**Collegiate evangelism produces joy in Washington**

By Jim Burton

ELLENSBURG, Wash. – During Jacob Dahl’s senior year at Washington State University (WSU) in Pullman, Wash., the civil engineering major had a “sitting-in-the mud moment,” much like the prodigal son. Though the Washington native grew up in church, he had somehow “missed the heart of the gospel.”

“I came to the end of my rope in terms of morality and self-discovery,” Dahl said.

Dahl crawled out of the mud and into Resonate Church, a Southern Baptist campus church at WSU, where he professed faith in Christ and was baptized.

“I had my life flipped upside down,” Dahl said of his salvation. “God transformed me into a man on a mission to see other college students come to know God in the same way I had experienced.”

With a degree in hand, Dahl promptly moved home to his parent’s basement in Bellingham, Wash., a six-hour drive from Pullman. The economy had tanked, and there were few jobs for civil engineering graduates. Unlike the prodigal son who ended up living and working on a pig farm, he took a job working up to 80 hours per week on a raspberry farm for minimum wage.

Dahl soon realized that raspberry farming was not his calling. He returned to Pullman for an internship with Resonate Church, for which there was little competition. The church told Dahl, “You’re the best we have, so we can’t tell you no.”

Looking back, Dahl understands why the Resonate leadership was hesitant to hire him. He had no ministry experience and was a new believer.

“I would not have hired myself,” Dahl said.

But Resonate took a chance on Dahl and sent him and one other person to the nearby University of Idaho in Moscow to assist with a new church plant Resonate Church had started there. Unfortunately, things did not work out for Dahl.

“I failed to see a lot of breakthrough on campus and burned out,” Dahl said. “I didn't think ministry was for me. It crushed my soul.”

**Second chance**

Dahl focused his efforts on his engineering career for the next two years, working at a WSU sports science laboratory. But rather than career fulfilment, the work brought questions.

“It was during those two years that I felt unrest, and eventually experienced a foundational call to ministry,” said Dahl, who now understood what God was asking Him to do. It was time to try again.

With his new bride, Jessica, and a team of 14 others, he moved three hours west of Pullman in May 2014 to rural Ellensburg to be the first Resonate site pastor at Central Washington University (CWU), which has nearly 11,000 students. Jessica and other team members brought balance to Dahl’s strengths and weaknesses. By September 2014, Resonate Church at CWU launched.

Within the first year, 36 students professed faith in Christ and 41 were baptized. The Resonate strategy forgoes brick and mortar. Instead, they are relentless about relationships, something college students crave. Though social media connects modern collegiates more than ever, Dahl said they’ve never been more isolated.

College students are one of the least reached people groups in the nation, Dahl said. That phenomenon is more so in the Northwest. Colleges are spiritually dark places at a dark time in history.

“It’s dark on top of dark,” Dahl said.

Dahl finds that modern students have virtually no knowledge of the gospel or biblical stories. At their fall retreat, there were students who didn’t know about sin. Others could not believe that Christ’s resurrection was real. While that lack of knowledge presents challenges, Dahl also sees opportunity.

“People coming to Christ have no preconceived ideas of who God is,” Dahl said. “It’s a fresh foundation.”

Resonate Church conducts a worship service Sunday nights at a campus location. The Resonate team is often on campus talking to students and inviting them to worship or to their villages, which are community groups where participants “unpack” content from the previous Sunday sermon.

From there, students can join a gender-specific huddle where they begin to learn about following Christ through the disciple-making process, with the goal of each student demonstrating obedience by being on mission. Besides worship, villages and huddles, Dahl’s team spends many hours hanging out with the students. Somewhere in that mix, a sense of family emerges.

“Church is not an event on your calendar you have to squeeze in,” Dahl said. “Church is a family that you become part of.”

**The party church**

Hanging out is a big deal at Resonate. College students like crowds, loud music and fun. They get that through Resonate, which regularly sponsors house parties and “compelling gatherings.”

“I love how, as a church, as a community we just throw real house parties and we’re there and we’re having fun and we’re doing everything that a college kid is doing—but we’re not getting drunk,” said Shannon Hazard, a CWU co-ed.

Even Resonate’s baptism services have a celebratory party feel with loud music, video testimonies, signs honoring baptismal candidates and lots of cheering. Dahl teaches converts that their baptism is their commissioning service to live an on mission lifestyle.

Marshall Bettis admits being apprehensive about his baptism. He describes himself as being like a frat guy without a fraternity. After months of hanging out at Resonate and one-on-one with Dahl, he confessed faith in Christ just two weeks before a scheduled baptism service.

“You could see the change from people getting dunked,” said Bettis, who was the last one baptized that night. “They are going in one person, coming up another, and that’s the symbolic thing of it. There is no simple word for it.”

Resonate is a network of college churches in the Northwest begun by Keith Wieser of Texas. Wieser moved to the Northwest in 2000 for seminary training in Vancouver, Wash., through an extension of Gateway Seminary, formerly Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. In 2004, he moved to Pullman to begin a non-traditional campus ministry at WSU, from which Resonate Church emerged. He is now a North American Mission Board collegiate church planting catalyst set on starting 21 campus churches across the Northwest by 2021 with financial assistance from the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®.

Jacob and Jessica Dahl now have an infant son, but remain fully engaged in the Resonate collegiate ministry at CWU. Yes, college students can be “flakey,” and ministry amongst them can be messy. But the Dahls also find joy.

“There is a special joy reserved for those who make disciples and share the gospel,” Dahl said.

*Jacob and Jessica Dahl* *are AAEO Week of Prayer Missionaries for NAMB. Half of the funding NAMB receives to support, train and resource North American missionaries comes through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Learn more about the Dahl’s and other missionaries at AnnieArmstrong.com.*

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*Jim Burton is a photojournalist and writer based in Atlanta. He formerly served Southern Baptists as the director of Volunteer Mobilization and Mission Education with the North American Mission Board.*