

HANDBOOK ON NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRY
A DECADE OF MINISTRY AT
AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCH, TOLEDO, OHIO

by
The Reverend Donald Rings Brewer

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The author recently attended a presentation by Lyle Shaller, noted authority on church development. Shaller presented 33 ministry strategies a church could take to prepare for survival in the twenty-first century. He emphasized that the strategies were progressive in their difficulty. The first possibility is to do nothing. The second is to vote to close, and he continued through the strategies up to number 32, the next to the hardest. That ministry strategy, he said, is to do neighborhood ministry. This news caught my attention, because the congregation I serve has been very successful in instituting and carrying out a significant program of neighborhood ministry for a decade. Because of that success, I felt printing our story might be helpful to other congregations looking for successful models of neighborhood ministry.

This is the story of Augsburg Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio, and its ten year outreach into the neighborhood. This move was a radical change from doing ministry in which the congregation is the target audience, to ministry targeting nonmembers in the immediate neighborhood. Augsburg's setting and situation are similar to that of hundreds and perhaps thousands of other congregations. We hope that by telling the Augsburg story some might find helpful models for their attempts at neighborhood ministry.

After its founding in 1914, the congregation built its church building on its present site shortly thereafter. The street, Sylvania Avenue, is a main east-west road that will lead you downtown to the East. What is now the largest shopping mall in the area is West, about three miles away. The limestone building is very visible on a corner next to the local city library branch. Although Sylvania Avenue is almost totally commercial in this area, immediately behind the stores are residential streets full of houses built from the twenties through the fifties. The two sections that we define as Augsburg's target areas contain 5000 homes.

Its location makes Augsburg a perfect candidate for neighborhood ministry. I have seen churches sitting in the middle of commercial areas where there is not a house for blocks, or surrounded by freeways or office buildings with large lawns without sidewalks. These settings are not conducive to neighborhood ministry. The best setting is one in which large numbers of children can easily walk to the church.

Like many others, Augsburg's glory days were the 1950s, when Sunday attendance was often more than nine hundred, and Sunday school often reached a thousand. Young families with a father who had a good job and multiple children occupied the surrounding houses. Many of these fathers were professionals and business people. The pastor at the time had come to replace the previous pastor, who had been elected bishop in 1942. Immediately after World War Two the congregation built a large three-story parish hall, including a gym on the third floor. It directed its ministry toward children in the areas of Christian education, music, scouts, and athletics.

We can graph the decline of church attendance in mainline churches as indirectly proportional to the growth of the interstate highway system. Through the sixties and seventies as the number of miles of interstate grew, and along with it the concomitant leisure industry, the average attendance at churches declined. How much the one had to do with the other is a matter of theory, but I think the correlation is significant. Anyway, attendance at Augsburg began to decline just as at other congregations during the same period. A number of pastoral changes in a short period of years, some causing membership disruptions, brought Augsburg to a state in 1987 in which average Sunday attendance dropped to near three hundred. Members were leaving in significant numbers, and there was much negative feeling about what was happening in their church.

In interviewing me, the council indicated they were looking for someone to do neighborhood ministry. I am not at all sure that they knew what neighborhood ministry was, but the leaders felt it was what the church needed. I suspect that many congregational leaders are in that position. Neighborhood ministry sounds like the thing to do, but there may be only a vague notion of what ministry with the neighborhood is. As mentioned above, neighborhood ministry is a radical turn in direction, from a ministry to the membership to a ministry to the neighborhood, nonmembers around the church building. If this answers the definition question the next question is far more important:

"Why do neighborhood ministry?" What is the motivation? If you are reading this book to find a model for neighborhood ministry, it is probably because you have come to realize that the future of your congregation depends upon building a new constituency of members from the very place the old constituency came from, the original neighborhood.

Augsburg had moved away from its building. As the families who had lived in the neighborhood became more affluent and wanted newer homes, they moved to the outer edges of the city or into the suburbs. Some were also fleeing the effects of busing on the school system. Of the families that stayed, the children grew up and moved away. In both instances, many of the members who had moved some distance from the church continued to return, even though there are many other Lutheran churches that they passed to return to Augsburg. Mom and Dad, now retired, stayed in the original homesite, until one or both died, and the house was sold.

Now comes the change. These now fifty year old homes were bought by folks not quite so affluent as those former residents. These new owners were not brought up in a society that automatically expected families to join a church. Besides, if they did attend Augsburg, they probably felt somewhat out of place. They did not join so easily and in such numbers as did the new residents in the 1950s. Homes once housing Augsburg members now housed families not connected to any church.

Churches in changing neighborhoods get gray; that is, the younger people move out and the ones who remain are the older folks. I heard stories of young families who transferred to another church simply because Augsburg had so many old people. To give an idea of the age of Augsburg people, when I arrived in 1987 there were eighty shut-ins. This makes the task of reversing the process much harder. The effect of an aging congregation on newer people looking for a church home was illustrated to us recently. We baptized four children in a family who had been attending our program for at least two years. The parents had been raised in another denomination. The mother told us that when they went to their denominational church down the street, they decided they would not go back because the church was full of old people. It takes time and right programming to bring in younger people and change the image.

So, the motivation to do neighborhood ministry at Augsburg was a panicked effort to make up for years of decline by reaching out to bring in new members. Augsburg's leaders had some vague notion that this meant some new directions, but they really had no idea what was involved. Most assumed that it could be done without significant changes that would affect the present membership; those who were paying the bills and really did not wish for their 1950's vision of the church to be disturbed. Let's change what must be changed, while maintaining the status quo!

Before you begin neighborhood ministry you must understand what it is going to do to your congregation. Neighborhood ministry chases people away at the very beginning. The neighborhood is changing. People who leave the neighborhood are to some degree escaping. They are escaping their old neighborhood, and the new people who are moving in. They are escaping the school system which now is declining in quality because these new children are there. They are willing to return to the old church so long as it remains a bastion against the community. But when neighborhood ministry begins to work, it brings in the very people the commuting members have been trying to escape. Now these new children are joining the established children in Sunday school. It is at this point that commuting members decide that the commute is just too much for them, it is not working, and they find it necessary to join a church near the new home. This loss was significant at Augsburg.

Another important fact to understand is that neighborhood ministry takes time. You don't see results in the first year. It took Augsburg about seven years to stop the decline in average attendance, and it has simply been stable for the last three years. Only the future will tell whether attendance at worship will go up. One thing is for sure -- we are serving a lot more people each week than show up to worship on Sunday morning.

The last caveat is that numerical equivalence is not enough. The members we lose have had a long history of attending and supporting Augsburg. The new members are not as committed to the congregation or to the denomination. They are consumers, and are accustomed to changing their loyalties on a whim. They are consuming Augsburg in the same way they consume sports leagues, hobby clubs, leisure involvements. Only the future will tell if they find the congregation's ministry important enough to commit themselves to it. And when they do, they do not have the income former members had, so it will take more of them to support the church to the same degree.

The format of this book is to outline individually the several dozen programs or projects that make up the neighborhood ministry we do. It is up to the reader to decide whether such a project will work in another context. First, however, I must introduce you to the staff people who actually carry out the ministry.

NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRY DIRECTOR

The church council made the decision to make neighborhood ministry a high priority by defining a full-time staff position for it. The initial year's salary was provided by designating money from the memorial fund. Judy Encheff began at Augsburg in 1989. She brought with her many years of experience in the county extension service, starting 4-H clubs in the inner city, nutrition programs for inner city mothers, community programs through the library, and programming in nursing homes. She had most recently been neighborhood ministry coordinator in the oldest Lutheran Church in Toledo that now sits in a radically changed neighborhood. There she ran many of the same kinds of programs she put into the Augsburg program.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

Dr. Carolyn Haury came on the staff in 1996. Hers is also a full time position. Her excellent background and experience in church music have been an enormous asset. She grew up in a church with a large children's music ministry carried out by a husband and wife team, and she carries on their tradition by bringing husband, John, himself a musician. John voluntarily works in the music program, much to our benefit. Carolyn's doctorate is in organ performance. Before Carolyn we had a part time director of music who also worked in the program with children.

It must be pointed out that though the skills these women bring to our ministry are significant, their most important asset is their faith. They feel a call, not to doing neighborhood ministry, or music ministry, but faith ministry. What they do gives them an opportunity to tell children about Jesus, and these days there are many children who know very little about Jesus.

CUSTODIAN

Do not underestimate the importance of the custodian. Every person who walks through the doors of the church has an impact on the custodian's job. If the custodian is not sold on the ministry that is being done, he/she is not going to appreciate having more work to do. In fact, the custodian must be seen as one involved in ministry, just as much as any other staff. We have had several custodians. The present full-time custodian works from 3:00 PM to 9:00 PM, so as to be present during the peak times of activity. He is in effect the building manager, being responsible for the building and overseeing the building use by the many groups. We also have a part-time assistant custodian.

INSURANCE AND LIABILITY

Just as every person who walks in the door impacts on the job of the custodian, so each person also impacts on the liability and the insurance carrier's willingness to cover the program. A church

contemplating neighborhood ministry needs to meet with its insurance carrier to discuss the implications. One policy our carrier insisted on is that any group who wants to use the church space for an event not connected with the congregation's ministry must have on file a certificate that they have their own liability insurance. As a result of this restriction several groups that had been meeting in the church had to make other arrangements because they could not get their own insurance coverage, and several who have asked for space had to be turned down for the same reason.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER

We begin with our most important medium of advertising, the Augsburg Neighborhood Newsletter. Its purpose is to advertise the neighborhood-oriented events coming up in our program. We normally send out six each year, timed for our most important events. They are distributed in plastic bags hung on door knobs by a company with whom we contract. We print them, and they deliver them. We send out 5000 or 8000, depending on what we are advertising. They are delivered to homes in the section immediately north and immediately south of the church. The cost is about \$240 for 5000, \$300 for 8000. The cost for us to print them is additional, of course.

The format is an 8 1/2 by 14 colored sheet, printed on one side by our duplicating machine. This size and format is the cheapest way to print it. We deliver it to the distributing company printed and folded. It is accordion folded so that the masthead shows on the top, and the sheet easily drops open.

This is obviously an expensive advertising piece. The costs involve paper, printing process, distribution, and the time of the staff person who writes it and puts it in order. The question comes up as to whether it is worth it. Our observation is that it is absolutely worth it. I am sure many people pay no attention to it and throw it away without reading it, but it certainly works for us. It does bring people to the events we advertise, and we are known in the community as the church that sends out the neighborhood newsletter.

It does not contain any neighborhood news. Immediately under the masthead is the major announcement of our next upcoming event. We will discuss these in depth on succeeding pages. The bottom half of the newsletter contains smaller announcements of three or four other events, invitations to Sunday school, worship, greetings from the pastor, etc.

We also do some paid advertising in the newspaper, and send press releases to community calendars in newspaper and electronic media, but the neighborhood newsletter is our most important advertising piece, and it goes only to our immediate target area. We do not think it makes sense to pay money for advertising that is outside our geographical target area.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS

Three neighborhood events bring many people to our church, and they are very easy to put on.

The neighborhood yard sale was our first. I had done these in two other churches: a suburban church and a rural church. The yard sale is held in our paved parking lot. Participants are offered one parking space. They bring their own tables or display equipment. We have upwards of 70 exhibitors each year, and the event brings hundreds of people. It is almost a fair. It is held on the first Saturday in June, from 9:00 until 1:30. It is advertised in the neighborhood newsletter, which contains a notice that any who want space should call the church for a reservation. The church secretary records names and addresses of those requesting space, until all spaces are taken. Two weeks before the event we send them a letter with the instructions and the number of their space, which we mark the night before with chalk. The place is pandemonium for about an hour before opening time, but they all eventually get settled and the customers come pouring in. About two hours after the sale begins, I

bring out a table from the church and place it in a prominent spot. I put a sign on it that says, "Everything on this table is free." By this time some of the exhibitors are finding they have items that aren't selling and they don't want to take home, so they put them on the "free" table. Folks love it, and many go home with items that cost them nothing. This has been a hit, and has earned us quite a reputation. It also serves to move items from those who can't use them to those who can. There are no restrictions on what can be sold, except food items. We'll talk about that later.

The next event we added was the Christmas craft sale. It is held in on a Saturday in November in the church basement, which includes four large rooms. In this sale we provide a table for each participant, which helps us define the spaces, but many of them also bring display racks that sit on the floor. It gets a little crowded, but it is not a problem. Even though practically everybody has a craft sale in the fall, we still have them clamoring for space. We can handle about fifty exhibitors for this sale. It is restricted to crafts.

The Saturday after Easter is our antique and collectibles sale. We hold this down to one large room with about 25 exhibitors. It runs from 10:00 - 2:00, but all the business is done in the first hour when all the antique dealers come swooping through looking for bargains. All three of these events are run in about the same way. We provide the space and the advertising. Besides the neighborhood news and the print and electronic media, we also put a large sign next to the road announcing the event. How much do we charge these folks for their spaces? Well now, that question gives me an opportunity to talk about another important aspect of our philosophy -- actually, our theology -- of doing neighborhood ministry, and that is...

IT' S GOTTA BE FREE!

We charge these people nothing. It is more important to make friends than to make money. While all the other churches around us are charging for everything they do, we have built up a reputation as the church where everything is free. It is the perfect approach to our target audience. We do have some problems selling the policy to our members who were born before 1940. Their philosophy is "everybody pays their own way." They really have a hard time understanding why we would not charge people for their spaces. But the generations born since the end of World War Two have been given so much they have almost what could be called a welfare mentality. They think it is perfectly natural that churches should be giving. The new paradigm churches who are catering to these folks don't even take up an offering in the worship service, lest they give the wrong impression. As much as possible we do not charge for access to our programs. It makes a big impression on people. While other churches are having money-making events, from bazaars to bingo, in effect looking to the community to subsidize their ministries, we are known as the church where everything is free.

Then how do we make money? Actually, we make a fair amount of money at these events. As I said, exhibitors are not allowed to sell food. That's our department. At each event one or more of our church groups sells food items. One group might have the lunch menu, one might sell cold drinks and chips, one might have a bake sale, one a candy stand. There is also the opportunity for a group to sell whatever fundraising items they are working on at the time. At the yard sale the senior citizens group has a rummage area selling items donated for the sale by the congregation. Our groups do rather well, and of course, you must have food items at events like these.

These events also give us some opportunity to do evangelism. We print our own eight page children's Christmas coloring books, for instance, and distribute them to children at the Christmas craft sale. They contain the Christmas story, and an invitation to observe Christmas at our Christmas eve services. At the yard sale a display table offers information on our various programs. We have passed out refrigerator magnets with the pastor's card on it, bible portions, and other items. This year we gave away bibles that had been used in the Sunday school, but have been replaced. There are lots of possibilities here.

Other events we have thought of include Spring crafts, and a gardener's market in the harvest season. Another local church that has a co-op nursery has a one day children's clothing flea market, and it gets an enormous response as folks look for children's clothing at reasonable prices. This would be an excellent event right before the beginning of school. The idea is for the church to provide an opportunity for neighbors to do business in ways they could not do alone. These can be very effective neighborhood building events. In a day when neighbors don't neighbor, our events are opportunities for people in the neighborhood to meet each other and talk. Before shopping centers and malls drew people elsewhere to shop, people went "downtown" on a Saturday night. The neighborhood events provide some of that atmosphere, in which people get to know one another.

RESOURCES -- MONEY AND VOLUNTEERS

Since none of our neighborhood programs is for the purpose of making money, we depend on other sources. The neighborhood ministry director's first year's salary came from funds in our memorial account. Since then the salary is a part of the yearly budget, as is that of the director of music. We do have some money raising events. Judy holds two spaghetti dinners per year: one on the first Wednesday in Advent and one on Ash Wednesday. Several purposes are accomplished with these. Because they produce a good turnout, many people are directed toward attending these seasonal Wednesday services. Money collected is for paying the cost of sending our youth to the Lutheran Youth Congresses. They give Judy an opportunity to use her volunteers. She has found that when mothers bring their children to the preschool program, they are usually willing, and even eager, to lend a helping hand. Getting them involved in something like the spaghetti dinner is an excellent opener to other programs and events. At these volunteer stints these folks meet others, and the ice is broken for future acquaintances at the church. This involvement of volunteers is a primary way of moving nonmembers to membership possibility.

We also have the usual bake sale, plant sale, and car wash. These are usually a part of the program of the music ministry, and the proceeds go to sending our musical children to music camp or a musical festival. For many youths the music camp or festival is a primary draw into the music program.

One of our Lutheran insurance companies, Lutheran Brotherhood, helps the program by providing matching funds. We report to them the events, the number of volunteer hours spent, and the amount of money made. They match the income, thus doubling our resources. We give the congregation opportunities to contribute to outreach ministries, and they respond well. Judy went to a local meeting of lay church professionals, where they were discussing Bible School. Several were complaining about the cost of Bible School, and were astounded when Judy told them that Bible School does not cost us anything; in fact, we make money on Bible School. Here's the secret.

First, don't be afraid to spend money on specialized offering envelopes. Offering envelopes do not cost, they pay. On the Sunday before Bible School starts, we put offering envelopes in the bulletins, and announce that those who wish to donate to the expenses of this important ministry are invited to do so. Children take home a Bible School newsletter daily with an offering envelope stapled to it, and an offering plate is available during the openings and closings each day. On the Sunday after Bible School we have the children present their songs during the 11:00 worship service, and we again include Bible School offering envelopes in the bulletin. We always cover our expenses, and then some. Of course, in addition to these offerings, our congregation is very generous in providing the snacks.

There is another aspect of doing neighborhood ministry at Augsburg that has been very gratifying to me. The congregation sees this ministry as so vital to our survival that often members come to me and offer me money for the program. Sometimes this money is a memorial for a loved one who has died. Sometimes it is a lump sum from a onetime income payment, house sale, or inheritance. These folks come to me and ask what could be done in the children's program with their

set amount of money. I periodically talk to Judy and Carolyn about this, so that I am prepared to offer several suggestions when the chance comes.

Carrying two full time staff for the purpose of doing neighborhood ministry is very expensive, and not every congregation can do it. Each congregation using this handbook will need to assess their resources and choose their activities accordingly.

FOCUSING ON THE FAMILY

We don't mean to discriminate against singles, couples without children, or senior citizens living alone, but the focus of neighborhood ministry is on the family. More precisely, it is on the children. We spend most of our time and energy on programs that are for children. The reason for this is that parents are looking for opportunities for their children, and if we get the children we eventually will get the parents. My first attempt at an outreach ministry to families was in a rural church that was down to about 35 in attendance. They were finding that new homes were being built around their church on the roadside half acre lots that farmers were selling to builders. The new families were moving out from surrounding towns. Most of them were not moving such a distance that they were changing relationships that they had established in their former towns. They were still going to the same school, shopping in the same stores, attending the same churches. They were just driving farther to do it. The problem was to get them to consider a new church relationship.

In this county there were no theaters, not even in the towns. The entire county did not have one family theater. The movie offerings in the nearby city didn't have much for children, and it seemed to me to be the perfect opportunity to present that congregation as family oriented. Using a small grant that had been left the church, we decided to have a family movie night and invite the community. This was the time before videos, and to rent a Walt Disney movie cost \$150. We decided on one called "Snowball Express," as it seemed to have an interest for the whole family.

We reserved the movie for the chosen date, then set about our publicity. I drafted a letter to community families, and we sent it by postal delivery to several hundred houses around the church. The letter bemoaned the lack of family movie entertainment. It said that our church was going to have a family movie night, and all in the community were invited. "Our families invite your family" was the way the letter read, and it was all free, there was no admission charge.

On the appointed evening the ladies of the church made popcorn. The place was packed. There were many people from the community in attendance, people who would otherwise have no reason to enter that building. Since it was a three reel movie, and time was needed to rewind and set each reel, the breaks gave the members of the church an opportunity to offer refreshments to the visitors and meet them. Now in this day of video, every family has a shelf of Walt Disney movies, so such a program would not draw a crowd, but it is a good example of how family ministry opportunities can present themselves.

Judy's first children's ministry venture at Augsburg was based on a program she had done at her former church. She offers a preschool program for ages three to five. She limits the group to fifteen, and uses space and equipment in the children's Sunday school area. In the ninth year now, she always has a waiting list from parents who want their children involved. It is a two hour program once per week. She asks the parents to stay and help her once every twelve weeks. In this way she gets to know the parents, and when she needs help in other areas, she asks them and eventually they become interested in other ministries of the church. The preschool has been the first contact with Augsburg for many who are now members. As with our other ministries, there is no charge.

The preschool session begins with "creative play," where the children have the option to color, paint, put puzzles together, play with blocks, etc. Since this is the time when children are being brought in, this individual activity time keeps the children active until the whole group has arrived. The group begins with the learning session, in which she tells them a bible story, and also uses

preschool Weekly Readers, which we subscribe to for this program. She says "The children love their work time. They do not like to miss work time." Judy explains to them that one of the reasons for worktime is to get ready for kindergarten. She feels that structuring the program is very important for the training of the children.

After worktime she may do exercising, or physical games. Bathroom break comes next, followed by snack time. She then marches them to the music room, where they have a half hour of music with Carolyn. The last half hour the children are taken to the nursery, which is furnished with large toys such as child's kitchen, workbench, house, drawing easel, baby care furniture, and other toys. Judy says the children have no difficulty playing there for a half hour. The play time is unstructured, and is a break from the previous parts of the program, which are structured.

For several years we had a Monday Morning Moms group. A volunteer nursery attendant was found who was willing to baby-sit the children while their moms met in the lounge for an hour and a half program or Kaffee Klatch. Judy got the group started and stayed with them for several months. She booked in speakers from agencies concerned with family matters, and arranged for one of the moms to have refreshments. After a while she allowed them to function on their own, which they did for about two years, slowly losing members as mom's situations changed, and the group disbanded. This will be the lifestory of these groups; therefore, it is better to start new groups than to try to add new people to established groups.

You cannot underestimate the importance of the ministry of programs like this. Families today are splintered by distances that make family solidarity impossible. Gone is the day when families got together in large groups for family dinner and the exchange between family members, where the men got together on the back porch and the women sat around the dining room table and they talked. These talks were very important, for they gave people the opportunity to hear the stories of the elders and talk over the problems of homekeeping and child rearing. People are isolated today and they have no one to talk over these things with. Programs like Monday Morning Moms can provide some of that. If that isn't the kind of ministry a church ought to be doing, I don't know what is.

We also have on the docket of things to do to offer a similar time to the mothers while their children are in our preschool program. It would not be hard at all to set up the coffee in the church kitchen and invite the mothers to sit around the kitchen tables while their children are being taken care of in the program. We have planned that the way to do this would be to have one mother serve as hostess to get the group started. Since the program begins in the fall and runs through May, a new group would be started each year.

In these programs people meet new people, have the opportunity to discuss problems, and get to know one another so that as they are assimilated into the church program they already know others who are on the same track.

The next children's ministry Judy started after the preschool was the Kids' Klub. This is an afterschool program that we run on Wednesdays. It is for children first-through-sixth grade. We get sixty to seventy-five children per session. The first twenty minutes is gathering time, and the children come in and choose to color, play cards or games, puzzles, chat with others or read. Judy then shows a twenty minute movie she has taken from the public library next door. These are 16 mm films, usually a cartoon, which she shows on the white wall of the room. Believe it or not, these children are so accustomed to watching TV screens that the large images on the wall fascinate them. One child asked "Is this a real movie?" Snacks are served during the movie. We are probably going to have to invest in a video projector, as the library is phasing out its 16mm collection -- it's obsolete.

She tells them a story out of the bible for about five minutes, then has the children do a worksheet that accompanies the story, which takes another five minutes or so. There are six different tables, one for each of the grade levels. Helpers who are Junior High youth are present to help the younger children.

After the first fifty minutes of being together, the group is divided into three groups. One group goes to the music room, one to the gymnasium for recreation, one to the craft room. After twenty minutes the groups rotate until all have participated in the three activities. After the two hour session, they go home.

Does all of this really work? Do any of these people actually become part of the church, or are they just using the church? Last Sunday we had first communion for twenty two children. Ten of them came from this outreach program.

In the summer of 1997 the program staff got together to plan for fall. We had so many programs going for so many age groups throughout the week that families were finding it difficult to fit it all in. We decided to go with one day into which we would fit almost all our programs. We called it "Wild and Wonderful Wednesday." We began the afternoon with the preschool program, followed by Kid's Klub after school. An open gym time at 5:30 brought in some youth who were not involved in anything else. At 6:00 we served what we referred to as "family dinner".

This part was the key to the success of the whole day. Dinner had been the tough part about getting families involved. We offered dinner for the family, followed by programs for every family member. Judy planned simple menus of food that kids tend to like. Tables were set and dinner was served family style. We asked that there be at least one adult at each table. Reasonable decorum was expected. Dinner was preceded by very simple devotions and grace. At 6:30, in scheduled timeslots, we offered adult bible study, men's prayer fellowship, puppet ministry, teen choir, catechism, study table, game table, another preschool time, teen bell choir, and a time to sit at the tables and just gab. It was all over at 8:30. Such an evening may sound like an enormous undertaking, but we have the spaces for it, and the participants thought it was great. We had 90 to 120 people for dinner every night, and those who came to the programs but did not eat probably brought the total to 150.

The evaluation team in the summer of 1998 affirmed the value of this Wednesday program, and planned emendations for fall. We decided to call it simply Wonderful Wednesday, as our trial year had tamed it and it did not seem so wild to us as it did when we first conceived it. Along with affirming what we had done the previous year, we decided to add some programs in areas where we felt a need. I offer the full schedule and descriptions of the programs from our publicity flier so that you will have a good idea what it is all about.

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WONDERFUL WEDNESDAYS 1998

4:00-6:00 KIDS KLUB, an afterschool program for children in kindergarten through 6th grade. Includes movies, games, crafts, service projects, snacks, and much more.

4:00-4:45 TEEN DROP IN - do your homework, sit and talk, or play a game (7-12 grades)

4:45-5:30 HOSANNA SINGERS for youth in grades 7-12. Sings for 11:00 am worship as scheduled.

5:30-6:00 OPEN GYM, for teens 7 through 12 grades

6:00-6:45 FAMILY DINNER, adults \$1, children \$.50. [note to reader - these dinners are preceded by a short worship service printed on a single piece of paper and distributed on the tables. It includes one hymn, which is accompanied on the piano or by any instrumentalists we can feature]

6:45-7:30 REVELATION RINGERS, handbell choir open to youth in grades 7-12

- 6:45-7:30 PUPPET MINISTRY for Junior and Senior High kids, proclaiming the Word with puppets. Performs at church service once per month.
- 6:45-7:45 PRESCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE PROGRAM with Miss Judy in learning and fun activities
- 6:45-7:45 GAME ROOM FOR GRADES 2-6. A time to sit and play a table game, a card game, or put a puzzle together.
- 6:45-7:45 HOMEWORK HELPERS FOR GRADES 2-6 Adults are here every Wednesday to help you with your homework.
- 6:45-7:45 BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS
- 6:45-7:45 MEN OF INTEGRITY, a prayer and support group for men
- 6:45-7:45 PROXY PARENTS Are you raising your grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or someone else's children? This group will help you with the struggles, joys, and triumphs.
- 6:45-7:45 CHAT TIME. Those who wish to do so after supper may stay in Luther Hall and visit. Relax and enjoy.
- 7:00-8:00 EMOTIONS ANONYMOUS, a support group for adults to help in coping with everyday problems
- 7:30-8:30 CATECHISM for students of Junior High age
- 7:30-8:30 ADULT CHANCEL RINGERS, a handbell choir
- 6:30-8:30 BANTAM BASKETBALL for ages 8-12 November through March
- 8:00-10:00 ADULT BASKETBALL in season

Child care services available 6:45 until 8:30 pm

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Each program we offer contains some of our own members, some members of other churches who are interested in that particular program, and some people who have no church affiliation. Of course it is the latter group who is our target, and we find that the first program people get involved in is a door opener; as they get to feel comfortable around us and in our building, they advance from one program to another, often bringing in more members of their family. Eventually some consider membership in the church.

Mother's Morning Out is a one day a week opportunity for mothers to drop off little ones in the supervised nursery for a morning of shopping or whatever. It's a real ministry to stay-at-home moms who have no one else to leave the child with to make the morning's duties easier to take care of. A co-op nursery is another ministry that is successfully sponsored by churches. The nursery association is a separate administrative body, and they run the nursery using the church facilities.

A centrally located church in a small town can offer "A Summer Place To Be," offering reading opportunities, story telling, games, toys, and supervised play area. This would work as an outside program such as a picnic shelter or even a tent in the churchyard.

Child safety is an important issue for parents. Whenever parents today are looking for a day care center, the issue of child safety is a priority. Each church doing ministry with children needs to have a policy regarding these issues, which should include publication of the policy, screening and training of volunteers and employees, records of who can come and pick the child up, use of locks, and many other issues relating to the safety of children while they are in your care. Many of the classroom doors in which children would be had opaque windows in the upper half. We had all the windows changed to clear glass. It seemed like an unnecessary expense, but it makes the environment safer when those who are in a room can be seen from the outside. Parents appreciate that the church has their child's safety in mind.

We have paid Sunday morning nursery attendants. That may seem extravagant to a congregation that has always switched the job back and forth to volunteers, but it has paid off. Parents expect that the person they hand their child off to has had some training and experience and some responsibility, not just a thirteen year old girl who was hurriedly pressed into service when the assigned adult couldn't come.

Judy has found that the Scout program called God and Me has been very helpful. They are six week programs, so that they don't require long term commitment. She offers them only to families whose children are mature enough and interested enough to be responsible for the work. It is an intensive study program that requires the child to do projects relating to the family, the church, and the community. It is available through the scouting program.

The local police department offered Bike-a-thon, a training session in bicycle safety and bike riding. We arranged to have one of them in our parking lot. The athletic committee also sponsors an annual three-on-three basketball contest in the fall, again in the parking lot and the gym.

Homes today are often not conducive to proper study habits, so a study table time offers children a supervised place to come and do their homework. If teachers are willing to volunteer to do tutoring, so much the better. Good high school students can also be used as tutoring volunteers to those in elementary grades.

WHAT HAPPENS ON SUNDAY MORNING?

No matter how good your outreach program is, it stands or falls on what happens on Sunday morning. If neighborhood people choose to try you out on Sunday morning, you had better meet their needs and expectations. Here the crucial element is the attitude of the church members. If your church wants to assimilate neighborhood people into membership, then it must be shown in that brief hour of worship.

Visitors are looking for friendly and helpful people. They are looking for acceptance of who they are as they are. They are looking for worship that helps them meet God. They do not know where everything is in the building. They don't know where the restrooms or the nursery are. They do not know what the congregation's expectations and rules are. They don't even know which book to pull out of the pew rack.

Young people today come to church dressed casual. They go everywhere dressed casual. It seems that soccer games and formal weddings call for the same dress code -- casual. That's pretty hard to take for the generation who sees dress as a sign of respect or disrespect, and who feel that when you come before God you wear your best. Regardless of what the church members may think about the attire, they must not display it to the visitor.

Another point of contention that I have dealt with is the freedom that parents give children in public places today. When a family attends church, the children are not necessarily made to sit and be quiet. They may not even be respectful of those around them. This does not sit well with the older generation, and we have had some unfortunate incidents where longtime members have made

remarks to parents that were less than welcoming. The pastor must continually speak about this to groups of members, to remind them of how important it is to be hospitable.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Vacation Bible School was invented at a time when most mothers stayed home and therefore were available to volunteer to teach VBS, which originally lasted for two weeks. As family lifestyles changed through the sixties, fewer mothers were so available, and family activities made two week schools impractical. In an attempt at keeping some semblance of the VBS tradition, churches went to evenings schools, cut out Fridays, went to one week, or many gave up on it all together. In the seventies I was on our synod Christian education committee. We tried to do VBS teacher training in our area of about thirty churches, but found that only about five of them were still doing Bible School.

If you want to do neighborhood ministry, you MUST do Bible School. Parents are looking for activities for their children in the summer, and Bible School is perfect. But you may need to reorient your thinking as to what Bible School is all about. First, it is not for the children of your members, although hopefully many of them will be included. It is for the children of the neighborhood. Therefore, it is planned in a way as to be available for them. Evening schools are pointed toward being convenient for members. A good neighborhood school must be in the morning. The second reorientation in philosophy is that Bible School is not a Christian education event; it is an evangelism event.

At Augsburg our schools usually run around 150 children, and have run in excess of 200. It is open enrollment and there is no pre-registration. We have no idea whatever how many children are going to show up, or what age level they will be. On the first morning we set tables outside near the door with simple registration cards, and ask mothers to fill out the card before bringing the children in. Volunteers are at the tables to assist children who show up without a parent, as many of them do. All are then directed to the nave. There the key persons are introduced during a brief opening. We then introduce the teachers for the youngest children's class, and ask those children to follow them to the classroom. The next group is similarly led out, up to the oldest level, usually sixth grade for us. Once in the classroom, the teachers make a class roster, and make decisions about splitting classes, if necessary.

With such an arrangement, we make everything very flexible. Since we have no idea how many children, or what grade levels we might have, we do not order books and craft kits from a church supply house. We would not know which to buy and it would be too expensive, anyway. We create our own curriculum, based on tried and true principle: Old Testament one year, Jesus stories the next.

We might choose five Old Testament people, especially those about whose childhood we know something about, or five stories of Jesus, such as parables, or miracles, or five people Jesus touched. The story is introduced in the opening, told in the classroom, perhaps with a related coloring page, video, or other graphic. Classes change, with some kids going to the room where they learn music that will be used at the VBS musical on Sunday morning. Some go to the craft area, where some crafts are designed to fit the theme, others are just for entertainment. A professional story teller -- Augsburg's Miss Amy -- tells the theme story and other stories in another location. Some may work on an all-school craft project, such as building a bible village. Of course, there is a snack time. Fifteen minutes before closing the children are brought back into the nave. There the music director leads some songs, or perhaps the teens present a puppet play, followed by a prayer and a send-off. It is important for us to begin and end in the nave, because our building is so big and confusing that parents picking children up must be able to find them in a central place.

How can we successfully pull off such an affair with so many children and no advance registration? First, leadership recruitment. We need about 30 volunteers, adult and teen. They are people involved in other programs, not necessarily members of the church. Judy asks them to help in

Bible School, and she has no trouble getting them to say "yes." You see, there is no classroom setting, so she does not ask them to be teachers; they have neither lessons to plan nor classes to teach. She simply asks them to be leaders who shepherd an age group around to the various learning centers. She says "I could never pull off such a big Bible School if we used traditional methods."

Another advantage to the learning center approach is that it cuts down on discipline, because they are always moving from one location to another. They do not sit in a classroom as they have in school all winter and spring. We do not have a recreation or game period, because we don't have time, and the children do not miss it. Also, since the leaders are not responsible for curriculum and a class, it is possible to use people who cannot be there every day. Someone may be able to work Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, another Thursday and Friday. As you must realize by now, we are very adaptable. Also, the size of our facilities allows us to expand when we need to.

Several years we had young people paid by the Private Industry Council who spent the month before Bible School getting the craft and handwork materials ready. This year we do not have such a person, but Judy has found that a lot of our older children are eager to help, and has scheduled workdays for them to come and help get Bible School ready. There are also many teens who want to help on Bible School week. We have teens we have never seen before walk in the door and ask to help. On the Wednesday following Bible School, Judy has a fun day when she rewards her youth helpers by taking them to a park for picnic and games.

One area we always feature is the all-school center. Every couple years we do a bible village theme, such as Marketplace 29 AD. We have many poncho-type bible costumes and the children wear them as bible people. One year we centered each day around a bible story from a book that contained the stories and a punch out building that represented that story, such as the house of Zacheus, the house of the father and two brothers, etc. Each day in homeroom the story would be read and the house put together, so that each class had its own miniature bible village. That village was duplicated in the all-school center using large appliance boxes. Each student made and took home a bible house, made from a block cut from a 2x4.

In 1996 when the Olympics were prominent in the news, we used the Olympic theme and materials made available through the Bible Societies. Each child received an Olympic New Testament. A local fast food chain was offering free Olympic gold medals, and was kind enough to let us have enough to give out.

One year the all-school center was a bible village that doubled as our craft center, with shops offering carpentry, pottery, weaving, music, sandalmaking, baking, scrollmaking, and a spice and herb shop. Here were hands-on-life experiences from Jesus' day. We also had a bible museum with display of items I had brought back from Israel.

Keys to the Kingdom involved turning our gym into the King's castle. Groups could get there only by going through a maze that changed each day. One year I got 75 appliance boxes, bound them all together, and cut holes through them as a sort of maze. The kids had a ball.

In 1998 we used an Old Testament theme. Years ago an engineer in the congregation built a Noah's Ark that has been used for several Bible Schools. It is 24 feet long and almost as high as the ceiling in our large room. It is big enough to get about 15 children inside. It is very impressive. It became the center of our Bible School. Miss Amy told her stories inside the ark. We sang Noah songs, the children put together a model of the ark that we got in quantity from Lutheran Brotherhood insurance agency, and there were ark pictures to color. Although we went on to use other stories on other days, the theme of animals continued. Tuesday it was Daniel and the lions; Wednesday, Elijah and the ravens; Thursday, Jonah and the whale; and Friday, Jesus and the sheep. One day the humane society brought in animals; another day the zoo sent a teacher with animals to talk about animal conservation. On Thursday the children brought a stuffed animal and we ended with a stuffed animal parade around the block. On Friday we ended the school with parents bringing in real animal

pets; we had a service of blessing of the animals and a live animal parade around the block. Sunday the children and parents came to the service and the children presented the music from a musical entitled "One Hundred Percent Chance of Rain."

1998 Statistics for the school show its effectiveness:

181 children enrolled

94 children first time in any of our programs

44 children attended that were in our outreach program

25 active member children

18 inactive member children

offering received \$339.46

expenses \$137.83

Our Bible Schools are different from anyone else's, and parents consistently tell us that their children, who go to more than one school each year, consider Augsburg's the best. That's what we strive for.

In some places a traveling Bible School could be very effective, in which a school would be held in the front yard and porch of members of the church, just for the local children. A van for carrying materials and a few volunteers is all that is needed. Obviously, there would not be an enormous number of kids at each location, but the idea is to do it in several locations, each for a week. Or, you could choose five locations and be in one place every Monday, another place on Tuesdays, etc. That would give you several weeks to attract new children.

MUSIC

Recent studies have shown the importance of music in child development. Music improves motor skills, math skills, and writing skills. Furthermore, parents are looking for ways to make music a part of their children's lives. Our director of music has made this new interest in music a magnet for parents the motivational factor in the music program.

Musikgarten is a copyrighted curriculum from Music Matters, Inc. of Greensboro, NC. The curriculum offers a wide variety of activities relating to music, including dexterity activities as well as full body movement, dance, stories, and instrument making by the children. Our director of music is very well experienced with this kind of program, but the curriculum offered by this company will provide even the beginner with an excellent program of music learning. We offered Musikgarten in a spring session of six weeks on a weekday morning for ages 3-5. We got immediate response to our publicity and quickly reached our capacity for the school. While Carolyn ran the music program for the kids, Judy invited the mothers who had brought them to participate in a mothers' group much like our Monday Morning Moms. There was varying interest to the mothers' part of the program, but some of the mothers did appreciate it.

Kid's Sunday is every second Sunday of the month at the 11:00 service. We erect risers in the chancel so that everybody can see the children; they sing the songs that they have learned in the weekday program, or in the Sunday school opening. Other musical groups also perform, such as the Alleluia Ringers, a bell group of over a dozen teens, or Alleluia Singers, a smaller choral group of teens. We also encourage other young people who play instruments to offer their talents on this day. So, if parents allow their child into our programs, the Kid's Sunday is a draw to bring the parents in,

and it happens every month. Along with the music, the pastor or someone else does a children's sermon or story, or a puppet group performs a faith script.

In the late spring, when we end the preschool and Kid's Klub programs, the children present a musical that they have worked on. This is held after a family dinner. The combination of musical and dinner brings out a crowd. Bible School closings are also held on Sunday mornings at 11:00 when the children present the music they have learned. In fact, the evangelism purpose of the music time for Preschool, Kid's Klub, and Bible School is to get the parents to attend a Sunday worship service. It's a little sneaky, but it works.

Just about every year we offer a concert by Captive Free, a traveling group of seven or eight youth connected with Lutheran Youth Encounter. They bring a wonderful evening of Christian music and witness. It is a little loud for the older folks, but the children and teens love it.

Although the ministry to children is our best evangelism thrust, we also have a reputation for being a church in which music is important. A few years ago we spent a quarter million dollars refurbishing our 51 rank Aeolian organ, and dedicated it with a concert presented by a prominent organist from Florida. Since the cost of the concert was picked up by a patron, the concert was offered free to the community. One officer in the local organist's guild told me he had never seen such a packed house at an organ concert in Toledo.

We have presented Vivaldi's Seven Last Words, Amahl and the Night Visitors, and the Crucifixion by Stainer. We had a wonderful presentation by a choir from South Africa, who presented African Christian music and used native African costumes. This fall our organist will offer a concert in September, a visiting church choir from Germany will present the Messiah, and in December the Perrysburg symphony will give a concert in our chancel. All these musical presentations are free. In addition, they keep our name in front of the community as a church that is active and interested in what we can offer to the community.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE HOLIDAYS

Three holidays have given us a good opportunity to draw new people. In a working class neighborhood, parents are happy for holiday events that are open to their children. Halloween is a holiday for which parents are looking for alternatives. For two years we offered a Halloween fun house. Because there are a number of hallways in our church basement that seem to wander in many directions, putting on such an event was easy. The catechism classes of Junior High children were given the assignment of producing displays of scary tableau. They loved it. A route through the basement was mapped out. Tableau were set in the various rooms along the hallway. The fun house was open for two hours in an evening near Halloween. Children were brought in one door, gathered in our large room, and then sent in groups through the hallway, exiting through another door. We had several hundred children for these events. It was, of course, free.

We abandoned this activity after two years due to reaction from the community. We received several communiques questioning whether the church ought be involved in such activity related to Satan's holiday. We decided to give in to public pressure, because we want to make a positive impression on the community, not a negative impression. We changed the activity to a Halloween Magic Show. Since I have contacts with the Toledo Society of Magicians, we arranged for them to present a free hour and a half magic show, usually on a Sunday night near Halloween. The Toledo Society of Magicians was looking for a place to hold their annual Halloween party, and for opportunities to give their members performance experience.

It is an equal trade. About two hundred people show up for this event, many of them in full families. The magicians understand that we are not looking for anything scary, certainly not anything Satanic. It is just an entertaining magic show. Parents appreciate an alternative to some of the unpleasant events around Halloween.

We did retain one item from the Halloween Fun House, however, and that is one of the ways we publicized it. For the fun house we came up with the idea of distributing free tickets. We printed up hundreds of free tickets, explaining the event and giving the information. Packets of these were given out to our Sunday school children the Sunday before, and they distributed them in school. It was an excellent method of getting the word out. We continue this with the magic show, but we have added one feature. Since we are a Feed Your Neighbor distribution point, the ticket reads that the bearer is admitted free with one can of food for the Feed Your Neighbor program. We get about 200 cans of food, and our reputation as the church concerned with the neighborhood is strengthened. The free ticket idea has been useful in advertising other activities as well.

This year we will add a new component to Halloween. We are printing up folders to hold suckers. We will print the folders with a Christian message, and include an invitation to our children's after-school program. Two punched holes in the folder will allow a sucker to be inserted. We will make these folders available to our members, encouraging them to give them to Halloweeners as an evangelism ministry.

The Christmas season provides several opportunities. Christmas is seen as a time for children, and, of course, that is right up our alley. The Breakfast with Santa Claus offered by commercial interests gave us the idea of Breakfast with Saint Nicholas. In this event we emphasize the Christian roots of the Santa Claus figure, which gives us the opportunity to also emphasize the Christian roots of Christmas.

Breakfast with Saint Nicholas is held on the Saturday nearest December 6, Saint Nicholas Day. It begins at 9:30 -- kids don't get up any earlier than that on a Saturday. As the children enter the large hall, sacred Christmas music is playing. The pastor gives a welcome, and leads the group in prayer. Breakfast is simple, consisting of juice, donut holes, and milk, with coffee for adults. It doesn't take long for breakfast to be over. Then we sing some Christmas carols accompanied by the piano. No secular song is used.

The story teller is introduced, our own Miss Amy, who enters dressed in a medieval costume. Miss Amy is a wonderful storyteller; she gathers the children around her and tells the Saint Nicholas story, usually using a puppet or some other means to draw the children's attention. This Saint Nicholas story is available as children's Christmas books, or can be found in books that describe Christmas traditions. The story tells about Saint Nicholas as a dedicated Christian bishop who shared his fortune with his flock. Since there are some parts of the Saint Nicholas legend that are not appropriate for children, we use especially the story of the three unmarried girls in a poor family, whom Nicholas helped by providing them with money so they could be married.

At the end of the story Miss Amy introduces Saint Nicholas who comes in to meet the children. Our Saint Nicholas costume is a dark red floor length robe with a matching mitre. The person playing Saint Nicholas wears the robe over an alb, with a large gold cross around his neck. He carries a crozier, the symbol of a bishop. A gray beard adds to the image, but it is not a white beard such as Santa Claus wears. Saint Nicholas' demeanor also sets him apart from Santa Claus; there are no "ho ho ho's" here. Saint Nicholas enters quietly and greets the children in the name of Christ. He takes a seat on the fanciest chair we can come up with, and speaks to the children on how excited he is about the coming celebration of the birth of Christ. Each child is invited to come up and talk to Saint Nicholas.

He does not ask them what they want for Christmas, but gives each child a candy cane, an orange, and a gold foil chocolate coin, the significance of which was explained by Miss Amy in her story. Parents often take pictures.

When all the children have talked with Saint Nicholas and received their gifts, he rises to lead them in prayer, and then blesses them with a benediction. He walks out; the pastor thanks everybody for coming, and invites them to Christmas eve services. The children leave with an Augsburg

Christmas coloring book which also announces our Christmas eve services. Attendance is about eighty, but we have often met new people at these events who have never attended an Augsburg event before. Many parents express their thanks for this event, especially its message of what Saint Nicholas and Christmas are all about.

Our Wednesday evening Advent services are kid oriented. They are informal; that is, I do them in my shirt sleeves rather than vestments, and the order of service is very simple. We use stories, drama, or costumed characters presenting sermons. We sing upbeat Christmas hymns. An important part of the service is the time set aside for the children's ministry projects. In the chancel are two low tables, holding a number of baskets filled with items to be put together into Christmas care packages. Judy explains what projects are being done on a given evening, then the children come forward and take a bag, putting an item from each basket in the bag, then laying the filled bag at the foot of the altar. The children go back to the beginning of the table and do it again, until all the bags are filled. Judy contacts several social service agencies to see what kind of care packages they can use. She is especially interested in social service programs aimed at children. She buys the materials for the care packages and sets them up for the children to put together during the service. Projects have included fruit baskets with homemade cookies for families at Ronald McDonnell House, or gift bags for the children in the program of the inner-city church Judy used to work for, consisting of coloring books, crayons, Christian symbol Christmas ornaments, or health kits to be distributed with our Feed Your Neighbor baskets, or similar bags for distribution at the Head Start Program at another local church. A day care program for severely ill children have also received our care packages. By providing this activity during the Advent service, our children feel that they have a part of our ministry to those less fortunate at Christmas.

Money for these gifts comes from a grant of about \$600 regularly given to us from a Lutheran insurance agency, AAL. They give it to us on the stipulation that we must use it for the poor, and we are grateful for their gift. Without it, we would not be able to do these projects which are such an important part of our ministry at Christmas.

Christmas is not the only time of the year that we give children the opportunity to serve others. Through a local Meals on Wheels program which delivers to 65 homes, the children reach our golden-agers with love. At Christmas time they make cards and include a small box of candy. At Easter the card is accompanied by an Easter basket. Greetings are also sent at Halloween and Thanksgiving. The cards are signed by the children using their first name, and saying that they are from Augsburg. We get the most delightful thank you cards from these senior citizens, who appreciate the children's attention so much.

The new component we are adding this year is a Christmas nativity walk through. In any congregation there must be a number of folks who have Christmas nativity sets of many types and origins. We are going to ask the congregation to lend their set(s) to us. We will set up a route through the rooms of the church, similar to the Halloween fun house idea. In these rooms we will artistically display these various depictions of the birth of Christ. Signs will identify the origin of any that are particularly important, and the owner's name will appear on each. We hope for the route to lead through the worship area, which will be decorated for Christmas and feature our half size manger scene. Children will leave with our Augsburg Christmas coloring book.

A commercial venture called Road to Bethlehem is another similar walk through that can tell the story of Christmas. In this event, scenes similar to life in Bethlehem are depicted. I have also played with the idea of a walkthrough tableau in which the Advent scenes are displayed with living people. The angel appearing to Mary, to Joseph, Mary visiting Elizabeth, the journey to Bethlehem, the wise men being visited by angels, and of course ending with the manger scene itself, perhaps in the chancel area. It would be something like a Christmas pageant, except each scene would be in a different room, and each event played out. Groups would be led through by a guide.

The church ought to have some sign of Christmas outside where people can see it. Outside manger scenes, or living nativities, draw attention to the meaning of the holy day. Last December our

music department presented the Christmas operetta Amahl and the Night Visitors. This year we plan a Christmas concert with a local symphony.

The Neighborhood Newsletter for December features an invitation to our Christmas eve services. The message implies that Christmas means more when Christ is included in the observance. Christmas eve is the most opportune time to invite to worship people who have never been in the building before. Every two or three years we spend extra money on our delivered invitations to Christmas eve services. We buy 5000 of a really striking Christmas bulletin and use them for our announcement. They are hard to miss in a plastic bag full of circulars, and I am sure they end up on a lot of refrigerators, with our name and invitation on them. We have two Christmas eve services which we feature: the 4:30 PM family service and the 11:00 PM candlelight service.

The family service includes music by our children's choirs and music groups, and a children's message. We find that the afternoon time is very convenient for families, because it causes less interference with after-dinner family plans. One very effective event I arranged was a visit to church by Santa Claus. I arranged with a local Santa Claus to arrive at the church about the time we would be singing the hymn before the sermon. Before that, I led the children through the birth story, in which we processed to the manger carrying the Christ child, and placed him in the manger. The children were sent back to their seats and then, during the hymn, without anyone calling attention to it, Santa Claus walked quietly down the center aisle, up into the chancel, and knelt before the Christ child. After about a minute, he walked out and left the building. It was so subtle that many people missed it, but for those who saw it, it was a memorable event. The message, of course, is that even Santa Claus worships the Christ Child.

Believe it or not, a Good Friday worship service has become an effective opportunity to do neighborhood family ministry. We have a very imposing wooden cross, about fifteen feet high, which we set up in the middle of our chancel. The Good Friday children's service starts at 10:00 am. Parents and children enter the church very quietly. We use some prayers and simple Good Friday songs (Were you there?) printed on a song sheet. The children are invited to come up to the chancel and sit on the floor surrounding the cross. The pastor tells the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. This year when the children sat around the cross I gave each of them a simple four piece paper jigsaw puzzle, challenging them to put it together. After they had worked on it awhile, I showed them that if you put the pieces together properly, they make a cross. I then talked about the cross being a puzzle, or mystery, to people who do not understand what it was all about. The children took the puzzle pieces home, with the plan to show it to someone at home.

Following the simple service, the children and parents went to the church basement and baked and decorated hot cross buns while Judy explained their significance. Then, of course, they ate them. They left with an invitation to celebrate the resurrection at our Easter services. We get eighty to one hundred at these Good Friday services.

On the Wednesday after Easter, which is during the school spring break, Judy has an Easter carnival which is open to all children in the community. About ten or twelve carnival-type games are offered. Each game is run by one or more teen volunteers, and the prizes are simple trinkets or pieces of candy. Koolaid and popcorn are offered as refreshments. In order to limit each child's access to the individual offerings, participants are given a sheet of paper when they enter. It contains a ticket for each game and each refreshment.

Since children are out of school after Christmas and Easter, these periods offer all kinds of possibilities to create events to draw children to the church.

THE CHURCH AS THE CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY

In towns in biblical Israel following the Babylonian captivity, the synagogue became the center of community life. It was, in fact, the only public building in most towns. All public and community

activities took place there. This aspect of life has been long lost, but the neighborhood ministry church tries to regain some of that.

Augsburg has declared itself open to housing community activities. The Alcoholics Anonymous group has met there for 20 years or more. The Emotions Anonymous group is somewhat newer. The church has also been a polling place for many years. The Toledo Choral Society has used the facilities for practice for over thirty years. In the late seventies a community activist started senior citizen activities in our large meeting hall, and that program grew to the point that they moved out into their own building which now bears her name, the Eleanor Kahle Senior Citizens Center. Their choir continues to meet at Augsburg for practice.

Augsburg has always been big in the scouting program, and we are the sponsors of a very large and active scout troop right now. Separate groups of scout leaders also use the building for meetings.

During the two weeks of the Gulf War, we had prayers every day, and invited the public. A large sign outside read "Daily prayers for peace. Noon. Public invited." The service consisted of about twenty minutes of bible reading and prayer. A clip board at the entrance gave people an opportunity to write prayer concerns for use in the service or later. We had several people every day. It gave me an opportunity to meet some folks I had never met before. One member came almost every day. I remembered he had a son in his twenties, and I assumed perhaps the son had been called in for the fighting. When I got the chance to talk with the man, and ask him whether his son was involved, he told me that his son was not in the service, but the time of prayer gave him an opportunity to do some praying in another area of his life that was not right at the time.

Although we ended the prayer services with the end of the war, I think it would have been an excellent neighborhood ministry to have continued. About noon on most days I am ready to knock off for lunch, anyway. I could see a church in our setting having such a service every day. A sign out front could announce it. A clipboard or mailbox attached to the sign could offer folks walking by the opportunity to write prayer concerns, even though they might not attend the service. The leader of the service would check this source prior to beginning the service.

I'm sure that in such a situation you could get all kinds of written messages that would not have anything to do with the prayer service, but such an offering would give the congregation the reputation of the church that prays for the community. And people would come. Although this seems confining for the pastor, it is possible to share the job with lay people. I could certainly see our liturgical deacons leading these services in my absence.

As pastor I have gotten involved in two community groups that have used Augsburg as their center. At its early stages I joined the board of an organization made up of business and property owners. I continue to serve on the board, and their large meetings are held in the church hall. The membership consists of about ninety business and property owners in the immediate neighborhood. Its purpose is to encourage a safe and thriving neighborhood. Since they recently lost their office space, they will shortly be moving in to a small office in our church building.

A warning here about community use of the building. Beware giving large amounts of building space permanently to community groups. One church in our community was built in the sixties using what I would call sixties social-action ideas. The members of the church, moving from another building, wanted to be sensitive to the needs of the community and planned a building whose spaces would be used by other community agencies. Several agencies have offices in the church building, and a senior citizens' center uses the large social hall. As a result of other groups dependent on the building, the congregation is very restricted in how they themselves can use it. They cannot have weekday funerals, for instance, nor even Bible School. Community use of the building is very helpful in doing neighborhood ministry, but it must be flexible use with the congregation in control.

In a changing neighborhood, crime concerns become an important part of community action. One way to address this problem with community people is through a Blockwatch program. We decided to start one. We contacted the city Blockwatch division and booked a presentation by one of the officers. The neighborhood newsletter announced the meeting. We had window stickers printed up that announced participation in the Blockwatch program, and including "Courtesy of Augsburg Church", thus getting our name on the front doors of many area homes.

A neighborhood group organized to address community problems and needed a place to meet when living rooms got too small. They began meeting at Augsburg and became known as Library Village Association. All their meetings are in the church hall, and we provide a place for them to keep their records. Every fall they have a small festival in a park in front of the library next door. We supply them with the tables and chairs they need, and last year ran a children's craft center during the event.

I attend most of the events these community groups hold in the church. One man was most profuse in thanking me for my interest and participation in the community. I told him "Please don't think I am doing this just because I am a nice guy. It is self-interest that motivates me. I am pastor at Augsburg, and I have a selfish reason for encouraging community action. The more that the community does to insure its viability, the more secure the church is. I am doing these things to make sure the church is still here twenty years from now." That is the reason for making the church the center of the community.

This brings up another point for you to consider, which I call "showcasing the pastor". It is important for the pastor to be visible in the community. People who may be attracted to the church want to know what the pastor looks like, and what kind of person the pastor is. For my first eight years as pastor I wore a clerical collar most of the time. I have been around long enough now that I usually wear a sport shirt, open at the neck, with a sport jacket. This is what I call the "Bill Gates" look, and is becoming the new formality. I seldom wear a tie. To the blue collar people in the community the tie is the symbol of the boss, and I feel that it is best not to approach that image.

Augsburg is blessed with a gymnasium. This is one of the very best resources to reach out to community kids. Opening a gym for basketball and just hanging out is a great way to bring young people in to your church. But you must be ready for them. Just about any time you open a gym you will have some youth show up, but of course you must be more organized than that. We got several of our teenagers together and told them we wanted to start an open gym, but we wanted them to help us decide on what the best time-period would be. They suggested that a summer program would be best on Saturday afternoon. The church across the street also has a gym, and they were willing to alternate Saturdays with us. A sign on the door of each church announced where the open gym was that day. Boys show up to play basketball; girls show up because the boys are there. It takes a good cadre of male volunteers. Females help, but there must be males.

Of course the gym is also the center for our league basketball program. Formerly participation in the league basketball program required church membership and regular attendance at church, Sunday school, etc. Since we have done away with those rules, the result has been that many of our participants are not members of the church. We rejoice in that, but it does bring its own problems. We have much less control over their behavior.

In addition to the basketball league we also participate in church baseball leagues. Both sports have brought in new people, who get involved in other programs and eventually join the church. In the suburbs parents have the time and money to enroll their children in all kinds of organized sports activities. In the blue collar neighborhoods of the city, the church has a wonderful opportunity to serve children and youth, and parents are looking for those opportunities. I had a phone call from a woman inquiring about our sports program. She introduced herself to me as a single mom with an eleven year old boy and two small children. In asking about our sports programs, she said she was looking for opportunities for her son to come in contact with adult males, because he had no other

access to be positively affected by adult males in his life. That shows the importance of such a program. The neighborhood ministry church with faithful adult volunteers can touch many lives.

The gym is also used by a singles', citywide, ministry group which shares various facilities in Lutheran churches in the city. They also use our lounge for planning meetings. Although it tends to be a Lutheran singles' group, it brings up a segment of the population that is often neglected. A neighborhood singles' group can be very successful and can put the church in contact with adults who might never otherwise enter the doors. In our day there are a lot of twenty-somethings, thirty-somethings, and even beyond that are craving meaningful contact with others.

Hobbies are another area of interest in which the church can offer space and leadership. Hobby groups often do not have a lot of money to rent facilities and are usually too big to meet in homes. Members of the church who have hobbies such as crafts, woodworking, ceramics, flower arranging, juggling, and a host of others, can start classes in that activity that would bring others in. A community theatre group can be started if there is no such activity in your neighborhood. All of these ideas are based on the fact that in a changing neighborhood many people are seeking activities. The church can provide a sense of community that few other organizations can offer.

NEIGHBORHOOD HELPING PROGRAMS

Toledo has a city food assistance program called Feed Your Neighbor. Ten years ago Augsburg set aside a classroom area to become a distribution center for the neighborhood. It is open each Friday morning for two hours. The policy is that food is given to whomever comes for it, so long as they have proof that they live in the approved area, so that there is no-working-the-system to get food at more than one location.

This is a cooperative ministry. We provide the space, one of the other churches provides the director. Volunteers, food offerings, and funds come from all of the some dozen churches involved. Our partner churches are very good in their participation and support.

In addition to food, personal care items, and sometimes clothing (especially coats and sweaters), are laid out on the table to be taken by those who can use them. Once when we found that we had too much furniture and toys in our nursery we put the items in the FYN area with a "free" sign on them, and they were taken.

A couple years ago Judy needed a new project for an education course she was taking in community work. We opened a "talk to Judy" office in the area where people came in to get food. The sign on the door offers information on social service agencies and services. Judy sits in that office during the time the food distribution is open. People come in and tell Judy their problems. If it is possible, Judy informs them about what agencies might be able to help them. She distributes literature and information from the agencies and has a phone to make inquiry calls for them.

Judy has found an interesting phenomenon in this ministry. Often people just come in to talk. Many have been through frustrating encounters with social service professionals, and they appreciate someone who is willing to actually listen to them without giving them a number and telling them to go sit down until they are called. Many pour out stories of lives so messed up nobody could straighten them out, and they don't really expect her to. They just appreciate having someone who will listen. Judy hears a lot of problems. She doesn't feel compelled to solve any, just to be an attentive ear.

We have had a number of instances where these folks have come in to inquire about what the church offers for children. Many of them have gotten their children involved, and eventually the family has been slowly worked into the church program.

Augsburg also houses an AA meeting and an EA meeting. We had another AA meeting and two AlAnon meetings, but we lost them when we went nonsmoking. The AA meeting simply uses the

facilities, and right now we have no church members who go who might regularly represent the congregation. The EA, however, has become an important part of the church's ministry. One woman who was introduced to Augsburg by attending an EA meeting, has become a member of the church. At the pastor's request she has taken the direction of the EA program as her personal ministry. EA has a faster turnover than AA, and a more fluid group, so that it is often hard for an EA program to keep on going. EA is a good therapy group for the pastor to refer people to who need ongoing help, and from that group we have received several members.

For two years we have had a Sunday morning Parish Nurse Program. We have several members who are nurses who run the program. They have a room near the elevator entrance to the building, where they offer noninvasive procedures, such as blood pressure, temperature, and recordkeeping on medications. They have found a similar phenomenon as Judy has found in her "Talk to Judy" office. Often people feel that the professionals they go to do not listen to them. Perhaps the most important ministry these nurses offer is a listening ear. They listen to the complaints, and make referrals to the proper services. In their training for this ministry, we emphasize that one of the best things they can do with these folks is offer hands-on prayer with them.

We have discussed how to take this ministry public, that is, how do we do this for people in the community? Several times we have opened the building for use by one of the hospital teams in health care screenings. We wonder if we could have a community nurse ministry. It's one of the items on our agenda.

Local nursing homes offer opportunities for ministry that will help you build a reputation as a congregation that cares. Our Care and Concern committee presents a monthly worship service at a nursing home closeby. A group called "The Popcorn Ladies" goes to the Lutheran home once a month and makes and distributes popcorn to all the residents. The residents really look forward to this. A puppet ministry would also be very much appreciated in a nursing care facility.

If your community does not offer one, consider making your church the center of a community adult school. Using local volunteers, members and nonmembers, you could offer courses on small engine repair, home repair, cooking, simple living, English, parent training, job skills, job search, community gardening, sewing, flower arranging, etc. Groups can be formed around hobbies, book review, travelogues, and many other possibilities. The goal is to get as many people through the door as possible, for whatever reason. Our church parking lot lies along the main street, and we are known as the church whose parking lot is always full. It's a good reputation.

Neighborhood ministry works best and fastest when the members of the church are involved in the program and make it a point to meet the newcomers. People are looking for programs that will suit their needs, and it is the programs that get them in the door. But even more, they are looking for friendship, and it is the making of these relationships that determines whether they will stay or not. If the members of your church are not willing to be involved, the process of assimilating people from the community will be very hard. Neighborhood ministry does not automatically grow churches.

HATCHEM, MATCHEM, AND DISPATCHEM THE WEDDING, BAPTISM, FUNERAL CENTER

Augsburg is a beautiful church to get married in. It has a long center aisle, a wooden main door with outside steps to come down, a pipe organ, multiple candle stands, traditional architecture. We established an open wedding policy; we would do anyone's wedding, even nonmembers. We had a big response. We established some strict guidelines in our policy that included appropriate music, restrictions on photography, and use of traditional liturgy. Some of these restrictions caused some brides to look elsewhere, but nevertheless we got an increasingly large wedding load, to the point that we had to limit the number. The pastor, organist, and custodian were becoming tired.

It was, however, a very useful device for introducing the church to young people for it is young people who have weddings, and it is young people who attend those weddings. For many it is the first contact with Augsburg. Though the bride and groom may not have been members when they were married, the contact with the church and pastor brought many of them back later.

We offer marital preparation in group sessions. I have a video of four very excellent presentations about marriage. One session is offered each first Sunday at 12:30 PM., right after the 11:00 service. This purposely encourages the couples to attend our worship service before the session. We expect each couple to attend all four sessions. There are always several couples planning weddings. In these group sessions they get to know one another and have the opportunity to discuss what the day's video has to say about their marriage. The video can give them more information in a half hour than I could give them in a few hours, and do it more entertainingly. I generally book a planning session with one of the couples after the video session.

As I said, we had to start limiting the weddings, which is regrettable. I really think an open wedding policy is a good way to meet young people. If this is an option for your church, you must first be sure that the organist and custodian are willing to give up their weekends. Perhaps you might find an additional custodian and organist who would be willing to share the load. Our fee for organist is \$100, and for custodian \$75, so it is financially worth it. The bride and groom pay these fees, of course.

In order to give the pastor a break, some churches have a wedding organizer who runs the wedding rehearsal and gets things ready the day of the wedding, so that the pastor has less to do. This could be another fee added on to the cost, paid by the wedding couple. If what you have to offer is a quality product, you will find many people willing to pay these fees in order to have a nice place to be married. We never had to advertise to get all the weddings we could handle, but a parish set up to doing multiple weddings would do well to advertise open weddings in the newspaper and other media. People are looking for beautiful churches and traditional weddings, and with the large percentage of people who have no church background, the wedding is a wonderful draw to get them to your church. If you serve these couples well, many will eventually consider your church their church. The wedding fee is, of course, an exception to the rule of offering everything free.

An open Baptism policy is another way to bring young people in. Whether you are willing to baptize children of nonmembers is something you must decide, but if this seems good to you, you will find it works. We have baptisms on fourth Sundays, and we always have at least one, usually more infants to baptize, up to six per month. All baptisms are performed at the Sunday morning service. Only adult baptisms are performed privately -- if the adult is too embarrassed to have it done publicly -- and even those are done only at the church font. We invite the parents and godparents to an informational meeting in the church lounge on the Thursday evening before the baptism. In this way we can meet them and go over the service so that they know what is going to be done and why. They also get to meet the other families involved in that Sunday's baptisms. We reserve two pews for each family, more if they need them. This encourages them to invite family and friends.

The combination of open wedding and baptism policy has put us in contact with many families who have entered other aspects of the program, and many have joined. A couple recently had their three children baptized, then called me the next week and said they were so happy with the way things went they wanted to book their wedding. They are now attending the premarital sessions.

Openness to doing funerals is another way to meet unchurched people. This ministry usually only involves the pastor who must be willing to go to the funeral home and do the service. Drawing the family into a church relationship depends on the ability of the pastor.

CONCLUDING WORDS

Several factors will affect the success of a neighborhood ministry campaign:

1. The degree of change that has occurred in the neighborhood between the time which the old members consider "the good old days," and the beginning of the outreach into the neighborhood. The greater that socio-economic change, the more difficult it will be to interest the neighborhood folks into being involved in an established church. If the word "deterioration" describes the neighborhood, you may be entering a losing battle.

2. The willingness of the established membership to accept the loss of old ways and cherished standards. In the past the old members welcomed new people with certain unspoken stipulations, which were the following:

This is our church. It will be awhile before it is your church.

This is the way we dress here.

This is the way we comport ourselves here.

These are the conventional programs we always offer here.

You are welcome so long as you fit into these expectations.

The more socio-economic change that has taken place, the harder it is for the congregation to alter its former expectations of new members. If they cannot alter their admission standards, it will be immediately apparent to new neighborhood people.

3. Money for programming. Judy is our full time paid program developer. Carolyn has one of the few full-time church music jobs in the city. In addition to their salaries, there is the money needed for programming. The congregation needs to be willing and able to support these ministries.

4. Personnel with commitment . I mentioned our two staff people above. They are a great team. Churches who do not have personnel like them available can do many of our programs using only volunteers, but that will affect the effectiveness.

The pastor, of course, must have absolute commitment to the process. S/he will be constantly defending the program against some who don't want any changes, some who do not understand what the idea of neighborhood ministry is all about, and some who don't want those people in our congregation anyway. One church in serious decline in a rust-belt city was challenged to reach out into the neighborhood, but decided that it was simply easier to do nothing and allow death to occur. In the seminar that led to this recording of the ministry at Augsburg, as mentioned in the introduction, Lyle Schaller gave dying as the easiest response to decline.

5. The window of survival. This means how long your congregation can continue to do ministry at the needed level before it goes belly up. Neighborhood ministry is not a quick fix for a declining congregation. It takes time. When we defined the job for the program developer, and brought Judy into the staff, some leaders voiced their assumption that if she did her job right we would see a turnaround in about a year. Of course, that didn't happen. As stated before, it took seven years to halt the decline of thirty years, and even now we have leveled off without growth for three years. When people ask me how well I think the program is going, I usually reply with something like "We'll know in twenty years. If Augsburg is still here then, the program was a success."

But perhaps we can put a more hopeful outlook on it. Augsburg right now is doing very significant ministry. Where is it written that every congregation must go on forever? Many lives are being touched and other congregations in the future will benefit from what we have done with those lives. We want to be successful, but we are not called to be successful. Success is a category we have invented. We are called to be faithful. Neighborhood ministry is faithfulness to the call to reach out and touch others with the gospel. We let the Holy Spirit decide what constitutes success.