such as school academic, attendance, literacy, job preparedness, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol prevention, low self-esteem, disruptive and violent behavior.

GOD HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN OUT OF OUR SCHOOLS! The law limits adults leading the students in prayer and religious activities. But the **students are completely free to initiate and engage in prayer and religious activities.**

- Students can form and participate in Christian clubs. They can lead a prayer, and other religious activities.
- **The church can support their efforts.**

THE CHURCH IN OUR COMMUNITY

Why do we need to go outside the church walls?

- The breakdown in community has led to breakdown in families & society
- People have pulled away from the church
- Parents are not involved as much in the schools
- There is a real need for community to return

How can we bring community back?

- Instead of waiting for them to come to us, we go to them
- Apartment complexes, parks, recreation center; wherever they gather
- Establish relationships by meeting regularly (weekly or monthly)
- Provide snacks, read books, tell Bible stories, be a good listener

Just imagine what the Lord can do through us if every Church, all Denominations in Every City had dozens of members say, “not I will, but I want, to Volunteer and make a difference.”

WHERE TO GO FOR RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Your Local School Board
- Chamber of Commerce
- United Way (25 agencies listed under them)
- Red Cross
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- A book Titled “Strategies for Transforming Your City – City Wide Transformation” by Wanda Walker. This book is an excellent resource and is in use in LaGrange, GA today.

OTHER FACTS OF INTEREST

We have a long way to go in our schools

The Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education to conduct an Asset Map for Troup County. The Graduation Rate for the state average is 81.6%. The College and Career Ready Performance for the state average of 76.6%. The Third Grade Literacy at or below Proficiency for the state is 37.3%. A critical measure was the percentage of 8th Grade students who were on grade point. The state average is 34.4%. Our middle schools in LaGrange were 9.9%, 34.6%; and 39%. Very sad.

In summary, (Communities in Schools, Troup County Report card 2018)

- Middle school students who were failing improved their grades, attendance & behavior improved.
- 100% of CIS middle school students were promoted
- Communities in Schools has a 91% graduation rate

Volunteer support allows students to experience a meaningful, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult. Can we make a difference? Absolutely!

Be The Outsiders Revitalizing Relationships by Just Being You

Realistically churches live to create programmatic ministry and to do! But The Outsiders want to encourage the local church to continue doing but when you do, remember to Be – Be present in your local community. Examples include:

Instead of doing Coffee with the Pastor at your local church, purchase gift cards to your local coffee shop or café and invite new guests and visitors to join the Pastor and some of its members for coffee outside in the community. Invite neighbors within the local community to come for a cup to talk about topics relevant to your community where you

can have influence. Bottomline, find ways to host your programmatic ministries out within the community.

Instead of food trucks being the only thing feeding people on Fridays during the summer, take your congregation out to these local events and just mix and mingle. Host game tables or provide toys for the kids in the park that night. Find ways to be present and create conversation starters so that you can begin to form relationships. Come out and organize an impromptu volleyball game and invite the people in the park to join in. Let the community experience the people from within your congregation and let your congregation build relationships with the community. Show yourself to be vested in your community. Outsiders are out in the community connecting with the people that they are there to serve.

Outsiders build relationships that lead to discipleship. Sponsor the movie night in a local park and host a discussion following or before the movie. Engage the community and create opportunities to talk and form relationships. Invite families and encourage your congregation to meet and mingle with at least 2 -3 families. Make the interaction about getting to know one another and not about inviting them to church right away. You build relationships before you can move toward discipleship.

Be intentional to have your small groups be present in local community businesses and leave a few empty chairs as a sign that you are open to others joining you. Even put a sign on the table that states all are welcome. Do everything in your power to not look closed off and do everything to look inclusive and inviting to those who may overhear and want to inquire. Maybe even display a sign that says, "questions are welcomed." Consider hosting a summer worship series in your park for young adults. Call it Worship under the Stars. Start it after dark and let it be a night of dancing, worship and praise. In between sets, provide a spoken word. Be intentional to be diverse and engaging with the style of your community. Recognize the sub-divisions or groups present so you get a sense of who is coming.

Be authentically you. Cancel worship one Sunday and encourage families to go to their favorite hangout and engage at least one other family or group of people. Invite them to join you. If you go to a bowling alley, challenge the family next to you and strike up a conversation. If you like a restaurant, consider asking another couple to join you that does not attend your church. Consider hosting a Sunday Worship at the Rink with a praise and worship while people skate.

Consider hosting exam game days at the college campus commons to give students a way to relax and refresh. Be on campus and offer study hall assistance on the campus and study snack breaks. Take this time to relate to the students and get to know them. Remember your college days and what would matter most to you.

Consider hosting a summer community series similar to the concert series in many local communities today. Create a different style of worship in the park every Saturday or

Sunday or mid-week for at least 3 weeks. Make it about music, praise, dancing and celebrating the diversity and cultures within your community.

Being The Outsiders is all about taking the best of you outside into the local community so that people can encounter you and the Christ in you. Being The Outsiders is about intentionally exposing the local community to everything good you have been keeping on the inside. It is about going out to build relationships and relate to those who are your neighbor, sharing the good news of Christ and being in relationship with others who will love Christ when they see that you love them.

Be The Outsiders Or Be Left Out

Being The Outsiders is not about church without walls but all about church growing beyond the walls. Our sole purpose as Christians is to go and make disciples. **The definition of “go” is**

verb - 1. move from one place or point to another; travel. 2. leave; depart¹⁸

This means as Christians we should be moving and not always in a stationary position. The Body of Christ must be on the move if we are going to make disciples. A body that remains stationary begins to experience decreased muscle function and begins a process of slow death. The Body of Christ is no different. According to the Pew Research Center, “Christians are an older population and [are] dying at a higher rate. In 2015, while Christians only made up 31% of the world population, Christians made up 37% of the world’s deaths.”¹⁹ The sign that there is life in the Body of Christ is we are moving and growing disciples for Jesus Christ. This movement needs to be **outside** the walls of a physical church and the growth in disciples will come from within the world, the local community and neighboring homes.

¹⁸ Dictionary.com; <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/make?s=t>

¹⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/>

Our movement should be the intentional actions and activities to make disciples. **To make means:**

*verb - 1. form something by putting parts together or combining substances; construct, create.*²⁰

We are to combine our intimate knowledge of Christ with the present-day existence of those operating **outside** of an intimate relationship with Christ. In putting the Christ in us together with the **Outsider** we form a new creation --- a disciple. As with Jesus and the early disciples, making true disciples requires time. Jesus spent somewhere around 3 years with the likes of Peter, James, John, Andrew and Thomas making them disciples. When we reach an **Outsider**, we must be willing to remain outside for an extended period and meet them where they are.

Therefore, as members of the Body of Christ, we are called to be The Outsiders, going out to those living outside a personal relationship with Jesus Christ to love them into the kingdom of God. The local church can follow this approach to become successful Outsiders:

Discipling is modeling in the presence of others the ways of Christ. It is the sharing of our story, our time and our love in our everyday ordinary life with the intention of allowing people to see the Christ in us. It is not about inviting someone to church, it is about inviting someone into a personal and intimate relationship with Christ. We do this by modeling Christ, sharing our story, sharing our time and sharing our love.

Modeling is allowing others to see us living the ways of Christ. It should look radically different than what they see in the world because we are a peculiar people, foreigners, exiles, Outsiders. (1 Peter 2:11-12 and 2) and because we are transformed (Romans 12:2).

Sharing our story is being willing to be ones true authentic and vulnerable self in the presence of others. It is allowing others to know your “before,” “after” and “work in process” as a means to understand God’s saving grace for all. What a radical transformation they will see! Our story is filled with good news! (Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14-15)

Sharing our time means being present and attentive within each interaction and often at the sacrifice of something that you might prefer to do. We are called to always value the salvation of someone who is lost above other material and finite things. (Matthew 4:19-20)

Sharing our love means being willing to come to others just as Jesus came to us. Love of our neighbor should be initiated by us, just as it is by God. The proof that there is genuine love is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. With love the Outsider finds grace and forgiveness. The Outsider will know

²⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/make>

we are Christians by the way we love and where there is love, there is God. God is love. (John 13:35)

There is a *double entendre* meaning to **The Outsiders**.

First, God is calling the Body of Christ to go outside the physical church and be active outside in the world. We are called to build relationships that expose people to Christ. To be very frank, this call is not about church attendance but Christ attentive. God is concerned for his lost sheep, those who are existing without a relationship with Christ and are disinterested in church. There are outsiders from the Body of Christ and there are Outsiders who are not actively involved in a life with Christ. God is calling the Body of Christ to go outside the physical church and love in **outsiders** living within the world.

Within the Body of Christ, we should all desire to be The Outsider who fervently seeks out individuals within their everyday ordinary life who are existing outside of a relationship with God. The purpose in finding these **outsiders** is to introduce them to Christ and show them the way to an intimate knowledge and relationship with God. Notice the goal is not to increase The Outsider's church attendance and membership. It is far greater and deeper than people in seats and names on the roll. If we don't get moving and go forward in making disciples, finding the lost and building intentional relationships founded and held together in love of self, love of our neighbor and love of God, then we will cease to be a church. We will become a monument, a thing of the past and not the living Body of Christ in the present. We have to desire in our hearts and purpose in our actions and ministries to engage those outside of our churches and outside of a relationship with Christ and go outside to find them and love them into a loving relationship with Christ.

Dear Lord, forgive us for the things we have left undone and grant us the courage and passion to follow in the ways of Christ, that will become The Outsiders you have purposed and called us to be; for the harvest outside our churches is great! May we do as you have commanded and go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. Help us to see through your eyes, love with your heart and do as only the power of the Holy Spirit has and will equip us to do in your name.

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