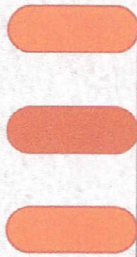


COMMUNITIES FIRST ASSOCIATION



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In all Your Giving.....Give Thanks

A reason to give thanks.....

The Fuel That Ignites

By: Jay Van Groningen
Executive Director

The fuel that ignites and keeps Communities First Association (CFA) alive is a rich mixture of three kinds of fuel.

1. The growing number of regional leaders who are training and coaching community leaders in the principles and practices of Christian Community Development are the primary fuel. It is their desire to affiliate, to learn from one another, to continue their own training as professionals that create the demand for the Communities First Association. In the last quarter three new Intermediary partners have been added to the association. And at this writing four more have begun preparing for CFA membership. A pretty rigorous job on the front end of vetting members.
2. A second fuel source is the growing discontent of Christian and church leaders in the institutionalization and inward focus of many congregations. Churches and Christian leaders in growing numbers want to know how to better engage in the transformation of their communities. They want a "certified" coach to rely on. CFA is becoming a significant "turn-to" to association for "certified" coaches. That became especially evident at the recent CCDA conference where CFA trainers led and participated in a Community Transformation track of workshops (with World Vision USA). CFA trainers had packed rooms and people standing in the hallways wanting to learn more.

What was even more surprising to us, were the number of requests for follow-up coaching from all around the country. This on top of a number of prospective coaches who want CFA "certification".

3. The third fuel is a spiritual fuel: It is the compelling call of the scriptures to make "all things new", to reconcile "all things" to God. God is an abundant God who placed into his world at creation all that is necessary for its well-being. God invites us to help people grow into their creative potential and capacities to work together and to bring in this life, signs of the life to come. There are a growing number of Christians and Churches who want to impact poverty in their communities. They want to impact poverty in ways that diminish it, eliminate it by building on the capacities and gifts of the poor, by developing indigenous leaders, and by changing the systems that perpetuate poverty. They want Christians and churches to bring the values of the kingdom to the conversations and dreams about community renewal, and community development. This is a spiritual fuel that keeps CFA members and a growing number of Christian leaders in this work.

CFA really needs your prayers and financial support. We are honestly overwhelmed at the moment by the growth opportunities and requests for CFA services. I have never been more excited nor closer to being overwhelmed. Will you join your prayers with mine for CFA capacity and ability to respond to the growing demands for our coaching?

Connecting Community



Reaching Out-Intentionally and Purposefully

It was among the Church's first acts of compassion more than 2,000 years ago—providing food for hungry families. But yet, for Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church, it was being done in a brand new way, intentionally and purposefully. Using an “action plan” that was developed with the help of Volunteers In Service, a CFA member, Plymouth Heights CRC saw the distribution of food as a “first step” towards starting significant relationships in their neighborhood. The church believes that by cultivating these relationships they can invite others to share in a new/renewed life with God.



“We know that God has placed our church in this neighborhood for specific reasons and to do specific things,” said Tom VanWingerden, a member of the church’s Missional Action Team, the team that developed the action plan.

“They did real well with events and programs,” Squires said, *“but they were limited in their relational engagement. They identified their biggest challenge as relationship in mission, but they also understood that they needed to begin with a serving opportunity.”*

The church, in partnership with Feeding America, has recently hosted two distribution events in their parking lot on Saturday mornings. While the first one drew 36 families, the second—saw 50 families receive fresh fruits, vegetables, baked goods, and juice. Families were eventually engaged around tables with volunteers who came out to help.

Even though we want to get to know them just a little bit better, and have them know us better, it’s not an ‘us and them’ kind of thing. We’re all in this together.”

Squires said the church is learning to understand what it means to be a good neighbor, working towards being a great neighbor.

“They’ve identified that it involves ‘boundary-crossing’ ministry. It means they need to be with people who are different and they need to cultivate friendships in the neighborhood.”

Squires also sees two significant things happening through this work. *“They understand that beyond providing a service, they can build relationships, learn from those who are being served, and eventually have those folks serving as well.”*

Members of the Association



Jay Van Groningen, CFA
(Association President & Eastern Regional Officer)

George Montoya, CFA
(Treasurer & Western Regional Officer)

Carlos Avrard, Muskegon, MI
Community Encompass

Andy Batten, Cleveland, OH
Lighthouse, Inc.

Delia Caderno, Miami/FL Communities
Partnership for Community Transformation (P4CT)

Rick Droog, Farmbelt (IA, MN, SD, NE)
Siouxland Diaconal Conference

Bethany Dudley, CFA
Chicagoland, Indiana & Wisconsin

Monika Grasley, Central Valley of California
LifeLine Community Development Corporation of Merced County

Paul Green, Chattanooga, TN
Hope for the Inner City

Terri Larson, Southern CA
Kingdom Causes

Jeff Littlejohn, WA, OR, AK, MT
Imagine NW!

Tronn Moller, AL, LA, MS
Faith & Community Development Institute

Jose Rayas, El Paso, TX
Valley Ridge Community Church

Stan Rowland, Phoenix and Tucson, AZ
LifeWind International

Wayne Squires and Jim Schepers, West MI
Volunteers in Service (VIS)

Al Santino, North East region
Northeast Community Transformation

John Teeling, West MI
Charlotte Dreams Out Loud

Judy Van Dyke, Charlotte, NC
Good Samaritan Ministries

An Immigrant's Pathway of Hope

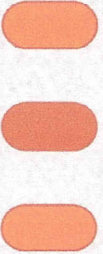
At age 22, I--Lisbel Rodriguez--have a reason to give thanks. I am beginning to believe that dreams really do come true, especially in America.



I first came to America from the Dominican Republic in 1994 to get treatments for burns I suffered at age six. It was arranged for me to come to the US to live with a host family while I received treatment. With the blessings of my family, I decided to stay in the US, unaware at the time, I was about to face a harsh reality--that this great land, the United States of America, still suffers from a "broken" immigration system. Denied a Student Visa from the US Immigration office, I learned about the Community First Association member, the Northeast Community Transformation, and their partnership with a local law firm.

My case was reviewed and it was determined that the denial of my Student Visa was issued without a valid reason. Though it was a long process, I didn't give up hope, because I believed that God wanted me here in the US to fulfill my dreams. I also believed that God did not want it to be easy. Sometimes if it happens too quick, you may not value it.

My story is just one example of how a Communities First Association partner used their training and resources to help create hope and justice for those, like me, who just want to live peaceably and to create a better life.



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\$200+	3

A Story of Gratitude.....

We have heard it said many times, "If you can read this, thank a teacher!" That's exactly what they did at the Hamilton Middle School in Southern California.

One neighborhood, lead by Kingdom Causes, a CFA member partner, formed their very first church/school partnership. It was a great witness to the city leaders who attended the meeting to see the Church come along side the school for the success of the students.



One of their first orders of business was to thank the teachers who had remained so dedicated to their positions. Teachers who were prepared to give more than just their time to see that students were given a quality educational experience.

On Teacher Appreciation Day many groups came together to show just how special teachers are to the Hamilton community. The teachers were joyful when they walked into a room decorated with flowers and banners. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism Church provided a wonderful continental breakfast and stayed to visit and get to know the teachers that served in their community. Even the students themselves took part in planning the celebration.

Some may consider this a small gesture, but not the teachers at Hamilton Middle School. They felt that-- "it's wonderful to know that you are appreciated in the community!"

Connecting Community. Harvesting Hope.



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Ten Paradigm Shifts Toward Community

Transformation (excerpt)

By Eric Swanson

A small cloud is on the horizon. The winds of change are beginning to gather strength and with certainty a storm is coming...change is coming.

- 1) **From building walls to building bridges.** *“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14).*
- 2) **From measuring attendance to measuring impact.** *“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast...mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough” (Matthew 13:33).*
- 3) **From encouraging the saints to attend the service to equipping the saints for works of service.** *“It is (God) who gave some to be...pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service...” (Ephesians 4:11,12)*
- 4) **From “serve us” to service**—from inward to outward focus. *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give...” (Mark 10:45).*
- 5) **From duplication of human services and ministries to partnering with existing services and ministries.** *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work” (Ecclesiastes 4:9).*
- 6) **From fellowship to functional unity.** In Philippians 2:2 Paul implored, *“...make my joy complete by being of the same, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”*

- 7) **From condemning the city to blessing the city and praying for it.** Jeremiah 29:7 begins by saying; *“This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem...to those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper”*
- 8) **From being a minister in a congregation to being a minister in a parish.** *“As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it...” (Luke 19:41).*
- 9) **From anecdote and speculation to valid information.** Two pieces of information changed the course of Nehemiah’s life that resulted in the transformation of a community. These two pieces of accurate information were catalytic to Nehemiah’s prayers and plans to restore a broken wall and a broken people. His burden to transform the city came from accurate information.
- 10) **From teacher to learner.** *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak...” (James 1:19).*

Where do we go from here?
What are the next steps for you?

Author: **Eric Swanson** is a Leadership Community Director for Leadership Network.