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Experiential

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Applicable

The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

Learner-based

Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

Field Guide to Neighborhood Outreach

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Field guide to neighborhood outreach. -- 1st American pbk. ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7644-3589-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Evangelistic work. 2. Church work. 3. Neighborhood. I. Group Publishing.

BV3790.F46 2007

269'.2--dc22

2007016367

ISBN 978-0-7644-3589-8

0-7644-3181-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07

Printed in the United States of America.

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FIELD GUIDE
TO
**NEIGHBORHOOD
OUTREACH**

ideas



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Loveland, Colorado

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INTRODUCTION



It's easy to go through weeks, months, or even years without ever meeting our neighbors. We can drive right into our garages and walk straight into our homes without ever seeing or building relationships with those around us. But God calls us to break free from that isolated way of living that is so prevalent in our culture. God wants you to be a light in your neighborhood!

Field Guide to Neighborhood Outreach will equip you with a variety of fun, creative, and exciting ways you can meet your neighbors and build meaningful relationships with them. And as you develop authentic caring friendships, you'll have opportunities to share Christ's love through words and actions.

The first step toward developing those friendships is to meet your neighbors. And yeah, we know it can feel a little cheesy to just ring a doorbell and say, "Hi, I'm your neighbor!" So in **"How to Reach Out to Your Neighborhood,"** we've included a step-by-step guide from a couple who has already forged new territory in neighborhood outreach. Their inspiring story will inspire you to take to your streets!

Then we give you the nuts and bolts ideas to use in *your* neighborhood with *your* neighbors! In **"Creating a Caring Community,"** you'll find suggestions and ideas for fun and easy ways to meet and interact with your neighbors by caring for each other and fostering an authentic sense of community where you live.

Gathering around an outdoor barbecue is a natural way for neighbors to interact. In **"Eating Together: Food-Related Outreach Ideas,"** you'll find mouth-watering ideas for parties and themed get-togethers that go beyond the backyard cookout and create memories your community will treasure.

"Sports and Outdoor Fun" and **"Indoor Fun and Friendship"** are two sections you don't want to miss, jam-packed with suggestions for gatherings and events that will be filled with laughter, smiles, and deepening friendships.

And what better time to gather together with neighbors than during

traditional “**Holidays and Seasonal Celebrations**”! Here, you’ll discover holidays with a twist—fun ways of celebrating traditions that involve your neighbors.

And look for the Helpful Hints and Instant Intentions sections. Helpful Hints are just that—tips or trivia to make your idea just a little bit better. And Instant Intentions offer ways to take the next step in helping your neighbor know Jesus.

God has planted you right where you live for a purpose. Let your light shine!

HOW TO REACH OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



*This man and wife single-handedly
built a sense of community by reaching
out to everyone in their neighborhood.
What can you learn from their example?*

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA

The neighborhood outreach ministry of Drue and Laura Warner began before they even moved into their neighborhood. As Laura explains, “My thinking on neighborhood ministry was really solidified after reading *Making Room for Life* by Randy Frazee. We read it as we were looking for a house to buy, and we had really been praying that God would lead us to the place he had prepared.”

Drue adds, “We know we probably can’t affect the entire city of Atlanta, but we may be able to impact our neighborhood and potentially even the suburb of Sugar Hill, where we live.”

Laura and Drue say their hearts are in alignment with the ministry vision of their church, Perimeter Church, in Duluth, Georgia. According to Drue, the church’s vision is “to bring the people of greater Atlanta and all places we serve into a life-transforming encounter with the kingdom of God.” He continues, “We believe that one of the greatest tools the church has today to accomplish such a mission is serving and loving others, particularly those with special physical or emotional needs.”

As a result of that vision, Drue and Laura made a decision. “Since we’re both extroverts and gifted with hospitality and mercy,” explains Drue, “the best use of our time with the greatest potential for spiritual fruit in the

lives of others is to focus our efforts on meeting, building relationships with, and serving our neighbors and local public elementary school.”

THE HEART OF THE MINISTRY

The couple moved into Lenox Park, a neighborhood of 240 homes, in August 2004. They wasted no time beginning their ministry. “Our first effort to begin meeting neighbors and building relationships was to coordinate a neighborhood food drive in October 2004,” says Drue.

It was important not to collect food door-to-door, but rather to have a central drop-off location. This gave neighbors the opportunity to stop by, have coffee and doughnuts, and meet one another. Drue and Laura also had a sign-up sheet available for neighbors who were interested in building a greater sense of community in the neighborhood. Ten people signed up.

After explaining their vision for community service and neighborhood relationships at the next homeowners’ meeting, 15 more people signed up. And the ministry grew wings.

OTHER OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

The couple began hosting Saturday morning breakfast gatherings for neighbors who expressed interest in building a greater sense of community. At these breakfast gatherings, the group cast its vision for more outreach ideas, and Laura and Drue helped the group come up with ideas of how to implement its intentions.

The result? The neighborhood has held a tsunami-relief drive, a summer pool party, an Easter-egg hunt, and a holiday decorating contest. In addition, 200 people attended a Halloween “meet and greet.”

Drue even dressed up as Santa for the neighborhood kids. “I was asked to be Santa Claus for a Christmas party for foster and adopted children through Bethany Christian Services,” he explains. “I figured while I had the suit, we could go ahead and use it as a relational ministry tool and invite neighborhood families to bring the kids over to our house to see Santa.” In addition, Laura and “Santa” gave families a news article that directed them toward the spiritual significance of Christmas.

The couple also hosted a caroling party one year. They invited neighbors who had been involved in many of their other activities throughout the year, and almost 20 people participated. Laura says, “Ages ranged from retired people, young couples, singles, and families with kids. The diversity in age added a richness and sense of real community to the group, and that was a blessing.”

A further blessing, she says, was the response to the caroling. The recipients, whom Drue and Laura had carefully chosen, included a wife (with two children) whose husband had been killed in an accident the first week of that December, an elderly woman who had placed her husband with Alzheimer’s disease in a nursing home the previous summer, a widow whose husband had died on Christmas day two years earlier, and several people who had just moved into the neighborhood.

“There was such a combination of tears and laughter along the way,” recalls Laura. “We had a very rich, wonderful time together.”

One of their most recent outreach ideas is a campaign to read through the Bible. The couple also plans to open their home one Sunday night a month so people can come over to discuss spiritual issues. “We have no idea how this is going to go,” says Laura, “but we feel that the time is right.”

.....
“All it takes is stepping out. Our community, our country is ready for it.”

DRUE WARNER, Community Outreach Associate, Perimeter Church, Duluth, Georgia
.....

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

At this writing, Drue can readily count off ways that this neighborhood outreach ministry has built solid relationships that might never have developed otherwise.

- Out of 240 homes, the Warners have built relationships with more than 75 neighbors and have developed close relationships with 20 of them.
- The neighborhood has donated more than 100 bags of groceries in the first two years of the ministry, building a firm sense of community among the donors.
- The Warners have identified deep emotional needs in four of their

neighbors—needs that otherwise would never have been known.

- Four families have expressed interest in attending or have attended church with Drue and Laura.
- Two men have attended Perimeter’s annual men’s retreat.
- Laura and Drue have had conversations about spiritual issues with 12 families.
- Six to eight couples have expressed interest in starting a small group that would focus on marriage and family issues.

None of these things would have happened without the intentional outreach of Laura and Drue.

.....
“We view our home as a primary tool for ministry.”

LAURA WARNER

.....
“Think about our culture. At least in suburban Atlanta, we are very busy, scattered, disconnected people,” says Laura. “When you

get together with friends, it is typically to meet at a restaurant or go to some other activity. It is rare to spend time in someone else’s home. But there the experience is much richer.”

SHARING THE GOSPEL

There are many ways to share the gospel, and certainly not all of those ways are oral. “We’ve shared the gospel through Christmas cards,” says Drue, “and by including our neighbors in e-mails and prayer requests when we learned during Laura’s pregnancy that our daughter had a heart defect.”

Laura and Drue share the gospel by their actions more than their words. “We’ve been intentional about not verbally sharing our faith—that is, evangelizing—with our neighbors or inviting them to church events until we’ve built a foundation of trust and respect,” explains Drue. “We don’t want to be perceived as having an agenda of trying to convert them or get them to come to our church.” After relationships have been forged, however, Drue says they are able to share the gospel freely because of the mutual trust they’ve established.

They strive to show their neighbors unconditional love and acceptance, rather than judging them. The couple wants to serve their neighbors with an attitude of humility, love, and acceptance.

Drue and Laura intentionally connect on a regular basis with other Christians they've met in the neighborhood. Together, they cast vision for the neighborhood outreach and pray together for their non-Christian neighbors.

Those efforts have paid great dividends. "I'd say that about 75 neighbors have experienced and/or heard the gospel through our neighborhood ministry," says Drue. "The relationships we're building will give us a great avenue for sharing the gospel—in our lives and in our words."

DAY-TO-DAY OUTREACH

Their neighborhood outreach hasn't cost Laura and Drue much in terms of dollars. "There's been a small financial cost to us," says Laura. "We often end up feeding others," she laughs. But since they piggyback on many of the events already planned and paid for within the subdivision, their costs are minimal, according to Drue.

Those events include pool parties, summer cookouts, and other social events planned and paid for by the homeowners' association. "We tap into those events," says Drue. "We make it a point to attend, meet new people, and deepen existing friendships."

"We make sure that we are volunteering, participating, and mingling with neighbors during these events," adds Laura.

Laura and Drue are intentional about giving their contact information to neighbors they meet for the first time. "We want them to have an opportunity to connect with us," explains Drue. "We typically don't ask for phone numbers, but we do try to find out where people live so we can stop by for a quick visit while out for an afternoon walk."

In addition, the couple serves the homeowners' association board as welcome team coordinators. The board sends them the names and addresses of people who have just moved into the neighborhood. "We try to make personal visits, delivering a current neighborhood newsletter and typically some cookies," Laura explains. Many of those first meetings result in further interaction, such as borrowing yard tools or asking for job contacts and school recommendations.

Other times, the couple invites new neighbors to dinner to meet established members of the neighborhood. "That way we're not the only

contacts people have,” Laura says. “We try to match newlyweds with other young couples, families with kids of the same age, and so on.” At this writing, Laura and Drue plan to start a Saturday morning coffee gathering to which they’ll invite both old and new neighbors.

THE COST OF THE CALLING

The cost is more in terms of time, but it’s a cost both Laura and Drue are willing to pay. “We’ve installed a glass storm door, so the main front door is almost always open,” explains Laura. “In fact, typically we close the main front door around 9 p.m., and we joke about being closed for business.”

All joking aside, the glass storm door serves a very practical purpose. “Many of our neighbors know that if the main door is open, meaning that you can see into the house and the porch light is on, visitors are welcome.” Otherwise, she says, the family is enjoying personal time. “We tell people about our open/closed-door policy.”

To preserve family time and avoid burnout, the couple generally keeps the door closed early in the morning as they enjoy breakfast together, and again in the evening during their daughter’s bath and bedtime. In addition, Drue’s responsibilities at the church often allow him to work at home half days on Fridays, during which time the door stays closed. The couple also values time away, making sure that family retreats are part of their annual calendar.

The couple has built enough relationships with neighbors, says Laura, “that barely a day goes by that someone doesn’t stop by for a short or long visit.” Someone might stop by to borrow a spice; someone else might need a listening ear.

To make the ministry vital and viable, Drue and Laura have to be willing to surrender their time and to-do lists to be available to their neighbors. “Many Saturday projects get put on the back burner,” says Laura, “not to mention the countless times I’ve just put the unfolded laundry

.....
“Many of our neighbors have become true friends. It’s nice to be able to see them often and not have to drive and battle traffic.”

LAURA WARNER

.....

back in the basket to make room for a neighbor on the sofa.”

When household jobs simply have to be done, Laura says, “We’ll talk to neighbors as we work—or invite them to join us! We just tell people we have to keep working when that’s appropriate to the situation.”

The ministry has also required a bit of personal sacrifice for the couple. In an intentional effort to spend more time at home, Laura hasn’t been able to dive into all of the women’s ministry activities she’s interested in at church. “We’ve cut out other things in our schedule in order to spend more time with neighbors,” agrees Drue, “things like taking time off from a church discipleship group in order to try to develop a group within our neighborhood.” But both agree the extra effort is worthwhile.

.....
“People are hungry for a sense of community, but nobody knows what to do. It just takes somebody to stand up and say, ‘Let’s do something!’”

DRUE WARNER

.....
“We want to be available to share our lives with the people God has placed around us,” Laura says, “and that is key to this ministry.”

BEARING FRUIT

Are Drue and Laura pleased with the fruit of this young ministry? Most definitely!

“In one way or another,” says Drue, “this outreach has affected every neighbor (approximately 500 people) in our 240-home subdivision.” If for no other reason, that impact has come about because Drue and Laura were instrumental in restarting the neighborhood newsletter. “Through communication comes influence,” chuckles Drue.

When asked to sum up their neighborhood outreach ministry, Drue answers, “I would characterize this as a seed-planting, relationship-building, long-term ministry. Our goal is to be continually planting seeds of the love of Christ as we seek to establish and deepen relationships over the long haul.”

The outreach has certainly been instrumental, says Drue, in building community both in his own church and in his neighborhood. “Our great passion,” he says, “is to see followers of Jesus Christ who live within our own neighborhood begin to function as the body—not as members of

various churches (while still maintaining active involvement there)—but as members of “The Church of Lenox Park.”

HOW TO GET STARTED IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

According to Drue, the idea of “loving your neighbor” is transferable from church to church, no matter what the size. “This model works

..... best in subdivisions, dormitories, and condominium complexes,” he says. “It’s probably more challenging in a rural setting. *“People don’t need to go to church to experience the church.”*

DRUE WARNER

..... However, there may be some great benefits in a rural setting because you’d have fewer neighbors and would be able to spend more time with them.”

If you’d like to reach out to your neighbors, heed this advice from Drue and Laura:

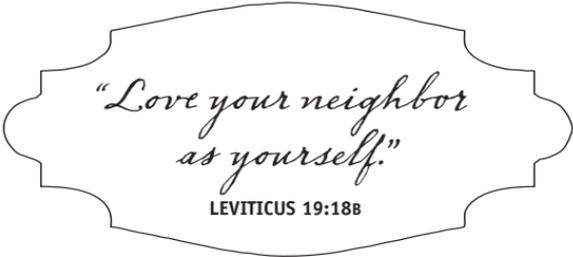
1. Pray. Ask God how he wants you to use your spiritual gifts, passions, and talents to minister to your neighbors.
2. Determine exactly who you will try to reach with the gospel. Set geographic boundaries—will you try to reach the people who live on your street? your block? your subdivision?
3. Brainstorm creative ways to connect with your neighbors. This can be as simple as delivering a plate of cookies to new neighbors or new parents.
4. Once you’ve connected with your neighbors, invite them to serve the community with you.
5. Rearrange your calendar so you can invest lots of time “in the field” (at home).
6. Be sure that all of your planning takes children into account. If their children aren’t well-fed and cared for, single moms won’t be drawn to this outreach.
7. Make service, love, and relationship-building your top priorities in interacting with your neighbors.
8. Wait for God’s timing before you begin to verbalize your faith, all the while praying for God to open doors of opportunity and to be working in the hearts of your neighbors.

9. Be proactive in spending time with both Christian and non-Christian neighbors.
10. Discover which methods of communication seem acceptable (and unacceptable) within your neighborhood.
11. Invite and empower others in the neighborhood to get involved in the ministry.
12. Meet people exactly where they are before thinking of inviting them to attend a church function. Cautions Drue, “Motives can easily be misunderstood among non-Christians.”

PLANNING A FOOD DRIVE

idea A neighborhood food drive is a good way to begin your neighborhood outreach ministry. Here are several easy steps to take in organizing an effective food drive.

- At least three weeks prior to the drive, get approval from your homeowners’ association or apartment manager, if applicable.
- Two to three weeks before your drive, contact your local food bank to learn its needs, and arrange a time to deliver your neighborhood’s donations.
- One to two weeks before the drive, notify your neighbors of the plan, detailing the items needed, the date, and the time of the drive. Do this by distributing a letter to each neighbor within your established boundaries.
- One week before the drive, place yard signs throughout your neighborhood.
- On the day of the drive, set up a visible drop-off location in your neighborhood. You may want to use a tent. Supply coffee, doughnuts, and information about the organization that will be receiving the food.
- Provide a sign-up sheet to collect neighbors’ contact information.
- Also ask neighbors to indicate if they’d be interested in future neighborhood outreach projects.
- Within one week of the drive, deliver the donations.
- Optional: After the drive, connect with neighbors who participated. Serve refreshments at your house, or plan a cookout to say thanks.



*“Love your neighbor
as yourself.”*

LEVITICUS 19:18B



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