

Sunset Presbyterian Church



Associate Pastor Barbara Feil

The purpose of the study was to identify transferable principles and practices used by churches that have been successful in attracting and assimilating unchurched people. The following is a summary of a leadership interview, three new Christian interviews, a survey of printed materials and an on site visit.

Question #1. What principles and practices used by these churches have been most successful in attracting and evangelizing unchurched people?

Sunset Presbyterian Church seeks to reach all levels of culture rather than target a specific group. However, because of their location the congregation is primarily made up of middle to upper-middle class college educated people. The church attracts families and this is a high priority. Senior Pastor Ron Kincaid and his wife have a family of eight children.

Sunset has not programmatic approaches to evangelism; instead, it permeates their ministry. Pastor Barbara Feil explains, "Evangelism is not an event, evangelism isn't a once a year push, evangelism is like breathing for us. So, it's part of everything we do. We teach a very relational style of evangelism. We are not trying to reach people who are not a part of our circle of influence. We want our believers to reach the people that God has place in their life naturally."

The church frees members to take the time needed to keep their circle of unchurch friends. Feil states, "I think everyone on our pastoral staff places a high priority on giving our people the time and the freedom to maintain their connections with their workplace, their marketplace, with nonchurched neighbors and friends. That is a high priority for us. They have to keep that circle of influence, that network of friends. We try to communicate clearly that we want to partner with them in reaching those people for Christ. And the primary way we want to partner with them is make our church a place where those people can come. Not just to some special evangelistic event but any Sunday and to any program or ministry."

Sunset Presbyterian Church offers a warm and accepting place for nonChristians to hear clear biblical teaching. "We open the Bible every Sunday," states Feil. "There is Scripture throughout the sermon. And yet, we find that nonChristians are appreciative of the fact that they hear the Word of God clearly, plainly, preached every Sunday. We've really tried to make sure that those people who haven't made a decision yet for Christ are

Participant Summary: “Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century”
A study of leading churches in the Portland/Vancouver area.

thoroughly accepted and enfolded into the church as much as possible so that when they do make that decision you don't have to bring them to church, they are already here. We've found that using relational networks is a much more positive way of identifying those who have come to Christ or who are ready to make a decision for Christ, who want to take that next step.”



Question #2. How do these churches welcome and follow-up unchurched visitors and new converts?

Sunset helps create a welcoming atmosphere by encouraging everyone, including the pastoral staff, to wear “stick on” name tags. They also pass a “Friendship Register” down the aisle each week, allowing members and visitors to sign in. Visitors usually sign-in this way, first, in order to let themselves be known. Visitors are also invited to identify themselves in the public worship services by simply raising their hand so that the ushers can give them a tape and brochure. “Our regular people know that the reason we are asking people to raise their hands is so they can identify them,” explains Pastor Feil. “I have had many first time visitors tell me that when they raised their hand three or four people around them said ‘hello, I’m so and so, who are you and welcome, we’re glad you are here, can I answer any questions.’ So, they have been greeted as a result of that. That has worked for us.”

New converts are the responsibility of the member who brought them. However, they have the assistance of the pastoral staff and the structure of the small group system to aid them. “There’s a small group system throughout the church. Every ministry in the church has some system of small groups. The largest or high profile one would be our adult care group ministry.” Pastor Feil states, “We have not instituted a new believer’s class. We would rather have that person surrounded by a group of believers who are sensitive and able to answer their questions and deal with their needs and bring them along in the context of the family, so to speak, the spiritual family. So all of our care groups and small groups are open to that. We are often making a networking connection between those who are younger in their faith with those who are more mature so that their questions can be answered. So there’s no formal structured way to follow-up new believers but there is help available for anyone.”

Question #3. How do these churches provide an opportunity for new people to gain a sense of belonging?

Sunset Presbyterian offers a five-week class that meets two hours each week called “Pathways and Connections.” Pastor Barbara Feil and Senior Pastor Ron Kincaid teach this class. Feil states, “We emphasize that it is not just for the purpose of membership. It is for the purpose of getting connected to the church, connected to God, finding pathways to relationships and service opportunities in the church.” In this class newcomers are encouraged to begin attending one of the many small groups called “Care Groups.” Feil explains, “We put a lot of emphasis on joining a small group. We tell them, ‘you probably will find that you won’t feel as strongly about staying here if you don’t find some kind of connection.’”

Question #4. How do these churches see that people are disciplined into fully devoted followers of Christ?

Throughout all the ministries the focus is on shepherding and discipleship—the whole culture is aimed at this process. Feil states, “From the time someone becomes a believer here at Sunset the rest of what we do is aimed at that, to help them grow in their faith. That’s what we are concerned about, that everyone grows in his or her faith. So the purpose of every ministry, across the board, is to help disciple people.”

Question #5. How do these churches help people take up the responsibility to serve in personal ministry?

There are three pieces in the assimilation process at Sunset: 1) growing spiritually; 2) connecting relationally; and 3) serving according to their gifts, passion and God’s call on their life. “We want every believer in our church to be able to answer or complete the following sentences:

My gifts are...

My passion is...

God has called me to...

Newcomers are primarily recruited for service through the “Pathways and Connections” class. Participants complete a self-study called “God’s Work of Art” in which they investigate their passion, temperament, spiritual gifts, maturity, talents and availability. Following the class they meet with a “God’s Work of Art” consultant who provides one-on-one assistance in finding an area of service.

Finally, Feil states, “We believe in whole-life stewardship. We believe that every believer has a whole life. We believe that they represent a neighborhood, a home, a private life, a workplace, a community, and a set of recreational priorities that are all part of their life. And we don’t want them to feel like we are only interested in the part of

Participant Summary: "Attracting and Assimilating the Unchurched in the 21st Century"
A study of leading churches in the Portland/Vancouver area.

them that shows up in church. We want them to take God and put Him in the center of their whole life and have Him radiate out through every area of their life."

Map/ Photos:



Assimilation Study - Participant Information (Fall 2000)

Church Name Sunset Presbyterian Church Region NW Portland
Street Address 14986 NW Cornell Road
City Portland State OR Zip Code 97227
Phone 503-292-9293 FAX 503-645-0701
Email info@sunsetpres.org Web site www.sunsetpres.org

1. Denomination Presbyterian USA
2. Date church was founded 1952
3. Founding Senior Pastor John Ediger Years in this church 1952-56
4. Current Senior Pastor Ron Kincaid Years in this church 19
5. Average Weekend Worship attendance 2300
6. Average number of visitors each Sunday 40
7. Current Membership 1650 (youth and adults)
 - Adults _____
 - Youth _____
 - Children N/A
8. Number of conversions during the past 12 months 50
9. Number of new members received during the past 12 months 221
 - Number from transfer (previously active in another church) 105
 - Number from conversion (or with no previous church affiliation) 116
10. Christian Education Classes
 - # of Adult Classes 8 Weekly attendance 50
 - # of Youth Classes 2 Weekly attendance 225
 - # of Children Classes 50 Weekly attendance 1000
11. Small Groups/Cells
 - # of Adult Groups 130 Weekly attendance 1300
 - # of Youth Groups 11 Weekly attendance 120
 - # of Children Groups N/A Weekly attendance N/A
12. Large groups meeting midweek
 - Youth Ministry 1 Weekly attendance 120
 - Children Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
 - Women's Ministry 2 Weekly attendance 200
 - Men's Ministry just small meetings Weekly attendance 30
13. Number of people with an identifiable ministry _____ Or approximate % 45%
14. Number of core lay leaders 140 Number of paid pastoral/ministry staff 10
15. Number of churches planted by the church 1.5
16. Describe your congregation's socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural distinctions:
 - Middle – upper middle class, Caucasian