

“Aha Moment”

The journey and process of starting a new church often feels like a maze. I know the end destination but there is no clear or easy way to get there. Most days I wonder if we at Second Chance are making a difference and if so, how do we keep moving forward to get the prize at the end of the maze. While many of my colleagues are celebrating church anniversaries and the moments of clarity when their congregation finally gets “it”, I have to search carefully for those moments that make it all make sense.

Recently I met with one of my clergy mentors and friends Mark at a time when things were moving very slowly for us as a church. Although we have an amazing launch team and a plan of what we want to happen, everything was put on hold as doors kept closing for funding sources, using space and moving into the next phase. Mark then asked me a really simple question, one he had asked of me several times; why are you starting a new church. This time my answer was different. It didn't have nice theological language or a commitment to a denomination. My answer was rooted in my own story of I found by finding Jesus. I knew what it was like to have nothing and be lost. I knew what it was like to have so many questions about Church, faith and God but no place to ask it that didn't tell me because the Bible said so. I knew what it was like to struggle and not care. As simple as the answer was, it was all because I had a relationship and connection to the one we call the Christ. I want others to know that same kind of love and grace and safe place. I want others to have a second chance regardless of how many tattoos they have or who they love. And sadly, too many churches don't embody this kind of gospel. This is why I am starting a new church.

We sat in silence for a moment, me feeling like it was the dumbest answer I had ever given. And then Mark said it was the best sales pitch I've ever given. This is what has to become the story I tell as I look for new disciples and form new relationships. It took me being ready to quit to be able to finally tell people why I was starting a new church. Yes there are still challenges, and no I don't have the answers or know how to get out this new church maze. But I at least have clarity over why I do what I do and a few people that believe in me.

-Rev. Trayce Stewart

Second Chance Christian Church

Steeple and Street Fairs: Defying Expectations

For the past two years we have been taking part in Westerville's street fairs, known as Fourth Fridays. On the fourth Friday of the month from May through September the Uptown section of the city (calling it downtown is a grave offense) is invaded. Community groups, businesses, and entertainers take over to setup booths and displays. The first year was our "Billboard Year." We had just arrived and didn't have a lot to show off, but we wanted to get our name and faces out into the community. This seemed like a great way to do it. That summer we found ourselves competing for attention amongst tap dancers and free snow cones, cupcake making stations and robots throwing frisbees, live musicians and the allure of fresh made donuts.

This year we committed to really get people involved and excited about church, not just snow cones. We worked to get a better location, make bigger and more colorful displays...we even took another group's suggestion to do a raffle. At first, we pretty much got the same reaction as the year before. Lots of people slowed down to look, but not many people wanted to really engage. The third month in, we upped the anti. Inviting the Why Marriage Matters campaign to share our tent, we hoped that having an established group with us would lend credibility. We got a lot more traffic, and some sideways glances, but still felt like we weren't connecting.

Then came July. Debbie got home late from work, the boys were screaming about something (to be honest it could have been anything with two under two), and the car wasn't even packed with our supplies. This led to...scrambled legs. We grabbed our displays. No time to dig out our camp chairs, Debbie yanked the play rug off of the living room floor, and off we went. We sat under the canopy tent (on the play rug from the living room) with our signs and displays, and we shared our family dinner.

It was single handedly the best response we'd received! People actually talked to us! Kids played, mothers fed their babies, people even asked where we got our rugs. We actually shared life (if but for a few minutes) with other people in our community. And after much reflection on why the barrier finally broke down, we realized it was because we had defied their expectations.

We'd spent so much time and energy trying to look "as good as" the other booths, we forgot to cherish what makes us different. We meet a different need for different people, and that inevitably meant we would look different. People were naturally attracted to what we were doing because it resonated with their own lives. It then became a pleasant surprise to discover we were a church. The amount of disbelief we saw showed that we had clearly defied their expectations about what church looks and feels like. Individuals who would normally be wary, found themselves saying...I could go to this kind of church. And some of them have, in fact, started coming!

Now, instead of being intimidated when people ask, "Where do you meet?" and we don't have a specific address; we get excited! We say, "Everywhere! Because God is everywhere! We worship in our home on Sundays. We study in a pub on Thursdays. We gather in the coffee shop on Wednesdays. And we will pray anywhere." The truth is, whether you are worshiping under a steeple or at the street fair, God is there defying our expectations.

-Rev. Debbie Saxe

Disciples Gathering

A-Ha

Recently, The Free Store was really slow. Since we opened in 2014, we have been consistently busy. While I am glad we are serving so many, the additional people mean not as much one on one relationship building time for me. God wanted it this way that day, I know.

It was cold and the few of us who were there were huddled around the fireplace. I began talking with a person I have now known for several years through The Free Store. Her teenage daughter and I have a special bond. She then began sharing all the struggles her daughter has had over the last couple of years. While I knew she struggled, I did not know how severe the problem was. I learned she had attempted to end her life a couple years back. My heart ached, and my soul was saddened that I could not have been more of a presence to this family during this time. However, I knew they had a church. I just figured that church was taking care of them. I was again saddened to find out that this was not the case either.

She then said that after her daughter had gone through counseling and putting in a whole lot of work in recovering from her trauma, she approached the church and asked to be baptized. To my dismay, they refused. I am not sure exactly why. Perhaps they don't quite understand mental health issues. The young woman was so desperate to end her life years prior because she had been bullied so badly by the "haves" at school. She was told she was not worth much. Then, years later, is that not the same message the church was sending her by refusing her baptism? I was fortunate to have the opportunity to share with the mother how much I value their family and especially their daughter. I offered to baptize her. I will look forward to the opportunity.

My A HA moment happened here...as I try to respect people's privacy and do not want to seem too pushy about my WAYS OF LOVE...I also need to remember that I have to be the one to offer what I know...**That our God is a God of Love and Mercy and Justice and that love is for ALL people.** People need to hear this, because unfortunately they are not told this enough. When people know they are valued and loved, they can handle a lot and get a whole lot more done for God's sake. I have to keep reminding them they are loved. This is simply my job.

-Min. Wendy Taylor

The Delaware Project

Hills to Climb

The first hill: The move

About a year ago I received a call from a Christian woman in Puerto Rico named Maria. Someone in her church, Disciples of Christ in Barranquitas, PR, had told her that there was a Spanish Disciples Church in Lorain and gave her my number. In our conversation, she told me that after much prayer, she had decided to move to Lorain with her two adult children and try to find a better way of life. She said she was told about our Mision Cristiana Discipulos de Cristo. She had some personal issues and wanted to start fresh someplace else and a friend she had in Lorain had encouraged her to make the move. Besides that friend, she had no family here. I told her that Mision Cristiana El Faro would be happy to help her in every way possible.

Second Hill: English Barrier/ Limited Finances

Neither Maria nor her children speak English and had limited savings. However, Maria felt that God was on her side. We have bilingual people in our small group and offered to help. Maria came a month after we spoke. Maria went to church and met our small group. A beautiful, brotherly, Christian bond blossomed immediately. We had already begun a plan of action to help this family because I had already informed them of their coming.

Third hill: A Job

The three of them were staying with the friend and their resources were running low. After a month of job searching, Maria found a job in a sandwich making factory and even though Maria didn't speak English, God's grace was with her and somehow made herself understood. The company soon noticed she was a hard worker with a winning spirit. We as a church continued praying for this family and to help and God was faithful.

Fourth hill: Transportation

Her friend provided transportation to and from work and when she couldn't do it, someone from our group would do it. Maria was praying for a car. Within two months, we were able to give her an old used vehicle that one of our church members didn't need and was donated to her. Now she had transportation and didn't need anyone to drive her back and forth to work.

Fifth hill: A Place of Their Own

Three months later she had enough funds to put a deposit to rent a house. Her son also was able to get a job at the same factory, and her daughter was hired at Wal-Mart. Together they will share expenses. They moved in to an empty house.

Sixth hill: Furnishings

Next hill to climb was getting the things she needed for the house. We were able to provide some funds to purchase a used refrigerator and stove, both in excellent condition. We got both items for \$150. Things started coming to the house, chairs, tables, curtains, mattresses, microwave, dishes; it was unbelievable. God moved the people and the family was taken care of.

A year later, Maria is doing well. She has been very active in our church, working in the same factory, making friends and is in the process of learning English. Because she has been faithful, God has been with her, helping her climb all those and promises to be with her in all other obstacles that will come. This is an example of a woman who believes in a Great and Mighty God and a church getting involved. We at El Faro each day thank God for all the things He is doing and looked forward for what He will continue to do with His church in the new year.

-Pastor Crucita Marrero

Mision Cristiana El Faro

A-Ha

Fringe largely gathers in public spaces and it seemed good and right to know those that, in many ways, make our church possible. It has always been our desire to cultivate relationships with the owners and employees at the places where we meet regularly. We met Cynthia when she became the regular Monday barista at the Short North Coffee House, where we meet on Mondays, almost a year ago. She quickly grew to a place where she remembered us and greeted us personally each week. She especially connected with Seth, they are both a little cynical and sarcastic and got on well.

Cynthia would share parts of her work and personal life with us and seemed to feel comfortable and supported by our presence there each Monday. In the course of across-the-counter conversation, Seth and Cynthia went from small talk to discussing her struggles at work and home. It got so that Seth became worried and would ask after Cynthia if she were absent on any given Monday. Cynthia eventually told us that she looks forward to our presence on Mondays. She said we were a calm, calming, warm, friendly presence for her. She knew she could count on us to interact with her in a polite and kind way and that we were not there to take advantage of any kindness she showed us in return.

Seth: Honestly, seeing and interacting with Cynthia every Monday, well, I felt like we were doing something right. She got to smiling as we came through the doors. In the course of things, I went from being polite and friendly-acting, to being genuinely glad to see her and concerned about how her life was going during the rest of the week. As we started on scarves this year it suddenly seemed ridiculous that as many scarves as we were making for strangers (who definitely needed them), we weren't making a scarf for Cynthia. I had learned over the course of time that she had had several struggles to get to a place of relative stability. That place of relative stability was in its self pretty uncertain and tiring. So...I stopped thinking about it and asked her if I could make her a scarf. She said yes, and I asked what color. In case it matters, she wanted purple and a purple scarf of baby alpaca wool is what she received right as the first cold snap of the year came in.

Ellen: I particularly enjoyed watching this relationship flourish. One of my first favorite things about the Ellen & Seth ministry team was the vastly different ways that we communicate with others. Seth can reach very different people than I can, and vice versa. But meeting Cynthia was this aspect of our partnership in practice. Seth commented after one Monday meeting that he found Cynthia very easy to create a relationship with whereas, while I found it easy to be friendly and familiar with her, I didn't think it was easy to get close to her. What a blessing to know that my partner has gifts where I don't! It was always a joy to see Cynthia each Monday and to create some warmth in her life.

-Rev. Seth Stout & Rev. Ellen Huffman

Fringe: a Community Growing