

Dear members of the class,

I hereby humbly submit this outline of a ministry project for your review. This has been an interesting exercise in research and application. I have had a wonderful time developing this material and learning about the culture I live in.

At the same time this has been a very frustrating experience as I have come into wealth of knowledge that I have not had time to process and integrate into this paper. I had to drop a section of information on the Sociology of this culture – the material is available, but I have been unable to combine in the time allotted. I also had to shorten some of the Missions Application sections because of time and because there was not time to develop the supporting research.

Finally, while at District Assembly, I attended the presentations on apartment ministry. There were two handouts given by the presenter, and each of these had a series of web links and detailed bibliographies. I did not have time to research any of this information. (Or the information I might have been able to get from Pastor Don Bird (Antioch Church) who arranged the seminar at assembly.) I also had material that was sent by Dr. Hofferbert, which I was largely unable to review.

It is interesting to be working on something real. Had this been just another paper, these omissions and changes would not concern me. As I look at actually making this a reality, however, I am impressed by the need for more knowledge than I have, and a need to "do my homework" before stepping out my apartment door.

This is not an apology for this paper. I am a perfectionist, and I see a real need for preparing for this work. This paper is what it could be, given the time available. It will do – It must do for now. Still, I plan to continue working on it before using it in ministry.

Sincerely,

Baird J. Ramsey

Applied Missions Strategy:
Apartment Ministry Project

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Global Evangelism
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Section 1 – Project Overview

Statement of Need:

Statistics indicate that only five percent of people living in multi-family housing are active in church. This compares with a 40% rate of participation in single family dwellings. Further, statistics indicate that 54% of the population in the top 10 U.S. cities live in multi-family dwellings. This represents over 30 million people in the United States.¹ This is a significant portion of our population who are in an under-reached, unevangelized segment of the population.

Statement of Intent:

As an apartment resident, I am both a member of this population, and a member of the larger Christian community. The apartment complex I live in appears to be similar to the national demographics, at least in terms of church attendance, although I have not done any formal research to confirm this.

I intend to develop a ministry to reach members of this community that will communicate the Biblical message in a contextually and relationally appropriate manner, and introduce them both to Christ and to the Church. This will be accomplished by developing a small group ministry as a bridge into the larger community of Christ, specifically, through one of the two local Nazarene churches. (Shawnee Church of the Nazarene is more traditional, Grace Point is more casual and contemporary.)

Demographics

Several major demographic lines divide the community in this apartment complex. The population can be divided by age, marital status, and income. There are also several different levels of faith and religious background. The group is almost entirely white, so racial issues are not a major factor. (There are, two non-white people in the community.) There are only two children in the complex since it is composed of single room apartments.

The population can be expressed in three general age groups. There are young couples, young singles, and older singles. The older singles are either result of divorces, and often have adult children and aging parents in the KC area. The younger singles are usually in dating relationships, some with live-in companions.

There are three major economic groups. The complex accepts section 8 federal funds, which means that it has a sizable population of individuals on disability pensions. Many of these are or have been mentally challenged, however, there are some who have minor physical disabilities. The second group hold blue-collar trade jobs or physical labor jobs, such as janitorial or food service positions. The final group is composed of entry level professionals. This is the group about which I have the least demographic information. Many of them are attending KU or other schooling, and are not generally around the complex or do not engage in communication with other members of the community.

Project Outline:

The first phase of this ministry is to establish relationships and a presence in the community. This will require a location – our complex does not have a meeting facility. Further, there is no community bulletin board or other means of communication to the community at large. Therefore, the initial activity will be a group event for the community, in the form of a picnic. This can be held either in the parking lot of the complex or at a near by location. (There is a vacant lot two doors down and the homeowner next to the complex is a member of one of the local Nazarene churches.) Therefore, the ideal location both for meeting and for this party is his yard. If it is not available, the next step would be to determine requirements for use of the other locations and identify other meeting locations.

The second phase of this ministry would be a process for introducing the people in the community to the claims of Christ. This will take the form of a "Non Believer's Bible Study" and will be a forum for them to ask questions about the Christian faith, discussion of the claims of Christ and a presentation of the

Gospel. Possible tools include Lee Strobel's The Case for Christ, *The Jesus Film*, and material from Chic Shaver's Basic Bible Study.

The third phase would be an ongoing regular Bible study for those who have accepted or re-dedicated their lives to Christ during this process. It would meet weekly and serve as both a means of community building and further evangelism, as well as a gateway into the local churches. It would also offer opportunity to develop mentoring relationships and allow others to learn the skills necessary to lead their own Bible study groups, allowing this ministry to be replicated within the complex as well at other complexes where people may later move.

ⁱ <http://www.caresteam.org/> -- Home page, July 29,2002

Section 2 – Community and Background

To plan a new project it is important to both understand the people who you are working with and other work that has been done in the same area. This information can then be used to contextualize the message to the people in the target group. Therefore, this section will first address the needs of the people in this apartment complex, and then address existing apartment ministry plans. Finally, it will look at some broader cultural issues that define the people in the target group and some general models of church ministry. These models will become a bridge towards contextualization of the message to this group.

Target Group Analysis

The target group for the purpose of this paper is comprised of the residents of my apartment complex. The complex has five buildings, each with four two floors of four apartments. All the apartments have roughly the same layout and are approximately 720 square feet. The apartment has a bedroom in the back, a hall down the outer edge, a central section with a closets, bathroom, and kitchen, and a front room that is roughly the same size as the bedroom, sharing a partial wall with the kitchen. The apartments are aligned such that the outer apartment on each side of the building extends past the front of the middle two apartments by the depth of the living room, and therefore, the kitchen and bath are even with the next apartment living room. The offset is maintained in the center apartments such that they extend the depth of the bedroom past the rear wall of the adjacent outer apartments. This alignment creates room for the stairs and balcony, which provide access to the upper apartments.

This also creates two "garden" spaces on the ground level between the apartments and stairs. These spaces have been neglected at most of the apartments. During the past two years, we have created a garden and flower bed in "our" plot, and this has given us a status in the community. This has also encouraged several other people to start maintaining and developing these plots,

and has generally improved the look of the apartment complex. This garden is an important inroad into the community for us.

Another common factor is that the apartment complex allows pets. There is a one time, \$100 pet deposit required. This is much better than most of the other complexes in the region, and therefore many of the people here have pets. There is a community joke about the different animal's "parents." Unfortunately, sometimes it is easier to remember the pet's name than the "parents" name since we see the pets regularly, but the people rarely.

Behavior Patterns

During the years we have lived here we have noticed several different behavioral patterns of the residents. One of the most interesting observations we have made comes from watching the cars in the parking lot. There are two primary patterns. Each is discussed below.

Not Home

On any given weekday night, most of the parking lot is full. There is a small but significant portion of the residency that works evening or night jobs – my work also requires nights, so I have some feel for who is where when. However, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights the parking lot empties out almost as much as during the weekdays. It seems that most people do not want to be home.

Bunkered down

The second mentality has been shared both our current and previous next door neighbors. Both of these single ladies have been recluses in their own house. They come home on Friday night and do not leave again until Monday morning. We very rarely speak to our current neighbor – if she hears our door opening in the mornings, she will wait inside her apartment until we are at our cars. Both have told us, that they are afraid in this area even though violence has not been a major issue in this part of Shawnee. The first had three dogs, for protection... When one of them died, she moved to a different apartment complex.

Socialites

There is a very small group of people who have developed friendships in this complex. We have a lady in the complex who loves pets. She is officially "mentally challenged" and probably has the basic mindset of a late teenager even though she is in her mid thirties. She is very friendly much of the time, and spends much of her time in the evenings going from apartment to apartment socializing. This pattern has created a loose network of friendships, where she is the key focal point.

There are also a few guys in one of the building who have been at the complex for more than three years. They have become drinking buddies and will sit in front of the complex talking in good weather. During the winter they will occasionally go from apartment to apartment, though this is not as common as their summer activities.

Needs Analysis

There are a number of different needs within this population. They come in many different forms, and not all of them are known. Here are some general categories.

Spiritual

In the category of unseen needs, most of the people in this complex, as with any other in the country, are not involved in a local church. They may hold religious beliefs, but they are not actively practicing them. Of the people we know, one openly talks both about his faith – he even shares it with others in the complex, but he does not go to church, and has said to us that he may well be going to hell for his failure to participate in church (and/or other undisclosed failures) Others just have not found a church locally, and therefore do not go. (Several are also the ones who seem to "bunker down" for the weekends.)

For the rest of the people, spiritual needs are not high on their apparent list of priorities. Spiritual things do not come up in conversation, and there is little interest either in organized religion or church. While there is probably some latent spiritual interest, it is hard to find.

Educational

In the more tangible area of educational needs, probably one half of the residents need additional training to be able to have stable employment. Many are in unskilled or trade labor. We have a security guard, several janitorial staff, and some people in construction and plumbing. The rest of the complex is younger – most would appear to have better jobs based on clothing and cars. Some we know to be in school, others would appear to be in careers – but not at a point where they would need to move into their own homes.

Therefore, there is probably both a wealth of skill and a great area of need. More research needs to be done to determine if there would be ways for people in the community to assist each other. If there were, this might be a good way to help people in the community and help them develop relationships with each other. These friendships are needed in order to develop trust and a larger sense of community.

Financial

There is a great diversity in financial ability in this community. There are some, like myself who are well off (at least at the gross income level...) Others are on Section 8 federal housing – a program for the disabled and mentally challenged. This later group is in the worst position – they are forced to hold jobs to pay the bills, but are not able to make more than a certain amount of money or they lose their federal benefits. (Which allow them to get apartments for less than \$100/month) Yet their education and/or disability prevent them from getting jobs that could pay the full rent or give them a livable wage.

Even for the people who are doing better, there is a lot of drinking, and the community's culture reflects the consumerism of our culture. Often there will be good furniture or used appliances, which are just thrown out. Also, people will occasionally leave the apartment and just leave all their possessions. They must move somewhere else and start over.

This offers both the potential for education in financial management and stewardship. For many, it also means that there is a great need for

compassionate ministries. Again, further research is required to determine specific needs.

Emotional

Another major need is emotional support. People in this complex are nervous about their neighbors. People do not, as a rule talk to other people in the complex. If you can get to talking with people, there seems to be a general loneliness. People try to use pets and the television to replace this need for interpersonal contact, but this is not sufficient. There is a general fear of crime, but I have not heard of any incidents of theft or violence in this complex in the three years we have been here. (Though there may well be some domestic violence that is not reported.) There are very rarely police visits to the complex – usually during the day or early evening. I would guess this is related to evictions or other matters, but no one has really had any stories. Indeed, the only story that has gone around is of a lady who was being stalked by an ex-boyfriend. (and this only lasted for a few weeks.)

Religious Backgrounds

More research is required. My wife and I have only had discussions about religion with seven people in the complex. Of these, one is a "Jew" by birth (but not practice), two are formerly charismatic, one is Presbyterian, one has been to many different churches and has no preference, one has been a member of the Disciples of Christ, and two have no church background at all. Of the people who have a religious background, only one attends church (and I do not know the frequency of their attendance.) I am also aware through discussions with other people of one Mormon.

There is some common Christian knowledge within the community that may be a starting point for further growth, but there is little active faith to work from. It will be interesting to see if it is easier to re-ignite people or to start with those who have no background – both groups may well be fertile fields.

Financial Patterns

More research is required. There is a lot of spending on alcohol and entertainment. There are also a number of newer cars. Many people have computers and Cable TV is common. It appears from the few conversations we have had that most people here go from paycheck to paycheck.

Education

There is a broad spectrum of educational attainment in the community. We have bachelor's degrees, and are probably not alone. There are many people who have only a high school education, and some that have vocational training. This diversity is a potential point of stratification and dissension in the community that would need to be monitored and addressed.

Worldview Analysis

While it is hard to come to a generalization of a worldview for this group, it is at least fair to say that they are generally post-modern. It seems that they also generally feel passed-by in life, are not hopeful about the future, and are living to get to tomorrow, or the weekend.

Section 3 – Research

Existing Models

It is best not to "re-invent the wheel" as the saying goes. Therefore, I have done some research for existing groups doing apartment ministry. There are not many of them who have made information or materials available. For those who have a web presence, here is the information that is available.

Apartment Life

Apartment Life is a Christian ministry in the south central United States that focuses on building community in apartment complexes. They pay housing for volunteer workers to live in the complex in trade for some minimal monthly requirements. They require the volunteers to commit 80 hours a month to the ministry. They state two purposes – the Christian ministry, and an economic benefit to the management of the complex. Here is the statement from their Frequently Asked Questions page (FAQ):ⁱ

1. What are the expectations for a CARES Team?

Apartment Life partners with local churches and the apartment industry to place teams into local apartment communities. These CARES Teams receive a free apartment and commit 80 hours per month of ministry to the community. CARES Team responsibilities can be summarized as follows:

- a. Serve the apartment community at least 80 hours per month (combined as a team). Common activities include welcome visits, community activities, resident care, community service projects, and management support.
- b. Model a Christian lifestyle that is beyond reproach.
- c. Pray for, minister to, and seek ways to meet the spiritual needs of apartment residents and management through relational evangelism.
- d. Complete activity and spiritual reports as requested and attend monthly training meetings.
- e. Maintain positive relationships with apartment management
- f. Be a positive ambassador for your apartment community and seek to attract and retain residents.
- g. Support Apartment Life through a monthly fee of \$100-200 per month (based on property type).

The specific responsibilities for CARES teams are found in the application packet.

2. What are the objectives of the CARES program?

Apartment Life has established business and spiritual goals for the CARES program.

The spiritual goals are:

- a. Build spiritual relationships with residents and staff (1 per week).
- b. Share the gospel with residents and staff (1 per month).
- c. Connect residents and staff to local churches (1 per month).

The business goals are:

- a. Reduce resident turnover – to positively influence 40% of renewal decisions.
- b. Attract new residents – to positively influence 25% of lease decisions.
- c. Reduce staff turnover – to positively influence job satisfaction for 60% of management staff.

Achieving both sets of goals is critical. The business goals provide value to the apartment owners and managers and ensure our continued presence in the community. This presence allows us to meet our spiritual goals.

3. What does a typical week look like for a CARES team?

Each CARES team has a different schedule based on the needs and activities of that community. However, some activities like welcome visits are “standard”. A typical week might be as follows:

Sunday	none
Monday	6-11 p.m. Monday Night Football party both members
Tuesday	4–8 p.m. Kids Club. one member
Wednesday	6-8 p.m. Welcome Visits both members
Thursday	none
Friday	9-10 am planning meeting with manager one/both members
Saturday	none

Kids519

A second ministry that focuses on apartment ministry is Kids519. The name stands for their goal of reaching kids between the ages of 5 and 19 in apartment complexes. They begin by locating an apartment complex that would be willing to have them. Then they do a picnic event to gain entry into the community. Their long-term program is to provide children with education and Bible knowledge while helping solve two issues – daycare between school and their parents return home, and assistance with the children's education.ⁱⁱ

Project Hope

Project Hope is a product of the Montgomery Baptist Association. Neal Hughes, who is Southern Baptist Missionary, directs it. He presented his model for ministry in two seminars at the Kansas City district assembly.ⁱⁱⁱ While this program is created in the Southern Baptist church, it is also useful in the Nazarene church since it is based on the ministry of John Wesley. The program basically uses the Cell Group concept as well as the bands, it is something that is both part of our heritage and something we are familiar with.

The program recommends several steps to entering a new multi-housing area. First, they suggest doing research. They suggest reviewing census data,

as well as data on the spending habits of the complex, as provided by Claritas and/or Scan USA – both pay services. Also, reviewing any applicable web sites, driving the area, asking local businesses and neighbors about the area. Further, they recommend establishing relationship with the manager or Management Company of the complex. They also recommend partnering with other local churches and finding history from these organizations. Finally, they recommend reviewing the history of the community.

Their next suggestion is to use Spiritual Mapping as a means to identify the spiritual habits and history of the community. They then recommend using this information in prayer to prepare for and advance the work of the ministry. The handouts do not give details on this process.

The next step is intentional prayer. They recommend prayer walking as presented in various books and models including Prayerwalking: Praying On Site With Insight by Mary Lake, Jericho Prayer Walking, Tabernacle Praying (the core group praying together and developing strategy), servant evangelism prayer walking, and peripheral prayer walking/driving. Each of these is defined in their handout.

This prayer and initial interaction with the community lead to the identification of a "Person of Peace." This is a person who is open to the missionary and is a person of compassion within the community. This person may or may not be a Christian, but will share the vision and sense a need for change. The handout states that: "you will find in this person an instant friend, who will open the door to others. Make this your base of operation, and your first indigenous leader." In the presentation, they mention that one of these leaders had been a drug dealer in the community, and even asked to be a leader before he was saved. He is now a minister of the local church, and a strong Christian.

After this is completed, they recommend beginning the active ministry. The basis for this ministry is a series of scriptures and is modeled on the ministry of the apostle Paul. The main focus of their plan from this point forward is to develop cell groups – Wesleyan bands of 12 people, who become elements of the local church. The operation of these groups is governed by the statement:

"The Holy Spirit be the teacher, the Bible is the text, everyone is a student and the leader is only a facilitator." This avoids issues with introduction of bad doctrine and untrained leadership issues. There is also a strong accountability structure, where each leadership level is responsible directly to the higher levels, reaching back to the program director. This program assumes that in larger implementations, such as their program, there will be four or five layers of leadership, each responsible for a larger area of ministry.

The material for the group meetings is strongly programmed from the top leadership, also reducing issues with individual leaders and their experience. The lessons are provided, the questions prepared, so the group level leader is just a facilitator. The material is a basic Bible study framework, and is often based on Wesleyan questions.

The program also uses the Wesleyan band concept, with small groups of three or four individuals in accountability relationships. These groups are derived from the cell groups and are both the center for individual mentoring and the point of development for new leaders and cells.

Other Ministries

Jackson Valley Apartments

Here is a statement about apartment ministry from a lady who does this work. It is particularly good at summarizing what appears to be a common attitude within apartment complexes.

"Instead of bringing people to church, we were taught how to take the church to the people," Bowling said. It was a concept Daugherty understood very well. As a newlywed, she had lived two years in the Jackson Valley apartment complex. From personal experience she knew people in low income apartments generally didn't feel welcomed in country-seat churches such as McKee because "most people there own their own homes." Even though she had been a member of McKee Baptist since age 10, Daugherty said she fought the feeling that she "didn't fit in" during the years she lived in the apartments. "I was in low-income housing and

everybody knew it." During those years she said, she would have welcomed the opportunity to attend a Bible study in the complex.^{iv}

The article continues to discuss how they set up Bible studies in the facility and later created a church for the people in the complex.

"Team Kids" Ministry

This is another ministry aimed at children and assisting them with homework and school. It has grown to includes teens, parents and church.^v

Union Baptist

The Union Baptist church Association has a statement about their apartment ministries on the web. This pages describes (briefly) a ministry that they believe has been highly successful. The program is based on Bible studies and around the clock ministry availability. They also have a clothes closet and food pantry. There is a Vacation Bible School, a camp, holiday dinner programs, and other fellowship.^{vi}

Solutions:

An article entitled *Redeeming the City – Exploring the relationship between Church and Metropolis* discusses the relationship between the church and people in the society. It discusses the role of the church as a bridge between the "public and private, sacred and secular" and described the church as a "mediating structure"^{vii} The articles states that:

"Among those institutions that serve to attenuate the individual's experience of social isolation and political powerlessness are family, neighborhood, church, civic organization, club, settlement house, political party, electoral system, and labor union. But today, many of those institutions are either decaying or have already died out."^{viii}

The article also quotes West as saying: "human beings evidently still strive to find purpose and meaning in life, precisely because the acquisitive roles of profit-

maximizer and consumer leave them feeling diminished, powerless, and unfulfilled."^{ix}

From here, the article goes on to describe four mission orientations proposed by McKinney and Carroll Roozen. These views will be used later to discuss approaches to the community.

4 Church Models

The Activist

The Activist church is focused on issues of social justice and correcting economic injustice. This type of group lives in tension with the social structures and focuses on changing them.

Civic

Civic oriented churches are more interested in maintaining the structures of society. They legitimate secular power relationships.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary oriented church is focused on allowing people the opportunity to leave the difficulties of their daily lives behind. This group shuns the outside world and tries to be separated from it.

Evangelistic

The evangelistic view is to go out and bring others into the community. It is similar to the sanctuary focus in terms of its view of the outside world but it is more engaged in public life seeking to share the message of salvation with those outside the community.

A view of the Role of the Church

The article also contains an interesting quote:

"only the church has the moral authority and the vocabulary to introduce transcendent concepts of personal worth and the sacredness of life that will both inspire responsibility on a personal

level and introduce purpose and definition to the role of civic government on a societal level."^x

Further, in a discussion of community development, the article suggests:

Modern liberalism posits an individual who only consumes public goods but does not produce them, hence modern secular organizations tend to treat individuals as consumers and clients. But in low-income communities, where material incentives may be lacking, individuals frequently make substantial commitments of their time and resources when provided with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and self-confidence that enables them to become producers of public goods instead of merely consumers.^{xi}

And concludes that:

The church must be seen as more than a set of organizations if its singular role in the city is to be made comprehensible. The church is a worldview, a preserver of sacred tradition, the sum of innumerable communities of like-minded believers, a vast complex of powerful institutions with local-global connections, and an independent base of transcendent moral authority.^{xii}

This authority and role allows the church to address the problems of nihilism.¹ As the article suggests "in the judgement of some closed observers, only the church has the resources effectively to dispel."^{xiii}

The argument presented can be summarized in these points:

Like the medieval monks who preserved classical learning in monasteries throughout the Dark Ages, today's church preserves and institutional awareness that human beings are not only driven by egoistic self interest and self-preservation, as modernism would have it; they are also motivated by profound moral and spiritual yearnings.

Prophetic, biblical religion is rich in stories, symbols, and metaphors that convey God's intention that people should act as coworkers in establishing justice, relieving suffering, and healing the world.

¹ Nihilism is roughly defined as a sense of hopelessness when confronted with the complexity of modern and post modern life.

It is through stories that we construct our self-image, which determines how we treat others, what challenges we embrace or shrink from, what rights or considerations we expect, and how we and others like us are treated by others.^{xiv}

While these quotes are given in the context of community development in the black inner city, and each point is followed by a political example, the concepts here give a good voice to the power of the church both in society and in the process of re-forming community. This is a needed task in our society.

Christianity as Another Sub Culture

Meredith Ramsay's paper continues by suggesting that Christianity is itself a sub-culture. It gains this status because the church creates its own social network, has its own standards and expected behaviors. This is both a benefit and a challenge in this task – while the development of Christian community can benefit the local group, it can also separate people away from their other communities.

Church and Nihilism

Ramsay also suggests that the church is uniquely suited to address the problem of Nihilism. This is defined in the paper as "the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair so widespread in black America."^{xv} While this is talking about the black inner city, I believe it also applies to any group who no longer believes that they are living in the American Dream. The article also sites Robert Bellah, who has suggested that " young people of all races and social classes have become objects of mounting concern because of their cynicism, hedonism, and lack of ethics and morals."

In response "the prophetic church instills hope and keeps alive the notion that 'history is incomplete, and the world is unfinished, and the future is open-ended and that what we think and what we do can make a difference."^{xvi} In another place the paper states:

Indeed there is evidence of a worldwide resurgence of religion, especially among women, minorities, and the poor, for whom an existence based on the Darwinistic principle of "every man for himself" offers slight security and cold comfort. In a world in which moral claims and social attachments are no longer universally acknowledged or treated as binding, the prophetic church asserts human connection. It holds individuals responsible to and for one another and holds the nations accountable for their treatment of society's most vulnerable members – outsiders, the sick, the elderly, the young, and the poor. The prophetic church has a solution to the problem of nihilism, which is to ground its members in a supportive, moral community, regardless of how far away they have fallen, and provide them with personal mentoring and citizenship and leadership training.^{xvii}

Community and Social Development

The following quotes presented in Ramsay's paper discuss the deep needs of these inner city people (mostly apartment dwellers) and their needs that can, she suggests, best be met within the church. This also seems like a good description of many of the people living in this complex – those who are not young and who have come to realize that others have already made their mark on the world – that we are the left behinds in the larger society.

Who is addressing the meaninglessness, hopelessness, and most of all, lovelessness which West views as the core problem for black America and which may well be the core problem for the rest of America too? "Where do ordinary people, steeped in lifelong experiences of humiliation, barred from acquisition of basic skills of citizenship—from running meetings to speaking in public – gain the courage, the self-confidence, and above all the hope to take action in their own behalf?"

"What are the structures of support, the resources, and the experiences that generate the capacity and the inspiration to challenge 'the way things are' and imagine a different world?"^{xviii}

ⁱ <http://www.caresteam.org/faqs.htm> 7/15/2002 This is a copy of several sections from their FAQ page. The remaining information is taken from some of their other web pages and the ministry application.

ⁱⁱ www.kat519.org Information is taken from their training materials and mission statement.

ⁱⁱⁱ The district assembly was August 8, 2002. He presented two sessions, "Casting the Vision: The Greatest Mission Field in America" and "Developing the Mission: Reaching the Greatest Mission Field of America." These are also the titles of the handouts for the session, which

provide a wealth of information on the people, the process, and the ministry they use. Information on Project Hope can be found at: <http://www.community-of-hope.org>

^{iv} <http://www.bpnews.net/printfriendly.asp?ID=3718> 7/10/2002 – "Committed duo helps church minister outside its walls" (BP)News – Joyce Sweeney Martin – Aug 4, 1997

^v <http://www.reporternews.com/1999/religion/apart0102.html> 7/10/2002

^{vi} www.unionbaptist.new/apartment.htm 7/10/2002 - The list of ministries is taken from this page, as nearly a quote.

^{vii} Ramsay, Meredith, *Redeeming the City*. Urban Affairs Review, May 98, Vol 33, Issue 5, p.595, 27pages. (Found in MasterFILE Premier Database of EBSCOhost – Page numbers not available.)

^{viii} *ibid*

^{ix} This is a quote of a quote: The citation given is West, Reverend Doe. 1996 Weld gets outrage from faith community. In Spare change: New England's Journal of the Streets, edited by Lea G. Jaroszewski. Belmont, MA: Herald Publishing.

^x Ramsay, *ibid*

^{xi} *ibid*

^{xii} *ibid*

^{xiii} *ibid*

^{xiv} *ibid*

^{xv} *ibid*

^{xvi} *ibid*

^{xvii} *ibid*

^{xviii} *ibid*

Section 4 – Missions Application

Cultural Gap Analysis

Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch present a scale to evaluate the difficulties of reaching a people group. They base it on two scales – a scale of relationship between the evangelist and the target culture, and a scale of availability of a cultural church.ⁱ The E-Scale is the measure of relation between the Evangelist's culture and the recipient's culture. Based on the definitions given, this work would be somewhere between an E1 and an E2. In an E1 the convert is not in contact with the church. An E2 is situation is where the potential convert is a member of a different but similar culture.

On the P scale, this is also between a P1 and a P2. A P1 is defined as a people group where there is a local church of the same culture, and a P2 where the people group do not have same culture church, but have a church from a similar culture.

The basis of this categorization comes from the information presented in the "Section 2 – Community and Background" portion of this paper. These people are considered to be in a different culture. However, they are also participants in the broader "American" culture, therefore placing them somewhere between the two groups in both cases. The second factor of this definition comes from the concept of a local church. In our apartment complex, almost all the people have cars, so they would be able to go to a relatively distant church. However, these people by nature do not like to travel and are not secure. They are also transient, so there is a continual element of change in their life. To manage this change, they try not to do any more than necessary towards integration into the community.

The results of these minor distinctions, however, are significant. If the results are P1/E1, this is normal evangelism. If we accept that apartment ministries are not just an under-reached people group, but actually have a different culture, then this becomes at least a missions field. (This is assuming that we accept that I am a member of the local culture.)

If we accept both that these people are not of the same culture, and that the missionary is of a different culture (as anyone outside the apartments would be, and as I may be since I do not have a long history in this area) then we are in the arena of "Frontier Missions." This is the hardest area of missions, two distinct issues must be addressed – the missionary's cultural gap and the work of establishing the church.

The Southern Baptist Convention and American Missions Board have defined apartment ministries as a mission field, and are using field missions strategies to build their work. I would argue that this is probably the best approach, since if only five percent of apartment dwellers are active in church (and therefore, almost by definition, part of a non-cultural church) then there is a profound need for the development of relevant churches. This in turn suggests a strategy that is intent on creating local churches and on creating missionaries within the culture, so that the work becomes evangelism – something that is in the realm of the average believer, rather than frontier missions work.

SMR – Sender, Message, Receiver

Since there is a cultural gap between the evangelist and the recipient group, there needs to be a process transculturation. One method for this process is presented by David Hesselgrave. He recommends a three-culture model of communication. His method takes the message as received by the missionary (the Sender), re-interpret it in light of the message as given in the Bible (the Message), and present it in a form appropriate to the recipient group.ⁱⁱ

This is a complicated and time consuming and difficult process. It is, unfortunately, largely beyond the scope of this paper. A basic and preliminary outline will, however, help develop a plan to meet these needs.

Sender

The sender must first remove the cultural forms and context of the message from the presentation that will be used to reach the target culture. This is done using the accepted tools of Biblical Interpretationⁱⁱⁱ

Some of the obvious cultural forms might include our idea of Church, the language of the message, and (at least initially) our expectations of dress and demeanor. For example, most Christians define church as the building where worship takes place. We expect people to drive to a place and meet at set times for a ritual. If we define church as more than the place of worship, then we would expect it to be Sunday School followed by a "worship service." This worship service is further defined as singing some songs, listening to a choir, a "special", taking offering, and then listening to a sermon preached by the pastor of the church.

While this form is our cultural understanding of "church," it is neither the model described in the Bible nor the most effective way of reaching small pockets of people who share a common culture. It is also not "seeker friendly" since we are still forcing people to go to a setting where lots of people who know what is expected will be critiquing the newcomer's behavior.

Another cultural form that may hinder the sender's presentation, as mentioned above, would be the language of the message. As people in the church growth movement suggest, while Christians see no issue with talking about the "blood," many people outside the church do not understand this reference. Indeed, they must think we are all colorblind when we talk about being made "white as snow by the blood of the lamb." (And many, I am sure, wonder about the lamb as well. Our college fraternities, for example, had traditions with lambs, and I do not think that they fit into our Christian world view.) These words and phrases, while very important to us as quick and effective ways to communicate a message within the church, must be re-defined or at least explained in the new culture before they can be used. Indeed, most of our "church talk" needs to be removed from the "message" so that the message of salvation and holiness can be effectively communicated.

Message

The discussion above of the sender does not do justice to Hesselgraves presentation in that it is also addressing issue of the message. To be more

accurate to his presentation, it is necessary for the sender to first "decode" the message of the Bible, in the original context that it was presented. This means understanding the original cultural context of each of the letters, books, and Gospels. This must be done both in relevance to his own culture (necessary for him to understand the Biblical message) and then in the terms of the target culture. This second "encoding" of the message is the message that will be presented to the target culture.

Hesselgrave presents several cautions in this process. First, it should be done without, as much as possible, reintroduction of elements of the sender's culture. It further means presenting it in a correct context that helps the recipient to both have their relationship with Christ, and also correctly understand the implication of the message in their culture – both that it transforms it and that it necessitates their performing the same process to reach other cultures.

Recipient

Therefore, the result of this process of contextualization would lead to the communication of the core Gospel truths in a language and form that makes sense to the people in the apartment complex. This means that the message must be presented in terms of its universal truth.

Basically, this means that our core doctrine must be presented in applicable language and form to these people. We must communicate something equivalent to the "Roman's Road" or the basic truths that:

- a. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
- b. The penalty for sin is death.
- c. Jesus paid the price for our sin.
- d. We must accept the gift of Christ in our lives.

And as Nazarenes and believers in Heart Holiness, we must also convey the message that God further calls us to live a holy life. This message must be communicated to share the hope that our sins be forgiven, but that we can live a life that is pleasing to God, free from intentional sin. It is this latter portion of the message that gives us the best hope to reach any person – we offer not only the

hope of salvation, but the hope of living up to the ideals that we all hold for ourselves.

Worldview differences

Since we are working under the presumption that we are dealing with a different culture. (And since this is supported by both sociology and some large church organizations.) We are looking at a situation where we are addressing people with one or more different worldviews. This means that our endeavor, in the end, becomes one of changing the worldview of the recipient culture. In this area of discussion, therefore, the number of worldviews does not matter. (Though each of these views must be addressed individually in the actual work of evangelism.)

Charles Kraft suggests that in this process, two major issues must be addressed – the adaptation of the day to day patterns of life, and deeper conversion of the worldview. He suggests:

A culture may be likened to a river, with a surface level and a deep level. The surface is visible. Most of the river, however, lies beneath the surface, and is largely invisible. But anything that happens on the surface of the river is affected by such deep-level phenomena as the current, the cleanness or dirtiness of the river, other objects in the river and so on. What happens on the surface of a river is both a response to external phenomena and a manifestation of the deep-level characteristics of the river.

So it is with culture. What we see on the surface of a culture is patterned human behavior. But this patterned or structured behavior, though impressive, is the lesser part of the culture. In the depths, are the assumptions we call worldview, on the basis of which people govern their surface-level behavior. When something affects the surface of a culture it may change that level. The nature and extent of that change will, however, be influenced by the deeper level worldview structuring within the culture.^{iv}

Therefore, we must address both the surface patterns of the culture, and the deeper worldview issues. But Kraft warns that this change must be done carefully. When we make changes to a culture's worldview, the result is both a change in behavior and an unbalancing of the norms of society. We must ensure

that the unbalance that created does not do our message harm. We must also ensure that we learn a lesson from behaviorism: If we take something away, we need to provide something in its place. It is much easier to replace a bad behavior than to eliminate it. (It is easier to replace swear words with a phrase like "bread and butter" instead of just removing the use of expletives completely. Over time, this change will allow the behavior to be completely removed, but a structure has been provided to meet the need – expression, without the offending language.)

Surface Level Culture

We intuitively know many of the surface level changes that we desire to see in our converts. We want to see changes of dress, marriage instead of cohabitation, purity, absence from alcohol and drugs, changes in language and social interaction. We want to see hate replaced with love. We want to see them make time for Church and make a commitment to our faith. These things can be separated into two categories – behaviors and beliefs. As the quote above suggests, this requires a worldview change.

Deep Level Culture

The deep-level cultural change is simple and yet complex. We want them to replace their existing worldview with a Christian worldview. This is a simple statement, but for us to make this happen in these people's lives is much more difficult.

Our goal is to show these people (in love) that they are sinners. We must then show them that they need a solution for their condition, and finally, we must show them that Christ is that solution. We must enter into this process understanding that our potential converts enjoy (mostly) their lives as they live them, or at a minimum believe that this is the way the world must be. (Look at people in India – they believe that the cast system is fair because their worldview believes that the current difficulties a person has in life are the result of failures in their past life. Therefore, there is no reason to want something better – this is a

just punishment for a crime that has been committed. This is a difficult concept for us to grasp, but an unquestioned "fact" to them.)

If we succeed in showing them their condition, and further are able to lead them to Christ, we must still show them how to replace their old views and lifestyles with something that is both Christian and functional.

The Task – Changing the deep culture.

Admittedly, this is a theoretical discussion of something that must be made practical. An example might be teaching people to do something other than drinking to have as a setting for conversation. We must show them how to deal with stress and boredom, as well as pain, grief, and fear in ways other than avoidance and intoxication. Obviously, this is neither a quick fix, nor an easy one – it requires learning new skills, activities, and thought patterns.

Given just this example, the group proposed must provide friendship, loving support, activity, training and practice in prayer, and accountability. This is a demanding structure. This is also the challenge of replacing a worldview. When the worldview suggests that this life is all there is, and that the best way to live is to both minimize pain and maximize pleasure, we must do more than change the pain and pleasure, we must change the value decision that underlies the choice. It is not just that the real pleasure is heaven and the real pain hell, but that the real value statement is about what Christ has done for us and the view God has of us.

ⁱ p. 510-511, *The Unreached Peoples Challenge* by Ralph D. Winter and Druce A. Koch, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1999.

ⁱⁱ p.393, *The Role of Culture in Communication* by David J. Hesselgrave, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ p. 394, Hesselgrave.

^{iv} p. 385, *Culture, Worldview and Contextualization*, Charles H. Kraft, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1999.

Section 5 – The "Program"

Proposed Strategy

To be able to make the worldview transition, we must first establish a ministry in the community. This is the most difficult part of the process. It is easy to gather information. It is easy to pray over an area, and meet a few people. It is much harder to get them interested in what we have to offer them, and get them to commit time to learning about God.

All of the ministries outlined above have used some form of community activity as a method to gain this initial in-road into the community. Once the people are aware of our presence and have had the opportunity to see something of our heart for them, they are more likely to be open to the message we have to share with them.

Picnic

One of the easiest in-roads into a community is often a picnic type event. It requires few resources other than food and grills, and is something that will attract people out of their apartments. Therefore, this is the proposed strategy for an initial in-road into the community.

Our apartment complex has a number of individuals who enjoy grilling. Since we already have people who are good cooks and have the materials, and since most of the people in the complex know these people, I am proposing a picnic where we provide the "raw materials," but ask the people to cook. Plates, utensils, chips, condiments and drinks would be provided, as well as hamburgers, hotdogs, and possibly chicken, depending on the number of grillers and grill space available.

There is some argument about serving hotdogs – they are small and easily carried. Project Hope and Kids and Teens 5-19 both mention that most adults will come and take small foods back to their apartments to eat instead of participating in the event. Therefore, Project Hope's suggestion was to "Load

them down so that they have to stay and eat." They also use a prize drawing to help keep people. Desert, if served separately, might also be useful.

Between the start of the event and serving food, Project Hope performs a presentation of the gospel. They also perform one after the meal and before the prizes. Since their target is a larger group than this apartment complex, I wonder if it is only necessary to make one presentation. Also, since Project hope starts with full Bible studies, they are seeking immediate decisions, not just soliciting interest.

Non Believer's Bible Study

While in College, we used a non-believer's Bible study as a means of introducing some of our non-Christian friends to the claims of Christ. We built the group by asking them to meet for a certain number of weeks, with a promise that we would not pressure them to make a decision for Christ, only that we would present the Biblical view of different topics for them to discuss.

At the first meeting, we asked each person to write a question that they would like for us to answer. We then chose broad topics based on their questions as well as some of our own as the material for our meetings. Our goal was to provide answers that were relevant to their lives.

While this method worked well in college, it might not work as well here. Also, I am more interested in gaining responses than I was with that group, especially since there are a number of people we know in this complex who are interested in spiritual things, and seem closer to decisions than the members of our college group. Therefore, I would probably not make the promise that we would not ask for a decision. I would also probably choose more structured material for the discussions. In the appendix, I present several possible outlines.

Bible Study Group

Once we have several people who have committed their lives to Christ, we will begin a regular Bible study group. This group will be oriented towards Christians, but will make room for people who continue to be interested who have not made decisions for Christ.

The goal of this group will be to develop mature, Biblically based, Christians. The plan will include both topical and Bible book studies, but these studies will be arranged such that there are three Bible books covered for each topical study. This makes sure that the group remains Bible focused.

Welcoming New Residents

Another area of ministry that needs to be considered deals with new residents. There needs to be a targeted effort to contact and connect with new residents. This is accomplished through the leaders and naturally through the "Person of Peace." There also needs to be effort through normal housewarming gifts (food, help moving in, etc.) to develop a relationship with the new residents. They should be invited to a Bible study group. (If they are willing to attend through the study and questions, they will hopefully come to Christ.)

Another opportunity to reach new residents would be any community events sponsored by the group. It is also assumed that every Christian will work to bring these people to Christ through their personal witness.

Development of Leaders:

Since I do not plan to be a permanent resident in this apartment complex, and since many of the people in this complex will not stay here for more than a few years, there also needs to be a plan for developing leaders to maintain the work after I leave. To achieve this, there will be an intentional plan of leadership development in the group. Further, this will allow the group to grow larger than the groups that I can personally run, since it may be necessary to meet in small groups due to the size of the apartments and the lack of a central meeting place in the complex.

Initial mentoring relationship

One of the first goals in the Bible study groups will be to identify people who are both capable and interested in becoming leaders. (The capable part is the more important one – the desire will come with growth in spiritual maturity.) These people will be asked to become involved in planning and approached

about leading the group after they have had some opportunity to participate in the group meetings. They would then be asked to facilitate a week when we would be able to assist them. Later, as they gained experience, they would be asked and encouraged to lead when we were not available, and finally, as the need arose, be asked to take leadership of their own group, with occasional supervision.

Development of internal leadership

Each group would be expected to follow the same model. Since this is built into the group's plan, this would also be the only model the people would know. It becomes expected that leaders will be trained and supported by the group. As the group grew larger, or as people moved to other apartments, they could continue this ministry with support and supervision from a more experienced leader or a local church.

Growth Plans

Since this is not just something that needs to be done in this complex, the goal would be to equip people to take this ministry with them. Therefore, there would need to be an emphasis in engaging the new leaders in the local church. If and when they move on, or I move on, the local church becomes their accountability and support system, providing them access to more formally trained leadership and better answers for questions that they do not have answers for.

It will also be necessary to identify sources of material for both the Bible studies and the topical studies so that the people are not developing their own lessons. Since they do not have theological training, it is probably not best for them to be doing independent interpretation. Also, this avoids some of the risk of false doctrine.

Ideally, there will be a second strong Christian who is not a leader who will be available to assist with additional groups and serve as a secondary point of accountability within the group, since they would be able to voice concerns about doctrine to other leaders. To ensure this in as many cases as possible, either

someone from the local church or from an established group within the same complex would be involved in the new group along with the new leader. In fact, it may be best to divide an existing group in half to ensure that there is sufficient participation in the group to ensure its survival.

Church Integration

While these Bible studies will provide both fellowship and ministry, it would be best to integrate these people into a local church setting. It is questionable if this will be possible. Some of the statistics indicate that there are almost insurmountable difficulty integrating apartment dwellers into the local church. Others, however, have had success, leading me to believe that there are some factors that relate to the local church, not just the cultural differences that are inherent in apartment dwellers.

Small group as door to church

One major issue to getting people to attend church is a feeling of isolation. Churches are foreign to these people and also threatening, since they do not know people in the church. If it is possible to integrate an outsider into the group from the local church, then this would provide two or three people at the church that members of the group would already know. These people then provide a bridge back to the local church. Further, if several people in the group are willing to attend together on a "first Sunday" that the group goes to church, then they would at least have their own circle of friends as a support group.

Compassionate Ministries potential

Another bridge between the local church and the ministry within the apartment complex might come in the form of compassionate ministries. There is a wealth of needs within the community, including food, education, healthcare, and support. To the extent that the local church is able to provide food, clothing, a parish nurse (as our church has,) or other resources, the church can build relationships in the community they may also be able to encourage trust and therefore attendance.

Section 6 – Materials and Outlines

Here are proposed studies for the first few months of this endeavor. The first outline presented is for the Non-Believers Bible Study. As mentioned above, it is intended to be a combination of answers to their questions and a presentation of the Biblical Jesus. I am calling this outline a "Worst Case Outline" because it assumes that I do not get any questions that would cause me to want to change it. It means that it will address my goal, but may not be as relevant to the lives of the people in this community.

Next I present an outline for the first study in the regular Bible study group. This is an introduction for new Christians. As an alternate, the New Believer's Bible Study could be used. Finally, there is an ongoing outline of possible books/topics for the group.

Worst Case Outline – Non-Believers Study

This will be a 12-week study of topics and Biblical responses.

- Week 0 – Intro / Getting Acquainted
This first week is just a chance for people to get to know each other better. It will also ask a few questions to give the leaders a chance to get a feel for the spiritual condition of the people in the group.
- Week 1 – Is God a Killjoy?
This lesson will discuss that idea that Christianity is just a bunch of rules that take the fun out of life. It will discuss why there are rules, and why they give us more fun in life, not less.
- Week 2 – 9/11 and Tragedy?
Is God responsible for this tragedy? Why would he let it happen? What do we learn from it? How do Christians deal with it?
- Week 3 – New Beginnings
Forgiveness of our self and our sins
- Week 4 – Angry At God?
Are we angry at God? Is this ok? How do we move past this anger?
- Week 5 –What makes you happy?
What makes life worth living? Is it stuff, people, or God?

- Week 6 – Creation or Evolution?
The creation/evolution debate. What is the Christian view of nature?
- Week 7 – Depressed?
Dealing with depression.
- Week 8 – Set Free!
Freedom from things that have happened in our past – abuse, etc...
- Week 9 – How to get to Heaven?
Do we get to heaven by works or by something God did for us?
- Week 10 –How Close is God?
Is God near us or far from us? How hard is it for us to "find" God?
- Week 11 – Beyond Circumstances
How do we move beyond the circumstances of our life?
- Week 12 –God's Love
The salvation message in John 3:16. (This is the appeal for conversion.)

New Christians / Fundamentals

After completing this study of issues, the next section will be a refresher and study for anyone who accepted Christ after the new believer's study. This would also be a starting point if there were enough people who were already Christians when we began the group. There are two possible topics: 1st John, or the Basic Bible Study.

Ongoing Study Plan (3/1 Bible/Topic)

After these two special sessions, the first being an introduction to Christianity, and the second being the New Believer's Bible study, there will be an ongoing series of Bible studies and topical studies. Each study would be for between 8 and 12 weeks, and would follow a pattern of doing three Bible study sections for each topical section. The exception to this might be a thematic Bible study, looking at sections of the Bible dealing with a certain theme, such as Holiness.

1 st John	This is a good study for people who are new Christians and offers insight on basic salvation and assurance of faith.
Luke	The action-oriented gospel – the Good news in an action oriented form.
Galatians	Fruit of the Spirit
Finances	A Christian view of Money as well as basic budgeting and stewardship
Corinthians	A letter that addresses many issues that are still present in our society today
Mathew	
Acts	Christian Practice
Relationships	A study of Marriage, Dating Relationships, or different people types

Conclusions

What a tremendous need and a tremendous opportunity. Neal Hughes, during his presentation, told a story of one apartment that he and his group entered. They were doing a prayer walk. An older lady stopped them and asked what they were doing. He replied. She asked them to come to her apartment, where she promptly got her family and lined her children up in the living room, then demanded that they present the Gospel. Neal says that this really wasn't a problem, and he presented the gospel to the family. Every one of them accepted Christ.

How many of us would be overjoyed to see such a conversion? We spend thousands of dollars on every convert we bring into our churches. Here, with only the investment of time and prayer, an entire family was saved. But this was not the end of the story. The lady proceeded to ask them to wait for a moment, while she went and got her neighbor because of her desire to share her new found faith. Her neighbor and family came, and also heard the gospel presented. Again, all were saved. This scenario was repeated several times, and by the end of the day, everyone in the complex (eight units) had come to know Jesus Christ as his or her personal savior.

While he may attribute this to irresistible grace, who can argue? God had prepared a harvest. It only required someone to come and share the Good News. While he admits that not every building is so receptive, they have found a great hunger in many of the apartments that God has lead them to enter.

The research indicates that just under half of the current US population lives in multi-family dwellings, the fastest growing type of housing. Only five to ten percent of people in multi-family housing are Christians. Many of those are new entrants, and since this housing includes nursing homes and assisted living communities, as well as housing complexes, apartments, and gated communities, there is a great need to share the gospel.

The research also indicates that Christianity is best solution for the stability and development of community. Christianity and the church are uniquely

suiting to deal with the stresses of modern life, the social issues, and the personal tragedies of the people living in these places. We have been commissioned to go out and reach people with the Good News. Where better than in places where there is a profound need?

We must intentionally target these communities because without this intentional work, they will never receive the Gospel and become participants in a community of faith. We must reach out – they will not come to us. They are uncomfortable with our achievements, our mobility, money, houses and "freedom." They do not have our privacy, our individuality. They do not have safety provided by fences and trees – only thin walls and weak windows. They live in a different world – a different culture.

This is our challenge – to make Jesus Christ relevant to their lives.

Appendix A - Actual Session Outlines

Week 0 – Intro / Getting Aquatinted

Ice Breakers:

1. Where were you born? Did you grow up there?
2. What is your favorite memory as a child?
3. What is your favorite food and what makes it best?
4. What is your favorite color, and why?
5. Have you ever been involved in church?
6. Who / What is God?
7. Do you think that we can know God?
8. If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

Discussion of the next Few Weeks

We will spend the next few weeks discussing God and sharing our views on a number of issues. I have some things that we can talk about, but I would like your ideas. Please take a card and write any questions you have about God, Faith, Religion, Jesus Christ or Christianity on the card. We may choose to answer some of them during the next few weeks.

Time for writing questions

Prayer Requests

Every week we will take a few minutes to discuss prayer requests and praises. Basically, what things can we pray about for you? You may pray for the needs of the other people in the class, but we will pray for you and these prayer requests. Please let us know about the answers you receive from your prayers – these are praises. We can celebrate together the things God is doing in your life.

Take prayer requests and pray.

Week 3 – New Beginnings

Ice Breaker

Q1: Have you ever done something stupid that you feel someone will never forgive you for? What was it?

Q2: What is the stupidest thing that makes you feel guilty?

Q3: On a lighter note, what is the greatest thing in the world?

Read the following Story:

At a conference of the Governors of the States several years ago, an interesting question was raised during one of the political debates. *What is the greatest thing in the world?* It was absolutely quiet. None of the governors had an answer. Finally a young aide took the microphone and said, "The greatest thing in the world is that we can walk away from yesterday."

I am not even sure if that young aide knew that she had just summarized the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of the Christian faith is that we can walk away from yesterday. [...]

To walk away from the failures and guilt of yesterday lies at the very heart of forgiveness. This is no call to cop-out, drop-out, or otherwise escape responsibility. But it is a liberating message that no one, absolutely no one, is tied to a past from which there is no release. The "gospel: gladly sings of the possibility of new beginnings.²

For Discussion:

1. What do you think of this story?
2. Is there really hope of release from anything in our past?

From A Christian Perspective:

Read: Luke 15 – The Prodigal Son

For Discussion:

1. Did the son deserve the celebration?
2. Would you have welcomed your child back in the same way?
3. Would you want to be welcomed back in this way?
4. What does this story tell us about the father?

Read: 1st John 1:19 says " If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

5. What does this say to you?

Take Prayer Requests and time for prayer.

² p. 248 - Burns, Jim, [Spirit Wings](#), Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan. 1992

Week 4 – Angry At God?

Ice Breaker

Q1: Are you (or have you ever been) angry with God? Why?

Q2: Is it all right to be angry with God?

Q3: Tell about a big disappointment in your life?

Read the following Story:

"Life Stinks!" If your friends aren't actually saying this, many of them are feeling it. Maybe you even feel that way. Consider the growing suicide rate, especially among young people. But it's not just the suicidal who are unhappy with life. Almost everyone feels the darkness of despair at one time or another.

A brief look at what life sends our way reveals why people get down.

- The person you love decides to end the relationship.
- A lack of money threatens to end you dreams of a college education.
- A life-threatening illness strikes someone close to you.

These are downers that can defeat us. When we become bitter about life because of things like this we often direct our anger towards God.

In a letter I read recently, a young person blamed God for everything that was wrong in his life. When I read it, my first thought was "What has happened to cause him to be so angry? How did he get to the point of giving up on God?"³

For Discussion:

1. Does Life Stink? Why?

From A Christian Perspective:

History: Elijah had just won a "showdown" between the god worshiped by the local people and the true God. In the process, the ministers of the other god were killed. Here is what happened next:

Read: 1st Kings 19 1:8

For Discussion:

1. Have you ever reached a point of "having had enough" and just stopped?
2. Could God provide food and water for someone?

Take Prayer Requests and time for prayer.

³ p. 11, Darrow Parker, What's God Have To Do With It? 365 Devotions For Students From Campus Journal, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI. 1993

Week 5 –What Makes you happy?

Ice Breaker

Q1: What is the best present you have ever received?

Q3: What makes you happy?

Read the following Story:

Pastor Larry Green asked the young people in his church what made them happy. Here are their top answers:

1. Summer
2. Clothes
3. Going to the mall
4. Going to parties
5. Looking nice
6. Not having a problem in the world
7. Talking on the phone
8. Getting my own way

How does this sound to you? Typical? About the same as your list? Or do you get the feeling that something's missing? That it's pretty shallow? C'mon. Be honest.

Just what makes us happy anyway? [...]

What about coming home to a happy and secure environment where you are accepted and loved? [...] Being able to get along well with all kinds of people? Having a good relationship with Mom? Dad? [Your spouse?] Being at peace with yourself? With God?

It takes work to be happy. Things can't make you happy because you'll always want more. People alone can't do it, because they're bound to disappoint you.⁴

For Discussion:

1. How would you respond to the following statement? "Happiness is not what you have to live on, but what you have to live for."
2. What do you have to live for?

From A Christian Perspective:

True happiness starts with your relationship with God through Christ. When that's as it should be, real happiness will spread from your heart into all your life. And your friends will be asking you, "What makes you so happy?"

Take Prayer Requests and time for prayer.

⁴ p. 67, Egner, Dave, [What's God Have To Do With It? 365 Devotions For Students From Campus Journal](#), Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI. 1993

Week 6 – Creation or Evolution?

What's God Have to Do With It? p. 108

Week 7 – Depressed?

What's God Have to Do With It? p. 301

Week 8 – Set Free!

Spirit Wings – p.74

Week 9 – How to get to Heaven?

What's God Have to Do With It? p. 135

Week 10 –How Close is God?

Spirit Wings – p. 92

Week 11 – Beyond Circumstances

Spirit Wings – p. 164

Week 12 –God's Love

Spirit Wings – p.106