



# **“THE GAME PLAN”**

**Strategic Ministry Plan of  
River of Life – Muncie, Indiana**

## INTRODUCTION

“The Game Plan” is the strategic ministry plan for growth at River of Life. It was developed collaboratively among many of the church leaders and members of River of Life. During the research/exploration stages of the project development all church members were invited and encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas for this system with the Project Team that was directly involved in the development of the system – and many of these ideas were incorporated into the final product.

This strategy described in this manual is the result of experience, observation, research, consultation, and common sense. The purpose of this ministry strategy is to utilize a systematic approach for retaining and incorporating newcomers into the church. This manual is a guidebook of explanations, information, processes, procedures, examples, and so forth. The purpose of this manual is to help ensure that our strategy is executed in an organized, uniform, and effective manner. It is intended to be used as both a training manual for new volunteers and a reference for existing workers. Because this model reflects many months of research and planning from many people it will not be modified carelessly. However, suggestions for improvements are always welcome and should be directed to the appropriate the Assistant Pastor or to the appropriate Team Leaders. New revisions of this manual will be made available as areas of further clarification and description are identified.

Kirk VanOoteghem,  
Assistant Pastor – River of Life

## EXPLANATION

### PURPOSE

The purpose of “The Game Plan” is two-fold: (1) to retain guests and (2) to successfully incorporate newcomers into the church. “The Game Plan” uses a fun and illustrative model – a baseball diamond – to represent a systematic approach to ministry. There are two related focuses in the model that are represented by two elements of a baseball diamond: the bases and the base-paths.



### BASES

The bases in “The Game Plan” model represent the natural stages or milestones that every new Christian should encounter as they become acclimated to the church and develop in the Lord. These milestones are what new Christians should strive for and what the ministry of the church should help them to achieve. The bases are identified as follows:

#### ❖ Batter’s Box = New Guest

This stage represents a brand New Guest at River of Life. At this stage the guest is generally curious about the church and wants to find out more about it. He likely has

one or more friends who are church members, and was probably invited by them. In most cases the New Guest has spiritual needs and may be struggling in one or more areas of life – but they may not share this with others. New Guests may range from skeptical to ambitious. Each individual is different.

❖ **First Base = New Church**

After one, a few, or several visits a guest will either decide the church is not for them and stop attending or, hopefully, begin to view River of Life as their New Church. At this stage, newcomers typically begin to open up a bit more, participate more in services, and may begin to express interest in other events and activities of the church. They are often interested in learning more about what the church believes and desire to become acquainted with the church leaders and ministries. Inquiries about becoming an official member of the church are common at this stage.

❖ **Second Base = New Birth**

When a newcomer attends River of Life for even a short period of time, they will inevitably be introduced to the plan of salvation – the New Birth experience. Some will accept this message and experience the New Birth almost immediately and others may take quite some time. But, nearly all will eventually receive the message of the Gospel as the Lord convicts their hearts and they see a need for God to change their lives. At this stage newcomers are generally very excited about what God is doing in their lives and become hungry to learn more about God's Word and grow in their relationship with Him. This is also a time in which the new Christian is eager to tell others about his experiences and share his faith.

❖ **Third Base = New Life**

In healthy churches, such as River of Life, newcomers who receive the New Birth experience should quickly identify that their New Life is Jesus Christ is just beginning and that there is much growth and development yet in store for them. At this stage, the new Christian often develops questions regarding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain activities, actions, and so forth as the Lord deals with him and he learns more about God's Word. He may also observe certain consecration/holiness principles at work in the lives of mature church members and want to more about these matters of discipleship. This is a critical time in the life of a Christian as his experiences and level of involvement in the church at this stage often determine if he will embrace a New Life in Christ or eventually leave the church and return to his former lifestyle.

❖ **Home Plate = New Level**

Christians who embrace their New Life in Christ and become discipled in the Word of God often seek to go even deeper in their Christian walk and become involved in some aspect of ministry or service in the church. At least, this is what *should* happen in a healthy church culture where new Christians observe more seasoned Christians actively involve themselves in the work of the Lord. This is what we are striving to

achieve at River of Life. At this stage, newer church members often seek the direction and guidance of church leaders and mature members. They often seek out a niche in which they feel that they can labor for the Lord and be a benefit to the church.

## **BASE-PATHS**

The base-paths in “The Game Plan” model represent the ministries or phases of action for the church in its endeavor to encourage newcomers and support them as they progress through the various stages, milestones, or “bases” described above. While some churches do this in an informal manner, River of Life adopts a systematic, organized approach in order to maximize our effectiveness and ensure that every guest and newcomer is afforded adequate opportunities to grow and develop in the Lord and become acclimated to the church. The goal of the River of Life “Game Plan” is for every individual to make it all the way HOME (to home plate). The letters **H-O-M-E** also form an acronym that represents the four base-paths in the model, as follows:

### ❖ **H – Hospitality**

The first task of the church ministry regarding new guests is to make them feel welcome and at home. We must convey to our guests that we care about them and that we are available to minister to their needs. Therefore, **Hospitality** is the focus of River of Life’s ministry to individuals who are at the “New Guest” stage (Batter’s Box). The goal is to systematically reach out to new guests while maintaining sincerity and a personal touch. Connecting with newcomers is the responsibility – and privilege – of all church members and is emphatically encouraged. Examples of connecting with newcomers include: being friendly, learning their names, inviting them out to eat or to one’s home, etc. While these individual, personal connections between church members and newcomers are vital, a more formal process is also necessary. It is essential to ensure that all New Guests receive proper attention and are presented with adequate information to connect them to the church. For this reason, the primary undertaking of the **Hospitality** phase is to implement structured “Guest Follow-Through” procedures (outlined elsewhere in this manual). The goal of **Hospitality** is achieved when newcomers “reach First Base” by becoming regular attendees and/or by viewing River of Life as “their church”.

### ❖ **O – Orientation**

While hospitality continues to be important, the needs of newcomers at the “New Church” stage begin to take on a new dimension. The task of the church moves beyond making the newcomer feel welcome towards a sense of becoming integrated and acclimated into the local church and the kingdom of God. Therefore, **Orientation** is the focus of River of Life’s ministry to individuals who are at the “New Church” stage (First Base). The goal is to systematically provide opportunities for new attendees to learn more about God’s Word and about the ministries of River of Life. Ministry activities during the **Orientation** phase center around several formal endeavors to which newcomers are invited to be a part of (outlined elsewhere in this

manual) including: a “Welcome to ROL” event, “Search for Truth” classes (ROL 101), and meeting with the Assistant Pastor and receiving information about becoming a member of River of Life. The goal of **Orientation** is realized when newcomers “reach Second Base” by experiencing and accepting the “New Birth” – repentance, water baptism in Jesus’ name, and seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because, according to Scripture, this experience initiates one into the Church (John 3, Acts 2, etc.), we also encourage newcomers at this stage to become members of the local assembly if they have not already done so.

❖ **M – Maturity**

When an individual experiences the “New Birth” it is not the end of the journey, but a glorious, new beginning. God’s Word admonishes us to disciple believers and help them to grow and develop spiritually. Therefore, **Maturity** is the focus of River of Life’s ministry to individuals who are at the “New Birth” stage (Second Base). The goal is to provide formal instruction to new saints regarding major themes and principles of God’s Word that are critical to maturing, growing, and developing in the Lord. Ministry activities at this phase will center on “New Life” classes (ROL 201) which are offered to all interested individuals (outlined elsewhere in this manual). This, of course, is naturally enhanced by the teaching and preaching that takes place in our regular services. The goal of **Maturity** is realized when believers “reach Third Base” by embracing God’s Word entirely and actively devoting themselves to living a “New Life”. This includes, among other things, embracing a consecrated, holy lifestyle based upon the principles and precepts of the Bible.

❖ **E – Equipping**

God’s calling upon the life of every individual includes more than merely one’s own salvation and consecrated life. We are all called to be participants in the Great Commission and laborers in the Kingdom. Everyone should participate in the work of the ministry and/or serving the church in some capacity. Therefore, **Equipping** is the focus of ministry to individuals who are at the “New Life” stage (Third Base). The goal is twofold: (1) to match the interest and skills of mature church members to ministry needs, and (2) to provide training and development opportunities that will enhance their abilities to labor in some aspect of ministry. The **Equipping** phase may transform and expand as the church grows. At a basic level, River of Life will endeavor to offer training and education opportunities for several topics such as leadership, prayer ministry, personal evangelism, and more. The goal of **Equipping** will be achieved when members of River of Life reach a “New Level” (Home Plate) in their relationship with Jesus Christ and church participation. This new level is realized when individuals move beyond *merely* being a consumer of the services and ministries of the church, but *also* become a contributor of the church body and a soul winner for the kingdom.

## MINISTRY ACTIVITIES

### Hospitality

At the hub of the Hospitality phase of “The Game Plan” is an organized, formal “Guest Follow-Through” strategy. This strategy is implemented by the Guest Services Team under the oversight and coordination of the Guest Services Director. Below is an outline of this strategy followed by an explanation and description. Samples materials for various steps of this plan are also included in this section.

#### **Guest Follow-Through Strategy Outline**

1. Day of initial visit – Greet guest and get information card.
2. Day of initial visit – Present guest with small gift at church.
3. Day of initial visit/subsequent visits – ALL members make guests feel welcome.
4. Day of initial visit – Send guest a letter from Senior Pastor.
5. Middle of first week – Add guest contact info to database.
6. Middle of first week – Send guest personal card.
7. Midweek of second week – Telephone call to guest.
8. Midweek of second week – Visit guest’s home, present Care Package.

#### **Guest Follow-Through Strategy Description**


1. Day of initial visit - A Guest Services Team member welcomes the new guest, gives him/her a ROL pen, and requests that he/she complete a Guest Information Card. The Guest Services Team member retains completed cards, marks the date of the visit on it, and submits it to a designated member of the Guest Services Team. [Note: The primary information sought on the card includes the guest’s name, address, telephone number, email address, interest in a Bible study, and information about current church attendance]
2. Day of initial visit - A gift is offered to the new guest by a member of the Guest Services Team as a favor for attending the service. [Note: The current gift offered is an audio CD containing a selected sermon].
3. Day of initial visit/subsequent visits - All ROL members (especially ministers and church leaders) are strongly encouraged to mingle with guests before and after each church service to make them feel welcome. Invitations to go out to eat or otherwise get together are encouraged. Mature church members are encouraged to take special

care of newcomers and informally “mentor” them through the process of becoming acclimated to the church.

4. Day of initial visit - A Guest Services Team member sends an approved form letter and church brochure in the mail to the guest. The letter is prepared immediately and sent in Monday’s mail. [Note: The letter is personalized with the guest’s name and electronically “signed” by the Senior Pastor. The letter contains the following content: (a) welcomes the guest to the church, (b) refers to the enclosed brochure and church website for more information about the church, (c) invites them to attend the next “Welcome to ROL” at the church, and (d) invites them to return to future services, etc.]
5. Middle of first week (Guest Follow-Through Meeting night) - A Guest Services Team member adds the guest’s name and contact information to a database. The database will be used to: (a) generate an email distribution list to send a monthly email informing recipients of regular and special events, and (b) generate a mailing list to mail fliers about special events and services.
6. Middle of first week (Guest Follow-Through Meeting night) - A Guest Services Team member sends a hand written, personal card to the guest. The card will go out in Wednesday’s or Thursday’s mail. [Note: The content of the card will be patterned after approved templates.]
7. Middle of second week (Guest Follow-Through Meeting night) – A Guest Services Team member will attempt to telephone the new guest on Wednesday or Thursday. [Note: The telephone call will be patterned after an approved script. One of the main purposes of the call is to arrange for the delivery of a Care Package to the guest’s home on the same day as the telephone call.]
8. Middle of second week (Guest Follow-Through Meeting night) - Two Guest Services Team members make a brief visit to the guest’s home to deliver a Care Package. [Note: The visit is patterned after an approved script. The Care Package includes: (a) some kind of food item (i.e. cookies, etc.), (b) one or more reusable items displaying the ROL logo and website (i.e. a coffee mug, refrigerator magnet, etc.), (c) a couple of approved tracts, (d) information about the *Search for Truth* Bible Study.]



## Guest Information Card

	<i>Guest Information Card</i>
Name _____	
Address _____	
City _____	State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____	
Email _____	
Are you interested in a free home Bible study? _____	
Do you currently attend another church? _____	
If you do currently attend another church, which church?	
_____	
<i>Please include any comments you may have on the back of this card.</i>	

## Sample Letter to New Guest

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

It has been our privilege to have you as our guest at River of Life. It is my sincere hope that you enjoyed the time that you spent with us and that you received a special blessing and touch from the Lord. I certainly welcome you to come back any time and worship the Lord with us in our services. Our doors are always open to you.

Often our guests request information about the church (and certainly many others have questions about us but never ask!). For this reason, I have enclosed a pamphlet which briefly describes some of the ministries and services that we provide at River of Life. Additional information may also be viewed on our website – [www.RiverOfLifeMuncie.com](http://www.RiverOfLifeMuncie.com). If you have any questions, or if you would like to communicate with a member of our ministry team, please feel free to contact us at any time.

We also host a “Welcome to ROL” get-together about every other month. This is a perfect opportunity for you to meet and mingle with many of our church leaders, become acquainted with our facilities, and receive answers to any questions that you may have. This is designed to be a fun, informal event and refreshments will be served. Our next “Welcome to ROL” will be on **Day, Date at Time**. We would be honored if you would join us – all you have to do is show up!

Once again, thank you for being our guest at River of Life. We hope to see you again soon and often!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Pastor John Martin", written over a thin red horizontal line.

Senior Pastor John Martin

## Sample Guest Follow-Through Personal Cards

### *Sample 1:*

Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I attend church at River of Life. I understand that you visited us recently, so I just wanted to send you this card to make you feel welcome. River of Life has been a tremendous blessing to me and to my family and we are very thankful to be a part of such a wonderful church. If you are looking for a church to attend regularly, I really encourage you to give River of Life a try. I know you won't be disappointed!

Thanks and God bless,  
John Doe

### *Sample 2:*

Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I attend church at River of Life. I understand that you visited us recently, so I just wanted to send you this card to make you feel welcome. I love River of Life because the church people are like a caring family. I always feel right at home at the church and I cannot wait until the next service begins. It is truly a refuge and sanctuary... I am uplifted every time I go. I hope that you keep coming back and that the Lord blesses your life in wonderful ways.

Thanks and God bless,  
Jane Doe

### *Sample 3:*

Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I attend church at River of Life. I understand that you visited us recently, so I just wanted to send you this card to make you feel welcome. I also wanted to share with you that God has really changed my life... and River of Life has played a huge part of what the Lord has done for me. I never would have dreamed that I could feel so happy, new, and free. I thank God every day for finding River of Life. If you need a change in your life, you've found the right church. I hope you decide to check out River of Life further and discover all it has to offer!

Thanks and God bless,  
John Doe

## Sample Guest Follow-Through Telephone Call

1. "Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_ from River of Life Church."
2. "Pastor Martin asked me you give you a call and tell you [once again] that we enjoyed having you as a guest in our church."
3. "We would like to invite you to visit us again soon." [Provide information about service times and/or any special services coming up soon.]
4. [Care Package:] "We also have a Care Package that we have prepared for you. I would like to send some by your home for a few minutes tonight to drop it off. Would about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes from now be a good time?"

### [If YES for Care Package...]

5. "Great! Someone will be by at [agreed upon time]." [Note: Confirm address and get directions, if necessary].
6. [Ending call:] "It was very nice talking to you. I hope to see you soon at River of Life."

### [If NO for Care Package... one or more of the following]

5. "If tonight is not a good time for you, we can call you back the next time we are delivering Care Packages. Would that be alright?" [Make a note of the guest's response for future follow-up.]
6. "Our church hosts a "Welcome to ROL" get-together for new people to meet our church leaders and learn more about the church. The next one will be on [day, date and time]. Would you be interested in attending?"
7. "Our church offers free home Bible studies. Would you like more information?" [If interested:] "Great, I'll ask an instructor to contact you as soon as possible."
8. "Do you have any prayer requests for our Prayer Team?" [Make a note of any prayer requests the guest shares.]
9. [Ending call:] "It was very nice talking to you. I hope to see you again soon at River of Life."

### Sample Guest Follow-Through Visit

1. "Hello. I am \_\_\_\_\_ from River of Life. We are just dropping by briefly to give you this Care Package."
2. "We want you to know that our church is here to help you in any way that we can."
3. "Our church hosts a "Welcome to ROL" get-together for new people to meet our church leaders and learn more about the church. The next one will be on [day, date and time]. Would you be interested in attending?"
4. "We offer free home Bible studies that have really been a blessing to many people. Would you like one of our instructors to call you about receiving one?"
5. Do you have any prayer requests for our prayer team?
6. "Before we leave, we would like to pray for God's blessings upon your home. Would that be all right?"

[Note: Make your visit brief, unless the person demonstrates a very clear desire for you to stay a while longer.]

## Orientation

The Orientation phase of “The Game Plan” centers around two ministry activities: (1) a newcomer orientation get-together called “Welcome to ROL”, and (2) “Search for Truth” classes (ROL 101) offered at the church. Both of these phases are implemented by the Education Team under the oversight and direction of the Education Pastor. Below is more detail regarding the organization of these ministry activities.

### “Welcome to ROL” Description

All newcomers (guests and members) are encouraged to attend a “Welcome to ROL” get-together that is held every other month at the church and coordinated by the Education Team under the oversight of the Education Pastor. Invitations to this event are extended in various steps of the guest follow-through strategy. Dates and times for the event will also be announced in church services. [Note: The purpose of this event is for new guests and new members to: (a) meet and/or mingle with the Senior Pastor and other church leaders, (b) find out more information about the ministries and services of the church, (c) take a tour of the church facilities, (d) enroll in a *Search for Truth* Bible Study class or a *New Life* class, and (e) enjoy the provided refreshments. The event will last no more than an hour, but people may stay and mingle as long as they wish.]

### “Welcome to ROL” Outline

[In the Sanctuary]

1. Welcome and introductory remarks from the Senior Pastor (if present)
2. Remarks from Assistant Pastor (about 5-10 minutes)
  - a. Brief history of River of Life
  - b. Brief description of important ministries and programs
  - c. Brief description of an invitation to enroll in SFT or New Life classes (refer to Education Pastor)
  - d. Introduction of church leaders that are present
3. Tour of facilities (pair guests with church leaders)

[In the Break Room and Youth Room]

4. Refreshments and mingling

## ROL 101 – “Search for Truth” – Description and Guidelines

1. Search for Truth is a twelve session Bible study course that is offered to all adult and teenage guests and newcomers to ROL.
2. Search for Truth is coordinated by the Education Team, which is overseen by the Education Pastor.
3. Search for Truth sessions take place on designated weeknights at the church (one session per week).
4. Search for Truth sessions strictly adhere to the *Search for Truth 2* teacher’s guide and charts. Significant changes to the curriculum are not permitted.
5. New students should begin with Session 1 (as opposed to beginning in the middle of the course). A new 12-session course will begin every six weeks to avoid long waiting periods for interested persons. All sessions will be scheduled a year in advance. Search for Truth will be vigorously promoted to newcomers in the church.
6. Each course will be taught by a team of three or four instructors. All instructors on the team are required to attend all sessions (excluding excused absences) and to participate in the teaching of each session (the charts for a single session will be divided between the instructors). All instructors must be approved in advance by the Senior Pastor or Assistant Pastor.

[Note: This strategy takes advantage of the different delivery methods, personalities, voices, etc. of the instructors to maximize the attentiveness and interest of the students. It also encourages the mentoring of beginning instructors by seasoned ones and allows for built-in backup in the event that one of the instructors must miss a session.]

7. Individuals who complete all sessions of Search for Truth will be given a “Certificate of Completion” and recognized in a church service.

## Maturity

The Maturity phase of “The Game Plan” centers on “New Life Essentials” classes (ROL 201) offered at the church. Oversight and coordination for these classes will be provided by the Education Pastor. A description and outline of the “New Life” classes is provided, below.

### ROL 201 – “New Life Essentials” – Description and Guidelines

1. The “New Life Essentials” series is a seven session series of classes consisting of five modules that is offered to all adult and teenage newcomers to ROL.
2. The “New Life Essentials” series is coordinated by the Education Team, which is overseen by the Education Pastor.
3. The “New Life Essentials” series sessions take place on Sunday mornings during Sunday School (from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m.) The current location for the classes is in the “Breakroom”.
4. The “New Life Essentials” series sessions strictly adhere to the following format:
  - **Session 1** (Module 1) – A “survival course” based upon the pamphlet *Growing On*. Covers six essentials for the Christian life: living by faith, prayer, reading the Bible, church attendance, witnessing to others, and tithing. A copy of the pamphlet is provided to each person in the session.
  - **Sessions 2 & 3** (Module 2) – Based upon the booklet *Essentials of the New Birth*. The sessions introduce the major topics of the booklet. A copy of the booklet is provided to each person in the session.
  - **Session 4** (Module 3) – Based upon the booklet *Essentials of Oneness Theology*. The sessions introduce the major topics of the booklet. A copy of the booklet is provided to each person in the session.
  - **Session 5** (Module 4) – Based upon the booklet *Essential Doctrines of the Bible*. The sessions introduce the major topics of the booklet. A copy of the booklet is provided to each person in the session.
  - **Sessions 6 & 7** (Module 5) – Based upon the booklet *Essentials of Holiness*. The sessions introduce the major topics of the booklet. A copy of the booklet is provided to each person in the session.
5. New students should begin with Session 1 (as opposed to beginning in the middle of the course). All sessions will be scheduled a year in advance. The “Essentials Series” will be vigorously promoted to newcomers in the church.
6. Each module of the “New Life Essentials” series will be taught by a different instructor (total of 4 instructors) who will specialize in the module that they teach. The same



four instructors will teach their module of specialization each time the sessions are offered. The Education Pastor (or designee) will be present at the beginning of all sessions to get them started. The Education Pastor will serve as a backup instructor in the event that the assigned instructor is not available. Any curriculum or instructor changes must be approved in advance by the Senior Pastor or Assistant Pastor.

7. Individuals who complete all sessions of the “New Life Essentials” series will be given a “Certificate of Completion” and recognized in a church service.

## **Equipping**

The Equipping phase of “The Game Plan” focuses on various training and development opportunities to equip mature church member for work in River of Life ministry and other services. This is a phase that is expected to transform and broaden as the church grows and new needs are identified. To begin, the goal will be to provide annual sessions on each of the following topics: Leadership, Prayer Ministry, and Personal Evangelism. These classes will be designated by the prefix ROL 301, 302, etc. The sessions will be instructed primarily by members of the Ministry Team (pastoral staff). Oversight and coordination will be the responsibility of the Assistant Pastor. Details regarding these sessions will be added as they become available.