

News and Current Events :: Christians connect through cooking, video games, hiking**Christians connect through cooking, video games, hiking - posted by jeremyhulsey (), on: 2005/8/20 12:44**

Christians connect through cooking, video games, hiking
August 15, 2005

It's Thursday night, and a small group from Red Rocks Church is gathering at a home in Golden, Colorado. They haven't come to pray or discuss the intricacies of Scripture. They're here to eat pizza and play video games.

Pastor Scott Bruegman, who leads the Assemblies of God congregation, admits that playing video games is an unusual way to minister. But he insists small groups such as this one serve a larger purpose. More than 120 people currently attend services at the church, which started early this year.

"I came out here and didn't know anybody," the 34-year-old pastor says. "I met a bunch of guys who played video games and I started playing with them. Now they all go to our church."

Bruegman sees small groups as the best way to reach the young, largely non-Christian, population in Golden.

"There are so many unchurched people here," he says. "We're basically starting from scratch with a lot of them because they have no church background. We have to build a rapport and invest in their lives before we can disciple them."

In addition to the weekly video game gathering, Red Rocks has organized groups for people interested in basketball, bowling, camping, hiking and mountain sports.

Another group, Clueless Cooking, seeks to attract young professionals who are single or newly married and learning how to make meals. There's also Chicks, Chat and Chocolates, a women's group that gets together to cook, eat, discuss books and watch good movies.

The average age of Red Rocks attendees is 26. Bruegman says the idea of playing a game of basketball or joining some neighbors for coffee and casual conversation appeals to many people who might not attend traditional church activities.

"These groups serve as entry points into our church," Bruegman says. "They're about community, social interaction and getting connected. Discipleship comes later."

Bruegman says a Buddhist recently came to the church and committed her life to Jesus as Savior after being involved in a Red Rocks couples' night and volleyball group.

"We're seeing the rewards of the momentum that these groups are building," he says. "Everything we do deals with connecting with God and with other people."

Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, brought the idea of sharing community and common interests through small groups to the forefront partly in his 2002 book, "Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21st Century." Haggard, who pastors the independent New Life Church in Colorado Springs, challenges congregations to use what he calls the "free market approach," which organizes groups around personal hobbies and interests rather than segregating them according to age, spiritual maturity or other variables.

New churches such as Red Rocks, whose leaders are trying to grow a congregation, aren't the only ones embracing this small groups concept. It's also being implemented by pastors of established churches who are looking for new ways to reach non-Christians and give attendees a sense of belonging in the midst of a crowd.

"We have a lot of people coming through the front doors of our church," says Ben DeBoef, small groups pastor at Calvary Church (Assemblies of God) in Naperville, Illinois, which has an average Sunday morning attendance of more than 4,000 people. "One of our main goals is to try to connect people, and small groups help accomplish that."

Calvary Church has about 150 small groups, ranging from traditional Bible studies to groups that focus on knitting, speaking Spanish, car building, flag football, fishing, volleyball, music, gardening and scrapbooking. They meet in such diverse places as restaurants, coffee shops, shopping malls, practice fields and homes.

"We are putting more and more emphasis on small groups," DeBoef says. "In the future, it's going to become an increasingly crucial aspect to the growth of this church."

Central Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri, which adopted the small groups concept last year, has approximately 30 groups as well as a full-time pastor who oversees the ministries.

"When people walk through the door, we want them to see an immediate path to involvement," says Craig Cunningham, Central's small groups pastor. "The small groups approach is what gives legs to that vision." As with Red Rocks, Central has a group that meets to play video games. Other groups include a couples' game night, fishing, a motorcycle group, a healthy cooking club, crafts, single parents, ultimate Frisbee, mountain biking and basketball. There are even groups for men who work nights and people who have lived in California.

College student Lanie Brewster, a member of Central Assembly's outdoor-themed Ecobonding group, says she has gained a lot from small group involvement.

"The Ecobonding small group created an opportunity for me to make new friends while learning more about outdoor activities such as climbing, hiking and camping," Brewster says. "There is something about sitting around a campfire that seems to elicit meaningful conversations, and there is something about being surrounded by God's creation that makes me want to know Him more intimately."

Shawn Maust, small groups pastor at Pathway Assembly of God in Middlebury, Indiana, notes that in addition to the other benefits, common-interest small groups encourage more laypeople to become involved in ministry.

"One guy who never saw himself leading a group realized he could use working on hot rods and classic cars as a drawing point to bring guys in and pour Christian fellowship into their lives," Maust says. "Our vision is that people would realize that whatever their interest and however God has shaped them, that can be a ministry. God can use them both here in the church and in the community."

Author(s): Christina Quick, Today's Pentecostal Evangel

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Re: Christians connect through cooking, video games, hiking - posted by coops (), on: 2005/8/20 18:12

Aside from the different views Christians hold about some of those activities, I think it's pretty good. There's preaching and conversions and prayer meetings, but also discipleship, and for babes in the faith this is a cool way to "do life" with people and see how a Christian conducts himself in normal life etc.

Just as long as it doesn't become a substitute or take over any prayer meetings or bible studies. I've been part of groups that do a quick study or throw up a few prayers, then all go out for a drive. If it doesn't become like that, then I think it's fantastic, especially for a young population who often need to look up to someone. :-)

Re:, on: 2005/8/21 2:15

I guess the old paths don't work anymore.

Like in Acts chapter 2 (whole chpt) which ends with ~

" And the Lord added to the church 'daily' such as should be saved."

Re: Christians connect through cooking, video games, hiking - posted by rocklife (), on: 2005/8/21 2:44

As long as the Christians are bringing the sinners up to God, and not being lowered down to hell, God's Truth is not popular, but leads to Real Life, I hope God is not forgotten along the way.

Re: Christians connect, on: 2005/8/21 2:59

I had to come back to this... I shouldn't have just left it that way. I just get jealous, I guess you'd call it, for His Word and for people to get the straight stuff.

This is a true story.

Some years ago, we took over a youth group that had all ages, right up to early 20's.

How they all were in the same group, I guess was because, nobody wanted to do 'youth or young singles' period.

It was an AoG Church also.

Anyhow, all they had been doing is pizza parties, trips, bowling, concerts, etc. etc., and some small Bible Study with prayer.

When we took over, (don't get mad just yet) ... but the first thing we did was ask them to not bring the heavy rock stuff to fellowship.

Some moaned and complained, but they complied.

One left, but we found out later, that he was the only one in the group that was tempting the others to even more carnality (sin actually. the girls told me.).

We told the group about the Book of Acts, about what we have (or CAN have) in Christ, just as the book of Acts, and said, we'd go by that book.

We gave them The Classics and we all sat on the Church floor in front together and began to pray.

One kid wanted to pray for the Church's building itself, so all the kids went around the 'Church' and prayed over each room. (This was their idea - but who could stop them ? :)

Each meeting they got more and more on fire and then in no time, wanted to go to the big-bad City to witness on the streets. (Wow - we take no credit for this, it was just 'happening' to them).

It was one great thing after another, that "they" would pick to do, after that.

Full blown revival happened there, because of those kids.

After months of this, they actually cried that they ever thought the pizza parties, etc. etc. had anything to do with the "Church" and only wanted the Bible (especially Acts :-)) and the good ol' Classics and to spend lots of time in prayer and out witnessing, etc..

They were reading as much as I was, at the time and the same books, by their own choice and eating them up. What Joy we had, and the Lord "did" add to our numbers, those who were serious with God.

Their hunger for God just increased by the month, and then they wanted even more and most signed up for Bible college, because they believed with all of their heart, that the depths of God's Wisdom, Knowledge, Power, Love, and Working through His Holy Spirit are Limitless.

And a lot more exciting to personally live out the book of Acts, then to go bowling. 8-)

There are two more stories I'd like to tell about that group, but that would make this too long.

I guess, seeing is believing. But I'll never forget them. Praise our God.

Re: - posted by jeremyhulsey (), on: 2005/8/21 9:10

Hi Grannie,

I have recently been in charge of the youth at my church. I too have met with resistance from them by the fact that I don't rely on parties and bells and whistles to work them up. But slowly over the weeks they've been starting to respond and see that the broken sisterns they were living off of are no good compared to the fresh spring (living) water of the Word of God.

Re: Praise The Living God !!!, on: 2005/8/21 22:14

Well done, Servant of God ~ Amen & God Bless and Prosper your Love of the Straight Paths.

We will pray for you to receive, with a harvest of Joy unspeakable :-).