



An Eclectic church with a Big Heart

An eclectic church family with a giant heart for their community finds common vision with Evana.



Not too long ago, Gil Michel was an accountant living in downtown South Bend, Indiana, who just happened to own a small rundown church building across the street from his house. Today, he serves as the pastor of that church. His wife Marketo serves as the worship leader. The body of believers call themselves, simply, That Church Downtown. Today the church is tearing down walls - literally as they make their meeting space larger, and figuratively as they work to reach the community around them.

Years ago, Gil Marketo gathered with his neighborhood association to take a tour of the vacant Salvation Army building across the street from his home. The group hoped the Salvation Army might give them the building to use for community events, but as they walked through, they were informed this would not be the case. However, when Gil stepped into the sanctuary, onto red-carpeted floor, he froze. He remembered a dream he'd had of pulling up this same red carpet, and he knew God wanted him to have this building.

"I didn't even have money to turn on the gas," he remembers. "There was black mold in the basement." "Gil is very patient." Marketo remarks about her husband. "He never wants to rush into anything, [without God's leading]." He wasn't going to build this church just because he had a pastor's heart and a wife with a worship

background, and a building. He wanted to wait for clear guidance from the Lord. During that time of waiting, other organizations and groups asked to use the building, and bit by bit, these groups helped fix areas of the rundown church.

Small Beginnings

Eventually, Gil and Marketo did start meeting in the church. Because they were both very involved in leadership at their own separate churches, they decided to meet on Saturday nights. They didn't tell any of their own church friends with hopes that the church would grow organically from the community. For a long while it was a dwindling group. "We were excited if there were fifteen people," says Gil. Some nights it was only the two of them. During that time, Gil and Marketo were involved with several different ministries through connections from Revive Indiana. They came alongside the local homeless shelter. Marketo ministered to the women of an adult club. A lot of the people they interacted with didn't want to give up their Saturday nights. For the woman at the club, Saturday night was their biggest moneymaker. "We decided we needed to move to meeting Sunday mornings."



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As the church grew, Gil and Marketo held to a few small principles they knew they wanted their church to be about. “We didn’t want to be super inward focused, we didn’t want this to be the Sunday club,” says Gil. “It’s still a fight to not settle.” Although they both come from larger churches, they wanted That Church Downtown to be more about giving of time and relationship, than growing in numbers. “We didn’t want it to be all about our leadership.” So they decided to skip the titles, and for the most part it’s okay for them to not play by rules. A lot of their members wouldn’t know the difference or care if they did. “We have a church of people who aren’t churched... or who have been hurt by the church.”

For Gil and Marketo, their ultimate hope is to reach more of the community right around them, and they encourage those in their diverse body to reach out as well. One of the church members, an older gentleman, set up his own service to the community. A tent and grilled hot dogs serves as a bicycle clinic. Through this outreach, several kids started showing up to services. Most of the time just to quickly grab a donut and be on their way. Unfamiliar with how a church service works, they would come in and interrupt the service to ask if there was anything to eat. Relationships with the kids grew. The man from the bike clinic gave them some refurbished bikes. Another woman asked for their mom’s number so she could be a surrogate grandmother. The kids started staying longer at the services, and eventually their mother came as well.

Another young man sat through countless services with his parents. He was a self-proclaimed atheist who came because he parents required church attendance to live at their house. According to Gil, “He was checked out.” Until one Sunday when he wasn’t. “He was in tears. The next Sunday, the same thing.” This summer, he was baptized at the church picnic.

It’s been a long road of digging deeper and forming stronger relationships. For a year, they had once a week family dinner and worship. “It was like Thanksgiving, every week,” says Gil. And that’s where the church is really built. Trust happens there. “People don’t spill their guts at the altar.” Marketo says, “They... stay until two in the afternoon then finally they are ready to tell you what’s going on.”

Common Heartbeats

Although their body of believers might look different than most, and their Sunday services might be more laid back than some, this church of new and old believers seems to share a common heart with those a part of Evana. Last year, John Troyer, reached out to Gil and Marketo about sharing at the 2018 Pastor’s retreat. They knew little about Anabaptists or Mennonites and even less about the Evana network, but they agreed. They were blown away with how much the heart of the people there resonated with their own. “We like to associate ourselves with people that aren’t quite like us in the expression, but very much like us in spirit,” says Marketo. So this summer, That Church Downtown joined Evana.

In September, That Church Downtown celebrated five years as a church. Today, they are in the middle of a renovation. They are taking out walls in the back of their sanctuary to make more room. The red carpet is finally being pulled up. Much like the renovation of human hearts, it’s a little messy. But God continues to work, and this varied group of believers continue to grow as they do life together and reach out to their community around them. ✚

Evana Network Searches for a New Executive Director

Evana Network is in a search process for a new Executive Director. John Troyer has filled that position since Evana’s beginning in 2015. Troyer, in his resignation to the board this past summer stated, “Since our beginning I have given my best to shape and lead Evana Network to where we are today. I believe now is the time find new leadership that can help take us to the next chapter”. In his resignation, Troyer stated that he wants to reduce his travel and be home more while his children are young.

Evana Network wants to find an Executive Director with a servant’s heart, someone that desires to serve HIS church. If you are interested in knowing more or want to recommend a candidate, contact info@evananetwork.org or call (941) 993-8487.