

Where Do We Start?

Honest talk about ethnic ministry by Rev. Dennis Hesselbarth



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY DENNIS HESSELBARTH

Recently, the Midwest District buried yet another ethnic church plant. Of the seven ethnic and urban churches we've birthed since 1989, only two have grown to maturity. Worse, this latest failure cut deep wounds in the planter and his family.

With our culture's influx of ethnic groups, we can ill afford to wound even one of the rare ethnic leaders God sends us. It's time to learn how to do it right.

So our district leaders proposed that a task force research strategies for healthy ethnic and urban church planting. We chose the last weekend in March to launch our efforts, pulling together a diverse group of leaders for discussion, followed by a full day of ethnic ministry training led by the group Serving in Mission and its Ethnic Focus Ministries.

The first day's discussion was painful. Our ethnic and minority brothers had plenty to say about our failure to embrace others who are different.

The distinction between immigrant groups and existing minority groups became evident. Recent immigrants are consumed with the challenges of language learning and establishing a new life. Existing minorities, while still facing an uphill struggle, focus attention on

the racial and class barriers that hinder full participation in our society.

The next day, SIM's training gave us visionary insight into ministry to immigrants. It was "can't miss" stuff. Several churches left committed to launch immigrant ministries. Yet we wished for the same passion and wisdom in understanding ministry to existing minority groups. We'll have to add that component to our district's emphasis and training.

Our task force is now researching what others have done, asking for input and models. Contact Dennis Hesselbarth (dennish@hilltopurban.org) if you have input. We hope to roll out a strategy that fits us and befits our Lord's deep passion for all people. ■

Dennis Hesselbarth pastors Hilltop Urban Church in Wichita, Kan.



MIDSIZE GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

If your church is eager to explore the impact of midsize groups in the context of the local church, mark your calendars for November 10 and 11 to attend “ABF06” at Hope Church (EFCA), outside Cincinnati.

Adult Bible Fellowships are powerful, midsize church communities that function like spiritual neighborhoods. Not a *replacement* for small groups, they are a strong complement. Ideally, these groups of 15 to 90 people are team-driven and mobilized for ministry.

A significant voice for ABFs in the evangelical community is Steve Lizzio, pastor of adult ministries at Hope Church. Steve will serve as one of the plenary speakers at ABF06, which includes talks on: “The Place of ABFs in Disciple-Making,” “Transitioning Your Church to ABFs” and “The Great Midsize vs. Small Groups Debate: Small-group options within ABFs.”

For more information on the Adult Bible Fellowship conference, visit the Web (www.abfresources.com) and click on the “ABF conference” link, call Hope Church at (513) 459-0800, or visit the church Web site (www.hope-church.org).

STATEMENT OF FAITH REVISION PROCESS

At this summer’s EFCA Leadership Conference, discussion continued about the proposed revisions to the EFCA’s Statement of Faith*, and delegates affirmed the resolution to continue the process—with a draft revision expected at the 2007 conference. To follow progress on the revisions and see the latest version, please visit the Web (www.efca.org). On the EFCA blog (blogs.efca.org/sof), you’ll also find a forum for offering comments and questions about the Statement of Faith, as well as about the process.

**To order a CD of “A Primer on Hermeneutics”—a message by Bill Kynes—visit the Web (www.nsresources.com) or call (800) 444-BOOK.*

FAMILY CHAT



Does your church have staff or volunteers serving in children or family ministries? Would you like to help them make connections and strengthen their impact? Encourage them to sign up for a new, free, e-mail chat offered by the EFCA Children and Family Ministries Department. It’s simple: Local church staff and volunteers send in their questions, and experienced EFCA practitioners respond.

“The whole idea,” explains director Greg Braly, “is to give people from any church a whole bunch of experts who are willing and able to answer their questions, point them to resources, or help them walk through fun things or hard things.

“When I talk to people around the country and say we’re doing this, they say, ‘Oh finally, I’ve got a place to turn.’”

Greg expects the e-mail chat to create a national camaraderie as practitioners communicate advice on everything from personnel selection and curriculum choice, to safety issues.

“This is just one of the ways we’ll help all our churches be connected, so that not one of our children or family specialists—whether professional or volunteer—will feel left alone.”

Begin networking by signing up for the e-mail chat on the Web (moodle.efca.org/mailman/listinfo/childfamily).