

connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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"No Strings Attached" Service

SHOWING
THE TRUE HEART
OF MINISTRY

FEATURED CHURCH:

Grace Church

LOCATIONS:

Greenville, S.C., and one
launching in Powdersville, S.C.

ESTABLISHED: 1995

SERVICES: 3

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 2,300

Thirty minutes was all it took for the stories of 525 elementary-school-aged students to seize the heart of Matt Williams—Next Generation Pastors Leadership Community member and Grace Church Senior Pastor in Greenville, S.C. He listened as the principal of Greenville's Monaview Elementary relayed stories of children whose only assured meals were the school's government-subsidized breakfasts and lunches, tales of young boys whose home lives made them so insecure they'd soil themselves at school, and others who wouldn't have clean clothes if it weren't for the school's single washing machine.

Yes, 30 minutes of this and it was clear God had brought Matt to that place for an important reason. With the help of Grace Church, Monaview Elementary would have new hope.

INSPIRED FOR CHANGE

"I would never have gotten that idea on my own. Not in a million years," Matt says of the Monaview Elementary program. The inspiration came from a biannual Next Generation meeting held in April 2007, when Matt approached the guest speaker—Senior

Pastor Matt Hannan of New Heights Church in Vancouver, Wash.—to learn more about the pastor's off-campus ministries. Their conversation ignited a spark in Matt Williams's heart and ultimately led him to Monaview Elementary—one of the poorest schools in the area.

Matt learned that 92 percent of students there are on free or assisted lunch. Church staff members prayed over the "wish list" the principal had prepared, and the church's video team presented



(Above) Students pile on for a hay ride on the Monaview campus. (Right) Hard at work, this young student has something to smile about.

Monaview to the congregation visually. The 12-minute video detailed the immediate need and spurred 400 Grace Church attendants to sign up and make a difference.

Now, each of the 29 classrooms has two "home-moms" to care about the children and participate with the students in class projects. Male mentors give leadership to boys in the school, and translators assist in parent/teacher conferences in the

46-percent-Hispanic school. To top it all off, the volunteers also organize holiday parties—a Monaview first!

UNEXPECTED IMPACT

The level of need at Monaview offers volunteers an abnormal amount of freedom to share their lives with people.

“These kids are so poor and desperate that nobody really cares. No one’s going to come and say, ‘Don’t take these kids out to play basketball, because it’s too much of a liability.’ They’re not going to stop you from

‘THE COMMUNITY IS SEEING THE TRUE HEART OF THE MINISTRY.’

doing anything. They’re just grateful to have you.” Recognizing that rare freedom, the volunteers take care to honor those liberties.

The kids are on the winning end of a powerful partnership. And there is another exciting effect.

“What we’re seeing is that some of the greatest impact is happening with the teachers, the faculty and the staff. There’s a lot of crying that goes on,” Matt says. Grace Church volunteers are building trust through “no strings attached” service. They enjoy working outside of the media’s radar as they help relieve some social problems the kids are facing.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Because Grace is an impractical distance from the school, Matt sought out a church on the school’s street and proposed, “If you will give us information

WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

Leadership Network has been one of the best things that’s ever happened to me from a ministry standpoint. You could never calculate the benefits our church, and I personally, have gotten.



—Matt Williams, Grace Church Senior Pastor, Greenville, S.C.

GOING MULTI-SITE

The Monaview school ministry is flourishing just as Grace Church itself has done since 1995. The small congregation that started with just five people now averages 2,300 in attendance.

Now Grace Church is going multi-site, adding one to two campuses in 2008. They’ve also chosen a pastor to take charge solely of off-campus ministry. In both of these new territories,

Matt plans to draw on Leadership Network’s resources. Already, some of his staff have attended Multi-Site Leadership Community meetings, and Matt plans to use Leadership Network’s



resources to bring the new off-campus minister “up to speed on everything going on around the country when it comes to being externally focused,” he says.

and brochures with your church’s information, we will send these students and families to you.”

“It’s been a healthy thing for us. Through this kind of relationship building, the community is seeing the true heart of the ministry,” Matt says.

The ministry plans to take on two schools next year and ultimately find help for the five poorest area schools. In the meantime, Grace Church is moving slowly and steadily, so they can maintain whatever they create.

“Anyone can make a big splash,” Matt says. “It’s very important that we don’t promise things that we’re not willing to deliver long term.”

Matt still can’t believe how it all came together. “I meet a guy through Leadership Network who lives in the Northwest. He just says one off-hand comment about an elementary school, and God takes that in me, brings it back to South Carolina, and you have more than 500 students being blessed because of what God’s doing through our church.”

From individual ministries to the church at large, Matt boils it down to this: “Lives are being changed in Greenville, South Carolina, because of a meeting I had in Dallas with Leadership Network.” **LN**