

East Hill Foursquare Church



Church Administrator, Marc Gale

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?

East Hill Foursquare Church, under the leadership of Pastor Ted Roberts, has become one of the largest churches in Portland and in the Northwest. The church is guided by four core values that form the acrostic “ACTS.” A stands for Adoration. “We are committed to a personal relationship with a gracious, sovereign and risen Christ.” C stands for Caring. “We are committed to reaching a hurting world through love, acceptance and forgiveness.” T stands for Transformation. “We are committed to the healing of hurting humanity by an encounter with the risen Christ AND by the process of the renewing of the mind through the eternal work of God.” Finally, S stands for Serving. “We are committed to the equipping and releasing of believers for the work of ministry until Christ comes again.”

The primary means of attracting unchurched people to East Hill is the life and witness of those who already attend. Church Administrator, Marc Gale explains, “Our people are our tool for evangelizing. What God has done in their lives is an example for the people that they are around—in families, in neighborhoods and in the workplace. Our members either extend an invitation to their unchurched friends or these friends visit East Hill because of what they see the Lord has done in our member’s lives.” The church also provides attraction events throughout the year to which members can bring their unchurched friends. Examples include the Ladies Fall Fling and a Valentine Event for married couples. At these special events guests find that church is not intimidating but enjoyable.

For a long time the primary target of East Hill Foursquare Church has been ministering to hurting and broken people in the community. Today's society has seen more than its fair share of hurtful behaviors that weigh people down. The odds of a

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person left to deal with a dysfunctional past have increased enormously. Through ‘healing evangelism’ East Hill has sought to touch people whose lives have been shattered, whether through divorce, drugs, abuse, addictions, whatever the issue might be, and attempting to meet those needs with the understanding that ultimately Christ is the answer. The church has always endeavored to be a safe and healing place for those are hurting. As a result of this focus on healing ministry, the church has attracted many people seeking wholeness for the hurting and broken areas of their lives but it has also attracted many “whole” people who appreciate East Hill’s focus.

Finally, East Hill’s weekend worship services have proven to be tremendously attractive to unchurched people. One new Christian summarized his response to the preaching of Senior Pastor, Ted Roberts, “I think the main reason we keep coming to East Hill is the way the messages are delivered. When I did go to church as a kid the messages were all ‘fire and brimstone’ and that was not for me. But here they are put in a format I can understand. Every sermon I have ever heard here had something I needed to know.” Gale remarks, “Pastor Ted has a tremendous way of making the presentation of the gospel connect so beautifully with his applicational messages. He closes his messages with an opportunity to come to Christ that’s very gentle and heart-felt.” Each month well over 100 people have been receiving Christ as their Savior. Trained prayer team members are available at the front of the worship center after each of the four weekend worship services to help people pray to receive Christ or to pray with them for other needs.

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

Visitors are welcomed to worship services by two groups of greeters. First, ushers are stationed at the sanctuary doors. Pastoral staff and lay leaders are the second group of greeters who circulate among the people. Helpers are also stationed at an information center, book and tape booth and a small group “Vital Connections” center. Senior Pastor Ted Roberts acknowledges each visitor by sending a personal letter of greeting. Finally, if the visitor submits a prayer request on the communication card, a telecare team member follows-up to pray for that request.



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“Alpha” is the primary new believer’s follow-up. Lesson topics include: Who is Jesus? Why and How Do I Pray? How Does God Guide Us? and How Can I Resist Evil? Alpha is an international ministry that started in England and is often used to target unchurched people. However, at East Hill they have not used it to target the unchurched, rather, they have primarily used Alpha for following up on converts that have responded from within the ministries of the church. The course uses a weekly format that combines video lectures with small group discussion over approximately three months with the addition of a weekend retreat. Two to three hundred people each year go through the Alpha course. However, there are two or three class options for new believers in addition to Alpha including the class “Learning to Walk With Jesus.”

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

East Hill doesn’t want people to just come and sit in the large worship gatherings; they want them to get connected. “We’ve made a commitment to get 80% of our church into relationships in the next 5 years,” declares Gale. “So, it is communicated at every point. Whether sermon illustrations, greeting people in the foyer or going for information at the counter—everyone throughout the congregation knows that is one of our main focuses. If there is someone who isn’t connected in some way, there’s an effort made to see that they are—whether by an usher or the senior pastor.”



One of the ways that has been most effective at connecting people is through the Restoration ministry. It is a two year plan starting with a class called, “Wounded by Shame, Healed by Grace” which deals with the dysfunctional issues of families and their past. From there they use John Townsend’s “Boundaries and Safe People.” The third class is called “Love is a Choice.” In each class there is about 30 minutes of teaching using videos before breaking into small groups. Those groups stay consistent throughout the 12-13 week course. After that a participant typically moves to another class where

they meet additional new friends. These classes have proven to be real stepping stones for complete healing and building friendships. Gale adds, "If we can get people into that process they will grow."

Another point of connection is through Life Line Groups. These are small groups that help people connect in relationships of care and support. These groups meet at various times in homes throughout Gresham, Portland and Vancouver and cover biblical topics of interest to each group.

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

East Hill is vitally concerned with the salvation, healing and spiritual growth of their members. There are four characteristics of someone who has been fully assimilated into the life of East Hill Church. First, they are on a path toward personal healing. Second, they are related to others in a small group. Third, they are working on developing or building a strong family. Finally, they are serving in ministry through one or two areas.

East Hill Church provides growth opportunities for people at all levels of spiritual development. The Alpha course represents entry-level discipleship. TAPESTRY Magazine, East Hill's monthly publication, lists the spiritual growth, healing and need meeting classes offered through the church. Gale comments, "Our adult education department is committed to providing a plethora of training to help people grow in their faith as well as grow toward ministry."

East Hill also provides an Adult Education Fundamental Track with three classes. These core classes are designed to help those seeking involvement in ministry at East Hill and are a basic requirement to working in most areas of ministry in the church. East Hill 101 - Membership Class, is a one-session class designed to teach the history, vision and mission of East Hill. It also presents principles of tithing, information on membership and an overview of ministry opportunities. East Hill 201 - Skills for Spiritual Maturity, is a four-week class designed to help people discover their personality and giftedness, teach how to communicate to help others and present opportunities to connect with a ministry. East Hill 301 - Pursuing Lifestyle Ministry, is a four-week class that teaches how cooperation with the Holy Spirit will lead a person from woundedness to effective discipleship. Participants learn about the gifts of the Spirit and how to be an effective witness of the grace and love of Jesus Christ. In this class they have the opportunity to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and share their testimony with another person.



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In addition to these offerings the church also has a two-year Bible College called East Hill Institute of Ministry that offers an Associate in Pastoral Ministry Degree. The program has been approved by the State of Oregon for degree authorization and is certified by the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Course offerings include Bible survey classes, systematic theology, biblical counseling, preaching, Christian education, worship, evangelism and discipleship. There are two primary programs of study for ministerial preparation, pastoral ministry emphasis and youth ministry emphasis. However, the Institute is also designed to provide individual growth for students who want to take selected courses without pursuing a degree.

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

Each ministry recruits those they need. Through the years one-on-one recruiting has always been the most effective. However, twice a year the church hosts a Vital Connections Festival on a Sunday where ministries are on display and recruit. Each ministry decorates a table and tries to convince members to serve in their area.



Newcomers are encouraged to consider serving in non-leadership areas of the church within about six months. Areas where they could serve quickly might be the nursery or as a greeter or in areas where it doesn't take a lot of knowledge. But before people can take on leadership involvement they must become church members, know their spiritual gifts and have taken the DiSC behavior profile by completing the East Hill 301 course. Also, a form called “Know Those Who Labor Among You” is sent around to the staff and any appropriate screening is done before a person is placed in ministry leadership. Training requirements vary for each ministry but the most common and successful method is on-the-job training.

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Map/ Photos:



