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THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

Lighthouse Missional Outreach: **Game On!**

By Kolleen Long



What is a Gaming Grotto? It's a chance for people of all ages to play all kinds of games: board games, card games, children's games, strategy games and video games. It's also a chance for believers in Palmerton, Pa., to build relationships with those who might otherwise never enter a church building. That's because a Gaming Grotto is also

▲ Some people like board games, while others like vintage systems or the latest video games. Palmerton's Living Hope Lighthouse, is hoping to reach all in their community – regardless of their gaming preference – with a Gaming Grotto outreach. It's held each month under the direction of Missional Pastor Chris Bronico (third from right).

the new missional outreach of Living Hope Lighthouse Church in Palmerton.

The idea, Pastor Nathan Fry explains, came after eight church leaders attended a Fresh Expression event last spring. "They came back with the idea of a Gaming Grotto for the church," Fry recalls. "From there, we put in an appeal for a church

planter and submitted a proposal for a Fresh Expression to the church planting commission." The plan was approved, and the Gaming Grotto was born in October, 2012.. Soon after, the EC denomination sent Missional Pastor Chris Bronico to the Palmerton congregation to

implement the plan. Other Lighthouse members help to lead and implement the outreach program.

"The church has a very missional heart," Bronico says. "It's kind of in their DNA as it is."

"We're very outreach oriented," Fry confirms. "We were thinking as a church, what can we do to reach out to people that is fun and still connects to them and hopefully [will lead to] discipleship down the road?"

The Gaming Grotto is held the first Friday of each month. Plans are in place to expand meetings to twice a month by the end of 2013 and, hopefully, to hold a worship service in conjunction with one of these times. "We're creating a 'third place,' somewhere you spend your time if you're not at home or at work," Bronico says. "It's a chance for myself and others from the church to meet with others in the community, build relationships, develop trust." From there, opportunities for intentional discipleship can grow.

Many who attend the Grotto like more traditional games. Others are drawn to three rooms holding video-game systems, including a "vintage" Atari and GameCube room, as well as the newer Wii and Xbox systems in other rooms. Each month, a different vintage game is featured at the Grotto. Participants can also

enter tournaments with prizes for the winners. A dance competition was held in March, for example, and drew in around 30 people, an even mix of church members and visitors.

"I think it's great," Fry says, noting attendees range in age from five to 65. "We've had people coming from Bangor [a 30-45 minute drive] who saw it on Craig's list."

Bronico says volunteers had time to talk to all the visitors, all of who said they'd like to return. Those who requested more info on the church got a follow-up email. "We're starting to see some beginnings of relationships form," he says, "which is really cool."

Bronico came to Palmerton to run the Gaming Grotto, Fry notes, but "he's doing much more than that. His main job is to be missional, to get out in the community and do outreach kind of things." Original plans have been expanded to encompass three separate areas: the Gaming Grotto, community-oriented service projects and possibly an afterschool program.

Service projects will allow the Lighthouse to be a stronger presence in the community, Bronico says. In April, they launched the Building Blocks Initiative. Each month, the

group will focus on a one- to three-block area in Palmerton, pray for that specific area and visit the homes and businesses there, handing out lollipops as well as

information on the outreach program. They will also select a local business to serve.

"We'll go to that business and let them know we want to pray for them and support them by encouraging people to patron their business," Bronico says.

On the fourth Saturday of the month, Bronico and others will physically help that business, by sweeping sidewalks, bagging groceries, washing cars, busing tables, etc. The goal is "helping others, just being there and talking with people," Bronico explains. "So we can bless them."

The third area of outreach, an afterschool program, is in early planning stages. Bronico notes that Living Hope Lighthouse's facility is located next door to an elementary school. He hopes to start a program there in the 2013-2014 academic year.

The Gaming Grotto currently meets inside the church. In the future, Bronico envisions a storefront presence in Palmerton's business district. Another possibility? "We'd like to start an alternative worship experience for the people who go to the Gaming Grotto," he says. Since the effort is so new, he is still waiting to see what direction the specifics of the missional outreach will take.

"We can have our visions, we can have our dreams," Bronico says, "but a lot of it depends on the people in our community." For now, he notes, they are in the process of building trust with that community.

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"missional" . . . to follow the lead of our missionary God who seeks to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled relationship with Himself. To be missional is to be, or to become, missionaries of/for God, intentionally going out of the building into the world to engage people in relationships that allow them to see and hear the Good News of Jesus, the cross and true life. Missional people find their part in God's mission.

Stay tuned for another look at the Missional Worldview when we talk to Chris Backert in an upcoming partners.

PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

You are invited to be a vital part of church planting by praying for our church planters, their families and their ministries by name (see the current list of planters and plants below). Invite others to join you in praying for our planters . . . in your churches, in your homes, or wherever you gather with praying friends.

ASK GOD TO:

- Whisper words of love and encouragement to our planters as they seek his guidance for their lives, families and ministries. Church planting can be hard work. Let's ask God to provide comfort and encouragement.
- Shout words of direction that our planters not miss what God is doing and wants them to do. Life can be distracting. Let's ask God to assist our planters with focus as they set their daily agendas for ministry.
- Meet the needs of our planters and their families – physical, financial, emotional and spiritual – as they faithfully serve the God of the harvest.
- Meet the needs of our fledgling churches as they seek to establish identity, develop relationships with people who need Jesus, and claim visibility in their communities.
- Surround our planters with his strong arm – protecting them, their families and their leadership teams as they face the challenges associated with spiritual attacks.
- Sustain our planters by providing the necessary energy to meet the demands of daily life and ministry. Planters are busy people!

CURRENT PLANTING MINISTRIES

PLANTS

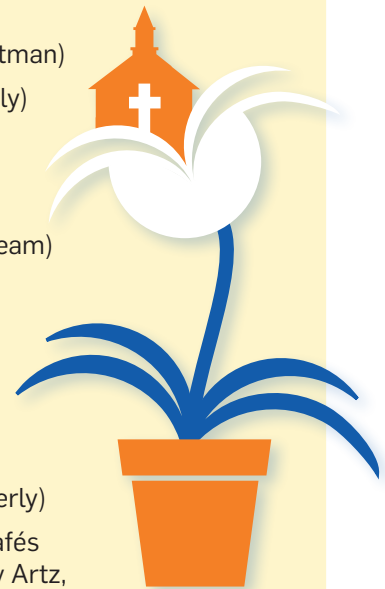
- Allentown, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Bethlehem, PA . . . Sunrise (Rick Sergi)
Now also sponsoring a LifeTree Café
- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Harrisburg PA . . . Restore Community (Brian Parker)
- Lancaster, PA . . . The Gathering (Juan Carlos Morales)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . Comunidad Biblica (Rolando Diaz)
Allentown, PA location
- Pottstown, PA . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
- York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)

RESTARTS / REVITALIZATIONS

- Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
- Tallmadge, OH . . . New Direction (Tim Ream)

INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS / MISSIONAL WORKS / POTENTIAL ADOPTIONS

- Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios
Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
- Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- West Lawn & Reading, PA . . . Lifetree Cafés
– Off the Avenue and Canal Street (Jerry Artz,
Mohr's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
- Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)



The **PURPOSE** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to know Christ and make Him known.

The **MISSION** of the Church Planting Commission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to help churches plant healthy churches that proclaim Christ to a hurting world.

The **VISION** of the Church Planting Commission is that the Evangelical Congregational Church becomes a Church Multiplication movement, realized when churches plant healthy churches that plant healthy churches.

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Pull up a chair and let's talk:

Churches Start a 2nd Joint Outreach in Reading

By Kolleen Long

It's been two years since the LifeTree Off the Avenue Café began meeting Tuesday evenings in West Lawn, Pa. Each week, participants gather to watch a DVD on a specific hot topic, and then discuss that topic over a cup of java. The coffeehouse ministry is the joint effort of two EC churches, Mohn's Hill in Reading and Community in Sinking Spring. This year, the congregations decided to start a second, similar effort by opening the LifeTree Café at the Canal Street Pub in Reading.

Jerry Artz of Community EC has been involved in both of these missional efforts from the start. He said the newest café was championed by the Matzes, a church couple who hosted at the original site. Nathan Matz in particular felt that while the concept was excellent, the coffeehouse setting needed some adjustment in order to meet his

generation where they live. "He said they were more comfortable hanging out in a pub or restaurant, where they can sit around and talk," Artz explains.

Matz, who works as a police officer in Reading, even had a specific locale in mind: the Canal Street Pub. And so, Artz explains, the two churches began exploring this possibility to make sure all involved were supportive. Of specific concern? Holding a ministry in a setting where alcohol was served, especially considering the EC denomination's stance of abstaining.

"We did not want to do something that would cause turmoil or struggle within the denomination," Artz says. "But the bishop and our conference minister were

supportive of this position. They believe if Jesus was walking the earth [today], this is where he would be, with people who are struggling and in places we may not go.

"We're not going there because of the alcohol," Artz adds, "but because we're trying to reach a generation of people who aren't coming to church. That [the pub] is their social setting."

Similar discussions took place with LifeTree (a subsidiary of

Group Publishing) and the congregations at Mohn's Hill and Community. With all in agreement, planning for the Canal Street café began in earnest. Up next was a meeting with the pub's owner, who was quite curious about why a church would want to meet on his property. That in itself, Artz noted, was a great opportunity to witness. The owner agreed to the ministry, and official

meetings began in February 2013

Each Monday night, the café opens like all those held nationwide: LifeTree provides a DVD about the weekly topic in order to encourage interaction. They've discussed topics ranging from gun control to the art of listening to the relevance of marriage in today's society. In April, planned topics include "What do people really think about Christians," "Triumph over Kharmia" (a woman's struggle with anorexia), "How to spot a liar," and "Amazing Grace" (regarding the



Nickel Mine school shooting.)

"That's how a typical month is," Artz says. "There's usually a deep topic, a funny topic, a religious-type topic. They constantly vary it within that format because many of the people that come to LifeTree have been turned off by church. If they come and it's all about Christian stuff, they're pretty turned off. The topics are designed to attract people so that, when you get to a more serious topic about faith, they're more comfortable being there."

This format makes it easy for hosts to strike up conversations with newcomers and regulars alike. "That's the neat thing," Artz confirms. "It's very natural, it's very easy. The biggest blessing – other than sharing Jesus with people – is for people who are uncomfortable sharing their own story to have a natural way to say, 'What does God think about this?'"

In many ways, he confirmed, it's like sitting around the kitchen table and talking with a friend about things that matter.

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To follow the ongoing story of the two cafés in this article, visit them on Facebook: www.facebook.com/LifeTree-Off-the-Avenue-Cafe and www.facebook.com/LifeTreeCanalStreetPub. You can also find out more about the national café movement at LifeTreecafe.com.