



Cross-Church Collaboration Changes Lives

Indiana Community Reaps Benefits of Six-Church Partnership

God has taught us that unity is the way of life, though sadly the world, in many ways, remains divided. In 2014, pastors from six churches in North Vernon, Indiana, banded together after they tried, separately, to make headway with various outreach opportunities and repeatedly hit dead ends. They determined that if they pooled their resources, they might experience success—and they were right.

"We felt that by joining six churches together, we could satiate the community with Christ's love," says Dan Denney, pastor of Christ's Way Christian Church.

A mobile home community in an unchurched part of town owned a building called The Pavilion. The pastors were told that if they were serious about ministering there, they could use that space to do so. Denney partnered with Caleb

Reynolds, pastor of North Vernon Church of the Nazarene; Tom Long, pastor of The Well Ministries; Robert Johnson, pastor of Trinity Full Gospel Church of North Vernon; Kent Stroud, pastor of North Vernon Wesleyan Church; and Mitch Harrell, pastor of Zenas Baptist Church, to form the Pavilion Churches.

The pastors began brainstorming ways to bring people together. They started by erecting a basketball court to attract youth. They also held a weekly movie night. They put on a hog roast and invited community members to the city park where the ministers took turns preaching each week. In addition, they began hosting a "Good News Club" in a local school as well as weekly prayer meetings in the mayor's office. Not

only did these activities create momentum, but the combined congregational resources also provided greater opportunities to serve.

When the Pavilion Churches built a recovery house for former addicts (see July/August issue of *Outreach*), drawing from multiple resources made a big difference both financially and logistically. One church had access to a backhoe while another had an electrician in its midst. Plus, combining the manpower of the congregations made carpet installation a breeze.

"These are all things that would have cost significant money," says Stroud. "By working together, many of these resources were donated from inside—and even outside—the churches. A singular church my size wouldn't have nearly as much success launching ministries because our congregation consists of just 70 people."

As church members across various congregations built and grew relationships, the surrounding community began to express an interest in collaboration. "The fact that the secular side is joining with the spiritual side—that, to me, is the piece that's unheard of," says Long.

That's why Johnson calls the

formation of the six-church collaboration a "God thing."

"When folks recognize that it's all about helping people, they begin to see past ministry-line boundaries and embrace the greater community," he says. "They don't get caught up in the 'my church/your church' type of mentality."

The Pavilion Churches has started a factory ministry that supplies jobs to ex-cons and has adopted an impoverished elementary school.

"We couldn't have begun to address these issues without the critical mass of all these pastors," says Reynolds.

The fact that they may not share the same perspective on everything is irrelevant. To be efficient and effective, each minister takes charge of one outreach emphasis. For example, Johnson is the point person for the elementary school, Reynolds is the go-to guy for questions about United Way and Long heads up the prison ministry.

"There's no way we'd each have time on a weekly basis to meet seven different areas that we minister to," says Stroud, noting that currently there are 1,200 different denominations and 40,000 different

church variations in the U.S.

"Obviously, we've gotten divided over little things," says Harrell. "This is an opportunity for us to come back together."

It's also an opportunity to build up a pastor who may be feeling mentally or emotionally depleted.

"Ministerial alliances break down often, but when you have other pastors to lift you back up, that's a huge benefit," says Stroud.

When a community comes together, phenomenal transformation ensues.

"Here's where I think God is doing something unique in our community," says Johnson. "By bringing all of these churches together, he's bringing the community on board as well. I mean, the fact that the mayor opens up his office to hold community prayer—I've never heard of that before."

Stroud prays that this idea of cross-collaboration among churches catches on nationwide.

"Churches should be working together," he says. "Because if they did, we would storm the world with Christ's unity."

—Christy Heitger-Ewing
PavilionChurches.com

