



LIFE NEWS

OUTREACH WITH UPREACH

BY RON STORY
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Over the years, Parkside has had some amazing outreach events! These events were designed for Parkside peeps to invite their unchurched family and friends and usually included lots of food, fun activities, and opportunities for interaction with others with the intent of connecting these unchurched folks to the transforming love of Jesus. Our events have included: Pancake Breakfasts, Western Nights, Fourth of July celebrations, Dessert Theaters, and more recently, Car Shows! All of these outreach events have required tons of prayer, planning, preparation, publicity, participation by Parkside peeps, and the presence of God's Spirit to draw others closer to Jesus. For the most part, these events have been deemed successful, and we have had many people attend Parkside services as a result of first coming to an introductory outreach event. We praise God for that.

However, I recognize that some of Parkside's best outreach events have happened over the last several months. "Say what?" you're thinking! "I don't remember hearing of any special outreach events recently!" You are correct. We haven't advertised them as outreach events, but they have included most, if not all, of the same elements; lots of guests, many of them unchurched, times of laughter and tears, food and fellowship around tables, stories of God's love and faithfulness and the clear presentation of the Gospel of Jesus. I'm talking about the opportunities we have had of late to remember and celebrate the lives of faithful saints who have graduated to glory.

In each Celebration of Life service, many family and friends who are not consistent in attending a church are present. They often come with questions and concerns about life and death and the

place of a church family in today's world. Their lives are busy, and they rarely take time to truly think about God and spiritual matters, but these events force them to take time out of their hectic schedules to stop and contemplate the realities and priorities of life. The journey of a faithful believer is reviewed, reflecting the joy and security of knowing Jesus in the midst of this crazy world. Songs of praise and worship are sung, often tugging on the heart-strings of those attending, reminding them of experiences with godly parents and grandparents in their past. A favorite Bible passage from the life of the one celebrated is shared, pointing to their new life in Jesus and their assured presence in Heaven today.

Following that time of reflection, everyone is invited to a reception in our Fellowship Room, where our Deacons have set up tables and chairs, and our Deaconesses have prepared an amazing buffet for all to consume while enjoying fellowship around the tables. The family of the graduate is loved and blessed, and all the guests are reminded of the value of having a strong church family in times of need. The transforming love of Jesus is on display, people are blessed, and God is glorified!

I thank God for our planned outreach events that bring new people onto our campus and prayerfully give them a sense of the love of Jesus. I praise God for our Celebration of Life services, where God draws people to reflect on their lives, and the transforming love of Jesus is presented and seen in the memory of a faithful believer as well as in the lives of the many Parkside peeps who serve and love on those attending. Our goal in all these times is ***Outreach with Upreach... to the glory of God!***

Ron