

STRONGFamilies® Innovation Alliance

▪ Session Executive Summaries ▪

Contents

Laying the Foundation.....	page 1
Pursuing Models of Excellence.....	page 9
Overcoming Obstacles.....	page 16

Spiritual Formation @ Home

Leading Edge Churches Driving Family-Centered Redemption

Part One – Laying the Foundation



April 2007 Session One Executive Summary:
The Strong Families Innovation Alliance

by Kurt Bruner (with Steve Watters)

Just The Beginning

In April 2007, leaders from 14 evangelical churchesⁱ gathered in Scottsdale, Arizona to launch a two year innovation process. From the nation's largest congregation to a recent church plant, participants represented churches from a wide range of sizes and traditions. They came together around a common recognition that generational faith-transference must be a key priority for the local church. While reliable data on the topic is difficult to obtain, even the most optimistic estimatesⁱⁱ suggest that fewer than half of kids raised in evangelical homes embrace the Christian faith as their own by the time they graduate from high school.

The gathering was hosted by *The Center for Strong Families* and co-sponsored by *Family Life* and *Focus on the Family* ministries. These organizations have spent decades motivating individual families to become intentional about the spiritual development of their children through media, events and resources. But they recognize the local church as God's primary instrument for spreading the gospel in every generation – and hope their support will enable the *Alliance* to develop working models for local church-driven family redemption.

Goals for the initial innovation session included creating a shared vision and common framework for innovation, providing a “kick-start” for participating churches to launch their own innovation efforts, and establishing a network of like-minded relationships for shared learning.

Vision & Framework

The scope of innovation was reviewed by each participant prior to gathering in Scottsdale and served as the general framework within which all brainstorming occurred.

Problem Statement

Evangelical families are failing to win and keep their own children in the Christian faith.

Vision

To create an innovation movement among evangelical churches that seeks to turn the tide by acknowledging the home as central to God's redemptive strategy.

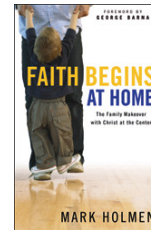
Innovation Categories

- **Strengthening marriage relationships:** Children need to experience a loving relationship between mom and dad that reflects the gospel and between parent and child that makes kids want to embrace their parents' beliefs.
- **Winning our children to Christ:** The overwhelming majority of those who ever become Christians do so as children, most before age thirteen. Most parents recognize it is their job to pass the Christian faith to their kids in the context of the home, yet feel ill-equipped to do so.
- **Launching our youth:** An alarmingly high percentage of teens raised in Christian families abandon their parents' faith during the teen and young adult years. And while this trend has created tension between parents and youth ministers, partnership between church and home is vital to launching our youth as committed believers.

Innovation Kick-Start

Several presentations focused on how participants might initiate and facilitate a family ministry innovation effort in their own churches. For some, this goal seemed daunting since “family” is a second or third tier emphasis of existing church priorities. Some drew encouragement from the Ventura Missionary Church “Faith at Home” model and the “Spiritual Formation @ Home” initiative underway at Lake Pointe Church.

- ***Faith At Home***: Mark Holmen has developed a model for family-centered church strategy that he presents to churches to help them mature from being a “church that does family ministry” to a “family ministry-centered church”. (Manuscript available upon request.)



- ***Spiritual Formation @ Home***: Kurt Bruner has launched a church-wide initiative with the 10,000 member Lake Pointe Church, designed to create a culture of intentional homes. (PowerPoint overview available upon request.) Key “leading change” and “innovation” principles have helped ensure leadership buy-in and vision momentum, including...



- Establish a Sense of Urgency
- Create a Guiding Coalition
- Develop Shared Vision and Strategy
- Communicate the Change Vision
- Generate Short-Term Wins



Clearly, working models are needed to serve as examples for other churches to emulate – which will become a primary focus of the next Innovation Alliance gathering.

Like-Minded Relationships

Perhaps the most important part of the first gathering was the opportunity for leaders from large and small congregations who hold a variety of church positions (senior pastors, student ministry leaders, children’s pastors, spiritual formation pastors, etc.) to dialogue about the common issues facing evangelical families. All participants share a passion for home-centered redemption and a desire to develop momentum in coming days in order to share what is learned with others.



Major Themes

Several themes emerged throughout the two days of discussion that are useful for framing specific church initiatives. Highlights by category include...

The Present Situation

Each church made a brief presentation describing their profile (location, size, audience demographics, etc.) and giving examples of recent innovations. They also offered their church's assessment of how they see themselves doing in the areas of...

- 1) nurturing strong marriages
- 2) parents introducing children to Christ
- 3) teens developing a strong Christian faith



The majority assessed themselves as having a “strong desire” in each of these categories with “periodic programs and some participation.” None, however, believed they had a “compelling vision with effective programs and high participation” on all three elements.

Some innovations already underway include...

- Willow Creek stated that their ministry was moving from one of providing family spiritual development to partnering with families in spiritual development.
- Mark Holman shared a range of activities that have taken place at Ventura Missionary Church ever since they committed to becoming a “faith at home-driven church” and made a long-term commitment to encouraging their families to take baby steps in their homes.
- Sonrise Church shared having great success with a periodic intergenerational service and adding a “bring back” element to their “take home” resources.
- Bill Walton of New Life described the theme printed on posters and t-shirts that reminds parents, “Sunday is the kickoff, the rest is up to you!” He consistently explains to parents in the church, “I’m not your children’s pastor, you are.” He fears the church has become an obstacle to parents spiritually disciplining their children because we’ve made it easy for them to think they can just outsource the job.
- Several discussed the way our churches tend to “dis-integrate” families (by splitting them up into various gender and lifestage groups) in contrast to the church plant philosophy of Grace Family Baptist where they fully integrate their church and treat the family as a unit instead of a collection of individuals.
- One church talked about the potential for delivering family spiritual development messages through existing small groups. Another recognized the value of developing men’s and women’s groups out of existing couple small groups so that the gender-specific ministry would be balanced by couples’ ministry.

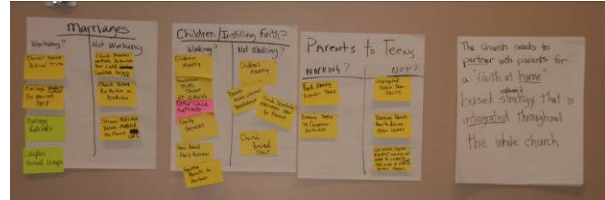


Brainstorm Category One: What Is and Isn't Working?

Four teams brainstormed the question, “What is and isn’t working in church-based family ministry?”. Common themes included...

Not Working

- Lack of church-wide strategy, making marriage/parenting an “after thought” rather than a core strategic target.
- Enabling “drop off” children’s ministry because it perpetuates “outsourced” child discipleship.
- On campus family separation – a symptom of “silo” ministry that treats everyone as an individual (or couple) rather than part of a family unit.
- Failing to connect the dots between a strong marriage, effective parenting, and children embracing the faith.
- Just telling parents, “It’s *your* job,” and assuming they know what to do.
- Segregating teens and parents
- Doing children’s and youth ministry without the “umbrella” of a family-centered model
- Reactive marriage ministry vs. proactive strategies
- Church leaders failing to MODEL strong marriages
- Programs are important, but they are the means – not the end. We need to create a church culture that drives family intentionality!



Working

- Creating intergenerational, shared experiences such as family-based small groups, parent-with-teen events, parents-with-child services, on-campus events, etc.
- Church providing tools for parents to use at home with kids
- Children’s ministry teaching core truths (i.e. Awana)
- Home-based family activities
- Parents and teens serving together (SS, Mission Trips, Etc.)
- Family services
- Pre-marriage prep
- Marriage retreats
- Couples’ small groups
- Marriage mentoring (couple to couple)
- Annual sermon series on priority of home



Brainstorm Category Two: How Might We Measure Impact?

A different assembly of teams brainstormed potential measures a church could use to determine success for family-driven ministry strategies. Top ideas included...

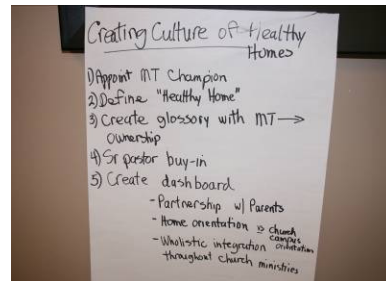
- Survey all attendees on “family intentionality” in categories such as marriage, passing the faith, etc.
- Percent of marriages proactively building their relationship and/or marriage health measure of trends (getting better or worse?)
- Percent of parents who proactively disciple their children
- Annual family health survey on marriage satisfaction, parent/child relationship, faith
- Survey teens re: relationship between and with parents
- Exit Interviews: Interview those heading into adulthood (college, career, etc.) regarding whether they feel prepared for coming challenges, etc.
- Divorce rate of regular attendees
- Number/percent of kids receiving Christ as savior by 13 years old
- In-home surveys (360° family assessment, long-term family health, etc.)
- Percentage of participation in family-driven spiritual growth process
 - Example: Number of “bring back” papers submitted--reversing the take home paper” idea by having child rewarded when parents do activity

Brainstorm Category Three: Big Dreams

We broke into three teams to craft high-level strategies individual churches might use as a basis for their own church innovation initiative.

Team One: Create a Culture of Healthy Homes

- Appoint a management team level champion
- Define “Healthy Home” for church
- Create a common vision with management team ownership
- Get senior pastor buy in
- Create a dashboard for success...
 - Partnership with parents
 - Home orientation vs. church campus orientation
 - Integration throughout church ministries



Team Two: Intact Families

- Vision: Intact families that live incarnationally and have generational influence for generations to come
- Goals:
 - 100% of church leadership is part of a healthy, intact family
 - 0% divorce rate (for new marriages)
 - 100% of high school grads are retained in their faith and fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives four years later
 - Intentional fathers leading their homes

Team Three: Faith at Home

- Vision: To become a faith-at-home-driven church that leaves a strong legacy to the next generation
- Goal: Equip the home to be the primary place where faith is nurtured
- Bottlenecks: Key obstacles to the goal include...
 - Parents are not equipped
 - Health of the pastor's family
 - A culture of "let the professionals do it"
 - Cost (money and time) of intentionality
 - Paradigm shift for all stakeholders
 - Current church leadership structures
- Opportunities: Top opportunities to move forward include...
 - Partner with people in "You can do it, we can help!" spirit
 - Make resources known and available
 - Small group coaching
 - Build and equip coaching leaders
 - Families learn common messages in common strategy
 - People are desperate for help
- Driving Force: All church leaders/stakeholders must buy in to the dream/vision

Of Special Note

Several themes surfaced throughout various sessions worthy of special note...

- **Current Realities:** Each church presented a "current reality" summary which surfaced the following common themes...
 - The "want to" for family impact is ahead of the "how to" in most churches
 - Church organization structures are an obstacle to family integration
 - Language matters because people have pre-conceived notions of what one means by "family ministry"
 - Good plans today are better than perfect plans tomorrow!
 - Senior Pastor commitment is a huge factor in success
 - We've been so sensitive to "non-families" that we fail to impact the majority of congregations – married couples and parents with kids at home.
- **The Divorce Link:** The group noted the need for data on any correlation between parental divorce and kids leaving their parents' faith. Are all Christian families hemorrhaging at the same rate, or do intact homes beat the odds? Intuition and anecdotal experience suggest divorce makes faith transference far more difficult. Are the majority of those abandoning Christianity those experiencing parental divorce?
- **Ideal vs. Real:** A brief disagreement occurred reminding all that we face an ever-present tension between upholding God's ideal for the home and the reality of broken families. Since the church does not have the luxury of choosing one or the other, we must find ways to do both--teaching and modeling God's design for families while extending grace and hope to "bumpy road" homes like those lead by single parents. Since a strong marriage is the foundation of every stable, healthy home – we must work to increase the likelihood of families remaining intact. At the same time, we must bring the hope of Christ's redemption to those living with the fallout of divorce, abuse, or other painful realities. Kurt Bruner reminded the group that this likely will not be the only tension to emerge during the

innovation process because a family-centered approach to ministry may call into question existing programs and priorities.

- **Church/Home Partnership:** A dominant theme of all participants can be summarized as follows: “The church needs to partner with parents for faith-at-home-based values and strategies that are integrated throughout the whole church.” Individual programs are great. But it is time to move toward integrated strategies.
- **Incarnational Gospel:** The church proclaims the gospel, but it is at home that it becomes “incarnational” – especially in marriage and parents living their faith.
- **Worth Considering:** Several “outside the box” ideas surfaced that can help trigger further innovative thinking, including...
 - **FAMILY TOOL BOX:** Offer parents a “tool box” of easy-to-implement ideas for creating faith transference moments at bedtime, mealtime, drive time, etc. Make them “bite sized” suggestions vs. complicated and long.
 - **ANNUAL FAMILY PLAN:** Host a New Year retreat/event in which families dream and plan the coming year together for connection and spiritual growth. Every family in the church writes a faith training plan with quarterly goals. The church celebrates progress throughout the year with a big “bash” celebration.
 - **INTRODUCING CHILD TO CHRIST EVENT:** Create experiences (church service, event, etc.) where the pastor walks children through their salvation decision with the child’s parents present and ready for follow-up.
 - **“MY FUN FAMILY” ESSAY CONTEST:** Develop a church wide essay contest for kids to highlight why their family is fun and intentional about faith training. Grand prize = family trip to Disneyland. Use same approach to emphasize marriage via “My Romantic Parents” essay contest with a romantic get-away prize.
 - **PARENT REPORT CARD:** Have the kids/teens give their parents a quarterly report card on the health of their marriage and parent/child relationships.
 - **FAMILY MISSIONS/SERVICE:** Host all-family missions and service opportunities to enable intergenerational service experiences.
 - **FAMILY SERVICE:** Conduct a monthly/quarterly intergenerational service that models spiritual formation at home principles.
 - **PARENT/TEEN MOVIE NIGHTS:** Host parent-with-teens movie discussion events to create dialog on worldview in media, etc.
 - **SIX WEEK LAUNCH:** Organize six week integrated launch strategy for your family initiative – including a sermon series, small group emphasis, parenting tools, etc.
 - **JOINT CREATIVE SESSIONS:** Host “parental guidance” sessions with parents and ministry leaders to brainstorm holistic strategies for strengthening families.

After completing our brainstorm sessions to generate common themes and dreams, all committed to launch or continue their own innovation initiative back home. The group set November 6-7 for our next gathering, when each church will give an update on progress to date and where we will begin exploring working models that surface among participating churches.

For additional information or questions from the Strong Families Innovation Alliance, contact Executive Director Kurt Bruner at kurtb@lakepointe.org



Spiritual Formation @ Home

Leading Edge Churches Driving Family Centered Ministry

Part Two - Pursuing Models of Excellence



November 2007 Executive Summary
The Strong Families Innovation Alliance

written by Kurt Bruner

Building Momentum

In November 2007, leaders from a dozen evangelical churchesⁱⁱⁱ gathered in Scottsdale, Arizona to continue the momentum launched during their first gathering six months earlier. (See the April 2007 Executive Summary.) The meeting was hosted by *The Center for Strong Families* and jointly sponsored by *Family Life* and *Focus on the Family* ministries.

Participants began by reviewing the scope of innovation as agreed upon in April 2007...

Problem Statement

Evangelical families are failing to win and keep their own children in the Christian faith.

Vision

To create an innovation movement among evangelical churches that seeks to turn the tide by acknowledging the home as central to God's redemptive strategy.

Innovation Categories

1. Strengthening marriage relationships
2. Winning our children to Christ
3. Launching our youth as fully devoted followers of Christ

The goal of this second innovation session was to begin identifying models of excellence for church-driven, family-centered faith transference.

Getting From Here To There

The alliance includes churches in various stages of innovation and individuals in a variety of staff positions including small group, student, children's, spiritual formation, and senior pastors. Prior to gathering, each identified their church as falling into one of the following three categories:



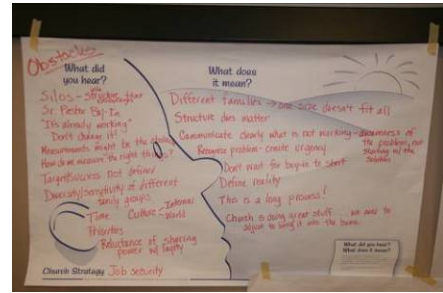
- **Category One:** Just beginning to craft a vision for families with key leaders in order to get these issues on the radar screen.
- **Category Two:** Starting to change existing programs and/or designing new programs that will move "family" from a third-tier to a second- or first-tier emphasis.
- **Category Three:** Have launched a senior leadership team initiative with the goal of developing integrated strategies for family-centered ministry.

Most described themselves as falling into the second category, only two placing themselves in the third. The group began this session describing some of the obstacles and challenges they face in trying to raise the priority and profile of marriage and family in their churches. They also shared some of the strategies being implemented to move forward and momentum building "quick wins" that are in process.

Obstacles and Challenges

Some of the common obstacles and challenges identified include...

- Ignorance of the problem/need among staff and parents
- Senior pastor and staff buy-in
- Understanding what a healthy family looks like
- Spiritual immaturity – parents have very little to pass on
- Clarifying the target (what is success?)
- Measuring success (what do we measure?)
- Current measures exclude “family”
- Church sacred cows
- Existing staff structure (silos)
- Customization for diverse family types and stages
- Lack of concentrated focus from a specific full-time staff member
- Urgent church priorities prevent allocating time/energy
- Finances to fund additional efforts



Key Insights:

1. Customize - One size can't fit all
2. Structure does matter
3. We must create a sense of urgency, clearly defining the problem before offering solutions
4. Don't wait for total buy-in to get started
5. This is a long process, so be diligent
6. The church is doing great stuff – but we need to help families bring it home

Strategies and Quick Wins

Adopting the view that a good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow, several churches shared highlights of early efforts including...

- Early conversations with staff about integration
- Evaluating the present reality (marriage strength, faith transference, etc.)
- Fresh ideas and offerings!
- Offering Intergenerational experiences (family worship services, mission trips, family VBS, etc.)
- Challenging every home to create a spiritual development plan
- Calling leaders to model within their sphere of influence
- Establishing clear goals for families (i.e. date nights, family nights, intergenerational experiences)
- Launching/offering “family small groups”
- Including family initiative in capital fundraising campaign
- Altering middle school discipleship program to include parents 6x per year
- Building a physical center for family materials
- Giving away free materials from *Focus on the Family* and other ministries
- Leveraging marriage/parenting conference to launch ongoing small groups with family emphasis
- Initial “family services” with take-home ideas
- Special needs family support group on Sunday morning

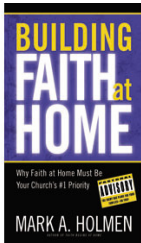


Key Insights:

7. Leverage the existing church vision
8. Don't always come up with a new plan – be consistent
9. Families need to be resourced
10. Create “catalytic” events
11. Work with your existing sphere of influence first
12. Evaluate every ministry through the “family” strategic lens

Building Faith at Home

Mark Holmen gave an executive overview of his church ministry philosophy as detailed in the newly released book *Building Faith at Home*. He shared the story of his own journey from student ministry to a senior pastor who places the home at the top of his church's strategic priorities. He also gave several practical insights from churches that assess every church program through the family lens.



Six Keys for Becoming a Faith-at-Home-Driven Church:

- Recognize the Critical Role of the Senior Pastor
- Language Matters
- Faith at Home Must Be Part of the Strategy of the Church
- “Where Your Treasure Is” Commitment
- Everybody Has a Part to Play
- Long-Term Commitment



Creating A Culture

Steve Stroope and Kurt Bruner gave an update on the Lake Pointe Church initiative through which they are attempting to create a culture of intentional families. They included *HomePointe* in their family initiative in the 2007 capital campaign to generate excitement and funding. A key element of the Lake Pointe strategy is to call every family to create a customized intentionality plan on a trimester basis and to measure church-wide family intentionality annually. (See full PowerPoint overview.)



HomePointe Goals:

- **Cast a Vision for Family Intentionality** (Worship Service)
- **Create a Culture of Family Intentionality** (Small Groups & Media)
- **Coach Family Intentionality** (Physical and Web Resource Center)



Intergenerational Experiences

David Hull and Craig Johnson explained how Lakewood Church is calling parents to pray for their children in a more intentional manner and creating intergenerational experiences co-sponsored by the children's and marriage ministries. Rather than a traditional Vacation Bible School, Lakewood created “A Family Adventure” summer event that brought parents and kids together for faith training and family enrichment.



On Purpose

Todd Olthoff gave an overview of early efforts at Saddleback where they are tying their model for marital health to the “five purposes” which define the overall church structure and strategy. They have aligned the men’s, women’s and small group ministries by changing their success measures and creating a clear pathway for couples who want to build a strong marriage. Because “Purpose Driven” is such a foundational emphasis of the church culture and leadership passion, the team bundled formerly isolated marriage ministries into a sequence of “On Purpose” steps for couples to grow together in faith. They have also launched their first Family Small Groups and Family Worship venue.



Purposeful Marriage Health Measures:

- Surveyed all church couples using www.surveymonkey.com
- Fed results back to small group hosts revealing needs expressed
- Emailed church couples to explain strategy for meeting needs – generating sign-up buzz

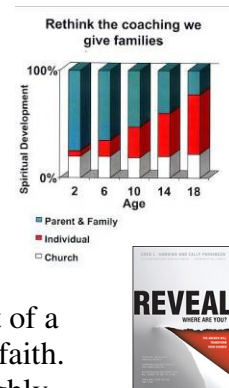
Leveraging Existing Momentum

Jon Vesely and Pat Cimo explained how the Willow Creek team is building upon the existing momentum of the church around results



from the *Reveal* survey to show how faith formation in the home is vital to fulfilling the overall church strategy. Willow has been emphasizing that adult believers should rely less upon the church for spiritual growth as they mature in faith. The family ministry team is

using the same image to help parents understand their role to drive most of a child’s faith formation in the early years in order to nurture the roots of faith. They have also been testing language that seems to work in a culture highly sensitive to inclusion.



Language that seems to work:

- From “family” to “household”
- From “family ministry” to “spiritually growing our congregation”
- From “family service” to “service for all ages”
- From “family resource” to “gather your friends, neighbors, & family members”

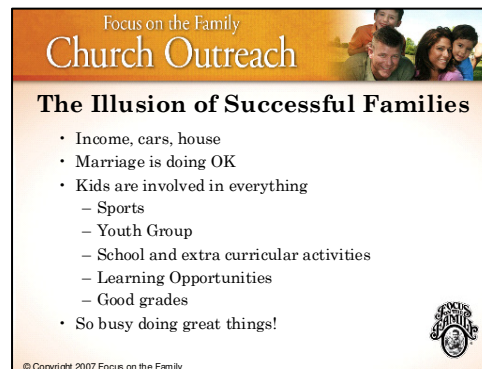
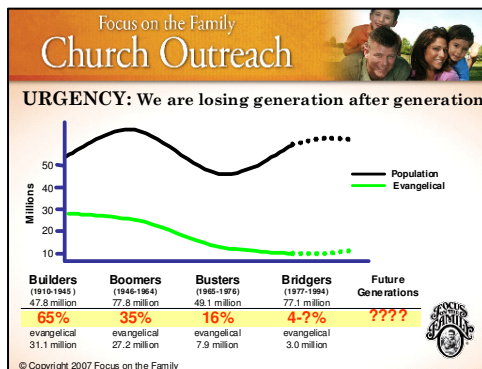
Laying A Strong Foundation

During a visit to TGen (Translational Genomics Research Institute) hosted by Dr. Jeff Trent, the group enjoyed a behind-the-scenes overview of how leading scientists uncover

new treatments and early detection strategies for serious disorders based upon foundational work accomplished through the Human Genome project. Dr. Robert Lewis from Family Life used the occasion to compare church-based family ministry to laying the foundation for a house. While the work is hard and rarely glamorous, everything else depends upon that solid foundation. And while other programs might feel more exciting and glamorous, all of them depend upon strong families.

Research Driven Urgency

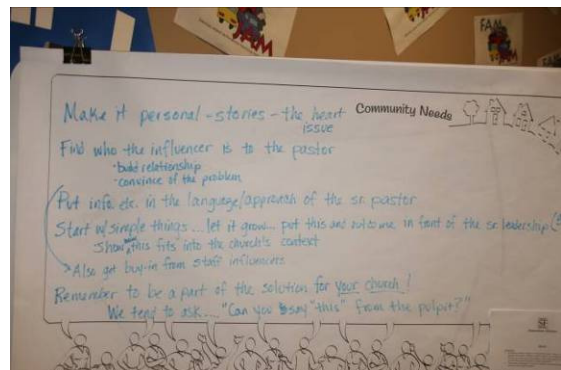
Chris Abeyta from *Focus on the Family* gave an overview of what the ministry is learning as they work with churches and families. (See full PowerPoint report.) They find that when leaders understand the trends regarding faith transference it creates a sense of urgency motivating action. Chris described the “illusion” of a successful family that needs to be replaced with a biblical understanding of family health and success.



Creating Leadership Buy-In

The hardest model to change is a model that works. The group discussed why “successful” church ministry models can make it difficult to elevate home-centered faith formation to a senior level priority. Placing themselves in the role of a typical children’s pastor who sees the need when others may not, several ideas for creating buy-in were offered including...

- Pull together data from other churches
- Offer solutions and “quick win” opportunities rather than just problems
- Invite the senior pastor to use his gifts/strengths to help solve a clear need/problem
- Integrate and support the existing leadership vision rather than compete with it
- Use both statistics and real-life stories to paint picture of need
- Give the pastor Mark Holmen’s book to read and discuss with leadership team
- Demonstrate buy-in from other key influencers



Model Components

The group ended their time together by identifying the “Lego piece” components that are essential to building a customized strategy for church-driven, family-centered redemption.



1. Empower a Visionary Champion

If everyone owns it, no one does. Make it clear which senior leader is responsible for keeping family-centered objectives on the team’s radar screen.

2. Establish New Success Measures

What gets measured gets done. Introduce simple measures that will keep family-centered strategies on the radar screen and drive continual improvement.

3. Build Upon Existing Church Vision

Do not compete with or criticize the existing vision. Build upon it to drive family-centered strategies. Don’t call the church to change everything – but to make everything more effective.

4. Build Into Existing Church Calendar

Include experiences that will move people toward greater intentionality on the church calendar rather than try to squeeze them in as exceptions or special events. The more “auto-pilot” your family emphasis gameplan the easier it will be for everyone.

5. Use “Home” Lens for All vs. Creating New Silo

As a priority every area of the church must own, apply “faith at home” lenses to every department and program rather than creating another silo competing for attention and resources.

6. Define Success and Call Families To Commitment

Give families a vision of success and repeatedly call them to commit themselves.

7. Foster A Culture of Family Intentionality

Find ways to communicate the priority and celebrate the practice of families becoming intentional.

8. Customization – One Size Won’t Fit All

Every family is unique due to life-season, ages and number of children, marital health, special circumstances, etc. Create tools that make it easy for families to customize.

9. Invest in Tools for Families

Just like we invest in curriculum for Sunday School, we need to invest in tools that will make it easier for families to do the right thing.

10. Two Degree Strategies

It is better to start small and build momentum than wait until you have a perfect plan with complete buy-in from all sectors.

See the appendix attachments for details on specific church initiatives. For additional information or questions from the Strong Families Innovation Alliance, contact Executive Director Kurt Bruner at kurtb@lakepointe.org



Spiritual Formation @ Home

Leading-Edge Churches Driving Family-Centered Strategies

Part Three – Overcoming Obstacles



May 2008 Executive Summary

The Strong Families Innovation Alliance

written by Kurt Bruner

Moving Forward

In May 2008, leaders from 18 evangelical churches^{iv} gathered at Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall, Texas to continue a collaborative effort started in 2007. (See executive summaries) The meeting was hosted by *The Center for Strong Families* and jointly sponsored by *Family Life Ministries* and the *Willow Creek Association*.



Participants began by restating the scope of innovation established in April 2007...

Problem Statement

Evangelical families are failing to win and keep their own children in the Christian faith.

Vision

To create an innovation movement among evangelical churches that seeks to turn the tide by acknowledging the home as central to God's redemptive strategy.

Innovation Categories

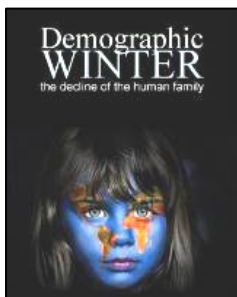
- Strengthening marriage relationships
- Winning our children to Christ
- Launching our youth as fully devoted followers of Christ

They also reviewed the ten “Models of Excellence” components identified in Fall 2007...

1. Empower a visionary champion
2. Establish new success measures
3. Build upon the existing church vision
4. Build into the existing church calendar
5. Use “Home” lens for all vs. creating a new silo
6. Define success and call families to commitment
7. Foster a culture of family intentionality
8. Customize – one size won't fit all
9. Invest in tools for families
10. Use “two degree” strategies

Objective: The goal of this third gathering was to help church leaders anticipate and overcome obstacles they may encounter driving a “spiritual formation at home” initiative.

Understanding The Times



The opening presentation emphasized the need for church leaders to become astute observers of the cultural trends, research, and popular ideas shaping the world of families. A better understanding of our times can help us develop better home-centered strategies. One significant trend was highlighted through a new documentary titled *Demographic Winter*.^v The film shows how a global decline in marriage and parenting has far reaching implications for the world economy. But it also frames our challenge with regard to generational faith transfer. A recent *Policy Review* essay described the history of Western Europe in which “unprecedented family shrinkage appeared

sometimes before and sometimes in tandem with unprecedented decline in belief...” The same is happening in the USA. Hoover Institute fellow Mary Ederstadt observed that family “inclines people toward religiosity” because marriage and children are the “symphony through which God has historically been heard by many people.”^{vi} While it is true that families are in decline due to lack of Christian faith, it is equally true that Christian faith is in decline due to a lack of healthy families. To stay current on such trends, Kurt Bruner suggested the quarterly *StrongFamilies Executive Briefing* available for free by emailing jefft@strongfamilies.com

Leadership Buy-In

The first team dialogue dealt with the kind of leadership required for a church to successfully implement a spiritual formation at home initiative. How does a division leader get this priority onto the lead pastor’s radar screen? What part must the pastor play in the initiative? Such questions were explored from the perspective of senior leaders (lead and executive pastors) and ministry division leaders (small groups, students, children’s, etc.)



KEY INSIGHTS: SENIOR LEADERS

Why isn’t this priority on many lead pastors’ radar?

- Other issues requiring attention
- Weak theology of family – doesn’t understand it as primary focus of church
- Assumes it is already happening in homes
- Lacks paradigm of how church can have impact

How can division leaders “sell vision” to pastor?

- Use existing church vision/language
- Speak his language so he can hear/absorb
- Bring champions/leaders – not just problem
- Explain size and magnitude of challenge
- Don’t blind-side, surprise or undermine pastor
- Make it his win vs. your win
- Offer shared knowledge (books, etc.)

What authority does SF@Home leader need?

- As high as possible – executive pastor or up
- One with trust of and access to lead pastor

What part must lead pastor play?

- Ideal = Pastor is the primary champion
- Minimum = Pastor gives ongoing endorsement, platform emphasis, and access

Other insights...

- People support what they help create, so don’t bring a finished draft
- Find quick/early/simple wins & new measures

KEY INSIGHTS: MINISTRY LEADERS

Why isn’t this priority on many lead pastors’ radar?

- It is not part of the educational pattern for seminary, leadership summits, etc.
- He has other passions
- He hasn’t seen it modeled, measured
- He doesn’t see the benefits
- It is not a personal priority
- It is a big challenge requiring lots of work and there are limited resources/time

What authority does SF@Home leader need?

- Depends upon the culture of the church re: empowerment, etc.
- No matter what level in organization, they will need access to lead pastor

What part must lead pastor play?

- Ideal = Brings full team on board and provides the finances and leverage the champion will need
- Minimum = He gives initiative a thumbs-up and models/teaches the priority

Other insights...

- Use Mark Holmen’s book “Building Faith at Home” to create buy-in
- Seek small wins

From Silos to Integration

The second team dialogue focused on the challenge of moving from isolated, age-graded programs (“silos”) toward integrated strategies for spiritual formation at home. The group discussed impact opportunities and challenges for each of the following “silo” ministry categories considered vital to successful integration.

Why is this “silo” key to success?

WORSHIP/TEACHING

- Worship service is “prime time” so vital to building the “brand” of SF@Home
- This is the face of the church where vision/info is transferred widely
- Best place to see big picture with everyone
- Place where people are “won over” by engaging both heart and head

ADULT & SMALL GROUPS

- Has access to marriage & parenting audience
- Already plays “equipping” role
- Low cost for high impact
- An easy “win” for in-home emphasis since most small groups are in a home
- Can foster “theology of family” curriculum

STUDENT MINISTRIES

- Positioned to reach both students and parents
- Can provide modeling for parents
- Tend to have “cultural relevance” with students

CHILDREN’S MINISTRY

- Direct connection to kids and parents
- Irreligious are willing to bring kids/grandkids to functions
- Has access to resources
- Has direct bridge into the home

What challenges must be navigated?

WORSHIP/TEACHING

- Fear of alienating those without intact home
- Plates of leaders are already very full
- Hard to measure impact
- Audience too varied to target well

ADULT & SMALL GROUPS

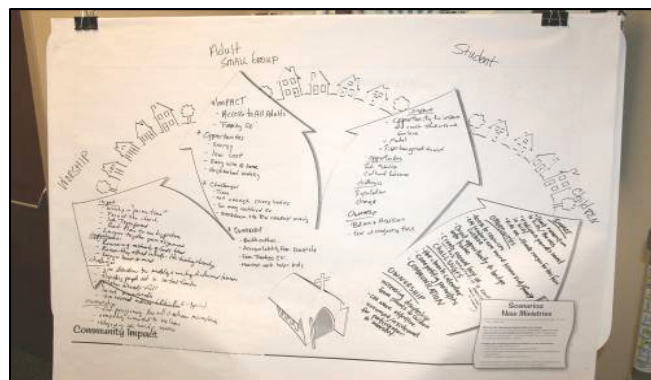
- Time – creating a spot for emphasis
- Developing strong leaders who model
- Decentralized, scattered groups difficult to get on same agenda

STUDENT MINISTRIES

- Reputation of youth leaders (“I know it all”)
- Buy-in difficult, but risk too great not to try

CHILDREN’S MINISTRY

- The reality of the church calendar
- Competing priorities
- Effective communication with parents



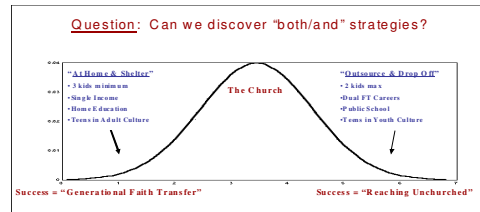
Navigating Competing Philosophies

The third and final team dialogue tackled the challenge of competing ministry philosophies that often reside within a single church – most notably within student ministries between those embracing one of two driving philosophies.

Competing Philosophies

Philosophy A

Success defined by...
“Reaching Un-churched”



Philosophy B

Success defined by...
“Generational Faith Transfer”

Each discussion group included participants from both ends of the spectrum and were asked to discuss how student ministry leaders can move beyond “either/or” thinking in order to address two realities. (1) Christian families are losing their own kids. (2) Un-churched kids need to be reached.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

CAMPS: Avoid “us” vs. “them” language or thinking. Humbly acknowledge your own bias to avoid overreaction or short-sightedness.

EXTREMES: Do not over correct, move too quickly or embrace one extreme. Find ways to incorporate the best of both philosophies.

CHURCH vs. HOME: Avoid letting ministry become “youth group centric” by acknowledging the home as the primary place of spiritual formation.

MEASURES: Do not allow attendance to be your only measure of success. Establish long-term measures to keep your team focused on this priority.



CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

VISION: Define “mature faith” for all kids in a way that both ends of the philosophical spectrum can support.

INTEGRATION: Facilitate strong families reaching out to un-churched kids in order to give them a vision of God’s design for a Christian home.

OUTREACH: Create a process to reach *parents* of un-churched kids – such as parent skill training opportunities.

TRUST: Listen to parental concerns and establish trust with them by acknowledging that student ministries exist to reinforce & support parents’ role – not undermine it.

Show-and-Tell Innovations

A highlight of Alliance gatherings is the opportunity to hear updates from various church leaders implementing their own strategies. The May 2008 gathering included updates from small and large churches, all addressing home-centered faith from different angles. Fast fire highlights included...

Saddleback Church

Couples Small Groups Pastor Todd Ohltoff shared the five keys to success for their



“Pathway for Couples” initiative. (1) Tied to vision and mission of the church (2) Outcome-focused using the five purposes applied to marriage (3) Resource-oriented with point where people are done (4) Common language (5) Consistent and ongoing offering.

Saddleback started offering Family Small Groups as a step toward generational integration and has launched a “Family Pathway” strategy giving everyone a clear road for becoming more intentional.

Healthy Marriage + Healthy Family + Individual Choice = Healthy Kids
(marriage pathway) (family pathway) (kids programs)

So far, 5800 have participated in pathway events among Saddleback attendees.

“I came to this retreat not sure if I wanted to stay married anymore. This retreat gave me tools and the action items to begin to implement. It also reinforced my desire to want to make my marriage work.”

“When you revealed that our spouse is the perfect accountability partner, that was extremely important to me. I had never thought of that, but you were right. Since the retreat, we have been better at asking questions, communicating and respecting each other more.”

Sonrise Church

Pastor J. Otis Ledbetter shared how his smaller church (600 at Easter) was founded on the principles of Heritage Builders (www.heritagebuilders.com) and giving parents practical tools for building a strong spiritual legacy at home. Despite a relatively low budget, the people of Sonrise have created engaging intergenerational faith experiences (“Kidz Jam”) which replaces one worship service per quarter and an incentive-based program where t-shirts are awarded to families that accomplish 6 family nights in a two month period. This reinforces a church culture and drives kids to pressure parental intentionality.

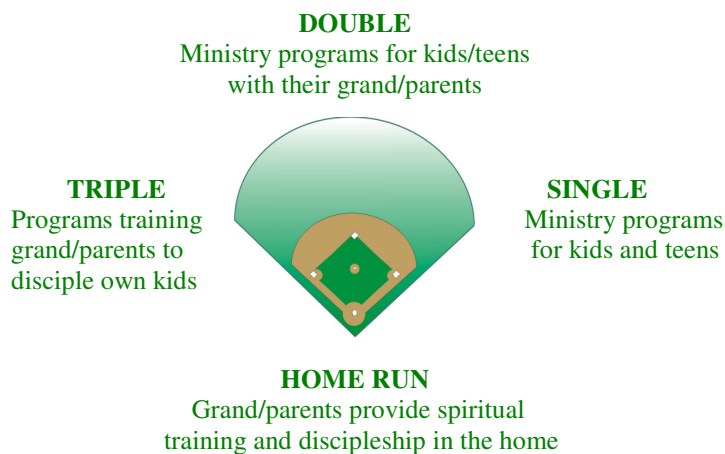


Wheaton Bible Church

Family Pastor Rob Rienow described a long and fruitful journey at Wheaton Bible Church developing three core theological foundations that became the basis of their “faith in the home” emphasis.

1. God created families to be discipleship centers
2. The biblical purpose of parenting and grand-parenting is to impress the hearts of children with a love for God.
3. The family is God’s primary engine of world evangelization through the power of multi-generational faithfulness.

The youth and children’s ministry model uses a baseball diamond image to highlight that every “hit” is a success. Some hits, however, accomplish more than others.



Early Wheaton Bible strategy shifts included turning the family pastor into a “horizontal” leadership position, incorporating “faith at home” into every ministry as their primary great commission strategy, and crafting a new mission statement: *Love God – through worship at church and at home.*

Ventura Missionary Church

Family Pastor David Teixeira gave an update on how the “faith at home” and “take it home” strategies pioneered at Ventura Missionary Church are expanding to other churches. While summarizing what’s working well at VMC and beyond, David shared the following...

- **Accepting Reality:** Rather than dream of the day families “stop being so busy” or become less intimidated by spiritual discussions, we operate under the assumption they will always be busy and design strategies accordingly.
- **Keeping it Simple:** The more basic and simple we keep things for the families and church the better because “more complex” does not necessarily mean “more effective.”
- **Measuring Improvement:** Each year we find gradual improvement in three areas...
 - **Anticipation:** Families looking forward to “Take It Home” events
 - **Attendance:** Families participating in “Take It Home” process
 - **Application:** Families actually being more intentional at home



Lakewood Church

Family Pastor Craig Johnson gave updates on a variety of innovative ideas that have been launched at their church (35,000 attendees) as the “faith at home” concept becomes part of overall church DNA. Highlights include...

- **Extreme Kids:** A small group discussion program where kids get rewards for working on their journals with their parents in a small group setting at home.
- **Camp Kidslife** – A family camp centered on a home topic where kids are doing lessons and activities in their classroom and parents attend sessions in a separate area. The final night is a family finale with a family covenant.
- **Main Street Emphasis** - Monthly family theme from Victoria Osteen in main service during baby dedication and “Homelife” e-newsletter to members.
- **StrongFamilies Small Groups:** Hundreds of Lakewood families will go through the StrongFamilies 100 series as a follow-up to Camp Kidslife '08.
- **Single Parent Families** - Craig described a creative approach to helping single parent families at Lakewood where they arranged to offer a \$1500 Disney vacation package for \$500 to the first 250 single parent families that signed up. They were overwhelmed by the 600 families that waited in line to take advantage of something they could never normally afford. Lakewood Church demographics reveal an estimated 60% of their kids will at some point live in a single parent situation, so the church is trying to be intentional about helping this key audience.



Woodmen Valley Chapel

Student Ministry Pastor Brian Carlson gave an update on growing momentum at Woodmen Valley Chapel. Much effort has been put into demonstrating to leaders and staff how driving faith home flows from and serves the existing church vision statement. Highlights from recent middle school ministry efforts driving intentionality include...



- **Spiritual Growth Plans:** Six “Driven” conferences were held involving more than 50% of homes active in middle school ministry. Parents and students crafted a “Spiritual Growth Plan” for the upcoming year.
- **One11 Challenge:** Calling parents and middle school students to take the One11 challenge in which *once* per week *one* parent and *one* child intentionally meet together for breakfast, lunch, ice cream, etc.
- **Driven Home Sheets:** Students take home from their service a sheet (also emailed to parents in PDF format) to help process the message through three questions parents ask the student, three questions students ask parents, and one challenge to do together.
- **Amazed Race:** Held a parent/teen “Amazed Race” based upon CBS reality show. Parent/teen teams raced 500 miles around Colorado. (Note: “Amazed” is a central idea in the church vision statement – “toward a deeper amazement of God’s grace.”)
- **Reworking New Believers Program:** Rewriting the new believer's/baptism course to make it a parent/child experience "at home" with "at church" reinforcement.

Lake Pointe Church

Pastor of Spiritual Formation Kurt Bruner gave an update on HomePointe, an integrated strategy for creating a culture of intentional families. Key strategy elements include:

- ❑ **“MAIN STREET” EMPHASIS:** Campaigns (sermon series, small group lessons, intentionality contest, etc.) to keep the priority of home at forefront of church culture
- ❑ **ONE STEP AT A TIME:** Provide tools that make it easy for couples, parents, and grandparents to become more intentional
- ❑ **CUSTOMIZED PLANS:** Trimester “intentional family plan” invitation in worship service and small groups that includes an “appraisal” to reinforce and gauge congregational intentionality
- ❑ **EASY ACCESS:** A campus and web “HomePointe Center” providing free, practical ideas and “going further” resources to support family intentionality



During the HomePointe launch campaign, 1500 households representing 4500 Lake Pointe attendees enrolled for ongoing email encouragement and creativity on becoming more intentional at home. A PDF document providing a more detailed explanation of the HomePointe initiative can be obtained at www.HomePointeModel.com

Parent Expectations

Kurt gave an overview of data provided by the Willow Creek Association taken from recent Reveal surveys in which parents provide insight into their expectations and satisfaction levels when it comes to churches helping them develop strong faith in their children. Key “take away” insights from the survey include...

- ❑ **EQUIP PARENTS MORE:** Parents of young children and teens want us to help them guide the spiritual development of their children far more than we do now.
- ❑ **WORK PARENTS LESS:** Parents think we ask them to serve in church programs a bit too often.
- ❑ **KEEP HAVING FUN:** Parents think we do a good job offering appealing and fun programs for young children.
- ❑ **MAKE IT REAL:** Parents think we do a poor job equipping their children to live out their faith in practical ways.
- ❑ **SEPARATE US LESS:** Parents of teens think we do a poor job of including kids in the life of the main church, possibly reflecting a “youth group centric” over-emphasis.



Marriage Movement

Eric Garcia (Association of Marriage and Family Ministries) gave an executive overview of what is happening across the country with regard to marriage trends and hosted a pre-screening of the September 26th film titled *FireProof*. (fireproofthemovie.com) The discussion once again emphasized the importance of church leaders understanding the times in order to develop better impact strategies.



Web Collaboration Invitation

John Trent invited those interested to join a Facebook group he is hosting designed to widen the innovation movement to churches beyond Alliance participants. Those interested can request an invitation at jefft@strongfamilies.com.

The fourth and final Alliance gathering is scheduled for November 2008 at Ventura Missionary Church. For additional information or questions about the Strong Families Innovation Alliance, contact Executive Director Kurt Bruner at kurtb@lakepointe.org

ⁱ The following churches were represented at the first Innovation Alliance gathering...

- **Lake Pointe Church** in Rockwall, Texas (www.lakepointe.org)
- **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas (www.lakewood.cc)
- **New Life Church** in Colorado Springs, Colorado (www.newlifechurch.org)
- **Sonrise Church** in Clovis, California (www.sonriseclouis.com)
- **Grace Family Baptist Church** in Spring, Texas (www.gracefamilybaptist.net)
- **Celebration Church** in Green Bay, Wisconsin (www.bcfgb.com)
- **Highlands Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.highlandchurch.org)
- **Willow Creek Community Church** in South Barrington, IL (www.willowcreek.org)
- **Northridge Community Church** in Cave Creek, AZ (www.northridge.org)
- **Saint Peter Lutheran Church** (www.stpeterriley.org)
- **Saddleback Church** in Lake Forest, California (www.saddleback.com)
- **Ventura Missionary Church** in Ventura, California (www.vmc.net)
- **Scottsdale Bible Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.sbcaz.org)
- **Woodmen Valley Chapel** in Colorado Springs, Colorado (www.woodmenvalley.org)

ⁱⁱ Data from the Southern Baptist Convention indicates that we are currently losing 70-88% of our youth after their freshman year in college. ^[3] In a report to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, T.C. Pinkney observed that 70% of teenagers involved in church youth groups stop attending church within two years of their high school graduation. ^[4] The Southern Baptist Council on Family Life**reported an even more staggering statistic — that 88% of the children in evangelical homes leave church at the age of 18. ^[5]

- The vast majority of those who ever come to faith in Christ do so during the years they spend under their parents' roof. (The Barna Update: *Evangelism is Most Effective Among Kids* -October 2004)
- A 2002 general market study revealed parents' number one concern as "raising a child who is well-behaved and has good values" – with 61% saying it is "essential" to help their kids develop a strong religious faith. (*A Lot Easier Said Than Done* - Public Agenda, 2002)
- Close to nine out of ten parents of preteens believe they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children about spiritual matters, with ninety-six percent saying they are primarily responsible to teach their kids good values. (The Barna Update: *Parents Accept Responsibility...But Struggle With Effectiveness* – May 2003)
- Children ages 5-13 have a 32% probability of coming to Christ. Those in and beyond their teens have a 4-5% probability. According to Barna Research Inc. "if a person does not accept Christ as Savior before the age of 14 the likelihood of ever doing so is slim." (The Barna Update *Parents Accept Responsibility...But Struggle With Effectiveness* - May 2003)

ⁱⁱⁱ The following churches were represented at the second Innovation Alliance gathering...

- **Lake Pointe Church** in Rockwall, Texas (www.lakepointe.org)
- **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas (www.lakewood.cc)
- **Perimeter Church** in Duluth, Georgia (www.perimeterchurch.org)
- **Highlands Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.highlandchurch.org)
- **Willow Creek Community Church** in South Barrington, IL (www.willowcreek.org)
- **Northridge Community Church** in Cave Creek, AZ (www.northridge.org)
- **Saint Peter Lutheran Church** (www.stpeterriley.org)
- **Saddleback Church** in Lake Forest, California (www.saddleback.com)
- **Ventura Missionary Church** in Ventura, California (www.vmc.net)
- **Scottsdale Bible Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.sbcaz.org)
- **Woodmen Valley Chapel** in Colorado Springs, Colorado (www.woodmenvalley.org)

^{iv} The following churches were represented at the second Innovation Alliance gathering...

- **Lake Pointe Church** in Rockwall, Texas (www.lakepointe.org)
- **Bannockburn Baptist Church** in Austin, Texas (www.bbcfamily.com)
- **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas (www.lakewood.cc)
- **Perimeter Church** in Duluth, Georgia (www.perimeterchurch.org)
- **Highlands Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.highlandchurch.org)
- **Willow Creek Community Church** in South Barrington, IL (www.willowcreek.org)
- **Northridge Community Church** in Cave Creek, AZ (www.northridge.org)
- **Saddleback Church** in Lake Forest, California (www.saddleback.com)
- **Ventura Missionary Church** in Ventura, California (www.vmc.net)
- **Grace Family Baptist Church** in Spring, Texas (www.gracefamilybaptist.net)
- **Hill Country Bible Church** in Austin, Texas (www.hcbc.com)
- **Sonrise Church** in Clovis, California (www.sonriseclavis.com)
- **Scottsdale Bible Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.sbcas.org)
- **Sun Valley Community Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.sunvalleycc.com)
- **The Rock Church** in San Diego, California (www.therocksandiego.org)
- **Fellowship Bible Church** in Little Rock, Arkansas (www.fbclr.org)
- **Wheaton Bible Church** in Wheaton, Illinois (www.wheatonbible.org)
- **Woodmen Valley Chapel** in Colorado Springs, Colorado (www.woodmenvalley.org)

^v www.demographicwinter.com

^{vi} Mary Ederstadt, *How the West Really Lost God* (www.realclearpolitics.com/articles)