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When beginning to choose an area for a church plant, our group chose to pick Evansville. Evansville is a growing city and seemed to be a logical place to plant a church. When contacting John Garrison, Indiana's local contact, we learned of a church in Evansville that was just beginning to plant a church. Land had been purchased in a nearby city called Elberfeld. Our team decided to research this area to make our work count for something other than an academic exercise. The name of the church plant is North Wood.

THE AREA

ELBERFELD DEMOGRAPHICS

Elberfeld is a small rural farming town just thirteen miles away from Evansville. With a population of only 3,500 people, our group knew right away that this was going to be a different church plant than we had originally expected. When looking at a chart of the types of jobs that are in the area, it is quite obvious this is a farming community. The town has a nice elementary school that supports kindergarten through sixth grade. After sixth grade, students go to nearby Tecumseh Junior/Senior High School which takes care of the 7th & 8th through senior grades (and post-secondary schools in the area include Evansville's U of E, USI, Ivy Tech and ITT).

When listing what there is to do in the area, not much space is required. Going to the "Official Elberfeld website" there is a link taking you to "Things to do" in Elberfeld. Clicking on this link takes you to a page that two more links: TV listings and Movie listings. When following the Movie listings, you are taken to the movie theater in Evansville thirteen miles away. Driving around in Elberfeld confirms that there is not

much to do in the town. This is your typical small town with no stoplight, and a train track running right through the middle of town. When asking a twenty-two year old male what there was to do in town he replied, "Not much. We do like to go mudding down at the stripper pits."

Elberfeld is a highly relational town. This is a place where everyone knows everybody else. Many of the people have lived in this town their entire lives. Speaking with them about why they stay, it was not uncommon to watch people pointing down streets to where their aunts and uncles and siblings live.

Presently, the average income of those who live in Elberfeld is just under \$19,000. When driving around the area, it is evident that this is going to change. New sub-divisions are being developed with very nice new homes to attract the people who are moving from the busy Evansville city life, looking for a quieter community to raise their children. The average household has 3.1 people living in it, but this may rise as new people move to the area.

At first glance, this sounds like the last place to spend resources. However, when looking at the surroundings of the location of land that Grace Baptist has purchased, one begins to notice some other keys. Elberfeld is in Warrick County. Warrick County is located in southwestern Indiana, on the Ohio River, and adjoins the eastern border of Vanderburgh County and the City of Evansville. It is part of the Evansville, Indiana / Henderson, Kentucky Metropolitan Area. This area has received national attention of late because several companies, including Conagra, Toyota and A-K Steel, have selected it as the location for major manufacturing facilities. These new factories mean new people and economic life.

Elberfeld's location is ideal for quiet suburban growth. When looking at a map, Elberfeld can be found by looking where there are major interstates. Elberfeld has easy access to Interstate 64, Highway 57, but most importantly the new church property is less than four miles from highway 41. The location of the church property is perfect, as it exists along the natural route people would take to leave the town. Since there is not much to do within town, people are used to leaving town and driving the church's direction.

There has been a lot of discussion about highway 41 for the last three years. A new Interstate is planned to run that will connect Evansville with Indianapolis. There are two plans that have been proposed. One of these two plans includes updating the present highway 41 and Interstate 70 into the new I-69. If this happens, economic development could take off in this area. One of the major pushes in influencing Governor O'Bannon's decision is the way that the 41 route would be an economic stimulus to this area.

LOCAL CHURCHES

The local churches can best be described as small traditional churches. Several denominations are represented in Elberfeld. Among those are Baptist, Methodist, and Church of Christ. While these churches are small, they appear to be well maintained and tend to represent the context in which they first were placed. That is, a church culture of the 40's and 50's. A visit reveals that the area around the small rural town of Elberfeld is growing. The same is not as evident of the churches. Each church appears to exist to minister to a portion of the population that its denomination has been able to etch out over the years. Interviews with several local pastors confirmed these suspicions.

Three of the four pastors interviewed minister in and to the community. The other pastor lives in the town, but ministers in nearby Evansville. Two pastors stated that their congregations were small and made up of predominately older families. The average worship attendance for these two churches ranged from 30 to 50 people (See Appendices). While the congregations were older, both pastors shared that their members were sensitive to the lost. One pastor shared that the members were open to change, but felt it was the “pastor’s job” as far as visiting and inviting the unchurched.

From the conducted interviews it became apparent that there has not been a consistent organized plan of outreach by the churches to the community. However, two of the churches are making attempts to reach the younger families of Elberfeld and the surrounding area. Within the last year First Baptist Church of Elberfeld distributed copies of the Jesus video, and opened its gym to the community for outside activities. In its recent attempts to reach younger families, the pastor of the New Jerusalem United Methodist Church has successfully led his congregation from a traditional service to a blended style of worship. The church is placing more emphasis on contemporary music and informal conversational sermons. In their efforts to appeal to younger audiences and families they also purchased a projector and worship screen, and make use of power point presentations.

One pastor who lived in Elberfeld was actively engaged in evangelistic activities. The only problem, his ministry was directed toward Evansville and not Elberfeld. His perception of the community and its need for ministry, however, complimented that of the other pastors. They all felt more needed to be done to reach the younger families, especially those with children. The pastors also agreed that the area does not need new

churches. One pastor stated that would only cause further decline and possibly closure to an already struggling congregation. The pastors were in favor of more support and resources for the existing church base. Thus all the pastors agreed on:

Targeting younger middle income families with children;
Not starting a new church work or plant, but
Revitalizing and supporting existing church base.

The other results of the interviews can be summarized as follows:

Congregation Strengths	Congregation Weaknesses	Outreach Methodology
<i>Outward focused</i>	<i>Lack of Commitment</i>	<i>Meeting Personal Needs</i>
<i>Openness to Change</i>	<i>Unwillingness to Invite</i>	<i>Pastor's Job</i>
<i>Sensitivity to Lost</i>	<i>Older Membership</i>	<i>Jesus Video; Open Gym</i>

OUTREACH PLAN

PRAYER

A prayer strategy is of vital importance to the overall strategic plan as a church or plant team prepares a community for a new church start. The Bible places much emphasis on prayer. King David, the man after God's own heart, spent much time in prayer (Psalm 17; 51; 1 Chronicles 17:16-27; 29:10-20). A large part of Jesus' earthly ministry focused on prayer (Luke 6:12). Jesus was always withdrawing from the crowds to spend time with his Father in heaven (Luke 5:16; Mark 6:45, 46). The early church devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42; 12:5; 13:2,3). And in his letters to the churches

throughout the Roman Empire, the Apostle Paul was always asking the believers to pray for him, the workers, and for the spread of the gospel (Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1,2). How much more, then, are we expected to enter into a spirit of prayer giving thanks for what God has done, praising Him for what He is doing, and asking His blessings upon what He will do. For we know that *“In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps”* (Proverbs 16:9).

Prayer is a fundamental discipline in the life of any believer or church. This is an area that can determine the success or failure of an existing church’s expansion or a new church plant. The pastor or team leader must believe in the power of prayer. He should demonstrate this belief by setting an example for the rest of the team or group of supporters if he expects them to follow. He should be sensitive to the maturity level of those who have offered their support, and be willing to supply the necessary materials if some need support or encouragement. The following schedule will aid the pastor or point person in leading others to cover the new work in prayer. The schedule assumes the pastor or planter has cultivated an existing church membership or group of supporters to aid him.

Prayer Schedule

12 months before Launch:

Assemble prayer support from sponsoring church, co-laborers, friends, and family.

Solicit corporate prayer support from association, state, and national denomination.

9-6 months before Launch:

Request each member or supporter to commit 1 hour per week in prayer for the Pastor, team members, committee persons, core group, and meeting place.

Conduct Prayer-Walks of the targeted area utilizing sponsor and partner churches.

Promote praying and reading through the New Testament in the sponsoring church.

3-0 months before Launch:

Challenge individuals to consider adding the discipline of fasting with their prayer.

Conduct prayer surveys by visiting the homes in the targeted area.

When someone responds to a knock on the door say, *“Hi, my name is John Doe. We are starting a new church in your area soon called Northwood Community Church. We would like to know how we might pray for you or your family.”*

Mail prayer-grams or postcards 1 to 2 weeks after conducting prayer surveys.

Distribute door-hangers, especially to those homes that responded to door surveys.

Hold special services devoted to corporate prayer. Consider having times for personal testimonies, or hold in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper.

Week of Launch:

Rally people to cover each hour in prayer leading up to Launch Sunday.

After Launch:

Pray for the visitors, and ask God to raise up more leaders and workers.

SMALL GROUPS

We consider small groups to be the only method the church should use when it is beginning. These small groups will help to create the needed family feeling and they will also draw people into the church. There will be several programs that we will implement so that the small groups will function properly.

Within our recommendation as possible future church planters, we are recommending that the church begin with small groups from Grace Baptist. Each person

and/or family will need to decide if they will want to be an extension member or a SWAT team member. These initial persons will, preferably, be residing nearer to the church than others who live in the city of Evansville.

Once the people in the area of Elberfeld begin to assemble and meet, they will form small groups according to a more specific locale. The individual groups will be assigned areas through which they can work to connect with unbelievers. Door-to-door visitation will be implemented so that the individual group leaders can get to know those in their area. If there are other members of the mother church who wish to assist, they will be encouraged to adopt an area around the proposed church site.

The main purpose of these small groups is to foster an atmosphere of family within the people of the church and with the non-Christians who join the church. In his book, *Where do We Go from Here?*, Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. provides some essential thoughts and strategies on small groups. His philosophy is that small groups (or in his case he would call them cell groups) are formed so that people within the church can learn about how to serve each other more effectively. Our proposed small groups would adopt this philosophy. When the group members get to know each other, they will be able to understand through what the other members are going through. It is essential that the group be familiar with one another so that a bond can be created.

Malphurs would echo this philosophy in that he brings out the “one another” passages that include the commands to love, be devoted, honor, serve in love, admonish, encourage, and to be kind and compassionate. The small group leaders will be trained in how to better facilitate this atmosphere for the good of the small group.

As suggested by Malphurs, lay persons will be “observed” for those who show leadership ability. When a leader is found, he will be able to be mentored by the leader of the small group, the pastor, or by one of the church planters. Neighbour’s program, which is quite extensive, can be utilized when a potential leader is found. We may look into adopting Carl George’s metachurch model for developing leaders that is spelled out in his book, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Malphurs informs us that small groups are an excellent opportunity for the potential leader to perfect his/her skills. When the leader is sufficiently trained, he/she will then be able to split and create his/her own small group. This process will create growth and health within the church.

The small groups will create a great amount of efficiency for the assimilation process. Malphurs again helps us with this process. He suggests that one of the biggest problems with churches is that people “slip out through the back door.” The fostering of relationships within the small groups will prevent this occurrence. We will consider making it mandatory for new church members to join a small group. It is thought that if the new member forms roots through the small group, they will be less likely to leave. The many activities and sharing of daily occurrences will feed the roots within the group.

We will offer the small group leaders the opportunity to specify the program of the group if they wish. Singles, Bible study, prayer, or even a particular hobby type of group could be created. Through this type of small group organization, particular groups of people will be targeted. Those with particular dependence problems can even form their own group along with groups that enjoy church type activities such as drama or teaching.

Malphurs suggests forming a purpose for the small groups. Our groups will be formed to create a close family of small groups within the larger church body. This will be associated with the roles of the small groups as well. After a person is selected to serve as the leader of the small groups, the leaders will decide on the favorable percentage of growth they wish to see created by the small groups. We may recruit people through advertising or the door-to-door method as explained above. All small group participants will be encouraged to invite friends. Furthermore, business cards with the name of the church and its office number can be given to the group members so they can pass them out to the community. These business cards will make it easier for some, who are not overly outgoing, to reach out and tell a lost person about the church. Meeting times and locations will be worked out among the leaders and specific volunteers to be hostesses and childcare workers will be arranged. The length of the time that the groups will continue to meet will be worked out along with the exact order of the small group meeting. Finally, the small groups will be evaluated on a regular basis to see if there are any needed adjustments.

These projections for the forming of the group will be very fluid. In the event of the need for change, the ideas stated above are not set in stone. Without these small groups, it is the opinion of the church planters writing this report; the church will be simply another small church in the area of Elberfeld. With the small groups, the church will have a better chance of growth and stability.

While there are many important aspects of this strategic plan, this church planting team believes that reaching the youth of the area is key. The youth population is quite large in the area and we feel that it is essential to develop programs so that they will be

attracted to the church. It could almost be said that this demographic is the target group. This section of the strategic plan will spell out how we would do this.

YOUTH

The youth population, ages one to nineteen, makes up a quarter of all the people in the city and surrounding area of Elberfeld. Taking into account the population of the city and area, the youth population is at almost one thousand and we feel that this large section must be reached. Almost eighty percent of all the households in Elberfeld are composed of a family of three or more and almost one hundred percent of these families are classified as factory and farm communities. This NAMB Demographic Report information will help us to target the youth in the area. While the youth may live in families that are predominately rural, they most likely follow the trends of kids from nearby Evansville and the country. Specific programs will be geared to reach the youth and they will be discussed later.

There are many indicators that lead us to believe that we must reach this age group. First, the city's web site was accessed and there was a web page that spelled out things to do in the city. When it came for area entertainment, the link provided the suggestions of watching television and going to Evansville to view movies. This, obviously, leads this church planting team to conclude that there is little for the youth in the area. Secondly, as the planting team was driving through the city, we saw many young people out playing in the street and in the yards of the houses. There is a new elementary school in the city and when kids are finished there in the day, there is little to do in the way of entertainment.

The church planting team feels that if we can reach the youth of the city and surrounding area, the parents will be reached as well. Many youth groups have successfully attracted the parents into the church because their children attended first. While the parents will be assigned to small groups within the church, the children will be assigned to specific programs and church related activities.

We will prefer to have many age specific youth groups that will be lead and directed by members of the core community and small groups. We would like to have the following groups: below age five, age five to nine, age ten to fourteen, and age fifteen to nineteen. The church leaders will seek laypersons that are skilled with these age groups or persons with children of these particular ages.

It would be ideal if the church could provide day care for the youngest group or for those kids who do not go to school. A few residents of the city and area expressed the need to have a day care service. This would be a great opportunity for the church if it were possible to accomplish. The church could provide activities for the youngest age group throughout the week, but especially on Sunday. Games for small children could be directed and toys with which the kids could play will be furnished.

The age five through nine age group and the ten to fourteen groups will benefit from the backyard Bible clubs. These clubs will take place predominately in the summer in hopes of gathering kids and parents into the church for the fall and winter. The clubs can be as elaborate or simple as the adult congregational volunteers desire. There will be an emphasis in staying in the community to do the activities, instead of driving to Evansville, so that a sense will be felt that the church is supporting the community. There are some available activities that the church can create for this age group. The

church could have a lock in for the this particular age of youth, Friday and Saturday afternoon sports activities will probably be the most common youth activity, and we could have evening game nights with board games and youth party type games.

The last age group will be the fifteen to nineteen age group. Those who easily relate to this age group will form sporting events on the weekends, evening dinner at a house that will be suitable for holding the group, community centered events that will involve improving or serving the community will be a main focus, and while the youth groups will try to do other things that are not T.V. or movie related the groups can gather to watch acceptable shows for a movie night. Other organized games, which are appropriate for junior and high school aged youth, will be implemented.

Those leading the group will compare and gather advise from other youth group leaders and find out what works best for the specific age groups. A great deal of time and effort will be put into attracting the youth of the city. As stated in the opening of this report, we feel that the children of the community must be reached. If the area begins to change through the kids, the adult community will surely follow.

WORSHIP

To minister to the community of Elberfeld and to the growing suburbs of nearby Evansville, the worship strategy of *Northwood* should take into consideration two people groups. On one hand you have the older established residents of Elberfeld. On the other you have younger families who are being attracted to the area by job opportunities in the city of Evansville, yet choose to live in Elberfeld because of its small town atmosphere. A blended worship service is recommended. A balance between the traditional service and a more contemporary approach can be seen as meeting this need. The service should

be “seeker-sensitive” or “people-friendly” because of the growth this area is expected to experience in the years ahead. This does not mean that the community is reached at the expense of exalting God and edifying the congregation. But believers can be nurtured in a biblical-based service that honors God and appeals to the needs of the unchurched.

The blended type of worship service will work when the core group has caught on to the vision of reaching the community for Christ. The music can appeal to both groups by mixing traditional hymns with contemporary choruses and songs. As far as instruments go, a piano or keyboard, guitar, and drums would be more appropriate than say an organ and piano. The worship leader needs to work in close conjunction with the pastor to see that the music supports the sermon theme or central idea. This can often be done with special music just before the sermon. The worship leader should also pay close attention to the flow of the service. A two to three member praise team can help keep the rhythm of the service smooth and flowing along. However, be cautious here. If accomplished singers are limited, do not use less experienced singers as they might disrupt the service and cause more harm than good. Use the gifted singers on a rotation basis to keep the services from being monotonous.

The worship leader should also see that guests and visitors feel at home and not be singled out. This can be accomplished by encouraging everyone to greet those around them as the worship leader transitions from one chorus to another. Visitors and guests should also be reminded that nothing is expected of them at offertory. The offertory at end of service is usually less disruptive than say in the middle of six or seven songs. Encourage visitors to simply fill out a card of their attendance and drop it in the plate if they would like more information on the church.

Sound expository biblical preaching is recommended. If done appropriately, such preaching will *show* the relevance of the Word of God to the problems many face day to day. Attention can be grabbed with a good opening personal story or statement about a current event. Interest can be maintained throughout the sermon by illuminating the points with vivid illustrations. Counseling for those who respond to the Invitation can be done by lay leaders in a room adjacent to the sanctuary. This often relieves the awkwardness that prolonged counseling may require.

The above recommendations for worship service may be formatted as follows:

Announcements (Power-point)
Soft instrumental music
Choruses/hymns
Welcome/greeting
Special events (baptisms, child dedications, etc.)
Special music
Sermon
Invitation
Offertory/music
Closing prayer

SURVEYS

As interviews were being conducted with the pastors by phone, a mental portrait of Elberfeld and the surrounding community began to emerge. Upon the team's visit to the area for door-to-door surveys, we found the area much like the picture that had been painted. A small rural town located on the northern boundary of an expanding city. The new upscale housing development of *Cambridge Village* was found nestled around a golf course within 4 miles of town. The fifteen-year old middle-income subdivision on the edge of town was located. And the older established residential neighborhood within the town itself was visited. We had to visit 4 homes in the Cambridge and between 2 to 3 in

town to obtain responses. The people were friendly, yet cautious. This was to be expected in light of what the nation has been going through in recent months. As we talked with people it became evident that they all enjoyed the “*small town atmosphere*” of Elberfeld.

The following table will summarize the results of the surveys:

Family	Music	Church Dress	Word Baptist In Name	Elberfeld	Church Need
<i>Ages 20-50 Married Children Educated Middle- Income</i>	<i>Ranged from Traditional To Contemporary</i>	<i>Nice, but Casual</i>	<i>Mostly Indifferent To No Difference</i>	<i>Positive: Quiet, Small, Know Everyone Negative: No Grocery</i>	<i>Activities Directed Children and Students</i>

Possible implications of the observations:

Preaching that shows relevance of the Bible to everyday struggles that families face;

Worship that balances traditional hymns and contemporary music in a casual atmosphere;

Care systems that minister to adults through cell groups and to children through small groups that allow interaction with one another.

SUMMARY

This is a small town with a great deal of potential. When planting a church, it is important to focus on building strong small groups within the relational town, focusing also on areas that are developing. It is crucial to build activities for children and youth to reach a need that the area recognizes and feels. The worship must be blended to reach the rural town, yet the continually growing younger generations. Despite the fact that many of local pastors see this church as a threat, the church plant must remain dedicated to evangelizing an area that needs continuous dedication to the word of God.