

OUTREACH

Atlanta Ablaze: Where We Have Come From

By Rev. Stephen Wiggins

When I first arrived in Atlanta in the position of Missionary, it was clear to me that a lot of work needed to be accomplished.

In the Atlanta South Circuit — where I was serving at that time — a lot of transitioning was happening with the congregations, with no clear combined plan for growth, development and outreach. Several of the congregations were also vacant.

The first year, I spent my time working with the pastors of the Atlanta South Circuit in the hopes of pulling them together to develop a plan of outreach. That first effort did not get very far because of some of the challenges many of the pastors were dealing with in their congregations, the lack motivation amongst some of the congregations for outreach and the resistance and/or apprehension from still other congregational members to try something different.

After establishing a Circuit Outreach Council, we met

approximately three times and the groups ceased to exist. It was one of those efforts where everyone thought it was a good idea, but nobody had the time to actually meet and move forward with the idea.

The second effort has been much more successful (praise

visions for ministry possibilities and to lead congregations into strategic planning for moving from maintenance to being actively involved in outreach and advancing the kingdom.

Five of the twelve congregations of the circuit have completed their Ablaze

As a part of their mission blueprint, the Atlanta South congregations have set as goals to start 41 new congregations, strengthen the 12 present congregations, send 45 new workers into the harvest fields and touch 650,000 souls by sharing the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ through an 'Ablaze touch.' The plan is to accomplish all this by the year 2017.

Along with setting these goals, I'm working to lead these congregations in developing and implementing a funding strategy to help empower the work. A part of this effort is to help encourage every member of our congregations to understand that every dollar counts; and, while there is a shortage in the world's economy, God has an abundance of resources available through his people! He just calls us to be faithful stewards of our resources.

I'm happy to say that several churches are now moving forward in the new church development process. Prince of Peace-Douglasville has worked

toward the launching of the Villa Rica Ablaze Mission. Lord of Life-Stockbridge is studying the launching of a second location near the Hampton, GA, area. Christ Lutheran-East Point is very active now in launching its second location church plant in Riverdale.

Also several congregations — Peace Lutheran-Decatur, St. Mark-Tucker, Incarnate Word-Tucker, Oak Road-Lilburn — are considering a partnership and studying the possibility of launching a preaching station in the Stone Mountain area.

Three new students are waiting for the next Concordia House of Studies class to start: two will be studying to become a Director of Christian Education and the other a Lay Minister.

Please pray for all of the work going forth, the partnerships which still need to be developed, the funding to help the work get done and the faithfulness of the congregations and individuals whom God has chosen to walk by faith and not by sight! To God be the Glory! □

Atlanta South Circuit Goals by 2017

- **Start 41 new congregations**
- **Strengthen the 12 present congregations**
- **Send 45 new workers into the harvest fields**
- **Touch 650,000 souls by sharing the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ through an 'Ablaze touch.'**

be to God!). Now each congregation of the Atlanta South Circuit has developed Ablaze Goals and each has completed the beginning stages of developing their Mission blueprint. These mission blueprints are designed to help create new

Covenant Congregation Orientations, and at least four others have made a decision to participate in the Transforming Congregations Network workshop. This is a far cry from two years ago when there was no motivation to move forward.

Faith Sharing Accidentally

By Omar Dittmer, Orlando

Ablaze Faith Sharing Events often happen accidentally; they crop out of everyday conversations and situations. The workplace is often fertile ground for such conversations to occur.

It should be no surprise that our gospel laced words are used by God the Holy Spirit to testify of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the express purpose of creating faith in the heart of the hearer. Our Lord calls us to "always be prepared to give an account of the hope that is within us." (1 Peter 3:15b) Many of us are shy about sharing our faith, wondering about how or when.

I hope that you will read the following story of how a United States Census worker who became an instrument of God while on the job for Uncle Sam.

How 2010 Census Work Became a Spiritual Journey

It began as an opportunity to make extra money and get some exercise in the sunshine of the Florida springtime. But what it became was an odyssey of spiritual growth for me and the opportunity for unnumbered people to hear the "gospel."

I took a test to work for the 2010 Census and was accepted as a lister, which meant canvassing census blocks to list every address within that block where people lived or could live. The work began with a training

session on how to enter addresses into a HHC (hand held computer). The crew was made up of 20 people and two leaders. All were strangers to each other, but the challenge of the job and the personality of the leaders helped to mold the group into a cooperative unit rather quickly. The people were racially diverse with very different backgrounds. Conversations at break and lunch times made it clear that the majority were not Christian.

The Lord gave me an immediate opportunity to share the hope I have in Jesus. At an early training session because of a "car problem" I asked for a ride home. The woman who volunteered to give me a ride home had lost a son by suicide some time ago. I shared some simple words of comfort of God's grace and planned to give her a "Care Note" from the rack in church the following Monday. She did not return on Monday and the Care Note remained in my census bag.

The training guidelines for a "lister" were to enter the exact address of each living quarters and tie it to a "map spot" from the GPS satellite. Also, we were to knock on each door to tell them of our purpose. Initially it was easy for me to ignore the "knock on the door." After all, it was really not needed for verifying an address ---and I was the child who sat at his mother's feet at Ladies Aid meetings rather than talking to and playing with strangers.

So the first days on the job were done efficiently and well as far as completing the verification of addresses, but weak on talking to residents. At a follow-up meeting our crew leader emphasized that we were to knock on "every" door.

After a few more days I began to be more aware that

angel ornament encouraged a wish for God's blessings on the day's activities. During the workday, those at home were often elderly, ill or there because of a problem. When the person's situation was clear, a brief word of spiritual encouragement was received with appreciation. In a few cases a

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every stop was unique. Not only the address and the nature of the building were unique, but especially the people who answered the knock or doorbell. All were curious about my presence, a few were irritated but most were open to a one- or two- minute conversation.

It was enough time to establish a friendly spirit and a positive exchange. After the brief explanation that was required, I found that a simple remark about the house or the person opened the way for the sharing of good wishes for each other.

More often than I ever would have imagined possible, the conversation could include a spiritual thought. When there was a Christian symbol in view, a reference to the cross, the "He is Risen" bumper sticker or

simple prayer seemed appropriate and was said after asking permission for it.

The Lord's hand was especially evident in one stop. I could tell that the woman who answered the door had been crying. With a little encouragement, she told of her husband's death a few days before. That morning was the first time she had come back home since he died, having stayed with other family members. She had stopped for a few minutes to pick up some personal items. That was the time when I came by. She had not had any contact from a pastor. Do you remember the "Care Note" I mentioned earlier? It was about God's help in time of a death! It was still in my census bag from a month before. Being able to share that message with her brought some

peace. We parted with a brief prayer and a hug.

I spent the last days of my census work with a much different attitude than I started. As I approached each door, I eagerly anticipated the possibility of having a friendly and positive exchange with a "stranger."

During the six-week assignment there were a number of group meetings with the leaders to update and correct the process. These were spirited sessions with opportunity to share experiences and feelings. Also, they were conducted informally around outdoor tables at Panera's Cafe.

One special "faith" discussion has led to an e-mail dialogue. Adriana is what I would call a product of the "post modern" generation of thinkers. An especially pointed conversation led me to suggest a reading of the book *The Shack*. I will give her the book and plan to discuss it later. It may be a great opportunity to talk about the heart of the gospel.

So my six-week odyssey of 2010 pre-census work resulted in listing more than 2000 addresses to receive the census mailing next year. But more importantly for me was the joy of spiritual growth in gospel inspired conversation with literally hundreds of strangers.

If you or your congregation are eager to be better prepared to share the gospel of Jesus Christ please contact Pastor Doug Kalllesen at 407.857.5556 ext. 2 or dkallesen@flga-lcms.org. □