



The heart of the community leader – May/June 2010



When you look for synonyms for “community,” you find words such as: kinship, unity, identity, and cooperation. I am blessed to say that GPS (Parents of Teens & Young Adults) at Hope Church in Mason, Ohio is a community in every sense of the word, which makes leading a community (ABF or midsize group) like GPS a true pleasure.

As a leader, I believe my responsibility is to create connectedness and relationships for individuals who are part of the larger Hope Church. In a sense, GPS is a small church within a large church. One key to an effective community is the quality of the leadership team, and mine is top-notch! The leadership team is comprised of the following leadership positions: Prayer, Care, Social, Assimilation, Service, Communication, and Refreshments. My role is to coordinate the efforts of the leadership team and to help set the overall priorities and vision for the community.

I believe one of the things that make GPS a success is that it is very much a democracy in that we listen to, and act upon, the desires of the group in all areas: teaching, prayer, serving, social, etc. To accomplish this, we conduct two surveys a year, one on desired teaching topics, and one on the general health of GPS. The leadership team reviews all the surveys, shares the results with the community in a town hall forum, and then makes any needed adjustments.

A community leader is also a shepherd responsible for keeping the flock together and making sure that everyone feels accepted, valued and connected. We have to be purposeful about helping people feel comfortable and accepted in our community. This begins with learning everyone’s name and personally spending time with them the first few times they visit GPS.

We create opportunities for connectedness outside the church by providing many social and serving activities throughout the year. In addition, there are times when members of GPS need help financially, physically or otherwise. In the last year, GPS has raised money to help one of our families pay their mortgage, as well as provided meals and housecleaning for another GPS family going through chemotherapy treatments. We serve outside of GPS but within Hope Church by sending out care packages to college students of Hope families. This past year, we sent out 78 packages to students across the US and for the first time, to a student in Europe. We also serve outside of Hope Church at a downtown Christmas store for the underprivileged, as well as at an area home for abused children. Serving together creates experiences that help the members of GPS grow closer together as we make a difference in this world for Christ.

Prayer is another area that results in GPS family closeness. Each Sunday, we have a different prayer leader. They know in advance what the teaching topic is for that Sunday, so that they can relate the prayer to the teaching. Our overall prayer leader encourages varied formats for our prayer time, from group prayer, to small groups to one-on-one prayer time. The variety keeps prayer time fresh and vibrant. We also strive to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit during this time which can require scheduling flexibility.

Social events also create connectedness. Regular GPS social events are Dinners for Eight (dinners in homes in which 6 guests are invited), GPS game night, GPS picnic, GPS annual Christmas dinner and others. Our social leader is very creative, and structures each event to help people get to know each other better and deepen relationships. In addition to creating connectedness, social events create an opportunity for GPS outreach, as we encourage GPSers to invite non-GPSers.

Three small groups in homes have also built stronger bonds with those GPS members who intentionally go deeper in relationship in this way. Others within the community have

connected through accountability groups and participating in women's Bible studies or men's studies together.

Lastly, good communication is essential to a thriving community. Each Sunday, I begin community with some humor (not always good humor!), and then we move into announcements. We cover upcoming events (social, service, etc.), as well as what is happening in the junior and senior high ministries (in the event our children forget to tell us!). GPS also has a weekly email update, which recaps the prior Sunday events, including prayer needs, and also serves as a reminder of upcoming events. This helps everyone stay connected, even if they miss a Sunday.

In summary, I believe the keys to an effective community are twofold: 1) a dedicated and broad leadership team so that the work is shared and no one individual becomes overloaded, and 2) a collective vision that we are about loving one another and building relationships.

Submitted By: Doug Dixon. Doug has served in the role of Community Leader of the GPS since October of 2006 after a pretty neat "Transitioning Leadership Ceremony." This ceremony was highlighted in the November 2006 Idea of the Month. Go to "Past Ideas of the Month" to check it out! The picture of Doug is with the GPS Leadership Team.