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The Grace Place Ministry Leads to Bible Studies and Baptisms

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Alenece Collie

Before services began in The Grace Place church plant, individuals prayed for the community in which they hoped to minister, and asked God to work in a mighty way to touch hearts and change lives.

The Grace Place ministry leads to Bible studies and baptisms

Indiana—“I won’t be coming to church anymore,” Hyveth Williams declared. “I feel the Lord has called me to do more than just sit in a church. I have been praying about this, and my friend, Habir Aviles, and I have decided to go to a section of Chicago and start knocking on doors. If you don’t see me in church, it will be because I am out knocking on doors, praying with people, and seeing if I can find some who will study the Bible with me.” Williams shared this with her pastor, Throstur Thordarson, of the South Bend First Church in Indiana.

Thordarson calmly responded, “Let’s pray about this.”

When they finished praying, Thordarson said, “There is a little company I have in South Bend. They are not growing, and I’m thinking of disbanding them, but they have this beautiful church. Why don’t you go and look at it before you go to Chicago? Just see what can come of it.”

The next Sabbath, Williams looked at the church.

“I was just overwhelmed by the facilities, the location and everything. It was just as if God was saying, ‘This is where I want you to minister,’” she said.

Immediately, Williams contacted Aviles, and they both prayed about the possibilities. They invited a few other individuals to join them, and the group grew to six people. They prayed and fasted together for a whole month, asking the Lord to reveal his will. The impression on all involved was that God wanted them to do something in South Bend.

They felt the Lord leading them to do a church plant with a community focus rather than simply another worship program. The thought was that if the community could be made healthy — spiritually, physically and mentally, the church would grow and make a difference.

The area selected included about one-third of South Bend. After fasting and praying for a month, the small group spent a week walking throughout the community in which they hoped to minister. They prayed for the people living there. They asked that God work in a mighty way to touch hearts and change lives.

The next week the group drove around the target community every

day and prayed for it. They said, “Lord, we are claiming this community in your name.”

Each day of the third week, someone prayed in the church facility. They prayed that God would bless the work and not only change those who came but also enable those ministering to be conduits of his love.

Following this, the group fasted and prayed for a week, for themselves and their leaders. Then, on Sabbath afternoons, they began to visit malls and shopping centers. They gave out cards and prayed for and with people. They announced they were going to start a church.

In addition to these efforts, 175 former Adventists living in the area were contacted and invited to return to church. Letters of apology were sent to each person. The letters said, “We apologize for whatever caused you to be disconnected from us. We want you back.”

Some people slammed their doors and said, “You are too late. Get lost!” However, many accepted the invitation and came back. When the first church service began, on Feb. 16, 2013, 90 people were in attendance, and at least 50 were from the community.

Once worship services began, attendees were invited to share a Sabbath meal together each week. Rather than hosting a potluck, the food was prepared by a hospitality team. Posted on the Internet each week, the menu included two options: clean meats (like chicken) and vegetarian. This allowed visitors to sample vegetarian food and learn about it, while still being able to eat something they were used to. This was helpful especially to those who did not regularly enjoy well-prepared, balanced meals.

After the meals, those who are willing, about 50 in number, have gone out and given things to the community. They have given out bread and other food, as well as amenities such as toothpaste and soap.

“Whatever we have, we give to them,” says Williams. “Our gifts of love are changing lives. We have been told how different things are in the community since we started doing this.



Hyveth Williams is the senior pastor of The Grace Place, which now averages 100 in attendance weekly.

“One man cursed us and slammed the door in our faces. ‘Don’t bother me. I don’t want to have anything to do with anybody,’ he yelled.”

Immediately, the visitors gathered on the front walk and prayed for the man. Then, they carried a bag of food back and set it near the door. As they were leaving, the man again opened the door.

“We are from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we just wanted to pray with you and give you this bag of food,” he was told.

“Okay, you can pray for me,” he responded.

During subsequent visits, it was learned the man had lost both legs in the war in Afghanistan. He lived by himself and had no one to look after him. Now, members of the church regularly check on him.

Williams declares, “He has come a long way from cursing us to now allowing us to pray with him, bring him things, and look after him. We see this connection drawing him closer to God and to others.”

Being community-focused includes cleaning up the neighborhood. Some-



On July 4, 2014, The Grace Place hosted a neighborhood party at which more than 200 community guests participated.

times, these efforts involve snow removal. Sometimes, they involve cleaning out a whole house where the people are just so depressed and overwhelmed they can’t deal with it. Church members go in, scrub, throw out trash, and help organize the home.

Williams said, “When we revamped a house in one neighborhood, the neighbors came around, looked and asked, ‘Who are these people?’”

Curiosity drew them to the church and to evangelistic meetings the church held last summer. Five people were baptized during the series.

“The Grace Place,” as the church plant has been named, has found many ways to reach the community. Financial peace seminars, diabetes seminars and a health fair are just a few ways the church members have assisted residents. They also hosted a big July 4th party for the neighborhood. More than 200 people came to enjoy free popcorn, a bounce house and games for the children.

“Our strategy,” says Williams, “doesn’t focus on having a high worship service with the best singers, the best pianists, the best organists and long



Sometimes, The Grace Place fellowship moves outdoors to enjoy worship at a local park.

offering appeals. We don’t have that. We have a simple service with three parts — prayer, praise and preaching. We don’t pass around a basket. We have a box where, if moved by the Spirit, people can give their offering. Generosity has characterized these gifts. Community residents see what the church is doing in the community, and they want to show their support.

Currently, 15 people from the community are in Bible studies, preparing for baptism. Around 100 attend services each week; these include at least 20 newly-baptized believers. The Word is getting out. The Grace Place is making a difference.

To learn more about this church plant, visit The Grace Place, currently meeting at the Community Congregational Church at 19671 Cleveland Road, South Bend, Ind. Sabbath school begins weekly on Saturday at 10:00 a.m., followed by Worship Service at 11:00 a.m. See also <http://www.tgpthegraceplace.org>.

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Photos by Alareece Collier