

# MOBILIZING YOUTH TO STUDY/SERVE A COMMUNITY →

**The story of how the principles** used to exegete a community have increased the ministry impact of a small church in central Vermont is proof that our God is active and at work in small churches across our nation. When I began the process of discovering how to study our small city (population approx. 20,000) I had no idea just how deeply it would influence the culture of the surrounding neighborhoods. What started as a graduate school project would end up shaping the ministry of a church for the next five years.

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As I developed our plan to explore the felt needs of the neighborhoods surrounding our church I was excited to see the Lord open doors I never thought imaginable. In March of 2008 I was contacted by the (non-Christian) Mayor and asked to help create a task force specifically tasked with addressing the issues in the very neighborhoods we wanted to study. This unsolicited call led to a partnership with local pastors, business leaders, civic leaders, and residents that allowed us to have a loud voice for change in our community. With the backing of this group, known as the HOPE (Healthy choices, Ownership, Pride, and Excellence) Task Force, we were able to develop a survey funded by a Christian grant foundation in partnership with our city government that would help us develop a strategic plan to address the spiritual, emotional, physical, and safety needs of the people in our community.

One of the greatest blessings for the church and our city was that as we began canvassing the neighborhoods to gather our information we did so with a group of students from our local churches. We were able to model for our community that students are present day contributors to our city—and more importantly our churches. They are not merely a resource for the future but rather an untapped gold mine for change today! These amazing students knocked on over 2,100 doors over the next six months and conducted a survey that gathered information on family composition, economic status, safety concerns, government assistance utilized, and church affiliation or spiritual leanings. This information was then used by the church (to develop ministry that helped respond to spiritual and physical needs) and was used by the city (to develop a strategic plan to help foster quality of life in these neighborhoods). Best of all, it led to several direct partnerships between the local church and local government to meet these needs together. The partnerships forged during this process have served to help strengthen our city's and church's response during Hurricane Irene and other natural disasters.

As of 2013 these partnerships continue and have grown. In the past year our church has helped the city obtain grants for drug prevention in students and for a new park for children. The city is a better place to live because the church has stepped up and mobilized in partnership with the city.