

*How God is using an unlikely collection  
of ordinary people to do extraordinary things*

## **Leadership Development Snapshot:**

### **FAMILY BASH**

On a mid-summer Sunday evening, the gym at Hilltop Urban Church began to fill with children, teens and adults for the opening night of Summer Family Bash. No parents were dropping off their kids; this was for the whole family and the “price of admission” for the children was for a parent or guardian to come along.

At six o’clock dinner was served. As they ate, the children, teens and adults at each table did “happy/sad,” answering the questions, “What was one thing that happened this week you felt happy about and one thing you felt sad about?” Then a teen praise team from West Evangelical Free Church led a time of singing.

For the next hour the children and the parents went their separate ways. About twenty teens, some from Hilltop and some from West Evangelical Free, took the children to the basement where Dave, the children’s pastor from West, taught the children a lesson on one of the fruits of the Spirit. Teens helped the children with crafts and poured on the TLC.



Meanwhile, the parents went upstairs where they dug into the same fruit of the Spirit. Far from being just a Bible study, this was a parent support group where parents shared freely about their joys and struggles with patience, joy, kindness, and self-control, and they went home with assignments—such as simple, homemade interactive games to play with their children—that helped them and their children practice that fruit of the Spirit that week.

After class everyone came back to the gym. Over dessert they shared around each table their answers to the question, “What do you need Jesus to do for you today?” and prayed for one another.

Once the children had left for the evening, the twenty-some workers had a wrap-up discussion, “What worked? What didn’t work? And what will we do differently next week?”

When the Summer Family Bash ended after four weeks, the workers met to evaluate. The event had been designed to:

- **Minister to whole families.** At Hilltop twenty years of ministering to children without reaching their parents had produced almost no lasting fruit. Therefore, the charge to the Children’s Ministry Team at Hilltop was to not minister to children in isolation, but together with their families. To make a lasting difference in children’s lives, they needed to reach their parents.
- **Build intergenerational relationships** between Hilltop’s children’s, teens, and adults.
- **Promote leadership development** among the youth.
- **Strengthen the urban-suburban partnership** between Hilltop and West Evangelical Free. (In the past, the West Evangelical Free youth group had come in and run a program for Hilltop children.) For the first time the youth groups of the two churches would be trained together and run the ministry together.
- **Empower urban ministry leaders.** In the past, leaders from the suburban church had run the ministry while urban leaders watched from the sidelines. This time Hilltop’s Children’s Ministry Team led and workers from the suburban church served in supporting roles.
- **Produce ongoing disciple-making relationships.** The team decided that the primary way they would measure the success of the program is by how many ongoing disciple-making relationships continued after the Summer Family Bash ended, not by how many attended or how much fun they had.



When the program ended, parents were saying, “We need to keep this going.” A couple of discipleship triads—groups of three adults who meet regularly for prayer, encouragement, and accountability—were born. Youth from the two youth groups—one urban, one suburban—had formed new friendships that continued through Facebook and the youth from one church spontaneously visiting the youth group of the other church. Several youth enjoyed having greater responsibility and showed growth as leaders. Parents were doing fun things with their children that they had never done before.

The workers were so excited by the wins that they didn’t want to wait till summer to do it again, so they scheduled a Winter Family Bash as well as fall and spring reunions for the parent support group.

So how did this amazing ministry event come together? Through the power of team. For the past three years, Hilltop has been intentionally cultivating a team culture that empowers people to use their gifts together in ways that constantly amaze the members of the teams. The Summer Family Bash was a huge win for the Children’s Ministry Team, but more than that it was the fruit of a team culture. Look at the teams that were involved in putting this event together:

- Hilltop’s **Children’s Ministry Team (CMT)**—Anna Mendoza (chair), Melissa Adams, Alice Montes, and Marguerite Garcia—led the planning and execution of the program.
- For the overall planning, the CMT invited others to participate: representatives of Hilltop’s Youth Ministry Team, representatives of West Evangelical Free Church (WEFC) youth ministry, and the lead teacher for the parent support group. Together this “**Steering Team**” decided on times, dates, the flow of the program, and the theme of the week.

- CMT member Alice Montes formed a **Craft Team**, recruiting some of the Hilltop youth to work with her to prepare original crafts for each of the lessons. These got rave reviews in the evaluation.
- Becky McCormick led the **Meal Team** to plan, prepare, and serve meals and dessert each week.
- The **Youth Ministry Team** (YMT) led by Amanda Swenson participated in the planning and conducting two Saturday sessions to train the combined youth groups from the two churches to work with the children.
- A two-person team, Pam Cornwell and Marguerite Garcia, led the **Adult Support Group**.
- Hilltop's **Sermon Team** (part of the church's new team culture) planned and preached sermons on the same fruits of the Spirit that were the focus of Summer Family Bash during the four weeks of the program.

In all, six ministry teams at Hilltop plus the Youth Ministry Team from WEFC worked together, all coordinated by the Children's Ministry Team. This was a Children's Ministry Team that didn't even exist just three years earlier. None of the team's members had ever seen themselves as leaders, and most agreed to join the team only over objections that they were inadequate. But now, after experiencing the creativity of working together as a healthy team, they are really starting to believe what their coach has been telling them: "You're a bunch of freakin' geniuses!"