

## **It Worked for Us Awards 2009**

### **Bartlesville District**

The FIGHT Club: Men connect through sports and service

The FIGHT Club is a church men's group. The name may cause raised eyebrows, and the men hope it does. They are fighting to win more men to Christ.

The FIGHT Club (Fellowship in God's House Together) of Claremore-First UMC has both an unusual name and an uncommon strategy for men's ministry.

"Thinking outside the box. That's part of the genius of the whole thing," said Pastor Ray Crawford.

The church wanted to reach younger men and younger families with children. A Saturday breakfast event, held monthly, was drawing a faithful group of United Methodist Men. However, most were retirees.

"If we want to reach men we aren't reaching, we have to do things that we aren't doing," said Rev. Crawford. "So we're doing things that men's groups don't usually do—and it's gotten attention. We are trying to reach out using our culture."

An original group of seven men discussed their varied backgrounds but common enjoyment of traditional men's activities such as sports and fishing. They agreed the club's focus would be on masculine fellowship.

They scored a home run with that idea.

The approach has provided "an adrenaline shot" for men's ministry at the church, according to President Jaimie Willis. "God's really blessed us."

The FIGHT Club currently plans quarterly activities—three fellowship events and a service project. The men have attended college basketball games and played laser tag. They go fishing, skeet shooting, and four-wheeling. About 20 traveled to Dallas for a Promise Keepers event. Military veterans were invited to speak at one fellowship event. "What a healing night

that was," Crawford remarked. "They were telling us things they had never told before. That enabled others to open up. It was a powerful moment."

The men include their children in some events. For example, the club hosted a district fishing tournament where youngsters took part, too.

Church leaders report growing numbers of men and younger families in worship. Claremore-First recently completed construction of a \$4.2 million children's center.

Willis said, "We have an outline for every event. We start with prayer, have a devotional, then do the event, and end in prayer. We want to make sure these guys are fed the Word every time they come. The event is fun, but we make sure we offer Jesus each time we are together. Our common bond is Jesus Christ."

Participation is significant in the service projects, too. The club learned a single-parent family lived in a home without indoor plumbing. About 50 men took part in a major remodeling effort, completing most of the work in one day. They installed a septic tank system, water heater, and plumbed the house. They added two bedrooms and built a deck.

For the family of a seriously ill teenager, the club built a picket fence as a gesture of caring. The gift fulfilled a longtime wish for the mother. The men arranged to do the work while the child was receiving medical care out of town.

Matching black t-shirts help promote the men's group in the community. The front imprint states "The FIGHT Club." The back of the shirt displays a crown of thorns. The design is deliberately simplified to encourage questions from the public. "People will ask about it, and we have a chance to witness. We are a visible witness wherever we go," Willis explained.

Other club leaders are Matt Tucker and Steve Egleston. A DVD presentation is available.

"There is a huge mission field out there," Crawford said. "We look at our church as a mission outpost rather than a chapel. The FIGHT Club is a mission tool, an evangelistic tool, to reach men that the church just has not reached" in other ways.

**Ardmore District– Ada-Asbury UMC**

The WAY,  
Asbury United Methodist Church in Ada had been providing a facility for meetings and graduation activities of the Pontotoc County Drug Court program.

Then a young woman in the program was baptized and joined the church, along with her family.

After discussions with her, members took on a more active role with Drug Court. "I think God had to hit us between the eyes to get our attention to the fact that this was where our ministry should be," a church leader wrote on the award application.

The WAY has evolved into a Tuesday evening program for Drug Court participants and the Southern Oklahoma Addiction Rehabilitation center.

Leaders report numbers have grown to more than 60 adults and more than 20 children.

**Clinton District – Clinton-First UMC**

Free Medical Clinic  
First United Methodist Church established the Clinton Free Medical Clinic in 2001.

The clinic is open on two Thursdays each month. On a rotating basis, local doctors provide their expertise and service. Volunteers fill support roles. On average, the clinic assists more than 150 people each month.

The clinic is housed on the church's campus and relies on donations from the congregation and community to provide medication at no cost to the patients. Gently used medical equipment, such as walkers, is

distributed. The Clinton Community Kitchen is another part of the ministry.

"This ministry causes us to think on a Kingdom level as we show the love of Christ to people we may never see again," stated Jalynn Youngberg on the award application.

**Lawton District – Verden UMC**

Joshua's Closet,  
Joshua's Closet was established by Verden UMC with a Petree Grant from the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation and individual donations.

This clothing ministry was developed to reach out to families in the community that needed extra help to clothe the children in their homes. The project supplies coats, shoes, socks, pants, shirts, and underwear.

"This ministry has opened the eyes of our members to social problems our community has, and allowed us to step out in love from our own four walls," church leaders wrote. "We believe this is a wonderful ministry for any church, but it really works in our small town. The families we help in return are wanting to help other families.

**McAlester District – Stigler UMC**

Backpack Nutrition Program  
The members of Stigler UMC recognized some children in elementary school were hungry on weekends. Teachers in the congregation shared stories of children who regularly asked for something to eat.

After investigating the possibilities and talking to leaders of other churches who were engaged in a weekend nutrition program, Stigler UMC decided on a plan and shared it with the school principal and counselor. Permission letters were sent to the parents of children enrolled in the school free-meals program. The letter asked the ages of other children in the home, so food could be provided for them as well.

On Friday, backpacks that contain nutritious, easy-to-open food

items are sent home with participating children. The backpacks are returned on Monday, to be refilled for the next Friday.

Cost is about \$400 per child for the school year.

### **Enid District – Enid-New Hope UMC**

#### **After-School Tutoring**

In early 2009, the pastor and members of Enid-New Hope church began planning a tutoring program for elementary students. Working with Enid Public School District personnel, they established weekly tutoring and mentoring at the church for fourth-grade students at Garfield Elementary. The principal and two teachers selected 10 students for the opportunity, and parents were contacted for permission and support.

The program consists of academic and social components. The social component focuses on forming mentoring relationships. For the new school year, the same students will be invited to participate as fifth graders.

### **OKC-North District – Edmond-New Covenant UMC**

#### **His Hands Ministry,**

His Hands Ministry is the name of a devoted group of people who meet faithfully each week to pray, write encouraging notes, and work in the sanctuary of New Covenant UMC, Edmond.

The church sponsors an online prayer network. Prayer boxes set up around the church invite people to drop in requests, and a phone prayer ministry tracks requests, too. Specific requests of the pastors are delivered to them. His Hands Ministry manages these prayer avenues.

The requests are taken to the altar each week for prayer by the group, and notes are written in response. His Hands Ministry also replenishes the print prayer resources and attendance supplies in each pew.

The prayer card sent out by His Hands Ministry features art painted by a young member. He offered the

artwork as a thank-you to those who extended love to him.

### **Muskogee District – Morris UMC**

#### **Farmer's Market,**

Two women in the Morris congregation noted the town of 1,500 people did not offer a farmer's market, although many in the community are involved in agriculture. They shared their idea to host one at the church.

Scheduling was one concern.

Restroom facilities for farmers or market customers would only be available if the church was open on Saturday.

The church chose hospitality.

Youngsters from the farm families also were invited to take breaks in the youth room, where there is an air hockey table.

Hosting the market has helped the church members deepen their discipleship by focusing on hospitality to the community, stated Pastor Nathan Mattox. In turn, everyone who steps foot in our parking lot on Saturdays gets to meet some of our members and take a brochure about our church.

### **OKC-South District – Norman-McFarlin UMC**

#### **Gleaning Urban-Style,**

In 2006, the United Methodist Men's group at McFarlin church, Norman, became aware of the national gleaning program led by the Society of Saint Andrew, to help feed the hungry.

The men developed a list of 17 agencies and churches that either provide meals or have a food closet ministry. The men gather leftover produce from fields after commercial harvesting, and they distribute the fresh vegetables and fruits through those groups.

The McFarlin UMMen expanded the project in June 2008, when Bill Chisoe learned unsold produce at a Norman farmer's market was often discarded. He asked those farmers to donate that produce, too.

### **Stillwater District – Perry-First UMC**

Blessings and Comfort Through Stitches,

In June 2007 the First United Methodist Church at Perry began a quilt ministry. A few women met weekly for several hours of community social activity. It was, in effect a revival of the quilting-bee tradition. As the group grew, they presented completed quilts to victims of natural disasters and to military personnel.

Today the ministry has expanded to include missions such as the Circle of Care Boy's Ranch, baptismal quilts for newborns, and prayer quilts for those who are ill. Baptismal quilts are labeled with the name and birth date of the infant.

Before a quilt is given away, it is draped over the altar. Church members tie a knot in the quilt and sign a card for the recipient.

Up to 10 women gather for about three hours each week to work on the blankets. The group has received about \$6,000 in donations.

### **Tulsa District – Tulsa-Faith UMC**

Special Angels,

The "Special Angels" ministry started when Tulsa-Faith members identified a need for families with special-needs children to find a church home that would welcome them.

In 2007, the youth minister spoke to members about these families. Several months of training and education followed. The ministry has grown to nine children with special needs.

Members provide personal care for their "Special Angels" each week. T-shirts identify the volunteers, who are each assigned a child to supervise, to minimize confusion and reassure the child.

### **Woodward District – Shattuck-First**

Extravagant Invitations,  
Two years ago, Shattuck  
FUMC's Missions & Evangelism Team

decided to go all-out to invite people to our new, contemporary worship service. From the church members, we collected names and addresses of people whom they knew didn't have church homes in our area. We went to work baking cookies, putting them on sticks with ribbons, and arranging them in small baskets as Cookie Bouquets.

The week before we launched the new service, we hand-delivered 87 Cookie Bouquets. People from 29 of those households visited us in worship! Many of these people continue to be involved in our church.

Last fall, we filled mugs with bags of coffee, hot chocolate, and tea mixes. We added a spoon dipped in chocolate and a magnet with information about our worship and Sunday school times. We hand-delivered these "Mugs-n-Magnets" to 149 households.