

BLOCK PARTY IN A BOX



Engaging Your Neighbors Through Gatherings,
Get-Togethers, and Other Great Events!

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INTRODUCTION

There are lots of ways to get to know your neighbors, and to build bridges of relationship with them. This packet will give a “how-to” for one particular way – through intentional gatherings (parties!) in your neighborhood. From a simple dinner to something much bigger, we want to give you the inspiration AND practical tips to help you do this!

I was driving through my neighborhood one December day and noticed a decoration in someone’s yard. It said, “Merry Christmas from the Johnsons.”

I thought to myself, “Oh, that’s nice,” and continued driving. Then questions started popping into my head: Who are the Johnsons? Where are they from? Do they have kids? Do they attend a church? I wonder if they have a faith in Jesus Christ? Will I ever know anything about them beyond that sign?

As I pondered these questions, I was convicted: I live two houses down from these people but I don’t even know their first names. I have traveled over 8,000 miles to visit people I have never met and share the gospel overseas – through a language barrier – but I can’t travel 300 feet to visit my neighbors and hopefully share the truth of freedom through Jesus Christ. Why is this? What am I afraid of?

Someone once told me, “Ministry is where your feet are.” When I heard that, I began to see more clearly the places where God had specifically placed me to be a light. I have been positioned in a specific house or apartment at each stage of my life to represent Jesus to those around me.

Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

We know that “neighbors” in the above passage meant more than simply “the person living on your street.” But isn’t our street a great place to start? It’s easy to sit in church, hoping that newcomers will arrive and hear truth – and even greeting those around us warmly. But we have the chance to engage with people in our neighborhoods, and people who may be reached by no one else. We don’t know if these nearby neighbors are spiritually “seeking,” wanting to find a church, or facing difficulties behind their

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front doors that no one knows about.

Who has God placed in your path... or on your sidewalk? These might be people God has “prepared beforehand” for you to connect with! (Ephesians 2:10)

Is there a seventy year-old couple that is retired and has family states away? A single mom, recently divorced, with two kids? A family from India that still has never been invited inside an American home? A Muslim family who’s scared of the reaction they might receive from American Christians? An atheist who has never known a friendly believer? A couple of young adults who just graduated from SMU and are now beginning their careers? Or even a family of Christians who have never actually experienced a biblical community?

Imagine it: You get to find out! There are endless possibilities and stories that God may have placed in your midst. How are you going to (literally) open up the door to these stories?

Special thanks to Phil Dunson, Tammy Fabian, and Chris LeRoux for their work on this resource, and all the Watermark members who shared their tips and stories so far!

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GROUNDWORK: WHAT TO THINK THROUGH BEFORE YOU START



Goals: Your Very First Decision

Whenever we plan an event, we often start by asking what we want to do, based on the people involved and the resources we have.

But there's one step that can lead to far better impact – if we include it before deciding what to do. This step is thinking through what we want to accomplish before we ever get started. Don't start planning your party without deciding your goals. That way, at every step along the way, you can build a party that will accomplish those goals – and you can let go of any “good ideas” that don't help reach those goals.

So before you start planning, make sure to...

- **Pray**
- **Discuss potential goals with your family and/or community.**
- **Decide your “target audience” for this event.** Who are you trying to engage?
- **Decide if this is a one-time event (for now) or a stepping**

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stone to more. It's certainly okay to create an event and then let God use it to show you next steps. But if you do have a follow-up activity in mind – like a weekly Bible study you'd like to start, a monthly “moms group,” an email newsletter, or another gathering a few months later, that's good to remember as you plan this event.

- **Decide what you're trying to accomplish through THIS event.** Write your goals down. Look at them and pray about them throughout your weeks of planning.

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Planning (and Getting Some Help!)

After you've decided – and written down! – your goals, here are your next steps:

Think about the tasks involved. These likely include at least the following:

- Create invitations / fliers
- Create / manage social media
- Advertise in other ways?
- Legal / permit requirements (if needed)
- Round up supplies
- Setup
- Meet and greet guests
- Coordinate activities at the party
- Serve food
- Take photographs
- Clean-up

Decide who will help. Hopefully you've already talked to your Community Group and other friends about this project. At this point, you'll want to decide who's helping put things together. Certainly, you might be able to pull this off yourself (or just as a family). But you should consider involving others, even if you don't think it's truly necessary:

- **Other believers:** Christians in your neighborhood (whether or not they go to Watermark), Watermark members who live nearby, and even other Christians who may simply need your “push” to start building relationships too!
- **Attendees:** For some types of parties, you should enlist the help of those attending! Consider asking those in your neighborhood to bring food, help with setup, etc. – or at least be prepared for those who ask about helping. Some neighbors may be excited to join in on party prep, even if they don't know the mission behind your methods!
- **Your community group:** Having a group helping you through this process will encourage you and assist you greatly. And the day of the party, you will have loving hosts willing to engage people and share their stories.

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This is also a cool chance to model biblical community to those who attend – and intrigue them about your church and your Lord.

Finally, it's okay if CG members or other friends come from different neighborhoods to help. This is a great chance for them to join in your local mission. Plus by “importing” a few friends, your party will avoid being too small to attract people comfortably.

Consider your resources. Obviously, you'll have to think about a “budget” for this event. But you also want to think about locations and space.

Based on whom you've decided to reach (in the “Goals” section above), how much room do you think you'll need? How many could you host inside? Outside? Are there other locations available – like an apartment complex or neighborhood “clubhouse” or pool area? What about a nearby park, restaurant, or activity center? (Be sure to find out the rules or costs associated with each.) Would it be possible to have a true “block party,” including blocking off the street? (Be sure to check on permits for that.)

“Before we hosted our dinner, when we were outside gathering the mail or doing yard work, everyone in our cul-de-sac drove by and went straight into their garage. After we had a Thanksgiving dinner, they would stop the car and get out to say hi.” - Tyler Briggs

Note: Depending on your situation, sometimes a larger event can be more “welcoming” than a smaller event. Of course, not everyone can hold a Block Party in the streets, but also don't be afraid to invite a lot of people if you can.

Decide the event to hold! Don't feel the pressure to do something “unusual,” especially for your first event! A simple dinner party or cookout in the backyard can be fantastic. Other simple ideas include movie nights or game-watching evenings. (See the next page for a great list of possibilities.)

You should also consider the upcoming calendar. Are there any good holidays around the corner? What about sports events that people would want to gather around to watch (or to pretend to watch)?

Finally – and this is important – consider what kind of gathering you and your family would enjoy! What best suits you and those who are throwing this party with you? While we should always be willing to step outside our comfort zones,

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it's still worth thinking about!

Figure out the food (if you're planning on food for your event). Food is obviously great to build community around. But unless your event is specifically for “foodies,” you might want to think about what would be easy and efficient to have. Burgers or hot dogs, chips and dip, popsicles, and potluck dishes might all be good options. Depending on the event (and your relationship with your neighbors), it might be completely acceptable to ask attendees to “pitch in” with money for the food, too.

Regardless of whether you go the “easy” or the “fancier” route, make sure the food is good. Think: If you were your neighbor, would you be happy to see the spread? Also, don't forget food safety: Use coolers for perishable food!

Prepare to care. As you're meeting neighbors, it's always possible a need will arise that you can meet by pointing people to various resources. After this section you'll find some great Watermark pastoral ministries, in case you need a reference. And don't forget about our other ministries: Bible studies, The Porch, open equipping like Merge or MoneyWise, and much more. (Visit watermark.org if you ever need info!)

“It opened up opportunities to personally know your neighbors and help in any difficult situation in the future.” - Amy Skinner

Potential Events

There are many ideas we've thought up or heard about from others who have held successful gatherings. To get you brainstorming, here's a great list.

- Game Night
- Movie Night
- Sports Night (playing or watching!)
- Cooking Lessons
- Barbecue
- Holiday Dinner
- Christmas Pageant / Christmas Story
- Gift Giveaway / “White Elephant” exchange
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Decorating the Christmas Tree
- Neighborhood sports games
- Kickball Game
- Whiffleball Game

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- Picnic
- “Get to know the neighborhood” theme
- Come-and-Go “Open House”
- Potluck
- Theme party
- Birthday Gathering
- Fundraiser / Awareness-raiser for a Good Cause
- Community Garage Sale
- Coffee and dessert
- Summer ice cream party
- Kids Crafts
- Art Party / Painting Party (and not necessarily just for kids!)
- Spiritual Discussion / Bible Study
- Prayer Gathering
- Meet a local “celebrity” (community representative, public servant, politician, etc.

“It was a great community group event that grew our group.”
- JP Pokluda

Watermark’s Pastoral Ministries: A Quick Reference

DivorceCare helps those facing separation or divorce. DivorceCare meets weekly for a period of 13 weeks (one Spring semester, one Fall semester), providing an ongoing “support team.” Email Emily Loper at eloper@watermark.org for info or registration information. Web: watermark.org/ministries/divorcecare

Great Questions provides a safe place for those who have questions or doubts about the Christian faith. It’s a great place to inquire and ask the tough questions, and no question is off-limits. This open meeting gathers Mondays at 7:30pm in the South Community Room. Contact greatquestions@watermark.org.

GriefShare offers a safe place to process the deep hurt of loss, for anyone who has experienced the death of a family member, friend, or loved one. Meetings offer a lesson, testimony, small group discussion, and workbook. GriefShare meets weekly each 13-week session (one Spring semester, one Fall semester). Email Mark Nicholson, mnicholson@watermark.org or visit watermark.org/ministries/griefshare.

MenD is available to help men heal from the destruction and devastation of

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sexual abuse. MenD meets every Monday, in either Open Group or a Step Study, in room 429 of the Watermark Tower at 7:15 p.m. Email mend@watermark.com for more information or questions.

QuestCare Clinic is Watermark's charity urgent care clinic, for anyone who is under- or uninsured. No insurance, ID, or appointment is required. Each patient is asked to make a ten dollar financial contribution if they're able. In-person Spanish translation and a translation language line are available. The Clinic is open 9am-3pm every weekday except Tuesday (when it's open from 1pm-3pm). Email clinic@watermark.org for more information, or visit questcareclinic.org.

re|engage offers hope to marriages by helping couples move toward oneness. Each week includes a time of music, prayer, a teaching or testimony by a couple who has experienced victory in the midst of hard times, and small group time which follows a specified curriculum. Every Wednesday night at 6:30 p.m. in the Loft. No registration beforehand is necessary. You can begin the re|engage process at any time. Email reengage@watermark.org for any questions.

re:generation recovery offers encouragement for those with "hurts, habits, or hang-ups" through an authentic community and well-tested principles. Help for anyone in finding freedom from addictive behaviors, compulsive thinking, and sin patterns. re:generation meets on Monday nights in the Worship Center at 6:30. Contact regen@watermark.org for any questions or more information.

Shelter is a Christ-centered support group for women who have been sexually abused or assaulted. Participants work through a curriculum in a small group with discussion led by a facilitator who has experienced healing from sexual abuse or assault. They are encouraged to share their struggles at their own pace. Shelter meets Mondays from 6:30-8:30 in the Chapel. No registration beforehand is necessary. For more info, email shelter@watermark.org.

Shiloh is our ministry to women who are experiencing infertility and/or miscarriage. In a small group or one-on-one, participants connect with others with similar experiences and encourage one another. Shiloh is a 10-week study (one Spring semester, one Fall semester). Email shiloh@watermark.org for more info and/or registration.

Someone Cares is a post-abortion restoration ministry. Our heart is to reach women who have been hurt by past abortions. A 10-week Bible study, "Forgiven and Set Free," is facilitated by women who have experienced God's forgiveness, healing, and restoration. Email someonecares@watermark.org for more info and/or registration.

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The Prodigal reaches families that are hurting or in chaos because of a family member who is living in sin or otherwise a “prodigal.” We provide a safe, loving environment where Biblical truths are taught and applied in the context of authentic, accountable, Biblical community. The Prodigal meets on Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:30 on the 3rd floor of the Tower. No registration beforehand is necessary. Email bduncan@watermark.org for more info.

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BUILDING YOUR EVENT



Ideas for Getting the Word Out

For many, the scariest part of this may simply be meeting your neighbors and inviting them. But once you get over this hurdle and talk to a neighbor or two, it will get easier and easier! So just do it!

Here are ideas about this process, gleaned from those who have held successful events:

- Make a flier or invitation that shares the vital details and attracts people to the party.
- Be sure to set a fun tone with the invitation, and ask yourself if you would find this flier appealing!
- Decide on whether you want to ask for RSVPs.
- You might want to include treats with the invites – like cookies – to give out with your friendly invite.
- Before approaching your neighbors, don't forget to pray!
- Invite door to door if at all possible, bringing your invitations with you. And if you've got kids, include them – that makes for an even more natural connection. While it may be easier simply to drop off cards or send emails,

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a personal invitation is usually much better.

- Consider the best time to invite your neighbors. When are they most likely to be home?
- If you might get nervous, think about what you'll say beforehand. A little practice can make you a pro!
- If you haven't met these neighbors before, share a little about yourself and your family. Even if this neighbor doesn't come to the event, you at least get to meet them!
- Be confident: People are much more likely to come to a party that seems like it will be fun, with a host or hostess who is truly excited about the upcoming event.
- If you already know some people are planning to come (either friends of yours or other neighbors), use that fact to build momentum. Let people know they can expect a crowd (NOBODY wants to be the only one at a party), and encourage people to help you advertise.
- Send or drop off a reminder card before the hangout.
- Don't be discouraged if people say no at first, or don't show up. Trust the Lord to bring the right people!
- But also don't be surprised if quite a few people head your way!

Tips for the Event Itself

Use name tags. A name tag can go a long way toward building community. Consider having these by the door or at the tables – everybody hates the feeling of not knowing someone's name, including your guests! And be sure to wear one yourself.

Delegate roles. One of the best parts about having help with your party is that no one gets so lost in the details that they forget to focus on PEOPLE. And if your Community Group or other friends from outside your neighborhood are helping, they can free you and your family up to build relationships with your neighbors – that's the point, right?

Be a “host” with each person. Your party isn't just about people, it's about *each person*! Make sure that you or others are ready to welcome each guest, reconnect with people throughout the party, and make sure people know where everything is. And remember – if you invited people yourself, then yours may be the only face people know. So try to greet each partygoer personally if you can.

Consider an official welcome. If it fits your event, prepare a brief moment to gather the guests together. This would be a perfect moment to encourage your neighbors to meet each other, share dinner details, provide bathroom locations, say a prayer before you eat, or express something about your family or your

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testimony – whatever fits the goals and context of your party.

Remember your goals. In the fun and bustle of your party, don't forget what you're hoping to accomplish. If you need to invite people to a follow-up or collect contact info, make sure to do that. And if your goal is to connect neighbors with each other or to have a few deep conversations, do the best you can to make those things happen!

Trust the Lord. At the same time, don't forget that it's the Lord who "builds the house" (Psalm 127:1) – and who builds a successful party! You can't make everyone have a great time, nor can you have a deep conversation with everyone who shows up. Trust Him as you make your way through the night, to guide you to people and to needs.

"The kids always come back every year. They look forward to the Christmas play. ... The majority of the people that came to our pageant were single moms or widows – you could tell it was somewhere they felt loved." - Rob Barry

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AFTER THE EVENT (DON'T MISS THIS STEP!)



Here's a shocker: The success of your event hinges more on what happens afterward than what happens during the party!

Remember the goals you determined at the beginning? Your event is only meant to lay the foundation for other relationship-building. So what should you do after the event? Here are some tips:

- **Remember names.** Whatever you have to do (including writing them down), plan to remember the names of the people you've met.
- **Get outside.** Even if you were a homebody before, make an effort to get out in your neighborhood now – especially at times when others might be outside.
- **Send thank-yous or follow-ups.** Consider some sort of follow-up email or note. And be sure to thank anyone who contributed to the party's success in any way.
- **Pray about specific relationships to go deeper with.** Perhaps God provided you with a few great encounters through this process. Don't feel like you need to follow up with everyone; let the Lord guide you to those few people (or even one!) to reconnect with soon.
- **Consider the long-term opportunity.** What did you learn from this go-round? And what might God have for your household in the coming year

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or longer, to continue to be a light for Christ in your neighborhood?

- **Share your story!** If you do hold a party – no matter how it goes – we'd love to hear about it! Please let us know about your event, as well as anything you learn from the experience. Just email externalfocus@watermark.org. You'll help us equip people even better!

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