

Rethink Church well worth the effort to reach across county

By Daniel R. Gangler

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– Michelle Knight

Photo courtesy of Calvary UMC

Members of Calvary United Methodist Church in Brownsburg spruce up a flower bed in nearby Williams Park as part of their Rethink Church outreach to their community.



Photo courtesy of Calvary UMC

Calvary's Sue Labrash and others write thank you cards during the church Rethink Church outreach.



Photo courtesy of Calvary UMC

Music Director Mark Herris leads Calvary's praise team at the Brownsburg Health Care facility as part of their Rethink Church outreach.

BROWNSBURG, Ind. – Engaging more than 400 members and guests in a Rethink Church community outreach was the biggest single event for this suburban Indianapolis congregation's members since they moved into their new building a few short years ago.

The outreach was well worth the time the 800-member Calvary United Methodist Church put into the venture, according to Associate Pastor Michelle Knight, who played a key role in the day-long activity that occurred both at the church building and across Hendricks County.

"The whole church, every age group was engaged. People here loved it and met more people than usual (on a Sunday)," said Knight.

A core group of ten members worked on a task force for several months to bring the May 16 community impact into being. Everyone was engaged in an intergenerational way from pre-school children to 90-year olds. There were projects for everyone. The congregation worshipped together on Saturday night and did the Rethink Church emphasis on Sunday morning.

Rethink Church included Greg Kelly and Jim Huston who organized evangelistic teams to canvas more than 800 homes leaving Rethink Church door hangers across a whole section of the city north of 56th Street, inviting residents to the church.

Rethink Church included a prayer bus led by Knight, which made 11 stops across the county to offer intercessory prayers at Kroger and Kmart parking lots, a food pantry, the school corporation office, Clarian West Medical Center in Avon, a mobile home park, city hall, the fire station, a women's and children's safe house, Hendricks Regional Hospital in Danville, the county jail and at home base – Calvary Church.

For those who could only do sit-down projects, there were care packages to the military personnel, health and layette kits for Operation Classroom programs in Liberia and Sierra Leone, cards to shut-ins and love notes to mission and Indiana Conference organizations.

Senior Pastor Todd Outcalt told Together, "We sent cards and letters to more than 300 clergy, district and conference staff throughout Indiana," The cards were made by the church's children.

An Eagle Scout project planted perennials at the scouting shelter house.

Volunteers immediately outside the church mulched the entire daycare playground and placed flowers and plants in beds surrounding the building.

Music Director Mark Herris took two chartered buses with the praise team, bell ringers plus the children's and youth choirs to two nursing homes for spring caroling.

Youth Director Andrew Attwood led the church youth, who picked up trash along Main Street and received many honks of appreciation for their work.

Other volunteers planted flowers in two city parks.

Responses

"It was just really fun putting our faith into action and being compassionate about it, not just talking about it," Knight told Together in an interview in her church office the week following the emphasis.

"Visitors who showed up for their first time to Calvary also were invited to join in. Some took the offer and volunteered their time. Others said they would return on another Sunday," she said.

Following the Rethink Church event, unexpected notes of thanks began to come into the church office.

One member wrote: "I want to tell you what an awesome experience I had being a part of Calvary's Rethink Church and particularly the Prayer Bus. I was deeply moved by the sincerity of the prayers and the depth of compassion I personally felt and witnessed on both trips. I felt humbled and blessed to be a part of the intercessory prayer team and honored to be able to pray for our community and all of Hendricks County."

The Hendricks County Sheriff wrote: "... thanks so much for your prayers and good wishes! We certainly appreciate being in your prayers. I have many friends who attend your church... During these trying times, we need all of the help we can get from our friends but especially from God."

The Director of Pastoral Services at a county-wide women's shelter wrote: "Thank you very much for including Sheltering Wings in 'Rethink' Sunday. We are most grateful to God for the faithful partnership of Calvary UMC through the years of our existence."

The Brownsburg Superintendent of Schools wrote, "I appreciate your including the schools, staff, faculty and students in your day of prayer and outreach. I would ask your prayers for our continued focus on the education of the children of this community, that we would attend diligently to their academic, emotional and character needs, and that each of us that works with children would be strengthened to be moral exemplars, and role models for life-long learning in all that we do."

Downsides

Like any emphasis in the church, the Calvary Rethink Church day did have a few downsides, according to Knight. One was around registration. Some members signed up and didn't show up. Other members who showed up didn't sign up. It all balanced out in the long run.

"The task force struggled between projects here at the church or in the community. What matters was the impact on the community, especially the faith community," Knight said.

The real plus was that such an organized impact engages more volunteers in a short amount of time compared to other church projects. There was very much a good feel. It was an exciting day, Knight reported.

For more information about Calvary's Rethink Church outreach, call 317-852-2541 or e-mail Michelle Knight at mknight@calvaryunited.org.

Editor's note. This Rethink Church day of outreach has been replicated several times across Indiana in congregations. It was first done as a project of the Indiana Conference session meeting in June 2009. The conference held another Muncie community outreach June 12 with more than 630 volunteers. Their story can be read [here](#).