

North Channel's Efforts at "Renewing Our Community" Focuses on Schools

By Karen Campbell

Pastor Dale Jones acknowledges that initially the idea of a group of pastors and churches from various denominations coming together for true renewal of a community seemed almost like an impossible dream.

While he now knows that logistics can sometimes be a nightmare, he has evidence that God-inspired dreams do come true.

As pastor of Sterling Wood Baptist Church, he wondered about the impact that doctrinal differences would make as churches in the North Channel area sought to become North Channel ROC which stands for Renewing Our Community. As president of that group and one of the stakeholders in a planned Easter event encompassing three school districts and many area churches, he has learned that the greatest challenge has come via the way groups think, not how they view doctrine.

During the planning and execution of the multiple-week emphasis on **Formula-4-For-Healthy Families**®, he saw structural differences in the cooperating churches and their differing approaches to decision-making create numerous hurdles.

"We were sometimes blindsided by the revelation of 'oh, *this* is the way this church works' which was not how *we* work," he explained. "So we have had to come to an understanding of how we can all work together."

Assisting the leaders in this examination of how thinking affects implementing has been the previous two years of working together in a leadership training experience fashioned after UBA's LeadersEdge. More than 50 pastors and church leaders have been studying learning disciplines such as shared vision, team learning, mental models, and creative tension as well as how to lead through change.

More than one of the **Formula-4-For-Healthy Families**® team leaders has acknowledged the benefits of having the common language of LeadersEdge and way to examine interpersonal interaction.

"I can say this . . . if it weren't for LeadersEdge and all that we've been learning, someone might be dead by now!" one team leader joked (and really, she was joking!) regarding the experience of working across denominational and cultural lines as well as approaches to leadership as plans were made for a community prayer service, Easter festival with children's activities, music concert, and a community Easter celebration.

The **Formula-4-For-Healthy Families**® is a response to superintendents at Channelview ISD, Galena Park ISD and Sheldon ISD who voiced a need to address concerns such as:

- 1) Insufficient sleep hindering students from learning
- 2) Lack of respect for authority contributing to a high turnover of classroom teachers
- 3) The need for both high school and advanced education to obtain better jobs

“Formula-4-For-Healthy Families® is a voluntary five-week campaign, which began February 26th, based on 32 student activities that address the above issues. Each activity will earn 1,000 or more points. Students who participate will be rewarded with an inexpensive gift. But those who *really* get involved can have their names in numerous drawings for exciting, high-dollar prizes donated by local businesses, churches, and individuals,” Jones explained.

“On Saturday morning, our kids will enjoy games, puppets, egg hunts, and prizes—plus an invitation to give their lives to Christ. That night, a spectacular youth concert will also include an appeal for salvation. To underscore the importance of the entire project, the Sunday morning Easter service will go beyond the classroom . . . beyond the pulpit . . . beyond the community—straight into the heart of each home!” he concluded.

The Easter Weekend Celebration at the Galena Park ISD Stadium concludes the campaign but not the work of ROC.

One of the admitted surprises of working together for community transformation has been how “God takes all the loose ends that we think are dead ends and ties them together down the road,” Jones said of his work with the other church leaders.

Initially moved to invest in the North Channel efforts by his exposure to the possibilities of community transformation during his own LeadersEdge experience, Jones encouraged his fellow pastors to do research on community needs more than two years ago. But, initially, nothing seemed to come of that effort. Now, Jones sees work done then and other attempts at addressing how diverse churches can work cooperatively coming to fruition.

He notes that due to an emphasis on compassionate ministry projects related to the CityFest/Luis Palau event last fall and the faithful prayer efforts of intercessors who have bathed the Easter event in prayer, the future holds remarkable opportunities for churches to continue to have an impact on the North Channel community.

“We have coordinators in every school for Formula 4,” he added. “Wow! What potential! We could see an expression of the body of Christ at every school!”

However, Jones also confesses that to realize these next steps toward true change in the community, ROC leaders will have to continue to practice two strengths which have sustained the group thus far – relational vitality and prayer.

“There’s the constant pressure of wanting to jump ship and go back to what is easier. But I think that God has called us to reach this level,” Jones said.

To address the need for honest assessment of the process and progress, ROC leaders don’t just come together to plan, Jones underscored.

“We voice issues honestly and we pray. We encourage one another not to disconnect, we check on our fellow pastors, and we step in when a pastor is under pressure.”

Prayers continue for the 35,000 children in the school districts encompassed by Formula 4 and for the households they represent. Since the initiation of the project,

prayers have been offered every Monday. Twice a month the focus has been on Formula 4 and twice a month other needs were addressed.

Recently, the intercessors gathered on a Monday and Jones noted a concerted effort to go beyond prayers for just an Easter celebration.

"I think they get it," he said. "The prayers were not just for the event but for transformation in our community, new ways to work together, what we can do after the event."

To hear more about the **Formula-4-For-Healthy Families**® campaign, the North Channel pastors who make up ROC, leadership development among this group and the outcome of the Easter celebration contact Jones at djones@sterlingwood.org or plan on attending UBA's Quarterly Associational Meeting April 24 where Jones and other ROC pastors will be the featured speakers.