



SMALL TOWNS • Just walk down the street

In small southern Illinois towns like Wayne City, being a missionary can seem like something for far-off places and foreign cultures. But in reality, there are people just down the street in need of a friend on mission for Jesus. **Marlene Wood** knows that. “We don’t have to go very far,” she said. “I just went three houses down.”

Her neighbor, **Kathleen Woodley** was struggling. She had recently placed her husband in assisted living, then her son died unexpectedly. Raised Catholic, but lacking a personal relationship with God, the weight of recent events weighed heavily. Then came the knock on her door. Wood was inviting her to a church Christmas program. She had never even been inside a Baptist church. “I feel as though God was trying to reach me,” Woodley remembered. So she said yes, and quickly became a regular, attending every service with Wood.

Just a few months later, Woodley prayed to receive Christ as Lord. “I was ending the service and I was praying,” Pastor **Jay Loucks** recounted. “When I opened my eyes, Ms. Marlene and Ms. Kathy are there and she says, ‘I’ve got to tell you, I’ve just asked Jesus into my heart.’ And the look on her face as she said, ‘I know Jesus now,’ what a precious moment that was. Nothing can be better than that.”

Loucks said there are many people like Woodley out there. When he began walking the streets of Wayne City, he discovered them. “God really just opened my eyes up to the fact that there are people here that need someone that loves them. There are folks here that are lonely.”

As he began efforts to lead Wayne City Baptist to reach its neighborhood, Loucks found encouragement in IBSA’s Evangelism Director, **Scott Harris**. The two teamed up for neighborhood evangelism during the 2021 IBSA Annual Meeting. “We just went and knocked on doors in a community for another church,” Loucks said. “I think that’s what the church has to do. We’ve got to get out beyond the walls.”



Through one-on-one consultations with pastors, as well as events like regional Ignite Evangelism conferences, Harris trains churches to engage their communities with the gospel.

That spirit is catching on at Wayne City Baptist, Loucks said. “I know they’re out visiting because they’ll tell me.” Woodley is one of them. She and Wood are praying for their neighbor down the street, and she has already invited him to church, telling him, “Between Marlene and me, we’re going to keep on you until you come.”

“It’s exciting when you got people that are willing to put themselves out like that,” Loucks said. “And they want to do it, they’re not saying, ‘Well, that’s your job.’ They’re saying, ‘It’s our job’ And I think that’s been a turning point for the church here.”



LOUCKS