

Baptists shower Birmingham with gospel via Crossover

June 11, 2019

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—About 400 teams of Southern Baptists took to the streets to pray with families and share the gospel of Jesus Christ prior to the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting in Birmingham, Ala.

Despite intermittent rain and threats of even worse weather on June 8, Southern Baptists set out to knock on the doors of 20,000 homes in greater Birmingham in their annual Crossover outreach. They also provided free medical and dental care through a Send Relief mobile clinic set up at Birmingham’s Sixth Avenue Baptist Church.

Brought together by gospel mission

“What brings us together is the mission,” said SBC President J.D. Greear. “What excites us when we come together is to be able to proclaim with our mouths and with our deeds that Jesus Christ loves people, that he died to save sinners and he offers healing for all who will look to him.”

Organizers tallying the day’s numbers said volunteers knocked on the doors of 10,409 homes, had 1,817 gospel conversations, prayed with 2,251 people and saw 364 people place their faith in Jesus.

Crossover is an outreach of Southern Baptists in the host city of each year’s Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first Crossover initiative before the 1989 SBC annual meeting in Las Vegas.

Outreach teams dispersed from seven hub churches in Birmingham-area

Baptist associations. The teams started their morning with training, then divided into groups and went into the community—each with the goal of visiting about 50 homes throughout the day.

Southern Baptists prayed with the residents, distributed information on nearby Alabama Baptist churches, a New Testament and a Gospel tract.

Great Commission expectations

“The Bible commands us to witness,” said John Woods, a Crossover volunteer from Poplar Springs Baptist Church in Ringgold, Ga., who visited homes near First Baptist Church in Pelham, Ala. “So why am I doing it? God told me as a Christian that I need to go out and witness.”

Southern Baptist seminary students presented the gospel in homes surrounding the seven hub churches during the week prior to Saturday’s outreach. Alabama Baptist leaders saw the Crossover activities as an opportunity not only to saturate Birmingham with the gospel, but also to train local churches in evangelism.

“We’d like to not only see gospel advancement and gospel saturation in our community, but I hope God will do something in the lives of our own people to increase the urgency of having gospel-witnessing presentations in our community,” said Dennis Blythe, executive pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, one of the hub churches for the initiative.

Gospel presented through dental & medical care

About 50 Southern Baptist volunteers at the site of the Send Relief mobile clinic at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church served the neighboring community by providing free dental care and medical screenings, along with childcare.

They also shared the gospel with neighbors as they waited. The demand was so high for the clinic's services that it extended hours to meet the needs and still couldn't see everyone who needed care.

"We can pull a tooth and take blood pressure, but when you're able to share the gospel with everyone who comes through and people respond, that's what it's all about," said Chris Underwood, associate pastor of congregation care and missions at Highland Baptist Church in Florence, Ala., who coordinated and recruited volunteers to serve at the mobile clinic.

Hoping to show what Southern Baptists are for

Sammy Gilbreath, director of evangelism for the Alabama State Board of Missions, noted that many people in Birmingham know what Southern Baptists are against. He hopes, through Crossover, many will learn what Southern Baptists are for.

"I'm absolutely amazed at the enthusiasm, the excitement, the passion, whether it's a seminary student, a college student or a grandmother. It's been exciting, if nothing else, to see evangelism in conversation all over the Birmingham region," Gilbreath said.

Bill McCall, pastor of The Baptist Church at McAdory, in McCalla, Ala., said the volunteers who helped his church engage his community were an answer to prayer.

Jesus spoke of the fields being white unto harvest and to pray for laborers, McCall said.

"God sent us laborers to send out into the field. To not only see the people going out to share the gospel door to door, but seeing the fruit of that labor

and people coming to Christ, that's overwhelming," McCall said. "That makes our hearts so full, and it gives glory to God."