

CHURCH GROWTH often follows well-planned community outreach programs and events. Knowing what to do, and when to do it, often leaves us mystified. Relax! Experts await your call or e-mail, waiting to help you put your best foot forward. Consider one or more of the following resources as you plan your next outreach.

Church Ad Project supplies relevant and attractive ad designs that can be used as postcards, flyers and posters. More than 100 fee-for-use ad designs are available. Contact: 800-331-9391; www.churchad.com.

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Outreach provides church communication and outreach tools, ideas and materials designed to reach people for Christ. Contact: 800-991-6011; www.outreach.com.

Make an impression, leave a reminder. Effective outreach must be memorable.

The following companies provide logo-imprinted gimmicks to enhance your next outreach program or event. Talk with one of their representatives instead of settling for whatever it was you did the last time you did an outreach.

- **Gopromos:** 800-523-9909 or www.GOpromos.com
- **4imprint:** 877-446-7746 or www.4imprint.com
- **Promo Direct:** 800-748-3326 or www.promodirect.com

"The greatest need in the world is the transformation of human nature. We need a new heart that will not have lust and greed and hate in it. We need a heart filled with love and peace and joy, and that is why Jesus came into the world." —BILLY GRAHAM, JUST AS I AM

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Newsletter Staff • Kolleen Long, Editor • Maureen Logan, Art Director • Brenda Long, Administrative Assistant



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100 West Park Ave, Myerstown PA 17067
717-866-7581 • eccenter@eccenter.com
www.eccenter.com

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Changing Your Church Can Change Your Life *by Kolleen Long*

BOTH RON AND BONNIE BELKNAP have grown closer to the Lord since deciding to try a new congregation, Jacob's Church in New Tripoli. Led by Rev. Scott Shay, the established church is currently in the process of joining the EC denomination.

The church, Ron says, is "a real Bible believing and teaching group of people that really help you to understand the teachings of the Bible. The fellowship at Jacob's is amazing and you just get this warm feeling when you are in their company and that feeling stays with you when you leave. This really helps you throughout the following week when you sometimes have to deal with difficult people or situations."

Ron, who owns an engineer design and services company, and Bonnie, an administrative assistant for a college athletic department, have two grown children, Jeremy and Jennifer, and had attended the UCC church in the past. They had grown uncomfortable with the direction that denomination's teachings were taking them as well as dissatisfied with their weekly worship experience. Ron adds, "It became work and it was not enjoyable to attend on a regular basis."

As they considered what to do, the Belknaps remembered a pastoral couple they'd met through their children. Donna Shay was Jeremy's fourth grade teacher, and the Shay's son was on a baseball team Ron coached. In addition, Pastor Shay was one of the speakers at Jeremy's

high school baccalaureate program. "We often said if we were looking for a church, that was the first church we'd check out," Ron says.

The Belknaps did not have to enter Jacob's Church to find out how friendly the congregation was. They were welcomed in the church parking lot the first day they visited. "People really reached out to us initially," says Ronald, "which made us feel welcome, right from day one."

Also from day one, the couple found ways to be involved, from church suppers to weekend retreats. They have served as greeters and given testimony at a Thanksgiving service. And each

Sunday, Ron says, they are eager to head back to worship.

"Pastor Shay is amazing," he explains. "We love his sermons because he delivers them on our level and he always has a message that you can take home with you and use the following week. He and his wife, Donna, have special personalities that are very warm and make you

feel so welcome at and out of the church . . . Their warmth is what also sets the tone for such amazing fellowship amongst the members."

The Belknaps joined Jacob's Church in July 2006, after attending services there for about six months. "Pastor Shay always talks about how the Lord has a plan for all of us," Ron says. "We are not sure why the Lord didn't guide us to Jacob's earlier, but maybe sometimes you have to see what else is out there to appreciate what you have."

Transform,
according to Webster's Dictionary, means "to change in composition or structure" or "to change in character or condition."

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.

WARNING:

Reading Scripture Will Promote Transformation

by Kolleen Long

WATCH OUT before asking Mercedes Cruz about her new life in Christ. She is so excited about growing in her faith; it's bound to be contagious.

He provides for me," Cruz says of her heavenly Father. "I know it. I've felt it and I've seen it. I've given up my whole self to him and my faith will be today, it will be tomorrow and it will be my future."

A native of Puerto Rico and long-time educator, Cruz first walked through the doors of Buenas Nuevas in West Hazleton about 18 months ago. "I decided I was looking for a church," Cruz says, who at that point had lived in Pennsylvania for about four years. "[I was] at a point in my life where I needed something."

She had heard of the bilingual church plant in Hazleton, but actually ended up driving around the block a few times before finding Buenas Nuevas. She felt welcomed by the congregation, and formed a friendship with Pastor Edwin and Marisel Mieses. Within a few months, Cruz also formed a transforming relationship with her Savior.

Accepting Christ was just the first step in changing her life. "It was after I started to read the Bible and understand what the Bible was saying, that I was saying, 'Wow, this is what I want to do. This is what I need to do.'"

Like most people, Cruz has plenty of responsibilities to fill her days. A school teacher for over two decades, she now works for the Migrant Education Program in northeast Pennsylvania, spending her days as an advocate for children in migrant families. Cruz also has an adult son who lives in Texas, and a grown daughter and granddaughter still living in Puerto Rico.

As her faith matured, however, Cruz realized she had to make time for God's work, as well.

"God has saved me and I want to give back," Cruz says. "Even when I wasn't thinking of him, when I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing, he loved me. That love is so unconditional. I'm still in that first love."

Today, her evenings are filled with church activities: teaching a citizenship class on Mondays, hosting a cell group in

her home on Tuesdays and leading English classes on Wednesdays. She also hopes to start working with children's ministries in the near future.



MERCEDES CRUZ

Cruz remains determined to keep growing spiritually through the Bible. "I'm studying about the Lord because I wanted to know more about him," she explains. And attending Bible classes at her church is a priority.

"God is part of my life now," affirms Cruz. "Before, I tried to do everything on my own. I have a different life now. I see things differently. Now I know that God's the one I need to ask. He's the one who takes control of what I need to do. He's the only one I know that I can trust. I actually have a love affair with him and the church has really been a support for me. The messages really apply to me and my every day."

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

—ROMANS 12:2 (NIV)

Sometimes, You Can Go Home Again

by Kolleen Long

FOR CHAD DOTTERY, returning to his faith began with a literal step: revisiting the church building of his childhood. He remembers attending services at Trinity Evangelical, Palmerton, with his parents. "And then my parents stopped going to church," he explains. "And I did, too."

Years passed, and Dottery focused on other aspects of life. But as his 30th year approached, the sales representative decided to take another look at spiritual matters. "I just felt that I needed a change in my life," he recalls. "I needed to do something, and I wanted to get closer to God. So I went back to where I started."

When he reentered the familiar church doors four years ago, however, Dottery noticed many changes, starting with the name. The EC congregation had been restarted as Living Hope Lighthouse, led by Pastor Nathan Fry.

"It was different than how I remembered it," Dottery says, then quickly adds, "but it was a good experience. I liked how the pastor presented the message every week. I liked the songs that we sang in worship."

Initial forays into church life were tentative. "When I originally started going back to church, I didn't attend regularly. It wasn't a priority for me to get there every Sunday. As I began to go a little more often and start to fellowship with others and become closer with the pastor, I slowly started becoming more spiritual and before you know it, I started attending more often."

"I got involved in various things at the church like get-togethers, fellowship luncheons and that led to starting reading the Bible more, praying more, just getting closer to God. Now, there's never a week that I miss church," he says. "I'm there every Sunday faithfully."

Four years since returning to his childhood faith, Dottery's life has changed on many levels. He now has a wife, Angela. He has a spiritual family at Living Hope



Chad Dottery (left) and Pastor Nathan Fry are part of Living Hope Lighthouse, an Evangelical Congregational Church restart in Palmerton, Pennsylvania.

Lighthouse. He notes that his friendship with his pastor has been a huge influence. And Dottery sees a change in himself, as well.

"When I first started going to [Living Hope], I would find my little spot in the church and just keep to myself," he says. "I've come a long way. Now, I actually enjoy walking around and meeting people and getting to know others."

Dottery tends to look for behind-the-scene ways to volunteer. He has planned bowling outings and attended ministry planning meetings, for example, and he fills in for the sound technician.

"I got out of my shell a little bit and have gone in front of the church and done the announcements and prayer and read scripture," he adds.

Obviously, Dottery is happy he gave the church another chance. He encourages those who have let their faith fall to the side to reconsider: "Let God do his work. If you're hungry and thirsty for God and you just give it a chance, you'll see the results and you'll be happy with them."

"We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

—2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 (NIV)