

Kentucky Ministry Takes Church Outside

Written by Ken Walker

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Servant's Heart in Louisville, Ky., doesn't hold a traditional Sunday service and doesn't consider itself a church. Instead, the Assemblies of God mission is taking ministry to residents in a low-income community known as Portland.

Teams witness during weekly prayer walks, regularly visit a liquor store to share Scripture with customers and hold home Bible studies. The mission has held clothing and food giveaways and helped sponsor free medical clinics.

"Our focus is to do our best and minister. It takes different forms and shapes," said Dave Heigl, pastor of the sponsoring Servant's Heart Church in suburban Jeffersontown, Ky.

Jared Miller, the 24-year-old leader who operates from a church-owned apartment, calls Spirit-led prayer its key. Teams pray for words of knowledge before prayer walks, with God showing them specific situations they will encounter, he said.

Miller estimates nearly 100 people have been healed in recent years of such problems as back ailments, ear pain and depression. "There's so much opportunity, so much spiritual ripeness," said Miller, who supports his family by operating a construction business. "That's why my wife and I moved here."

In addition to penetrating the neighborhood with prayer and scripture, Servant's Heart is attempting to bring dozens of area churches closer together. Bible college student Michael Barger is part of the ministry team at an area Southern Baptist church and a key Servant's Heart participant.

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"God has given us so much favor down here," Barger said of the outreach in Portland. "It's more powerful than anything I've ever seen. Many times when someone asks us for prayer, God shows up and it gives us the opportunity to share the gospel."

Larry Stoess, a United Methodist minister who has directed the Portland Promise Center for 15 years, said Servant's Heart is one more sign that God is pricking people's hearts to reach out to the troubled area. Miller and his wife, Brianne, are among several young couples who have moved into the neighborhood and loved Christians, alcoholics and homeless with the same fervor, Stoess said.

"We've been praying for Christian leadership for some time and we're beginning to see that emerge," Stoess said. "With Jared and Brianne, nobody recruited them. They just showed up. It's very encouraging."

Servant's Heart has received a boost from an unusual series of gifts. Since 2007 two men have given Servant's Heart five houses, which have provided shelter to various people, including some with financial struggles. As miraculous as these gifts are, Miller says nothing matches God healing people and bringing the book of Acts to life.

"I had never experienced spontaneous prayer and repentance before," he said of one impromptu prayer circle last year that exceeded his expectations. "I was catching a glimpse of what revival will be like. For people in our neighborhood, we believe that stronger than Sunday morning worship time is a seven-day-a-week connection to the family of God."