

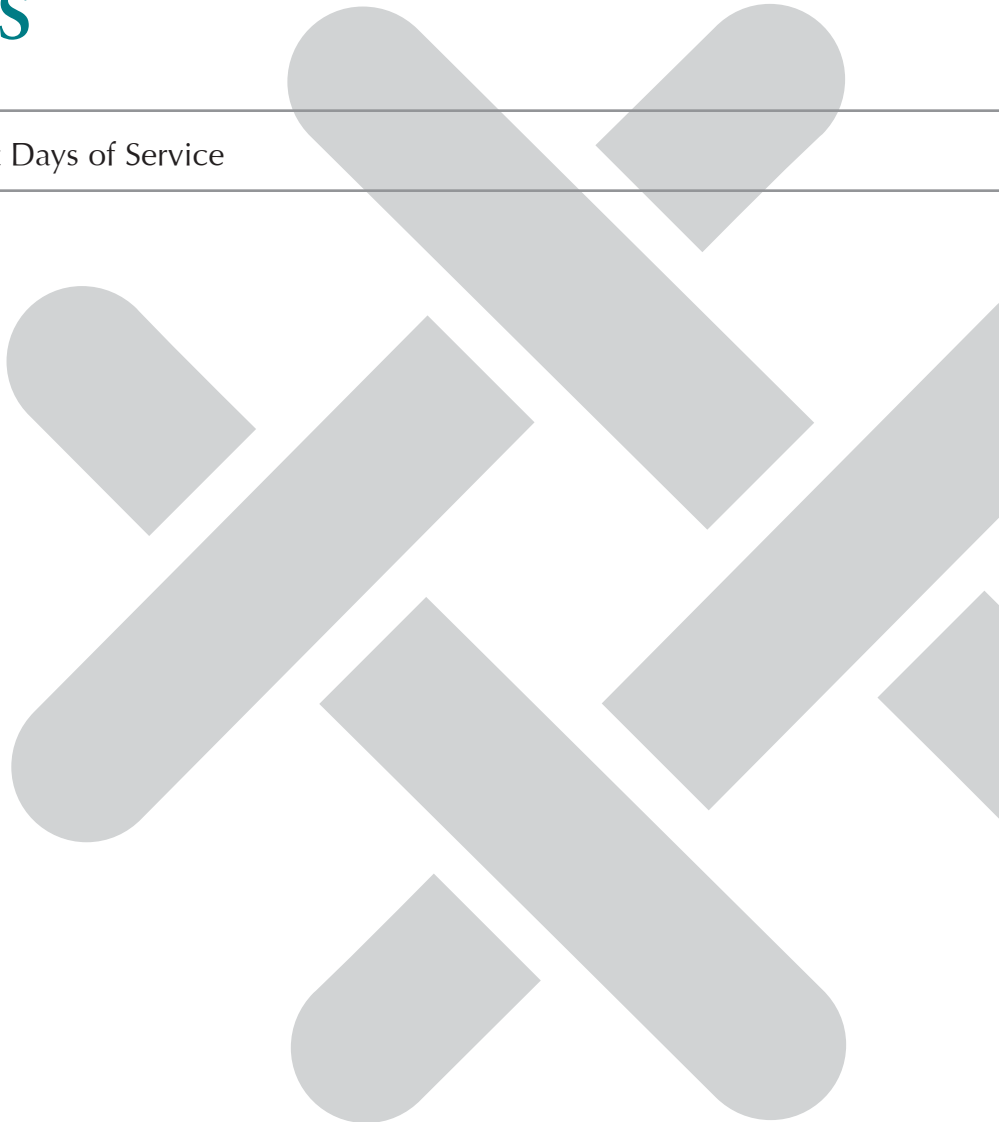
# SIX CATALYTIC SERVICE APPROACHES

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Taking First Steps through Great Days of Service

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*by Krista Petty*



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***“Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>1</sup>***

**Overview**

Churches across the country are talking about ways to expand their involvement in local community service. But they also know that it takes more than talk to become externally focused. “We aren’t interested in keeping people busy with church stuff,” says Glen Brechner, adult ministry team leader of **Fellowship Bible Church North** in Richardson, TX ([www.fbcnorth.org](http://www.fbcnorth.org)). Leaders want people to go beyond busy and beyond church walls into a meaningful, life-changing, active faith described in James 2:17 “...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

**WE AREN’T INTERESTED IN KEEPING PEOPLE BUSY WITH “CHURCH STUFF.”**

How do churches reach the goal of exercising a living faith in all their members?

Many are orchestrating all-church, one-day service events. Through these bursts of activity, they are sparking a positive change that shifts their church culture from an internal to an external focus. They are seeing hundreds and even thousands of people put away the golf clubs and pick up a hammer, just like Jesus picked up a basin and towel (John 13:2-5). According to Leadership Network’s Eric Swanson, director of Externally Focused Churches Leadership Communities, “Organizing and programming a large service day or event creates great momentum and gives people an easy first-step opportunity toward loving and serving in their community.”

Why are large community service events a key agent for change? The answer is most likely found in what are commonly known as “tipping points.” W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne outline this theory in their article *Tipping Point Leadership*, “The theory of tipping points is well known; it hinges on the insight that in any organization, once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are engaged, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic, bringing about fundamental change very quickly.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, planning a large service event can move people

towards a new idea quickly and enthusiastically. Kim and Mauborgne suggest that there are three critical components to tipping points that unleash a movement: (1) making unforgettable and unarguable calls for change, (2) concentrating resources on what really matters, and (3) mobilizing the commitment of the organization’s key players.

Churches that have successful catalytic service events do all three actions and more. They make calls for service through directed, focused and memorable communication to the congregation. They invest resources of time, money, and people to the service event. They also engage the commitment of leaders—from small group volunteer leadership to church senior leadership staff.

**Helping People Move to the Unfamiliar**

While the goal of serving outside the walls of the church is to meet needs and be of value to others, service can also help the congregation move from their familiar and comfortable spaces to unfamiliar and challenging places of spiritual growth. Just as good nutrition alone cannot make a person healthy, good Bible teaching alone is insufficient for spiritual maturity. “People need exercise for physical health and service for spiritual health. We learn from the Scriptures, but we grow by serving others,” says Eric Swanson. Coordinating a service event helps move people from an unsupportive attitude toward service to one supportive of change and expanding ministry. When people become supportive of things that they were once unfamiliar with, great creative synergy and blessing emerges and there is foundation for new, externally focused church cultures to begin.

**Ideal Learning Environment**

Unfamiliar	<b>Panic Zone</b>	<b>Innovative Zone</b>
Familiar		<b>Comfort Zone</b>
	Unsupportive	Supportive

Why is critical mass so *critical*? According to the USA Freedom Corps, research shows that one of

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the primary reasons people give for not volunteering or serving their community is that they simply don't know where to start.<sup>3</sup> When the service event is one of the primary messages your church communicates, more people will sign up because they are well informed and they clearly see the path to involvement. More often than not, a positive experience during first-time community service can lead to long-term engagement for both the individuals serving and church and community partnerships.

The following six catalytic service approaches have served as springboards to changing church culture and helped remove the guesswork for first-time servers. Seven examples of specific events and budgeting needs are presented, followed by the essential components necessary for success based on engaging a significant percentage of your church in service.

### Six Springboards to Service

#### 1. Strategic Service Alongside Local Businesses and Schools

**Pantano Christian Church** in Tucson, AZ ([www.pantanochristian.org](http://www.pantanochristian.org)) develops two large-scale service events annually called *Serve Tucson* and *Make a Difference Day*.

*Serve Tucson* is a quick two hours of service on a Saturday morning. According to Dave White, pastor of "glocal" outreach and community empowerment, 600-700 people are involved in creating goodwill through their simple good deeds. Projects completed during this short burst of free services include:

- *Offering free car washes*
- *Handing out bottled water at major intersections*
- *Delivering Hershey's Kisses in bowls as a thank you to local businesses*
- *Feeding quarters into washers and dryers at local Laundromats*

- *Giving donuts to police and fire fighters*
- *Handing out popsicles at parks and recreation events*
- *Nursing home visits*
- *Performing a targeted neighborhood clean up*

"We work with businesses and neighborhood associations in targeted areas as well as with the police department," says Dave. When *Serve Tucson* first got off the ground, it was mainly coordinated by staff, but Dave now has a volunteer leadership structure in place. "Events are organized by project with a project manager overseeing up to ten locations," says Dave. "Each location is headed by a team captain who takes responsibility over that project location."

The start-up budget for *Serve Tucson* was \$2,500. "We rarely spend more than \$1,200 now that we have plenty of safety vests and other reusable resources." Donations are also key components to involving the church and community and saving on the budget, "We take donations of 10,000 water bottles, 200 pounds of Hershey's Kisses, and several businesses donate towels for the car washes." Just as grace is a free gift, these simple gestures of kindness serve as illustrations of grace.

*Make a Difference Day* uses a slightly different tactic for Pantano Christian Church than *Serve Day*, with more manual labor, and a longer day. In 2005, Pantano saw about 400 people involved from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. on this day of service. Partnership with area schools is a critical component. Dave explains, "*Make a Difference Day* is organized by the church with the participation of schools. Each school has a project manager who appoints team captains for each activity they will be doing on the campus." Once again, the key is to give responsibility and authority to the team captains. Pantano budgets about \$10,000 for *Make a Difference Day* annually. In 2005, the church worked with local schools to accomplish the following:



DAVE WHITE

- Room painting
- Landscaping
- Minor remodeling of the teachers' lounge and principal's office
- Room decorating with teachers
- Parking lot re-striping
- Safety painting and general clean up
- Decorative rock spreading and sandbox building
- Pouring a concrete sidewalk specifically for handicapped kids

"Both events have been optimized for our Life Groups to take primary ownership of projects.

This helps them develop a mission in addition to their other activity," says Dave.

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Dave cites three main reasons they put so much effort into both *Serve Tucson* and *Make a Difference Day* annually, "First, they are

powerful in developing an outwardly focused culture. Second, they bring a wonderful 'God flavor' to the community every time we do them. Third, they are a lot of fun!"

2. **Empowering Small Groups for Service Fellowship Bible Church North** in Richardson, TX, ([www.fbcnorth.org](http://www.fbcnorth.org)) operates as a church of many small groups. To integrate an external focus into church life, the church designed their service event, *Love Collin County*, totally through their strong small groups culture. Glen Brechner says, "Each project had a point person and a number of small groups at that project." During the one-day service event in 2005, almost 800 people were involved in multiple projects around the county—that's 40% of the congregation. To coordinate this event, the church surfaced opportunities through current agency partnerships along with city partnerships. Some projects completed via small groups included:

- *Cleaning up a city park*

- *Re-roofing a church which serves an underprivileged area*
- *Providing land clean-up*
- *Filing and volunteering at a local medical clinic*
- *Painting and remodeling at a local Boys and Girls Club*
- *Participating in a local museum renovation*
- *Performing house repairs for elderly*
- *Volunteering at Real Options, an abortion alternative clinic*
- *Cleaning and organizing the Assistance Center of Collin County*
- *Serving at the City House Shelter*

Love Collin County is a joint effort that begins with the pastor of outreach and his community outreach volunteer team. The small groups ministry then helps get the word out and engages a "Reach" person in each small group. The annual budget for this event is roughly \$10,000 for various supplies and the money is well spent. "This one day of service is an opportunity to build momentum for bridge-building and launching our small groups into community service. It is also an opportunity to let more people in the church get a taste of community service," says Glen.



Volunteer Sue Moore at the museum project

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3. **Serving Continually Throughout the Year Centennial Community Church** in Littleton, CO ([www.ccchurch.org](http://www.ccchurch.org)) chooses various service opportunities throughout the year as a catalyst for their external focus. "We have monthly vision assignments that encourage service outside the walls and begin to reshape



A girl from a local neighborhood in Littleton, CO has her face painted at Centennial's Community Fun Day

our culture," says Theresa Wisda, mobilization pastor. Assignments change from month to month to give variety and different levels of commitment.

Involvement in the monthly vision assignments fluctuates each month. "Our smallest turnout has been 30 individuals and our largest participation was 90 families!" says Theresa. Both staff and volunteers coordinate projects through local schools, nonprofit ministry partnerships and the neighborhoods in the community. The following is a sampling of vision assignments:

- *Community Fun Day – free party in a local park for surrounding neighborhoods. Church families attended only to serve or work.*
- *Serving Our Schools – a three-hour workday to help three local schools with painting, weeding, and raking. Kids were able to help with the outside work.*
- *Inner City Work Day – home renovation work with a local organization called Open Door Ministries.*
- *\$100 Multiplication Challenge – 25 people were given \$100 and asked to multiply the money and give it away to bless the community. Some involved direct serving, some just passed on cash and/or goods donations. "Some people shared with me that they are going to continue being involved in the ministry they made the donations to!" notes Theresa.*



THERESA WISDA

Centennial has kept the cost of their vision assignments to a minimum. "Both Community Fun Day and the \$100 Multiplication Challenge cost about \$2,500 each," she says. But Theresa also notes that the original \$2,500 invested in the \$100 Multiplication Challenge has been multiplied to over \$25,000 with

results still coming in at the time of this publication. Theresa believes that the assignments pay off not only in the short term for completing projects, but for the church culture.

"We are trying to really create an ethos of serving. Vision assignments are a catalyst to people taking initial steps to serving, making community connections and sparking an interest for serving over the long haul."

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#### 4. **40 Days of Service**

**Parkcrest Christian Church** in Long Beach, CA ([www.parkcrest.org](http://www.parkcrest.org)) finds best success through a 40-days model, similar to 40 Days of Purpose launched by Saddleback Church following the release of *The Purpose Driven Life*. For their external focus to get a jump-start, Parkcrest staff wrote curriculum for small groups on the topic of serving that were supported through the weekend message series. Each staff member, including custodians and receptionists, wrote a daily devotional that was also provided. At the conclusion of the series and the study, numerous service projects were promoted with a challenge to sign up. They estimate that 65-70% of the total congregation was involved in serving during this event. Cathy Taylor, volunteer ministries pastor, came up with the project list, which included:

- *Serving meals through a partnership with an agency*
- *Offering a picnic in the park with local nonprofits*
- *Playing games at a convalescent home*
- *Creating special "bags of love" for people standing in line at the local soup kitchen*

"We find it easier to get people to sign up for outreach service than our internal opportunities like greeters and ushers," notes Cathy. One unexpected benefit was the

WE FIND IT EASIER TO GET PEOPLE TO SIGN UP FOR OUTREACH SERVICE THAN OUR INTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES LIKE GREETERS AND USHERS.

interpersonal relationships that developed among church members. “We had some women’s ministry groups serving with women from the church who volunteered with the local substance abuse shelter. These two groups of women came from very different places in life—economically and socially. By serving together, they began to build bridges. They have gained an acceptance and understanding of one another.”

- *A Time to Serve – various serving opportunities in December*

“These events, while serving the community, are also a catalyst to church members becoming involved in serving on a regular basis,” says Eric.



### 5. Churches Partnering with Other Churches for Big Impact

“Partnering with other churches is an effective way to maximize your efforts,” says Eric Swanson. That is exactly the model **Grace Brethren Church**, in Long Beach, CA ([www.gracelb.org](http://www.gracelb.org)) used to implement their external focus. Realizing that mobilizing the church to serve the city was essential to the church’s vision to make disciples of Christ, Pastor Eric Marsh was redeployed to give clarity and action to the externally focused vision by starting **Hope for Long Beach** ([www.hflb.org](http://www.hflb.org)). Hope for Long Beach is dedicated to serving the city with community partners as well as church partners. “Each year Hope for Long Beach coordinates four large events to serve our city. These are church-wide and/or community-wide opportunities for service to the community.



ERIC MARSH

- *Inside-Out – designed for Grace Brethren church only, serving their tightly connected community partnerships. Approximately 300 people from Grace participate.*
- *Serve Day – where they serve together with other L.A. and Orange County churches. Approximately 5,000 individuals participate through 30 churches.*
- *Carnival – an alternative Halloween event designed for families in the community*

Serve Day, begun by **RockHarbor Church** in Costa Mesa, CA ([www.rockharbor.org](http://www.rockharbor.org)), is an annual event empowering local churches to get involved in community service that clearly demonstrates the power of God’s love through acts of empowered kindness and meeting real needs. Growing every year, churches from Orange and Los Angeles Counties join together to plan and implement over 250 service projects that transpire at organizations, businesses, and other locations in practical and tangible ways. How does a multi-church service event get coordinated? The organizational structure for pulling together 5,000 people in one day is impressive. Each church involved recruits liaisons to work with and be trained by the *Serve Day* oversight team, which is staffed by leaders from six local churches. The liaisons from each church also engage a project leader for each project developed. The oversight team provides the participating churches with the following items:

- *Clearly defined job descriptions for the roles needed from each church*
- *Quality training manuals—which were mainly written at RockHarbor*
- *Hosting and planning of training events and rallies for liaisons and leaders*
- *Staff support and advice*
- *A project development timeline*
- *Communication tools (including logo,*

*promotional timeline, website and DVD's)*

- *Hosting of [www.serveday.com](http://www.serveday.com) for easy registration and project management*



Even the littlest members get involved with Serve Day.

For Grace Brethren's part of the endeavor, they develop projects with nonprofit partners. "Last year, all our projects were with organizations that we work with throughout the year. Rather than doing 'one-hit' type of projects (which can also be good) we want to continue to work with organizations that we can serve with in the future. These are the organizations that are leading the compassion efforts in our city. We learn from them. It also gives our members an easy opportunity to learn about the organizations we work with

and the many opportunities to get involved," says Eric Marsh.

Some examples of projects completed include:

- *Carnival for 150 inner city kids*
- *Rehabbing a home in Long Beach with [Rebuilding Together Long Beach](http://www.rebuildingtogetherlongbeach.org) ([www.rebuildingtogetherlongbeach.org](http://www.rebuildingtogetherlongbeach.org))*
- *Revamping a thrift store which funds a shelter for homeless pregnant women*
- *Making and delivering bouquets to a multiple sclerosis convalescent home*
- *Ultimate Logo Makeover where 25 of our most creative volunteers compete to design a new logo for a local nonprofit*

Developing strategic partnerships with local nonprofit organizations is a key value for Hope for Long Beach. How does the church determine what agencies they have partnerships with? "Pretty simple; they are organizations that people from our church volunteer at on a regular basis, and organizations that share our values, whose vision we hope to see spread in the city," says Eric.

Budgeting for this multi-church project takes on an innovative approach with each

participating church paying for the amount of participants they project on a sliding scale. The cost break down is as follows:

- 0-500 participants at \$5 each*
- 501-1,000 participants at \$4 each*
- 1,001 & up participants at \$3 each*

Additional expenses are picked up by the teams at individual churches. According to the *Serve Day* training manual, the budget for this event is shared.

"In previous years, one or two churches have funded *Serve Day*, and we believe it is only fair to ask each church partner to fund the event based on their

expected number of participants." The money collected per person goes to cover the costs associated with administrating and promoting *Serve Day*. The *Serve Day* 2005 overall budget was broken down and shows that 70% went to sign-up brochures, 10% for website, 7% for rally, 5% for appreciation, 5% for training meetings, and 3% for media kits and public relations materials.

With a complex structure, budget and intricate communication between the partnering churches, what makes *Serve Day* worth the work?

Eric Marsh passionately believes, "that as the body of Christ we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the world. The mission of our church is that we exist to represent and extend the reign of God by making disciples in our city, and through our city—the world. *Hope for Long Beach* and the *Serve Day*



A father and son serving at Long Beach food bank on Serve Day

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project exist to extend this vision in very tangible ways. The reason I put so much time and effort into it is because it is the calling of all Christians to be on mission in their communities through word and deed.”

### 6. *The Spontaneous Service Event*

While there is great power in the *planned* service event, **Blackhawk Church**, Madison, WI ([www.blackhawkchurch.org](http://www.blackhawkchurch.org)) has learned to also take advantage of *spontaneous* community service opportunities. “Every year since the 1960s, Mifflin Street in Madison



has been host to a huge college beer fest on one block,” says Matt Metzger, young adults minister at Blackhawk. The day before the Friday night block party, a simple conversation led to a spontaneous response to the Mifflin Street clean up problem. Through multiple emails going out to the young adults at

Blackhawk Church, Matt’s team mobilized a cleaning crew for the Saturday morning following the party. “I thought 15 people would show up. Almost 70 people arrived at 6 a.m. to clean up before the parties even got up.”

The entire block was cleaned up within two hours, and several interesting street conversations took place. “Over and over again, people were asking who we were and why we were doing this,” says Matt. From men who make their living from recycling to the groggy partygoers, there was a strange sense of amazement to their service. “Hung-over students started to emerge as we were cleaning up. Out of guilt, they began to clean up with us. When we told them they could go back to bed—that we were taking care of it—they had no box to put this into. They were amazed,” laughs Matt.

When the local news crew showed up at 9:30 a.m. to do their annual filming of the Mifflin Street carnage, they found nothing left to film. “By 10:00 a.m. every major news agency was at Blackhawk Church looking for the clean up story,” says Matt.

According to Rich Henderson, the Mifflin Street party has been a catalyst for more community engagement. “We had tried working with a couple of community groups in the past but had very little success. After Mifflin Street, one community agency director said, ‘I think something like this clean up can open up conversation for partnership.’”

Though the group of young adults was looking to be stealth with their clean up, everyone in the community heard about it. “I began to immediately receive emails that our project changed people’s perspectives and broke down some negative Christian stereotypes,” says Matt. The young adults continue to look for service opportunities, both planned and unplanned.

### Essential Guidelines for Success with Service Events

Whether it is a strategically planned and programmed event, or a spontaneous response, actual hands-on service experiences can mobilize a church for greater external focus and help people find a new sense of purpose and meaning. Albert Schweitzer once said, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be truly happy will be those who have sought and found how to serve.”<sup>4</sup>

The six ideas above show examples of the wide range of church-wide community service approaches. You may be inspired to coordinate a similar great day service event for your church, but almost all leaders have faced the reality of planning and dreaming, only to have 23 people show up, when you planned for hundreds. Sometimes there seems to be no rhyme or reason for the lack of participation. What are the essential steps in making the days of service “great” like the ones profiled here? The following section reviews common themes that run through most successful service events.

### Prayer Precedes the Plans

Christian apologist Lee Strobel once said, “Before Jesus would talk to his neighbor about God, he would talk to God about his neighbor.”<sup>5</sup> As your church engages community leaders in conversation of partnering for a service day,

prayer should be a key element. “Prayer began with our management team and elders about six months before the campaign started. We bathed the entire project in prayer from the beginning planning stages through casting the vision for our congregation, which included asking them to pray every step of the way,” says Cathy from Parkcrest.

Eric Marsh points to dependence on prayer as the primary credit for the beginning of Hope for Long Beach. “We didn’t start out by trying to ‘do’ many great things for our city. We started with several small groups praying for months about what it would look like for our church to become more externally focused.” The leadership team of Hope for Long Beach values a life grounded in daily prayer. In addition to this, once a month they begin Grace Brethren Church worship services

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with a time of focused prayer. “We break up into groups of five or six and pray for specific needs and hopes for our city.” They also devote time in planning meetings to commit all that they do in prayer to God. “This keeps us grounded in the midst of busyness. We recently added a person to our team who has a gift and heart for prayer. Her role is to remind us to pray, but not to be our ‘shaman’. At our last meeting we took an hour to reflect on Psalm 23 through

prayer and praise to the Lord for our ministry and the work he is doing in and through us.”

#### **Consider Your Current Church Culture During Planning and Implementation**

Churches with a strong small group structure already in place should infuse service projects into that existing culture. Pantano, Fellowship Bible Church North and Parkcrest honored their small group cultures. Pantano gave all Life Groups first opportunity to take ownership of a

location. “If they do that, we take the location off the public sign up list and let the group have a lot of freedom in making it happen,” says Dave White. Glen Brechner says, “We are trying to regionalize it so small groups in certain geographic areas can serve in their area and develop longer, stronger relationships.”



GLEN BRECHNER

Parkcrest took the small group to an additional level by including a sermon series, a study and the call to action through service in their 40 Days campaign. “We had a six-week sermon series in which our lead pastor preached on the topics of becoming a servant, engaging culture, learning the heart of God, serving our community, serving in the church, and leaving a legacy that would be discussed in the small groups that week,” shares Cathy. All of the 120 Parkcrest small groups watched a DVD (made in-house) and shared in a discussion of the weekly theme. Small groups were the main vehicle for communicating the service plan. Cathy says, “We provided the groups with a list of projects and agencies although many of them came up with their own ideas.”



Parkcrest clothing giveaway

Building a church of small groups, often called a “cellular church” and utilizing that structure may well be the most effective long-term externally focused growth strategy available for the future. Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point* and *New Yorker* columnist, wrote about the amazing influence of Pastor Rick Warren on current church culture and his cellular church structure as a successful model for volunteer involvement and giving to the church. He also cites the work of sociologist Robert Wuthnow in the effectiveness of greater volunteer numbers when they are involved in a small group experience. Gladwell writes:

Membership in a small group is a better predictor of whether people volunteer or give money than how often they attend church,

SOCIAL ACTION IS NOT A CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEF, IN OTHER WORDS. I DON'T GIVE BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN RELIGIOUS CHARITY. I GIVE BECAUSE I BELONG TO A SOCIAL STRUCTURE THAT ENFORCES AN ETHIC OF GIVING.

whether they pray, whether they've had a deep religious experience, or whether they were raised in a Christian home. Social action is not a consequence of belief, in other words. I don't give because I believe in religious charity. I give because I belong to a social structure that enforces an ethic of giving. 'Small groups are networks,' the Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow, who has studied the phenomenon closely, says. 'They create bonds among people. Expose people to needs, provide opportunities for volunteering, and put people in harm's way of being asked to volunteer. That's not to say that being there

for worship is not important. But, even in earlier research, I was finding that if people say all the right things about being a believer but aren't involved in some kind of physical social setting that generates interaction, they are just not as likely to volunteer.'<sup>6</sup>

What Gladwell describes above is reminiscent of Paul's writing to the Romans, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5). Like the American Express mantra, small group membership also has its privileges.

**Develop and Sustain Long-Term Service Opportunities through Partnerships**

"I went to the local Substance Abuse Foundation (SAF) and asked how we could help them. They told me their biggest need was mentoring," shares Cathy from Parkcrest. While that was not necessarily a one-time project opportunity, it turned into a meaningful partnership and personal mission for Cathy. She formed a group to identify and meet the mentorship need. Cathy says the brainstorming and prayer session about the SAF needs, "were the most God-inspired things I've ever been a part of!" After several months of working with SAF, her team has moved from

working on a project to people-on-people ministry with the women at SAF. Many women in the mentoring program now choose to come to church. "When you ask me 10 years from now what I'll be doing, I'll still be doing work with SAF." This long-term commitment came because of a short-term plan.



Parkcrest volunteers offering a cooking lesson to women at the Substance Abuse Foundation.

**Equip Volunteer Leadership From Year to Year**

"The key is getting the team captain to take ownership at the grassroots level, then empower them—not micromanage them," encourages Dave White at Pantano. With each monthly vision assignment, Theresa Wisda from Centennial says her team learns more. "In the future, my hope is that all of these assignments are generated by people in the church. They would not be staff-driven, but driven by the body."

Leadership is often developed when volunteers are able to meet and exceed expectations. To do that, they need clarity. "One thing all volunteers need is a clear idea of the need, what their part is in serving that need, whom they will be working with, and the expected outcomes of their involvement...If you want people's hearts, they need to know what they are exchanging their lives for." write Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw in *The Externally Focused Church*.<sup>7</sup>

IF YOU WANT PEOPLE'S HEARTS, THEY NEED TO KNOW WHAT THEY ARE EXCHANGING THEIR LIVES FOR.

Eric Marsh of Hope for Long Beach believes very strongly in leadership development. "One way we are building into the future of Hope for Long Beach is by raising up leaders within the church and providing for them opportunities to get a taste of service and leadership. Younger generations need to be empowered by someone who trusts they can use their talents and gifts for the sake of God's Kingdom." Grace Brethren Church has been very intentional about acting on that commitment to leadership development in the

spiritual community forming in its corner of the United States. During the summer, Hope for Long Beach offers an extensive internship program to their college students. "Through this fellowship program we expose college students to the hopes and needs of the city and require them to use their passions to bless the city. This enables students to be imaginative in the way they make the vision of our church a reality within their lives. In turn, their enthusiasm grows to infect the church in ways that programs or senior leaders cannot."

### **Be Open and Flexible to Change and Growth**

How are churches improving their great days of service in the future? For Pantano Christian, it is about collaborating ministry goals into one goal for the church. "We are aligning the efforts so that more energy is concentrated into targeted neighborhoods where we would eventually like to see both community transformation and church planting take place," says Dave White. They are also looking to use technology as a future tool. "We are also working on a web registration program that is simple and facilitates team communication."

Glen shares that Fellowship Bible Church North would like to see the *Love Collin County* project partnering with the schools as well as try some large group service projects that can accommodate 100 or more people. "One thing we will also do next time is have a gathering place, prayer and, at the end of the day, a celebration," he adds.

### **Inspire the Masses by Communicating the Vision**

In the book, *The Founding Fathers on Leadership*, author Donald Phillips writes about the actions necessary to inspire the masses for change in the American Revolution. How did the 13 colonies, with separate and distinct governments, come together? "They turned to those who had the potential to motivate great masses of people in a relatively brief period of time," writes Phillips. While there were many revolutionaries calling for independence, there was a moment when Thomas Paine, a penniless writer, rose to lead the way by communicating the vision. With his manuscript, *Common Sense*, Paine "challenged the existing paradigm." Paine also made a point of making *Common Sense*, well, *common*. He used everyday language and *Common Sense* was read

aloud to people who could not read. "Paine strategically realized that only through plain talk could the great masses of people be mobilized..."<sup>8</sup>

Just as inspiring the people to revolt was no small matter, changing the DNA of a church can seem monumental. One step all the churches profiled here took was to strategically communicate the service event and the vision of serving the community in numerous ways. "If a revolution was going to take place, a great majority of people had to be the catalyst..." writes Phillips.

Communication started with one person or group at a time. In every church, there are certain influencers who will be receptive to and get behind an idea whose time has come. Who are the influencers in your church? What is their perception of community service? When church leaders invest time with influencers, they can help to manage the acceptance and perception of new ideas. As they tell their stories, an increasingly larger group of people will come on board.

At Grace Brethren, communication has been vital as the senior leaders lead the congregation in launching Hope for Long Beach, serving the community alongside nonprofit organizations and partnering with other local churches. Communication flows through sermons and various ministries of the church. "We also have regular announcements about large events, a booth on our plaza after the service with information about all of our partner organizations and a website." In order to understand the wide range of ages at Grace Brethren, Hope for Long Beach chose a "coach" for each Sunday School or youth ministry. The coach's role is to inform their class of upcoming events as well as communicate back to Hope for Long Beach the group's interests and questions in regards to being on mission in Long Beach. In addition to the coaches, the vision is communicated through "champions", who are regular volunteers at the church's partnerships.

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“Champions connect Grace Brethren volunteers with the nonprofits. This has opened numerous opportunities to lead groups in becoming more externally focused. Coaches and champions meet four times a year and are in frequent contact with us in order to mobilize the groups to serve.”

Communication is also visual. A common element of event communication includes logos, pictures, and promotional materials. The Hope for Long Beach initiatives all contain visual elements, such as the *Serve Day* logo (see p. 6). For all of their public service events, Dave White from Pantano Church says, “We have five to six weeks of publicity in live announcements, web and paper sign ups and tell lots of stories from these events *after* they happen.” Communication should not come to a screeching halt when the event is over. “Lots of photos and video are taken for storytelling purposes,” says Dave. Continue to communicate the service days so the church can share in celebration stories after the event (and those that did not participate can see what they missed).



A poster promotes the 40 Days of Service program at Parkcrest Christian Church

### Leadership Is Supportive of the Externally Focused Vision



CATHY TAYLOR

A vital step to communication is the public support of the day of service from visible leadership. Cathy from Parkcrest says it was critically important that the lead pastor talked about participation in the service projects in his sermons almost every week. “Our service project became *the thing to do instead of just an option*,” says Cathy. All churches featured here agree that having top level leadership buy-in is critical, whether it be the senior minister or additional staff members. Dave White of Pantano Church says that in the beginning it was essential, but not as necessary now that the word is out. “We have a teaching team with all pastors demonstrating ownership of these outreach events across the board.”

In working with multiple churches, Eric Marsh agrees that staff leadership buy-in is vital to the success of service events. “As we work with other churches, we constantly hear that the senior leaders need to get on board with the externally focused ideas in order to influence the congregation. We found this to be true at Grace Brethren. Hope for Long Beach began because we have had the support and influence of our staff and leadership.”

### Remove Barriers to Involvement

“To give people a taste for ministry, your church must increase the number and frequency of drop-in, get your feet wet opportunities,” write Rusaw and Swanson.<sup>9</sup> Busy families need opportunity for connection on the weekends so Centennial’s monthly vision assignments always include a family-friendly project to choose. According to the churches profiled here, “Don’t leave the kids out of service opportunities!” More families will sign up if they can serve together. Parents may also see the community service projects as a way to impart valuable life lessons to their children. According to the Hope for Long Beach *Serve Day* training manual, “Kids can make a great addition to the serving team, provided the projects match their maturity and skills. If you’re patient and have a little creativity, you can involve your child in any of the kid-friendly projects. You’ll know best what project will be a good fit for your family. As a team, you may decide to designate someone to stay with any very young children, so everyone else can be free to serve. No childcare is provided at the *Serve Day* rally – children are welcome [to participate]!”

OUR SERVICE PROJECT BECAME *THE THING TO DO* INSTEAD OF JUST AN OPTION

DON’T LEAVE THE KIDS OUT OF SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES!



A family from Fellowship Bible Church North works together striping the parking lot at the museum renovation project.

People need to engage in activities that produce results and that they can celebrate on the spot. Dave White says that the families of Pantano take time to celebrate with lunch together even after their two-hour *Serve Tucson* projects.

**After the Service Day Relax, Review, then Repeat**  
Aristotle once wrote, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO. EXCELLENCE, THEN, IS NOT AN ACT, BUT A HABIT.

The churches profiled here see the value of repeating their events, either annually or monthly. Churches partnering in the Hope for Long Beach *Serve Day* are asked to plan follow-up service at each project location. According to the training manual, “In years past, we have found that planning a follow-up project can help solidify a relationship between your church and the

organization, business, or person you are serving. It also lets the participants see that the value is in regular service—not just a once a year event.”

**Dialogue Your Way to a Successful Day of Service**

The above examples certainly provide inspiration and a foundation for churches to model. But as Dave Fleming writes, “The simple truth is that it’s easier to copy another church’s success than it is to dialogue your way to your own.”<sup>10</sup> Rich Henderson, pastor of extension ministries at Blackhawk Church couldn’t agree more. “Not everything everyone else does works. Don’t replicate, but use prayer and discernment,” says Rich. Like most ministers Blackhawk staff members

THE SIMPLE TRUTH IS THAT IT’S EASIER TO COPY ANOTHER CHURCH’S SUCCESS THAN IT IS TO DIALOGUE YOUR WAY TO YOUR OWN.

are always looking for innovative ministry ideas, but the common phrase that comes up in staff brainstorming sessions is, “That’s a great idea. How do we *Blackhawk* it?”—meaning, how do we take that ministry innovation and mold it to fit the creative and unique culture in Madison, Wisconsin? Each church has a unique ministry to provide to the community and a unique

church culture to understand. One of the best ways to dialogue to a great service event is to brainstorm using the following list of questions:

- *How will we articulate the vision?*
- *How will we locate the projects and get organized?*
- *What kinds of projects motivate and excite our people for service? Create a list of projects that are attainable, yet challenging.*
- *How can we maintain the person-to-person connection during a service day?*
- *How will we celebrate the successes?*
- *Not all projects will go as planned. How will we empower people to troubleshoot on the spot?*
- *Even though we want to be initially successful in the one great day of service, how can we leverage this event to have long-term effects?*

**The Power of the Service Experience**

No one would doubt that a short-term mission experience has the ability to change lives. Can a local community service experience be just as powerful? Lynne McCauley says that it can. She’s experienced great moments of life change on both the mission field and during local community service. Lynne never imagined that her life experiences would lead her to becoming a follower of Christ, much less a staff member at **Northview Christian Life Church** in Carmel, IN ([www.nvcl.org](http://www.nvcl.org)). Three years ago, she was unchurched, uninterested, and agnostic. “I was invited by friends to attend a church outreach event that was basically a free block party for the neighborhood.” Finding it awkward to say no, the McCauley family tagged along. “Wouldn’t you know it—we had a decent time and then they invited us to a worship service. Again, how do you politely say no?” she laughs. They went to a service...then another...then another. Soon after, she plunged headstrong into a relationship with God, but much of her life still revolved around herself.



LYNNE MCCAULEY

Preparing to turn 40, Lynne announced to her

family and friends, “‘I’m going back to Italy for my birthday’ and it was going to be all about me!” she says. Interestingly, details about a mission trip to Brazil started to appear in the church bulletin around the same time. One morning in prayer, Lynne realized that if she truly wanted her 40th year to be meaningful, it needed to be about service to others, not service to herself. Lynne’s “all about me” birthday trip changed to an “all about God” trip to Brazil.

In Brazil, Lynne says, “God broke my heart over the people of Brazil.” She found herself grieving over what grieves God. “I was a wreck—the wheels completely came off my wagon.” One of the first questions she asked her husband when she got off the plane was, “‘Can we sell our house and move to Brazil and start a mission training center?’ I struggled to reconcile the poverty I had seen there with the affluence in our community. I struggled with our lifestyle and materialism.”

Feeling restless and dissatisfied, she found direction from a statement in the Beth Moore Bible Study, *Believing God*. The popular Bible teacher writes, “Our promised land here on earth is where our theology merges with our reality.” With that, Lynne went looking for her promised land.

Her search led her to a local mission opportunity, since she could not go on the foreign mission field. Was it a compromise? Not at all. She began attending a local inner-city outreach program on the weekends. Lynne shares about her life-changing community service experience:

I sat down to have breakfast with two homeless men and talk about life on the streets. As we were talking, one of the men began to have a seizure. I was a critical care nurse for 11 years so I was familiar with the scenario and helped lay him on the ground and to talk to him during the episode. As I knelt

beside him on the floor and talked, he kept his vision locked on me, and I on him. The paramedics arrived and began to minister to him in a cold and impersonal way. All the while he kept locked on me. As they bundled him on the gurney and prepared to roll him out to the ambulance, he pulled down his oxygen mask, looked me directly in the eye and whispered ‘Thank you’. I looked at this man—dirty, unkempt, vomit in his beard and smelling of alcohol and urine—and I thought to myself ‘I am looking into the face of Christ.’ I knew right then that I was right where God wanted me and I have been involved there ever since.

Lynne is currently serving as the director of externally focused initiatives at her church. Through the power of her experiences, Lynne confidently says, “I have never been happier in my life. I didn’t set out to work in ministry, but in my search to find more meaning in my life, I discovered my promised land.” She now devotes her life to making sure that others have the opportunity to have a life-changing missional experience in the heart of Indiana like she did. She is a living example of what Phil Kenneson, professor of theology and philosophy at Milligan College, writes about in *Cultivating a Generous Heart*:

The notion that we might not simply take Jesus to the poor, but just as importantly, meet Jesus *in* the poor, might run counter to our normal ways of thinking... But it’s quite possible that in reaching out to the poor and oppressed of our neighborhoods and the world, we too will be converted. Converted from our own prejudiced opinions of those who are different from us. Converted from our own constricted views of God’s work in the world. Converted from our own narrow understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

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## Awaiting a “Second Conversion Experience”

There are thousands of men and women inside the walls of the church, like Lynne McCauley, who are simply waiting for a “second conversion experience” to inspire their lives. Could serving become that experience? How many people can you engage through your church this year to not only bless the city, but have what John Seybert of **Peninsula Covenant Church** in Redwood City, CA ([www.peninsulacovenant.com](http://www.peninsulacovenant.com)) calls a “blessing experience?” Those blessing experiences can be traced from the earliest days of the church onward, as outsiders marvel at God’s work and want to join the spiritual and social dynamic that is happening. Acts 2 records a time period where the early church grew at an exponential rate because God was at work through the spiritual

and social dynamics of the early church. Spiritually, God worked in a mighty way and the impact did not go unnoticed. “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Socially, the believers responded in action by serving one another. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” (Acts 2:44-46) As the early believers loved deeply and served selflessly “...the Lord added to their number *daily* those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)



KRISTA PETTY

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mlkday.org>

<sup>2</sup> Harvard Business Review, April 2003, pgs. 60-69.

<sup>3</sup> Ferraro, Patrick. "Volunteerism on the Rise: President Bush Renews Call to Service" Philanthropic Research, Inc. August 2002 [www.guidestar.org/news/features/volunteerism.jsp](http://www.guidestar.org/news/features/volunteerism.jsp) accessed July 21, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service. "Benefits of Serving" [http://www.nationalservice.org/for\\_individuals/benefits/index.asp](http://www.nationalservice.org/for_individuals/benefits/index.asp) Accessed July 21, 2006.

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<sup>6</sup> Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Cellular Church" September 12, 2005. [http://www.gladwell.com/2005/2005\\_09\\_12\\_a\\_warren.html](http://www.gladwell.com/2005/2005_09_12_a_warren.html) Accessed July 21, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Swanson, Eric and Rusaw, Rick, *The Externally Focused Church*, Group Publishing, Loveland, CO, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, Donald, *The Founding Fathers on Leadership*, Warner Books, New York, NY 1997.

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneson, Phillip D., *Christian Standard*, Standard Publishing, Cincinnati, OH, April 24, 2005, pg. 260-263.