

2008

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Rita Spillyards



Care Night

Several years ago, members of First Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Ark., were seeking something to replace the outdated visitation night, something that would combine outreach with caring for current members. Eventually, we stumbled upon Care Night.

The late Bill Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church, Blytheville, Ark., had borrowed heavily from Jerry N. Tidwell's *Outreach Teams That Win: G.R.O.W.*, coined the term Care Night, and enlisted layperson Gail Sullivan Jowers to put the plan into action. After visiting by phone with Gail, we were excited to adapt her thoughts and bring Care Night to Pine Bluff. It worked there, and now is working well at Rolling Hills.

Description

Built upon the Great Commission and other directives of Jesus, Care Night is a carefully structured strategy by which we minister to those around us, both within our church family and beyond. It combines outreach with inreach that clearly demonstrates Christian caring. Participating church members meet together to visit, make telephone calls, write letters and pray. By choosing avenues of service, volunteers work within their gifts and at their desired level of involvement.

On the selected date, participants gather for approximately one hour. Everyone signs in and moves to his/her chosen area of service: inreach or outreach tasks, prayer, childcare or food preparation. Those planning to complete inreach and outreach tasks select assignments from three tables designated visits, telephone calls and writing. Everyone pauses as a leader prays and gives brief instructions. Participants then disperse to complete their assignments.

Those who are visiting depart in pairs as no one is allowed to visit alone. Callers use church office space as a phone bank, and

writers gather at tables stocked with supplies such as pens, cards, church stationery, address stamps, church directories and local phone directories. Those praying meet with a leader who has a list of all the assignments. They spend the hour praying by name for each individual who may be contacted. Everyone assembles again at the end of the hour to report to the larger group about their work. A light supper or refreshments may be served after the hour or during the work period.

Assignments

Outreach visit assignments include initial doorstep stops at the homes of first-time visitors to the church. Some form of a visitor gift bag* may be delivered at this time, while a visit to a second- or third-time guest might involve delivering Sunday school literature or children's materials.

Inreach visits might include brief stops at the homes of recently bereaved members or those confined by illness or disability.

Telephone calls are placed to viable prospects, as well as members, who for any reason are being especially remembered. A quick phone call inquiring about an ailing family member, for instance, can be a blessing.

Cards and letters can be compelling follow-up messages to prospects and excellent tools for expressing any of the following to church family members: Congratulations, Get Well, Thank You, Happy Birthday, Happy Anniversary, or simply, You are loved. Letters of encouragement to military personnel or missionaries are often unexpected, but much appreciated. Children and teens enjoy receiving mail, especially personal notes saying, "I think you're great because ..."

Schedule and participants

Late Sunday afternoon or early evening is a good time to find folks at home. Especially since contacts are brief, most people are quite receptive. If other Sunday evening church activities conflict, Care Night certainly can work on

another night of the week. The frequency of Care Night meetings is based on the size of the church, size of the geographic area and the number of committed participants. One or two meetings per month are typical.

A few trained leaders are necessary to produce the preliminary paperwork and staff the assignment tables, but everyone is welcome and can easily participate. Deacons, Sunday school teachers, outreach and inreach leaders are strongly encouraged to attend. When possible, children and youth teachers may bring a student or an entire class to share the experience.

Preparation and follow-up

Extensive planning is essential. Church staff members need to be on board, and compelling publicity is a must. Although not a necessity, church computer software is a tremendous asset in keeping records and preparing assignment sheets.

Leaders must purchase and assemble all supplies, prepare assignment sheets (with maps, if needed), ensure visitor gift bags are available, perform necessary follow-up, and compile reports. In addition to text reports, someone handy with a digital camera can capture heart-warming images for the church newsletter such as the following:

Sunday school teacher Stacy and sixth-grader Brynn delivered helium balloons advertising an upcoming church event to a family with three children, who squealed, "We love you!"

Two ladies took a small plate of snacks to a friend who is confined to her home, anticipating entering a hospice program. The brief visit and comfort food assured her the church family loved her and had not forgotten her.

As a prospect, Julie says she was amazed at the caring attitudes of Rolling Hills members and confided she especially enjoyed the homemade bread included in the visitor bag. Julie is now an active, beloved member of the congregation. **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 Rita Spillyards, director of education and outreach at Rolling Hills Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ark. Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.