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## **Youth Evangelism Congress Funding Innovative Ways to Share Christ**

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▲ One of the golden youth evangelism stories which has emerged from the Youth Evangelism Congress is a Food Love Outreach spearheaded by Indiana's Evansville First Church member Levi Pemberton, seated on couch, fourth from left.

# Youth Evangelism Congress Funding Innovative Ways to Share Christ

**YOUTH EVANGELISM THROUGHOUT LAKE UNION HAS FLOURISHED DUE TO THE UNION'S BI-ANNUAL YOUTH EVANGELISM CONGRESS, WHICH PROVIDES A DOLLAR-FOR-DOLLAR MATCH FOR YOUTH EVANGELISM PROJECTS APPROVED BY LOCAL CHURCH BOARDS. SINCE THE FIRST YOUTH EVANGELISM CONGRESS IN 2013, 107 YOUTH EVANGELISM CONGRESS-FUNDED INITIATIVES HAVE RECEIVED \$535,871 DOLLARS IN FUNDING INCLUDING ALL MATCHING FUNDS.**

"It's innovation, creativity that's going to take our evangelism impact to the next level," says Lake Union Youth Director Ron Whitehead. "And the more we can create entrepreneurial young adults, that are thinking about evangelism and sharing the Gospel, aren't we better off as an organization?"

One of the golden youth evangelism stories which has emerged from the Youth Evangelism Congress is a Food Love Outreach spearheaded by Evansville First Church member Levi Pemberton in Indiana. Pemberton recalls attending the 2020 Youth Evangelism Congress and coming away inspired. Ultimately, the Food Love Outreach — an evangelism project funded through the 2022 Youth Evangelism Congress — was born.

Pemberton notes that there are a few colleges in the Evansville area, and one of the goals of the Food Love Outreach was to be a public campus ministry revolving

around breaking bread with students in the community.

"Food is cross-cultural [and goes] across language barriers and we have a fair bit of foreign students and out-of-state students, so we thought, 'What if we just reach out to people with food, break the ice in a neutral area and see where it goes?'"

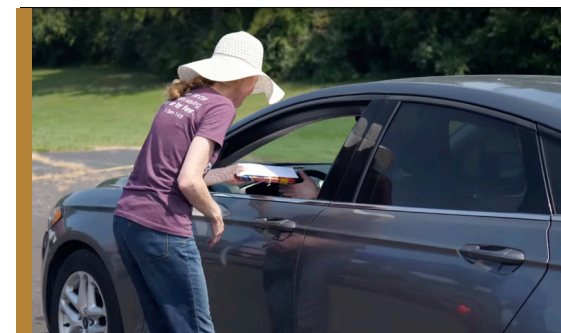
Pemberton recalls that it was the warmth and the hospitality of Evansville First Church members which drew him to the church and paved the way for him to join. He says that as members cooked for him, and ate with him, "I really loved it. It's something that really spoke to me. ... It really made me feel loved. So I thought if that's one thing that our church can do really well, why not play on that and just focus on that — just making people feel loved."

Pemberton says that youth from the church and in the area would go play volleyball Saturday nights and then go out to eat

afterward, "and that's where the real Food Love Outreach kind of began, with eating Denny's at 11:00 p.m. with people who would go and play volleyball with us." And as young people were invited to dinners on Friday nights and invited to go out to eat at Denny's on Saturday nights, they eventually "wanted to start coming to church," Pemberton said.

And something as simple as taking young people to Denny's and fellowshiping with them has paid major dividends as youth have come into the church simply because of feeling the love as they broke bread with church members.

Pemberton recalls a conversation with a young person reached via the Food Love Outreach who told him, "Levi, never before in my life have I come to a young adult group and just felt loved." According to Pemberton, that young person said that in prior encounters with church members, they did not feel like the members were truly genuine. "He said, 'Levi, you've given me just an open space to be loved and to really connect spiritually' .... So they now go to church."



▲ The gas card evangelism event hosted by Illinois' Thompsonville church was held in July 2022, and the individuals reached during that event not only received a free \$50 gas card, but they also received books including E.G. White's *The Great Controversy*.

Whitehead says that the Food Love Outreach is just one of many innovative Youth Evangelism Congress-funded projects that have reached young people for Christ.

“We tell everybody, do evangelism that you think there’s a way you can call people to the Gospel. That’s the purpose,” Whitehead says. “Do good, but in your doing good, figure out a way to invite them to hear about the Gospel. There’s a lot of different ways of doing that,” he adds.

#### THOMPSONVILLE GAS CARD GIVEAWAY

Another innovative evangelism project funded through the 2022 Youth Evangelism Congress was a gas card project organized by members of the Thompsonville Church in southern Illinois. Spearheaded by Thompsonville church member Jonathan Babb, the gas card giveaway was a big hit with the community and beyond.

The gas card evangelism event was held in July 2022, and the individuals reached during that event not only received a free \$50 gas card, but they also received books including E.G. White’s *The Great Controversy*. Other than the station where individuals received a gas card and ministry-oriented books, they also had the chance to stop by a prayer station offering health screenings. Ultimately, Thompsonville church members

reached many for Christ through this Youth Evangelism Congress-funded project.

“Obviously, there’s a place for traditional evangelistic series and prophecy seminars and all of that, but from my perspective, especially as we more and more [see] people suffering on all levels, Jesus’s main focus was meeting the people’s needs,” Babb says. “For churches, even our church, [what] we all struggle with is finding the best ways to meet those needs and conduct effective evangelism, and what the union does with the matching funds helps to spur young people” to think of more creative ways to spread the Gospel.

“My goal was always to try and [meet] people’s needs and as you meet people’s needs, they’re going to be more receptive to hearing the Gospel and coming to church, learning about what you have to present besides the needs,” Babb adds.

Whitehead says that even if changes need to be made to projects approved and funded by the Youth Evangelism Congress, “We give permission to the local church to adapt the project if they run into brick walls or can’t get permits. ... It’s not about the union anyway. We’ve already invested our dollars. But the local church is working with the young adult to figure out how to [make it work].”

#### CONNECTING A GENERATION TO THEIR LOCAL CHURCH

Reflecting on his work spearheading the Youth Evangelism Congress, Whitehead says that looking across his lengthy career that has been focused on youth ministry, what he has seen God do through the Youth Evangelism Congress stands out. “It has all the components of creativity, innovation, relevancy, and it connects this generation to their local church. We’re not taking them away, inspiring them, training them, and then dropping them back to a place that has no connection to their lives.”

Khai Khai Cin, who serves as coordinator for the Youth Evangelism Congress, says that he has been a first-hand witness of the tremendous impact the Youth Evangelism Congress has had on efforts to spread the Gospel among young people.

“I was a delegate and now being a part of the backstage, it’s a great honor and blessing to me to learn and grow. And with all of the things happening all around us, now is the time to be on fire, to reinspire, to rekindle that [evangelism] desire within young people.”

For more information, visit [www.lucyouth.org](http://www.lucyouth.org). ■

*David Pluiose has worked as a journalist and volunteer lay pastor. He is now pursuing an MDiv at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.*

## New Directors at Battle Creek’s Historic Adventist Village

JOHNSONS FOLLOW THE SCHERENCALS WHO RETIRED AFTER 12 YEARS MANAGING THE HISTORIC VILLAGE

**IN SEPTEMBER 2023, MARK JOHNSON AND HIS WIFE, BECKY, MOVED TO THE HISTORIC ADVENTIST VILLAGE TO COMBINE THEIR LOVE OF PEOPLE, HISTORY AND ADVENTIST HERITAGE.**



▲ Don and Betty Scherencel retired as caretakers for the Battle Creek Adventist Historic Village.