

Overview of Focus Goals 2008-2012

Please read before proceeding to questionnaire.

Four years ago, in 2007-2008, when we hammered out our current Focus Goals, we judged ourselves to be weakest in the areas of **discipleship** and **outreach**, and so we wrote up some specific goals to aim at. Below is an overview of our efforts in these areas; we thought reviewing this first would help set a context for the questions we are asking.

Discipleship

One of the areas we focused on was helping both men and women go deeper and be more regular in the study of God's Word. During these last four years we have seen the following: a) In the first year Jerram Barrs taught our women in an evening class; b) Betty McCracken agreed to teach a weekly, daytime Women's Bible study; c) Jessie Swigart agreed to teach an evening "section" of that daytime class; d) Hal Pendergrass has continued to teach a Saturday morning, bi-weekly Men's Bible study; and e) Ed Killeen started a Friday morning, bi-weekly—and now weekly—Men's Bible study. Over the past four years the women have studied the book of Revelation, Psalms, Genesis, and Luke, and the men have studied Psalms, Galatians, Revelation, and Joshua (between the two different studies). Several women in the fellowship have also started a few groups that meet weekly to practice the discipline of meditation on the Word and to help encourage each other and hold each other accountable for applying the Word in the concrete situations of daily living.

Outreach

The second area we addressed ourselves to, after discipleship, was outreach. Generally, the term "outreach" has become an all-inclusive term that covers everything Christians do to directly engage with non-Christians: getting to know them and drawing them into relationship; helping them meet needs of all kinds, especially through ministries of mercy/teaching/support, etc.; getting them to think about important issues of life and death and/or answering their questions; sharing the gospel directly with them; and finally, planting churches, to the end that there might be a Christian presence and witness to Christ in more and more neighborhoods and places across the globe so that more and more people can hear the Good News that the Kingdom of God has broken in on the world and be invited into it through faith in Jesus.

Personal witnessing. It has been argued that the most effective way of bringing people into the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus is via personal relationships that develop over time and lead eventually to the gospel being personally shared—regardless of how the non-Christian(s) *first* gets to know the believer(s). And certainly those people we have seen come to Christ at Old Orchard through the years have come largely through relationships informally established with believers in our fellowship.

Engaging Non-Christians. Over the years Old Orchard has done various things to try to engage non-Christians, from hosting a film series on parenting to setting up outdoor movie nights in the church yard one summer. One of our most effective ministries was our "Six Dinners," lovely dinners in the Milligan House to which our folks would invite guests and listen to someone talk on a topic that would then be discussed and lead to fruitful conversations about spiritual things. It was a huge amount of work, so it later morphed into "Four Desserts!" More recently we've done Movie Nights, where we invite friends and watch a film and eat pizza together and then talk about the film afterwards.

We've also started our "Three Nights Together" in the fall, and have tried to encourage the fellowship to invite non-Christians to them. Twice now we've brought the Christian Celtic band, *The Crossing*, down from Chicago, and advertised these concerts publicly.

Our Arts Ministry has hosted several art shows that brought significant numbers of outsiders (including neighborhood artists who showed their work) through the Milligan House doors and into good conversation—and even relationship—with us. And last, but not least, we have begun a new emphasis on trying to make our community groups be a "place" to which non-Christians can be invited so that they might experience something of the warmth and caring of the fellowship in the body of Christ.

Ministries of mercy/teaching/service. Our English Conversation Class to international students on Fridays is a ministry of teaching/service. We reach out these students with an aim to “teach” better English—of course, in a low-key, conversational way, and to provide them the service of deepening their understanding and experience of American culture. Out of that some deep friendships have developed, and some of these students have become very interested in Christianity.

And probably our oldest ministry of teaching and service is our week-long Summer Bible School for children, or “Summer Narnia,” as it has come to be called.

We also reach out to those in need outside our church walls by getting involved with existing ministries of mercy: Cornerstone, a non-profit housing ministry; Webster-Rock Hill Ministries; Grace and Peace Women’s Shelter, Bethany Christian Services, etc. And occasionally we’ve organized special relief collections in the neighborhood (e.g., for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, and of the 2011 tornado in Joplin).

All of these kinds of outward-focused ministries of mercy/teaching/service become ways of demonstrating the love, care, and mercy of God, and they help us win the right to speak into peoples’ lives and share with them the claims of Christ and what we have found in him.

Church Planting Efforts. In 2005 we planted a daughter church, South City Church, by sending out Jay (and Jen) Simmons as our planting pastor along with about 19 of our people.

Four years ago, in 2008, our associate pastor, Mark Tucker, urged us to be seriously aiming at planting another church by 2012, and then lo and behold, a kind of hybrid church plant began to develop in late 2009-2010! We partnered with Memorial Presbyterian and Grace and Peace in a cooperative effort of three churches to establish Midtown Church, which just “launched” in January. In addition to the Tucker family, three households left Old Orchard to join that new work.

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So God has been good to us in giving us discipline and progress in the areas of discipleship and outreach, as well as in other ongoing areas of ministry. But we do need to seek his face for our future, for the next four years, so that we keep growing.