

GROUP LIFE CONFERENCE 2008

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS

Why Community is Essential

John Burke

Water and oxygen we understand, but why is community so essential to the human heart? In a brand-new talk, John Burke digs into the theological underpinnings of group life to help you rediscover your passion for planting, cultivating, and nurturing community.

John Burke serves as lead pastor at Gateway Community Church in Austin, Texas, a congregation dedicated to helping unchurched people become a unified community of growing Christ-followers, no matter what their background or past. He is also the president of Emerging Leadership Initiative (ELI), a non-profit organization founded to help establish a multiplying network of missional churches that envision, equip, and empower young emerging leaders to plant innovative churches. Before starting Gateway, John was the executive director of ministries at Willow Creek Community Church. He and Kathy are the parents of two children, Ashley and Justin.

Where Community Grows Best

Mark Batterson & Heather Zempel

The high-achieving, highly mobile, de-churched neighborhoods of Washington, DC, aren't ideal environments for small group ministry. Yet, National Community Church is making it work. Learn about their "organic approach" to community and how you can see group life flourish despite harsh surroundings.

Mark Batterson serves as lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC. In 2007 Outreach Magazine recognized NCC as one of the 25 Most Innovative Churches in America. One church with eight services in four locations, NCC is focused on reaching emerging generations. 73% of NCCers are single twenty-somethings and 70% come from an unchurched or dechurched background. The vision of NCC is to meet in movie theaters at metro stops throughout the metro DC area. NCC also owns and operates the largest coffeehouse on Capitol Hill. In 2007, Ebenezers was recognized as the #2 coffeehouse in the metro DC area by AOL CityGuide. Mark is the author of *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* and *Wild Goose Chase: Reclaiming the Adventure of Pursuing God*.

A native Alabamian, Heather Zempel invested her parent's money and six years of her life at Louisiana State University earning bachelors and masters degrees in biological engineering. She finally left Cajun country to apply her newly acquired skills as a consultant at an environmental engineering firm and later as a policy advisor in the United States Senate. She now engineers environments that foster community and spiritual growth as the discipleship pastor at National Community Church in Washington, DC. Heather and her amazing husband Ryan can be found on Capitol Hill enjoying theater (from the audience or the stage) and settling arguments with Webster's Dictionary. Check out her daily ramblings at www.discipleshipgroups.blogspot.com.

What Stunts Community Growth

Will Miller

Author, speaker, and conference favorite Will Miller explores the barriers that keep community from optimum growth—and the tools needed to overcome them. With Will's

unique blend of humor and insight, you'll discover how hearts get wounded and how community is necessary to heal them.

Dr. Will Miller is from New York City and is an ordained minister, a hospital and police chaplain, and a psychotherapist. He has worked in community mental health centers and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs. Will has served as a spokesman for the National Institute of Mental Health. He is one of the country's foremost media and popular culture analysts, and has been profiled on NBC's Dateline and in People Magazine. Simultaneously, for 16 years, Will had a successful career as a stand-up comedian, opening for Aretha Franklin and hosting Nick-At-Nite. Currently, Dr. Miller is a therapist and campus minister at Purdue University where he lectures on media effects. He holds a Masters Degree and a Doctorate in Urban Education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a Masters in Clinical Social Work from Columbia University. Will's books include *Why We Watch: Killing The Gilligan Within*; and *Refrigerator Rights*.

Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

Bill Donahue

Why do some community initiatives fly and others fall flat? Bill Donahue investigates how certain strategies flounder, the missing essentials that can lead to their failure, and how you can avoid making the same mistakes. Or if you've made them already, learn how you can get back on your feet.

Bill Donahue's passion for helping churches develop leaders through small groups led him to Willow Creek in 1992. Bill is currently the Executive Director of Group Life for the Willow Creek Association. Prior to that, he served on the staff of Willow Creek Community Church for six years, helping launch and develop the church-wide small group ministry. He was also leader of the Couples Ministry, Director of the Willow Creek Institute, and headed the Leadership Training Department. Bill has a Ph.D. in Adult Education from the University of North Texas, a Master's in Biblical Studies from Dallas Seminary, and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Princeton University. He and his wife, Gail, have two children, Ryan and Kinsley. Bill is the co-author (with Russ Robinson) of *Building a Church of Small Groups*, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* and *Walking the Small Group Tightrope*

How Community Transforms

Miles McPherson

When community works—when it's characterized by good health and a supportive environment—it can have a transformative effect on individuals, on churches, and within entire neighborhoods. Miles McPherson details the importance of a community-focused church, and the power of community to impact our entire culture.

Miles McPherson is the President of Miles Ahead, and is an internationally known speaker whose bold, down-to-earth, and humorous style has become his trademark. His relevant message challenges both the young and young-minded and often compels them to recalibrate their lives in light of the Gospel. McPherson achieved All-American honors in college football and went on to play as a defensive back for the San Diego Chargers. He earned an MDiv and is now Senior Pastor of The Rock Church in San Diego, where more than 11,000 people attend one of five weekend services. McPherson is the author of several books and articles, and in 2007 earned an Emmy Award for a documentary on methamphetamine.

Thriving as a Small Group Leader

Russ Robinson

Some small group leaders thrive, leaping from adventure to adventure. Others are barely hanging on. The difference between enjoying and enduring has to do with calling. Learn how to embrace your leadership position by living out your calling in response to each person, every meeting, and every opportunity that presents itself.

Russ Robinson has held a variety of ministry roles in the past several years. Russ served on the Willow Creek Community Church staff beginning in 1995, first as Director of Small Groups, and then as Executive Director of Ministries and Small Groups. Prior to his staff role, he also served as an Elder for four years. From 2002-2004 he was also Senior Pastor at Meadowbrook Church in North Haledon, N.J. As Director of Ministries and Small Groups for Willow Creek in South Barrington, I.L., he championed much of the transition to Willow becoming a “church of small groups.” That meant connecting over 18,000 people into 2,700 small groups, where he led over 200 staff and 4,000 volunteer leaders. Russ is the co-author (with Bill Donahue) of *Building a Church of Small Groups*, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* and *Walking the Small Group Tightrope*.

Running Together: The Role of Small Groups in Spiritual Formation

Mindy Caliguire

The Christian life is not a solo sport. That's why we invest so much time into small groups! But beyond side products like pastoral care, assimilation, or friendship-building, we mainly want small groups to offer transformation. In this session, we explore basic spiritual formation and then consider the unique place small groups—and small group leaders—have in soul-level development.

Mindy Caliguire and her husband, Jeff, planted a church in the Boston area, where she served in a variety of leadership roles for 10 years and launched Soul Care, dedicated to helping people restore health to their souls. She served in the area of spiritual formation at Willow Creek Community Church from 2001 to 2004, concentrating on membership, the ministry of prayer, small group curriculum, and “soul care” for individual staff teams. In 2005, she re-engaged with Soul Care, serving churches and organizations through leadership consulting and retreats. Mindy also serves as the Midwest regional director for the Spiritual Formation Alliance, building partnerships and creating formational events. Whether formally or informally, Mindy mentors leaders, focusing on re-establishing their spiritual vitality as the primary step towards a lifestyle of sustainable ministry and leadership.