



# Taking Off in Turbulent Times

By Daryl Nuss

**T**he challenge before them demanded a creative solution.

Shortly after Japan's deadly attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, American military leaders discerned the great need to launch some kind of counter-attack on Japan. When aviators realized that it *might* be possible to launch B-25 bombers from an aircraft carrier, plans were initiated for a secret mission commanded by Jimmy Doolittle.

But there was a challenge. The B-25 bomber was never designed to take off on the short runway of a carrier flight deck.

Changes to the planes would have to be made. They would have to be lighter and still carry extra fuel. The movie *Pearl Harbor* depicts (with some artistic license) the epic challenge of remodeling a B-25 to take off from an aircraft carrier. On April 18, 1942, sixteen bombers successfully lifted off the USS Hornet in a historic air raid on Japan.<sup>1</sup>

Just as Doolittle's mission was clear, the National Network of Youth Ministries' mission of uniting youth workers to reach every teenager has been the focus for 28 years. Just as the B-25 bombers had to be redesigned, NNYM is asking important questions about what kind of changes are needed to fulfill that mission with today's generation.

One of my fulfilling responsibilities is helping give leadership to our annual meeting of the NNYM Ministry Council. This council—which meets every January—is made up of 36 diverse, select youth ministry leaders who speak into the future of the Network.<sup>2</sup>

The main topic of our latest meeting was discussing how we can maximize our efforts of uniting national organizations and people in local communities to reach every teenager. Interestingly enough, to ignite discussion on this important issue, we used the Doolittle clip from the movie *Pearl Harbor*.


At the national level, we are seeking guidance about how we can adjust or redesign ourselves to serve you better. How is God using present circumstances to open doors of opportunity for future fruitfulness?

As we think about 2009, it seems almost a foregone assumption among most experts that 2009 is going to be a tough year. Although this may be true, we can't lose sight of God's greater perspective about the future. Many times, God uses tough circumstances to open the door for something new.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises, *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland"* (Isaiah 43:19).

What are the new things that God may be undertaking now in our lives?

This is a critical question for each of us personally. Are you facing some special challenges today? Perhaps you are feeling the crunch in your personal finances or ministry resources. Perhaps you are experiencing turbulence in your ministry relationships or in your closest family relationships. Perhaps you are in the midst of an unexpected illness or ministry obstacle. Bear in mind that these unexpected life situations may be preparation for God to do a "new thing" in the midst of your circumstances.

Whatever your circumstances today, I encourage you to stop and ask the Lord what "new thing" He is doing in your life and ministry. Just as Jimmy Doolittle's team of aviators faced an uncertain fate with courage, innovation, and faith, we can trust the Lord to do amazing things in the coming days. 



**Daryl Nuss** serves as the chief ministries officer for the National Network of Youth Ministries. Daryl and his wife, Donna, have invested their adult lives in reaching and ministering to youth. Daryl served in local and national positions with Student Venture/Campus Crusade for Christ, and along with his wife and two boys, moved to Moscow, Russia in the early 1990s to launch Campus Crusade's youth ministry there. Since returning to the States, Daryl and Donna have involved hundreds of students and adults in their annual English camp projects to Russia. He also has started the Youth Missions Network, served on the World Evangelical Alliance Youth Commission, and is on the board of trustees for Sterling College.

<sup>1</sup> If you search online for "Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders" or Jacob DeShazer, you will find some inspirational accounts about the 80 Army airmen who flew this mission. The story of Jacob DeShazer and how the Lord used his capture by the Japanese is amazing.

<sup>2</sup> See who is on the current Ministry Council at <http://www.youthworkers.net/index.cfm/fuseaction/about.ministrycouncil>.



## How Youth Workers in Denver are networking to reach at-risk youth in their city.

It's been said that when God gives a good idea to someone, He often plants the same idea in others' hearts at about the same time. The partnership that results when the parties "find each other" confirms God's voice for all, bears greater fruit, and God gets the credit.

That's what happened when church and parachurch ministries in the Denver metro area teamed up to mentor struggling youth.

Kids were struggling. Cut off from caring adults who could guide them with proper emotional and spiritual guidance, three realities were clear to urban church leaders in the city:

- **First, kids have a way of wandering off if we don't work hard to connect with them.**
- **Second, kids have a way of becoming what we encourage them to be.**
- **And finally, life is not a dress-rehearsal... everyday circumstances shape and influence who youth will become.**

For one year, the churches huddled together to pray. What could they do? A plan was needed to replace the vacuum of adult leadership.

These realities, and absentee parents, made a strong case for the providing mentoring relationships.

The Save Our Youth (SOY) Mentoring Ministry, directed by Luis Villarreal, was born out of this collaborative ministry. The dream was to mentor disconnected teens who were looking for help. It was word-of-mouth at its best.

The waiting list of kids wanting mentors grew fast, but the available mentors were few. Resources were needed. The call went out for adult mentors from the pews of churches in the city *and* in the suburbs. The pulpits of evangelical congregations in the Denver area echoed the need.

As Save Our Youth began to experience some success, they also found their horizons expanding. For five years, SOY only served low-



income and at-risk youth in Denver proper. Their belief was that the kids who needed them only lived within the Denver city limits. Luis admits, "It is human nature to commit resources only to our neighborhood's needs, and not answer the cries across town."

But God began speaking to Luis about the growing breakdown of families and increase in single-parent households due to divorce. He began to see the need for mentoring in other communities, including suburban areas.

As SOY expanded its ministry targets, God was also dealing with the heart of a veteran youth pastor in one of those suburbs.

Will Babilonia remembers being invited by the local Aurora high school principal to a meeting for truant teens and their families.


Instead of starting from scratch, Will recognized the synergy of partnering with Save Our Youth. "The culture, ministry divide and ministry adjustments are not monumental here," he said. "But Save Our Youth had the mentoring and administrative structure and staff to train and oversee our youth and the mentors we recruited." A deal was struck.

Will agreed to recruit mentors. Save Our Youth would process the mentor applications, make the appropriate matches and supervise them over the course of four years, the average duration of their mentor matches.

Now two years into their collaboration, it has been a partnership made in heaven. Both partners are fulfilling their mission, responding to the voice of God, and meeting the needs of at-risk kids in their community.

Luis remarked, "It's been said that so much more good could be done in the world, if we don't care who gets the credit. That's the kind of partnership that Will and I share with our ministries. We all want the best for 'our' kids."

Will nodded in agreement. "We both realize that hundreds of kids are falling through the cracks educationally, spiritually, emotionally. And although we can't reach them all, we are throwing the life preserver of a mentoring relationship into their troubled waters."

And above all, they believe they are pleasing the Lord: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:40) 

## The school dean is constantly giving us updates on the turnaround certain kids have made, and our relationship with the school district is stronger than ever.

Will attended the meeting as a community resource for them, but as he listened, his heart broke for the kids whose lives seemed destined to failure and despair. Will prayed for several days, asking God to show him how Colorado Community Church (CCC), where he was serving, could make a difference.

The Lord spoke to Will and encouraged him to find mentors from his congregation for these teens. Then, the day before Will planned to call the school principal, he received a call from a school district official, asking him if he was open to the idea of people from CCC mentoring at-risk students from the local high school. Will was floored! That conversation started a whole chain of phone calls and emails. God was bringing a united effort together.

Will noted, "Low-income and at-risk youth are not relegated to urban communities only. We began to educate our church members regarding the pool of neighborhood youth around us who struggle and need mentors."

When the schools agreed to the mentoring idea, it wasn't long before Luis and Save Our Youth were at the table providing much-needed guidance, matching Christian adults with the school's at-risk students. Will is grateful for Luis' generosity. "Not only did he share his wisdom from over a decade of Christian mentoring, but he also provided the oversight and structure of the program. Save Our Youth has invested the human and logistical resources that keep this program running."

Will pointed out, "The school dean is constantly giving us updates on the turnaround certain kids have made. We continue to find additional ways of partnering with our local schools, and our relationship with the school district is stronger than ever. This is because two average ministers got on their knees to seek the Lord's wisdom on how to make an eternal impact in our community, and to grab the towel and basin and serve the least of these. SOY and CCC truly is a match made in heaven!"



**Luis Villareal** is the president of Save Our Youth, a 12-year-old mentoring program for at-risk youth in the Denver-metro urban communities. Luis and Save Our Youth have developed a practical mentoring model addressing the ABC's of startup, mentor and staff development, and ongoing management for successful mentoring programs that keeps mentor match longevity as a priority. Luis is a licensed clinical social worker, and for many years, was the pastor of a local urban church serving impoverished individuals and their families to help them develop and learn the necessary tools for spiritual, emotional, and educational health and success.



**Will Babilonia** says he has seen "war on two continents," from growing up in a Puerto Rican gang in urban Chicago to serving in the Army in Operation Desert Storm. He found Christ through the juvenile justice ministry of Youth for Christ, and draws on the difficulties that he endured as a young man to communicate Christ to teens and their families. He served nine years in the Army and has been involved in youth ministry for 15 years. He is currently on staff at Colorado Community Church in Aurora, Colo. He has been plugged into the Denver-area Network since 2000, and serves on the NNYM Ministry Council. He and his wife, Sabrina, have two children: Silas and Thaddeus.



NETWORKING IS CRUCIAL IN

by Jacob Isaac

**T**he crisp tone of the flight attendant over the microphone cut through the silence of the aircraft as we glided 35,000 feet above the ground. "Please fasten your seat belts; we have begun our descent toward Frankfurt. I hope you had a pleasant journey. Thank you for flying Lufthansa."

I could have shouted, "Hooray, Frankfurt, here I come," for I was so relieved that I could finally stretch myself! A slight bump and a jerk indicated that we had landed, and I felt the plane's movement as it taxied on the runway.

I spent the night in the waiting lounge, watching the people from different countries and cultures bustling around sipping coffee in the café, strolling about shopping or just looking at the products in the duty-free

shops. The battery-driven cars whizzed past with elderly passengers and I found myself wishing for the electric vehicle to tour around the huge airport! I watched with fascination at the display boards with arrival and departure details; especially thrilling was the *whirring* sound of the flight timetable charts flipping as flight after flight landed or took off.

I must have dozed off on the seat as I watched... only to be rudely awakened time and time again by endless announcements. What seemed like an endless night finally came to an end with the break of dawn. I was tired, bored and my back began to ache.

I thought, "I *could* be snugly tucked in bed at home, enjoying a good night's rest, instead of flying halfway across the globe exploring networking with people for the cause of the

gospel!" I moved over to get closer to the huge glass panes that separated the terminal building from the flight parking bay.

I watched bird-like machines gracefully line up in rows along their bays, waiting to be cleaned and reloaded. I noticed several trucks alongside the planes, and there were also other men zooming around in their smaller inspection vehicles, heading back and forth from the aircraft. I may have been bored but they were not, each one focused on doing their own thing and oblivious to the others.

Some had charts in their hands and others – in smaller clusters – checked the wheels and other important parts of the aircraft. One of them was dragging a long hose to refuel the plane, another was on a fork lift that took him almost over the wing to do some routine checks. The food was being loaded, and the luggage hold was being emptied and cleaned.

observed and learned quickly what could incur the wrath of my parents or bring us favor with them. The latter was a far better proposition, I reasoned, and for most part of my life, I pleased them in many ways and earned the respect of the rest of my family.

I quickly learned that this was also pretty much the formula I may need to survive in the world of friends and enemies. Whether it was a fight over a marble or a losing football game – the formula was "Work it out, cooperate, negotiate, collaborate." Living in a one-room house meant sharing space, meals, resources, hand-me-downs, almost anything and everything!

My dad, being a generous and kind-hearted Christian, often opened our small house to relatives who were in dire situations – sometimes for months at a stretch. As kids we found that we had to share our already-strained resources with some more people. With these family interactions I learned the



It was a most essential quality of being the *ecclesia* people who are "called out of," set apart, and distinguished from the rest. They were noticed for this quality: something that stood out and made heads turn; and much more than a fashion statement because of who they were. After all, when was the last time we met a believer who sold his property to help

## Whether it was a fight over a marble or a losing football game – the formula was "Work it out, cooperate, negotiate, collaborate."

My bored mind suddenly came alive watching this amazing effort to get the flight airworthy again. I had just realized that though these men may never board the flight or be applauded for their efforts, they work tirelessly to make these machines fly and to fulfill the advertiser's promise, "An unforgettable flying experience." They were doing what was to me a very significant human effort to work together.

Trust, openness and mutual concern are vital ingredients.

As I flew on the next leg of my journey, I began to ask myself, "Why am I involved in networking? What is it that made me value networking?" I could have been doing something else. I pondered the questions.

As a child, I was raised with five other siblings. I was the youngest at home and the stronger one of a set of twins. Ahead of us were three sisters and finally an older brother, the firstborn. Being the youngest of a large family, I

importance of caring for my weaker sibling, sharing goodies...and vital ingredients like trust, openness and mutual concern came alive to me.

These early lessons came to me as described here. I believe they had a major part to play in teaching me valuable lessons on networking that I would appreciate years later. After all, **partnerships are more than coordination, planning, strategies and tactics. The kingdom of God is one large family. The heart of the gospel, above all, is restored relationships.**

Looking at Scripture, the body of Christ as described in 1 Corinthians 12, is one body carefully woven together piece by piece for a divine purpose. Acts 2:42 talks about the believers of the early church having a togetherness that was unique; they strived to share and care for each other as one people rescued by the mercy of God.

another struggling believer? Loving, caring and sharing was the fabric of their "being," almost their *raison d'être* as a church.

To highlight my points further, I have borrowed principles from among the many "Partnership Principles" that Phill Butler describes in his book, *Well Connected*.<sup>1</sup> These points help me construct my experiences in this journey of learning to be a networker.

All effective strategic partnerships are driven by an energizing, challenging vision.

When I began a coffee house ministry, it was a step of faith. I knew clearly that the Lord was leading me to reach out to the urban youth, a group that was energetic, lively, and ambitious, yet misplaced in society and struggling in the margins.

I had a dream and a desire, two essential ingredients to create something out of nothing. I had no idea how to do it, nor did

I have the financial resources to get it done. Therefore, I began a journey of faith and began to see many miracles of God's provision. What came to my rescue was my ability to connect with people, and that's what I did. I began to share my ideas and ask people to help in whatever way they could. I soon saw heaven literally open up. That's the power of networking.

People discovered a new-found joy to give and be a part of this unique outreach opportunity. Helping hands volunteered to set up, move,

pursue bringing youth workers together as part of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Youth Commission and actively involved in mentoring younger leaders of the Lausanne Movement, I see the same exciting principle. Partnerships are a process.

What we sow in the early years (exploration), we reap years later as God widens the net (formation). While we spend most of our life and ministry being "event-driven" we need to focus on the process of staying connected (operation).

## Warm fellowship isn't enough. Effective, durable partnerships are a process, not an event.

rearrange, pull down, borrow, and return. That's not all – we needed a high-quality sound system, musicians, musical instruments, a coffee machine and cutlery to serve hot coffee, ideas, more volunteers, graphic designers, camera men, newspaper editors – not to forget the prayer warriors and the donors.

All of them came and got involved in this effort to "permeate the society with the gospel of Christ." Those around me wanted to experience the energy, the excitement. Stick together. Lift the name of Jesus; not just verbally, but also through the things we were doing. We were all together in one accord. All people had something in common: *Jesus*.

If you ask me, was the networking intentional? I would say, "No, in this case it just followed an energizing, challenging vision!" **This vision must be beyond the capacity of any single person or agency to achieve alone. Only the vision will keep you going. Partnership for partnership's sake is a sure recipe for failure. Warm fellowship isn't enough.**

**Effective, durable partnerships are a process, not an event.**

It's been many years since that first experience doing a coffee house ministry. Now, as I

I now have many more opportunities to see the worldwide church coming together on various occasions and for specific reasons. If the basics are not right, we will go through the same insecurities we faced when we first began the ministry journey.

The ploy of Satan is the same: fear, intimidation, and most of all, insecurity. The fear of being left out, feeling intimidated that someone else was given an opportunity and not I, the feeling that I will be overlooked, ignored, side-stepped. Whatever the feeling and whatever the reason, these are excuses that are not from God. They are from only one source that we all are aware of: Satan! His tactic is to intimidate and watch the fun as we self-detonate and destroy ourselves.

Partnerships take time. They have to be carefully nurtured. There are no shortcuts. They have to go through the process that involves time and energy. It has to be worked out in real time and it bears fruit in real time. **Every lasting partnership has exploration, formation and operation stages. Forming them takes much more time than you expect.** ↻



**Jacob Isaac** is the founder and CEO of Kerygma, an urban youth ministry based in Bangalore, India reaching youth through a café, camps and a drug rehabilitation center. He is a trainer and conference speaker and creative worship leader. He was involved with the Union of Evangelical Students of India (UESI) from 1991 to 1997, ministering to students on college campuses. He also is on the leadership of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Youth Commission, representing South Asia. He is currently involved in a national youth research project spanning 10 cities of India called "Yuvapeda." He is married to Sheela, and they are blessed with three daughters, Rebecca (16), Jerusha (12) and Deborah (10).

# My Journey from Islam to Jesus

by Keivan Tehrani



**M**y earliest spiritual memories consist of Muslim prayers and Friday services at mosques.

I was born in Iran and raised in a Muslim family in the 1970s. Early in my life, I was very engaged with my Muslim faith and its religious traditions. I grew up mostly around women; my mom, sisters, aunts, and grandma would pray the “five daily prayers” faithfully.

The late 1970s in Iran were very turbulent times. There was a revolution, the Shah was overthrown, a more radical Islamic government took over, and war began between Iran and Iraq. My family lived through months of bombings before deciding it was a good time to leave the country.

We left everything behind and lived in Spain for a year and began to learn English. We finally got our visas and were able to come to America to start our lives over again in Northern California.

In America, my parents were no longer as active in their Muslim faith as they were in Iran. Although I believed in God, I found myself drifting away from Him as I grew older. Consequently, by my freshman year of high school, I had pretty much given up on religion completely.

Ironically, at the same time my older sister converted to Christianity during her senior year of high school, after an invitation to a youth group by a friend. My parents fought with her and I rejected her faith for three years. Through some

providential events, I came to faith in Jesus during the middle of my senior year.

The next year I went to college and was very active in leadership and evangelism at the University of California in Davis. During my junior and senior years there, I was asked by my church to be the high school director, which was an incredible honor as a full-time student. It was there that I grew tremendously as a preacher, evangelist and church leader.

After college I was invited to be a pastor at an Iranian Church in the Bay Area. It was a church that not only ministered to the local Iranian population, but had a powerful satellite outreach to millions of Iranians worldwide. It was incredible to hear the testimonies of countless people from distant countries that had found new faith and joy in Christ through our work.

I realized early on in my faith that I was very blessed because several people took the time to invest spiritually in my life when I was a hopelessly lost high school student. While in college, God instilled in me a passion to unite Christian leaders to reach hurting young people with the hope that comes only in Christ.

However, one of my biggest disappointments in Christianity was the the disunity I saw and the lack of cooperation between churches and ministries, even though they shared similar callings and core values. I thought to myself, “This internal fighting distracts all of us from our primary calling.” I recognized that my background, testimony and passions aligned perfectly to challenge pastors and Christian communities to work better with each other to reach the lost.



While I was doing some research in seminary, I read one of Abraham Lincoln's addresses to Congress during the Civil War.

In it he said, "Will not the good people respond to a united, and earnest appeal from us? ... We can succeed only by concert... The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew."<sup>1</sup>

These words – spoken 150 years ago – ring especially true today amidst the global economic meltdown, the spiritual condition of our nation, and the devastated youth culture that we all want to help redeem.

I wonder what would happen to our world if churches put aside outdated and irrelevant dogmas and united, by the grace of God, to love and serve our unbelieving world as "one body." We must never compromise the core teaching of the Bible, but we can let go of some

daunting task of reaching Bay Area youth and leaders. My wife reminded me of one of my favorite illustrations; one I have often used in sermons.

A little boy walking on the beach came upon thousands of starfish washed up by a storm. These starfish were doomed, so he began frantically throwing them back into the water one at a time. An older gentleman also walking on the beach saw the scene and said to the boy, "Don't you see there are thousands of starfish and miles and miles of beaches? You can't possibly save all of the starfish!"

The boy paused, picked up a starfish and replied, "Yeah, I know; but I can save this one!" as he threw it back in the water.

In the Bay Area, where I live and work, 90-95% of young people do not attend church. This is a disheartening statistic! Young people everywhere are a tremendous and important mission field for all of us. We must serve the



## My journey brought me halfway across the world to hear and receive the message of eternal life in Christ.

of the divisive practices we have adopted in the Western Church to fulfill God's "Great Commission."

We can not wait for our government or school systems to change. We must engage young people right now with utmost urgency, or we risk losing entire generations. Our children are in a very real and dangerous spiritual war. Their faith and morals are attacked every day by friends, teachers, media, and dysfunctional parenting.

Even societal laws are increasingly attacking Judeo-Christian values. Schools are promoting immorality to the most vulnerable and impressionable in our society. We must do something! We cannot stand by as observers in this radical culture war.

A few months ago, I was very heartbroken and feeling overwhelmed by the burden and

world, but should never forget our homes (our Jerusalem) and our calling to reach our young in our schools right here.

I am blessed that a few people took the time to invest in a lost Iranian boy. I am one of those starfish that was given a second chance at life. My journey brought me halfway across the world to hear and receive the message of eternal life in Christ.

It is incredible now to be used by God to lead large evangelistic worship events and to build unity in His body. I believe that together, a more beautiful and united church can raise a generation of young spiritual leaders who will stand strong amidst whatever societal pressures they face. ♻️



**Keivan Tehrani** is the San Francisco Bay Area coordinator for NNYM and founder of Compassion Bridges, a ministry working to transform the Bay Area by mentoring students and uniting leaders to reach the lost. For 10 years, Keivan served as the youth and English pastor at the Iranian Christian Church, a ministry that reaches out to millions of Iranians worldwide through its satellite broadcasts. He has degrees from UC Davis and completing his M.A. from Fuller Seminary in 2008. His greatest joy comes from his family, and spending time with his two beautiful young children.

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress - Concluding Remarks"; December 1, 1862.

# COOPERATING IN THE FIGHT AGAINST

# WORLD HUNGER

by Mark Orr



## Networks Show the Power of Synergy

Much of our news is about economic downturns and partisan wrangling in Washington. But in cities across America, people have been coming together to do more than wring their hands:

- In Kansas City, churches have come together for ten years each spring to do "Serve Day." Over 500 students participate annually in this city-wide day of service in the Greater Kansas City Area, ranging from home rehabbing, to caring for the elderly, to organizing and stocking local food pantries and more.
- "First Priority" clubs pick up trash to beautify their high schools, giving up time to hang out with at lunch their friends to instead serve overworked and oft-unappreciated custodial staff.

When the body of Christ gets outside itself like this, their neighbors take note, often surprised by the practical witness of churches serving side by side instead of fighting. What follows is a more in-depth account of one area, southwest Connecticut, where churches have had remarkable success serving their community.

What might God want you to do in *your* town?



**M**ore than a decade has passed since a group of churches in Fairfield County, Connecticut were first encouraged to work together to participate in the World Vision "30 Hour Famine."<sup>1</sup>

It started with a local businessman, whose heart was gripped by the statistic that 35,000 children were dying each day due to hunger-related causes. He knew he had to do something about it.

He began to call churches and organize planning meetings. His efforts resulted in a very successful 30 Hour Famine event that raised over \$70,000 – more money than had

been raised at any single World Vision event to that date.

The success of the combined Famine event opened the eyes of many youth workers and churches to the reality that something of immense value can be achieved when youth groups work together and collaborate on events – a concept not widely accepted or practiced in New England.

The truth was undeniable: the energy surrounding the combined Famine and the amazing results were far greater than what any individual youth group would have achieved. We all learned a valuable lesson, and the success we experienced was the result of God

honoring and blessing our efforts to build unity in the body and cooperate rather than complete or just “do our own thing.”

Over the course of the next few years, a smaller group of churches continued to do the Famine together but, due to the lack of a local “champion” and overall coordinator, the success of the first Famine was not repeated. That is, until a few years later!

In February 2005, a handful of Fairfield County youth leaders gathered at a local church to pray for teenagers and encourage each other. Out of the energy and commitment of those at this first small meeting, a thriving local network emerged. They met regularly and grew in membership. Soon the network signed on with NNYM, began exploring the possibilities of jointly sponsored events, and

Then in April of 2007, twenty-four churches and 500 students and leaders participated. The numbers were getting a bit out of hand, and it was quite a challenge to find a church in the area that could seat 500 for dinner. But they squeezed everyone in—just barely! The evening ended with a concert from *Leeland* and we had completed another great Famine!

When the mayor of Bridgeport found out that a group of 500 teenagers were descending on his city to do service projects on Saturday morning, he insisted on personally addressing the crowd before they began their work. The mayor commented that he had never witnessed such an ethnically diverse and multi-denominational group working together.

This example of cooperation between diverse churches was truly an example of the hope

We continue to be engaged with hunger and poverty-related issues throughout the year. Some of our churches have also expanded their participation by engaging in other World Vision programs and projects.

In addition, a local school principal promoted student involvement in the Famine because it related to an issue he cared about: world hunger. Students were allowed to raise support during school hours, and were encouraged to wear their Famine tee shirts on campus.

A further benefit has been the energy that has flowed back into our networks. We have found that this event is one of the quickest and easiest ways to connect new youth groups and churches to our local networks. Because of the status and reputation of World Vision and the wide acceptance of the 30 Hour Famine

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built relationships with the staff at the local World Vision office.

It wasn't long before the network decided to revive the concept of the combined 30 Hour Famine – and the rest is history! In April of 2006, 200 students and leaders representing thirteen churches gathered together for the Famine. After an evening of great worship, mixers, and hunger related videos, they hit the local YMCA for a couple of hours of free use of the entire facility. The group had a blast!

An overnight at the church followed. The next morning, after hearing the testimony from a speaker from Kenya, they piled everyone in their cars, vans, and buses and set out for a series of work projects in the nearby city of Bridgeport, Conn.


The Famine event closed with a “third-world banquet” and a Celebration Concert with *Bethany Dillon*. Everyone had an awesome time and \$35,000 was raised. They were on a roll!

expressed in John 17:21, where Jesus prayed, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You have sent Me.”

In 2008, the event was split into four different locations in order to accommodate more churches and encourage greater participation. In total, over the past three years more than 1,300 students and leaders from over thirty ethnically diverse denominations and churches have worked together to raise over \$200,000 for world hunger. *These results have placed us into the top five Famine groups in the country.* And they say, “It can't be done in New England!”

The ripple affect goes far beyond raising money, however. Not only have our networks raised substantial funds to help fight world hunger, but we have completed numerous community service projects, exposed our students to the worldwide plight of the poor, and inspired students to develop their own justice causes.

across denominational boundaries, we have found the Famine to be a “non-threatening” way to get new churches involved.

The benefits go both ways and, in the end, the hungry are fed, unity is built, and Christ receives the glory. What could be better? 



**Mark Orr** is the New England regional coordinator for the National Network of Youth Ministries. Mark is an ordained Presbyterian minister and has served in youth ministry for over 30 years, both in the church and with parachurch ministries. Mark and his wife DJ have two grown children and reside in Norwalk, Connecticut.

<sup>1</sup> World Vision is a cooperating ministry with NNYM. More information about the 30 Hour Famine and be found at [www.30hourfamine.org](http://www.30hourfamine.org).