

2010

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Brian Foreman



Looking outside the church for community resources

In the summer of 2008, I resigned from a position as youth minister at a church in Charlotte, N.C., in order to concentrate on further education. To pay the bills, I began work as a consultant with an organization that focuses on community engagement around issues of social trust. Since then, I have experienced excitement about resources, partnerships and ideas, while also experiencing sadness over lost opportunities.

Consider this exchange with the leader of a local student drama troupe. He had been working with this group to create original pieces around social issues such as racism, dating violence and gang activity. The group included students from several demographics across ethnic and socio-economic status. I asked why he chose to take on this project. His response was: "Students are not just the future, but the now. They have the power to change the course of history."

The group of students performed their pieces five times in the community, at local theaters and colleges, but never once in a church. These pieces speak directly to the issues students face, but the church had no opportunity to frame a conversation around them with the words of Christ. When I asked other youth ministers around town, they loved the idea but had no notion this type project was taking place.

Why did I spend nearly two decades in student ministry? I believe in the power of students to change the world as God directs and uses them. I heard a similar refrain echoed from several people who work with students at schools, arts agencies, nonprofits and corporate mentor programs. There are countless people who work with youth in a variety of sectors that I had never considered as resources and partners. I suspect I am not alone in this regard. Ministers and educators are so busy with their work that networking is not always a

Resources

Block. *Community: The Structure of Belonging.*

Cohen and Prusak. *In Good Company: How Social Capital Makes Organizations Work.*

Hurley and Brown, "Conversational Leadership: Thinking Together for a Change."

Wenger. *Cultivating Communities of Practice.*

Vogt. "The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation and Action."

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valued use of time. When we do network it is with people like us at other churches, where we mine for ideas and best practices, oblivious to what exists beyond our boundaries.

Lay leaders have an advantage in this area in that they interact outside the church in various circles. The challenge is being attentive to those potential relationships that can enhance ministry, programming and service opportunities.

In any event, there are opportunities to grow your resource list through human capital rather than just ideas captured from the Internet or the latest book. While these are valuable resources, the ideas of people in your community may prove priceless. Here are a few recommendations for building those relationships.

- Volunteer in projects that do not involve the church. A secondary benefit here is the renewal you may find through connecting with others.
- Every couple of months, invite individuals in your area of interest to discuss together what they are working on, finding energy in, and are generally excited about.
- Ask friends who they think you should get to

know who has a passion similar to you. Call them and schedule lunch.

Creating change and partnership ideas begin with conversations. Networking to build human resources in the community is essentially that. Nurturing your passions outside of ministry is also vital.

Consider some of the following ideas for collaboration that enhance what you are doing in ministry.

- Ask a local drama group for volunteers who can provide dramatic scripture readings.
- Engage local slam poets to listen to a conversation your group is having and respond to it with an impromptu poem.
- Invite people working on the front lines of social causes to speak to your group and then volunteer with that person's organization.
- Find ethnic restaurants to host your group and have a conversation about coming to a new community, cultural diversity and hospitality.

These are simple ideas, but the real magic occurs when you have built trust with those outside the church who help make these events better because they share a mutual regard and passion for the work you are doing. This requires the work of building relationships through conversations that matter. You may be surprised to find that others want to have substantive conversations with people, even those with whom they may not find agreement.

As you engage with and meet people in your community who share similar passions to yourself, try building authentic conversations where you share your dreams and fears about what is happening in your area of interest. In the midst of those conversations you will discover pockets of energy in one another, ideas about other people you could connect one another with, and ideas for making your projects better. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Brian Foreman, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership and a consultant for community engagement issues in Charlotte, N.C. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.