

Empowering Church Volunteers

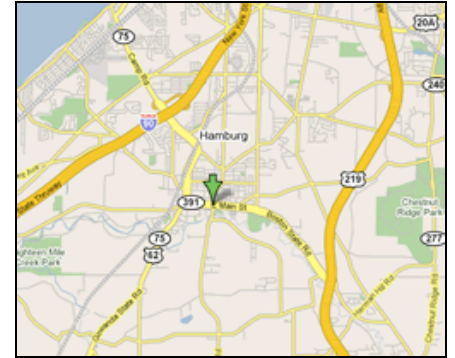
Twenty-two years of EMI training in Hamburg, NY

How do you impact volunteer effectiveness and commitment for the long haul? Pastor Bill Nykyforchyn of the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg discovered something that has had a profound impact. He has noticed that folks who were in charge of various ministries throughout the church were not only much better at their jobs, but also served longer if they had attended an EMI seminar.

Bill had just started at the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg in 1983 when he attended a seminar by Gary Sweeten, founder of EMI.

Now the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg does their own in-house training with EMI-trained instructors. "We run the *Listening for Heaven's Sake* class in October, *Renewing the Mind* in January, and *Speaking the Truth in Love* in the Spring. We've just added the *Irresistible Evangelism* course and the *Confronting Conflict* courses.

"People ask us how we maintain interest in the EMI courses year-in and year-out. We don't have to work at it. Once people take the *Listening* course, they're hooked." The people, Bill went on to say, see the benefits of the training right away. "Each week they add more tools to their communication toolbox."



Listening in the Church

Where do you apply EMI skills to impact your church? "The one big thing," Bill says, "is that the courses teach our people how to listen--really listen." Bill went on to talk about a man who was a table leader for one of the Alpha groups. The man thought he was supposed to actively evangelize the people at the table. Bill took him aside and explained to him that his job was to listen and to facilitate conversation at the table, not evangelize. Bill asked the man "How many people have you had come to Christ by your methods? Let me tell you how powerful it is in the Alpha course when we listen." Bill said that it was quite difficult to convince the man that listening to those people at the table was more powerful than his preaching. It came as no surprise to Bill to learn that that volunteer had not yet been to the *Listening for Heaven's Sake* course.

The core tenets of the EMI courses have permeated all aspects of ministry at the church from divorce recovery classes, grief support classes, and diet classes, to support groups for families suffering from mental illness. "In divorce recovery, it is the testimony of the believers in the group that stirs so much evangelism, not leader preaching," Bill said. At the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg, the support group leaders don't preach. They listen." Bill says that the EMI courses teach facilitators to "listen to what they say and to hear what they believe."

Listening to the World



Last January Bill and a team from the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg traveled to Zambia to train pastors and leaders. Bill and the team worked in partnership with World Hope, a Christian organization that arranges first-world to third-world church-to-church connections.

"We did the Listening course with the Zambian team. It went very well. In fact, the World Hope administrator in Zambia said, 'I have twenty teams coming. But I would make room for your team because you are bringing powerful tools that the people want.'"

Next, Bill and a team are going to South Africa to work with World Hope, using EMI materials to do grief training for all the families suffering from having lost loved ones to AIDS.

The Wesleyan Church of Hamburg recently changed its mission statement to "Changed by Christ to Change Our World." It fits the church well, don't you think?