

# partners

THE KINGDOM EXTENSION NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

## KINGDOM VISION

Seeing beyond our own expectations

### EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

**E**xpectations. Wow, do I struggle with those. Usually, I have “high” expectations and then often times find myself disappointed when those expectations go unmet or at least do not arrive on my timeline. If there is one thing God was trying to teach me in 2018, it was that while having goals, dreams, and hopes are not a bad thing, becoming anxious, agitated, and frustrated when they do not come to fruition as I had envisioned is a control thing. God wanted to remind me that He is in control and He supplies, provides, and arrives on His time, not mine.

Since I began teaching six years ago, I had always *expected* that I would be working with a contract. However, by August 2018 our teacher’s union had been in salary negotiations for over two

years. I really had *expected* that somewhere along the line an agreement would have been met, and we would not have had to go on strike. This was new territory for me. I never envisioned myself walking a picket line and was a bit concerned about the possible length of the strike and lack of income. However, September 10, 2018, arrived and there I was, walking in the rain with several hundred other teachers. I often try to look for some kind of silver lining in a rough situation, so I reasoned that after each day of picketing, at least I could go and work on our church’s building project. However, God had even bigger plans than that short-sighted *expectation*.

As the strike came to fruition, the teacher’s union was very adamant about continuing to give back to the community and began organizing community service

opportunities for the teachers to participate in after their required picketing schedule. As I drove up the mountain to our church building on Monday after the first day of the strike, I

thought, “This is my community service, but I wonder if it could also be a community service project for other teachers as well?” People often cringe at the thought of public school and churches working together. They *expect* there to be push back. I think it is the devil’s way of polarizing us. God wants to use us to break down those walls and to build bridges and opportunities to minister, together. So, that evening, not really sure what to *expect*, I emailed the union liaison for the

**“Sometimes God shows up. Sometimes God shows off.”**

MARK BATTERSON

Lynda Miller experienced this in her little corner of the world. Check out her thoughts as she tells us her story.

community service opportunities, and they gave me the green light to publicize the need. They also advertised the opportunity and my contact information on their daily updates, and before I knew it there were about twenty teachers signed up for three days of work! This was God exceeding my *expectations*!

Having the teachers, their families, and even one of the middle school sports teams help that week was an amazing blessing in so many ways. First, the work they were able to accomplish helped move along the renovation progress. That, of course, was my initial *expectation*. However, God had so much more in mind. The teachers and their families became very interested in the fact that there was now going to be a church building on their mountain. They were excited to hear of the ideas we have for serving the community, which includes offering the teachers dinner on parent-teacher conference days since there are no restaurants on the mountain. It includes weeknight youth outreach to the kids they teach each day. I even had one of the teachers tell me that she refers students to our weeknight program who need some extra encouragement and guidance. "You need to go see Pastor Paul," she tells them, and she had never met us before but heard about the ministry from other students. Another blessing was getting to know teachers from other schools in our district who were also Christians and wanted to help see this building become a reality for

ministry. Finally, God used this opportunity as an outreach to those who may be searching and wondering what Jesus is really all about. Rubbing shoulders with each other as we hammered nails, painted, and cleaned helped to build a friendship and comradery that says, "You are welcomed here and I so appreciate your service." It helps to build a rapport with those we are seeking to lead to the Savior. It helps to open doors, in more ways than the building doors. After the strike, I made a point to write thank-you notes to each of the teachers and teams that helped us that week. I wanted them to know how much they were appreciated and valued.

As Bushkill Community Church prepared to open on March 17, 2019, I had numerous teachers and staff checking on the

progress and expressing interest in attending to check it out once we are opened. I truly believe that God used the strike to help open doors to people's hearts as well as the front doors of the building. I had *expected* to spend that week at the building mostly alone chipping away at the long list of repairs. Instead, God blessed me with the opportunity to work with friends, to make some new friends, and to plant seeds for His purpose. My lesson from all of this: *Expect the unexpected* and allow God to work in the *unexpected* instead of trying to make Him fit into my *expectations*. May you also *expect* to be used by God in *unexpected* ways.

Blessings,  
Lynda Miller  
Bushkill Community Church ■

## Praying for Church Planting

### PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Balance, health and a sense of well-being for our planters and their families
- Strong priorities to avoid the negative impact of busyness
- Creativity and opportunities for planters and leaders developing outreach ministries
- Positive experiences as our younger congregations develop community connections
- Eyes that see the harvest and hearts eager to respond

### CURRENT PROJECTS:

#### Churches and Church Plants

- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Lancaster, PA . . . Christ House Church (Tim King)
- Lehigh Valley, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Pottstown area, PA . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
- Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
- Willow Street, PA . . . Virtual Church (Addison Roberts)
- York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)
- York, PA . . . The Next Step (Carlos Kelly)

#### Partnerships

- Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
- Mohnton, PA . . . Dinner Church (Robert Shuey)
- Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)
- Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring, PA . . . Fresh Expression Launches
- Slatington, PA . . . Dinner Church (Brian Kern)

\*An "informal partnership" is a loosely defined relationship between an "established church" and another "church or church plant or church planter" that is transitional or less precise than an adoption, plant or "out of that church" ministry. Some informal partnerships are based on the ministry of one of our men, the use of building space, or overlapping ministry events or conversations regarding future partnerships. These partnerships may become more formal or will dissolve when appropriate.

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# KINGDOM DINNER

## Finding Church Around the Table

**D**inner churches transform everybody,” according to the Dinner Church Collective video (you can watch it here: <https://dinnerchurch.com>). Three E. C. churches have found that to be true. As you read their stories, you’ll discover that each dinner church functions differently, but they all share a desire to welcome their neighbors into a safe place where they can experience the love of Christ and be discipled. Dinner church is hosted around tables, much like the churches in the book of Acts, and creates community, a unique manifestation of the body of Christ for those who may never attend a traditional Sunday morning service. Read their stories with a willingness to hear what the Spirit of God might be awakening in your heart for your neighborhood.

### TRINITY E. C. CHURCH SLATINGTON, PA

**Launched:** November 2017

**Meeting place:** Church Fellowship Hall

**When:** Wednesday, 6:30 to 8 pm

**Frequency:** Once a month, but considering twice a month

**Advertising:** Signs around town and church sign

**Typical attendee:** Lower income community members, some on disability



Pastor Brian Kern had read about dinner church and thought it might work in Slatington, “and so many things don’t work here,” he says. So he sent two members of Trinity to a Dinner Church Encounter held at Community Evangelical Church in Sinking Spring; they returned ready to go. “Where are we going to get the money?” was the treasurer’s first question. Brian assured her that people would donate what they needed, and that has been true since the start.

But they did have one issue to address before they could launch—the church had no kitchen. An office in the 120+-year-old church was renovated into a kitchen. And in the gracious way that God provides when we move out in faith to serve him, the renovation team discovered drainage and water lines to already be in place just where they needed them!

Dinner Church is designed to reach the unchurched, and their first dinner saw several attendees

with whom they had no previous contact. It’s grown from there because “in a small community, when you make inroads into one person’s life, they vouch for you, and you can then make inroads into many people’s lives,” says Brian. About half of the participants have never been to the church before.

Trinity rotates the main course based on the seasons, although it doesn’t advertise the menu ahead of time. It might include something like spaghetti and meatballs, chili, or lasagna cooked up at home, donated, and served by three groups of church members who switch off. A Dinner Church participant has begun baking desserts for the group each month. The food is plentiful, and leftovers are sent home with attendees. Everyone pitches in to help clean up.

A typical evening sees 20 people enjoying a meal while live or recorded Christian music is played. Scripture is read before the meal begins, and as

the meal concludes Brian leads a discussion on the Scripture passage. "The meal is a way to meet people in the community," says Brian, "and hopefully build a relationship that will give us an opportunity to love them and show them Jesus."

**Brian's most important advice to those considering a dinner church:**

- Ensure you have a commitment of at least a year from a core group, so you know it will consistently take place. (Trinity started with a core group of 6 or 7, which has now grown to 10.)
- Know your target audience and who you are going to draw. It will often be lonely people, and in Trinity's case, those who struggle economically. This means there may be other things they ask of you, like rides to the doctor or help with a bill, so be ready. "It's messy," says Brian. "You must be prepared to do things that are inconvenient and uncomfortable. It's part of what community is all about; it's not just food."



**ZION E. C. CHURCH**  
**MOHNTON, PA**

**Launched:** November 2017

**Meeting place:** Church fellowship hall

**When:** the last Saturday of the month, 5 to 6:30 pm

**Frequency:** Once a month, but considering twice a month

**Advertising:** No advertising except word of mouth through food ministry

**Typical attendee:** Food ministry participants, other community members

Pastor Bob Shuey attended the same Dinner Church Encounter as the crew from Slatington and saw the idea as a natural extension of the church's monthly food ministry. He asked Sue Race, who had been involved with the food ministry for 16 years to spearhead the initiative because she knew well the food ministry families the church hoped would attend Dinner Church.

"The major focus for us is showing God's love unconditionally," says Sue. "We want people to feel welcomed and to see God's love through us." One way they do that is to establish themes for each month so it feels like a special dinner and attendees feel God's presence. Colors of the tablecloths and the table decorations match the monthly theme. Sue designs placemats that tie the theme together; it might have themed illustrations for the children to color or inspirational quotations

around the theme or season.

Sometimes the food matches the theme as well, like having pork and sauerkraut in January to celebrate the new year. The food budget is \$100 to prepare for 50 people, some of which is supplied by donations from other churches or individuals. A large donation from The Restaurant Store helped Zion get Dinner Church up and running by providing tablecloths, bread baskets, salt-and-pepper shakers, plates, cups, bowls, and utensils.

"Texas Roadhouse will donate up to 300 rolls and cinnamon butter to church dinners," says

Sue. Bread donations also come from Bimbo Bakeries, maker of Thomas's English Muffins and Stroehmann breads. Vegetables, fruit, and desserts made by church members round out each meal.

**"When we break bread together, something really holy is taking place."**

Sue chooses to publish a menu for the year so people know what will be served. Selections include shepherd's pie, ham and string beans, taco salad, and various meat-based casseroles.

Sue, who works at Shady Maple supermarket, coordinates with the meat department to plan the main dishes around when certain meats go on sale. She and Jeff Brendle, a local chef, handle the cooking each month, which is done in the church kitchen. Two to three volunteers come to help with set up and serving. Leftovers are packed up to go home with participants, several of whom help with room clean up.

Dinner is dished up beginning at 5 pm. Typically, over 30 people attend, enjoying recorded Christian music and conversation while they eat. A prayer jar sits on each table with slips for submitting a prayer request. A volunteer is committed to praying for those requests regularly. At 5:45, a devotional is shared, which lasts 15 to 20 minutes. "We do have one couple who comes and eats and then leaves before the devotional," says Sue, "but we continue to show unconditional love. We aren't doing this so people come to our church on Sunday. This *is* their church. The people trust you and they open up to you. Sometimes it's just lending an ear. This ministry is such a blessing in my life. When I do this I am filled with so much joy."

**Sue's most important advice to those considering a dinner church:**

- Pray for God's guidance and wisdom. "On my own this would flop," says Sue.
- Be prepared; think ahead of time about what you will need if you are cooking at the church,

including all the little ingredients you might throw in when cooking at home but you won't have in a church kitchen. "Oh, and buy yourself good sharp paring knives!"

**LAURELDALE HOME DINNER CHURCH**  
**SPONSORED BY COMMUNITY EVANGELICAL CHURCH, SINKING SPRING**

**Launched:** June 2018

**Meeting place:** Dave and Tammy Hahn's home

**When:** Tuesday, 6 to 7:30 pm

**Frequency:** weekly

**Advertising:** Flyers handed out in one-block radius before starting, sign out front

**Typical attendee:** neighbors from three streets

On hearing about the dinner churches at Zion and Trinity, Dave Hahn said, "Ours is different from the traditional dinner church model, but God is in them all."

Dave and his wife, Tammy, had

been looking for a way to impact their neighborhood for several years. "God had put it on our hearts," says Dave. "We wanted to get to know our neighbors, and we tried some things like block parties and Easter egg hunts. We even tried a Sunday morning meeting, but that didn't work well."

Then at a Fresh Expressions ([www.freshexpressionsus.org](http://www.freshexpressionsus.org)) gathering—designed to explore creative ways to launch "fresh expressions" of church for those not involved in church—the Hahns met Verlon and Melodee Fosner. The Fosners are the directors of the Dinner Church Collective, and the Hahns attended the seminar the Fosners presented at Community Evangelical Church, the Hahns' home church. (This was the same Dinner Church Encounter that inspired the Trinity and Zion E. C. dinner churches.)

"We felt the prick of the Holy Spirit, that this was the direction we should go," says Dave. "People prayed with us and prayer-walked our neighborhood with us. We looked for places to meet. And God closed every door." And so the Hahns



brought Dinner Church home.

Every Tuesday the Hahns and those who serve with them move the furniture in their living room and set up two five-foot round tables. With their dining room table that gives them seating for 24. It's possible they could squeeze one more table in if necessary. Most weeks, attendance is in the high teens, with a high of 21. Usually they see new people attending every couple of weeks.

In a community of older duplexes and single family homes, the Hahns are attracting a group of people they call the "urban isolated"—people who may be single or couples, but who are lonely, who give friendly waves to their neighbors but often don't know each other. "Two people who come realized it was their first time eating together even though they'd been next-door neighbors for 13 years," says Dave.

The Hahns were surprised by the lack of basic Bible knowledge, even among older neighbors. "We expected people to have more familiarity with it. So you have to get rid of religion and just have Jesus," says Dave. "Tammy and I both had to unlearn things we had sucked in as part of our Christian background, so we could see our neighbors as people and not be judgmental."

Community Evangelical has provided great support for the Hahns' Dinner Church. There are at least eight people from the church who cook and provide food. They're encouraged to make

their own favorites, because that way they're always "putting out their best." While the church will reimburse them the food costs if they hand in receipts, many choose not to. They cook for 25, and typically the cost works out to about \$3 to \$4.50 per person. Attendees bring dessert.

The meal arrives at the Hahns' home by 5:30 and at 5:45 the volunteers and early arrivers spend a few moments in prayer. The meal—typically meat, salad and potato—is served promptly at 6. Food, dessert, and conversation lasts until 6:45. At that time a 20-minute interactive sermonette is presented by one of four rotating leaders. Prayer requests are taken and prayed for before the evening ends. Clean up is easy with disposable tableware and foam take-out containers to send leftovers home.

Bibles are provided to those who don't have one, and people are amazed by what's in it. One gentleman, who had no religious background, early on called Tuesday night his "favorite night of the week, because I'm being refreshed." Over time he stated his belief in Jesus and in the power of prayer as he saw the difference it made. A volunteer gave him two large print Bibles to choose from. He chose one and gave the other to his neighbor.

Currently Dinner Church is working through the book of Mark. As they proceed, the leaders are putting together a curriculum so that others don't have to start from scratch as Dinner Church is duplicated.

**"How many crockpots of food would it be worth to be part of a transformation story?"**

And that is the Hahn's hope: "We invited three streets," says Dave. "Every block in Laureldale could use a dinner church." The Hahns are happy to go anywhere to talk with individuals and churches about how to get started; they want to see it expand.

"This is not about bringing people back to our church, Pastor Mike says. It's about taking the church to them. We are their church. And it's extremely fulfilling," says Dave. "When you see it, it's magnificent."

#### **Dave's most important advice to those considering a dinner church:**

- Have a burden that you don't want people to go to hell. You want to tell them about Jesus and make disciples.
- Pray that hosting the church won't be a personal burden. The Hahns both work and own a business. "We found it became easy when we let the Holy Spirit run it," says Dave. "But we still need to clean the entire house every Monday night."

#### **Tammy's most important advice to those considering a dinner church:**

- Realize there is no way you can fill every role; it would be very hard to do without committed people by your side—servers, cooks, greeters, teachers.
- Know that, for whoever is living in the neighborhood, you will be a source of contact, and you must be committed to your neighbors. But you will need to set boundaries; you're not their counselors, you're their friends. "You're not just going to church, attending and then going home," says Tammy. "You're living it." ■