Small Groups Fair Offers Something for Everyone
by Glenda Hass

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Community Engagement: I'm in the God Business
by Rajkumar Dixit

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Let's Talk: Sermon Bloopers

Every once in a while, my mouth operates faster than my brain while in the pulpit, and what comes out gets the whole house laughing hysterically. So let's talk about sermon bloopers. Send us your best stories and let's share a good laugh together here at Best Practices.

Ideas, Events, Resources, Announcements

Evangelist Mark Finley has a new evangelism resource website,
Into All the World, that shares cutting-edge soul winning principles that are effective in leading people to Jesus and His truth. When you sign up for the blog, you will receive reviews of new evangelistic methods and outreach resources. You'll sharpen your own evangelistic skills by putting these principles to use in your witness immediately.

Previous resource links:

- Meal Train
- A Digital Sabbath
- Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program
- 5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church
- The Absolute Best iPhone Apps for Pastors
- The Absolute Best iPad Apps for Pastors

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The Fair was organized as a result of a discussion between the newly arrived pastor, Jeffery Crain, and Richard Reyes, elder, about strategies to grow University Parkway Church. Crain said he had had success with small groups at previous churches where he pastored. Reyes led out in recruiting members already involved in various leisure activities. “The goal is connecting with others through fellowship. We hope to invite many others from the community to connect with the church and Jesus through these activities,” said Crain.

There are already signs that this approach combining church fellowship and community outreach is working. Reyes’ wife, Rayna, posted information about the groups on Craigslist, and received a text reply from a woman interested in racquetball, tennis, and running. A neighbor of one member signed up for the handcrafters’ small group. Leader Marla Schilling said she is very excited about her group. “This will give us an opportunity to get to know one another better, and develop some close friendships as we share new craft ideas, visits, and create something with our hands.”

In addition to newly formed small groups, several groups already in existence added new members at the Fair. The Running group, led by InStep for Life coordinator Erika Peterson, added about 20 members. Sports enthusiasts can also choose such activities as cycling, golfing, biking, tennis, and racquetball. Fifteen additional individuals signed up for the International Diners’ Club. Organizer Maria Nelson noted that “each month we experience a different culinary adventure at various area restaurants. We have fun, fellowship, and good conversation.”

On the more spiritual side, there is an already existing Prayer Warrior group and a ShareHim group. The ShareHim group of 13 members met with Crain to plan two ShareHim seminars in September. To follow up on the success of this kickoff event, the members plan to repeat a Small Groups Fair every 90 days. Crain explains, “That will give people an opportunity to rotate to a different small group and promote community awareness and participation in our Christian fellowship groups. As church members become more connected, they will invite others to join them in a nonthreatening circle of friends. The hope is that sharing our interests in the small groups will help build relationships for eternity.”

Glenda Hass is a retired Federal Civil Service worker, and serves as the clerk for the University Parkway Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pensacola, Florida

Reprinted from the April 2013 SOUTHERN TIDINGS
“I’m in the God Business”  
By Rajkumar Dixit, DMin

It was 7:30 on Sabbath morning when my phone rang. On the other end was a businessman I had met just a couple days before. “Kumar, what time does your church service begin? Is it okay if I bring a friend with me?”

His name was Carl. We met on Wednesday morning at the Vancouver Board of Trade, an organization where business professionals meet together for networking, and relationship building.

My church treasurer wasn’t convinced that the $1200 in annual fees was worth it. To be honest, I wasn’t sure either. I have been looking for ways to connect with the business professionals in Vancouver since I moved here a few months ago. Vancouver is known for being one of the most secular cities in the world. In fact, 7 out of 10 residents claim to have no religious affiliation.

When I woke up on Wednesday morning, the last place I wanted to be was the Board of the Trade new members orientation. The meeting started at 7:30am, a convenient time for busy professionals to connect before heading to work. For a pastor who had attended a late night church committee, the idea of waking up for this early morning meeting was distasteful. Perhaps it was guilt, or the fear of wasting that $1200 membership fee, that gave me the motivation to attend.

There were about 100 people in the room. Each of these white-collar professionals had only one thing on their mind: “Sell, sell, sell.” After breakfast and a brief introduction by the Board of Trade representatives, we were instructed to stand up and give a five second introduction. In those five seconds we were supposed to state our name, our business, and what we have to offer.

As I listened to the various realtors, bankers, financial analysts, and entrepreneurs sell their services, my heart began to race. What am I supposed to say? I think I’m in the wrong place. I began to doubt myself. The gentleman next to me stood up and introduced himself: “Hi, I’m Larry. I own Fast Signs. We are in the business of making you signs, fast.” Everyone chuckled.

It was my turn. I stood up. “Hi, I’m Kumar. I am the Pastor of the Oakridge Adventist Church in Vancouver. I’m in the God business.” The room erupted in laughter and applause. Applause. People were smiling and happy to have me in attendance with them.

After the introductions, we moved from table to table to explain who we were in greater detail. Instead of five seconds, we were now asked to give a one-minute pitch – explaining what services we provide. I explained, “I’m here to get to know the business professionals better and to offer you a way to know God. If you need assistance with a wedding, funeral, or have questions about God, give me a call.” During the next hour, as we played this version of business speed dating, I collected over 30 business cards from business professionals who wanted to connect on a deeper level.

As the meeting ended, I realized that I have a unique service to sell. While there were a half dozen realtors and bankers in the room trying to build a case for why they were different from the others, I was the only clergy in the room. What if I became the unofficial chaplain to this group of people? What if I were to become their pastor and help them on the
I drove to the church office after the meeting and entered every person’s business card contact into my email database. My plan is to send them monthly notes of encouragement and opportunities to connect with my church.

Leadership Howard County

A few years ago, I had lunch with Ron, an influential leader of the community. I had been the associate pastor at the New Hope Adventist Church for eight years in Howard County, Maryland. Ron suggested that I apply for a position in Leadership Howard County. Leadership was an 18-month cohort – with leaders from local, civic, and business sector. Ron explained the power and influence of Leadership in this way, “Kumar, this is the secret key to the city. If you get into this program (he was an alumni) you will never have a door close on you, or have an unreturned phone call. You will quickly discover the power behind this fraternity.

The Leadership program is highly competitive. Of the 100 people who apply each year, only 40 individuals are accepted. I applied and with the help and influence of Ron, I was accepted in. The tuition is quite expensive. It cost $3500 to belong to the cohort. Most companies and organizations pay for their tuition fees because they know the value. During the orientation, I quickly discovered that this cohort did in fact retain the cream of the crop. There were bank presidents, large business owners, the fire county chief, city planners and more.

The purpose of the Leadership program is to introduce to people how decisions are made, and how you can make a deeper contribution to the city you live in.

During the 18-month cohort I was exposed to a detailed overview of how the city works. Politicians, judges, and experts from the non-profit sector taught during our eight-hour marathon sessions. Each of them shared different insights to the inner workings of the community. We learned how the city leaders are developing their strategic plan. We received the latest demographics to study and discuss before it had been circulated to the press. We discussed and often argued about the challenges related to poor, and the underserved in the community.

When I applied, I thought I would be sitting in monthly meetings for eight hours a day, networking with other influential leaders. I was naïve. In addition to the eight-hour monthly meetings, we were given homework and projects to accomplish. We were divided into small groups and assigned a non-profit board in the community to meet with, give free consultation, and work on a project they needed help with.

My group was assigned to an organization called Rebuilding Together. Rebuilding Howard County was a local chapter of the national organization, based in Washington, DC. My group was asked to provide expertise consultation by addressing a marketing strategy, brand awareness, and member retention.

My group consisted of a marketing professional, Internet entrepreneur, senior vice-president of a large government contractor, and a litigation attorney. In addition to meeting with the Rebuilding Board, we had to meet on a weekly basis apart from our regular work responsibility. After meeting for several months, we developed a seventy-page business plan; complete with a marketing proposal and professional video commercials that was presented to their board. We donated a cumulative of 200 hours to this project.

In addition to the monthly Leadership meetings and our business project, we also had another set of required homework. We were expected to attend a minimum of 3 field trips to local private and government agencies such as the recycling center, the police and fire department, and hospital emergency room. These field trips provided a glimpse on how the County operates, and revealed growth issues related to a metropolitan area.

Why would busy professionals take the time and money and invest in a program like this?
This was the best place for myself as clergy to build strong relationships with business professionals, by building trust and collaborating with people I would rarely be in contact with. For example, the president of the local theatre called me and asked if they could use my church for practice for a few months, while they were renovating. I was able to minister to an attorney going through tough divorce. Two fathers whose children had autism came to me for spiritual counseling, asking how to deal with the stress that was oppressing the entire family. Several of these individuals have attended church with me. One new friend said, “Kumar I love your church. If I wasn’t Jewish I was be coming here every week.” If I didn’t move shortly thereafter, I have no doubt that she probably would have starting regularly.

When I made the decision to move to Canada, my entire cohort planned a happy hour at the local restaurant to say farewell to me. These busy professionals took off work early to spend a couple hours at the local restaurant to honor with me before I moved. When the moving truck came to pick up our belongings, the vice-president of the United Way drove to my home to say farewell.

Once again, I was the only clergy in this group of esteemed leaders. My role evolved quickly and I became their pastor.

**Building relationships**

How are you building relationships with the business community? When the local civic and city leaders have a problem, do they think of asking your local church leaders to join the conversation? While most of the professionals in my cohort joined Leadership as a way to network and expand their business, I have an entirely different motivation. I joined to build trust and introduce people to Jesus.

On a spring afternoon, we were headed to the state capital to meet with the governor and his staff. As we rode the charter bus, I sat next to Heather, the Senior VP of a technology company. She grew up in a secular home where spirituality was never discussed. Aside from being married in a Catholic church, she had never attended a church. It quickly became evident to me that she had been saving all her questions about Jesus and how to follow him for our bus ride. “I have always felt that God was watching me since I was a child,” she shared with me. As a result she brought her entire family to my church to visit.

I don’t want to give you a false impression that this is an evangelistic model. Rather, this is a way to get involved in your community immediately. How are you engaging the civic and professional leaders in your community? Can you pick up the phone and expect the leaders to answer? If there were a sudden disaster or emergency, would the community leaders think of you and your church?

As you join a local civic group, consider the good will you will be able to contribute on behalf of God’s kingdom.

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Rajkumar Dixit is the pastor of Oakridge Adventist Church, in Vancouver Canada. He is the author of Branded Faith: Contextualizing the Gospel in a Post-Christian Era. You can follow him on twitter @kumardixit.
C.D.: the Man Behind the Message

A Book Review by Rudolph Peters

In the book *C.D.: the Man Behind the Message*, Harold L. Lee and Benjamin Baker tell the remarkable story of Charles Brooks – evangelist, ministry mentor, and race relations trail blazer extraordinaire.

Brooks’ impact on race relations in the church came full circle when Neal Wilson, then president of the Columbia Union Conference, recommended him to serve as a field secretary. Later when Doug Simons was nominated to serve as the lay activities secretary and in spite of his qualifications and impressive service record was rejected for racial reasons, Brook’s passionate and effective leadership opened new doors of opportunity for people of all races to serve in Columbia Union Conference leadership positions.

Brooks’ greatest legacy is seen in his lifelong work as an evangelist and soul winner. From his encounter as a youth with the noted evangelist E.E. Cleveland to his last public evangelistic meetings and retirement, Brooks preached on every continent, exposing millions to the gospel of Christ, and leading thousands to membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The book presents an in-depth story of Charles Brooks’ life and ministry. It covers all the major developments in the life of this gifted man of God and gives the reader insights into the things that inspired and motivated his epic ministry. In the telling of the story, lifestyle issues that were core to evangelism in the 1960s are highlighted, even though many of those issues are not as prevalent in the church’s evangelistic emphasis today. While those issues are seamlessly developed in some parts of the book, there are places where they seem forced into the narrative. This minor concern, however, does not detract from the authors’ effort to offer us a window into the man behind the message.

The book has historical value for those who wish to study the development of race relationships within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is not exhaustive, but offers a teaser for further study. The book also provides a manual for public evangelism, documenting the essential steps needed for a successful evangelistic campaign. For these two reasons this book is a must read for all Seventh-day Adventist pastors and for leaders in the broader Christian community.

*Rudolph Peters is pastor of the Beacon Light Seventh-day Adventist Church in Richmond, California*

**Editor’s Note:** Save 25% on the purchase of this book during the month of February by calling your Adventist Book Center at 1-800-765-6955 or by using the coupon code CDRH25 when ordering from the Adventist Book Center online.
Stories We Tell: Lessons from a Mouse

by David Resendes

About five years ago I asked God whether or not I should invite a young man named Sean to live with my wife and I. He had just moved to the area. He wasn’t a Christian, and he had a party lifestyle in his history. Even though a friend from church asked me to consider this opportunity, I didn’t feel comfortable and politely turned down the request.

A few days later I went on a prayer walk down a dirt road. Off to the side of the road I noticed a small white mouse lying on its side. Thinking that a hawk might swoop down and eat it, I scooped up the mouse with a piece of paper and took it home.

Rummaging through my trash, I found an empty peanut can. I poked holes in the lid and lined the can with ripped pieces of paper towel. All of a sudden I heard a voice in my heart say, “David, you have so much compassion for this mouse – What about Sean for whom I died?”

Wow, that changed my mind! I then invited Sean to stay in our home. Everything went fine, and in time he gave his heart to the Lord and was baptized.

There are some things we will never experience unless we take quality time with God in prayer. What’s more, quality time also requires a certain quantity of time. If you spend a few minutes a day in prayer, add a few more. And then a few more. Go slow and grow. Start small and end tall. Grow your prayer life from small talk to God talk.

David Resendes is pastor of the Stockton Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Stockton, California