



### **Managing ABFs - Some Ideas From the Front - March 05**

As we were beginning to implement ABFs here at Village Seven about seven years ago, it was my task to find a team and start our second community (our name for ABF). It was necessary for the same reasons you have probably seen in your church. Our first ABF, Joint Heirs, was made up of young families who were flooding our nursery. Diaper bags were all over the community – and newlyweds were not ready for that and so they were not staying. So, as I began to build the new ABF for young married couples it was easy to manage it. I had a phone roster, I met all the time with the leadership team that was developed, I would often teach there, and my social life revolved around these young couples. It was easy to influence and to manage.

But as our ABFs multiplied, my influence in individual communities diminished. I would try to make it to some of their leadership meetings (and still do) but if I was to remain sane and married, I could not make it to all of their leadership meetings or I would never be home. I gave up trying to manage all of the communities phone rosters (for they could do a far finer job). So how could I multiply my leadership influence? Here are a couple of things that I have found helpful in allowing my influence to expand and my calendar to remain open to expand ministry.

**1) Gather your ABF Leaders** – build a community of community leaders - Five times a year we gather all of our ABF leaders together for 90 minutes of pure undiluted ABF. We call these our All Communities Leadership Union (ACLU – cute huh?) For the first 30 minutes we remind the leaders of the vision of ABFs- and try to encourage them that they are in the front lines of ministry in the church, and we try to challenge them. For the next 10 or so minutes we bring news items – such as when Missionaries will be visiting their ABFs for the Missions Conference, or special requests that other ministries would like the ABF to help them with. Then we guide in discussion about their struggles and concerns, perhaps keying off one of the areas we just lead in vision on. We want them to know each other and to build community. Then for the final half hour we mix them up with folks they don't know and allow them to ask anything of each other that they want. These meetings are key in keeping ABF leaders on the same page and for them to view other ABFs as their comrade and not their adversary.

**2) Reproduce yourself for when you're not around.** Have you ever noticed that you end of answering some of the same questions over and over again? Have you ever noticed that good willed folks leading your ABFs may tend to violate the same church policy (like a failure to reserve rooms on time) over and over again? This is why we give our community leaders copies of The ABF Book and our Communities notebook which talk about our vision, our structure for leadership, how to transition leadership, how to start new ABFs, how to be certified as a teacher, policies for communities, church policies they need to be aware of, how to adopt a missionary, how to get things done at the church (like reserving rooms, and making copies, and more.) At first it doesn't feel good to be reduced to a notebook, but rest assured they still need you, but they will now come to you for the Pastoral needs and not for the things that can zap you of life. Also, your notebooks can be all over the place reminding folks of your vision and all the other things you wish they would not have to keep asking.

**- Kevin Allen, Pastor of Communities & Christian Education at Village Seven Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado**