

connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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Transforming Lives Through Outreach

SERVING THOSE
OVERLOOKED BY
SOCIETY

FEATURED CHURCH:

Creekside Community
Church

LOCATION:

San Leandro, CA

ESTABLISHED: 1990

SERVICES: 2 weekly services

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 400-425

The members of Creekside Community Church in San Leandro, California have many passions. It's inspiring to learn how this church and its members have channeled their passion for service into a wide variety of outreach efforts.

Creekside's particular calling is to help those whom society has left behind. Two of the church's most active volunteer efforts involve prison ministry and an after-school faith-based program for at-risk children. Both programs are growing and changing in exciting ways as the participants' needs evolve.

BEHIND BARS

Creekside's prison ministry outreach program is off to a strong start. Twenty-one Creeksiders in two teams meet each Friday to make a 90-minute drive to the 2,000-person corrections facility. The prison mostly serves as a short-term holding center for men who will serve the bulk of their sentences with larger facilities. A small number of prisoners serve terms of less than two years at the facility.

The Creeksiders spend two hours at the prison, holding a worship service, Bible study and prayer time.

Five men came to the first meeting one year ago. Now, 35 people regularly attend.

God must have seen that Creekside was ready for a new challenge. The church leadership learned one of the men they had been ministering to was up for parole, says Kathy Greer, Creekside's director of community services. He was to be paroled in San Leandro, home to Creekside.



A policeman talks about his career with Creekside's after-school students.

This was the first time a participant in the prison ministry had been paroled. He wanted to continue his involvement with Creekside following his release, so team members put their heads, hearts and prayers together to help this man start a new life. The church found transportation, housing, fellowship and small-group accountability for this paroled prisoner.

Although unexpected, this outgrowth of the prison ministry has been quite a blessing. It allows the church to help men transform their lives, Kathy says. Support and ideas from other churches she met through Leadership Network's Externally Focused Churches Leadership Community has been extremely

helpful. She hopes to draw upon those resources to grow Creekside's new post-incarceration program.

CHILDREN AT RISK

Another Creekside passion is the area's underserved youth. Four years ago, church members approached the largest—and lowest-performing—elementary school in the Oakland School District in hopes of starting an after-school ministry.

IT TRULY WARMS THE HEART TO SEE HOW EXCITED THE STUDENTS ARE TO GO TO 'THEIR' CHURCH EACH WEDNESDAY.

Although the principal appreciated their interest, he said the school had even more basic needs—a teacher-appreciation program, in-school tutors and playground monitors.

This wasn't exactly what the church had planned, but God opened their hearts to be of service. Creekside formed an active teacher-appreciation program (the first in the school's 30-year history), which sponsors events, holds back-to-school breakfasts, and hosts holiday luncheons where the teachers are given gifts.

After several years of working in the school, the church again approached the principal with the idea of a faith-based after-school program. This time, he enthusiastically agreed.

WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

When I first went to a Leadership Network meeting, I felt like crying. I didn't know there were so many people who felt like I did. I was inspired by the people and churches I met dedicated to outreach. I got such encouragement and support from churches of all shapes and sizes. Leadership Network has been such a blessing.

—Kathy Greer, Director of Community Services, Creekside Community Church



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The students in Creekside's after-school program tend to come from very different backgrounds than the church volunteers who work with them. To foster understanding, Kathy has created binders for the volunteers that contain photos, bios and personal



information about each student. That way, volunteers can get to know the children on a deeper level, and understand some of the challenges they may be facing at home. It also allows other church members to learn about the students and pray for them in meaningful ways.

Although Creekside faced some challenges and resistance to the program (applications had to be edited several times to take out any references to the Bible or faith), 30 children now attend the program each week.

Volunteers pick up the children from school each Wednesday afternoon. Kathy says it truly warms the heart to see how excited the students are to go to "their" church. Once at the church, students do 45 minutes of homework, have worship and singing time, listen to Bible stories, make crafts, have a snack, and play sports.

A key part of the program is bringing in career speakers to talk about what they do, why they like their careers and what they had to do to get their jobs. The goal is to change the outlook of these students, many of whom think success is a "cell phone and hot car," Kathy says.

The Creekside volunteers are making a great impact in the lives of these children. Many of the students don't receive adequate meals at home. Others live in broken homes, or have suffered the violent death or abandonment of at least one parent.

"We reach out in love," Kathy says. "We are trying to be faithful to God's call. We don't know how we are impacting these children's lives but we have been blessed beyond belief to get to know them and their families. It's a delight to work with them." LN