

# Paying it Foward

## Training College Students to Live Authentically

Illini campus pastor, Mike Klunke knows what it means to "pay it forward." He's been doing that since he started Cornerstone Christian Fellowship five years ago when he deliberately targeted the student population at the University of Illinois in Normal, IL.



College students—as every church planter knows—are a tough group to build a congregation around. They are enthusiastic and energetic, but they come and then leave when they are done with school. Plus, someone else benefits from all the teaching and training you give them.

That's what thrills Mike—the love and spiritual formation he gives to students will spread across the country. Mike knew he wanted a different kind of church—more training facility than showcase.

Much of the zeal for God in college-age believers, Mike says, is powerful and impacts everyone around them. Mike wants to focus on providing experiences that grow loving, self-aware men and women of God who know and accept themselves, allow themselves and others to fail, and walk in the light of the gospel. In some

ways, this passion grows out of Mike's own experiences as a young Christian.

"Eleven years ago when I was in college, my church offered EMI's Apples of Gold course(now titled Listening for Heaven's Sake). It exposed me to a different way of relating to people. The thing is, I didn't use the course 'out there'; Michelle, my wife, and I used the skills in our marriage for years. When young people at Cornerstone ask me why our marriage works, I credit that course. It's the one tool that has the longest and most significant impact on our marriage." ([Sign up for EMI's Caring Couples, Feb. 9-10.](#))

### Integration Before Propagation

As Mike thought about the kind of impact he wanted his church to have, he realized he wanted these EMI relationship ideas to become part of their "unconsciously competent" DNA -- to communicate and care for one another. "Two and a half years ago, I started sending my student leaders to LIFE Seminars in Cincinnati. The church is committed to covering their tuition -- a long term impact investment. I know spiritual formation and personal development take time. The students come back from the seminars pumped. They are learning how to listen, really listen. The impact on their own relationships is phenomenal."

Last year Cornerstone paid tuition for 17 people to attend LIFE Seminar. "The training is so valuable I doubled the number we sent. Cornerstone may not receive all the benefits of the training they receive at EMI, but that's okay. We pay it forward by training them and then sending them out to change the world... by being more real and by listening to one person at a time."

