

Transformed to Go to the Cutting Edge

by Darrell Webb, Church Health Strategist, North Region

At the age of eighteen, Brandon Hembree served as a student pastor for the very first time. However, after graduating from college with a political science major, he wanted to pursue his passion for politics and enrolled in law school. Hembree realized that the cross was calling him for something greater. During the first year of law school in his home state of Mississippi, Hembree dropped out and enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Still without full surrender, he asked, "God, do you want me to do ministry for the rest of my life?" With an overwhelming peace, he knew the answer. In May of 2009, Hembree put prayers and words into action as he moved to Northern Virginia to serve as student pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC) in Manassas. Hembree shares, "This was the moment my life was transformed from my selfish sacrifices to counting the costs and following anyway."

Transformation can be defined as "a change in form, appearance, nature, or character," all of which express the reshaping of the youth ministry at EBC. "When I came to EBC, I came not to build their youth program, but to build the Kingdom of God. I told our staff they would not measure the success of the ministry by how many students walked into our doors but by how many students walked out of our doors disciplined and eager to disciple others. The church staff was supportive of me leaving the walls of our church to go find the lost and the hurting," explains Hembree.

Hembree believes that if a revival breaks out in Northern Virginia and around the DC area, it could change the entire world. It would affect the people of the nations who live there and some of the most powerful leaders in the world. There are about 12,000 unchurched students within a 10-mile radius of his church. He began wondering how he could reach these thousands of students; who could, in turn, reach the Greater DC area for Christ. It would have been easy for Hembree and EBC to focus on reaching their own ministry of 100 plus high school students that attend Emmanuel Christian School. Instead, they chose to focus their attention on the mission field of their local public schools.

Cutting EDGE Ministries, a non-profit organization, already had a presence in several middle and high schools throughout the Northern Virginia region. It was the tool that God had ordained for Pastor Hembree and EBC to reach students in area public schools. The goal of EDGE Clubs is to connect students to God and then the local church. This evangelistic and discipleship after-school club is led by students from area youth groups, student pastors and other adult volunteers.

Once the clubs began, Christian youth group kids were disciplined and trained to reach their schools for Christ. Hembree stated, "At first,



Brandon Hembree teaching youth.

it took a while for the clubs to get off the ground. All of the clubs I oversee at Manassas Park, Osbourn Park and Stonewall Jackson High Schools started with no more than 2-3 students that were in my youth group. By Christmas, we saw almost 200 students that were members of EDGE Club. Numerous students

accepted Christ throughout the year. That's literally how the clubs grew during the first four months! Students brought in a friend, they would hear the Gospel, God would save them, and then they would become a member of EDGE Club."

Hembree testifies that, with the seeds planted at the club, the harvest was great near the end of the school year. He tells us that out of the three high schools he worked with, 42 students gave their lives to God this year.

EBC began to see these students from various races, genders and ethnic backgrounds take over their youth group as they hungered to be disciplined and get involved in their local church. Hembree states, "On several occasions, they began bringing in their whole family." These kids have become empowered by their church to be missionaries in their schools. God has united the hearts of public school and Emmanuel Christian School kids as they pray for one another to be a witness on their campuses. Amazingly, God has done this work amidst a church that is presently in a state of transition without a senior pastor.

What would it take to see God do such a work in similar harvest fields throughout North America? Pastor Hembree exclaims, "First, you need to get sold out for Christ and the mission He gave us to bring the Gospel to the lost and hurting. Second, realize that God has a calling on you; regardless of whether or not you are a pastor or have a pastor at your church. God is looking for people with a heart to reach students with the Gospel. If that's you, you can volunteer at EDGE Club and reach students in the public schools in your area."

RESOURCE

■ **Website:** www.edgeclub.org

■ **Contact:**
Call Brandon Hembree at 703-368-9206 or email him at bhembree@ebcnva.org

■ **Consider:**
How can you empower the youth in your church?