

The Power of an Invitation

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GROTTOES

It started with a sixth grader. **First Baptist Church** (FBC) in the small town of Grottoes, VA now has almost five percent of the town attending each week, and it all began with a student who invited his friend to church.

The friend came and brought his parents and sister. God worked in such a way that three of them were baptized. Then they started inviting people too—grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and neighbors. The sixth grader continued to invite people too. Now more than two dozen regular attenders—Sunday School teachers, finance team members, outreach leaders, men’s leaders, prayer leaders, and new members—can be traced to the simple invitations of a middle school boy.

Numerous surveys confirm that people start attending church simply because they are invited—and the overwhelming majority were invited by a friend, not a pastor or a postcard in the mail. The Bible indicates that loving God means loving others (Luke 10—The Parable of the Good Samaritan) and, as the Father sent Jesus, so also, He is sending us (John 20:21) to our neighbors, friends, co-workers, classmates, and family.

After serving for a time in youth ministry in Central Virginia, Mark Wingfield, his wife (Melanie), and their children moved to the Shenandoah Valley in 2009. Wingfield had grown up in the area, and he had a heart for the region.

Over time, he received opportunities to preach, and he fell in love with the people of this small, country church. First Baptist Church of Grottoes called Mark Wingfield as pastor in 2012, and God’s blessings followed. The first Sunday he preached there, 25 people (mostly senior adults) were spread throughout the sanctuary. Now the church runs multiple services, its classrooms and parking lot are full, and the congregation has purchased six acres of land a mile away for a future relocation.

The stories of God’s fingerprints abound. One mom regularly asked for prayer for her son and his wife. The two eventually responded to an invitation from an FBC attendee, and now both are Christians and active leaders in the congregation. A senior adult

Pastor Mark Wingfield and his wife, Melanie

invited her daughter who, although initially reluctant, became a regular attender and eventually professed faith in Christ. A young man is now being mentored and disciplined one on one by Pastor Wingfield because his family invited him to church.

“There’s no real secret to what’s happened,” says Wingfield. “We made a commitment to live in the community, get involved in the town, and regularly invite others. God has taken that obedience and multiplied it dozens of times.”

A beautiful picture of this came when the church decided to help people at the only grocery store in town carry their bags to their cars. While assisting a 90-year-old woman, they asked how they could pray for her. She mentioned that her brother in West Virginia had died and she had no way to get to the funeral. FBC members arranged a ride for her, and she has been attending the church ever since.

The church has also demonstrated a Kingdom mindset by sharing its facilities with church plants; helping other small churches do VBS collaboratively; and joining in outreach projects with other churches, such as a fall festival and a live nativity. This Kingdom-first perspective is clearly evidenced in the ministry and growth of First Baptist Church of Grottoes.

“The church has not experienced things like this before,” Pastor Wingfield observes, “but it helps us understand the big picture of what God is doing in the Shenandoah Valley.”

FBC Grottoes is demonstrating to its community that they are *Not Alone*. Jesus put it this way, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, HCSB).

A Challenge to Consider

In your church, challenge your people to invite others. Provide resources and opportunities to invite family, friends, and neighbors. Get involved in the community.

You can’t love your neighbor if you don’t *know* your neighbor—**consider joining Bless Every Home** to help you pray, care, share, and disciple (sbcv.org/blesseveryhome).

