

# partners

THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

## New Direction: Producing New Growth

By Kolleen Long

**N**ew Direction, a restart church plant in Tallmadge, Ohio, is taking just that – a new direction. In some ways, explains Pastor Tim Ream, it feels like his congregation is restarting once again. “But,” he adds, “at the same time there is a renewed hope and vision and energy that is in our midst that wasn’t always there.”

Recently, Ream noticed among his congregants a couple he did not know, but who seemed to know many others in the church. He learned they had previously attended New Direction before its restart, and had since tried – and failed – to find a new church. “They had been worshipping other places but never felt at home,” Ream says. “They said, ‘It feels good to be home.’ That was, for me, a pretty healing experience.”

He explained that the first 18 months of the restart had included lots of “ground clearing,” work that remained to be done to close the

old church before focusing on the new. Things began to change about six months ago. At that point, Ream says, “We gave up and said [to God], ‘If you’re going to make this happen, you’re going to have to do it.’”

And God was faithful, he affirms. “He’s provided resources and he’s provided healing, either immediate or through time. Every time, he’s been faithful.

“It’s a different spirit in the church. It’s one of hope, one of God moving. We need to keep up and be running alongside him, watching to see what he’s going to do.”

Today, New Direction is seeking God’s direction and members are taking initiative. Some participants in a study on holiness, for example, began a home study, inviting friends and coworkers to participate. Another couple started a mid-week prayer meeting which routinely lasts several hours. More recently, a man formulated a plan to systematically walk through

their city (which borders Akron, Ohio) and pray for each of Tallmadge’s 20,000 residences.

The congregation also holds two special Sunday night services each month, the first of which emphasizes food and fellowship. The second is dedicated to discipleship training, or “New Direction 101.” Discussion ranges from the meaning of salvation to what role the bishop plays in the EC Church. “We’re training people in the nuances of the denomination and in their own faith,” Ream says.

They are also reaching out to former congregation members by planning a “United Healing Service” this June. Ream hopes the event will foster reconciliation and offer a sense of closure. “It’s part of the foundation clearing that needs to happen so we can build on the good foundation we already have and the good things we have going on,” Ream says.

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# Restoring Community

By Kolleen Long

**R**estore Community, located in Harrisburg, was birthed to create and cultivate missional communities, with the goal of connecting with people who are disillusioned by the church. “We hope to influence those who are disconnected to become disciples,” Pastor Brian Parker says, and he believes God has sent him to those who would never wander into the doors of a church.

There is a sense both of excitement and risk in giving Jesus full access, time and energy to your life, Parker says. “And it’s been neat to see the seeds of the gospel planted in lives.”

The community generally meets in a home setting. Regular activities include a twice-monthly missional community, which welcomes those outside the church who are interested in deeper spiritual conversations. Restore also gathers twice a month for “DNA,” or discipleship, nurturing and accountability. These meetings are for committed members (15 to 20 on any given week) to pray, foster spiritual growth and challenge each other to reach out.

This past year, for example, they connected with a mother and daughter in a rough spot. The family car was totaled and they lacked the funds to replace it. “Our community got together, and one of the couples who just got married had a third car just sitting,” Parker explains. “They offered to give her the car. It needed some repairs, and the community offered to pay for the repairs.”

These acts of generosity helped the woman to trust the church enough to engage with some of its members. “The mother is still disillusioned with the church,” Parker says, but “she’s read

scripture with us and no longer outrightly rejects God. She’s been willing to hear the words that God loves her and her family.”

In fact, the woman and her daughter have started to give back through Restore’s Power Pack project, part of a greater nationwide movement that fills backpacks with foods and other supplies for families who depend on free school lunches. Restore’s local program assists 400 families a month.

Each week, four or five Restore volunteers organize the basic supplies and hand them out at a school. Around Easter time, some of the supplies included diapers, which moved some recipients to tears. “They couldn’t believe what they were receiving,” Parker recounts, “and we were blown away by the fact that

we get to be an extension of Jesus to those in desperate need.”

He relates this type of active ministry to the words of James: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (1:27).”

“The relationships we’ve been able to build, those we’ve been able to serve and love, it’s just been amazing,” says Parker. In the past 6 months, Restore has connected with 90 “people of peace,” individuals who are not ready to commit to faith as yet, but who are engaged and interested in building relationships and discussing spiritual matters.

“They bear witness to what God is doing in our lives,” Parker says of these people, “and they see what God is doing in their lives, too.” One couple has made the transition from becoming people of peace to becoming committed members of Restore. “They’ve been able to grasp the full picture,” Parker explains, and the couple is now building relationships and praying for other people of peace.

They are among a larger group of people who have reconnected with the church through Restore’s efforts, although not all of them choose to remain with that specific church family. Some move on to other, more traditional churches in their areas. For his part, Parker is happy that Restore has been a bridge, allowing people to find their way into the evangelical body of Christ.

“It’s not about us and building our church,” he says. “It’s about Christ and building his kingdom.”

“I’m excited to tell you these stories,” he concludes. “The stories and numbers represent the spiritual passion of Restore in our community. It’s happening - we see it happening in our communities. We are engaging the disengaged and giving new

vision to the disillusioned.”

“I’m struck by the fact that we are growing and being restored by God’s story in the scriptures, and our lives and the lives around us are already being restored,” he says. “I’m excited to see what Christ has in store for us as we continue to live out the Gospel and reach out to those disillusioned by the church.”

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# Sergi to Conclude Time at Sunrise

By Kolleen Long

Change is on the horizon for Sunrise, an EC Church Plant in Bethlehem, Pa. Pastor Rick Sergi announced to his congregation in April that the denomination asked him to take a full-time position, one he has accepted, at Emmanuel EC Church in Bethlehem.

When he makes the transition to Emmanuel in July, Sergi says some of Sunrise's attendees may choose to follow him, and others may choose to find another church. But his hope, Sergi says, is that Sunrise will continue with a new pastor. Since Sunrise began as an outreach under New Bethany EC, Allentown, which is led by Pastor Gus Al-khal, Sergi is hopeful that a new leader will be found through New Bethany's lay leadership.

On a typical Sunday, 10 to 20 or more people attend Sunrise services, which are held in a large meeting room at Arabic Living Church in Bethlehem (a second charge for Pastor Al-khal). The informal service begins with the group sitting in a large circle to talk about their week.

"It's kind of like family getting together," Sergi explains. "We reconnect, find out prayer needs or praises they have to share. It leads to a foundation for how the rest of the service unfolds."

Some weeks, they go directly into prayer as group. Other weeks, they break into small groups for discussion. The flexible format suits the attendees' range of ages, including teenagers, married couples and senior citizens.

No matter their age, all are encouraged to look for ministry opportunities in their work place, family or neighborhood. And all find encouragement in the Sunrise setting.

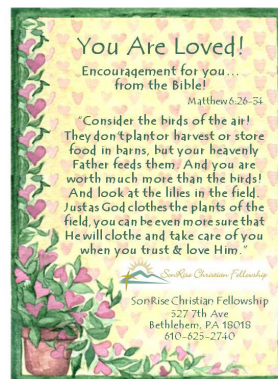
Sergi often uses the classic Verizon commercial image, the one where the

service tech stands with the entire network behind him. "You may be the point person in your family or in the place you work," he tells the Sunday gathering. "But behind you is 'us.' We have people, we have resources, we have the ability to help you minister in the places you find."

If one person shares something going on in his work place, for example, the entire Sunrise group may find a way they can help. The goal is to show their communities a positive view of God and his followers.

"We're trying to essentially give God a good testimony in those situations," Sergi says. "We go out into the community around the church with some kind of blessing. . . bags of groceries, books, flowers. We go door to door, with a gift in hand, just to bless people. It gives us an excuse to ring the doorbell."

"One of the things we've said all along, and it seems to be coming true, is that we never know how long we'll be



here," Sergi notes, "but as long as God allows us to meet, we want to give God a good name. [We show someone] there is a God, that he loves you and we're a part of showing you that love."

The move to Emmanuel will be a big change for Sergi, who has been

an engineer for three decades and has been leading the church plant for six years as a bivocational pastor.

"I remember back when we first talked about [starting Sunrise], everything sounded good up until the time we ready to launch and I just sort of panicked," Sergi admits. Like Moses, he began listing for God the reasons he was not qualified to lead the plant. In response, God led him to the book of Acts, where Sergi read Peter's words: "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk (Acts 3:6 NIV)."

To Sergi, God's message was clear: "That's all I'm asking. I don't care about what you don't have. What you do have, I want you to share."

That, says Sergi, has been his desire at Sunrise and will remain his desire as he ministers in a new place— to share a love for God and his word and a chance to have a relationship with God.

"Having been faithful to do that in a small setting, God is blessing me and allowing me to do that in a larger setting," Sergi says. "The setting may be different but the ministry isn't."



Members of Sunrise, a church plant in Bethlehem, Pa., regularly go door-to-door in their neighborhood, handing out a item like these cheerful plants, in the hope of blessing their community. It gives them the excuse to ring the doorbell, Pastor Rick Sergi confirms, and reminds people who need to hear it that God loves them.



New Direction has continued outreaches that have proved successful, such as a community Easter egg hunt. The restart is also embracing new opportunities, such as hosting a Corn Hole tournament in May, organizing an outdoor baptism service this summer and holding a Bike Blessing and Rally from July 11 to 13. The motorcycle event will include opportunities to

camp on the church lawn, a Saturday ride through Ohio's Amish country and an outside Sunday worship.

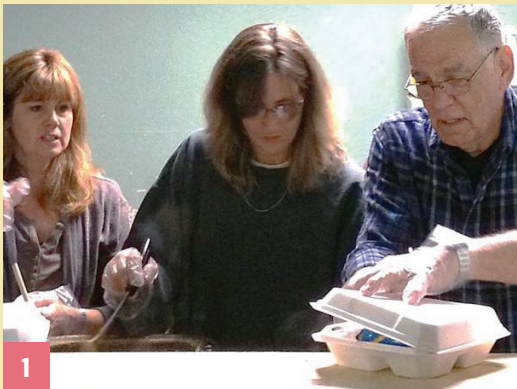
Plans have been laid regarding raised garden beds, built at the church last year. Ream serves as chaplain for a spiritually-based free clinic, and the church is teaming up with this clinic to start a pilot program for at-risk diabetics. One Saturday a month, 100 clients

will receive nutritional counseling and have opportunity to work in the garden.

Church members and others from the community will serve as hosts during the monthly garden program.

"If spiritual questions come up, they can be there to answer those questions," Ream explains. "And if the conversation isn't going in that direction, they can hopefully guide it there."

## New Direction, Tallmadge, Ohio, In Action:



1



2



3a



3b



4a



4b



5

- 1 Laboring for their neighbors in a South Akron soup kitchen
- 2 Celebrating a member's healing from cancer
- 3a, b Creating raised garden beds in joint ministry with Faithful Servants Care Center
- 4a, b Giving free water at the city's Touch A Truck event
- 5 Inviting local families to an Easter egg hunt

# GREAT COMMISSION PRAYERS

Jesus said, “... go and make disciples....”

That is exactly what our church planters are doing. And it is a spiritual endeavor. Please pray for our planters, their families and their ministries.



## **PRAY FOR OUR CHURCH PLANTERS BY NAME. ASK GOD TO:**

- Provide the daily needs of their families.
- Protect them from unnecessary distractions.
- Provide ministry contacts in their communities.
- Protect them from Satan's attacks.

## **PRAY FOR OUR CHURCH WORKS BY NAME. ASK GOD TO:**

- Provide the financial needs of the ministry.
- Protect the unity of each fellowship group.
- Provide the necessary leaders and volunteers.
- Protect the heart of the pastor, leaders and volunteers.

## **PLANTS**

- Bethlehem, PA . . . Sunrise (Rick Sergi)
- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Harrisburg area, PA . . . Restore Community (Brian Parker)
- Lehigh Valley, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Millersville, PA . . . The Gathering (Juan Carlos Morales)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . Comunidad Biblica (Rolando Diaz)
- Allentown, PA location
- Pottstown area, 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)
- Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)
- Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring & Mohn's Hill, PA . . . Two Lifetree Cafés (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- “Off the Avenue” and “Canal Street”



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.