

partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

Sharing Spaces, Church Planting Edition

By Kolleen Long

DO YOU REMEMBER the popular show *Trading Spaces* from awhile back? It was one of my favorites. Two sets of neighbors, aided by zany designers and an inventive carpenter, went into each other's homes and completely remodeled a room. Sometimes the results were great, other times they were appalling. And that's what made the show so watchable! Trading spaces could be . . . scary!

But sharing church spaces – the focus of this newsletter – doesn't have to be scary. In fact, many congregations have found successful and satisfying ways to make it work.

From a practical mindset, it makes sense to share a church facility. Many buildings sit empty for days at a time. Others include rooms or areas that are primarily neglected.



The Gathering "family" (shown above at a recent outdoor outreach) is one of two new congregations that share space with Grace EC Church, Millersville. Read inside this issue of *Partners* to discover how three diverse evangelical groups not only coexist but benefit from sharing one roof.

Sharing church space is also a way to practice hospitality. It allows you to reach a segment of your community that may be in the dark. And it's a way to keep the flame burning in your own hearts. As the

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"Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be **inventive in hospitality."**

(ROMANS 12:11-13, THE MESSAGE).

SHARING IN ACTION

Here are some of the EC Churches currently sharing their facilities with another congregation:

- York, Pa.:** *York St. Paul* and *Iglesia Cristiana* (both led by Carlos Kelly).
- Ephrata, Pa.:** *Ephrata Grace* (Jeff Martin) and *House of Blessings* (Abe Montanez).
- Lancaster, Pa.:** *Trinity* (Bruce Sellers) and *Iglesia De Dios Ven A El* (Luis Ramirez).
- Millersville, Pa.:** *Grace* (John Tornfelt) and *Tapestry* (Ed Runkle) and *The Gathering* (Juan Carlos Morales).
- Brownstown, Pa.:** *Ebenezer* (Keith Miller) and *Abundant Life Revival Ministry* (Jose Rivera).

A Match Made in Heaven?

Between that first meeting between leaders of the churches involved and the congregation's approval vote, make sure some key questions are covered:

- Do both congregations agree on theology?
- Will rent be paid?
- What spaces will be shared? How often?
- How will set-up tasks fit into everyone's timeframe?
- What supplies will be shared between the groups?
- Who will handle cleaning?

Once an agreement is reached, leaders should meet regularly to make sure all parts of the plan still work. And they should look for practical ways for the congregations to interact, from social events to community outreaches.

If your church is considering opening its doors to another congregation, make sure discussion, planning and communication are a part of the process. For more points to ponder, see "How to Share Your Buildings without Losing Your Church" (<http://www.joyfulheart.com/church/share.htm>).

Can Three Congregations Share One Space? Yes!

Grace EC Church, Millersville, is home to not one, not two, but three independent congregations: the host congregation, Tapestry and The Gathering all find a unique way to use the space, and a unique way to reach the diverse community around the building they all call home.

Rev. John Tornfelt, Grace's pastor, says the arrangement works well for all three congregations, perhaps due to demographics: mostly senior citizens comprise Grace's membership; mostly young adults and families attend The Gathering; and Tapestry has those primarily in the middle. In addition, both Tapestry and the Gathering pay rent to Grace, which helps offset not only basic building costs but also the increase in utilities, etc., due to extra usage. In return the two groups have the meeting space they need.

For the past several years, Grace's congregation has held a 9 am worship service, followed by Sunday School. This allows Tapestry, led by Pastor Ed Runkle, to set up for a 10:30 service in the sanctuary. Since both groups are

on the grounds at the same time, they intermingle during a coffee/social time between services.

The Gathering began meeting at Grace since its start one year ago. They meet on Saturday evenings in the lower level, which includes a nursery, children's room, kitchen and main meeting room which comfortably fits the 50-55 people in attendance. This fall, they will switch their worship service time to Sunday afternoons. The Gathering also holds small groups at various homes throughout the week.

While college students are a key demographic, several young families have begun to attend The Gathering, including a growing number of infants and children. "Our bend is more of a hip-hop style and culture," Juan Carlos Morales, teaching pastor, explains. "But at the same time we don't – for the sake of relevance – abandon what the church has done historically."

Or, as Tornfelt puts it, "We're all singing Amazing Grace – we may be singing it differently, but we're all singing the same tune."

Tornfelt, Morales and Runkle meet

regularly to ensure all runs smoothly. "We make an effort to meet, talk, and communicate so if there are issues, we can deal with them," Tornfelt confirms. The pastors also look for ways to build relationships between members of the three congregations.

Tapestry's ministry includes addiction-recovery groups, and they also plan to start Alpha groups in the fall. Individuals from any of the three congregations are welcome to participate in these groups. And the churches also participate in combined events like a Christmas Eve service, community outreaches and church clean-up days.

"We want to further that [interaction] into more of a regular thing, instead of waiting for an event," Morales says, noting that such relationships can only enhance each congregation's ministries. "I think it's going to get to another level."

"We're locking arms, we're joining hands," Tornfelt says. "The bottom line is, we need them and they need us. But it's more than that. We want to do things together."

Lancaster Congregations Find the Right Fit

Luis Ramirez, pastor of Iglesia De Dios Ven A El, was not the first to approach Trinity EC Church, Lancaster, about sharing facilities. Trinity's pastor, Rev. Bruce Sellers, recalls that a wide variety of groups asked the same question over the years, but none of these turned out to be a good match.

That changed several years ago when, after a Sunday morning worship service, Ramirez approached Sellers to talk about his Latino church plant. They were fast outgrowing their space in a private home, and Ramirez asked about the possibility of meeting at Trinity instead.

"I just felt there was a spirit connection between the two of us," Sellers recalls. In fact, the two men discovered, they had both lived in the same area of western New York.

Due to this initial comfort level, Sellers and Ramirez set up meetings to explore their options. Discussions ranged from visions for their congregations to the needs of

each group. Ramirez, who operates independently of the denomination, reviewed the EC discipline. In all, except for some cultural differences, Sellers and Ramirez found the two churches were a good match.

Ramirez next met with Trinity's church board, and then the decision to share facilities was put before members during a congregational meeting. After the presentation, Sellers recalls clearly, one woman said, "It seems to me, if this is what God wants us to do, why wouldn't we do it?" After a moment of silence, heads began nodding in agreement and Trinity voted to open its doors to Iglesia De Dios.

A written agreement was established early in the relationship, outlining what facilities would be used and when. While Iglesia De Dios Ven A El does not pay a set rent, they volunteered to contribute each month based on the money they collect. "They have been very, very faithful to do that," Sellers says.

The Latino congregation meets

each Sunday afternoon for worship at the Trinity building. While they originally used just the sanctuary and a connected classroom, they recently began using the downstairs hall, as well, in order to accommodate a growing children's ministry. They also meet at Trinity on two other evenings for prayer and teaching sessions.

Seller says that the opportunity to share its space has benefited his congregation in many ways. "There has been some forward movement in the vision of our people to be willing to use what is really God's property and God's resources for kingdom purposes," he notes, adding, "I look at it as an opportunity to be part of what God is doing."

Since matching up with Iglesia De Dios and even participating in some joint events, like a combined church picnic, Trinity's members are connecting with people they might otherwise never know. And, Sellers jokes, "it's made some of us learn more Spanish."



The Gathering has met in the lower level of Grace EC, Millersville, since its start one year ago and is reaching a hip-hop generation with the ageless truth of the Gospel. The group recently held a three-on-three tournament at Millersville University, which featured artist Jeo Ramos (G.O.D.sent), pictured on the left. On the right, a Millersville student converses with Juan Carlos Morales, Mark Ammerman and Pablo Candelaria of The Gathering.

PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

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

Please pray for our church planters, their families and their ministries by name. Invite others to join you in praying for our planters on the first Sunday of each month.

ASK GOD TO:

- Set a hedge of safety around our planters and their families
- Meet the physical, emotional, spiritual and financial needs of our planters
- Energize our planters and their ministry teams for the adventure
- Provide opportunities for our planters to engage the lost for Christ
- Fill our planters with wisdom for preaching, teaching and counseling
- Protect our planters and their families from any kind of harm
- Guard the hearts of our planters

CURRENT PROJECTS

PLANTS

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

RESTARTS / REVITALIZATIONS

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

INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS / MISSIONAL WORKS / POTENTIAL ADOPTIONS

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



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apostle Paul urged early Christians, "Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality." (Romans 12:11-13, THE MESSAGE).

As evangelicals, we strive to have a kingdom mindset, and the idea that our building is not really "ours" but God's fits into that mindset. Why shouldn't a building be shared by two (ore more) groups with the same goal: to reach others for Christ?

Of course, the decision should not be taken lightly. And the ways you share a facility can be as unique as your congregations. Early planning, ongoing communication and lots of prayer are key. Read on to see how several EC churches have successfully approached sharing spaces.



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.