

UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR THOSE WISHING TO BUILD JESUS-BRAND COMMUNITIES

1. Make a long-term commitment to a local community. Every time we move, we uproot, and that has consequences for community. Think in terms of years and decades when it comes to community, not months. If you've got a four-month plan to increase community in the church, you are not thinking straight.

2. Express gratitude for the gift of community whenever it's possible. Follow the model of Paul, who was constantly opening and closing his letters with thanksgiving for the communities to which he was writing. Thanksgiving is like sun on the soul.

3. Emphasize whole-life, holistic small groups. More and more we are encouraging small groups to have meals together. Sitting around a table having a meal with others is a sign of God's kingdom. It's the banquet feast of the kingdom made flesh. Communion is another great thing to encourage a small group to celebrate together. Have them read N.T. Wright's book, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*. Some wonderful things happen in that context. Promote care traditions in your small groups, things like hospital visits, meals for families of new babies, help moving, and so on.

4. Remember that your ministry to the poor isn't just throwing resources at poor people; it's building community with them. We have a single moms' ministry that is all about enhancing the experience of community for single moms and their kids, and it's powerful.

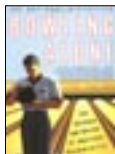
5. Develop a Biblical theology of community. Just like we continue to need to take our worldview blinders of rationalism off so we can embrace the supernatural, we need to take our worldview blinders of *individualism* off when we are reading the Bible. This is one of your primary tasks if you are teaching the Bible. Help people take those blinders off. Do a series on "Redeemed Community in Genesis". It's amazing how that's a major theme. Or a series on the healing ministry of Jesus—and how the healings restored people to *community*.

6. Build on the social capital strengths of women. Women are generally better at this than men, and it is important for women to be involved in leadership for where the church is headed.

7. Spin technology to build social capital. This is one of Robert Putnam's recommendations. The church should be on the forefront of spinning technology to enhance, not reduce, social capital. Use group lists for small groups so they can keep in touch, send out prayer SOS emails, etc. Our church has a video game night once a month at the church, where they link up all the computers and go after each other virtually. It brings out a bunch of men who would never otherwise venture into this context. Our associate pastor works at building connections between those guys, drawing them in as resources for the single-parent families with their computer needs.

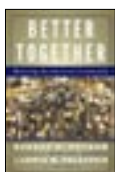
—Ken Wilson

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:



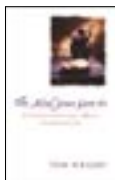
Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community

By Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2001)



Better Together: Restoring the American Community

By Robert Putnam (Simon & Schuster, 2003)



The Meal Jesus Gave Us: Understanding Holy Communion

By N. T. Wright (Westminster John Knox, 2003)



Life Together

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer