

A TESTIMONY OF
OUTREACH

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My name is John Rotharmel, and I am the lead pastor of LaSalle Lighthouse. Since the beginning of our ministry journey, my wife, Kim, and I have always felt a call to join with others in ministry to lead as many people as possible to Jesus. That is our ultimate purpose in life and has helped shape our vision for what outreach looks like. As youth pastors, we would often get together with other youth groups for events and outreaches. We thought, if we could reach some alone, how much more could we reach together?! This same vision for outreach continued in us when we became the lead pastors of LaSalle Lighthouse 19 years ago.



We wanted to reach the town, but the town was closed to any churches doing anything with the town. They did not want to appear to show favoritism to one church over another and, therefore, it was difficult to get involved with anything in the town. There were four other churches in town, a Presbyterian Church, a Lutheran Church, a Baptist Church, and us, the Assemblies of God Church. Kim and I were determined to get to know them. We wanted to see how we could support one another in reaching people.

As you can imagine, the churches were very diverse in their beliefs, but as long as they all believed and taught that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, then we could choose to focus on what unites us rather than the little things that could so easily divide us. We called and met with each pastor individually over coffee and shared our hearts with them for unity. We told them how we would love to build a relationship and see how we could support them and walk together to reach LaSalle for Jesus.



They were all happy to meet us, but because of our very diverse church traditions, everyone was at least a little timid to jump in completely. There were fears of churches trying to steal members from other churches and uncertainty as to how to move forward together when our church traditions were so diverse from one another. We were all okay with focusing on Jesus and Salvation through Him being the only way to Heaven, but how do we function in unity with the other concerns hanging over our head?

Because of this uncertainty all of the pastors decided to start meeting together once a week and get to know one another before getting our congregations involved. So, in September 2006 the LaSalle Ministry Alliance was birthed out of a Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Assembly of God pastor getting together for fellowship, a heart to see LaSalle reached, and a hopeful desire for unity

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As we met and prayed together, we shared each church's statement of faith and got to know one another personally. Our personal relationships grew and through that, trust grew. At that time, all of the churches felt a need to develop a joint benevolence program and the Caring and Sharing program came into being. We put a leader to oversee it that all of us felt comfortable with and came up with a set of guidelines that Caring & Sharing would go by.

The leader was in charge of oversight, accepting applications, and interviews, and one delegate (usually the pastor) from each church had a vote for approval of the application. We became associated with United Way, and applications started coming in. This allowed us to reach out to those in need in the community, meet a pressing need in their lives, and hopefully lead them to Jesus. From that time until now, the four churches have together given over \$500,000 in financial assistance, in addition to food and clothing. By the next Easter, the Presbyterian Church invited us to join them for their Lent services, which were done as a Taizé prayer service. This was the first time that our congregations would be getting together, and we had no idea what a Taizé service was, so again we were a little timid.



We did research and invited our board to attend with us. The service was an amazing prayer service in which several different individuals led in prayer and meditation on God's word. As Assemblies of God pastors, we had never participated in lent before, but for many years after that, as our relationship with the other churches grew, we would continue to participate with Good Friday and Lent services. We also started doing a joint VBS in which volunteers, supplies, and finances came from all four churches.

We decided to approach the town as a unified body of Christ, four churches working together with one purpose, and, because of that unity, the town opened to us and allowed us to advertise our events in the town newsletter and website.

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The schools even allowed us to send home flyers with the students to advertise our upcoming VBS and any other pertinent events we may be having. We began to acquire bounce houses to use for outreach, which were paid for by funds from all four churches pitching in. The middle school allowed us to use their gym and cafeteria for Light the Night, our Halloween outreach. The town also would shut off the water to the town park to allow us to have Movie in the Park 3 times in the Summer.



We would set up bounce houses, serve free snacks, and get to know the people. This was such a big success that eventually the town board offered to pay for half of the movie licensing cost, which could be a lot depending on the movie we were showing. We started exploring ways to use the bounce houses to generate funds for the Caring & Sharing program and decided to start “renting” them out. Bounce houses are heavy and a lot of work to set up, so we decided that thirty percent of all revenue would go into Caring & Sharing and seventy percent would go to the person setting them up.

This helped provide an income for someone and helped the ministry earn money to reach more people. Not long after that, the town asked us to help them with their yearly town celebration, LaSalle Days, at no charge to us, by bringing the bounce houses and charging whatever we wanted to raise funds for the LaSalle Ministry Alliance. This was a blessing that God was giving us for both finances and outreach!

We decided to use the funds earned at LaSalle Days for Caring & Sharing. At that time, we saw the need to write down a formal statement of faith and create a set of bylaws that all of us would go by within the LaSalle Ministry Alliance. This was important, not only for our operations, but for the future pastors of the churches to know and understand how we support and function together. We started an afterschool program, Kid’s in Christ (K.I.C) in which volunteers from all four churches offered tutoring.



We would serve snacks, offer homework help, and teach them about Jesus. The school loved this so much that they let us use their playground and promoted it to students. Many students came to the Lord through K.I.C. Sadly, after Covid, this program has not been revived, but the school is asking for it, so we are praying for “laborers because the harvest is plentiful”. In all of this, there are several things we have learned. It is important to care for the church the Lord has put you in. Do not by any means forsake that as your primary focus. However, God also did not call us to be exclusive from other people who share faith in Jesus, just because their traditions might look differently than ours.

As long as we all agree that sin is sin, the Bible is the all inspired true Word of God, and that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, all the rest is details. Psalm 133 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” What would the church look like if we stood united and chose to join together, reach out, and lead people to Jesus? That is the heart of it all.