

MINISTRY AWARDS



ANNUAL CELEBRATION

2020

GINA ROBERTS

RICHARD LUCCO AWARD IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP



City Covenant Church is a flourishing community of believers in an urban, highly-transient, impoverished area. Led by Pastor Semmeal Thomas, the church actively prioritizes relationships with the people of downtown Detroit. Because of its faithful leadership, the church is able to engage in several community ministries, spreading the light and love of Jesus. Gina Roberts has been recognized as one of these faithful leaders, essential to forward-momentum in servant leadership. As Semmeal says: "Gina is faithful. That's what encompasses her in a nutshell."

Gina has lived in Detroit her entire life. Many years ago, she started Lovestar Ministry in an effort to feed the homeless on a monthly basis amidst sunshine, rain, or snow. In the early days, volunteers consisted of her own family, cousins, and a few church members. She felt a connection with the homeless and was drawn to their personalities. Because of her passion to do more for her community and after nearly a decade of partnership with her church, Gina and her husband Bernard made the difficult decision to leave their place of worship in search of a new church home. While Gina chose to take a weekend to herself before beginning the search, her husband decided to visit the church that his cousin PeeWee had been attending. PeeWee was a homeless man who had, by the grace of God, found a church home and faith community that he loved with people who accepted him. He invited everyone he met to church on Sunday. After attending just one service, Bernard rushed home to share his experience with Gina. He just knew Gina was going to love PeeWee's church family!

That very next Sunday, Gina attended her first service at City Covenant Church and has faithfully remained a part of that community ever since. The people at City Cov were "not ordinary church people. You see, if you are homeless -- or an alcoholic or addict or seem like you have a mental illness -- those people attract my attention." She felt like this church body represented a beautiful array of all God's people, and this felt like home. Gina connected with Pastor Semmeal and said she knew instantly that "they share the same spirit. They're both super nice and love people." She invited him to serve alongside her and a team of Love Star Ministry volunteers. To her great surprise, Semmeal accepted and in return, asked her to come to the next Leadership Team meeting to share about her non-profit. As it turns out, that was the beginning of something beautiful.



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One of the things Semmeal learned to do early on was to look at the community and his congregation and notice the jewels - those that have dedication, specific skill sets and responsibility. Gina is one of those jewels. She is incredibly dependable and dedicated to providing her family and her community with a real life example of what it means to be a faithful servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Reminiscing on her journey of leadership at City Cov, Gina said that she "never asked for any position." She didn't ask to be on the Leadership Team or to make big decisions or to become the Head Deacon. She attributes much of her growth to mentorship and people empowering her to step into her own leadership calling.

When asked what brings her the most joy in the work that she does with the homeless, Gina responded instantly - without hesitation: "The people in the community, and seeing a lot of them come to Christ just by coming here. They think they are coming for a meal, but actually Christ is drawing them in." Gina loves knowing everyone by name and believes that is one of the most beautiful gifts you can give a person - to hear and know and call them by name. When asked about the most difficult parts of her work, she explained that "seeing people in the streets breaks her heart. Some of them don't have a clue what the real world is like and what life is about - what Christ is about." Gina believes it is our duty, as followers of Jesus, to teach this generation what their parents didn't teach them - to care for and unconditionally love the homeless of Detroit.

Everyone knows Gina, and Gina knows everybody. That's one of her best qualities and warmest gifts. She leads a women's small group, is closely involved with "Breaking Bread," serves on the church's leadership team and has been recently appointed to the Great Lakes Conference Executive Board as a trustee. With her sweet and humble disposition, it was difficult for Gina to wrap her mind around receiving an award for leadership. She responded graciously with the following: "I've been in ministry for 21 years now, and I have prayed to God that I could do something in the Covenant Church. I'm overjoyed because I don't see what you all see or what Garth sees or what Pastor sees. I just see this is what I do every day as part of my life. Be quiet. Shh. All glory be to God!"

"I wish I had a hundred Ginas!" said Semmeal. "I've seen tremendous growth in her." In the beginning she was the kind of leader who did things around the church to make sure it was running. She fixed things and kept things together from an operational standpoint. She has grown into teaching groups, praying for individuals, and visiting the sick. The unique thing about Gina is that she continues to do the new thing, while still managing to take care of the old things. "The ultimate deacon is one who can do both, and I am very proud and very pleased to be able to call myself her pastor."



DAVE AND BETH CHILCOAT AWARD AWARD IN CHURCH OUTREACH

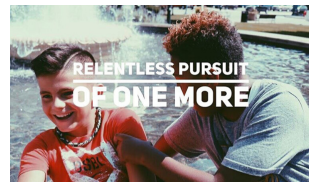


LifeChurch Canton has always been driven by New Life. "The Code," or set of beliefs to live by and live into, prioritizes it and defines how to live as a community of people with new life in Christ. It is an actionable, measurable statement of who they have been, who they are, and who they will be. With this intentional kind of core belief system, we celebrate Life Church's commitment to outreach by awarding them this year's Outreach Award.

Over the years, there have always been opportunities to measure and celebrate new life. It has been a fundamental value to track and measure the number of individuals that come to Christ. In just the last five years, LifeChurch Canton has led over 1000 individuals to Christ, and this is only what has been trackable via Connect Cards. An important aspect of this is to always allow time at the closing of the message to invite people into communion and relationship with the Lord. This weekly invitation helps to maintain the commitment to outreach.

In addition to inviting people into deeper relationship with Jesus and tracking those who accept, leadership prioritizes talking about outreach, celebrating new life with people, and coming alongside individuals as they move forward in their relationship with the Lord. Several avenues to this include partnership, discipleship, volunteering, Life Groups, Life Journey courses, and baptism. With so many resources and offerings, people feel connected, necessary, and loved. They are able to take half-steps, baby steps, or giant leaps toward greater faith.

When talking about outreach, LifeChurch Canton is referring to our need for Christ. What better way to get to know Him but through relationships with those who are already connected in the church. Not only do they offer steps toward knowing Jesus, but they prioritize offering half-steps, ways in which individuals can move toward being a part of the Body of Christ according to their own timing. Examples include free public events like "Trunk-or-Treat" or "Explore," a course where people are encouraged to come and ask hard questions about life and faith. Nobody has to believe or even agree with what is being taught. They simply invite and try to create a space for those half-step-takers. Another half-step example is the commitment to digital church. This is meant entirely for the population who wants to investigate from a distance and try things out before committing to attending in person. Digital half steps are for the purpose of outreach, not for the purpose of comfort for a believer.





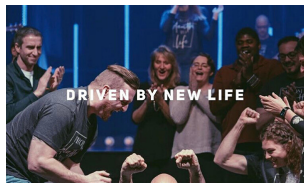
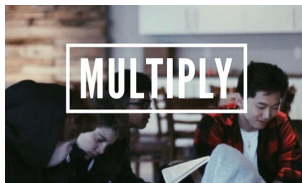
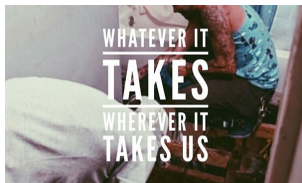
DAVE AND BETH CHILCOAT AWARD AWARD IN CHURCH OUTREACH

LifeChurch would attribute their successful drive for outreach to their intimate knowledge of the local community. Knowledge allows them to eliminate barriers that are perceived to be between individuals and Jesus or between man and the church. If church is perceived as boring, they make it interesting. If the church is perceived as always asking for money, they find creative ways to teach about tithing. If people perceive church services as running too early in the morning, they launch an afternoon service. If the community prioritizes kids, the church creates dynamic youth programming to draw in families. Theology is never changed, but the ways in which they prioritize welcoming newcomers reflects relevant times.

One unique priority is their heart to be inclusive of all people in all walks of life and in all kinds of life circumstances. LifeChurch Canton is a place where everyone can feel like they are at home. Prioritizing "You Belong" -- part one of the "The Code" -- opens up the power of outreach. They aren't looking to love just a particular group of people, but striving to love everyone, just as the Lord demonstrates. "Our church reflects our community. In numbers, this works out to be almost 25 percent mixed ethnicity and one of the things that makes us a unique place where many call home.", said Rich Allen, Executive Pastor.

With a desire to be a true reflection of the heart and image of God, they don't pursue diversity because it makes God smile. They do so because they've recognized that church is not whole without EVERYONE. A key scripture that guides LifeChurch in this pursuit comes from the Revelation of John in chapter 7:9 where every "nation, tribe, people and language" stand before the throne of God. "If that's a vision of where this is all going, then it's our responsibility to better reflect the Kingdom of God.", said Jared Van Voorst, Associate Pastor. LifeChurch also recognizes there's a long way to go, which helps inform their mission to intentionally move closer to restorative justice, pursuing true unity in the body of Christ through humility, proximity and love.

As a church community, one of the very best parts of the live, in-person service is greeting visitors at the front door. This stage of "visiting somewhere new" is a significant decision for someone. They are giving the church a chance, and it is a unique opportunity for the church to welcome and love. LifeChurch has prioritized being invitational, remaining purpose-filled and creating intentional spaces for greater community interaction. The most important person is the first time visitor because "they are guests in our home. As they are comfortable and receive hospitality, their spirits open up to what God can do.", continued Rich. "We're not really that clever. We're just completely sincere about all of it -- believing that God wants people in the community who don't know him to find him -- to find that new life in Christ!"



DONEARL JOHNSON



ARV ANDERSON AND LARRY SHERMAN AWARD IN CHURCH PLANTING

LifeChurch Auburn Hills (LCAH) is a multi-ethnic community being transformed and empowered by the grace, truth and love of Jesus to make disciples who can make disciples of all nations. This vision is so intricately intertwined in the hearts of church planters Donearl Johnson and Cameron Underdown. Each of these pastors has contributed to the vision, planting, and growth of LCAH. For this reason, we recognize and celebrate their obedience to God's call.

Donearl Johnson was born and raised in Flint, MI to parents who had committed to Christ and were passionate about spreading the love of God in their community. His parents were very active in ministry and were highly instrumental in his spiritual development. Donearl began working in ministry at a very early age and learned to serve others in multiple capacities. He recalls that growing up in the inner city, he was exposed to a lot of things; however, his father challenged him to "dare to be different". He embraced this challenge, which served not only to be lifesaving, but also significantly shaped his character. During his middle and high school years, Donearl found peace with not being defined by what others considered "the norm." This resolve allowed him to step outside of his comfort zone and connect to others who were different - interacting with people of various ethnic backgrounds, conversing with people with different beliefs systems, and befriending those who were not considered "popular".

At the time of his graduation, Donearl's father encouraged him again to do something different. This time it required leaving everything he knew, stepping away from his hometown, and pursuing a new career. Heeding this advice, Donearl enlisted and honorably served in the U.S. Navy for eight years. Earlier in his military service, his faith was challenged, and he yielded to temptations. Donearl walked away from following God, but God never gave up on pursuing him. At the time, Donearl perceived his faith as being "performance based," therefore thinking that he had gone "too far" and was no longer worthy.

It was at one of the lowest points in his life that he began to truly understand the immeasurable grace of God. During a significant life changing event, God got Donearl's attention and reminded him how much he loved him and that he still had work that he wanted to do in and through him.

One of the most memorable things Donearl witnessed and experienced was the unparalleled unity that was formed amongst a very diverse group of people for the sake of protecting and defending the Nation. This sparked a desire to pursue a God-given vision. He began to consider what it would look like if a diverse group of people committed to journey together to advance an everlasting Kingdom; a mission and passion for which Jesus came, died and rose again.



CAMERON UNDERDOWN



ARV ANDERSON AND LARRY SHERMAN AWARD IN CHURCH PLANTING

After his military service, he was ordained in 1998 in one of the largest African American denominations, but realized that he had friends that he could not invite, nor worship with, because they would not understand the context. With this in mind, he journeyed on a different path and connected with a local mega church in which the membership was predominantly white. Completely out of his comfort zone and experiencing a very new expression of the Christian faith, Donearl began to learn and unlearn various truths. He jokes about how in this setting, he learned for the very first time that it WAS possible to have a worship experience in just one hour! Donearl made many friends along the way and realized that God doesn't waste what you've gone through. He understood that God wanted to take his upbringing and his adult experiences and merge the best of both worlds, creating a community where everyone feels welcomed, encouraged and challenged to be all that God calls them to be.

Donearl says that when he looks back over his life, there were times that he felt he made the wrong decisions, questioned the path he took, and wondered if he had made the wrong steps. Life appeared to be represented by "dots." [At one time and place he was doing this and at another time and place he was engaged in something else.] However, he came to realize that those dots were more like plots on a canvas. While traveling between the dots, it didn't make much sense. But in hindsight, he can clearly see God's hand connecting the dots - revealing a beautiful picture of God's purpose for his life. When he looks back over his life, there is no question that God was using him in many ways to bridge communities. LCAH is what God has been preparing Donearl for throughout the entirety of his life. Donearl prayed to connect with others who were being prepared and also who shared a similar passion. God answered those prayers.

Cameron Underdown began his formative, teenage years as an outspoken atheist until the age of 18, when he had a radical encounter with God and gave his life to Jesus. He anticipated using his skills in web development to maintain his cushy, work-from-home, contract worker status. However, the Lord -- in a surprising and lengthy turn of events -- took Cameron down a different path. He wound up accepting a full time internship in ministry, raising funds in the form of support. He anticipated that the internship would be focused almost entirely around all things marketing and technical, but to his great surprise, his role developed into one that was much more ministerial in nature. Cameron found himself with an evident apostolic calling on his life. He knew very quickly that he was made to help churches start new ministries.



DONEARL AND CAMERON



ARV ANDERSON AND LARRY SHERMAN AWARD IN CHURCH PLANTING

Throughout the next decade, Cameron found himself in the familiar practice of launching ministries amidst strife and less-than-ideal circumstances that grew into successful endeavors. But when a good friend from church approached Cam about a church planting opportunity, he politely - but firmly - declined. Once again, he had found himself in a comfortable position and was not looking for change. Donearl, of course, was able to get him to agree to one meeting. That one meeting was all it took.

Cameron reminisced: "What changed it for me was a conversation with a close friend - a young man I led to Christ at Oakland [University] who had never gotten connected with a local church. He was only ever connected to me because there really wasn't a local church he felt like he could go to and feel like his voice was represented." In hearing his story, Cameron knew that planting this church with Donearl would be God's way of launching a community where anyone he had ever been close to, amidst all the varying networks of churches and organizations that he had been a part of, could feel like they were at home - that their voice mattered. Both of these men had so many years of pre-existing relationships with diverse groups of people. They were able to start on this foundation with others sharing a similar vision. "If there's anything noteworthy, it's what we did for the 10 years prior [to launching LifeChurch Auburn Hills], and not what we've done since we launched." We had both prioritized the deep lifestyle commitment to intentionally building honest friendships - "3-C-strong" friendships.

If you visit LifeChurch Auburn Hills, you will hear the 3-C strong language, which represents committed, cross-cultural and Christ-centered friendships. This developed out of years of living and pursuing that reality in the face of life's natural opposition and confusion. Both Donearl and Cameron are focused on a newly-understood facet of Christ through people who are different than themselves. They see people. They love people. They serve the people of the community for who they know they are in Christ. It is evident that this is a form of excellence both pastors bring to the table of church planting.

As all planters realize, the amount of energy, resources and work that goes into relationship-building is never-ceasing. Donearl is a proud father of four and has been blessed with nearly 24 years of marriage to his amazing wife, Jenetta. Cameron is a proud father of three and has been blessed with nearly 10 years of marriage to beautiful wife, Lyndee. We thank the families who humbly support our planters for their part in the beautiful new life that is LifeChurch Auburn Hills.





DAVE DAHLBERG AWARD IN CHURCH VITALITY

Leroy Covenant Church may be a small church in a small town, but it has proven over the last 130 years to have a big heart for lovingly sharing the Good News with their community. Amidst a pastoral search and with the help of Stan Hagemeyer's leadership as Interim Pastor, the church is making great strides toward becoming a healthier missional church. For this reason, and his previous contributions at other churches in transition, we believe it appropriate to recognize Stan Hagemeyer as this year's recipient of the Vitality Award.

Stan has served as an interim pastor for nearly two decades, currently dedicating his time and energy to Leroy Covenant Church. He has blessed 9 churches as Interim Pastor in 3 denominations, including six ECC congregations. His role at LeRoy is limited - more so than he has ever experienced before. However, he is available two Sundays each month to lead worship, be available for pastoral care, and attend necessary board meetings and leadership efforts. One of the most rewarding parts of his current role is the opportunity to consult with their Vitality Team and be part of some life-giving congregational events.

"I try to help people understand that the most important thing about finding a pastor is to identify one who is devoted to Jesus Christ and who doesn't mind being known as a faulty human being.", says Stan. He prioritizes vulnerability and sharing real stories from his life and how God has met him in his shortcomings with grace and love. It is important, he says, to "encourage people, likewise, to not expect the pastor to be some kind of knight in shining armor who somehow magically attracts people to come to the church." He has helped their Vitality Team move through several events toward those goals.

Stan designed a Memory Celebration to enable members to look back at what God had done in their church's past and to recognize their personal experiences as part of that story. He introduced the concept by sharing his own personal story, how God encountered him in his own failures that shaped and molded him and his faith. Then, using small group exercises and introspective thinking and sharing, members of the church identified events that have impacted them over the church's lifetime, sharing how these affected their lives both positively and negatively. A second event, similar in style, explored Change and Transition in both congregational life and personal experiences. Most recently, he helped design a Service of Consecration to help the congregation reflect on personal shortcomings, confession, and to rededicate themselves to God for his purposes. It was important to help them not only know in their heads but also in their hearts that it is possible to redirect and get back on track after experiencing mistakes or confusion.





DAVE DAHLBERG AWARD IN CHURCH VITALITY

Stan attributes his own love for the Body of Christ to an experience in his mid-thirties. Having been a pastor for several years and leading a small congregation in central Illinois, Stan learned that having a degree in theology did not make a person more Jesus-like. In fact, at a time when his own shortcomings were obvious, Christian friends demonstrated a profound kind of love that helped reshape him and his views of ministry. He came to recognize that ordinary, every-day people who love God can make a world of difference for the Kingdom - regardless of any formal academic training.

Having served as the Interim Pastor for nine churches previously, Stan has a gift in recognizing how to operate when a church is feeling distressed. He listens and leads with intentionality. In responding to his selection as the Vitality Award recipient, he thought, "There's got to be someone else who is some kind of expert in this. I haven't had much to do with Vitality. I've only tried to work with churches in helping them get back on track after some bumps in the road." Stan is also a trained pastoral coach and has been coaching both Reformed and Covenant Clergy for the last 14 years. When interviewed, he shared with great humility that he simply works at being calm in any circumstance or troubling situation. He asks simple questions to help individuals see how God is working. He knew from his Interim/Transitional Ministry training that it was important to understand the dynamics of a congregation in transition. Feelings of grief and loss may include anger, guilt, depression or relief. It is important to give people permission to say what they are experiencing and to feel what they are feeling. Once this happens, people begin to understand one another again and get comfortable with who they are as the Body of Christ.

At Leroy, Stan confesses, he was a bit apprehensive at first. But when he got acquainted with people in the church, he noticed these folks had real passion for helping others and pursuing Jesus' priorities. He thanks the Lord for giving him the ability to see the good in everyone he has encountered, allowing him to love, affirm and encourage. He continues to stretch the congregation by his own example of a person who believes we can always celebrate what God can do with us and our limitations. One unique aspect of Leroy Covenant is their culture of staying around to visit after services, Stan mentioned. There are no treats or beverages to entice people to stay. It is just naturally a part of their way of doing life together - to stick around, relate, and connect. This beautiful scene of prioritizing relationships is a reflection of the growing vitality of the church.

Stan and his wife, Mary Ann, live near Fountain, Michigan off the beaten path. They have four married children with twelve grandchildren. He enjoys cross country skiing, fishing, and writing. He just published a book in December called, "Having Courage to Care - You can Help Others Who Are Suffering." We are so grateful for humble, dedicated servants of the Lord like Stan Hagemeyer.



**ARV ANDERSON & LARRY
SHERMAN AWARD IN
CHURCH PLANTING**

2019 Donearl Johnson &
Cameron Underdown

2018 New Community
Church

2017 LifeChurch Livonia
Leadership

2016 Harlan & Wendy
Henderson

2015 Brittany Barlow &
Abbie Golden

2014 Alex Rahill

2013 Jerry Ricks

2012 Herb Kolbe

2011 Father Paul Chateau

2010 Scott & Tracey Austin, Jason & Lisa
Condon, Mike & Mel Muscarella

2009 Caleb Skinner

2008 Lois Johnson

2007 Dan & Lisa Johanon

2006 Jim Wallis Sr.

**DAVE & BETH CHILCOAT
AWARD IN CHURCH
OUTREACH**

2019 LifeChurch Canton

2018 Maria Koliantz

2017 GLC Evangelism
Cohort Leaders

2016 Shunichi & Masako
Miyamoto

2015 Melissa Williams

2014 Bruce & Barbara
Baehr

2013 Rick Miller, David Trosper,
Sharon Hamilton

2012 Marge Palmerlee

2011 Judd Hamilton

2010 Don Schiewer

2009 Alan & Deb Asp

2008 Keystone Church of
Hazelwood & Stoneridge
Covenant Church

2007 Monique Holliday

2006 Dave & Beth
Chilcoat

**DAVE DAHLBERG AWARD
IN CHURCH VITALITY**

2019	Stanley Hagemeyer
2018	Forest Park Covenant Church
2017	John Wenrich
2016	Federated Covenant Church
2015	Kelly Casey
2014	Keith Cheli
2013	Bill Anthes
2012	Russ Carlson
2011	Sarah Gordon
2010	Josh & Alycia Meriweather
2009	Bob & Joanne Gielow
2008	Steve Armfield
2007	David Dahlberg

**RICHARD LUCCO AWARD
IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

2019	Gina Roberts
2018	Laura Garvey & Tamra Soderberg
2017	Ja'mel Armstrong & Matt Ness
2016	Greg Applequist & Steve Armfield
2015	City Covenant "Mothers of the Ministry"
2014	Shaun Marshall
2013	Dan Wolter
2012	Richard Lucco



**SEEING
CLEARLY**
TO FOLLOW IN OUR
MASTER'S FOOTSTEPS
GLC ANNUAL CELEBRATION