

Second Baptist Church & The Churches of Springfield
A Model of Church to Church Collaboration for Community Transformation
By Krista Petty (FASTEN, 2007)

Church Name:

Second Baptist Church

Location:

Springfield, IL

Web sites:

www.secondbaptist.org

Compassion Ministry:

Second Baptist Church Missions Ministry
and
Churches of Springfield

Church size:

5000

Key Audiences:

Urban, suburban, or rural churches looking to partner together
Churches seeking to do significant work with children and schools
Churches desiring to synergize local, regional, and world missions

Key Lessons:

Prayer is foundational to any work of the church
Gain credibility by listening to community leaders
Cast vision by influencing influencers
Value mission and unity above numbers and recognition

Churches That Would Be Missed

Tired adages of how we can accomplish more together than we can alone may be trite, but they're true. In a memorable day in 2004, 680 volunteers from the Churches of Springfield, a network of 75 congregations deeply committed to community ministry, repainted the entire Hickory Hills Middle School, replacing all its guttering, remodeling a modular unit, and completely re-doing the landscaping. The massive effort accomplished the school's five-year maintenance plan in one day and saved the school district somewhere between \$60,000 and \$80,000. The "extreme makeover" even made the Springfield evening news.

Second Baptist Church in Springfield has played the key catalytic role in making this level of unity and multi-church engagement possible. Theirs is a story of the power of

prayer and strategic vision casting with lessons for any church that wants to make enough impact in its community that it would be sorely missed if it were gone.

SBC in Brief

Second Baptist has been a part of the Springfield community since 1887. It is a large church (5000 members) with a lot of hard-working families and a growing young adult population. Bob Roberts, the church's Minister of Springfield Missions, laughs, "We don't have any sugar daddies." The church is annually one of Missouri's leading churches in baptisms and has three Sunday Schools and two worship services, with average Sunday school attendance over 2000.

In 1997, Second Baptist accepted the Southern Baptist denomination's "Acts 1:8 Challenge." Drawing on Jesus' famous words about mission, the church devoted itself to a comprehensive missions strategy in its local community ("Jerusalem"), region ("Judea"), continent ("Samaria") and world ("ends of the earth"). In an article published in *On Mission* magazine, Second Baptist's Senior Pastor Dr. John Marshall explains that this conviction and strategy that has led to greater local missions involvement. He writes, "At Second Baptist we believe missions entails praying, giving, and going. (You notice we don't consider the going part to be optional.) So, having agreed we all must pray, all must give, and all must go, we turned our attention to Acts 1:8, which provides the geographical mandate. This verse tells the local church where to fulfill the Great Commission—parameters set by Jesus Himself. Our missions assignment is to the ends of the earth, beginning next door."¹

Worship. Serve. Go.
Second Baptist desires to touch the people of the world through those located in Springfield, Missouri. Our purpose is to Worship, Serve, and Go to the whole world starting with Springfield. We believe in living a life of **distinctive obedience** to the truth found in the Bible. We invite you to join with us as we Worship, Serve and Go.

Though Second Baptist Church (SBC) had had a long-standing vision for global missions, John recognized that to advance in the Acts 1:8 challenge the church would need to strengthen its local and regional outreach. To do so, he turned to Bob Roberts. A retired postmaster whose golf game was going great, Bob had already been brought on SBC's staff to work part-time on global missions. (The first action SBC had taken in their Acts 1:8 Challenge was to divide their missions ministry into three areas: Springfield; Missouri/USA; and other continents. The church then appointed a staff member, explains John, with "responsibility for each point of the Great Commission compass.")² In Bob's work as the global missions coordinator, he had exceeded expectations. Bob and his wife, Bonnye, had set a goal of encouraging 28 people to go on short-term trips to one particular region; in the end, 82 people got involved. To kick-start local missions, John asked Bob to move over to SBC's local missions department and help it achieve similar success. "He believed in me so much and empowered me to develop the process," Bob recalls with gratitude.

SBC on Mission

Bob's first step to invigorate local missions involved the launch of the Book Festival in 1999. The project has become a beloved tradition that continues to this day at SBC. The

concept is simple; as Bob puts it, “We feed the kids hot dogs and give them books.” But the program offers from 75 to 125 volunteers annually a great opportunity to get their feet wet in community ministry. From this modest beginning, the church began launching other kids outreach events. They started Kids Clubs in the parks and “Good News” After School Programs to love on at-risk elementary students. SBC has also played host to a number of community youth sports banquets and is a strong partner with several youth-serving community agencies, including the Boys and Girls Clubs and the Salvation Army.

The Foundation: Prayer

For the last several years, Bob and other SBC pastors have participated in a core group of ministers from about 15 congregations in Springfield that met regularly for prayer. These leaders would encourage one another in their ministries and pray for the city. In the last few years, the group increasingly began to talk about “doing something” together. With Bob giving leadership to SBC’s local missions, he was in a position to serve as a key catalyst for collective action. But Bob always credits the power of prayer, not his leadership, for the successful endeavor that the Churches of Springfield has become. “Churches of Springfield was God’s process of answering those years of prayers,” he emphasizes.

Listening to Community Leaders

In 2003, SBC inaugurated an innovative series of “community listening” sessions for the multi-church prayer team. With others’ help, he identified the top 50 community leaders in Springfield and started methodically bringing them in to meet and share with this group. “We talked to the mayor, fire and police chiefs, sheriff, school district officials and others,” Bob explains.

While Springfield enjoys important assets—the bustling city of 200,000+ is a national hub for the financial services and medical industries, boasts seven colleges, and is marked by a vibrant web of small businesses—it also has needs. To better understand those needs, the prayer group members asked each city official to answer the same four key questions:

- What is the difficult part of your job?
- What is the impossible task?
- How may we pray for you?
- What can the churches of Springfield do to make this a better community?

The meetings with community leaders spanned several months, each one offering an opportunity for shared learning and targeted prayer. The intentional listening process set the stage for the churches’ collective action in the city and also helped these ministers gain credibility in the eyes of the mayor, sheriff, and other city officials. As they listened and learned, the group bonded. When one city leader shared results from a study that concluded that children who were not reading on grade level by third grade had a higher

likelihood of incarceration, the light bulb turned on for Bob and the other ministers: They needed to support schools. And The Churches of Springfield was borne.

“I got this crazy idea,” remembers Bob Roberts. “I went and asked the school official, ‘What if we could accomplish your five-year maintenance plan for a school in one day? Give us your toughest school!’”

With the original prayer members at the core, the network of The Churches of Springfield soon grew to 75 engaged congregations. Their signature initiative is a city-wide tutoring program for at-risk third graders. Today, one hundred people from the various congregations involved in the Churches of Springfield network are tutoring in local elementary schools, and SBC itself sends some 350 volunteers into the schools. In addition to efforts with the younger kids, SBC and the Churches of Springfield are also involved in the upper grades. “We have a faith partner in the middle and high schools through Fellowship of Christian Athletes,” Bob reports. SBC is involved in ministry to college students as well.

The coalition also performs “extreme makeovers” at local schools like the one mentioned earlier at Hickory Hills Middle School. They call their service initiatives “Church Action Projects”—CAPS for short. The Churches of Springfield have worked together on numerous projects, including tutoring, supporting community arts, and disaster relief, as well as city planning projects. “The mayor knows he can call the Churches of Springfield for anything and we’ll come through,” says Bob. “When we had a terrible ice storm, the mayor did not hesitate to pick up the phone and ask the churches of Springfield to help clearing the debris of 1,100 elderly residents’ homes.”

Strategic Vision Casting & Mobilization

Like many effective externally focused churches, much vision is cast at SBC from the pulpit, as the senior pastor emphasizes God’s missional call in his Sunday sermons. But SBC and other key congregations in the Churches of Springfield have also intentionally cultivated sustained support for external focus by “influencing the influencers.” Bob explains: “We selected a group of 50 people and had lunch with them—casting the vision of being connected in the community and a part of the Churches of Springfield. Then, we selected another 50 and another 50. Each of the initial Churches of Springfield senior pastors did this as well.”

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| <p style="text-align: center;">2007 SBC
Springfield Mission Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bridges for Youth (Neighborhood youth centers)▪ Fellowship of Christian Athletes▪ Good News Clubs▪ Grand Oak Baptist Mission Center▪ Greene County Baptist Association▪ Pregnancy Care Center▪ Real Encounter▪ The Salvation Arm▪ Springfield Victory Missions |
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In addition, SBC mobilizes volunteer support for missions by recruiting “mission champions” within the church’s Fellowship Bible groups (small groups) “Out of 54 Fellowship Bible groups,” Bob reports, “We have 46 mission champions.” This helps

sustain missions both locally and globally. Like most congregations, SBC also communicates volunteer needs through the weekly bulletin and church web site.

Bob also took time to identify potential service project coordinators. “I did a lot of this through ‘half-timers,’” he explains. (“Half-timers” is author Bob Buford’s term for middle-aged adults who have peaked in their careers and now may be particularly open to robust involvement in leading Kingdom ministries.) “I have a group of 40-50 leaders with strengths waiting to be called,” Bob says. “I’ve had to practice not ‘doing’ but leading and letting others do the rest.” And SBC has been willing to invest in leadership development, paying costs for training seminars necessary for volunteers involved in certain initiatives.

Sustaining the Outreach Arm

Sustaining a vibrant ministry like SBC’s local missions and the Churches of Springfield requires that key elements be in place both within and outside of the congregation.

Inside the four walls of the church, both leadership and laity must be passionate. For Bob, endorsement of the Churches of Springfield by SBC’s senior leadership has been crucial. For a church to transform a city, Bob asserts, “The senior pastor must be involved and has to cast vision and has to be a mobilizer.” At SBC, local missions is so important that Bob directly reports to the senior pastor. Though empowerment of lay leadership is necessary in facilitating many projects, Bob notes that decision-making at SBC is very senior staff led. “You can’t always manage on consensus. We are ‘tri-led’ by the senior pastor, executive pastor, and worship pastor.”

This does not mean that the laity is unimportant. To the contrary, Bob reports that lay members are often the best sources for creative ideas. “People migrate to our ministers after worship service. We get more ideas for ministry from the pew than from each other on staff,” he says. Clearly, many members at SBC believe they have something important to contribute to the church’s local outreach. The congregation also generously supports the ministry financially. SBC’s local missions work is financed through a faith commitment offering taken every 18-24 months. The ministry’s budget is between \$108,000 and \$120,000 annually. Roughly \$15,000 to \$20,000 of the budget is earmarked for special events with the Churches of Springfield. In addition, SBC’s local ministry is also boosted by occasional special gifts. Commitment to outreach is also sustained by the laity’s ongoing engagement with scripture and its call to mission. Bob reports that not only has SBC seen more church members stepping up to serve the community; more also are engaging in Bible study. “Sixty percent of our members are involved in Bible study,” he says.

Outside the church, SBC leaders maintain key relationships with community stakeholders within and outside the faith community in order to facilitate good will and ongoing cooperation. Bob and other leaders serve on the Good Community Member Board, a broad network of community agencies that meets once a month to assist each other in being successful in efforts to serve Springfield. Participation in this group helps SBC and

the Churches of Springfield continue to learn more about the community, understand what others are doing, and identify where important work remains unfinished. This kind of engagement with secular partners further solidifies SBC and the Churches of Springfield's reputation in the community and provides a platform for relationship-building that helps sustain the movement.

"The mayor knows he can call the Churches of Springfield for anything and we'll come through."

-- Bob Roberts, SBC Minister for Springfield Missions

Overcoming Challenges

While the multi-congregational efforts of the Churches of Springfield have been rewarding, they have not come without challenges. Bob mentions four the group has faced but overcome.

The first is meeting overload. Obviously, in a collaborative effort like The Churches of Springfield, meetings are critical for purposes of coordination. But Bob argues, "You don't have to have a lot of meetings. You must have decision-makers that empower people to go 'do'." When Churches of Springfield first started, they held monthly meetings. Now, they've reduced this to quarterly gatherings, with special speakers. "We didn't want this to become routine. This is special," he emphasizes.

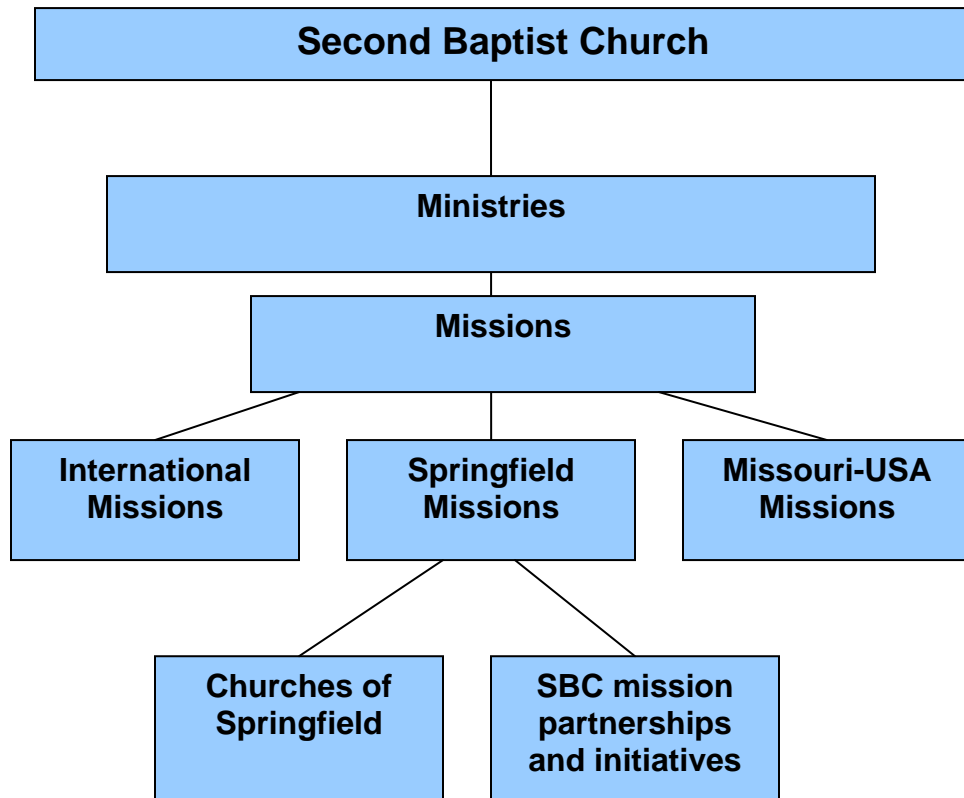
Communications overload is a second challenge. Again, to keep a collaborative healthy, communication is obviously important. But Bob carefully chooses what emails he sends out to the rest of the churches, so as to not over-communicate. There is no newsletter and they have no formal process of communication other than email notification of the quarterly gatherings, projects, or emergency needs. "We have committed ourselves to communicate when it was important," Bob reports. "No trivial communications and no taking advantage of the emails in the network."

The group is also careful not to allow money to be a divisive issue. When The Churches of Springfield implements a collective project, each congregation is asked to contribute what it can to the initiative. As Bob says, "We just divide the cost, asking churches to pay what they can."

A final challenge is overcoming the issues that can arise when congregations of many different denominations try to work together. To maintain unity, The Churches of Springfield have two items it continuously stresses, Bob says. "First, we are here to glorify God. Second, we ask everyone to check their denomination at the door. We collectively agree this is not an organization but that there is flexibility to simply meet needs." This dedication to unity has produced a lot of goodwill around the city and even contributed to some diverse churches promoting the good news in partnership. "A few of

us have even begun to do some evangelistic events together for the benefit of the Kingdom of God,” Bob shares enthusiastically.

Krista Petty is a coach for Externally Focused Churches and writer for Group Publishing and Leadership Network. Most recently, she served as editor of The Externally Focused Church (Group Publishing) and Living a Life on Loan (Standard Publishing). She resides in Johnstown, Colorado with her husband, Steve, and three great kids. The Petty's are active members of LifeBridge Christian Church. Comments or questions for the author can be sent to krista_petty@msn.com.



3 Views

What is Churches of Springfield?

Ask this question in Springfield, MO and here are three answers you might hear.

Community

This is a credible group of leaders we can count on for anything. We don't know what we would do without them!

Church Leaders

The unity experienced in this group has caused us all to grow and open our eyes and hearts to community needs. "Churches don't pay taxes. This is a great way for churches to contribute back to our communities," says Bob Roberts.

Church Members

Churches of Springfield is a part of our church ministry to the community. It offers us many opportunities to do good works together and to share the gospel message in our community.

¹ <http://www.actstone8.com/atf/cf/{4C497052-E965-4C35-9713-3D98856F159E}/Reflections.pdf>

² <http://www.actstone8.com/atf/cf/{4C497052-E965-4C35-9713-3D98856F159E}/Reflections.pdf>