

“Thank you so much for the chocolate chip cookies. They were yummy. All of us, Judy, Kate and Jerry appreciate your recognition of Norwalk Business Appreciation Day and your extra efforts to make it memorable. In return, thank you for the good work that you do in Norwalk.”

**Blessings
Judy and Staff
(Local Business)**

This was one of the many responses we received following a recent act of kindness outreach at our church. Watching the town recognize our presence and developing new relationships with those who do not know Christ has been an exciting experience. They know who we are what we are about and they are responding!

An Outreach Strategy for the Local Church

“If we are serious about reaching this community and experiencing growth, then we must expand this facility.”

Hearing that statement ignited an immediate mental and emotional journey from our beginnings at the church to where our discoveries of God’s amazing grace find us at this moment.

Almost immediately, however, two additional statements interrupted my thought patterns:

“We asked God to bless this work and bring people to Himself and He answered our prayer” said one individual.

“I think we should take on this entire project by faith: God is in this,” one of our seasoned saints communicated.

You can hardly imagine the joy I felt as I listened, reflected and thanked God during that brief interaction with those I love and serve with here at _____.

Following that discussion we voted to expand our facility **by three times** — “beginning immediately.”

And it all began with a strategy...

A simple strategy created to help people visualize — *and experience* — what could and should be done in order for a church to grow God’s way.

How I “discovered” this simple, workable strategy may be seen in the context of my story.

Following my graduation from seminary, I ran into a brick church wall: most sought out men to serve as Christian education, youth or music pastors.

But my desire revolved around reaching out to those far from God and seeking to bring them into the wide and beautiful arena of God’s grace.

Sure, church planting remained an option but that door didn’t open for me.

So my wife, Lisa, and I headed to her hometown where I began lay work to support my family.

What an incredible adventure our move began!

In a town of 17,000 people (which I'm sure included the pets!), we began worshipping and serving with the other 180 people of Calvary Baptist Church in Norwalk, Ohio.

I admired the lead pastor's faithfulness and vision for what the church could do. Nourished in that environment of acceptance and appreciation for who God created me to be, I made myself available as a volunteer at Calvary.

On September 9th, 1992, I became a non-paid part-time outreach pastor. I became the point man for evangelism in the church.

And by God's grace....

Nearly nine years later the work grew to upwards of 350 people, with multiple staff and multiple services.

The Easter Service in 2000 had 585 people in attendance.
God rewards those who take Him seriously about reaching His lost sheep.

My history led me to this conclusion: **churches do not grow by accident.**

Churches grow by design.
And God gave us the design in His Great Commission.

Applying the Scriptures both practically and personally thrusts the people of God outward into the world around them.

So how did we get from the "here" of 180 people to the "there" of 585 people?
In a word: **focus.**

But we did follow a process...

We Had A Point Man

Any church halfway serious about reaching people must commit time, money, and people to this purpose.

At Calvary, they eventually hired me.

I recruited,
Coordinated,
Trained,
Planned,
Motivated,
Organized,

And developed a strategy -A strategy to reach our community with the amazing story of God's amazing mercy, grace, and love for those far away from Himself.

The point man need not be the lead pastor, *but the lead pastor needs to wholeheartedly support the vision and outreach efforts of that man.*

Many churches seek staff members who are gifted in the areas of Christian education, music, and youth ministry.

These positions are an important part of the well being of the Body, yet they do not address a major part of God's purpose for the church.

Pastors and church leaders need to seriously consider hiring a full-time point man in the area of Outreach!

If your church cannot bring on more staff members, then seriously consider developing a team of people within the church that can help the pastor develop an outreach strategy and implement it.

Develop a strategy.

Outreach is the umbrella that covers evangelism, global missions, and discipleship. Introducing your people to the Evangelism Explosion or the four Spiritual Laws is good, but it falls short of the big picture. A particular method of evangelism is one of the last steps in the outreach process. People have to be motivated to share before they can adopt any particular method.

Most churches would agree that part of their purpose is to reach people for Christ. They would also agree that this task should happen at home as well as globally. Putting local outreach and global missions under the umbrella of outreach is only logical. I worked very hard in this area in the beginning of the process because most people are very passionate about the importance of global missions but rather neutral in the area of local outreach.

We used global missions as a springboard for reaching our own community. Once I became serious about what God was doing around the world, our people caught that passion. Mission trips, mission conferences, and a weekly segment entitled "mission focus" were avenues that renewed interest in local outreach. Taking 50 people on two short-term mission trips created a desire within the people of the church to reach their own community.

People in our church started saying, "How are we going to reach the people in our community?" We had just unlocked the door to a bright future of tremendous outreach in Norwalk. I began to develop church-wide outreach events. Special Sundays like Easter Sunday, Christmas, law enforcement appreciation day, teacher appreciation day, friend day, Fourth of July, children appreciation day, and graduation day helped keep the emphasis on outreach.

We also began a full-scale jail ministry with numerous people from our church serving at the jail. Many men and women came to Christ as a result and many of them later began to attend our church. In 2000, we ministered to over 5000 people in our jail ministry alone.

Our growing outreach included many other planned activities including: ladies' banquets, Christmas concerts, sportsmen's dinners, random acts of kindness, sports

outreaches, community counseling and evangelistic Bible studies. Our goal is to have four church-wide community outreach events each year and four church-wide random acts of kindness each year. This provides opportunities for everyone at the church to be involved in reaching the community. "Many hands make light work" is an axiom proven time and time again as our church people accomplish much in a short amount of time. The key is to **empower** your people.

Empower your people.

At Calvary, we have an outreach team and a global mission team. These groups meet monthly to plan and develop strategies. Each team has between eight-and-ten people.

Eight church wide outreach events each year are not a task for one person. The people on our outreach team have been trained to do my job. Planning, recruiting, motivating, serving, creating, and working are parts of each team member's job description. In 2000, one of our Random Acts of Kindness was passing out coffee and doughnuts at Walmart the day after Thanksgiving. We had over **50** people participate in this ministry. We designated March 23-24th of 2001 as Business Appreciation Day. Our church simply said, "thank you" by sharing one dozen homemade chocolate chip cookies with each of the 185 businesses in town. Once again, over 50 of our people participated in that simple outreach. In fact, it was this event that generated the letter at the start of this article.

Whether you are a church with only one pastor or five, **your church has people who have a heart to reach the lost.** Find out who they are. Leaders need to unleash those people to see the most awesome miracle, changed lives for Christ.

Know your community

I have learned a lot about Norwalk in the last nine years. I learned about Norwalk by becoming a part of the community. In my situation, I had the opportunity to become the high school soccer coach. I got to know hundreds of families through this opportunity.

Being the county's jail chaplain has provided opportunities to serve on various community based boards and committees. This has led to several connecting points for our church people to involve themselves in the community. Through these opportunities several families have come to Christ and are serving in our church today.

Paying attention to the needs of people goes a long way toward reaching them. Our Savior continually demonstrated a love and concern for those who were seeking or needing help in all areas of their life.

Summing it up

To reach those who do not know Christ is a value that few who read this publication would disagree with, yet for our churches to allow let that be a driving force is another matter. Here are a few suggestions to direct you toward becoming an outreach driven church.

1. Look to hire a full time or part time outreach pastor for your ministry.
2. Identify those people in your church who have a passion to reach lost people.
3. Organize an outreach team (10-12 people)
4. Organize, plan, and develop a strategy to reach your community with the direction of pastoral leadership.
5. Split up the load and get everyone in your church involved.