

Show Christ's love by working to renew communities, student leaders told_30804

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Show Christ's love by working to renew communities, student leaders told

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SHREVEPORT, La.-Christians can pull the United States out of societal decline by reaching out to their neighbors as Christ would, a community renewal activist told student leaders.

Civilizations rise and fall, and the United States is on the downhill side of its prestige, said Mack McCarter, founder and coordinator of Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal.

Social injustice is on the rise, life is being devalued, and corporate ethics are fading, he said. Americans increasingly are becoming socially dysfunctional as they become disconnected, he observed. Growing up, he knew everyone on his block, but now people do not know the names of their neighbors.

"We can e-mail our friends in Berlin but don't know who is living and dying three doors down from us," said McCarter, who recently spoke at a

Christian Association of Student Leaders meeting, sponsored by Texas Baptist Leadership Center and the Baptist General Convention of Texas institutional ministries section.

But Christians bring hope of societal renewal, he insisted. Believers can reconnect society one person at a time by showing the love of Christ.

When individuals show that caring spirit, friendships begin to emerge, McCarter said. Through friendship, lines of communication are established, and compassionate relationships develop.

"It isn't Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal that's the answer," he said. "It's the love of Christ."

The Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal effort uses a three-pronged approach to reconnecting the citizens of Shreveport and Bossier City. About 12,000 people are volunteer members of a "We Care Team." These individuals sport "We Care" bumper stickers on their cars and pins on their shirt collars that make "caring people" more visible. Team members commit to care for others in their daily lives.

McCarter and his staff also recruited about 500 "Haven Home" leaders, who are committed to making friends in their neighborhoods and teaching others how to build relationships. Volunteers also hold parties in their homes to bring communities together.

A wave of individuals volunteered to move into high-crime, low-income neighborhoods to completely rebuild a caring community.

These Internal Care Unit members work to establish trust with adults by first caring for their children.

The effort is working, McCarter said. Crime dropped 42 percent in the community. Attitudes are changing.

The Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal effort is one model being studied by the BGCT City Core Initiative.

Individuals are getting trained by community renewal staff and using it across the country. Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal staff members are using a government grant to demonstrate their model can work nationwide.

Demonstration projects are under way in Austin and in Abilene, where Hardin-Simmons University is involved.

Other demonstrations are taking place in Baton Rouge, La., and Knoxville, Tenn.

McCarter used a recent Christian Association of Student Leaders meeting at Hardin-Simmons University to encourage nearly 200 young people to incorporate community renewal principles into their lives.

The more people that are actively sharing God's love, the greater impact this model will have, McCarter said. Love leads to relationships.

And when a believer has been properly equipped, relationships lead to disciples, he added. Disciples can change the world.

"The ultimate goal is to be faithful to God speaking to us through his Son," McCarter said.

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