

connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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Embracing the Unexpected: A Story of Partnership and Growth

LIVINGWATER
FOUND ITS HOME
AT THE LOCAL
YMCA.

FEATURED CHURCH:

Stillwater United
Methodist Church

LOCATION:

Stillwater Campus in
Dayton, Ohio; Livingwater

Campus in Englewood, Ohio

ESTABLISHED: Stillwater Campus: 1995;

Livingwater Campus: 2002

SERVICES: 5 weekly services in 2 venues

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 750 total;

100 at Livingwater Campus

Stillwater United Methodist Church in Dayton, Ohio, is a church with many blessings. A growing, involved membership is just one of those blessings. When an opportunity to grow even more presented itself, the church took a leap of faith and never looked back.

Several years ago, Lead Pastor Duane Anders answered a phone call from a vice president of the YMCA. When the caller mentioned he was seeking donations to fund a new space for a local YMCA, Duane commented that his church would like to use the new space, too. The VP took Duane seriously and said the YMCA organization would be open to the idea of partnering with the church so resources could be shared.

Stillwater UMC worked out an agreement that a pastor's office would be located in the YMCA, that they could place a sign on the property and

that the church could meet on Sunday mornings and use the building one weekend evening a month.

This expansion was christened Livingwater United Methodist Church. And although Livingwater has its own pastor, Stillwater considers itself one church with two locations.



John finds many opportunities to share his ministry at the Kleptz YMCA.

LIVING AND GROWING TOGETHER

John Alice is Lead Pastor at the Livingwater Campus. He says the powerful partnership between Livingwater and the Kleptz YMCA is still growing.

One great thing about partnerships is that they enable two groups to do more together than they might be able to achieve individually. Such is the case with one of the most popular joint efforts of Livingwater and the YMCA.

The groups partner to put on the annual "End of the Summer Blast." Free and open to the public, the event

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features a huge “big top” style tent that Livingwater sets up in the parking lot. The church kicks off the event with an “under the big top” morning worship service. The fun continues throughout the day with live bands and other great entertainment. The Y opens its doors so that members and non-members alike can enjoy the facilities.

Through this partnership, the church is able to meet and follow up with a lot of new people. John estimates they’ve ministered to more than 2,000 people over the event’s two years.

The church also participates in other YMCA-sponsored events like “Healthy Kids Days” and “Family Fun Days.” John reports the members volunteer with activities like face painting or serving refreshments. They have a “conspiracy of kindness” to show others how God works through them.

WHEN PEOPLE TELL JOHN THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD, HIS SIMPLE ANSWER OF “THEN I'LL BELIEVE FOR BOTH OF US” ALWAYS DRAWS THEM BACK TO HEAR MORE.

YOUNG AND ENTHUSIASTIC

The partnership between the church and the YMCA is so strong that they recently jointly hired a staffer to focus on teen ministry. The youth pastor oversees

WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

Leadership Network has encouraged me to think in different ways. It has helped me define and look into how we can become one church in two locations. We are not separate churches, but a community that worships in two places. Leadership Network’s resources, models of ministry and ministry philosophies have challenged my thinking and helped me think creatively about our church.



—John Alice, Lead Pastor, Livingwater Campus

ONE CHURCH; TWO LOCATIONS

Instead of developing a separate church identity and liturgy at each location, Stillwater UMC strives to keep the “one church-two locations” feel.

The locations share a similar, non-traditional worship style. Members of the church are welcomed at either location and often take advantage of the programs at both campuses.

Church leaders are active in Leadership Network’s Multi-Site Churches Leadership Community. The Community has helped the team at Stillwater develop a plan for keeping their church strong while ensuring its members feel connected.

monthly teen nights at the Y that feature Bible study, praise and worship. The first event had 50 attendees; the second and third, around 80. For the next event, they are hoping for 100 or more teens.

REACHING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

John says having his office in the “hub” of the Y gives him great opportunities to share his ministry. People are always walking by, sticking their heads in to say hello or stopping in to chat. New YMCA members on orientation tours are introduced to John as well. When people hear he is the Y’s pastor, they often stop by to find out more about the church.

The non-traditional setting of the YMCA may make John more approachable to people who are struggling with their faith—or lack of it. John reports much of his time is actually spent working with people who are not members of the church.

“I love on people,” he says. “I reach out to them.” When people tell him they don’t believe in God, his simple answer of “Then I’ll believe for both of us” always draws them back to hear more.

John wouldn’t have been able to connect with such a variety of people if his office was housed in a traditional church administrative building. By being out and interacting with the community every day, his ministry touches people ... and continues to grow. **LN**