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engaging your local community

a resource for churches considering partnerships
with local ministries

ENGAGING YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

THE UMVIM "MOVEMENT" VIDEO SERIES IS A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL CHURCHES TO EXPLORE TOPICS INCLUDING MISSION THEOLOGY, EFFECTIVENESS IN MISSION, AND SUSTAINABILITY.

LOCAL MISSION OFTEN TAKES A BACKSEAT TO OTHER MISSION EFFORTS, SUCH AS INTERNATIONAL MISSION. EVERYONE WANTS TO SHARE A PHOTO OR STORY ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY--BUT FEW WANT TO TALK ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES OR VISITING THE HOMELESS EVERY WEEK.

BUT LOCAL MISSION IS JUST AS CRITICAL, IF NOT MORE IMPORTANT, THAN ONCE-A-YEAR MISSION EFFORTS TO FAR AWAY PLACES.

LOCAL MISSION ENGAGEMENTS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO DEFINE AND GROW A CONGREGATION, AND TO HELP A CHURCH BECOME A PART OF A COMMUNITY.

BUT STARTING YOUR OWN MISSION EFFORT, OR EVEN PARTNERING WITH AN EXISTING ONE, IS SOMETIMES AN "EASIER SAID THAN DONE" EXERCISE.

I HOPE THIS RESOURCE WILL HELP YOU THINK THROUGH ALL LOCAL MISSION HAS TO OFFER, AND HELP YOU HAVE CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHURCH ABOUT HOW TO BECOME A PART OF YOUR COMMUNITY.

-REV. MATT LACEY, EXEC. DIR
UMVIM, SEJ



EXPLORATION QUESTIONS

DOES YOUR CHURCH HAVE AN EXISTING RELATIONSHIP WITH A MINISTRY?

If your congregation currently has a partnership with an existing ministry, there's no need to re-invent the wheel. If you are looking to do a little more, ask them what they need, or if there is a need that isn't currently being met. Chances are they will have some suggestions for you.

ARE THERE LOCAL MINISTRIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

If your church is not engaged at the local level, a quick internet search will show you potential organizations in your area. More than likely there are at least one or two. If you struggle to locate options, try asking other local churches or congregation members.

ASKING OTHER CHURCHES

If you do find some good options for local projects, but don't have a current partnership with them, ask them for a list of churches or organizations that currently support them. More often than not, they would be more than happy to give them to you to get honest feedback.

PARTNERING WITH ANOTHER CHURCH

After looking at your budget, you may realize that taking on a new outreach effort on your own is something your congregation cannot afford. Consider asking another congregation to partner and share the financial burden.

Plus this is a great way to build community and maintain a healthy number of volunteers.

DON'T COME WITH AN AGENDA

The last thing that potential projects and organizations want to hear from churches is: "This is what we think you need." Most outreach

organizations are passionate and effective in their work.

Trust them to let you know what they need. If that's not something you can offer-- that's ok!

TAKE YOUR TIME

If you live in an urban or suburban area, there may be a good number of potential projects to choose from. Be sure to take your time and do your research. Finding a good fit is key to developing a lasting relationship.

GET CHURCH LEADERSHIP ON BOARD

It's always best to involve your church leaders, both laity and clergy, before starting a new outreach effort. This step may be critical in securing funding and developing a good volunteer base.

HAVE YOUR PASTOR(S) SHARE ABOUT THE PROJECT

Having your pastor incorporate this new effort in sermons and bible studies is a great way to get the whole church on board. Plus, chances are she or he is always looking for new sermon material!

FINDING NEEDS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

If it becomes clear that there are no viable outreach partners in your area, or you are simply looking to start something on your own, demographic tools such as Mission Insite, and others, will give you an assessment of the makeup of your community. In some Annual Conferences, this service is free for churches to utilize.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Starting a mission effort from scratch is a difficult task.

One of the most time consuming elements is gaining the trust of the surrounding community, and for good reason. Sometimes those outside the church are skeptical about some churches' motives or their message. Taking the time to ask community leaders what they need, as well as listening, is a critical first step. Without this, your effort won't last long.

CONSIDER SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

No one likes to think about money. But without it many outreach efforts cannot function. When planning be sure to keep this in mind and give yourself plenty of time for the church finance team, or other committee(s), to give their blessing.

CONSIDER LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT

Having a set agreement with a mission partner or organization about the length of your church's involvement is a smart step, especially if this is a new partnership. In addition, it allows you to address questions or concerns before committing your church's volunteers and funds.

BAND-AID VS SUSTAINABILITY

Feeding the homeless is one of the first ideas that many consider for a local outreach project. Meeting an immediate need such as food or clothing is a great first step in getting your church involved. Some churches are shifting their efforts to focus on long-term sustainable needs, rather than short term "band-aid" efforts. Have this conversation with your congregation and church leaders as you plan.

VOLUNTEER BURNOUT

Developing a team to serve as a catalyst for a new mission opportunity is critical. One person, or even two or three, can't lead this effort by themselves. Also be sure to think about the future: what happens if the regularly serving volunteers "burn-out" and take a break from their service. Are there enough volunteers to cover the gap? This is another reason why getting congregational support is important because it allows you to form a wider volunteer base.

LEADERSHIP SUSTAINIBILITY

In addition to considering the long-term involvement of volunteers, be sure to think about developing a diverse leadership team that can help direct the partnership. Having just one or two church members spearheading the effort won't be sustainable in the long run.

EXPLORATION WORKSHEET

IF YOU WISH TO DREAM AND PLAN ABOUT LOCAL OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES AS A PART OF A COMMITTEE, SMALL GROUP, OR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS, WE'VE PROVIDED THIS WORKSHEET TO HELP DIRECT CONVERSATION AND ALLOW FOR MEMBERS OF THE GROUP TO EXPLORE THEIR IDEAS. PARTICIPANTS ARE ASKED TO COME UP WITH 3 IDEAS FOR POTENTIAL MINISTRIES AND WORK THROUGH THE SHEET WITH THOSE 3 IDEAS IN MIND

WHY DO YOU FEEL REACHING OUT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT?

LIST THREE NEEDS THAT YOU FEEL ARE NOT BEING MET IN YOUR COMMUNITY

1

2

3

WHAT GIFTS DO YOU FEEL YOUR CHURCH HAS TO MEET THESE NEEDS?

1

2

3

LIST POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR YOUR THREE IDEAS

1

2

3

ARE THESE FINITE [ACHIEVABLE] NEEDS OR ONGOING NEEDS?

1

2

3

WHAT CHALLENGES WILL VOLUNTEERS IN THESE MINISTRIES FACE?

1

2

3

AFTER 1 YEAR, WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE TO BE A REALISTIC OUTCOME FOR EACH OF THESE IDEAS?

1

2

3

EXAMPLE MODELS

FOOD CO-OP AT WOODLAWN UMC, BIRMINGHAM, AL

The Low-Income Food Program is an empowerment food ministry, run by a 501(c)3 called Table to Table Inc., which was birthed out of Woodlawn UMC.

- 2 co-ops with 25 households each.
- Each co-op meets twice a month, and each household receives 1/3 to 1/2 of their groceries a month.
- The co-op members put in sweat equity and commitment to the co-op community.
- Table to Table buys the food from the Central AL Food Bank.
- Our co-op members have to live in our zip code and qualify for government assisted-food.

Sample Schedule for Co-ops:

- Delivery trucks arrives (or volunteers pick-up from Food Bank)
- Each co-op member has one of the following jobs:
 - Unload trucks
 - Make coffee/hospitality
 - Sort food into categories
 - Sort and pack fresh produce
 - Ready the room for box packing
 - Divide and pack boxes depending on size of family (3 sizes: 1-3 people, 4-5 people, 6+ people)
 - Break down boxes and take out trash
 - Lead community meeting - this person also helps to order the food in the weeks before
 - Pray/Sing at our worship time
 - Load cars
 - Clean up building

Other Considerations:

Many Co-ops have one or two part time staff members who oversee the day-to-day operation and handles paper-work. One of these positions may be from the co-op community and/or a church member.

A pastor may offer to give pastoral care to co-op members, or do a devotional at the gathering time.

One of the main-values of the co-op method is **trust**. Because everyone is not leaving with the same amount of food or a box that looks just like their neighbors, trust is critical. Building this trust can be hard but once achieved as the community bonds, can provide support/friendship in ways outside the co-op.

One of the first steps is making contact with your local United Way chapter, or area food bank, to determine how they provide assistance.

NOTE ABOUT MINISTRY EXAMPLES:

WE HOPE TO CONTINUALLY UPDATE THIS SECTION WITH MORE IDEAS FOR MINISTRIES. IF YOU HAVE A MODEL THAT YOU WISH TO SHARE, CONTACT US AT SEJINFO@UMVIM.ORG