

Greater Portland Bible Church



Executive Pastor, Dennis Blevins

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?

The primary reason that unchurched people are attracted to Greater Portland Bible Church is the relationships that their members have with people in the community. Executive pastor, Dennis Blevins illustrates, “We have one group that has primary relationships with about 150 Hawaiians. So we are seeing a large number of unchurched Hawaiians getting into small groups, investigate the Bible and showing up at church on Sundays.” Others are coming because of their MOPS groups, which is for Mothers Of Preschoolers. Then out of those MOPS groups, where they have wonderful relationships, they are invited to come into groups where they can investigate the Bible. “Out of five new women in MOPS three of them are seekers,” states Blevins. “I think by providing for appropriate areas of need and along with the relationships built in both business and schools, we’re attracting people.”



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

Greater Portland Bible uses a two-part evangelism strategy that employs “come to us” methods as well as “go to” methods. They set up a series of events through the year that are designed to help the members have something to invite their friends to outside of just normal church services and other church activities. One example of a “come to” event is a dinner theater that attracted over 600 people. Their “go to” strategy includes the ultimate goal of having eleven evangelistic outreach groups located off campus.



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

At Greater Portland Bible, when people walk in the door, whether they are a newcomer or have been here for many years, they are usually greeted by up to six people before they are seated. On Saturday night, worshippers enjoy a more contemporary upbeat worship music. On Sunday morning, they enjoy a very warm, lively, yet worshipful style along with baby dedications, baptism and a variety of other things. Ultimately, in a very creative way, the people never know what’s going to happen on a Sunday morning. The worship services are not predictable, they are always a little different.

The church is structured to provide welcome and follow-up for guests as well as care for members. Blevins explains, “Our church is divided into eight ‘flocks.’ There are three children’s ‘flocks,’ two youth ‘flocks,’ and three adult “flocks.” The adult flocks are young flock, middle flock and the more mature flock. These “flocks” provide an easy identity group for members and newcomers of every age and stage of life at Greater Portland Bible.

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

One way that the church connects with newcomers is through the Discover Greater Portland Bible Class, which is offered every quarter, usually after a major event.

The class is always offered on Sunday mornings. Newcomers come to understand the history of the church, the vision of the church and the place of a disciple in the church. The class also helps them find out where they are in the four-stage process of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. “We tell them how the church can serve them and give them a response card where they can indicate which of the ministries they are interested in,” states Blevins. “We then interview those who choose to become members and make sure that they enter our ministry structures—weekend worship services, Adult Bible Fellowships and small groups.”

“If a person attends the Discover Greater Portland Bible Class and indicates that they want to become a member, what we try to help them understand is that they are asking us to provide oversight and leadership in their life. That means that they are submitting to the authority that this church has, therefore, we will take responsibility to make sure they are taken care of as a member,” explains Blevins. What you are saying when become a member is, ‘I want to go where this church is going, I want to grow in my relationship to Christ, and I am going to be involved in the structures of the church to help me do that.’”

One new member stated it this way; “I was blown away by the fact that they expected me to know the Bible. Whereas, the attitude I observed while growing up in a mainline church was that there is one guy who is expected to know the Bible and he’s supposed to tell us everything. There was no challenge other than the requirement of going on Sundays. But at Greater Portland it was challenging, it was interesting and at the foundation of it all was this one book, the Bible, not some other requirements that you had to go through. I felt free to choose to go to Greater Portland or any other church, their main concern was my relationship with God.”

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

When newcomers visit Greater Portland Bible they are connected to one of the “flock” pastors whom then initiates follow-up using a “shepherding profile.” If the new person is a seeker or a new Christian, what they call a “Come and See” person, then the pastor works through the first steps of Christianity with them or delegates that to one of his trained leaders. They make sure that the person is invited to any one of the church’s growth environments. He connects with them and makes sure that they have understood the spiritual decisions they have made. He takes responsibility for their spiritual feeding.

As a new Christian moves along and begins to demonstrate the qualities of a disciple they are invited to a higher commitment level—what is called the “Follow Me” stage. They continue to work with them in their growth process using a different curriculum for up to a year and a half. Blevins states, “As they continue to grow, we then move them into the ‘Be with Me’ stage where they begin to take on ministry leadership responsibilities.” Even at this stage they continue in an ongoing accountability group which helps them continue to grow.

Someone who has been fully assimilated into the life of Greater Portland Bible will demonstrate faithfulness a number of commitments. First, they would be attending an Adult Bible Fellowship where they take a role in meeting others in the class and

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building relationships. You would also see a whole-hearted worshiper, you'd see a faithful witness, you'd see an equipped minister, and you'd see a caring community member. You'd see someone who is engaged in a small group during the week where he or she is working through a curriculum of discipling and study that is helping him or her deepen daily disciplines and his or her walk with God. You'd also see him or her beginning to discover how God has gifted them to be all that He wants them to be.

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

Greater Portland Bible is concerned about helping members find a meaningful place of ministry within the church but their first concern is that members be grounded spiritually. Finding a place of ministry is based on where a person is in the disciple making phases. "If they are in the 'Come and See' phase we don't encourage them to get involved in any ministry," comments Blevins. "We mainly see them as needing to be ministered to, cared for, fed and encouraged. We seek to get them involved in a small group and an Adult Bible Fellowship. If they are in the 'Follow Me' phase, in the early stages we don't involve them in any kind of ministry. We are mainly building them and equipping them." However, in the latter stages of "Follow Me" and definitely in the "Be with Me" stage they begin to ask them to be apprentices, to learn the skills of leading an evangelistic group or leading a basic accountability group or being an outreach coordinator or an assimilation coordinator or a teacher--depending on how they are gifted. At this stage of spiritual growth, they may also move into ministry in the Jr. High or High school, or even the children's ministry. At Greater Portland Bible they believe that ministry leaders will reproduce what they are, therefore, they invest heavily in the spiritual development of everyone, hoping that one day they will take up leadership and personal ministry within the church.

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Map/ Photos:



Assimilation Study - Participant Information (Fall 2000)

Church Name Greater Portland Bible Church Region SW Portland
Street Address 2374 SW Vermont
City Portland State OR Zip Code _____
Phone 503-452-9375

1. Denomination Independent
2. Date church was founded December 1977
3. Founding Senior Pastor Lynn Kent Years in this church 23
4. Current Senior Pastor Lynn Kent Years in this church 23
5. Average Weekend Worship attendance 1130
6. Average number of visitors each Sunday 6
7. Current Membership _____
 - Adults 791
 - Youth 213
 - Children 296
8. Number of conversions during the past 12 months 120
9. Number of new members received during the past 12 months 32
 - Number from transfer (previously active in another church) 0
 - Number from conversion (or with no previous church affiliation) 7
10. Christian Education Classes
 - # of Adult Classes 10 Weekly attendance 190
 - # of Youth Classes 3 Weekly attendance 190
 - # of Children Classes 9 Weekly attendance 120
11. Small Groups/Cells
 - # of Adult Groups 25 Weekly attendance 250
 - # of Youth Groups 13 Weekly attendance 100
 - # of Children Groups _____ Weekly attendance _____
12. Large groups meeting midweek
 - Youth Ministry _____ Weekly attendance 100
 - Children Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
 - Women's Ministry Women Alive Weekly attendance 80
 - Men's Ministry Prayer Force Weekly attendance 40
 - Other Ministry Worship Weekly attendance 80
 - Other Ministry _____ Weekly attendance _____
13. Number of people with an identifiable ministry 540 Or approximate % 54%
14. Number of core lay leaders 120 Number of paid pastoral/ministry staff 12
15. Number of churches planted by the church 0
16. Describe your congregation's socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural distinctions:
 - White, upper middle class