

# connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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## Now Showing: Christ's Love for All People

LIVE IN A  
THEATER NEAR  
YOU

### FEATURED CHURCH:

National Community Church

LOCATION: Washington, D.C.

ESTABLISHED: 1996

SERVICES: 5 weekly

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 1000

Could a simple trip to the train station launch a spiritual journey? The answer is "yes!" if that station is Union Station in Washington, D.C. There, National Community Church (NCC) is winning people for God by turning a familiar setting into an arena for teaching and worship.

Church leaders say the goal is to offer worship services "live in a theater near you." One of those theaters is in D.C.'s historic Union Station. With its nine movie theaters, 40 food-court restaurants and 150 shops, Union Station is the perfect pre- and post-service "fellowship hall." It also serves well as a non-intimidating environment for newcomers.

NCC's second location meets at Regal Theaters in Ballston Mall, 15 miles from Union Station.

### GOING WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

NCC has been unconventional from the start. Although its path hasn't been easy (sparse attendance and the closure of its meeting place were stumbling blocks), NCC follows God's direction.

The church was led to Union Station, where they could meet people in "the marketplace," as Lead Pastor Mark Batterson says. Although the train station offers no grand stained glass or traditional church pews, it does introduce people to God in the familiar setting of a movie theater. But instead of the latest

blockbuster, what's showing each Sunday is Christ's love for all people.

### CATCHING A DIFFERENT CROWD

The theaters serve NCC well. They are an out-of-the-box location for an out-of-the-box congregation.

A large percentage of NCC attendees are what Mark terms the "de-churched." Unlike the "un-churched," the "de-churched" have been around church, but have been turned off by the typical church scene.



(left) Union Station in Washington, D.C., is the century-old building that National Community Church calls home.

(right) The theaters at Ballston Mall make the second location of National Community Church.



"We are trying to catch a different crowd," says Ballston Point Pastor Joel Schmidgall. "Meeting in a theater is not a temporary solution. Instead, it is actually part of our vision."

Union Station's historical setting also brings visitors, from people off the streets to former Attorney General John Ashcroft. NCC wants to attract people from all church and non-church backgrounds to an environment where people can feel comfortable.

Connecting with people is a theme NCC uses in its ministry. They use the title "point pastor" for each location's leader. Point pastors make personal connections by getting acquainted with people in the church. >1

So, even when the weekly message comes over the big screen, the congregation is able to interact with someone after the message. "It takes away any awkwardness" there would be from the absence of a traditional speaker, Joel says.

### CREATING A THIRD PLACE

NCC agreed that they needed a "third place"—somewhere between home and church where people could spend time. In mid-2006, NCC opened Ebenezer's Coffeehouse, located one block from Union Station.

### 'MEETING IN A THEATER IS NOT A TEMPORARY SOLUTION; IT IS A PART OF OUR VISION.'

The Ebenezer's building is a tri-level, multi-functional coffee hub near Capitol Hill. It conveniently lies across from Washington's 2.3 million-square-foot convention center. The top floor is designated as office space; the main floor is the coffeehouse; and the lower level is set up as a performance area.

What had been a dilapidated building is now a thriving venue for relaxation and conversation. Historical societies have commended NCC for its success in connecting the past with the present.

God gave NCC favor in gaining ownership of the building. Although outbid, NCC was chosen by the seller and proceeded to the zoning process—a difficult achievement in historic Washington.

### WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME



"[Multi-site] is definitely not the norm. It usually requires a lot of explanation to others. Leadership Network was a place where we could hear about the struggles

other churches were having and the things that were working for them. It was good to let us know 'you're not alone' and build some credibility. It also encouraged us to sit and think, 'Okay, how should this be done?' That was helpful for us."

—Joel Schmidgall, Ballston Mall Point Pastor,  
National Community Church

## MAKING A GLOBAL IMPACT



The name National Community Church accurately suggests the church's vision is both focused and wide-ranging. Local outreach is a major part of

NCC's makeup, but worldwide missions have a powerful role as well. In 2006 alone, NCC organized major mission trips to the Dominican Republic, Galapagos Islands and New Orleans. Soon they will travel back to Ethiopia—where Joel says participants "trained missionaries and built houses for single moms."

Re-zoning for commercial use took patience, prayer and faith. The community was unsure how to react to the new development, but NCC is gradually winning them over by giving back through outreach.

"The goal is that the business makes money so we can do more events in the community and expand our influence to other countries," Joel explains.

To passersby, Ebenezer's is a typical trendy coffeehouse. "We don't have a neon 'Jesus Saves' sign flashing out front or anything," Joel says, but it is wholly submitted the cause of Christ. In fact, the coffee sold is "coffee for a cause," meaning the proceeds go to community outreach.

From 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., Ebenezer's is buzzing with business. It is also home to a live Saturday-night service in the lower level, which is recorded, edited and used for the next-day's Ballston and Union Station services.

"There may be stuff going on downstairs, but we never shut down the coffeehouse to have church," Joel says. Many times, people who just stopped in for coffee wander downstairs to see what's going on and stumble into church.

"We have a deeper vision," Joel explains. "We want people in the church to be there and people from the community to be there. It is intended to be a place where church and community can cross paths. It's a relational piece."

Through outreach and discipleship innovations, NCC is bringing in new believers and winning back others. Their ties to the community help ensure they will be doing so long into the future. **LN**