ISSUE 02 // **FALL '17**

NEOZINE

CELEBRATION

TOTALITY

NEW YEAR
NEW IP

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Xenos Christian Fellowship is a non-traditional, interdenominational church with mainstream biblical doctrines. We sponsor neighborhood home groups for all ages led by volunteers.

Like other Christian Evangelical churches, we celebrate the Bible's message of freedom and the hope this brings to all humanity through Jesus Christ. We also dump the confusing rituals and traditions wherever the Bible gives us this freedom. Jesus taught about spiritual life and relationships, not *religion*.

This is why our ministries provide a warm and non-threatening environment where people can seek a personal relationship with God, ask questions, and find out what the Bible actually says. Visit our site to read about our core values to see what's so exciting about this person named Jesus Christ. He was remarkably irreligious and he was all about personal relationships. Jesus brings a newness to life, called spiritual life, and that's when things get really interesting!

The Bible records the amazing history of God's kind intentions for us. He created us with design and purpose. The Bible reveals how to build significant lives that impact our families, friends, and the people we meet. God leads people into maturity and the opportunity to impact the world around us in truly significant ways.

Published by Xenos Christian Fellowship, Identity Project of Kent State University.

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It was for freedom that Christ set us free.

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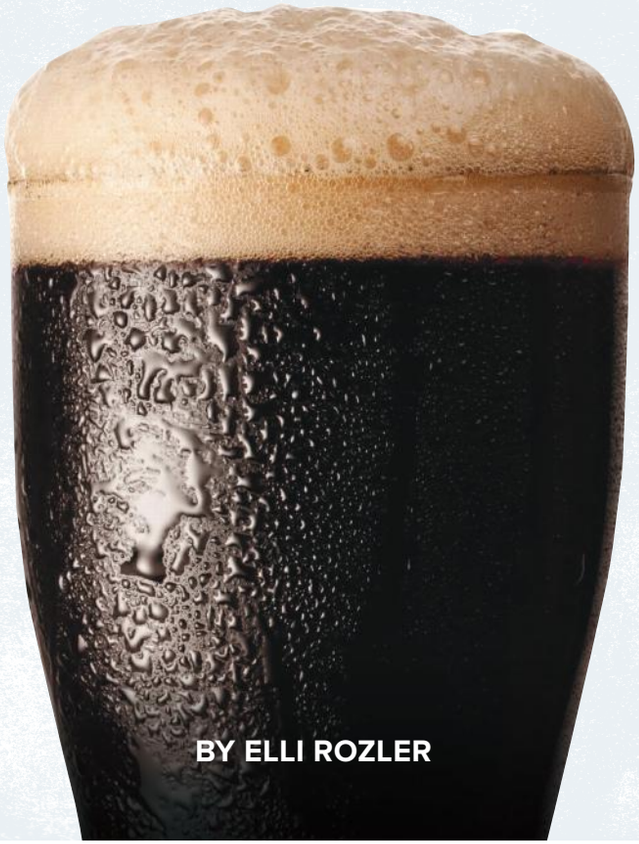
SMASHED ON STOUT

TURNS OUT THEY WEREN'T WASTED AFTER ALL...

Smash is one of the four college Bible studies belonging to Identity Project (IP) - home churches for students at KSU, run by students. As of this fall, our beloved Smash is splitting, adding a new group to that number. Join us in welcoming: **STOUT!**



BY ELLI ROZLER

A TONE OF GROWTH ENVELOPS IP: a sense of excitement and a desire to expand to every corner of campus with the Good News. Smash gets to accomplish this vision: to make a new group that will reach more people and provide new opportunities for members to step up, serve and lead. God has used their unique giftings (and personalities) to reach many people. The testimonies of growth and faith from Smash bring much glory to God.

Smash is known across IP for their unity, encouraging words and perseverance. They've faced difficulties, but God has used them to the extent that they are able to split into two groups - specifically a group for graduate students/post-college members (Stout) and another that is mainly college students (Smash).

Please join us in prayer for these two home churches as they part ways this fall. Please pray for the new deacons raised to lead these two churches. And please pray for perseverance amid the anticipated spiritual oppression these servants will encounter.

SMASH'S LEADERSHIP TEAM consists of Greg & Lina Morscher and Alex & Lydia Herbers. Alex & Lydia just became deacons during Labor Day weekend! Learn a bit about the new deacons in Smash:

ALEX (VYKING) HERBERS

Alex grew up in Cincinnati listening to heavy metal and Weird Al. He received Christ into his life around age 9 after hearing evidence for God at a youth group teaching. A few years later - senior year of high school - he decided to give his whole life to Christ after realizing real purpose could only be found in things that don't go away when you die. The only thing we can take "are the people that we help come to know God and come into eternity with him." After studying for one year at the University of Cincinnati, he moved to KSU in 2010 and joined NeoXenos in order to figure out how to truly follow God.

He has experienced much breaking in his walk with God. "God has been very patient with me, and our current teaching series in IP about David rings true in many ways for me," says Alex about turning back to God again and again. This once dark, angry guy has transformed

into a caring, dedicated leader who is ready to run at God's call. His vision for the new Smash? "My prayer is that God would help everyone take him more honestly at his word and to trust him in every aspect of our lives."

Alex is a web & graphic designer, and he gets to start this new Smash with his wife, Lydia, by his side. Ask him for some heavy metal recommendations or feel free to say "hi" - he's nice now.

ALEX & LYDIA HERBERS

LYDIA HERBERS

Lydia has always been a free spirit: her love for travel, beautiful (but thrifty) things, and fun foods has led her to meet interesting places and people. Through her youth, she wanted to get away and move to a big city. So, why still in Kent, Ohio? She came for KSU's fashion program, but she found that wasn't the best place to serve God. Since dedicating her life to God, she's found more joy than any of her ambitions or dreams could have provided her. God has transformed her to care deeply for the people around her and her friends recognize her deep love for them. "It definitely took breaking of much stubbornness and bitterness, but it's been awesome seeing so many lives transformed by the Gospel!" says Lydia.

THE SMASH LEADERSHIP TEAM

She received Christ in 6th grade at Blowout, a part of Xenos Columbus. It was her first time hearing about forgiveness and Jesus' death on the cross. In the future, Lydia looks forward to meeting with students who come to this home church and watching students fall in love with Christ. A challenge she sees is the smallness of the new group - it will require everyone to step up in ways they might not have done before.

Lydia loves Handel's ice cream, Jack White, running, but mostly her husband Alex - and Handel's. Feel free to ask her to grab a scoop sometime!

STOUT'S LEADERSHIP TEAM consists of Craig & Ericka Smith, Rich & Becky Hager, and Eleni Duchaine. Ericka, Rich & Becky have been raised up as deacons! Learn a bit about the new deacons in Stout:

ERICKA SMITH

ERICKA SMITH

If you know Ericka, you know she took a big step by moving from Columbus to Northeast Ohio. But with good reason: a rocket scientist and a ministry that needed her passion. Ericka joined Smash about a year ago and recently married Craig Smith earlier this year. God has used her gifting to establish some solid women in that group.

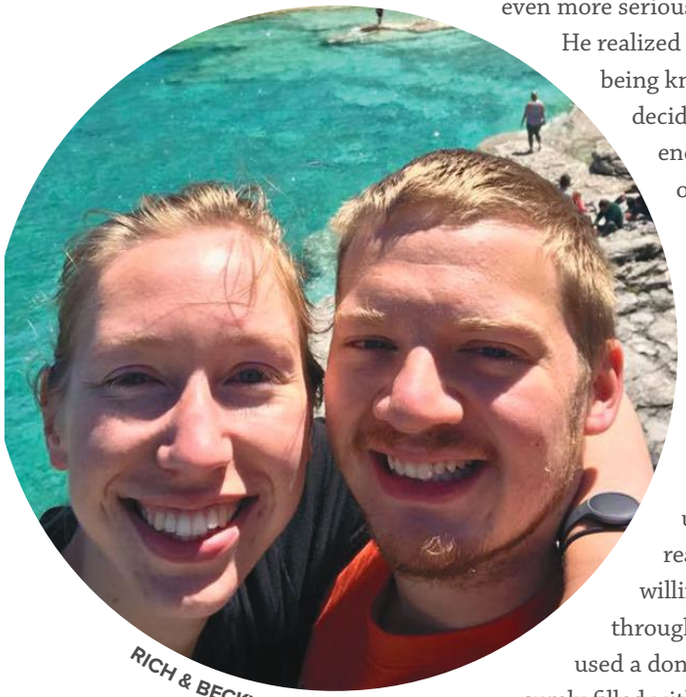
Ericka accepted Christ when she was 12, but she gave her life to the Great Commission in college after a missions trip. The trip was to a closed country, a place where people were persecuted and killed for following Christ. This challenged her: "I really wrestled with whether or not my faith was real,

and was Christ really worth following? Even to death?" She returned home with an urgency to share Christ that hasn't left.

Ericka has also been able to share this passion in her work, as she works for a campus ministry and with international students. Along with ministry, she's worked as a nanny. This is actually how she met her husband: after five years of nannying his niece and nephew, she agreed to go on a date with their cool ("and handsome") uncle Craig!

RICH HAGER

Rich received Christ his junior year of high school after two months of attending a Bible study in Stow (he's from Bedford). He realized how easy it was to come into a relationship with God and accepted Christ into his heart. Rich still took his significance from the drug and party lifestyle, but after about four months of that, he decided to turn to the Lord for a purpose. He took his walk with God even more seriously upon graduating into IP. He realized he was all about himself and being known as "the funny guy," so he decided to refocus his efforts and energy into spreading the news of God reconciling the world to Himself through Christ. And what a force Rich has been since then!



RICH & BECKY HAGER

Rich hopes Stout will not be defined as "the old group" of IP, but rather that it would be known as a group willing to be used powerfully by God, who readily gives to those who are willing to be used. God can work through anyone, Rich says. "God even used a donkey once...our home church is surely filled with asses (myself included), and I know he can use us powerfully!"

Today, Rich is still really funny (yet he doesn't take his identity from this anymore), and he works as a substitute teacher. He's been married to his stunning and patient wife, Becky, for a little over two years.

BECKY HAGER

Becky's story also started in middle school where she received Christ at a summer camp at age 13, but she didn't know where to go from there. NeoXenos met her before she started high school - and she was shocked to discover what sharing the Gospel was and that there were so many around her that didn't know Jesus! This is when her life became dedicated to sharing the Gospel with those around her.

Becky has come a long way from her shy, high school self we first met. Today, she's looking forward to starting a fresh "venture" into the post-college-no-kids demographic. She is very convicted about body life and working together, "as this is a big draw to folks just out of college since it can be hard to find friends in a career, and none that look like the genuine investment that serving Christian relationships are!"

Rich and Becky got married in May of 2015 and are parents to their puppy—Harambe—who will eat just about anything given the opportunity (ask to see a pic—or five).

THE STOUT LEADERSHIP TEAM

NEOXENOS IN INDIA

By Zak Rozler

Two teams from NeoXenos took the long journey all the way from Northeast Ohio to visit our brothers and sisters in India this summer! These groups went to assist the ministry of an indigenous, church-planting movement that our fellowship supports called India Gospel League.

The first team to make the trip was a mixed group of men from multiple home churches and age groups: Terry Alesnik, Ryan Leon, Nick Schiffer, Richard "Fresh" Hager, Thomas "Tommy" McCartney, and Alec Milnes. They were in India from June 16th through the 25th.

They had two purposes for this trip across the world; preach the Bible at pastor's conferences and see for themselves what God is doing in another country. The first few days the team stayed in the city of Salem at Sharon Gardens, the main campus of India Gospel League. There, they were able to spend time with some of the leaders of the movement: Sam Stephens and Benny Chellapandian. There, they were able to witness some of the amazing work being done, such as a children's school, a tailoring school, a community college (where almost all the attendees end up receiving Christ!), and a hospital with hospice care.

"FOR GOD LOVES THE WORLD SO MUCH THAT HE IS REACHING PEOPLE IN NORTHEAST OHIO AND ALL THE WAY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD IN SARIKI AND IN DHULIBADRA."

—TODD MULLER

The next few days the team traveled to preach at multiple pastor's conferences. The pastors at these conferences come from all over the region to learn new material that they can then use to help build up and strengthen their people back home. The theme of the year for India Gospel league isprayer, so the team taught multiple in-depth teachings on the subject. After that they were able to go to Sariki, the village that our fellowship here sponsors! They met Pastor Rau, who leads the church there, and talked with his people.

The second team to go to India this summer from our fellowship left on August 30th and is set to return September 10th. The team consists of Todd Muller, Neil Brooks, Joe Allie, and Chris Baker along with some men from other churches.

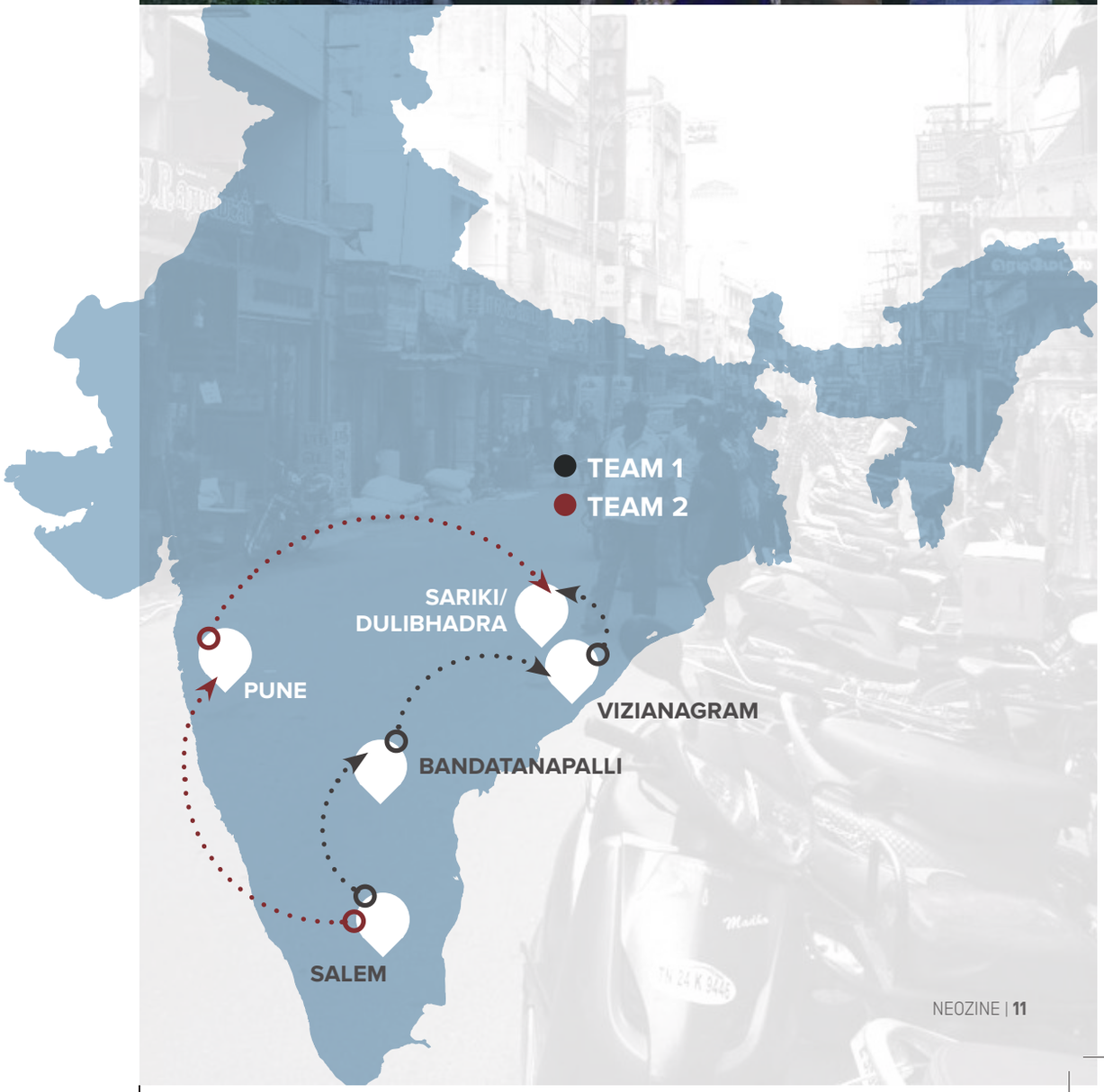
The team will be prepared to give a full briefing upon their return - which consisted of helping

Here is a list of the first team's prayer requests for India:

- Pastor Benny has plans to create a Shepherd's Place within 5 years
- Malaria in Sariki
- Pastor's families—physical ailments and health
- Children's discipleship—850,000 children are currently being discipled
- They have a goal of 950,000 children by next year

dedicate a church after experiencing Sharon Gardens for a few days, attending a three-day pastor's conference in the city of Pune in the western state of Maharashtra, just a couple hours away from Mumbai where they preached all three of these days to help equip dozens, if not hundreds, of indigenous Indian pastors. After this, the team went to visit our sponsor village, Sariki, and then flew home out of Mumbai the next day.

Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in India - especially those that attended the conferences and church dedications lead by our teams. Pray that they will continue in faith after these conferences, with what they heard, able to go out in boldness into a hostile territory with the gospel!



NEW YEAR
NEW IP

Story & Photos by Kyle McCallum

It's the year 2008, the beginning of fall semester. A ragtag group of about eight incoming freshmen grab a bottle of wine and gather at the infamous grassy knoll on Kent State's campus - the same place where National Guard troops opened fire on students nearly 40 years prior. The students gather to pray, and pour wine onto the hallowed ground to dedicate Kent State's campus to the Lord. A week later, the same group would invite their friends to a new Bible study meeting in one of the campus dorms. They grew quickly, and soon the little Bible Study became its own home church. Identity Project (IP) was born.

Nine years later, Identity Project starts its ninth school year at Kent State. The ragtag group of eight incoming freshmen is now a thriving network of five home churches and 17 ministry houses.

At its first combined meeting of the Fall 2017 semester, IP had nearly 200 people. The atmosphere was electric. Veteran IP members Richard Hagar and Carlell Howard delivered a powerful message out of the book of Acts. People stayed late playing Musical Jeopardy and later fellowshipped into the early morning hours at one of the ministry houses. The night was a celebration of how far the Lord has taken this ministry and also to christen the start of a brand new home church.

The practice of Identity Project is to split its home churches once a meeting gets too large to support quality discussion and the raising up of new leaders. This practice led to the creation of four home churches: Ham, Nitro, High Life, and Smash, each with between 30-45 people in weekly attendance. Smash is the latest home church to reach critical mass, so it split to create identity Project's fifth home church, called Stout.

Every start of the school year, members from each home church hit up the back to school events with the purpose of making new friends and inviting them out to fellowship. This year, the results are already proving to be promising. In addition to a record-setting first combined meeting of the year, each home church saw higher-than-average attendance at their first individual meetings on September 5, 2017. Almost a decade after Identity Project's inception, the Lord continues to grow and sustain it. It has never been more exciting to be in college ministry.

THE PRACTICE OF IDENTITY PROJECT IS TO SPLIT ITS HOME CHURCHES ONCE A MEETING GETS TOO LARGE TO SUPPORT QUALITY DISCUSSION AND THE RAISING UP OF NEW LEADERS.

Each home church meets on or around Kent State campus Tuesdays at 8:30 PM. Every Saturday at 6:00 PM, all of IP plus youth and adult groups meet at Bowman Hall. If you are interested in checking out any of our meetings, or if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at kyle@neoxenos.org.

KATE ALLEN DELIVERS HER TESTIMONY

KYLE BREAKS IN THE NEW OFFICE SPACE, ROOM 120K STUDENT CENTER

CARLELL HOWARD AWAITING HIS TURN AT THE PULPIT

a New Bible Study to help connect the dots

ARTICLE BY LAURA HUDOCK ART & PHOTO BY ADI MCCULLOUGH

This fall, we started a Bible study for students with disabilities at Kent State's Campus. The idea was inspired by a curriculum written by Jill Miller, wife of Paul Miller, author of A Praying Life. The Millers have a daughter with multiple disabilities. Through her life they noticed a need to adapt God's Word so that she, and others like her, could have the ability to better understand their loving father's words..

"...Kim can learn, like I can learn from these Bible studies. We can adapt them so she and her friends can learn. Jesus says in Luke 14:21, 'Go quickly into the streets of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to my banquet.' Do you think once Jesus has them at the banquet he isn't going to feed them? One of the ways we are nourished is from the Bible. Kim was at the table but she had little food to eat. So we began to adapt The Person of Jesus for Kim and her friends. Welcome to the feast!" - Jill Miller, on "Bethesda Series."

Welcome to the feast!

A few of us recently noticed a need within Identity Project for our peers with varying abilities. For some, it's hard to sit through a 1 to 2 hour college-level Bible teaching and take away their own convictions. I'm sure all of us could say we have been there as well! We've had people come to our meetings, but because of a disability, they were unable to get as much out of the teachings as they had the potential. We noticed it was sometimes difficult to have a meaningful conversation with them afterwards, but they were thirsting for the truth. The curriculum we'll be using, called "Bethesda Series," is a more hands-on, interactive approach to teaching the Bible. The teachings utilize skits, movies, discussion, props, and drawings to teach a passage without having to "simplify" it, or take out any of the meat. We are very thankful material like this is available for us to use!

Seven workers (plus a few others for support) were trained on Wednesday, August 30th by three members from See Jesus Ministry. They traveled all the way from Philadelphia to help get us started! They gave an overview and history of the curriculum and we learned it's adapted material from Miller's book, Love Walked Among Us and the correlating adult study, The Person of Jesus. In their church, they implement the material as well as train others around their area. They have seen a lot of fruit and success as people connect with this material. Xenos Columbus also has a group called "Access Ministries," and they have seen people with disabilities show up to the group just because it's the only social group in the area - and they want to meet new people - and then end up receiving Christ.

Our new Bible study group, which we are calling "Connect" is meeting on campus every Tuesday at 8 pm in Fletcher Hall Room 108. After the teaching, we will join the other IP home churches for the after activity. **The goal of Connect is to connect the dots for students to learn more about Jesus and to connect with others**. Connect is open to students (post high school age) with disabilities related to social, cognitive, physical, or attention deficit.

Please pray for our group as we reach (what seems to be) an unreached group of our peers, and hopefully their families as well! Pray for the workers as they'll be taken away from their typical home church during the teaching to serve. Pray specifically that the word will spread to Kent State's other groups "Autism Connections" and "Career and Community Studies." Pray for the word to spread among their friends. Pray for the hearts of new students coming - that they could hear and receive the word just like everyone else!

LEAVING THE NEST

by Joel Hughes

A terrifying day in the life of a mama bird has to be when its chicks finally leave the nest. It was easy when the chicks were tiny, naked mouths to feed. Then they started growing feathers. No longer content to let you puke food down their throats, the growing chicks wanted you to drop off their meals in the nest for them to fight over for themselves. And then they started walking around on branches outside the nest, tempting fate as they stared down at the ground and waved their wings around as if they could fly. Although flight is impossible for the growing chicks at this point, they might as well wander the tree, as they're too big to fit in the nest together. Finally, when they boldly jump off the branch with that smug look only youth can proudly wear, the bird parents are confident that they will plummet straight down like a rock to be eaten by cats waiting below.

Imagine how it feels to be a bird flying away from home for the first time. The thrill of freedom combines with the sudden realization that there is no nest and no food. Suddenly, what seemed like a pretty good plan looks premature and hasty, but circling back to the nest only provokes a disappointed "failed to launch?" lecture from the parents. Building a nest turns out to be really, really hard. Especially when you're hungry. Visits to the parents for a handout quickly provoke an unwelcome line of questioning: "Are you going to mate for life? I hear some birds are not mating for life anymore…"

IMAGINE HOW IT FEELS TO BE A BIRD FLYING AWAY FROM HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

So it is with birds, and so it goes with people, except that we don't even seem to have the basic instincts that God gave an animal. Parenting is a "skill" you do not inherit and for which your parents may have been terrible role models. Most of us end up making it up as we go, vacillating between self-assured complacency and hand-wringing anxiety. Maybe I'll read a book! That's a good idea. But wait, so many parenting books exaggerate, offering unhelpful tips. You know what sells? Hysteria. Apparently a tsunami of depression, nihilism, and moral decay awaits this generation. Apparently, the cause is the iPhone. Or Sunday school. Or liberals. The list goes on. When will this wave of failure crest? Not for a long time. Your children are doomed, based on pop culture and media sources.

The prognosis of the popular parenting press is not welcome news to young adults. Now you're faced with building your own nest and finding your own food. There's been so much bad press about "millennials" that maybe the media is the cause of the gloom you are bound to face. Self-fulfilling prophecy? Moreover, when you mate (for life, right?) you will make more screaming mouths to feed. Then what? What's after the "iGen"? Will the next generation be even worse? It has to be, according to the news. It is enough to make a person just want to curl up in the fetal position with their iPhone.

Or maybe not. Parenting wins and losses have been documented since Adam and Eve (Cain did not turn out too well, but Abel was a good boy). Surely we can find some wisdom in scripture about how to raise fruitful, content children. We can raise kids who fly free to lead meaningful lives of quiet, determined dignity instead of falling into the shallow exhausting party sweeping away most of each new generation in a flood of wild living (1 Peter 4:4). **NeoXenos will offer a Parenting Class this fall. Space will be limited, so it is only open to couples with children. In true NeoXenos style, all other details are TBD. Stay tuned!**

BY ZEB JONES

IN TOO DEEP

Summer 2017 held many astonishing adventures for members of Identity Project! One such adventure took place deep in Laurel Caverns geological park in PA. Over 30 of our IP guys went Spelunking (Cave Diving)! Friday night was spent setting up camp and sitting around the campfire discussing the much anticipated weekend ahead. Saturday morning started off with a teaching by Ian McCullough and myself over what it looks like to be a man in the world compared to what the Bible says on being a spiritual man.

RICH HAGER (TOP) AND BRYAN BASSET (BOTTOM) TEACHING ON DAVID AND JONATHAN IN FRONT OF A BEAUTIFUL OVERLOOK

After the teaching, we loaded up for our adventure and drove to Laurel Caverns Geological Park in Pennsylvania. Upon our arrival, we were given helmets and were checked to make sure we had the necessary materials to spelunk; long pants, long sleeved shirts, closed toed shoes, and two flashlights. The guides gave us all helmets and a crash course on cave diving. After that, we dove right in. We plunged 45 stories into the earth, exploring the amazing cave environment around us. As we went deeper into the cave, we faced several obstacles including large rocks that threatened serious injury if we made any wrong moves. Some of us attempted the more difficult paths and had to army-crawl through freezing cold water. Several times during our adventure, we broke out into song, confusing other tour groups we passed. It's quite an experience hearing the National Anthem echoing through the vast network of caverns, sung by an unholy choir of sweaty, untrained men. The trip was tons of fun and we all worked together to get through the obstacles in our path and encouraged one another as we trekked onward.

After an unforgettable time in the caves, we ended the day with a highly impactful teaching by Bryan Bassett and Rich Hager. An amazing sunset served as the backdrop for their teaching, and it was the perfect final reminder of how the lord has created such a beautiful world for us after seeing the caves. Bryan and Rich taught over the power of bromance by talking about one of the Bible's most notable ones in Jonathan and David. The teaching really hit home how sweet our friendships with our fellow brothers in Christ really can be. After a weekend of bonding with these brothers, I really felt what the bible was talking about - I felt closer to these guys through this time together. The retreat was very refreshing and the lord really worked through the trip by helping us build closer relationships with one another. So if you ever are looking to explore a cave in PA, give Laurel Caverns a try....just remember to bring two flashlights!

LOGAN TILLER, ALWAYS KEEPING HIS EYES PEELED LOOKING FOR STEVES—WHAT THE LOCALS CALL SNAKES

CELEBRATION!

NEOXENOS CELEBRATED THE 30 PEOPLE WHO STEPPED UP TO GET BAPTIZED AT THE 2017 ANNUAL BAPTISMS IN SEPTEMBER.

BY MEGAN SMALLEY
PHOTOS BY KYLE MCCALLUM

THERE'S SOMETHING TRULY SPECIAL ABOUT THE NEOXENOS ANNUAL BAPTISMS – it's somewhat of an unofficial holiday for Neoxenos. It always happens in September, the weekend after Labor Day on a beach not too far from the Akron area. Hundreds of people, including family and friends, gather to hear about how lives have been transformed the past year. And, like with all holidays, there's a lot of food brought by all in attendance.

Neoxenos isn't big on religious traditions or rituals by any means – and this was a key reason why I was attracted to the church about seven years ago. However, the Bible does command the church to perform two rituals: baptism and communion.

So, what makes these two rituals so important? Kyle McCallum explained this well during his teaching before the baptisms started. First, they are important because Jesus said so. Regarding baptisms, Jesus told his disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age," in Matthew 28:19-20. And second, getting baptized is a way to share the new hope that people have after they accept Jesus Christ; it's a way to proclaim that you have received and understand this hope.

Many folks attended the 2017 Neoxenos Baptisms at the beach at West Branch State Park this year, and thank God many got

BOYD WORZ WAS BAPTIZED BY HIS SON JAKE LAGOTTE

baptized as well. In total, 30 people proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ at this year's baptisms. And that is something certainly worth celebrating!

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" – Luke 15:10

Jesus said this after sharing the parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin – he says a shepherd celebrated when he recovered his one lost sheep and he says a woman celebrated when she found her one lost coin. If Jesus tells us to celebrate when one sinner changes their mind, we must celebrate even more for the 30 people who professed their faith in the Lord this year!

All 30 of the people who shared testimonies during baptisms had entirely different stories, and they came from all different backgrounds. A couple of them even came from different countries, like China and India. Some of them accepted Christ at a younger age, while others were older when they made that decision. Some grew up in Christian families, while others had little to no exposure to the Gospel before being invited to Neoxenos. Regardless of the background or upbringing, all 30 stories featured the same plot – how God had saved them from a reckless life apart from Him. That makes for 30 victorious stories.

MY PURPOSE NOW IS TO BE A SERVANT OF GOD, SHARING HIS LOVE.

— ALEX AUPPERLE

God has pulled all these people out of dark places. So many of them shared about how they struggled with depression before deciding to place their lives in Christ, and some had even contemplated suicide. All of them lacked a purpose apart from Christ when they were pursuing worldly things, be it a career, a girlfriend or boyfriend, popularity, or drugs.

MONIQUE BROWN BEING BAPTIZED BY AUNDRIA HULL AND RACHEL MURREY

LIZZIE RUPLE BEING BAPTIZED BY CAITLIN MCCALLUM AND LAURA HUDOCK

Yet it was encouraging to hear how God transformed all their lives. And here's just a sample of how some of them have been transformed:

"People now notice my loving demeanor – they ask me if I'm a Christian. That's God working through me. My purpose now is to be a servant of God, sharing His love." – Alex Aupperle

"I felt empty, but I ran back to God. And I'm running and running now! I had been so empty and so lonely before. But now, I have a hope that overflows." – Shelby Berent

"I've been through pain, but I feel nothing but joy by what God's done in my life." – Kennedy Koehler

"God was patient with me in the baby steps I took toward walking with Him. I now know that I'm forgiven in Him and washed clean." – Allie Miller

"I still get depressed sometimes, but I'm overall happier since accepting Christ. I have friends. A relationship with God." – Justin Robben

Jesus performed many miracles in our midst here at Neoxenos, transforming these 30 people's lives this last year. And I could go on and on, sharing each of these people's stories. Unfortunately, I don't have the room to do that in Neozine – which reminds me of this witty verse John used to end his gospel: "Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written."

If you missed out on this year's baptisms—or if you attended and would like to re-watch them or share them with family and friends– all of them from this year were recorded and will be posted online.

REFLECTING ON THE BMT

by Olivia Alesnik

THE BMT, OR OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE BUFFALO MISSIONS TRIP, WAS AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER.

Being able to go on it the past two years has been such a blessing from God. At first, I was very nervous about going on the BMT before my first time doing it in the summer of 2016. We went to Buffalo, New York, to run a Vacation Bible School for kids in the city. When I first heard that they would be inner city kids, I was pretty scared. Movies and books portray poverty-stricken children as selfish, violent, and rude. I had that view of them before we even got there.

God completely changed my mind once we arrived, though.

Looking out the window when we arrived in Buffalo, I was immediately blown away. Trash littered the streets, traffic was crazy, buildings were dilapidated and abandoned. This was not the environment I was used to. Stow, Ohio, has cookie-cutter houses with picket fences surrounding their prominent flower beds. Our streets are clean and our schools often earn awards in excellence. I could tell that life in Buffalo wasn't this way.

We soon arrived at our host family's home. My anxiety increased as they opened the front door. A little boy stepped out of the house and stared at us. Our missions team all got out of their cars and gathered by the front porch. By the time we all gathered, five more family members had materialized. The tallest child, Ash, had introduced himself. I could tell he enjoyed all of the attention and he reminded me of myself. The rest of the family introduced themselves. The mom's name was Meghan McCallum (no relation to our McCallums), the dad's name was Rod McCallum, and their four children's names were Ash, Samaia, Levi, and Alaina. They were a cute family and you could tell Meghan and Rod were passionate about their ministry. Meghan led us

OUR HIGH SCHOOL TEAM WORKING ON THE "FARM"

ZAK ROZLER AND ONE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS

RYAN HEMPHILL TEACHING AT THE CAMP

into the backyard where both she and Rod explained that they moved to Buffalo to do missions work and provide food for their neighborhood using fresh produce. Their mission immediately became ours: to love the children the way God loves us.

2016

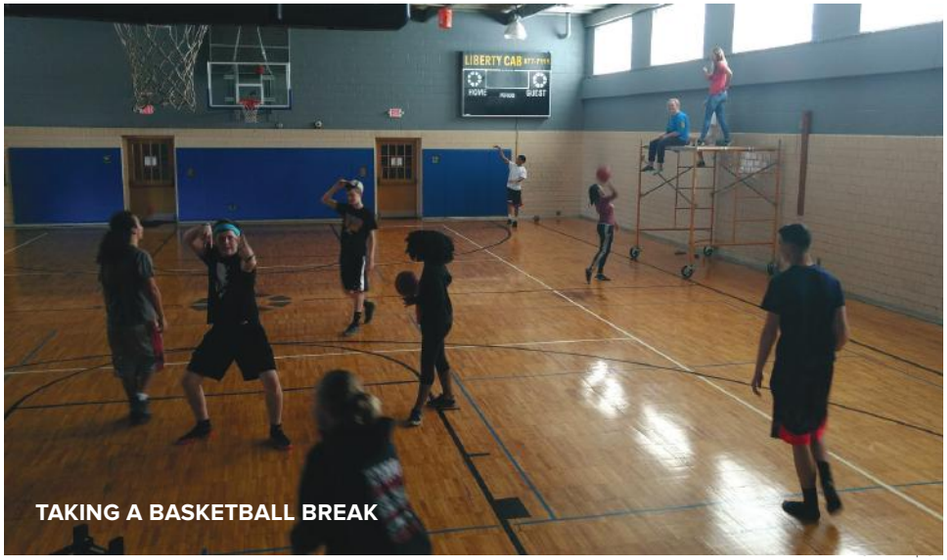
My first year on the BMT, I really learned how good God is. In the course of six days, there were multiple salvations of students at the Vacation Bible School. Each day, we would pray for energy and guidance with the children. We would be tired all day but as soon as the neighborhood children would come over, we were ready. Each night we would play with them, eat with them, and talk with them. By the end of the week, it was hard to leave. I had such a heart for these children. Some didn't have moms and dads. Some didn't have food at home. Others were being beaten and abused at home. I couldn't even imagine how they lived like that. Some of the older kids who were only 13 would have to take care of their younger siblings. Being exposed to such heartbreaking situations and hearing such horrible stories really hit my heart. I was eager to show them God's love because they hadn't experienced it. I couldn't wait to go back the next year, and I'm so glad we did.

2017

My second year on the BMT really showed me how important unity is in the body. Some of the student workers who went from Neoxenos struggled with gossipping, being disrespectful, and neglecting to love each other. We talked on and on about how much we wanted to go out and love the children yet we were neglecting to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. After leaders had brought up this issue to us and we prayed about it, things started to change. I personally felt the importance of unity. Things go so much smoother when we work as a team. We had fewer salvations this year during the Vacation Bible School, but kids (and us workers) were still impacted. Most of the children who came the previous year returned again this year. The children who were saved last year also came back and even brought other family and friends. God is clearly working in Buffalo and in Neoxenos. I am so glad that we were able to fight the good fight, and I can't wait to see how God uses us in the future. Thanks for all of the constant prayers!

ABOUT THE MINISTRY

Rod and Meghan McCallum serve the youth of Buffalo in a variety of ways. The youth group they help run is now part of Youth for Christ and through Queen City Farm they use their house and large garden/farm to help feed neighbors. They also are members of City Vision Fellowship. You can learn more at: www.facebook.com/yfcbuffalo and www.yfc.net/citylife.



TAKING A BASKETBALL BREAK

Story & Photos by Keith McCallum

TOTALITY

ABNORMALITIES

Everything about that day was abnormal. Our eclipse-chasing caravan was far from Northeast Ohio, deeply embedded in the hills of Western Tennessee, which was an abnormal place in so many ways. It was a spiritual day too. The "Totality" eclipse of 2017 gave us a taste of disorientation, as Jesus told his disciples: "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars ...men fainting from fear!" Jesus was talking about the cataclysmic thermonuclear madness of Armageddon, not our eclipse, of course. But after Tennessee I understood how the sun, moon and stars can rattle a human brain when they get whacked out of normalcy—we awaken every day expecting the sun to rise and shine, not turn black.

I saw more about our Creator-God during Totality than I can recall from any other natural phenomenon—which is quite a claim, because at age 60 I have seen some things. I am a scientific thinker, not influenced by primitive superstitions, but I still could see the hand of God during the eclipse. In fact, I went into the eclipse with no spiritual expectations, like any of the tens of millions chasing the eclipse that day, thinking it was a rare but natural phenomenon. It ended up undeniably spiritual.

The eclipse revealed our Creator, and I was not alone with that view. A hallowed sense of awe descended over the entire USA, following the path of the eclipse from coast to coast. Totality revealed the intersection between the majestic Creator and finite, stunned creatures. Even a prominent atheist, an astrophysicist, remarked on NPR that it was the closest thing to a Divine presence he ever experienced. While not renouncing atheism, he encountered the stunned-awe any believer experienced that day.

My 96-year-old father followed the eclipse on TV all day long, having nothing better to do. He said stunned-awe was a universal constant across the country. Despite America's Culture Wars, the unrest, protests and counter-protests, the eclipse brought Americans together by the tens of millions, all concentrated in a narrow streak of moon-shadow called Totality. The violence, protests and fights stopped at least for a few minutes, while our Creator took the stage.

That morning, as the NeoXenos eclipse chasers prepared to leave, it zapped me like a Taser—God's signature. A Creator designed the eclipse, or it could not happen with such meaningful precision. The news media reported on it for weeks, saying "it just so happens..." the moon is 400 times smaller than the sun, "and it just so happens" the moon is 400 times its own size distant from the sun. This is why it just so happens the moon covers the sun, giving us Totality and the glowing corona from the sun.

The odds of this 400 by 400 alignment between sun, moon and earth randomly occurring are infinitely huge, which really means impossible. Why God did this can be surmised from God's revelation about Himself, to some degree, which I later shared with our unlikely atheist host. This eclipse impossibility alone may not turn heads among atheists, who could simply say, "Yes, it is statistically impossible, but not completely impossible." Random chance, after all, produces events that just so happen. It reminds me of how Jim Carey responded in Dumb and Dumber when the girl he crushes on said his chances were "one in a million" of winning her. "So you're saying I have a chance!?" Carey said. Except in this case the chances are more like one in 10^256 or greater, just to illustrate it.

But the eclipse alignment is a small example of statistically-absurd random chances in the atheist's faith. Far more significant is the absurdity of life occurring by chance. It requires a vast number of lucky events, each absurdly-impossible, but all required together in a tsunami-size wall of good fortune. The impossibility of an amino acid forming by chance is statistically absurd, considering the astonishing complexity of amino acid molecules. Yet life requires at least 20 such molecules, according to NASA scientists. Stephen Hawkins, himself an atheist, calculated the force required for the Big Bang resulting in a material universe. The precision of the Hawkins Number proves the material universe occurring by chance is statistically-impossible. An atheist's faith in random chance, far from reasonable, is exponentially-absurdly-impossible faith in good luck. "But still not completely impossible" would be a Dumb-and-Dumber response.

GOD'S FINGERPRINTS

I walked over to Big Charlie. It was time to share the Taser.

"Charlie, can I say something about God and this eclipse?"

"Sure," he said. So I explained the 400 by 400 "just so happens" impossibility, which he agreed was incredible.

"THE REAL QUESTION IS WHY, IF THERE IS A CREATOR, WOULD HE SET UP THESE TOTALITY MOMENTS?"

"The real question is why, if there is a Creator, would He set up these Totality moments?" Charlie

IF THERE IS A GOD, THE ECLIPSE IS A PICTURE OF WHAT HE'S LIKE, BECAUSE HE COULD TERRIFY US WITH HIS PRESENCE AND HE DOESN'T.

nodded and sipped his beer. So I explained the Bible says God uses nature to reveal his character, and an eclipse stops and stuns us. It is a little scary. But not too scary, because even the most ancient human can see the moon is blocking the sun—the moon is visible during daylight—and it only lasts a few minutes. But it is like a gentle reminder there are forces beyond our control. It makes you stop and think 'Is there a Creator?' without terrifying you."

"Well, like I say, I think shit happens," Charlie said.

"Yes, that could be true," I said, waiting to see if I was allowed to continue. He seemed OK with it. "All I'm saying is that, if there is a God, the eclipse is a picture of what he's like, because he could terrify us with his presence and he doesn't. If he literally stretched out his hand to cover up the sun, that would be convincing and extremely terrifying. He doesn't do that. Instead, he just leaves his fingerprints, saying 'God was here.' It's a gentle, kind notice, and it gives us a chance to think about it. Because that's all he's asking for: 'Just give me a chance…'"

"Well I agree with Charlie, I'm an atheist too," said a guy who just arrived. He said he was the best friend of Charlie's dead son and talked more about the suicide a year ago. It strikes me that some people experience so much pain and suffering that atheism seems like the best option, because if God exists, he is a monster allowing such things.