

Participant Summary: “Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century”
A study of leading churches in the Portland/Vancouver area.

Christian Life Center



Senior Pastor Werner Rienas



Associate Pastor Greg Hickman

The purpose of the study was to identify transferable principles and practices used by churches that have been successful in attracting and assimilating unchurched people. The following is a summary of a leadership interview, three new Christian interviews, a survey of printed materials and an on site visit.

Question #1. What principles and practices used by these churches have been most successful in attracting and evangelizing unchurched people?



Christian Life Center (CLC) is a church with a casual atmosphere and a contemporary style of worship that targets families with children under age 18. The primary reason for this target is that 75% of those living in Washington county are young families.

There are three major points of attraction for CLC: its new facilities, personal invitations and big drama productions. Associate pastor, Greg Hickman states, “I would say 65-70% of the people come because of the building. The second reason is because a friend invited them. We really stress greeting one another and being friendly and loving.” Senior pastor, Werner Rienas affirms that, “The attraction is word of mouth.”

CLC doesn’t do dramas at Easter or Christmas because other churches already provide productions at those times. Instead they write major shows based on best-selling

books and offer them at between major religious holidays. "We are trying to develop a Christian Theater ministry that impacts our culture with relevant drama," states Rienas. The most recent drama production, "Left Behind," drew over 12,500 people and included actors from churches all over the Portland area. "We feel we are doing 'Kingdom work,' we are not just trying to just build our church." CLC mobilizes their own members to invite friends to these productions and hopes to see Christians from other churches bring unsaved friends to these shows then disciple them back in their own churches.

Question #2. How do these churches welcome and follow-up unchurched visitors and new converts?

Pastor Rienas suggests that 20% of those who visit a church visit again, another 20% will never return no matter what follow-up is done. However, 60% of guests need nurture and follow-up if they are to return. The welcome and follow-up of guests at Christian Life Center is called "Care Ministry".

There are four teams of greeters in the "Care Ministry," one team for each Sunday of the month. On their assigned Sunday, a team begins greeting members and guests thirty minutes before each worship service. The same team will spend the next four weeks following-up on the guests who came that Sunday.

During the first week, the Care Ministry tries to provide 5 touch points. On Monday guests receive a plate of freshly baked cookies delivered to their door to express appreciation for attending Christian Life Center. On Tuesday a Care Ministry team leader will make a phone call to each guest. A letter from Senior Pastor arrives on Wednesday and is followed up by a phone call from Senior Associate Pastor Greg Hickman on Friday. Finally, a Care Ministry team member will provide another personal phone call on Saturday.

Care Ministry team members continue to make weekly contacts during the next three weeks of the one-month follow-up plan. During week two Care Ministry team members call the guests and send them a postcard. During the third week they invite guests to an event that fits their needs or interests. In the fourth week, the Care Ministry team members again call or make a personal visit.

After the one month follow-up plan Care Ministry team members are urged to continue to establish a personal relationship with guest by making phone calls, inviting them to events, sending cards, and spending personal time with them. Hickman explains, "For many people it takes them several months to make a decision on a church. Most people don't make it the first, second, third or fourth visit. Often it is taking people three or four months to make that commitment. So, we have trained our care ministers to be patient, call them up two or three months later. We try to take a balance between not doing anything and being very aggressive by constantly having touch points but at the same time coming across very gentle. We are really here to help them and we try to get that across in as many ways we can."

Question #3. How do these churches provide an opportunity for new people to gain a sense of belonging?

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In addition to the Care Ministry there are two primary strategies for connecting new people. First, Christian Life Center places a high priority on small groups that meet in various neighbors in Aloha, Tigard and Beaverton. These groups are called H.O.M.E. Groups, which stands for Homes Open for Ministry and Encouragement. Groups meet two to four times each month with trained small group leaders directing a time of casual sharing, prayer, refreshments and a lesson from God's Word.

The Christian Life Center also provides a series of classes to help newcomers connect with the church in members and ministry. Introduction to CLC explains the history, vision, and beliefs of the church. CLC 2 covers fundamental doctrines and the importance of unity in church life. "Christ calls His Church to be a HOSPITAL, a FAMILY and an ARMY" (CLC 2 page 4). Finally, there is a seven-week Ministry Identity Class (CLC 3) to help people discover their spiritual gifts and best fit for ministry. Of those who have completed this six-month to one-year process, 80% have remained connected with the church.

Question #4. How do these churches see that people are disciplined into fully devoted followers of Christ?

Christian Life Center offers men's and women's discipleship groups in addition to their H.O.M.E. Groups and elective classes offered on weeknights. Half a dozen people are also participating in a special one year discipleship track called MIT (Ministers In Training).

Question #5. How do these churches help people take up the responsibility to serve in personal ministry?

As soon as a person has attended at least Intro to CLC he or she can begin serving in an entry-level ministry. However, when the ministry position involves providing leadership, the training process is a long one.

Every ministry does their own training according to their needs but Pastor Rienas explains why he prefers the intensive seminar format: "What we have found is that the protracted longevity of training, week in and week out, has not worked well in our society, in our culture. What we try to do is try to condense it, make it very brief and succinct, hit some points very hard and be done with it. And people appreciate that a lot more because of the time commitment that people have. But in order to serve in that capacity you have to go to that training. It's mandatory, you are required to attend because we want the people to experience quality and dynamic leadership in those areas."

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Map/ Photos:



Assimilation Study - Participant Information (Fall 2000)

Church Name Christian Life Center Region Westside Portland
Street Address 5585 SW 209th Ave.
City Aloha State OR Zip Code 97007
Phone 503-649-4444 FAX 503-649-6597
Web site www.clcaloha.org

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1. Denomination Assemblies of God
 2. Date church was founded 1939
 3. Founding Senior Pastor started by laity Years in this church N/A
 4. Current Senior Pastor Warner Rienas Years in this church 7
 5. Average Weekend Worship attendance 766
 6. Average number of visitors each Sunday 14
 7. Current Membership 341
 - Adults 341 (must be 18 or older to become a member)
 8. Number of conversions during the past 12 months Adults 39; children 107
 9. Number of new members received during the past 12 months 122
 - Number from transfer (previously active in another church) 106
 - Number from conversion (or with no previous church affiliation) 16
 10. Christian Education Classes
 - # of Adult Classes 4 Weekly attendance 70
 - # of Youth Classes 5 Weekly attendance 80-90
 - # of Children Classes 14 Weekly attendance 300
 11. Small Groups/Cells
 - # of Adult Groups 18 Weekly attendance 200
 - # of Youth Groups 1 Weekly attendance 20
 - # of Children Groups 0 Weekly attendance 0
 12. Large groups meeting midweek
 - Youth Ministry 1 Weekly attendance 60-70
 - Children Ministry 1 Weekly attendance 120
 - Other Ministry Adult mid-week service Weekly attendance 82
 13. Number of people with an identifiable ministry 400 Or approximate % 50%
 14. Number of core lay leaders 75 Number of paid pastoral/ministry staff 6
 15. Number of churches planted by the church 1 (Hispanic)
 16. Describe your congregation's socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural distinctions:
 - Middle class, predominately white (85%), Asian (8%), Hispanic (6%), African-American (1%). Many of the people are associated with the computer industry (high tech). This also means we have a number of entrepreneurs who launch start up companies. It is a younger congregation with the median age of 37. Leadership is visionary & change-oriented. The facilities are new (5 years old). The church is contemporary and dynamic.