



A Midsize Group Responds to a Crisis – September 07



August 27, 2006, is a day most people in Lexington, KY will remember with great sadness. The 6:00 A.M. Comair flight 5191, bound for Atlanta, attempted to take off from the wrong runway and crashed killing 49 of the 50 people on board. As news of the crash flashed through the community, churches across the region stopped to pray for those connected with this tragedy.

During the days following the crash people from Southland Christian Church were involved with the families of those killed and with people from the rescue teams. Some people sat with family members while they cried while others pointed out the compassion and love of God to those asking why. Many purchased food and gift cards or wrote letters of sympathy to people they would never meet in this life. This outpouring is an example of the three elements we seek in our mid-size group environments; spiritual formation, shared life, and care.

New Beginnings in Christ, a weekend Bridge Environment (mid-size group) realized one group of folks seemed overlooked in expressions of compassion—the air controllers. This mid-size group determined they would reach out to this group through cards and meals. Teams of people took food to the control tower at Bluegrass airport for the air controllers while others sent letters and cards of support. The NBC group regularly finds outlets for service as a part of their mid-size group experience as do many of our other Bridge Environments. While many think of this environment as a Bible study, it is obviously far more than that; it is connection with one another, and service to the community.

In the not too distant past the mid-size groups at Southland Christian Church were viewed as a holdover from a former era. In the last two years, especially after reading *The Search to Belong* and *Organic Community* by Joseph Myers, we began to reexamine the value of Bridge Environments and are now discovering ways to move people from the large group into mid-size groups while encouraging the formation of Life Groups within those groups. Our newly reformatted Women's Ministry now purposely focuses on helping connect women in a quarterly large group, helping them move to a monthly group experience. From these large group experiences there is intentional connection to weekly Bridge Environments, and when the ladies are ready—connection to Life Groups. Men's Ministry follows a similar format of intentionally inviting men into a Bridge Environment where they can make friends, and as those friendships deepen—assist their launch into Life Groups. Not only do we recognize the strengths of the mid-size group environments, we are investing more resources to create irresistible environments.

As we continue to trust God in growing our congregation, we realize there are many places where people connect with other believers and with God. Our sensitivity to these increases our appreciation and commitment to all places where people find connection and belonging. We no longer attempt to force people to make choices about where they connect, rather we offer strategic environments and allow the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people to help them make the wise decision. In all our Bridge Environments there are three elements we seek to include: spiritual formation, shared life, and care for one another and the community both locally and internationally.

The NBC group and many folks from other Bridge Environments responded to the tragedy of Flight 5191 as they believed God led. As each week passes we hear more stories of these elements becoming part of the DNA here at Southland Christian Church. We honor and praise God for His continuous guidance in connecting people. We pray for wisdom as we continue to

listen carefully to the stories people tell us about connecting with other believers for shared life, spiritual formation and care, through mid-sized groups.

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