

**LOVE  
YOUR  
CITY**

**LEADING YOUR CHURCH  
INTO MISSIONAL LIFE**



# RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The scene opens with a pastor, and he's tired. A new pastor in an old church with an aging congregation and few young people. The words that come out of his mouth are surprising. "I believe we have to find a way to engage the struggling neighborhood behind our church." Something inside him knows his first mission as the leader of a struggling congregation was to lead them out into loving their neighbors.

Finally, after some deep conversations and hard work together, the pastor invited Boy With a Ball to come and train them to launch **Love Your City**, a model for engaging and transforming neighborhoods. The pastor, several elders and a handful of members gathered on a cold Saturday morning to walk into the neighborhood behind their building. People were visibly nervous as they broke into small teams and walked down streets lined with quiet, closed and dilapidated houses.

One of the church's elders was the first person to find the courage to walk up the sidewalk to the first house on the street. His knuckles rapped on the door a few times, followed by a long, tense silence. And then the door opened and a miracle occurred.

The man's words were not what anyone could have expected. They were humble, broken and filled with emotion: "Hello. My name is Sam and I am with the church...well, the one right there," he said, as he turned and pointed to the building a few hundred yards away. "Well," he continued, "we have been there as a church for a long time and, to be honest, we have been terrible neighbors. So here we are, finally, and I just want to, first, apologize to you for not ever meeting you before and then, hopefully, begin to change that."

Sam told the family he spoke with that his church was going to be out most weekends to come by and see how they were doing, to talk with them if they had any time. He told them that he was hoping that he and his church could learn from the people in the neighborhood, and explore the ways they could all work together to help the children and young people living there reach their dreams.

**THERE IS**

**A NEED**

**FOR A NEW**

**GENERATION**

**OF LEADERS**

# THE STATISTICS ARE STARK

- The percentage of Americans who say they belong to a church or other faith community is at an all-time low, averaging just 50%.
- Older Americans are now far more likely than younger adults to be members of churches.
- Nearly two-thirds of U.S. 18–29-year-olds who grew up in church tell Barna they have withdrawn from church involvement as an adult after having been active as a child or teen

As a result of this exodus of youth, many churches face aging congregations with buildings and budgets but no future. Even cutting-edge church plants that are targeted to reach these younger populations are struggling to find traction in their efforts to reach the hearts of younger Americans and to develop them into a next generation of leaders.

While young people may be indifferent toward the churches they see around them, what they are passionate about is making a difference. Your church might be better positioned than you realize to help them move from aspiration to concrete involvement. **Love Your City** leverages young people's hunger for meaning into powerful opportunities for local churches to develop new leaders and serve their neighbors.



**YOU  
ARE  
HERE!**

**LOVE  
YOUR  
CITY  
BETTER**

# FOLLOWING JESUS INTO LOVING OUR CITIES, OUR NEIGHBORS

In order to take this step, churches will have to find their faith footing in a moment when they can easily feel overwhelmed by what they see happening in the world around them. Jesus often leads us into uncharted territory. And while this moment seems uncharted and unfamiliar to us, it is not really new: Jesus' church is always in mission, His mission. It's a mission that calls us outside of ourselves, our accustomed habits and patterns and our familiar ways of doing things. We go with Jesus to them, not wait for them to come to us.

If we can learn to see how Jesus is leading us to love our cities, our neighborhoods and our communities, we suddenly find so many of our greatest challenges become easier. Following Jesus into our neighborhoods on a regular basis is vital to engaging our local community and to attracting younger leaders, both of which are keys to any church today having a vibrant, fruitful future.

# JOY IN THE DISCOVERY OF NEW LIFE

One year after the first knuckles knocked on the first door, the old church with the new pastor now knows the names of most of the residents of the hurting neighborhood behind their building. On several Saturday mornings a month, you can find them walking in small groups up to each house to check on the families living there. They have started a tutoring center, ESL classes and are partnering with other groups to provide their neighborhood with resources that can help their neighbors grow.

Their next step will be to turn to the university down the street to invite students to come as volunteers to make a difference in their community. This church, once facing a difficult leadership transition and nearly impossible future, lifted their eyes from what seemed like disaster to see where the grace of God was flowing in their neighborhoods and they joined Him there. The result has been joy in the discovery of new life, new relationships and new hope.

# THE POWER OF LOVE YOUR CITY

**Love Your City's** power is in its capacity to bridge the distance between young leaders, churches and their communities: Young people yearn to experience faith in practice and to help others. Leaders within churches are fighting against feeling irrelevant to their communities while not knowing how to engage in ways that go beyond things like one time shifts at a soup kitchen to building real relationships with people that help bring about lasting impact. Community members face a myriad of challenges including financial problems and struggles to find employment or do well in school. **Love Your City** is not "just another program" to give church folk something to do. It is a pathway to addressing the needs of the church, of the neighborhood, and of young people.

# GROW A NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

**Love Your City** is a vehicle to see this movement begin with your own congregation either by joining in with an existing effort or to work together with Boy With a Ball to start one in your city. **Love Your City** begins by gathering a group of people within your church around “going.” This gathering can and should be of a mix of older people, younger people and even volunteers from outside the church. After a weekly time of training, talking and growing into real relationships with one another, the group then begins walking together into a hurting neighborhood close to you. Here this group of leaders learns and grows together as they go house to house, building relationships with the people living there.

As relationships grow and listening to community members creates learning about what young people and families are facing in the neighborhood, mentoring relationships and small groups begin to form: Women's groups, tutoring centers, ESL classes, job skills training.

The possibilities are limitless. As these grow, the community begins to rise.

And as the community rises, your church grows into making a real and transformative impact, your members are equipped to love their neighbors and a next generation of leaders are drawn and developed.

# HOW LOVE YOUR CITY CAN HELP YOUR CHURCH TODAY

Here are three ways to explore how **Love Your City** can serve you and your church:

1

## COME AND SEE

Find the closest Love Your City to you and whether you just come once, come once in a while or come every week, your participation will weave you into the ongoing story of how God transforms a community.

2

## GO ON A TRIP

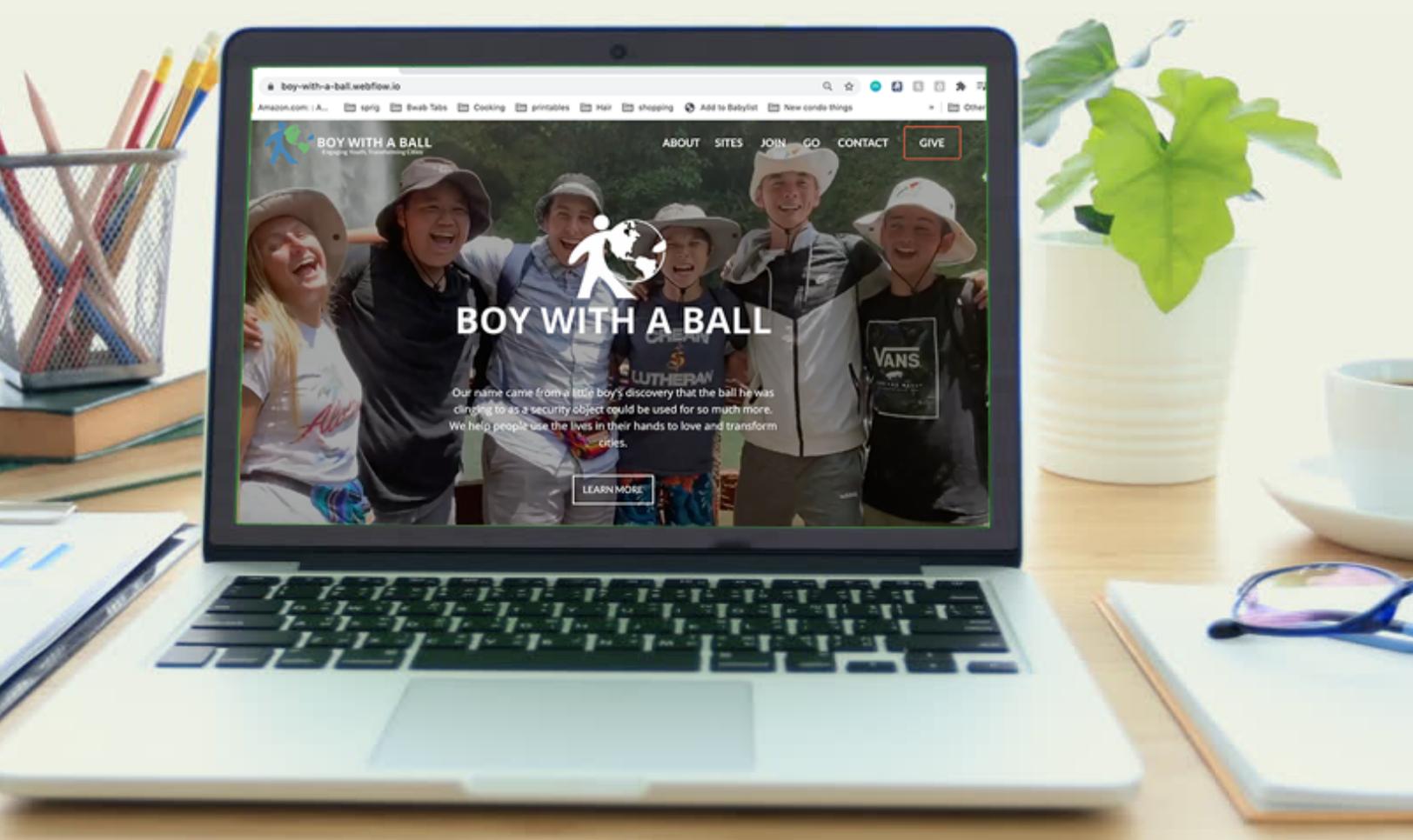
Take a trip to either Costa Rica or Kenya. We provide of pre-trip training and then allow you to join with a current Boy With a Ball team around the world for a week as you touch the power of **Love Your City**.

3

## GIVE US A CALL

Do you have questions about the challenges facing your congregation, and how Love Your City can help? or maybe you're wanting to start Love Your City where you are? Schedule a call with us!





# BOY WITH A BALL

The destination for church leaders  
to learn and grow

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