



**INSIDE:**

+ **Outreach Ideas for  
Ellis County**



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ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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## **Editor's Note:**

Editor's Note: This month we asked our writers to identify what out-of-the-box church outreach ideas they would like to see implemented in Ellis County.

## ***"Real Stories by Regular Folks"***

### ***Written by:***

***Rev. Christine Wagner***

Where was your favorite hiding place as a child? What was your most memorable kiss? When did you first "break the rules"? These prompts and countless others are invitations to conversations and storytelling. So many folks turn to their screens and devices and gorge on whatever stories the algorithms dish up. These stories usually tend to push us into our mutually exclusive corners where we take potshots or worse at others.

Listening, speaking and sharing our own personal stories with others can be considered radical acts of love. Bringing people together in a warm and welcoming space, where

stories are spoken and heard, can provide life-giving sustenance to a fractured community.

This is what a small group of dedicated people have been offering for over ten years in a small town in southern Oregon, approximately the same population as Hays. Four or five times a year The Hearth invites five or six people from different walks of life to share their themed stories with friends and strangers who gather to listen. The first Hearth event got off to kind of a rough start in a local bar. For one thing too many people were crammed into too small a space. And my how it's grown. Currently about 400 people attend these events.

Mark Yaconelli, a former Presbyterian Youth Minister

and author of books on youth ministry, founded The Hearth with family and friends. In his recently published book, "Between the Listening and the Telling: How Stories Can Save Us," Mark shares funny, tragic, and profound stories from his own life and from his years as a "storycatcher"-hearing, affirming and amplifying the stories of others. With their permission, he shares some of them in this book. A group met in the church I serve each Wednesday night during Lent to discuss Mark's book. We were nourished both by the soup served and the stories we shared.

Mark and his wife, Jill, just returned home from a cross-country tour in their van with The Hearth motto painted on the side: "Real

## ***“Real Stories by Regular Folks” (Continued)***

Stories by Regular Folks.” He is encouraging people around the country, in communities large and small, to form their own story sharing venues and to begin to really listen to one another. In his book he writes, “We have to listen. We have to tell the truth. We have to practice being together . . . If we create the time and space needed to listen, we soon find the delusions of us and them, friend and enemy, holy and profane dissipate, and we enter into the mysterious, particular truth of you, of me, of us. Gathering to share stories is how we learn to trust one another. It is an exchange of gifts. You talk. I listen. Now I talk, you listen. It’s a humble exchange. Image by image, experience by experience, our lives

become nourishment for one another. Through the listening and the speaking we dismantle the barricades.”

Who might join in creating such an offering and opportunity in Hays? Might a church or churches work together to create a local version of The Hearth? In Mark’s model, Hearth events are not overtly Christian or religious. People of all persuasions or none are equally welcomed. Story topics do not encourage either political rants or religious proselytizing. Most events do not take place in churches, for there are many people who would not darken the doors of a church.

Where could we meet where all would feel welcome? Can we work

together to offer a safe and lively venue? Are there folks in Hays, Regular Folks, brave and vulnerable enough to share Real Stories with the community? Can we look into one another’s eyes and speak the truth in love? Can we hear each other as sisters and brothers longing for life that is good and beautiful and true? Let me know if you might be interested! I’m kind of scared, excited, and hopeful we can get to know one another.



*Rev. Christine Wagner is the Transitional Minister at First Presbyterian Church of Hays where she first became a member more than 33 years ago.*

### ***Needed Ministries in Hays***

***Written by:***  
***Ben Houchen***

When thinking of needed ministries in the Hays community, it worries me that the kinds of services needed are ones many of our churches and parishioners may struggle to support for a variety of

reasons. First of all, everything, and I mean everything, we do has become so politically and divisively charged, that helping people who are the most vulnerable is something that even the most well-intentioned pastors, priests, and churches may shy away from getting involved

in. Secondly, we have so fully embedded ourselves in our schedules that adding anything new to the plate just seems untenable.

And finally, we know that those who have the least give the most to ministries and services. I feel that further taxing already

## ***Needed Ministries in Hays (Continued)***

struggling budgets will create more people in need, rather than helping those currently in need. I also know that many of those most in need don't trust the church at-large. They have been hurt by churches, and don't want those wounds reopened as they are facing an already vulnerable situation to ask for aid.

We need to take time to think through the needs of our community. We need to take time to listen, discuss, and observe. And while I have only been in Hays for a couple of years, I have been listening and observing as much as I can. I think there are 3 areas are challenged with: food, shelter, and protection.

We need food and shelter to survive, and we need to be able to feel safe to thrive. And these are the three things that I still see a need for in Hays Kansas. The school district is going to end the school year with several thousand dollars in outstanding school lunch debts. While ministries like Feeding Hays are having a positive impact there, more still needs to happen. We have food pantries and other assistance for those needing food, but we

have not advertised and promoted these well enough. Many people do not know just how many options are available to them. Even with all those options, I see a need for more food services such as meal nights, expanded food pantries with fresh foods, as well as the boxed and canned foods provided now.

We also have a large LGBTQIA community that is often the most at-risk group of teens and adults in our city. A community that has embraced so many and takes pride in their desire and ability to embrace all, yet falls short in embracing these most at need, is a shameful thing. We need to hold each other accountable to a Christ love that would never treat another human being with indignity or scorn. We need ministries that express support and care for the LGBTQIA population in Hays, just as we want to do for every other group and individual in this city. We need defense against hatred, support in crisis, and aid in times of need.

Hays also has a homeless problem that seems to be nearly ignored. We have a program to help transient homeless find shelter and

assistance in Salina, but we do not have strong services for the homeless who live and work in our community. Those living on friends' or relatives' couches, living in their cars, or living in long-term motels are not homes with security and stability. We need much more affordable housing and services to help people get into and stay in these homes. Being in a college town always affects the cost of rent, but we need to work together as a community to find ways of lowering these costs and keeping them affordable for families and workers who have made a permanent home in Hays.

So many things need to still be addressed, and I believe this is a community that can rise to the occasion of meeting these needs. And if we can, we can be a model for small town health and vibrance throughout Kansas. I would certainly love to try. Now we just need to pick a place to start.



*Ben Houchen is the Administrator of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Hays*

## ***Fresh Ideas for ECMA***

***Written by:***

***Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry Sr.***

The mission of the church is to assess for relevant needs and then provide those needs to the individuals within its community. One of the challenges of collaborating with people is to know who we are working for and how to address the concerns of those who are being helped. Many churches and ministries make the mistake right away by not following through with a proper needs assessment. For example, if Ellis County were to structure a ministry to help the Aborigine in the South Sea Islands to develop their community or help the Vietnamese understand life in a tropical environment, those are two ministry ideas that are not directly relevant to the immediate community.

It is imperative to understand that there are two areas that need concentrated on in this community. There are many tracks in which allow those two classes to prosper and also empower the citizens to address growth in our community. The two focus groups to which many ministries can develop and

grow are children and seniors.

Every community has a demographic structure that involves these two groups. A thriving and growing community will always have children because children are the lifeblood of growth for any community. When a community does not focus on its youth and does not address the needs of its young people, parents tend to migrate away from that community. This is due to their desire to be satisfied with and to see their children receive services that are vital to their growth.

As to senior citizens, many communities will find themselves with an abundant population of individuals who are aging. It is these individuals who have many needs and are often neglected, not only by community leaders but also church leaders. With a major focus on youth and the neglect of those who are seasoned with years, communities suffer and die.

Seniors often have the desire to receive adequate services available to them. When the need is not met, these seniors depart from a community and migrate to a place where there are

people of like mind and like activity. Oftentimes seniors look for a warmer climate or activity base that meets the focus of those of their peers. Such migration to areas such as Florida, Arizona, and California have left cities in the central plains and in the northeast with decreasing population. The services that are neglected are the very services that are needed to maintain this group, especially those who are still active in their lifestyle.

The solution for Ellis County is twofold. First, there is a need for Christian daycare. By that I mean a church program with a structure that has a spiritual curriculum. There are enough video games, social programs and activities that will direct the minds of our youth in a direction that is not Christ-centered. It is important and even imperative to have a place where children can go and learn of the Bible and read Bible stories. This will help to develop a lifestyle that is focused on spiritual principles and spiritual activities. It is unfortunate that many groups think it is not acceptable to have a Christian alternative for those who want to learn and grow from the Bible.

## ***'Fresh Ideas for ECMA (Continued)***

The second idea is one that is vitally necessary to this community. Having a senior daycare option is critical for those who want to be active and do not want to sit at home alone without anyone to communicate with. This allows those who feel neglected or are susceptible to a fall or injury to be among their peers playing games and participating in activities

during the day. While their children or grandchildren are at work and at school, seniors in turn will have the ability to be able to communicate and interact with people of substance which will bring meaning to their lives. The option of senior daycare will give individuals who work the assurance of knowing that their senior family member will not be home

alone. These seniors will be able to interact on a daily basis when their lives are filled with loneliness and despair.



*Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry, Sr., of Hays is Pastor Emeritus of the Southwest Region Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.*

## ***Needs and Resources***

***Written by:***

***Rev. Cana Moore***

We see many instances in the scripture where Jesus or the early church reach out to support and inform their community and other communities. If outreach is the question, "How do we make a difference in our community and in doing so, share the love of God?", then the answer can come in a million different ways. That is one of the gifts and core realities of Christian faith-it can be applied in any context, expressed in any community, even in our own.

When reflecting on outreach work, church

members and leaders should consider two elements: needs and resources. If you have the resources to support the resolution of a given problem, but it is not a need in your community, that is a mismatch. If you have a need you know can use supporting, but do not have a church community able to meet that need, you have another mismatch. The best kind of outreach is the one where you can meet both needs and resources.

One excellent way to start asking how your particular church can meet needs in your community is to evaluate what assets you have. This kind of practice, in

other spaces often referred to as asset-based community development, first says, "What does my church have to offer in skill, education, and interest?" Once you have evaluated that, you can begin to see patterns of areas where you might be able to offer support. It also presumes that your church and the people in your church have something to offer.

Every context will be different. Some places have space, a large building or lots of property, and they can use that as a resource for hosting events, creating temporary housing or permanent rentals. Some

## ***Needs and Resources (Continued)***

churches have money, and they can use that capital to make significant financial change in their community by giving generously without worrying about budgetary concerns.

Here are some suggestions for what your church might use as an outreach to help support your community and in doing so share God's love with the world. If you have church members with time who love the outdoors, then start a community garden or a walking club. One helps with food insecurity and the other with the loneliness epidemic. If you have a community with more

technical skills, like mechanics, host a car tune-up day or offer regular basic car service classes to those who don't have the resources.

Have a lot of former educators? Start a tutoring organization. Have a lot of crafters? Host a community craft night. Have busy families? Use a food box or pantry to ensure that they can participate in the work without having to take a lot of time out of their schedule. Set good and clear parameters, as well as consider points of vulnerability. Who is at risk if we start this ministry, and how can we safeguard that?

What are our limitations and why? Ministry outreach should be challenging, but it should also be natural. It should flow out of who you are as individuals and as a whole community. Don't think small about what ways your church can care for those around you. God's freedom and abundance for us means our small thoughts about the world freed us from our own reservation and fear.



*The Rev. Cana Moore is the pastor of Hays Christian Church*

THEN DAVID CONTINUED,

**“BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS, AND DO THE WORK.**

**DON'T BE AFRAID OR DISCOURAGED,**

**FOR THE LORD GOD, MY GOD, IS WITH YOU.**

**HE WILL NOT FAIL YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.**

**HE WILL SEE TO IT THAT ALL THE WORK**

**RELATED TO THE TEMPLE OF**

**THE LORD IS FINISHED**

**CORRECTLY.**

**1 CHRONICLES 28:20**