

Storms don't dampen Crossover spirit

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By Mickey Noah & Mike Ebert

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (BP)-Heavy rain, dangerous lightning, tornado warnings and, in some places, flooding buffeted metro Indianapolis during most of Crossover'08, but by afternoon the sun emerged and local and visiting Southern Baptists were out telling others about the Son.

As much as eight inches of rain fell in parts of the Indianapolis area June 7, and it looked like months of preparation for neighborhood block parties, car washes, car shows and concerts might go for naught.

Mark Kennedy, a member of Greater Love Missionary Baptist Church in Indianapolis, shares his testimony at the churches block party June 7. The evangelistic outreach was part of Crossover'08, an event co-sponsored by the North American Mission Board and the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, which precedes the June 10-11 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. (Baptist Press Staff Photo)

While some Crossover'08 events had to be cancelled, the rain didn't dampen the spirits of Baptists gathered for events in Brownsburg, Ind., and at a multi-ethnic church in east-central Indianapolis.

Now in its 20th year, Crossover is an annual outreach to share the Gospel

in the host city the weekend before the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting — June 10-11 this year at the Indiana Convention Center.

Some 500 volunteers -- local Baptists and others from across the country — were scheduled for Crossover, which was jointly sponsored by the North American Mission Board, the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana and the Crossroads Baptist Association in Indianapolis.

Hope Community Church in Brownsburg, 18 miles west of Indianapolis, hosted a block party attended by 250 people from surrounding neighborhoods. When the torrential rains hit Saturday morning, organizers moved the event indoors and made the best of the situation.

"I was up praying at 6 o'clock this morning, hoping the Lord would change His mind about this, but He didn't and we said rain or shine we are committed to this event," said Hope Community pastor Jim Bohrer. "We advertised it, we told people we were going to do it and we were going to keep our word whether or not it was convenient."

Among the 250 on hand, 90 were not regular attendees at Hope. At least five indicated they prayed to receive Christ. Volunteers from Michigan helped train church members for the event and a team of college students from Tennessee was on hand to help. When cancelled other Crossover events, volunteers from North Carolina diverted to Hope Community to help.

"We had some people who had done it for awhile show us the ropes so we didn't get stuck or confused or miss a beat," Bohrer said. "We were able to see this run smoothly, even with the rain, because of the assistance we were given from other Southern Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ."



Worship leader Gary Geissler, leads the closing prayer at a June 7 block party at Hawthorne Baptist Church in Indianapolis where several residents of the community received Christ. More than 27 block parties were scheduled as part of the evangelistic outreach of Crossover'08 although torrential rains threatened many of the events. Crossover'08 was co-sponsored by the North American Mission Board and the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana and preceded the June 10-11 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Indianapolis.
(Bob Carey/ BP Photo)

Frank Page, who is closing out his second term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, dropped in on Hope Community's block party after spending two hours sharing Christ door-to-door in the rain.

"Crossover events are important," Page said, "because they combine the energies of local people with visitors such as myself in a beautiful partnership, and then the Gospel is shared far more than it normally would be. So it's very important and just a great practical way to express the Great Commission."

Starting each year's convention with Crossover, Page said, "shows what our priority is. It shows what we really care about is winning people to Christ."

Stephen Davis, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, took encouragement that Crossover's impact will last far beyond a weekend event.

"We're doing some other things connected with these events, so it's not just an event but a process," Davis said. "It's the beginning of helping us plant nine new churches in the Indianapolis area. And every event is connected to a local church. So we're going to have much better follow-up and we should see a much better result coming from this in terms of baptisms and strengthening church membership."

The weekend emphasis also is a healthy reminder for the state's Baptists, Davis said.

"Eighty percent of the people in Indiana do not attend any Christian church on any given Sunday," he said. "So we have a huge mission field here and ... one of the things we're trying to do is to remind Christians that Indiana is a mission field."

At Eastside Community Baptist Church in east-central Indianapolis, the worst of the storms was over by the time their block party started at 4 p.m., with volunteers on hand from Indiana, North Carolina, Virginia and Kansas. Blue skies and sunshine attracted a few hundred people who enjoyed live music, popcorn, cotton candy, snow cones and a myriad of attractions and games on the lush green lawn of the four-year-old church.

Terry Lewis, Eastside's pastor, said the congregation wanted to host the block party because "we are always happy to reach out to anyone. Our model here at Eastside is that it's all about ministry. If we're not doing ministry, how do we know we have anything?"

Lewis said Eastside is about 40 percent African American, 40 percent Anglo and the rest Hispanic, Filipino and Asian. The small church — some 50 people attend each Sunday — is housed in a former Latvian Lutheran church building that dates from 1921, replete with stained-glass windows.

"We've had 130 professions within a mile of the church," Lewis said of several days of Crossover-related activities, "so it's been a super week for Eastside. Our members are excited and people in the neighborhood we're trying to reach have been excited."

Cowboy preacher Harvey Gates, blacksmith Bobby Truitt and pastor Marcus Redding of Hull's Grove Baptist Church in Vale, N.C., hammered out horseshoes stamped with Bible verses like John 3:16 or personalized with the names of visitors to Eastside's block party.

"Do you know Jesus?" Gates asked a freckle-faced, red-headed boy as he finished a horseshoe for the boy. "I try to get at the person's spiritual condition before I give them their horseshoe," said Gates, who also pastors Cross Creek Cowboy Church near Vale.

Truitt, who originated the horseshoe ministry a few years ago, said the trio went through 160 horseshoes at an earlier church block party that was moved inside because of the rain. Since he launched his ministry, Truitt said he's given away 12,000 horseshoes over the past two and a half years.

Hull's Grove also brought their balloon, skateboard and motorcycle ministries for the three-hour block party. Eastside, meanwhile, brought in a full-time evangelist-artist, Ray Jenkins of Fayetteville, Ga., to minister to adults and kids via his artwork.

Earlier in the week, 105 student volunteers in the North American Mission Board's World Changers program divided into teams to work in a northwest Indianapolis neighborhood renovating eight houses, including siding, roofing, painting and gutter cleanout.

The volunteers included six church groups from four states, said Brittany Smith, World Changers mission communications specialist. "Despite the heavy rain, they got a lot of work done," she said.

Lewis and Eastside Community Baptist Church hosted ICE (Intentional Community Evangelism) teams who blanketed the streets and malls of Indianapolis for seven days sharing the Gospel. Despite the rain, ICE teams attempted to hit the streets each day after breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Victor Benavides, ICE coordinator for NAMB in Alpharetta, Ga., said more than 600 city residents made decisions for Christ. "We hoped to get 1,000 but not all the numbers are in yet. Because of the tornado warnings, we had to pull our ICE folks off the streets for two days."

How did the residents of Indianapolis neighborhoods react to dozens of Southern Baptists braving the torrential rains and showing up on their front porches?

"At first, some were suspicious, because in some communities there's a lot of drug activity and prostitution. We saw people arrested in some areas all week," Benavides said.

ICE volunteers like Rick Mull of Morgantown, N.C., and Wally Babb of Fayetteville, Ga., agreed that evangelizing on the streets of Indianapolis had been a joy.

"It was my first time for ICE, but God opened up doors and we shared Christ," Mull said.

"Although we had some bad weather, we just prayed through it," Babb said. "If it rained in one neighborhood, we'd either go to a mall and witness or just prayerwalk the neighborhood we were in. We'd find someone to share with."

Also as part of ICE, Benavides said 36 high school students from White Oak Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, raised \$9,000 for their 21-hour bus ride to Indianapolis and led at least 50 people to Christ. They also used Eastside Community Church as their base of operations, sleeping on their bus parked just off Michigan Avenue.

"We at the North American Mission Board believe in ICE," said NAMB President Geoff Hammond, who joined ICE volunteers in knocking on doors on Saturday. "I'm just grateful God let the storms finally pass over. Relationship evangelism is important. You go out and share and if the people aren't interested, you just have to move on to someone else. You can't take it personally."

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