

partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

Church Plant Snapshot: The Gathering, Lancaster, Pa.

By Kolleen Long

The Gathering includes a wide array of regular meetings, ranging from a Sunday afternoon worship service; mid-week groups like Men of Valor, Overflow (for Women) and Sojourners, a co-ed group; a bi-weekly "One Mic" event at Millersville University and monthly prayer meeting called Love Night.

And they look for ways to put that love into action. Recently, Pastor Juan Carlos Morales notes, The Gathering sponsored an outreach during Millersville's homecoming weekend. The church set up tables and served hot chocolate from 10 pm to 2 am on both Friday and Saturday. "Many students were at parties and drunk," he says, "but many of them came and we got to share our faith with them as we served them hot chocolate. It was a great success. We hope and pray that somehow the Gospel was planted!"

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The Big Apple was no match for this group from The Gathering, a Lancaster-area church plant. The day trip to NYC included Mariah Marrero, Norma Marrero, Julia Shoemaker, Howard Sirota, Orlando Williams, Milan Credle, Leo Mercado, Tiara Lugardo, Eric Williams, Lenise Morales, Zion Morales, Lynette Morales, Ivelisse Pagan, Leah Lewis, Dayona Ellis, Juan Carlos, Philile Philzah, Zaniah Banks, Garrett Ellis, Stephan Brown and Olayinka Osibodu.

Making the Connection: Horizon, Allentown, Pa.

Things are happening at Horizon, especially since the church plant purchased a permanent home in January 2013. The building, an existing church structure, is located at the edge of the city of Allentown.

"Everything we're going through now, it's like it is a first for us," says Pastor Bud Daneker.

In addition to regular worship services, Horizon has five small groups that meet on a weekly basis and typical Sunday children's programs. Other efforts, Daneker says, are the result of a decisive effort to launch Horizon into their new neighborhood.

"It's been pretty cool since we moved into the building," he explains. "About 30 people are coming from the neighborhood. That's been really fun, and it's been really encouraging. A lot of people [coming to Horizons] have been disconnected from church. They all say it's exciting to see a church doing something."

His congregation has hosted movie nights and holiday-themed events, such as an Easter-egg "drop" in partnership with a volunteer fire

company. More recently, Horizon held a trick-or-treat event with 200 children in attendance. Next up is a community Thanksgiving service. They are also planning a kid's day on November 30. Parents will be invited to leave their children at the church property for a fun-filled day of food, games and a Veggie Tales movie, giving moms and dads a chance to go Christmas shopping on their own.

The congregation helps monthly with a program that feeds the homeless in Allentown.

They are also part of VAST (Valley Against Sexual Trafficking), a group that helps provide housing for women escaping this existence, and Touch of Life Foundation, an orphanage in Guyana. "We've helped them to get a building," Daneker notes of the latter, "and we're planning a mission trip to Guyana next summer to work at the orphanage a week or so."

Prayer is, of course, an essential ingredient to all of Horizon's efforts,

and Daneker notes spiritual intercession is needed from brothers and sisters in the EC denomination. Pray, he asks, that new people get connected. "It's hard because you have a lot of new people who show

up and they think that everyone else belongs."

"We spend a lot of time praying for people to get connected," he adds, noting a particular challenge is bringing together a range of people from a gamut of religious backgrounds, from

Buddhism to Christianity. Many have a healthy dose of skepticism and are hesitant to fully commit.

"How do you present the gospel in meaningful ways to them? They come with a lot of church baggage," he explains. "Just that process of trying to heal people from the ugliness of their past, the suspicions they have, trying to help these people connect to faith is somewhat challenging."

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— Bud Daneker

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The church sponsors other events, including day trips to New York City and a mission outreach in the Dominican Republic. They are planning to attend a men's conference in Minneapolis as well as take a follow-up trip to the Dominican in 2014. "We are also in prayer about Japan 2015 to visit EC churches there," Morales explains. "So we are excited about that!"

As they look to the future, Morales notes, they hope to connect with more church partners as well as continue to draw people into fellowship at The Gathering. As the

congregation grows, Morales says, "we can then do more for the people and students of Millersville. We have started membership classes and have gotten a great response from people who want to become members."

"Pray that we continue to be faithful with what God has given us," Morales continues. "We are excited to see what is in store for next year! Pray for our families to be strong and committed to each other and for clear direction on what to do next as a church plant."

PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

Church-planting efforts face the same hurdle facing all believers: how to share the unchanging message of the Gospel to an ever-changing culture. That's one reason church-planting encompasses such a range of ministries, from congregational plants and restarts to missional outreaches in coffee shops, game rooms and beyond. We ask that you keep all of our church plants in your prayers. Specifically, as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3, pray that "the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you."

CURRENT PLANTING MINISTRIES

PLANTS:

- ★ **Allentown, PA** . . . *Horizon* (Bud Daneker)
- Bethlehem, PA . . . Sonrise (Rick Sergi) . . . and LifeTree Café
- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Harrisburg PA . . . Restore Community (Brian Parker)
- ★ **Lancaster, PA** . . . *The Gathering* (Juan Carlos Morales)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . Comunidad Biblica (Rolando Diaz)
 - Allentown, PA location
- Pottstown, PA . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
- York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)

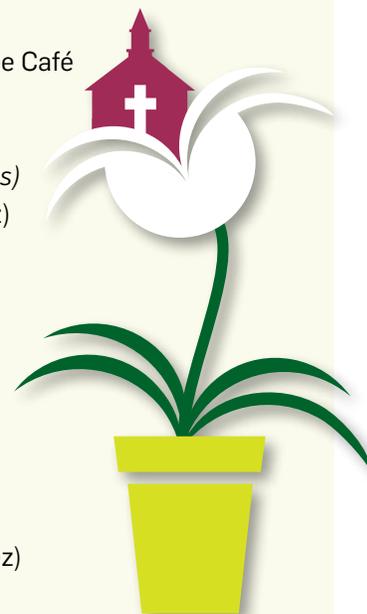
RESTARTS / REVITALIZATIONS:

- Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
- Tallmadge, OH . . . New Direction (Tim Ream)

INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS / MISSIONAL WORKS / POTENTIAL ADOPTIONS:

- Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
- ★ **Reedsville, PA** . . . *LifeTree Café* (Jeff Byerly)
- ★ **Sinking Spring & Mohn's Hill, PA** . . . *Lifetree Café* (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)

★ These five church-planting ministries are featured in this edition of *Partners*. Look for insights into additional plants in the next newsletter in 2014!



The Gathering, an EC Church plant in Lancaster, Pa., sent a mission team to the Dominican Republic this year. Participants included Garrett Ellis, Dayona Ellis, Milan Credle, Zion Morales, Juan Carlos Morales, Lynette Morales, Lenise Morales, Reese Brown, Zane Brown, Saba Battles Williams, Brittney Koser, Orlando Williams, Olayinka Osibodu, Ryon Freeman, Geraldine Gelin, Jim White, Rebecca Auguste and Theresa White.



The **PURPOSE** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to know Christ and make Him known.

The **MISSION** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to help churches plant healthy churches that proclaim Christ to a hurting world.

The **VISION** of the Church Planting Commission is that the Evangelical Congregational Church becomes a Church Multiplication movement, realized when churches plant healthy churches that plant healthy churches.

Growing Roots: Lifetree Cafés

By Kolleen Long

The EC Church currently supports four Lifetree Cafés in Bethlehem, Reedsville and the Reading area. These missional outreaches connect believers with people in their communities who have left – or never engaged with – the evangelical church but are open to spiritual discussions, all in a neutral location. The format of the weekly meets is simple: gather to watch a short film then stay to discuss its cultural “hot topic.” Recent weeks have focused on ghosts, grief, Islam, gun control, forgiveness, suicide, UFOs and hoarding.

The important thing,” Jeff Byerly of the Reedsville Lifetree says, “is that we connect with a variety of people during and after the episode. There is a beautiful community that continues to emerge between people from differing backgrounds and experiences. It is a gospeling community of its own – a body that is not only tethered to our church, but operates as its own body.”

Jerry Artz of Mohn’s Hill notes that, with time, the Lifetree events do draw people back to God. “We are building community,” he explains. “After three years we are seeing people join small groups at our church. Friendships are growing deeper. We are seeing people hurt by church and far from God slowly softening to searching again.”

Church members who attend the cafés must find the right balance between sharing and listening. Respect is key, notes Byerly. This approach has allowed his group to befriend a frequent participant, a Muslim woman who speaks positively about the topics and is open to hearing about Jesus. Nathan Matz, director of the Canal Street Pub café, shares how a

seemingly random meeting turned into a heartfelt conversation with a woman deeply hurt by institutionalized religion. He invited her to attend Lifetree; she came and stayed for three hours, sharing family concerns with team members who had been in her shoes.

“Our team sent her out into the night with warm hugs,” Matz recounts. “Before she left, she made sure to tell us that this night was exactly what she needed. She expressed that she would like to continue coming and that maybe someday she could convince her current boyfriend or son to tag along too. So we’ll trust God for that as well!”

As more people attend these cafés, expansion is necessary and additional opportunities arise. The Reedsville group is looking to add a second meeting night in 2014. Sinking Spring hosted the Eastern Regional training for Lifetree LLC with 50 people in attendance. At the Canal Street café, Matz notes, they currently meet twice a month and are planning now to start a small group in response to those who attend.

“We have a tremendous need in this area; seekers are asking for this! Even the owner of the pub [who allows

the café to meet rent-free] who is not a believer is asking to join,” he explains. “This group will be designed for people to come and openly express their anger, doubts, hurts and frustrations and ask the tough questions that people are not talking about at church. This group has not started yet but will start soon. We are waiting on God’s timing for this and his clear direction. Obviously this is the front lines of winning souls for his kingdom and we are under tremendous attack because of this very group trying to start!”

All the Lifetree Cafés need prayer to continue their efforts. Pray for more staff to commit to the events, asks Byerly, and for available locations at low or no rental costs, says Artz. “Pray that many who have left the church would find Lifetree a safe place to share their journey,” he adds.

“Pray against the evil one,” Matz adds, and that the Lord “will continue to work and heal hurting people. Pray for our team to be sensitive to the spirit on when to listen, when to speak and do it all out of Christ’s love, not out of obligation. “

