

## Lay Renewal Weekends energize IL Baptist churches



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WASHINGTON, Ill. | Members of Roland Manor Baptist Church in Washington, Ill. are excitedly expressing their desire to do more inside and outside of their church walls, shared the church's pastor, Steve Hardin. Their desire also includes starting new Bible study groups centered on God's Word as a way of getting to know each other better.

The event that sparked this desire was an April 24-26 Lay Renewal Weekend. Hardin estimates 75 percent of the church's resident membership participated in the weekend.

Hardin said the church last held such a weekend 15-20 years ago. "It's been a long time and was such a positive experience our members said let's do it again for the new people in the church."

"Lay renewal weekends are proven to be effective at making it possible for churches to do the ministry God has called them to do," said Mark Shipley, the Illinois Baptist State Association's church renewal coordinator.

Lay Renewal Weekend literature describes the weekends as "an opportunity to re-awaken the church to its purpose and passion. It takes believers, wherever they are in their spiritual journey, and refreshes them with a godly perspective of their roles in service to others." The weekends are the first step in the five-part Church Renewal Journey.

The success of the weekend depends on the laity of the church as the title suggests. "The church family, not just the pastor, has to get behind lay renewal," Shipley shared. "If not, it's not going to succeed."

Chatham Baptist Church in Chatham held a Lay Renewal Weekend May 15-17. "The weekend opened up communication between people who have never talked before or met in small group settings," said Chatham Baptist's pastor, Milton Bost. "It also opened up fellowship opportunities for members to share their testimonies. Some people realized they didn't have testimonies and now have a renewed commitment to Christ."

As a result of the weekend the church is planning to begin new small groups. "Our goal is to see small groups develop to reach out to people in the community who are not involved in church and see them make decisions for Christ," shared Bost.

The weekends, which are led by trained lay renewal volunteers who travel to the churches, begin on Friday's with small group times for church members – adults, youth and children – where they are asked what they would like God to do for them and their church that weekend.

Saturday sessions begin with coffee groups of 10 or more at church members' homes. Members may be asked to tell their most vivid memory of an answered prayer or to reflect on the state of their current spiritual walk. Saturday afternoon is spent in larger groups – separated by men, women, youth and children. Saturday night's session includes more testimonies by visiting team members and small-group discussions among church members. The session may be in the form of a "catacomb service" with dimmed lights during which families sit together, memorializing how early Christians met secretly in the catacombs of Rome. Early Christians had no organs, hymnals or even Bibles. They simply shared what they knew – songs, Scripture and letters from fellow Christians. In a Lay Renewal Weekend setting, the catacomb service is a 30-minute time of spontaneous sharing and singing, followed by family prayer at the church altar.

The wrap-up session on Sunday is the day's worship service but without a sermon – just songs and testimonies. On Sunday night, after the volunteer team has left for home, the church holds a post-Lay

Renewal Weekend evaluation session to reflect on the weekend and begin steps to turn ideas and plans into action.

Through Lay Renewal Weekends churches can seek to grow in Christ and reach others for Him. “In Scripture God says if His people seek His face God will respond. I think it is a promise of God that He will visit,” Shipley said.

*For information about the Lay Renewal Weekend or the entire Church Renewal Journey, contact Mark Shipley at (309) 361-3566 or e-mail [shipleymark@comcast.net](mailto:shipleymark@comcast.net). Also visit [churchrenewaljourney.net](http://churchrenewaljourney.net).*