

connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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Energized for Service

BUILDING
BETTER IDEAS
TOGETHER

FEATURED CHURCH:

The Well Community Church

LOCATIONS:

Fresno, California

ESTABLISHED: 2002

SERVICES: 5 weekly, at 2 sites

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 2,200

He calls it “the conference of the future.” Brad Bell, Directional Leader and Lead Communicator at The Well Community Church (“The Well”) in Fresno, Calif., says being a part of Leadership Network’s Next Generation Leadership Community has changed the way he views conferences, lives life, leads church and impacts others.

Brad’s young church is breaking new ground daily. The Leadership Community Group was a venue for gaining insight from people whom Brad describes as “high-octane, with a profound love for the Word, a love for the Lord, a love for the Church and for people.”

A conversation with Next Generation mentor pastor Robert Lewis caused Brad to ask, “Does the community consider this church a blessing?” And, The Well responded. Now, this six-year-old church is feeding children, empowering adults and launching positive-impact programs throughout Fresno.

EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP

The Well launched a nonprofit organization in Fresno called Every Neighborhood Partnership (ENP).

The church approaches elementary school principals at needy schools in the area and asks to partner with them to provide mentoring, tutoring and community outreach. The school’s agreement takes little convincing. They “roll out the red carpet,” Brad says. The Well then jumps in to reach their simple goals, which break down into five phases.

Phase I is Saturday sports. It’s easy getting the kids to join in the fun. “You throw a bouncing ball out on the playground and somebody with a pulse, and



Kids play at the Saturday Sports ministry.



those kids will lose their minds!” Brad assures. The kids get to play hard and work up a strong appetite, because The Well has teamed up with The Poverello House—a local nonprofit organization that serves the area’s hungry and destitute—to supply the children with what is, for some, the best meal they have all week.

Phase II is classroom mentoring. Volunteers from The Well enter classrooms to give teachers an extra set of hands and eyes. The schools report that the classrooms with mentors are functioning better than those without assistance because the teachers are allowed to focus on teaching.

Phase III is neighborhood projects. The church organizes effective one-time service events, like “extreme makeovers,” around the neighborhood.

Phase IV is relocation. The Well wants to do more than impact the community from the outside; it’s going “incarnational”—*becoming* the neighborhood by buying or renting houses there and placing people from the church in those homes. While it is a radical commitment, the average Well member is 27 years

‘A CHILD HAS A NEW PAIR OF SHOES BECAUSE SOMEONE GAVE.’

old—mobile enough to make the move and eager to participate.

Phase V is employment, and it’s still “under construction.” The plan: The Well launches businesses as neighborhood ministries. Next, the church helps residents develop job skills and strong résumés or enrolls them in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes—whatever each individual needs. The church then connects with existing local businesses to learn exactly what skills those businesses seek in an employee. The neighboring employers agree to hire locals on the contingency that the employees complete the Every Neighborhood Partnership training. One hope is that local business leaders also guest speak on professional topics, like interviewing.

FROM VISION TO REALITY

Community Involvement provides a cycle of blessing. Brad puts it this way: “A child has a new

WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

At conferences, you pay to sit and listen to a guy who has great things to say. But you have 15 questions that, if you could ask, would customize that experience in a profound way. At Next Generation LC meetings, the mentor pastors customize the experience. I’m able to leave having my questions answered, so it’s fantastic. It’s combustive!

—Brad Bell, The Well Community Church, Fresno, Calif.



NEIGHBORHOOD THRIFT

All Neighborhood Thrift inventory comes from people at The Well. In most cases, merchandise is flowing in faster than the church can sort through it. And, it all goes toward blessing the community. Shoppers can fill a brown bag with items and pay one low, flat rate per bag—no matter what’s inside. For some mothers, Neighborhood Thrift allows them to adequately clothe their children for the first time.

pair of shoes because someone gave.” And, the cycle is about to come full circle. Neighborhood Thrift is preparing to hire people from *inside* the neighborhood to start the job training process. There, workers train for a year. Finally, The Well supplies local businesses with résumés of their recent graduates to help employees acquire permanent employment.

While Brad is excited about the success of ENP, he says what’s most exciting is that it wasn’t even his idea. It came from the church’s idea-building method.

UNCONVENTIONAL INSPIRATION

Inspired by Disney Pixar’s idea-mapping process called “storyboarding” and Steve Jobs’ keynote messages at Macworld conferences, The Well births out-of-the-box ministry ideas on a regular basis. Ideas filter up through the leadership where they’re tweaked, refined or embellished. Finally, the year’s ministry plan is presented in a “State of the Church” keynote address.

ENP began this way. It started with the idea of Saturday sports in a particular neighborhood. But when the kids were tiring after a short time of play, it was back to the drawing board. Volunteers saw that the kids weren’t getting sufficient breakfasts. From there, the Poverello partnership was born, and so on.

Church leaders are encouraged to think big within a guiding parameter. This year’s is “Focus on health and allow for growth.” By seeing problems, uniting the church around a solution and putting ideas to action, The Well places no limits on God, as they dream big for His cause. **LN**