



Cooperative Baptist
Fellowship Virginia

Mission Box 2018-2019

**Churches Supporting Schools...
Transforming Communities**

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Introduction/Invitation

CBFVA believes deeply that local mission investment is a key component to a church living out its mission in a faithful way. For the past several years you have been asked to “fill boxes” with specific supplies to meet needs of ministry partners. This year, however, CBFVA is launching a new kind of “Mission Box.” Instead of filling a box, we invite your congregation to engage in a four-week adventure, your congregation will take the next step in connecting more closely to your community, specifically in respect to connecting with your local schools. This three-week “Mission Box” walks your congregation through an in-depth Bible Study, success stories from Virginia Churches to spark your imagination and a “road map” to get your church started.

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Week One: Examining our Theme

Written by Joshua Hearne

I don't like to be late, but nearly nine years of life in intentional community may have had some effect on my punctuality. So, when I pulled my car into the street parking near a certain apartment building, I was not only in a hurry, but also anxious about it. As was often the case during this season in the life of the neighborhood, I was met by several kids at my car door. No longer worried about tardiness, but newly worried about the flow of traffic through the neighborhood and whether or not the kids were watching it, I grabbed my bag and made my way to the stairs to answer their myriad questions. What were we going to have for dinner? Did I bring my frisbee? When was the next big meal? When was our next lake trip? Had I heard about Tricia going to the hospital? But all these questions quickly gave way to one most pressing and important question: where was my daughter?

Satisfied for a moment by my answer that she was coming with her mom in a minute, the kids went back to playing while I helped set up for a community meal on the front lawn of the apartment complex we affectionately call "Big Blue." When my daughter arrived, the kids were excited for her to join their games, but were reminded by her unsteady toddling that she was still learning how to walk. Leaving their game to the side, they eagerly took turns holding her tiny hand and walking slowly with her from one end of the lawn to the other. They showered her in praise for her faltering steps, rejoicing not in the speed of her walking but in her willingness to try and get up after falling. In fact, they were so fascinated with her progress that they had to be reminded to eat over and over again. These children with whom I've shared so many meals have found a variety of ways to show love, but none have been as dear to me as walking carefully with my daughter from one end of the lawn to the other. Their love for me was most expertly shown by the way they loved my daughter—I saw their love in their faithfulness to my daughter's faltering steps.

Activity

Ask your audience to divide up into small groups (2-4 people) and take turns answering the following questions.

- Where have you seen love recently?
- How have you shown love to others recently?
- How does your congregation most express its love for its neighborhood? For its city? For people far away?

To understand Jesus' commandment in John 15:12, we must first consider the context in which he gives it. In John 13 and 14, Jesus has been teaching the Twelve about a wide variety of subjects but has been reiterating a commandment to love one another. In John 13:34-35, Jesus commanded them to love one another and insisted that this love would be what identified them to the world. In John 14:15, Jesus insisted, "If you love me, you will keep my

commandments.” In John 14:21-24, Jesus continues to insist that loyalty and love are intermingled.

Having established the primacy of love in his teachings and that loving others was not only a commandment, but also that keeping God’s commandments are a means by which we love God, Jesus offers a metaphor about vines and branches at the beginning of John 15. In John 15:4, Jesus implores the Twelve to “abide in me as I abide in you.” The Greek word used for “abide” here and throughout John is *meno*, and it can mean a variety of things but typically means something like “remain” or “wait for/with.” When Jesus calls upon the Twelve to abide with him—to be rooted in him as the branches of a vine are rooted into the trunk of the vine—he is calling them (and us) to rest and trust in God’s goodness and love. Rooted in the foundation of God’s presence, we will find ourselves nourished by God’s love and can expect for the Fruit of the Spirit to grow naturally in our lives.

Activity

Start by reading Galatians 5:22-23: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”

Say something like, “We’re going to take a few minutes now to consider where we can see evidence of the Spirit in our lives by taking note of what fruit God is growing in us through God’s love. How are you becoming more patient or generous? When have you grown in joy or gentleness? You have a piece of paper in front of you, feel free to write your thoughts there. We’re not going to ask anybody to read it out loud or make you share what you’ve written.”

Allow some time for the members of your audience to reflect on their own spiritual growth in the Fruit of the Spirit. Every so often, read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud again to jog their memories.

Jesus commands his followers, once again, in John 15:12 to “love one another as I have loved you.” At first glance, this may seem to be another repetition of a fairly common command from Jesus. After all, even those with only a passing familiarity with Christian teaching know that Jesus told people to be loving. But, consider that this commandment to love comes with a huge qualifier. We are not just called to be loving, but are called to love others “as I have loved you.” It is a kind of outward facing reciprocity that challenges us to mirror Jesus’ love to the world. The words of verse 12 are blessedly simple, but that certainly doesn’t mean they’re easy. How has Jesus loved us? How can we love others with the same fullness, devotion, and sacrifice with which Jesus has loved us? These are big questions with big answers, but they are important. Jesus seems to offer an answer in verse 13: by laying ourselves down for others. Yes, sometimes, this has meant dying for others or heroically sacrificing ourselves in a moment, but it also means laying our egos down in favor of others. It may mean sacrificing our desires for the benefit of others. There are many ways to lay our lives down for others whom Jesus has commanded us to love. In submission to God’s will as our foundation and in mutual submission to each other in the shared life of community, we find that love is powerful if not always easy.

Activity

Lead your audience in an open discussion about ways that people can lay themselves down for others. You may find that people are slow to respond at the very beginning of this discussion, so you'll want to not only to have a few of your own answers prepared, but also be ready to encourage a "popcorn" style of response where people are welcome to answer in 1-3 short words without having to go into greater detail. If the audience is engaged and seems willing to consider, try returning to the subject of our first activity and localizing the question by asking them to continue naming ways that your congregation could lay itself down for others locally or in your neighborhood.

Week One: The Clinic

Written by Matthew Hensley

How well do you know the community that surrounds your church? That was a question members at Huguenot Road Baptist Church (HRBC) were asking over 12 years ago. The church, which sits in northern Chesterfield County and across the street from the Richmond City Limits, was realizing that the congregation was made up less and less of the local community as more members were driving in from neighborhoods further out. At the same time, congregants were beginning to get involved in mentorships at a local elementary school and were finding that the needs down the road were as real and great as they were elsewhere.

One minister serving at the time recalled experiencing a ministry that matched the gifts of the local congregation and the needs of the community with a unique Christ-like touch. In fact, it was that Christ-like touch that gave the ministry its name. After a time of discernment, the Huguenot Road congregation sensed God leading them to engage its local community with a similar ministry.

The Touched Twice Clinic, offered one Saturday every September, seeks to offer needed services like medical appointments, vision screening, dental screening, flu shots, haircuts, clothing, home goods, a warm meal and groceries to whomever attends – no matter who they are. These services, and the skilled volunteers who administer them, are the first touch. The second and necessary touch of each clinic are the many volunteers called advocates. An advocate doesn't just provide help; an advocate stands up for and walks with someone during a certain season in life. Although for most guests and advocates, this season is relegated to one day, this experience can be the foundational ah-ha moment that leads to further advocacy on behalf of another in the weeks and months afterward. An advocate is paired with a guest and helps the guest schedule appointments, guides them through the building, eats lunch with them and, most importantly, builds a relationship founded on trust and respect.

More recently, the church began to notice high school athletes taking advantage of the free medical services to complete their athletic physical. The following year, the church began working with the athletic directors at the two city schools closest to Huguenot Road – Huguenot High School and George Wythe High School. Since then, more and more athletes come each year to the clinic for their physicals. Sometimes the coaches bring the whole team on a school bus. The youth room is converted to a waiting area for the teens with snacks, video games, and, of course, advocates to help pass the time.

The opportunity to receive a sports physical is something that many students and families take for granted. But for many city students, a free sports physical is the difference between getting to excel on the field or realizing another lost opportunity. What's more, many parents are grateful that they, too, can take advantage of all the other services offered at the clinic. But as one mother said this year, "if I had to choose, I want to be sure my daughter gets her physical so she can play volleyball."

In addition, this relationship has aided a deeper partnership with Huguenot High, where the church has hosted athletic banquets and sponsored the basketball teams by providing a pre-game meal, devotion, and inviting congregants to cheer for the team during the games. As the Touched Twice Clinic has grown, so has the desire to take it out of the church building and into new communities. Two years ago, a second Clinic day was offered inside the City of Richmond, at Oregon Hill Baptist Center. In the past, many involved with the center's ministry had come to the clinic at HRBC, by bus. This time, HRBC was ready to go to these guest's neighborhood. In effect, we became their guests.

The HRBC congregation continues to be transformed into God's likeness as they willingly serve their community during the clinic. As they stay open to the needs around them, God points them to new friendships and ministry partnerships.

Week Two: Be a Blessing

By Matt Winters

Before you begin:

- Read Genesis 12:1-4. Reflect on God's call of Abram and the subsequent promises.
- How has God been faithful to Abram throughout the Scriptures? What stories come to life for you that continues God's promises?
- God's promises often come with a "so that..." You are blessed to be a blessing is the theme of Abram's call. How have you been blessed by followers of God? What stories of blessing do you cherish?
- What has been your legacy of being a blessing to others?
- How might God be calling you and your faith community to be a blessing to those around you?

A flat tire in the middle of Emporia, Kansas, troubled a Canadian man named Elliott. He was just passing through Emporia on his way to the Mexican border town of Matamoros just south of the Rio Grande and the city of Brownsville, Texas. A quick bite for lunch would allow him enough fuel to make it to Texas by nightfall. In downtown Emporia, he rolled into a church parking lot with a flat tire. Stuck for an extended period of time, Elliott's mission had been delayed.

Elliott departed Canada in the hopes that a struggling congregation in Matamoros would still be encouraged despite losing its pastor some months back. A poor congregation with little industry and fewer opportunities for economic vitality, the Mexican church had now lost its shepherd and reached out to the Canadian church for help. A partnership between the two churches formed after the Canadian church went on a mission to Matamoros three years earlier. Not only did the Canadian church help build the cinderblock worship space but they helped nurture the budding congregation. Elliott's vehicle was full of Spanish Bibles. He brought four times as many Bibles as the church building needed hoping the Bibles could be distributed into the neighborhoods around the congregation.

Yet, Elliott thought being stuck in Emporia didn't help him or the congregation. A couple local folks in the church parking lot noticed Elliott struggling to change his tire and offered to do what they could to help. Upon talking with him, they took special interest in the cases of Spanish Bibles, which had been stowed above the spare tire. Elliott related his story as to where he was headed and some of the fears he had for the Matamoros congregation. The church members in Emporia shared that there was a local man, Davis, he had to meet.

Over lunch the church members introduced Elliott to Davis, a Sunday School teacher who had been leading mission trips to Matamoros for years. It turns out Davis had numerous ministry

contacts in Brownsville, TX, and Matamoros, Mexico. He suggested Elliott visit the ministry center as he approached the border. Having fixed a flat, being nourished, and feeling overcome with excitement, Elliott left Emporia with blossoming expectation that God may be up to something surprising.

When he came to Brownsville, Texas, the next afternoon, Elliott arrived at the United in Christ ministry center and met with the missionaries, Marc and Chacho, whom Davis suggested. Upon sharing the story of his intent, the missionaries asked if they could be of help to him. While they did not have direct contact with his congregation in Matamoros, they had served with several congregations in the same area. Marc and Chacho volunteered to travel with Elliott to meet the Matamoros congregation. Upon arriving in the village and spending the day with the congregation, Elliott asked if the missionaries knew of anyone who may be willing to help pastor the congregation. Marc and Chacho, whose ministry center trains pastors, shared they may have one man with whom they would discuss the opportunity.

Over lunch the next day, the missionaries, Elliott, and the potential pastor meet to discuss the congregation. Upon hearing the name of the village in which the congregation sits, the potential pastor revealed that he had a dream the week previously in which the name of this village had been stated and had since been on his heart. He knew nothing of the village or even what the name meant, but he speculated that the dream foreshadowed a new step in ministry.

A church desiring to bless a sister congregation; a flat tire in Emporia, Kansas; and a chance meeting with strangers. God uses our desires to bless others and transforms them in a way that weaves God's handiwork throughout our lives. Being a blessing to others allows us to see God's ability to draw people close.

Open discussion questions:

- When were you totally surprised by God's provision?
- When God moved in unexpected ways, who were the beneficiaries?
- How have we experienced God's power when we have desired to be a blessing to others?
- When did we stop short of following through on blessing others? What were the complicating factors (i.e. distance, flat tire, unknown companions, etc.)?
- Read Genesis 12:1-4.

The desire to be a blessing to others is not a new phenomenon, though it seems to be reborn in our Christian practices. It's a command that helped form our heritage as God followers. We celebrate the initial call of Abram in Genesis 12. Abram will be a great nation! Abram will be blessed by God! Abram will have his name be great! Abram will be a blessing to all the peoples on earth! If we are too self-absorbed, we cherish the three initial promises of greatness and neglect to pay attention to the reasons for these promises: the people of earth will be blessed through Abram and his descendants. We stand in the lineage of Abram and we must continue to fulfill the promise that we are to be a blessing to the people of the earth.

Open discussion questions:

- What blessings do you feel and experience as a direct result of being a child of Abraham?
- How often do you find yourselves being more reliant on receiving the blessings from God than on passing on the blessings to others?
- Where do you feel challenged to withhold blessings? What is taking place to keep you from extending the blessings?

Without a doubt, it's easy to be a blessing toward our friends and those with whom we have affinity. Yet, God didn't call Abram to be a blessing just to his friends and colleagues. God called him to be a blessing to everyone. We are acutely reminded of who are neighbors are when we read Jesus's response to the lawyer's question of "Who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10. Our neighbors are outsiders as well as insiders. In short, they are all the peoples of the earth and the very same people God calls Abram and us to bless.

Open discussion questions:

- Who are neighbors you have chosen not to love? Why have you neglected to love them?
- What is one way you can show love to these neighbors this week? Can you covenant with another member of your group to hold you accountable to loving your neighbor?

When we understand God's call to be a blessing to others, we should not expect the blessings to be repaid. We aren't called to love others with the hope they'll return love to us. We aren't called to be a blessing to others with the expectations that they'll bless us more abundantly in return. Perhaps, if anything, it's best if they pass forward the blessing to someone else instead of returning it to us.

At Vacation Bible School this past summer, our students raised money to bless our local schools. We had one goal: provide gym equipment for one local Physical Education teacher. He had a budget that couldn't support all the equipment he needed, so our students decided they wanted to take the VBS mission money and bless him. We set a goal to purchase \$500 in gym equipment, which was more than three years worth of his budgeted amount. In total, the VBS mission offering raised about \$1,800. The leadership team purchased the needed equipment for the P.E. teacher and blessed him with it. The remaining money was split among eight different teachers the VBS leadership team identified, and each was given a gift card to use in whatever way he/she deemed fit. Each of these gifts was given freely, as a blessing, with no strings attached. The church didn't ask the teachers for an accounting of their expenditures; we

just wanted them to know that we recognize what they do for our students and the sacrifices they make.

Many of the teachers were overwhelmed with the love. We don't know how the money was used by all the teachers, but this one story returned to us. A teacher received her gift card on Sunday at a worship service and spoke to her husband later that night about what she should do with it. She was touched and surprised by the church's willingness to bless her though she didn't feel like she should receive it. She didn't think she needed the money. Then Monday came. The call came in about mid-morning. The familiar voice on the other end of the phone was a student who had just graduated High School and was now a student at Virginia Tech. "Ms. Morning," he said, "Things are going great, except, well, I need a computer for school, and I don't have anyone to ask and I was hoping you could help. I found the cheapest option that would allow me to do what I need to do and the cost is \$149. Can you help me by any chance?" This student's home life was as broken as was the physical condition of the house in which he used to dwell. He had a special relationship with his teacher, and they mutually inspired one another. With tears in her eyes, she said, "Yes, I have a gift card for \$150 for you to buy your computer."

When the church blessed the teacher with the gift card, we gave her the freedom to do with it as she pleased. She was able to pass along that blessing to an individual student whose needs were met. Praise God. Other teachers bless multiple students in their own ways. This church is a part of this community along with our teachers, and it takes all of us to make a difference. We encourage you to find ways of being a blessing in your own way.

Open discussion questions:

- What are some creative ways you can be a blessing to your community?
- What needs are around you that you have the capacity to address?
- What are the steps you need to begin taking to be a blessing to the community?
- What stories remind you of the importance of passing along blessings you've received to someone else?

Week Three: Listen, Don't Project

Written by Matt Winters

Before you begin:

- Recall the stories of Jesus' ministry (Luke 7 and 8 is a great example). He moved slowly from town to town, immersed in the lives of its citizens. He was present with them. They came to him. He responded to their needs through teaching and healing.
- Jesus' model of ministry shows he often responded to the needs in the communities in which he visited.
- How responsive is your church to the needs of the community?
- How much of your ministry programming is based upon the needs expressed in the community versus based on what the church has always done?
- If you had a blank slate, what ministry programs would you alter, displace, or begin?

Transforming longstanding institutions takes time. Total transformation actually takes a whole new approach, and, if done well, an archaic institution can find new life and begin to thrive in new ways. Many churches remain stuck in their ministry identity and service delivery. Churches are not the only societal institution that can bog down in the midst of our cultural revolution. Consider another institution that runs parallel with the church: your local library. For generations, the library has served largely as a book exchange. It has been an institution with a singular purpose: delivering educational materials such as books, magazines, or newspapers to the public. For a time, it was a necessary and integral resource in the community. Many families in the community could not continually purchase new books and stockpile them in their homes. The library was a depository of education and information. By the late twentieth century, libraries began to lose their grip on their importance and influence within the community. With the advent of the Internet as well as electronic readers, fewer and fewer neighbors and communities relied on their libraries. Libraries began to lose consumers as the culture around them began to change. Their primary mode of connection to the community began to wane as the cultural needs bypassed them. The library's story is familiar to our churches' story.

Open discussion questions:

- What are examples of institutions in your community that are facing the need to restructure, reorganize, and reframe their systems and values?
- In what areas of your local culture do you find natural connection points with your church community?
- With what parts of your local culture does your church miss connection points?

Let me introduce you to the Suffolk Public Library. The leadership team at Suffolk Public Library recognized the elements of the same dilemma in its community. The Suffolk Library had been focused on offering what the citizenry no longer needed: a book exchange. No longer did Suffolk need a space dedicated solely for book exchanges. They realized the community needed so many more things. The community needed opportunities to gather, affinity groups to rally around, a place of safety, and a wealth of resources to encourage and instill values. The library committed to be something different. They wanted to provide books to folks who needed them, but they considered that service delivery to be a secondary identity. They wanted to provide opportunities for the community to come together, to get to know one another, to have fun, to learn together, and to grow together.

Over the course of several years, the Suffolk Public Library has transformed itself as an institution. It is one of the key community resource partners for the city—a city that spans over 400 square miles. It provides countless opportunities for citizens to engage with one another and with challenging topics and unique opportunities. Among the vast diversity of its programs and opportunities are a few examples for September 2018: Banned Books Week, Kids’ Science Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Classes, Hispanic Heritage Month activities, Talks on Tap (lectures at a local brewery), Magic: The Gathering Club, Running Group, Moms’ Exercise Club, SAT prep, History Lectures, and Science activities for children. The library aims to connect with as many citizens as it can and offers numerous opportunities for connection across a vast array of platforms. The library transformed itself from being a book exchange to a community resource focused on developing human capacity. They introduced resources and aligned their programs to build the whole self.

Here’s how they did it:

Step 1: The library showed up in the community. They attended city events, had floats in parades, attended city festivals, talked to people in their neighborhoods. The initial focus was to remind everyone about the library and remind everyone the library cares about the city.

Step 2: The library began to inquire what the citizens needed and wanted. After an initial surge in making their presence known in the city, the library staff began to listen to what the citizens wanted. They asked strategic questions like, “What’s missing in our community?” and “What would you like to see the library do?” and “How can we help?” and “What interests do you have?”

Step 3: The library staff began to restructure its values and resources to reflect the needs around them. The library was not inundated with new funds. The library did not secure new grants. Instead, the leaders looked at their budget and decided to focus their resources around what the community needed. They were less interested in supporting the archaic institutional book exchange model and began to restructure their organizational values and approach to addressing the needs in the community.

Step 4: The library constantly evaluates and adapts to a changing culture. The library is committed to being flexible and malleable. They are risk takers and are okay with programs that flop. They know the needs around them will be changing constantly, and they are aware they’ll also need to be willing to change again.

Open discussion questions:

- The library's focus began not with what they wanted to offer but began with being present in the community. Where are key references points in your city where you can enter and be present?
- How often does your church find itself listening to the needs of your neighbors? What would change if your ministry agenda started with the needs of the families with whom you connect/with others you don't yet connect?

There are many lessons for the church can learn from the work the library is doing. Many of the steps the library took are steps churches can take in order to be more relevant and helpful to their communities. Perhaps the greatest lesson is listening.

Open discussion questions:

- Read the following stories: Luke 7:1-10, 7:11-17, 7:36-50.
- Jesus's ministry was itinerant—he traveled often. Notice he doesn't always come into a town with a prepared message. He just shows up and responds to the needs that emerge.
- How often does our ministry into the community begin with a pre-arranged message that will be shared? What would it look like to be present in the community and respond as the Spirit directs?
- What aspects of your community's life to you feel called to show up in? Where are you afraid to go?

Churches often incubate their own ideas and project them onto the community assuming the community wants what the church is offering. That is not always the case; in fact, the community may not want or need what the church tries to offer. Consider this example. Building off a successful VBS program that addressed the needs of children who struggled with sickness, at the next VBS Bethlehem Church wanted to help provide special needs playground equipment. The plan was to raise money to purchase special needs equipment for a local gymnastics center. Many kids in the community take gymnastics, and the gym has a special needs class. The VBS leadership team decided to purchase special needs equipment for the gym. The team met with the owners of the gym on two occasions and followed up with them over the course of several months, but the owners of the gym did not need the equipment. Feeling disheartened by the closing of the door but encouraged by the desire to provide special needs equipment, the team proceeded to ask the local school system where they could provide playground equipment for special needs children. Five or six different schools were asked as well as the School Board. None of the schools responded. The School Board did not respond.

Frustrations mounted until we realized that the dream of providing special needs equipment was the church's dream. It was our plan that we wanted to project onto the schools. We were outsiders planning to assist them in the way that we wanted. We never asked them what they needed. We came into the meetings with our agenda and what we wanted to have happen without recognizing that the schools had their unique needs.

Many churches continue to operate in this same manner. We project and assume that we have what the culture around us wants. We assume that we are offering the very things they need. Yet, we frequently neglect to listen. We may not even ask them what it is that they need. So, the programs we offer come from ourselves. We hope we will hit the sweet spot with our ministry endeavors even though we haven't taken much time to assess whether our programs are needed.

In the end, the plans for the special needs playground equipment were discarded. We couldn't find anyone who wanted it. We couldn't get calls back from the schools. We decided to change our tactics. We still wanted to help the schools and be a part of the solutions they desired. We had a lone contact at a local school with whom we had built a relationship over the course of several years. After a quick conversation about our desire to help in whatever way the school needed, the guidance counselor asked for two days to inquire. In two days, she shared that the gym teacher at the school had worn out equipment in the gym. He could benefit from certain gym equipment that would benefit all the kids in the school. If we were willing to help him out, the school would be so appreciative.

The focus for the Vacation Bible School mission offering then fell into focus. We intended to help supply the gym teacher with equipment that would benefit special needs students and, especially, every single student. It took us inquiring and listening in order to truly be a blessing. It ended up meeting the needs in the community even more acutely than the way we intended.

Open discussion questions:

- What voices are not being heard in your community?
- What are examples of ministries in your church that just aren't meeting the anticipated need?
- How could your ministries incorporate ideas from the stakeholders in the community? How much of your ministry planning incorporates feedback from those you seek to serve?
- How different would your ministry be if you began to offer what the community wanted?
- How much of your ministry is grounded in what you think the community needs? Does the community really need it?
- Who are local advocates/agencies that you can partner with to really help you get clear about what your community needs? Who is willing to contact them?

Back to School Night Story

By Liz Andrazi Deere

The sun was beginning to set over the mountains when I arrived at Wilton Farm apartment's parking lot. Members of Broadus Memorial Baptist Church had set up tables in an "L" before I arrived and they were now scurrying around organizing and setting out school supplies by grade level. Two teachers from Stony Point Elementary helped make sure supplies matched the lists for each age group. All the while, children meandered around, skipping between the tables and the nearby playground. Some older children climbed trees, and the younger ones slid down slides and pumped their legs to take swings high into the air. Parents wandered up bringing more children and doing the work of keeping them all corralled and out of the street. I offered to help, but mostly stood back and observed. This Back to School Night was running like clockwork, and I was invited to partake in a beautiful expression of God's love that I had absolutely no hand in creating. This breezy and warm summer evening was the backdrop for a local school, church, and apartment community to come together once again and support our children.

The Broadus folks – most of whom also volunteer in our children's ministry, Kingdom Kids, where they build relationships through sharing Bible stories, songs, and meals with these same children every Wednesday night of the school year – gathered and settled the families and many children and gave instructions. The kids were divided into their grades and the youngest, kindergarteners getting ready to go to school for the first time, were invited up first. I stood at the backpack table, the start of the assembly line. Their little eyes were wide as they picked out the color pack they wanted. I smiled as they wrapped their arms around a bag that, while scaled to a kindergartener's size, still seemed to overwhelm their tiny five-year-old frames.

As the kindergarteners picked out their backpacks I heard familiar joking voices just behind me. Two of our freshmen–twins–who live in Wilton Farm had arrived on the scene. I had only been at Broadus a little less than a year, but they had been a part of Broadus' family through Kingdom Kids, other Back to School Nights, Sunday mornings, trips to UVA basketball games, and many meals and moments in between—for almost their whole lives. They were baptized into this community and they now offered hugs, high fives, and jokes to the Broadus folks that taught them on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings. They are the cool, older kids that the younger ones look to. Their smiles were infectious and they brought an air of ease and joy to the evening. I looked to them and was reminded of the intricate, long work that God does among God's people. I am thankful for every Broadus member, every Stony Point support staff and teacher, and every Wilton Farm resident and community members that have been a part of this journey. This is God's work in the world. Bringing communities together, sharing what we have, receiving the gifts from those we meet along the way and then turning around and offering this story of belonging to others.

There is just something about brand new school supplies. They have always filled me with anticipation, inviting me to dream about the words I will write, the words I will read, the drawings I will create. I saw a flicker of this on the faces of our youngest friends as they made

their way around the table for the first time. There were little squeals of excitement as they realized that all of this was theirs to take home and, in just over a week, to school. Their parents and older siblings helped open their bags and the children began to fill them with treasures. Their first stop? Books.

A community member, who is passionate about spreading the love of reading, and who connects with the children periodically through book nights at Kingdom Kids, had gathered piles and piles of books and invited the children to explore the titles that were most appropriate for their age. They slid their treasures into their bright, new packs and continued on. Here, as they rounded the bend in the “L,” they came face to face with the two teachers, for some their very own teachers, who would welcome them to Stony Point Elementary for the first time in a few weeks. They got to say hello, and I suspected, felt a little less anxious about starting their school journey now knowing another smiling adult face that would help them feel safe, loved, and smart.

After introductions, smiles, and encouragement the children picked out their favorite color notebook, paper, pencils, markers, and crayons. They finished off their journey by stocking up on classroom supplies—clorox wipes, tissues, hand sanitizer—all things that would help make their classroom healthy for learning. In just a few short minutes our new kindergarteners were equipped, celebrated, and invited into the excitement of a new school year. They were ready to learn and grow.

This year’s kindergarteners may have made a short trip around a table, but this scene was at least fifteen years in the making. I, like our kindergarten friends, got the distinct privilege of walking up and enjoying decades of relationship building without doing much at all myself. What a grace. I was welcomed into the fold of what God has been doing in partnership with Broadus Memorial Baptist Church, Stony Point Elementary, and Wilton Farm Apartments since the early 2000’s. To learn more about this journey and the community of faith I am now a part of, I sat down with our Associate Pastor, Margarete Gillete, to hear more about how all of this began.

It began, as things often do, with a relationship. There was a Broadus member who lived in a neighborhood near the church and whose daughter attended Stony Point. This naturally provided a connection point and pulled the school onto Broadus’ radar as a space to be a good neighbor. Margarete reached out to Stony Point’s Family Support Worker, Pat, and began to build a relationship. Things like this take time, Margarete notes. It took time to build up trust and to prove, simply by showing up again and again, that we were in this for the long haul. Margarete remains the contact person, and advocate, for this continued partnership. Even as pastors changed, she communicated the history of the work with Stony Point and the families in Wilton Farm and encouraged continued support and relationship building. Back to School Night is just one piece of the ongoing partnership between Broadus, Stony Point, and the children and families who are part of Wilton Farm. As trust grew between Stony Point and Broadus, Pat began to contact Margarete with more ways to support families. The number one goal in any of these support opportunities? Protect and celebrate the dignity of families being served. Whether it is providing a holiday meal, toys at Christmas, or gift cards for groceries, it is so important to “not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). We

serve families and strive to be good neighbors by listening to needs, and then meeting those needs in a way that celebrates the image of God in each person.

The image of God, or Imago Dei, we are all created in it; every Broadus member, every person at Wilton Farm, and every Stony Point teacher and support staff. We celebrate this unity by entering into the work God is doing in our neighborhoods. For Broadus Memorial Baptist Church, this looks like a commitment to Wilton Farm and Stony Point that spans decades. We celebrate, with our continued love, that God opened the doors for this partnership all those years ago.

Week Four: Creating Strategic Partnerships by Matt Winters

Before you begin:

- Read 1 Corinthians 1 & 12. Reflect on Paul’s focus on unity in the church and disdain for division. How does that same unity carry over to the church universal?
- What are some of the themes from your heroes’ lives (i.e. selfless, sacrificial, brave, wise, dedicated, etc.)?
- In the life of your church community, where have you seen them be too isolated?
- In the life of your church community, where have you seen partnerships with others develop?

Most of us love the stories of the hero who overcomes inane obstacles or rises from the ashes to defy the odds. One example, *Unbroken*, details the life of Louie Zamperini. Louie was an avid runner who finished in eighth place in the 5,000-meter race at the Berlin Olympics in 1936. As World War Two began, Louie served in the Pacific Theater in the United States Army Air Forces eventually being shot down in combat over the Pacific Ocean. Left adrift in a life raft floating across the Pacific Ocean for forty-seven days, Louie and a comrade were picked up by Japanese soldiers and held for years in prison camps until the end of the war. Louie never allowed himself to be defeated—from the lack of food and water on the open ocean or from the oppressive prison camp officials. His courage and fortitude are an amazing testament to the human will.

If we’re not careful, we can become infatuated with people who do extraordinary things. In fact, we may believe that our worth is found in doing groundbreaking work. We may even begin to believe all good and necessary work must fall on our shoulders. How many times have you heard the phrase, “If you want it done right, then do it yourself?” As an American culture, we have become very individualistic and self-guided. This separation from the larger community creates harm as we begin to operate within our own fields. It’s as if we have erected barbed wire fence to keep others at bay and away from the work we’re doing. We are reluctant to cross our boundaries and feel invaded when others come into our territories.

Sample open discussion questions:

- Who are some of your heroes?
- What are some of the themes from your heroes’ lives?
- How many of these heroes did amazing things? How many were individuals versus a piece of larger partnerships?
- When have we felt like we encroached on someone else’s territory? How did we respond?
- How do we respond when others come into our field (hospitable, grateful, frustrated, resentful, etc.)?

Jesus always sent the disciples out in pairs, yet how often do we find ourselves doing ministry by ourselves? The Apostle Paul stressed the need for the emerging Corinthian church to not get hung up on individualism. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he is addressing the quarrels that are emerging between different camps within the church: Apollos's faction vs. Cephas's faction vs. Christ's faction (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). Paul's message is clear: the church is not about division and is not about individualism. Paul reinforces this point later in the letter as he speaks on the church as the body of Christ. Each member has a role to play and each member has a service to offer. Neither member is greater due to their role nor is one lesser. The body is intricately connected to and interdependent upon its members.

Sample open discussion questions:

- Read Mark 6:7-13. How does Jesus send out the disciples—singularly or paired?
- When do we see ourselves or our ministries being too dependent on individuals?
- How can we begin to change the narrative of individuals being involved in ministry?
- What can we do to help ensure folks aren't serving by themselves?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1 and 1 Corinthians 12.
- When has your church community experienced division? What were its

Moving beyond the body of Christ that comprises an individual church, local churches constitute together the body of Christ for the community where they serve. Each church has unique gifts that complement and balance the ministries of other churches. Churches working in tandem with one another can provide a greater impact on the community than any particular church can do by itself. Again, Paul reminds us that we are all baptized into one Spirit as one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). When multiple churches can come together as the singular church in the community and work under a singular banner with a singular focus, then the church truly functions within the kingdom of God as Paul suggests—no division, no individualism.

Sample open discussion questions:

- What excites you about what your sister churches are doing in your city?
- Share some examples of the best ways you work with other churches in your city.
- What is a ministry that another church is doing that you have always wanted to help do?
- In what ways does your church's ministry overlap the ministry of another church?
- Where are natural partnerships in your city among churches that have the same calling/heart/mission?

While several churches in Suffolk have done short-term ministry efforts together, we had not developed the capacity for a dedicated effort until the Summer Meals Program expressed a need around which we rallied. Here's the back story: the local public library became a host site for the United States Department of Agriculture's Summer Meals Program that aims to feed children during the summer months. The program's target is to deliver meals to children who ordinarily may miss out on meals during the summer, especially those students who regularly receive free or reduced meals during the school year. The local library had the space to host the program but did not have the human capacity to do so. Several church leaders volunteered to get involved, and throughout the summer six to ten churches per week supplied enough volunteers to ensure the library could keep its site open for the Summer Meals Program.

The Summer Meals Program was too great for any one church to do by itself, and the library could not offer the program without the human resources from the church. Because of these intricate needs and opportunities, these churches came together across denominational lines to be a benefit to the community. Individuals and church ministries both laid down their individual goals to ensure the greater good was met. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the program is that it introduced new advocates to groups already at work in the community.

The greatest outcome is that the community is now stronger because the churches reached out in a creative way and met neighbors they didn't quite know. New friends were made and new connections in ministry were made. New partnerships began to develop. New advocates emerged. The churches worked for the larger community and ventured beyond their own fields of ministry. In doing so, they found other partners who can provide elements of ministry currently missing.

Schools have similar partnerships at work in the walls. I called up to one local school and asked how many community partners they have. The guidance counselor could easily name at least a dozen. Not many of them work together though. It seems many of us just operate within our own space, disconnected from one another. Why don't we begin to change that narrative? What can we do to bring these community partners together? What would happen if worked together in the schools instead of working to death in our own fields? How could our schools be different if we spearheaded efforts to work with others who were different than us? What lessons would that teach them—or us?

Closing Discussion Questions and Next Steps

- What are some ways your church community can be more engaged with partnerships in your community?
- What non-church entities are attempting to do some of the same work you feel called to do? This can start the conversations about partnerships?
- Have you identified your local schools with whom you want to partner? What are their needs? Who is going to be your contact person for the school?
- As you begin to develop partnerships, you are being stretched beyond your walls and being more open to the lives around you. Listen to what your schools and partner advocates say so your ministry can become more robust.

8 Important Steps Toward Supporting Your Local School

Lessons from Two Decades of Friendship between a Community, a School, and a Church. A road map to help get you started.

Written By Liz Andrasi Deere

1. Brainstorm Connection Points

Do you have children attending your church who also go to school in your church's neighborhood? Reach out to their parents! Find out if they have any ideas for supporting their child's classroom, teachers in general, or the administration and support staff.

Does your neighborhood school host community events such as carnivals, plays, or concerts? Are there opportunities to engage with these efforts? Check out the school website and find out! Perhaps people from your church can attend some of these events. Take advantage of these opportunities to meet your neighbors and invest in the good work they are doing!

Do you have any teachers in your congregation? Invite them to coffee! Buy them a meal! Even if they do not work at your church's neighborhood school, they can offer a wealth of perspective and ideas about how they wish to be supported.

2. Seek Out Advocates

Most schools have advocates within their support staff. They do their work under different names like School Social Worker or Family Support Worker. Find out who that person is at your school and reach out.

3. Consider Your Resources

Not all resources are monetary. Do you have retired folks in your congregation that could go and read to classes? Perhaps your church could supply chaperones for field trips. Does your church have space you could offer for after school programs or community meetings? Do you have a church van or bus that you might offer in some way? Walk around your space and begin talking with your people; you may discover you are rich in resources.

4. Listen

Once you have connected with your advocate and reached out via the connection points you brainstormed...listen to them! This is the time and space to ask questions. Think about the strengths/assets you have within your congregation and listen for ways to connect passion and resources to the actual need. It is tempting for a church to look at their skills and resources and develop a program without doing the important—and perhaps humbling—work of asking if that program is actually helpful.

5. Check Your Motives

Think about why you want to connect with your local school. Connecting with your motivation is a good way to inspire your church community to stay the course on the long road of community relationship building.

Is your purpose to offer service that often is anonymous? Is it to help ensure that all children within the school have equal access to resources? Is it to help relieve and support tired teachers, administration, and parents? Is it to learn ways to advocate for better legislation that will impact and serve communities beyond your own?

There are many good reasons to connect with and serve a local school. However, it is rare that our motives are totally unselfish. Are there motives buried beneath those listed above and those you've named for your own community? Dig a little deeper and consider these, too. Perhaps you long for young families to fill your pews? Perhaps the church down the road is more active in the community and it is competition that is driving you? Be aware of these motives and how they might affect long-term relationships and expectations.

6. Identify a Church Coordinator

Supporting your local school is a great way to invite church members of all ages to engage and serve! Is there someone among them, or someone serving on the church's staff, that can be the dedicated coordinator and chief communicator about efforts and needs over the years? A consistent person is important because they offer leaders within the school one person who they know they can call as needs arise. If pastors change over the years, it is important to have someone within the church to continue to advocate for partnership and support who knows the history of the relationship with the community

Life is unpredictable, and over time this point person, the Church Coordinator (or whatever term your community prefers), may need to step down. Before that happens, invite someone else to take on the role and set up time for knowledge and connections to be handed over so that the transition is as seamless as possible.

7. Practice Patience

Building a community of trust and support takes time. Teachers, administrators, and support staff are used to passionate groups coming forward with genuine offers to walk alongside a school, and the families they serve, only to find their passion wane within the first few months. This could leave them wary of offering their time and energy to you, yet another passionate group. Are you willing to devote the time to building a deep and long-term relationship? Then, practice patience. Show up in whatever small ways you can to assure your neighbors that you value the work they do and want to support them in whatever ways they might ask.

8. Notice the Presence of God as You Go & Celebrate the Imago Dei in your Neighbors

Take time to celebrate moments of connection with your neighbors as you journey together down this road. As you move through the years of relationship building, continue to pray for the Spirit of God to move and inspire. Your church is entering into Kingdom work that God has already begun, with people God loves. Take time to notice the threads and glimmers of this and celebrate that you have been invited into this good work as beloved people of God serving beloved people of God.