

Rolling Hills Community Church



Associate Pastor, Bill Towne

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?

1.1 What are the primary reasons that unchurched people are attracted to your church?

Rolling Hills Community Church was founded in 1978 by five families in Clackamas county at that time when this was the most unchurched county in the nation. The church has since grown to be one of the largest in the northwest with nearly 3000 worshipers each weekend. Rolling Hills is a safe place that people can come to investigate the claims of Christ. They can understand what is being said and yet remain anonymous and feel safe. "We also have really strong youth and children's ministries, so many unchurched people come because of their kids," explains Pastor Bill Towne. "Also, our senior pastor, Dale Ebel, who does most of the speaking, is very transparent. So when people come they don't feel like they are being preached at. They feel like there is a normal guy up there who has struggled and yet has found victories and peace in his life. They can relate to him, he seems real and genuine. Every weekend service we present the gospel. So, we encourage people to bring their friends. We try to work primarily through networks of relationships so the people we are reaching are people like us. They know that it is a safe place to bring their unchurched friends."

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Rolling Hills does bridge-in and bridge-out events. Bridge-in events are events held at the church that are purely evangelistic where the leaders really encourage regular attenders to bring to bring their friends. In fact, a lot of the time the church makes it where members can't buy a ticket unless they are bringing an unchurched friend. They offer a lot of bridge-in events throughout the year, such as drama presentations, mother-daughter teas, or a garden tour. Bridge-out events are where members try to go into the community. “We encourage people with ideas and then connect them with people in our body who have already done them,” states Towne. “One good example of a bridge-out event would be a block party.”

Rolling Hills is very intentional about communicating the purpose of every event. And they seek to match the outcome of each event with one of their five purposes. Their logo is a tree and T.R.E.E.S. is an acrostic that spells out their purposes. T stands for Teach the Word, R stands for Reach the world, E stands for Equip the believer, the second E stands for Exalt the Lord, and S is refers to Support each other. Towne explains, “We are very intentional with our people about the purpose of each opportunity coming up. For example, if the opportunity coming up is a ‘Reach the world’ event we will let them know that they are not supposed to come unless they have an unchurched person with them.”

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

“Every week we welcome first time guests in the service and ask them to fill out a welcome card,” explains Towne. “Those cards are taken and those people are called that week and welcomed. They are asked if they are seriously looking for a church. Are they visiting? How did they find out about Rolling Hills? Did a friend bring them? Did they see us as they were driving by on the freeway? What are they looking for in a church? What did they enjoy at Rolling Hills? What didn't they enjoy? Are they interested in any information from us? And, if they are interested in a particular ministry, we let that ministry know and that ministry follows-up with them.” For the last two years the church

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has tracked each visitor for a whole year. They would call them three months after their first visit and ask if they are still attending Rolling Hills or if they have chosen some other church. If they found that they were still in the process of selecting a church, they would ask if there were some way that they could help them. As soon as they get plugged in at Rolling Hills or somewhere else they wouldn't call them anymore. But if they don't get plugged in they continued calling for a year. “We just wanted to see how we are doing with assimilating our first time guests into the body,” stated Towne. “We found that about 25% of our in-town guests were assimilated into the church.”



At each service when they give an invitation to receive Christ, instead of asking people to come forward for an “alter call” they have people respond by going to a station in the foyer after the service. “We give them a packet of materials and ‘The New Believers Bible,’ explains Towne. “We also invite them to an ongoing four-week class for new believers that meet weekends during one of the services. We are not seeing the people who accept Christ this week join the class next week. That would be the exception. Perhaps 10% would take the next step immediately. More of them will stick around the church and three months down the road they will connect with the New Horizon class or a New Beginnings six-week study in a small group or one-to-one discipleship. We try to provide multiple opportunities for new Christians to grow.”

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

Rolling Hills is very intentional about connecting worshippers in vital relationship through small group participation. On a week when worship attendance is 2800 they will also have nearly 2700 participants in small groups. They call these small groups Community Groups. Their stated mission is “to connect people relationally in groups for the purpose of growing in Christlikeness, loving one another, and contributing to the work of the church, in order to glorify God together.” They currently have nearly 100 Community Groups meeting throughout the Portland metro area.

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One newcomer to Rolling Hills described the importance of her small group connections, “If you just come to church every Sunday I suppose you could get something out of it because the message is so relevant. But when you get involved in some of the extra-curricular opportunities you are truly blessed. When I did accept Christ as my Savior I decided that I would put God first in my life. So, when I went back to work I continued to attend the women’s Bible study on Tuesday mornings. Even on the days when I have really been pressed to meet a quota in sales I still attended and God has always been faithful to me as long as I have been faithful to Him. My husband and I are also just now joining a community group in which several members of the congregation get together on a more intimate basis and discuss whatever topics they choose to discuss. It could be a review of the message notes from the previous Sunday or you could choose your own Bible study. I think that the special programs are what really fulfill and enriches your Christianity, your faith, your relationship with the Lord.”



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

Pastor Dale Ebel outlines several steps for new Christians to begin their walk with Christ and continue to grow in their faith. The first step is to be baptized publicly. Next, new believers are given a special Bible that has a simple follow-up study that they can complete. They are also encouraged to attend a special four-week seminar that is held during one of the weekend worship services. Next, they are encouraged to attend the Life Development Seminar 101 called “Discovering Membership.” This four-hour session is held about four times a year on a Sunday afternoon from 3:00 – 7:00 PM with a follow-up session on Thursday evening where they try to connect participants into small groups. The final step for ongoing spiritual formation is to join a small group where they can share life with other Christians and encourage each other in spiritual growth.

Rolling Hills Community Church currently offers four Life Development Seminars based on the T.R.E.E.S. theme. LD 101 – “Planting: Discovering *Membership* as a *Believer* in Christ,” includes information out the history, purpose, mission, strategy, style and beliefs of the church. LD 201 – “Growing: Discovery *Maturity* as a *Disciple* of

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Christ,” focuses on how to start and maintain good spiritual habits like time with God, giving and Christian fellowship. LD 301 – Producing: Discovering *Ministry* as a *Servant* of Christ,” includes sessions on what the Bible has to say about ministry, how to discover your unique design for ministry and finding a personal ministry at Rolling Hills. LD 401 – “Sowing: Discovering my *Mission* as a *Messenger* of Christ,” is designed to help Christians develop a “life mission” including the desire to share the good news of Christ with others. After completing LD 101 and signing the membership covenant, members are encouraged to take the remaining LD seminars in any order they wish.

Rolling Hills also offers a three-year, non-accredited seminary program for spiritual growth and development called RIHBS (Rolling Hills Institute of Biblical Studies). They offer one course per semester on Thursday evenings taught by seminary professors for the Portland area. Students pay a nominal fee for tuition and a textbook. They can then attend class on a listen and learn basis or they may complete the classes for credit and receive a RIHBS certificate. They currently have between 125 to 175 attending the institute.

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

Rolling Hills is committed to mobilizing members and attenders for ministry involvement. Newcomers are encouraged to find an entry-level ministry right away. Life Development 101 promotes ministry involvement from the start. Life Development 301 helps members discover their unique combination of personality, gifts, abilities, and experiences in order to identify an appropriate ministry involvement. Those who attend the class can meet with a ministry mentor who will assist them in finding their ministry match. Positions of spiritual leadership, such as Community Group leaders, require additional training, higher levels spiritual maturity as well as personal references and background checks. Ongoing training, support and accountability are provided to Community Group leaders and each ministry area offers supplemental training according to their specific needs.

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Map/ Photos:



Assimilation Study - Participant Information (Fall 2000)

Church Name Rolling Hills Community Church Region SW Portland
Street Address 3550 SW Borland road
City Tualatin State OR Zip Code 97062
Phone 503-638-5900 FAX 503-638-8267
Web site www.rollinghills.org

1. Denomination non-denominational
2. Date church was founded 1978
3. Founding Senior Pastor Dale Ebel Years in this church 22
4. Current Senior Pastor Dale Ebel Years in this church 22
5. Average Weekend Worship attendance 2875
6. Average number of visitors each Weekend 30
7. Current Membership _____
 - Adults 3379
 - Youth 895
 - Children 1000
8. Number of conversions during the past 12 months 388
9. Number of new members received during the past 12 months 404
 - Number from transfer (previously active in another church) ---
 - Number from conversion (or with no previous church affiliation) ---
10. Christian Education Classes
 - # of Adult Classes 4 Weekly attendance 300
 - # of Youth Classes _____ Weekly attendance 320
 - # of Children Classes _____ Weekly attendance 566
11. Small Groups/Cells
 - # of Adult Groups 135 Weekly attendance 1500
 - # of Youth Groups 60 Weekly attendance 350
 - # of Children Groups 55 Weekly attendance 400
12. Large groups meeting midweek
 - Youth Ministry 1 Weekly attendance 350
 - Children Ministry --- Weekly attendance ---
 - Women's Ministry 2 Weekly attendance 250
 - Men's Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
 - Other Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
 - Other Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
13. Number of people with an identifiable ministry 800 Or approximate % 28%
14. Number of core lay leaders Number of paid pastoral/ministry staff _____
15. Number of churches planted by the church 1
16. Describe your congregation's socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural distinctions:
 - Primarily white, well educated, double income, mid 30's, with families