

# Drawing a picture of God's Love: one crayon at a time



[because lost people matter]

It's hard to believe that a bunch of crayons could change the whole DNA of a small Midwest church. But that's exactly what happened to First Baptist Church in Bicknell, Indiana. Frustrated with the status quo of seeing a community ravaged by poverty and drug abuse, but not knowing how to make a Kingdom impact in the Northern Knox County area, Pastor Seth Alexander enrolled in the CECL<sup>SM</sup> program at Green Lake. With the help of great speakers, an encouraging CECL<sup>SM</sup> coach, and a group of his peers spurring him on, God began to reveal to Seth what a large-scale impact that FBC Bicknell could have on the community of Northern Knox County. FBC's leadership gathered at Green Lake Conference Center for the third session of CECL<sup>SM</sup> Class 5, and caught the same vision Seth had received.

The leadership team began to take a look at the programs FBC offered and were dismayed to discover that every single one was inward-focused, meaning the programs were for people who already had a relationship with Jesus Christ. God was calling the church to reach out and minister to the hurting hearts who could not be found in the pews. Through prayer and scripture, the leadership team came up with a new vision of what God wanted to accomplish through this church: to reach the 4,734 unchurched people in the North Knox area. A new mission statement was also developed to articulate FBC's new vision: "We live to grow Christ's Kingdom by passionately sharing His truth in love."

With the catalyst of the great programming at CECL<sup>SM</sup> and the wonderful GLCC environment, Seth and the team forged ahead, praying for God to reveal ways to make the vision more than lip service. God began to open the congregation's eyes to the needs around them.

There were many children attending our Wednesday night programming who came in hungry and asked for several snacks. God birthed it in the hearts of the volunteers that FBC needed to feed these children a nutritious meal – to fill the belly and the spirit. It's hard for children to focus on the Gospel presented to them with the ache of hunger in their stomachs. As the need was presented, the people of FBC responded with generosity and met the needs of these precious children, many of whom come from unchurched families. One Sunday night a month, FBC also offers a free meal and fellowship to anyone who walks into the fellowship hall (we even deliver!). This has been so effective because the pews have been mobilized to do outreach and to live a lifestyle of worship that goes beyond Sunday mornings.

Once a year FBC offers a free clothing giveaway called the "Free 4 All" right before school starts. Many of the students who attend school at the local elementary (which is approximately 80% free and reduced lunch) and their families line up hours before the event to receive brand new and gently used clothing items for the upcoming school year. These same families can be seen at the children's programming and the free meals as many

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people in poverty learn to trust FBC, and hopefully the Church as a whole once again. The most well-attended Free Meal was the Thanksgiving meal, which fed almost 400 people in a little over three hours.

the city and a man who couldn't keep his property clean. A couple of church members read his story in the newspaper and were saddened to hear that the man would be fined daily until he cleaned up the property. The man had fallen on hard times and was physically unable to work on the cleanup himself. So with rakes, gloves, and a spirit of generosity, a group from FBC spent a Saturday morning working on the property. The city mayor came out to check on the progress, and it was an outreach tool designed to minister to the homeowner and the city, but God (in his creative way) expanded that ministry and put FBC's story on the front page of the county's most popular newspaper.



**"Free 4 All" back-to-school clothing giveaway for local elementary students**

In order to demonstrate the massive need for Jesus to the congregation, the leadership team began to collect used crayons from local head starts and preschools. Eventually 4,734 crayons were collected. On Launch Day for the new vision, the crayons were prominently displayed for a great visual of 4,734 broken people that God wants to use to color a picture of love to this world. When people begin relationships with Jesus at FBC now, a crayon goes out of the tube. When they are baptized, a brand new crayon is presented to them. If you visit any FBC member's home, you will find a crayon with a magnet on his or her fridge. That crayon represents someone that is in need of Christ's saving grace. The members each have at least one unchurched person they are praying for and intentionally inviting to church and into a relationship with Jesus.

FBC, which is planted smack-dab in the middle of town, saw ways to meet the physical needs of people in the area and in the process, hopefully give them a new glimpse into who Jesus is and how He brings freedom to the oppressed. Parades are a big part of the entertainment in the town of Bicknell, and the large parking lot in the middle of Main Street became a major source of ministry as FBCers handed out free popcorn, hot dogs, water, and a smile to those gathered, who were baffled that no one would take their money. After all, CECL<sup>SM</sup> taught the church to GO TO the people instead of waiting for them to come in.

At FBC people believe God is creative, and His people must also express creativity as they work to reach the unchurched in the community. One of these "creative outreach projects" involved being a peacemaker between

FBC believes the Church as a whole in North Knox is barely scratching the surface of how Jesus desires to restore our community, individual by individual and family by family. It is a blessing to see God working and join Him in His efforts to win these cities by love. Every time a crayon comes out of the tube, it does not represent a number, but a life changed by the redeeming power of Christ. Interestingly enough, all of this outreach and mobilization of the people of God have led to 14 baptisms so far this year and even more crayons coming out of that tube.



**FBC's tube of crayons**

The CECL<sup>SM</sup> program was just the catalyst that FBC, Seth, and the leadership team needed to bring great ideas to fruition with the help of great teaching and practical application as well as important accountability and loving guidance. This has changed the very makeup of the church and there's no going back! This new mission and vision have left an indelible mark on who FBC is as a church, and the hope is that this church will continue to advance the Gospel through the streets of Bicknell and North Knox.

With assistance and hope given by CECL<sup>SM</sup>, things will never be the same again. CECL<sup>SM</sup> helped FBC begin drawing a picture of God's faithful love, one crayon at a time.



**Seth and Lauren Alexander**