

Re-creation: An Exploration of faith leading to re-creation.

Religious Recreation.

The project of an AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer Chris Busker is to increase McDonough County's substance-free leisure activities for young adults (ages 18-30). Among Chris' goals are to assess existing leisure services, initiate activities beyond the college bar scene and increase availability of and participation in cultural entertainment (music, spoken word, art, performance).

Chris's research has shown that boredom is a powerful sobriety killer. A perceived lack of leisure services can lead to young adults' developing poor leisure habits or leaving the area for a perceived better menu of leisure services. Providing adequate, demanded and affordable leisure services improves the quality of life for all, including young adults, and provides an increased workforce with higher levels of productivity. If a region recognizes a substance abuse problem, leisure services must be addressed. Addressing these services first will separate those who abuse mind-altering substances from perceived lack of opportunities and those predisposed (or currently attached) to indulgent leisure habits.

Further, Chris has found that 1/3 of individuals in Macomb and 1/5 of individuals in McDonough County live below the poverty line. Providing adequate leisure services is necessary for maintaining and improving the quality of life within the region. Providing new leisure services for young adults has the potential to crack generational poverty, allowing participants to learn new skills, save money and engage in healthier recreational activities.

Chris has been seeking host sites for nightly gatherings between 9 pm – midnight (which he has identified as prime leisure time for 18-30 year olds). Finding a paucity, he and his roommate have opened their own large loft apartment to music performances and gatherings. These regularly attract 60-80 guests. They are on the verge of completing construction of a recording studio within the apartment, which will be available to area musicians.

Simultaneously, Chris has been asking churches and campus faith communities about church sponsored activities for 18- 30 year olds, as well as evening activities. Of the 67 churches and church affiliated organizations in McDonough County, Chris emailed 11 with documented emails, called every church in the county, and called the 35 churches in Macomb for a follow up. A few offered programming Sunday and Wednesday evenings, usually concluded by 8 pm.

Chris has also been interviewing 18-30 year olds and has come to an intriguing conclusion: ***Eighteen to 30 year olds are seeking community, especially between 9 pm – midnight. And they are interested in conversations about the meaning and purpose of their lives, how they can improve our world, and how to navigate life.***

Young adults seek spaces in which they can listen to others and learn more about themselves. The pages of the creative arts and writing publication of our local community college support this as well –

the poetry and short stories are filled with expressions of soul-searching and spiritual hunger. In addition, Chris sees isolation among the faith organizations and sees that as detrimental to community.

Chris' interpretation? We have a supply-side problem. Let that sink in. **This is a SUPPLY-SIDE problem.** Chris' generation is interested, but our churches aren't (yet) addressing their needs. Chris' generation wants to meet 9 pm – midnight. They want to plan and lead and participate, rather than just observe and consume.

Chris has a dream. Chris wants to re-create space for interfaith conversations. He wants to open spaces each night of the week through a rotating program. Wednesday and Sunday nights would continue to be denominationally segregated nights. However, every evening in the week could have an interfaith program at a rotating location to connect campus ministries and faith traditions. In Macomb, the Wesley Foundation, Catholic Newman Center, Unitarian Universalists, Episcopalians and the Islamic Center have expressed interest in working together in some capacity.

These alternate nights would be more focused on community-building and commonalities that unite. For example, any faith community or community organization could host a night per week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday) and Saturday could be a special event which might include a service opportunity.

In thinking about how to proceed, Chris has been exploring an assistantship for an RPTA major (Recreation Parks and Tourism Administration) at Western Illinois University (WIU). He believes RPTA is a good fit because RPTA teaches how to be detailed oriented and deliver consistently reliable programs, and is focused on people and their well-being and holistic growth.

WIU has campuses in Macomb and Moline and so this interfaith initiative could serve much of the western region of our presbytery. In the corridor between Macomb and Moline, Presbyterian congregations and connections that have demonstrated interest in interfaith and young adult activities already are: **First Presbyterian, Macomb** (hosted the only community-wide interfaith observance on 9-11-11 and an interfaith community series on Human Trafficking in the fall of 2012); **Faith United Presbyterian, Monmouth** (conducted a six week course on Eboo Patel's book *Acts of Faith* in preparation for Patel's October 2014 visit to Monmouth College; offered an interfaith prayer meeting for peace and soup supper attended by college, congregation and community members); **Westminster, Kirkwood** (CRE's parents are members of Faith, Monmouth and her family members attended Eboo Patel book study); **Sugar Tree Grove, Monmouth** (co-pastor is chaplain of Monmouth College where there is an interfaith "Better Together" chapter); **Monmouth College** (Presbyterian college that hosted on-campus visit from Eboo Patel fall 2014; has an interfaith student group with connections to Faith, Monmouth; chaplain is co-pastor of Sugar Tree Grove, Monmouth); **Intercultural House, Monmouth College** (faculty advisor/house parent is a member of Faith, Monmouth; residents have relationships with Faith, Monmouth - church members, Mission Committee and pastor).