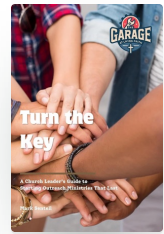


Turn the Key

A Church Leader's Guide to Starting Outreach Ministries That Last

MARK SENTELL



This book shouldn't take very long to read, but I know you're busy, so if you can only read two pages before you turn the key, these are them.

The mission has always been outside. Many small churches treat outreach as a program to add once everything else is running well. That is understandable. It is also, theologically speaking, backwards. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18–20) flows from Jesus' authority, not from our readiness. The church does not exist for itself. It exists for the world. So the question is not whether to engage in outreach. The question is how.

Your Sunday service and your outreach ministry need each other. Ralph Winter named the church's two structures. The modality is the local church in its ordinary form, the homestead that tends the found. The sodality is a task-focused mission structure alongside the church, the frontier that seeks the lost. The Garage at Living Faith is a sodality. A homestead with no frontier turns inward, and frontiers without homesteads eventually become abandoned. The homestead forms. The frontier deploys. The frontier sends back. The homestead deepens. The false choice between outreach and discipleship is one of the enemy's most effective tools for keeping the church small and self-absorbed. Refuse it.

The Gospel travels across a relational bridge. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). God did not send a pamphlet. He came. The bridge has three spans: presence, because one event does not build a bridge; genuine care, because people know within minutes whether they are a project or a person; and honest faith, the honest answer to the question everyone eventually asks, "why do you do this?" It is not a technique. It is incarnation.

Ministries that last hit the sweet spot. They are multi-skilled, with room for the person who has never touched a wrench. They are multi-generational, because the body of Christ spans every age. They create repeat contact, because you don't pitch Jesus to someone you met once. They meet practical and spiritual needs. They are sustainable on a small church budget. They build community among volunteers. And they are scalable, built on principles rather than particular people.

Customers, volunteers, and infrastructure must grow together or fail together. Every struggling ministry I have seen struggled because one part grew faster than the others could keep up. Demand is easy to grow too fast. Volunteers are the hardest leg to build. Infrastructure is the least glamorous, but without it a ministry runs on heroic individual effort and burns out its best people. Leadership's primary job is proportional attention to all three.

Every ministry that lasts needs a founder and an organizer. Michael started fixing cars in his driveway with a passion, a gift, and a church culture that said go ahead and try it. I came alongside later with systems, funding, and partnerships. Without the founding passion, you have an organization without a soul. Without organizational capacity, the founding passion burns bright and then burns out. If you are one, find the other.

Don't invite unchurched people to church events. Create spaces where people who genuinely share an interest (cars, food, art, motorcycles, gardening) gather around it, and let the church people there love the people they meet. Unchurched people have very good radar for events whose real goal is getting them through the door. Paul became "all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). That was not a marketing strategy. It was genuine identification.

Four filters will tell you whether an idea can work in a small church:

1. **Volunteer load:** Can three to six people run this?
2. **Cost:** Can you run this on a few hundred dollars a month?
3. **Repeatability:** Will the same people return regularly?
4. **Relational depth:** Can meaningful friendships actually form, or are you building audience, not community?

Then apply the test that matters most: would someone still come if we never invited them to church? If not, it will produce resentment, not relationship.

Then start small, and play the long game. Spend three months listening before you launch anything. Ask community leaders what problem keeps showing up that nobody is solving well. Solve one problem well, because nobody partners with you because you have a vision. They partner with you because you have a track record. Recruit volunteers who are Flexible, Available, and Teachable, and keep telling them the stories. Fund it from several streams so none dominates. Become the connector, a hub rather than an island. And build a ministry that can survive your absence.

The need in your community is real. The Gospel is the answer. You are the bridge. That is the book. The rest of it tells how The Garage grew from one driveway to five hundred cars a year, and walks through every step of starting your own.

Free to share. Print it, copy it, hand it out, and use it in your church. Freely I have received; freely I give. "You received without paying; give without paying" (Matthew 10:8). If you'd like the whole book, it's at marksentell.com/books/turn-the-key, along with a free leader's guide.

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