

Prayer behind the scenes

Rebekah Schmill
Goshen College

Among the nearly 8,000 Mennonites at the convention, 12 might be considered the prayer specialists.

They are the full-time members of a prayer team that is hard at work, behind the scenes, to provide a spiritually uplifting experience for everyone connected with Atlanta 2003. They are joined by scores of others who have volunteered their prayer time in shifts.

“Our biggest desire is to see God do all he wants to do during this convention,” said Tim Leaman, a prayer team member.

The main focus for the prayer team is to pray for the service leaders during the worship times and the delegate meetings.

The prayer volunteers meet during every session behind and to the right of the stage, where they spend the time in constant prayer.

Katie Cunningham, another prayer team member, said it is “lifting other people up so God can speak through them.”

Tim Shue, a worship leader, said that knowing the prayer team is there, unseen, “means a lot” and “helps put us at ease.”

Les Horning, a member of the Assembly 2003 planning committee and the prayer team

coordinator, developed a calendar for the three months preceding the conference. Horning said the prayer calendar was to serve as “a small gesture to help us focus our prayer as we planned for Atlanta 2003.”

The prayer calendar was broken down so that every day there was one specific prayer concern or person to pray for, with an overall theme for each month.

In the convention center there are other opportunities for prayer. Near the youth worship hall entrance, in room B217, one half of the room is set aside for stationary prayer. The rest of the room is a labyrinth, a prayer path. Markings on the floor indicate where to walk and how to guide your thoughts as you pray and reflect.

Kevin Clark, a prayer team member, said the room is “an intentional place for people to come to refocus.”

Prayer tables are also located throughout the convention center, with forms to be filled out with prayer concerns that are then taken up by the prayer team.

A prayer wall is located outside of the prayer chapel for people to write out reflections or concerns. It may also serve as an inspirational stopping place for passersby.

“God is moving here,” said Jen Leaman, a prayer team member. “He is speaking to people.”

“Our biggest desire is to see God do all he wants to do during this convention.”

Tim Leaman

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community ministries.

“Atlanta is a very important site in the history of the civil rights movement,” said Shands Stoltzfus, who as a parent and pastoral leader, didn’t want to see youth come to Atlanta and not realize its significance.

“It’s so powerful to be where these wonderful ... civil-rights advocates were walking,” said Andrew Roth, of Lancaster, Pa., who led a tour that included 27 youth and their sponsors from Yellow Creek Mennonite Church near Goshen, Ind.

Stoltzfus, the associate campus minister at Goshen College and minister of urban ministries for

Mennonite Mission Network, organized the walks together with her Goshen College assistant, Stephanie Short, and with Sarah Thompson, a Goshen resident who now attends Spelman College in Atlanta. The Plowshares peace studies collaboration of Earlham, Goshen and Manchester colleges underwrote a portion of the Freedom Walk.

More than 2,200 participants pre-registered for the tours, which, despite demand, are no longer open to additional participants because of a lack of tour guides. Yet individuals and groups can easily use the prepared materials for self-guided tours.

“Actually being where Martin Luther King walked makes it seem real,” said Mandy Swartzentruber,

a member of Yellow Creek’s youth group.

“It was worth it,” said Maria Yoder (the group’s only African-American), who with Swartzentruber and Natalie Reinhardt was most surprised by the black-white line, a boundary that segregated blacks, denying them the same city services as whites.

“That they [white firefighters] wouldn’t go to ‘black fires’ was pretty bad,” said Andrew Raber, who recalled a tour statistic: In 2002, Atlanta police shot 12 people. Blacks accounted for all five fatalities; none of the officers received more than a minor penalty.

“That shows there’s still racism,” Raber said.

Campolo continues to challenge status quo

Reminds youth that everyone is welcome at God’s table

Jodi H. Beyeler
Goshen College

He may be getting old, but the fiery Baptist evangelist Tony Campolo hasn’t lost his gift for being a prophetic – and at times controversial – voice in the church.

In his Saturday night youth worship sermon, filled with his usual abundance of jokes, fast talking, dramatic expressions and a little front-row spit, Campolo reminded the young people that God’s table isn’t just open to the perfect and the righteous.

Campolo specifically pointed to several groups of people that

the church has wrongly been hesitant – or completely resistant – to welcome in, including persons of color, Jews and Palestinians,

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Tony Campolo

homosexuals, the poor and victims of AIDS. “Whenever you reject any person, you are rejecting

Jesus,” he said. “The church ought to be open to everybody.”

“If you come to Jesus, no matter what condition you are in, he will receive you, cleanse you and invade you,” he said. “If Christ is in you, you will become a new creation, and when this happens, you will want to change this world.”

He told the young people that it is their job to change the conversation and the “direction of the wind” in the church. “We need the winds of justice, the winds of equality and the winds of fairness,” he said. “And we need justice for all, not just for the people who seem safe to you.”

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