

**CREATING A STRATEGIC CHURCH GROWTH PLAN FOR
THE ABUNDANT LIFE OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
IN COLCHESTER, CONNECTICUT**

Charles F. Brown

Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God, a sixty-year old church in a rural New England community, has struggled with fluctuating attendance. Even after constructing a new facility and changing its name, the church still struggled to increase its attendance. With the Great Commission as the compelling mission, this project sought to develop genuine health and strength at Abundant Life that would ultimately result in numerical growth. To accomplish this monumental task, this project examined the scriptural foundation for church growth and reviewed current literature regarding principles for establishing a healthy and growing church.

This project incorporated numerous internal church surveys and evaluations that helped guide Abundant Life in forming an effective strategy toward church growth. An internal Appreciative Inquiry and a professional survey through Natural Church Development provided crucial insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the church. Field research, through interviews with effective New England pastors and leaders, contributed pertinent information which Abundant Life will continue to incorporate into its growth strategy. The research also revealed the importance of visitor retention, the key role of leadership and vision, and the power of small group ministry. The academic research, in combination with the field research, supplied valuable insights that will assist Abundant Life in the church growth process. This project will serve as a helpful tool for other church leaders in New England who desire to lead their church to greater health and church growth.

**EXTENSION EDUCATION: TRAINING COORDINATORS
TO FACILITATE DISTANCE EDUCATION THROUGH
THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD BIBLE INSTITUTE
IN BELIZE**

Terry Lane Castleberry

The specific objective of this project was to train coordinators to open new extension classes and effectively facilitate existing extension classes offered by the Assemblies of God Bible Institute (AGBI) in Belize. Extensive biblical and literary research and a thorough evaluation of current extension classes led to the development of a coordinator training session which incorporated various forms that addressed specific areas of concern.

Attendance at the Main Campus of AGBI has been in decline since 1990. Surveys and interviews indicated that the decline in enrollment was directly correlated to the financial cost of attending the Main Campus, which included cost-prohibitive travel, loss of steady employment, and neglect of current ministerial and family responsibilities. As a means of addressing these realities, this project developed a coordinator training program whereby coordinators could serve as a liaison between local extension sites and AGBI. By training coordinators how to deal with issues related to the main campus such as advertising, registration, accounting, evaluation, and communication, the trained coordinators were equipped to establish new extension sites where the people live. In so doing, people desiring theological education can acquire it in their local context at a significantly reduced cost.

This project achieved its purpose of creating an effective coordinator training to facilitate the establishment of theological extension education in Belize. The project could be implemented in other contexts with great success.

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED MINISTRY: A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR FAITH ASSEMBLY OF GOD, DEWEY, ARIZONA

Wendell Lee Clark

Dewey Faith Assembly of God, a small church in rural Arizona, ministers to the people of its community. Over the years, many people have attended Dewey Faith, but the church has been unable to keep most of the attendees. After examining the causes of this lack of growth, it was determined that the main reason was due to ill-equipped leadership. Without adequate leadership in place, the community did not receive the ministry it needed. People from the community only saw a small church that did not have the programs they desired.

This project implemented a leadership development ministry to help Dewey Faith face its growth issues, develop effective leaders, and overcome the growth barrier. In developing leaders equipped to lead missionally, Dewey Faith began to reach its community effectively. The leadership ministry challenged the leaders in the church to grow individually and to think “outside the box.”

As a result of this project, the church has experienced new growth—including both membership and conversion growth—and new ministries continue to impact the community as well as the church. Because of the training the leaders received, Dewey Faith grew 20 percent from 2008 to 2009. The children’s ministry continues to grow as it ministers to children of all ages.

This ministry of leadership development continues to aid in the expansion of evangelism and discipleship efforts at Dewey Faith. New leaders now attend leader training that will give them the confidence to lead effectively. In addition to the benefits of this project for Dewey Faith, this project will also provide a tool to help other churches train leaders for effective ministry.

PREPARING FOR MATE SELECTION: A BIBLICALLY BASED DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCE FOR YOUNG SINGLE WOMEN

Janet Carol Creps

The topic of mate selection holds a prominent position in fields ranging from psychology to popular culture, and rightfully so. Second only to a commitment to follow Christ, the most critical decision single individuals face concerns the person they will marry. The prevalence of problems like cohabitation, divorce, and family violence testify to the fact that too many mate selection choices are turning out tragically. This project tested the potential of seminar-based training to equip single women to undertake the challenging journey toward finding a spouse.

The field presentation consisted of a one-day seminar for single women, providing a biblically-based learning experience designed to offer insight, support, and interaction to build confidence in women for their futures in healthy marriages. The project addressed specific concerns that women face in the process of forming such a marriage relationship.

Assessment of the field presentation, accomplished by comparing pretest and posttest surveys of the participants, found a significant need for mentoring single women on the topic of mate selection. Specific changes in attitude revealed in the comparison included: (1) improved confidence in their ability to experience healthy relationships with the opposite sex, (2) better appreciation for the benefits dating offers in finding a potential spouse, (3) greater insight into important character traits for discerning a potential spouse, and (4) increased confidence in their futures in a happy marriage.

The surveys conducted in the seminar validate the need for discipleship during the “pre-engagement” life stage. Also, they suggest the potential of biblically-based seminars to provide training that can lead to better mate selection decisions and healthier marriages.

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
UNIVERSITY'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION COURSE,
"AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY"**

Clancy Hayes

This project evaluated the effectiveness of a university-level spiritual formation course that I developed in the fall of 2007 at Southwestern Assemblies of God University (SAGU). After teaching the class for several consecutive semesters, the time had come for formal assessment. Did the class curriculum accomplish what it was designed to accomplish? Did students who took the course show measurable spiritual growth?

To find out, I surveyed students currently taking the class and students who had taken it previously. Over 100 students enrolled at the time of the project completed a pretest at the beginning of the semester and a posttest at the end of the same semester to determine cognitive progress made by students during the semester. One hundred and fifty students who had completed the course in previous semesters took an on-line survey that asked them to assess behavioral changes that had occurred in their spiritual lives resulting from the SAGU spiritual formation course. These students also reported any attitudinal changes they observed in their lives related to specific course topics.

To get fresh insights and perspectives on the class, I surveyed a sample of ministers from the eight districts that own SAGU, asking them to evaluate the spiritual formation course syllabus. These ministers offered suggestions of topics and requirements that they felt would enhance the course.

This project revealed that the spiritual formation course has been successful in meeting its cognitive, behavioral, and affective goals. The project also pointed out ways the course could be adjusted to maximize its effectiveness.

REMEMBER THE POOR: PROMOTING COMPASSION WITHIN THE HEARTS OF MALAYSIAN CHRISTIANS

Qui Lin Liao

Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, is a progressive city with a growing economy. Opulence and a divergence in the quality of life have contributed to segregation between the social classes resulting in an oblivion or indifference of the rich toward the poor. This segregation is also present in churches in Kuala Lumpur where the majority of the congregation are made of first- and second-generation middle to upper middle class believers.

This project organized a one-day event entitled “Remember the Poor” with the purpose of promoting compassion in the hearts of Christians to reach out to the poor. The event consisted of a two-part program: a seminar and a practical exercise. The seminar focused on influencing and affecting a positive change of attitude of Christians who are uninvolved and not drawn to reaching out to the poor. The practical exercise provided the setting for the participants to demonstrate compassion by partnering them with an orphan for an afternoon outing.

Participants completed pre-event and post-event questionnaires designed to determine the effectiveness of the project. The analysis of the data indicated an overall measurable positive attitudinal change of the participants toward the poor and an increased desire to demonstrate compassion toward them.

The project shows that biblical teaching and positive motivation will encourage Christians to cross the chasm of indifference and to proactively reach out in compassion toward the poor.

THE BEATTITUDES OF MATTHEW 5:1-12 AS A MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN ADULTS

Dennis Dean Niles

This project investigated spiritual formation knowledge, behavior, and attitudes among adults at Faith Lutheran Church. A significant teaching program, along with a variety of sermons that specifically focused on spiritual formation, was delivered to the congregation over a period of ten months. Supplemental surveys and personal interviews helped assess the level of spiritual formation and determine strengths and weaknesses.

The content was not viewed as a program but as a means to create awareness and to open the door for the grace and power of God to work in individual lives. Just as Jesus viewed the Beatitudes as the foundation for spiritual transformation in His disciples, this project assumed that a similar spiritual matrix could be effectively used in the local church. This spiritual formation involves a life-transforming process whereby a person is shaped into the image of Christ through a growing relationship with Jesus.

As a result of this project, the people at Faith Lutheran Church expressed a growing desire for biblical learning and godly character formation as expressed in the Beatitudes. In addition, the people in the church have displayed a noticeable increase in ministry participation. Although assessment of spiritual formation is difficult to measure, the results of the project indicate that the research, teachings, and surveys produced a keen awareness for the need and value of spiritual formation and the importance of implementing a church-wide biblical approach to spiritual formation.

CREATING VISION AND INSPIRING A HOPEFUL FUTURE THROUGH AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AT ARENA FIJIAN ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Walter R. Peavy, Jr.

This project created a positive environment in which eighteen members of Arena Fijian Assembly of God in Sacramento, California used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to participate together in dreaming of a hopeful and positive future and in casting vision for that future. The group consisted of both pastoral leadership and church members; the opportunity for inclusive participation was met with a favorable response.

In the three-hour AI presentation, participants utilized AI as a positive tool to identify the best of Arena Fijian Assembly of God. Members were asked to dream big dreams regarding their church, based on what they valued and appreciated about Arena Fijian Church. The AI gave opportunity for all members to participate, to share their desires and best hopes for their church.

Individuals provided a written response to a pre-session questionnaire, which gave each member an opportunity to reflect and respond to the best practices and values of Arena Fijian Assembly of God. Pretest and posttest surveys and post-session interviews also provided quantitative and qualitative assessment of the project.

This project recommended to Assemblies of God leaders—specifically Intercultural Ministries Directors and those ministering within a cross-cultural context—the ongoing need to intentionally build formal and informal relationships with ethnic pastors, churches and leaders. In cultivating attitudes of humility, trust, and mutual respect, foundations of successful cross-cultural ministries are more likely to occur.

Appreciative Inquiry could also serve as a useful tool for other cross-cultural settings—to create a hopeful future based on the best of a church's past.

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CELL LEADER TRAINING MODEL FOR BANGKOK LIBERTY CHURCH IN THAILAND

Anuparp Wichitnantana

Bangkok Liberty Church, between 2002 and 2008, taught various cell leader training models (G12, Trinity, Meta, Abbalove, and Hope of Bangkok models) as they were, in original form, without any adaptation and evaluation of the effectiveness of each model. Nevertheless, over the past half decade, the church continued to experience a plateau in attendance. Also, the number of cells and cell leaders did not increase as expected. This project attempted to evaluate these five models to ascertain which components of the models relate to cell leader effectiveness and used the result of that evaluation to propose a new, BLC-contextualized cell leader training model unique to Bangkok Liberty Church that would utilize the best parts of all the models.

Through the study of biblical-theological concepts and the five cell leader training models, this project identified nine factors and thirty-five sub-factors and tested the correlation of these factors and sub-factors to cell leader effectiveness. The ministry intervention surprisingly revealed that only six major factors and eleven sub-factors had positive effect on the effective training model for cell leaders.

This project proposed a new BLC cell leader training model with five major topics and eighteen sub-topics. In addition, BLC could use this model as a guideline to develop an effective cell leader training material.