

11 for 11: Ideas That Work

Fast Forwarding Your Church's Community Engagement

by Reggie McNeal

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The Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, TX (www.austinstone.org), bought a defunct building in an under-resourced part of its city, established a counseling center and other social services in the building—and over 50 church members moved into the declining neighborhood.

Peninsula Covenant Church, Redwood City, CA (www.peninsulacovenant.com), one of the largest Protestant churches in the Palo Alto area, is blending its upper-end neighborhood with a poor community just across the street. The church has become so involved in the community with its Serve the Peninsula Collaboration of government and city leaders that pastor John Siebert was elected to the City Council.

A Methodist church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, moved its Vacation Bible School to a public school that it has been serving—with the full blessing of the school system. Church leaders told the parents of church kids, “Our VBS is at the school this year—in the poorest part of town.”

These churches and others like them are pioneering a shift in leaders who are truly engaging their communities in mission. These churches are not



A group from a Missional Renaissance Leadership Community praying.

only deploying their own members for service; they are engaging with people who aren't part of their church, but who are attracted to rolling up their sleeves to bless the community.

These on-mission churches look not only to their own resources and ideas for the community; they are strategically engaging with other churches and non-church organizations. These churches are moving from ministry *for* the community and in the community, to ministry *with* the community.

We know how to do ministry *for* the community; we're doing this *for*

you. The missional conversation the past few years has moved church leaders more into ministry in the community—outside our church walls. This new movement is a rise in churches that are working shoulder-to-shoulder in partnership with the community—across multiple domains of business, education, health care, social service and government—to transform a city.

Metrics

- **More Americans are pursuing spirituality outside of traditional, organized contexts.**

More than one in five Americans who say they are absolutely sure about believing in God virtually never attend church, according to the massive research Robert Putnam published in his recent book, *American Grace* (page 473).¹ Further, Gallup polls see near record high in the percentage of people who say that religion is losing its influence in America.² Also notice the dramatic rise in recent years of the “nones”³ – the now 14% of Americans who say they have no religious affiliation, yet half of whom believe in God and the Bible. To me, studies like this affirm why missional engagement beyond the walls of traditional church real estate and programming is the path to the future. We’ve got to figure out how to help people “be church” who cannot or will not go to church as it exists now.

- **Participation in service is increasing.**

While we’re losing ground when it comes to attracting people to our worship services, what I call an altruism economy is attracting our friends to **works of service**. Just look around. *American Idol* can raise millions for a good cause in one night. Warren Buffett and Bill Gates are giving away billions and encouraging their mega-rich colleagues to do the same. Charitable giving in the U.S. now tops \$300 billion a year.

So invite your neighbors or co-workers to church, and they may say “no”—no matter how sexy your sax player or how cool your smoke machine. But invite them to serve alongside you at the local school next Saturday, and they’re more likely to say “yes,” and to ask if the whole family can come too!

Trends

- **Missional churches are engaging non-believers as part of their labor force.**

I was encouraging the staff at **Cathedral**

of Joy, Richland, WA (www.cojchurch.com), to market beyond church insiders for their community and global engagement efforts, and their youth pastor backed me up with a great story.

He had just met his neighbor, who was sort of intrigued that he was a youth pastor. But when the pastor talked about an upcoming church trip to Central America to dig water wells, the neighbor really perked up: “That sounds like something I’d like to do. Can I go?” Little did the youth pastor know, the guy volunteering for this Christian mission trip is an Egyptian Muslim. Wouldn’t it be just like God to hijack an Egyptian Muslim with a tender heart, and throw him in with a bunch of Christians for 10 days? The neighbor came back later and said, “I just called my sister in Chicago and she’d like to go on that trip, too.” He is already an evangelist.

Helping people have abundant lives motivates people. I tell church leaders to think beyond their members for their service corps. Every one of your folks who participates in that weekend of service could easily bring three neighbors or co-workers and get them engaged in the community; they’re often wide open to this.

- **Missional churches are increasingly working in cross-domain collaboration.**

Churches on the move in their communities realize that true city transformation is too big for one church, or even a conglomerate of churches, to tackle. Real change around deep problems takes partnership and collaboration across multiple domains: churches and other ministries, social services, businesses, schools, hospitals, and governments.

Crossroads Community Church, Cincinnati, OH (www.crossroads.net), is leading four other churches and five non-profit agencies to build a one-stop social service mall called **CityLink** (www.citylinkcenter.org) that will offer



A group of volunteers from Crossroads Church working with other community organizations on “Go Cincinnati” a one-day, service project designed to impact the city.

housing, job assistance, and health care to needy families.

Fellowship Church, Dallas, TX (www.fellowshipdallas.org), provides a Refugee Empowerment Pathway for dozens of refugees living nearby the church—including helping them enroll in college and paying for their first semester. **3e**, McKinney, TX (www.3emckinney.com), is a group of 30 churches that delivers food every weekend to more than 800 elementary school children.

WoodsEdge Church, Houston, TX (www.woodsedge.org), partners with a secular organization that runs an apartment complex for women with HIV/AIDS. **Momentum**

Church, Cincinnati, OH (www.momentumchurch.com), has chosen a local elementary school to serve—which, by the way, is one of the most impactful and fail-proof ways for any church to get engaged in the community.

- **Church leaders are gaining a better understanding of community development.**

Political opponents made fun of President Obama for his background as a community developer. But I'm telling pastors they need to become community developers if they want their church to make the difference it should. The church is already deployed across all the domains I mentioned earlier. We already have people in politics and education and health care and in business. The church is deployed across all domains, and is in a unique position to call a party for the city to focus on healing itself. No one else is positioned like that.

Christ Church United Methodist, Birmingham, AL (www.christchurchtv.org), identified the poorest part of the city and made a 25-year commitment to serve that part of their community. That's real community development, not just a drive-by event. When you commit to 25 years of efforts in a needy part of town, you can develop some metrics that measure long-term impact. You can commit to raising graduation rates and reducing hunger. **Titus County Cares** (www.tituscountycares.org), which distributes more than 1,000 backpacks of food to kids every weekend, reports that school attendance is up and visits to the school nurse are down. They believe that will eventually lead to higher graduation rates and less prison time.

Questions

- **What will the new scorecard look like?**



Volunteering in schools and community centers is one of the most impactful and fail-proof ways for any church to get engaged in its community.

Missional ministry requires a different scorecard than churches have used in the past. This scorecard goes beyond the traditional benchmarks of buildings, budgets and butts in the seats. In this new missional world, there are dynamic metrics that can measure a church's effectiveness in the community. Measures might include:

- How many backpacks were delivered for a weekend supply of food?
- How much money is the church giving away?
- How many life coaches are deployed outside the church?
- How many volunteer hours are church members logging outside the walls?
- How many cross-domain collaborations is the church engaged with?

A revamped scorecard also means resource reallocation—our prayer, time, people, money, facilities and technology. How would prayer, and money and time be redirected for community development? And once you change the scorecard, you change

the game. What gets rewarded gets done. Once you change what you're celebrating, you get more of that.

- **How do we learn to collaborate across domains?**

Unfortunately, churches have a spotty history of true collaboration across multiple domains in a community. We're not very good at collaboration, because we want to be the show. If we want to drive the ideas and staff it with our people and invite people into the presence we've created, we may be missing cross-domain collaboration in the process.

Real collaboration goes beyond selling a great idea to the city, and getting them to give us resources. We need to figure out how to convene and create cross-domain partners, not just targets or functional users. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, or put our efforts solely under our own label. Whatever needs to get done in a community, there are probably community agencies already there. Why aren't we figuring out how to get behind the Salvation

Army, for instance, to care for the homeless? That's the collaborative mentality.

Predictions

- We will see the rise of city churches.

If churches get serious about truly engaging their communities, thinking outside their own membership for their work force, collaborating across multiple domains and banding together to get the job done, we will see the rise of city churches—churches of all shapes and sizes networking together for city transformation.

Christ Together (www.christtogether.com) is an emerging network of churches in the Chicago area that initially came together to pray for the city. Currently, there are leaders from more than 180 Chicagoland churches that are interested in working together, rather than view each other as competitors. Scott Chapman, the leader that helped spark this movement in Chicago, says he has invitations from leaders in 16 cities to explore similar city church efforts.

I believe this is a movement of the Spirit, like scales falling from people's eyes. God seems to be having a different conversation with the church

about its role in the world. There is a rise of Kingdom consciousness vs. my-church-only awareness. Church leaders are developing a non-church-centric view of God's Kingdom—where we understand that Kingdom is about street life and bringing abundant life where people are. We are becoming more willing to pitch our fortune and future with the community.

This movement will convene the church around service—not around politics or around being a moral watchdog for the community—but around loving your neighbor. The spirit is calling us out to be church better, not do church better.

Endnotes:

1. Putnam, Robert. and David Campbell *American Grace*. Simon & Schuster, 2010. p. 473.

2. Newport, Frank. "Near-Record High See Religion Losing Influence in America." Dec 29, 2010. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/145409/near-record-high-religion-losing-influence-america.aspx> date accessed 4/19/2011

3. *American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population*, American Religious Identification Survey 2008. http://www.americanreligionsurvey.org/american_nones_the_profile_of_the_no_religion_population.html date accessed 4/19/2011



About the Authors

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About Leadership Network

Leadership Network's mission is to accelerate the impact of 100X leaders. These high-capacity leaders are like the hundredfold crop that comes from seed planted in good soil as Jesus described in Matthew 13:8. Leadership Network is a division of OneHundredX, a global ministry with initiatives around the world.

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About 11 for 11

The idea behind 11 for 11 is to profile eleven specific ministry innovations (one per month) during 2011. The total series will also include Global Connections Churches, Rapid Growth Churches, Executive Pastors and Key Implementers, Large Church Senior Pastors, Next Generation Pastors, Externally Focused Churches, Multisite Churches, Leadership Development, Generous Churches, and Next Horizons.

Fast Forwarding Your Church's Community Engagement is also available in these formats.



podcast



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Contact Us

Contact Reggie McNeal at reggie.mcneal@leadnet.org if you are interested in joining a Missional Renaissance Leadership Community. The Missional Renaissance Leadership Community combines church leaders with key influencers from the private, public and social sectors of their cities—such as business executives, school superintendents and nonprofit leaders—to tackle huge societal issues like poverty, hunger, disease and mal-education.

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Additional Resources

The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church by Reggie McNeal (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2003)

Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church by Reggie McNeal (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2009)

To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City by Eric Swanson and Sam Williams (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2010)

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