

Christians ask: â€œWhat if we had just one month to live?â€

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SULPHUR SPRINGS—If Christians knew when they only had one month to live, what passion to make a difference would be engendered?

That is the question 30 Hopkins County congregations are asking themselves during their [One Month to Live](#) campaign.



Bruce Welch (right), minister of education at First Baptist Church in Sulphur Springs, and Joel Tiemeyer, pastor of The Way Bible Church and head of the Hopkins County Christian Alliance, spearheaded the drive to involve churches throughout their area in challenging members to ask, "What if we had just one month to live?"

(PHOTO/George Henson)

The Hopkins County effort began last May when Brit Fisher, children's minister at [First Baptist Church in Sulphur Springs](#), saw a television report of a similar campaign in Clinton, Okla., and told Minister of Education Bruce Welch he thought it was something their church should do.

Welch called the First Baptist Church in Clinton and learned it was a citywide campaign. He thought maybe the same approach should be tried in Sulphur Springs.

When he brought the idea to Joel Tiemeyer, pastor of [The Way Bible Church in Sulphur Springs](#) and head of the Hopkins County Christian Alliance, it didn't take much convincing.

"They were already looking for something to do as a communitywide project, and this fit like a hand in a glove," Welch said. He also approached Rehoboth Baptist Association, drawing in churches from the surrounding communities of Como, Cumby and Dike.

"When Bruce came to us with this idea, it was kind of like an automatic," Tiemeyer said. "It wasn't anything you had to think about and pray about because we had been doing that since January—really praying and asking God, 'What's the next step for our city to take for all of us as churches to come together?'"

That was the beginning of what Welch and Tiemeyer pray will spark a life change for Christians throughout the county.

"It's living every day not as if you are about to die, but living every day as you would if knew you only had 30 days left, and when the campaign is done, to live the rest of your life with that purpose, that meaning, that drive to accomplish those things you've always wanted to accomplish" for the kingdom of God, Tiemeyer explained.

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Bruce Welch and Joel Tiemeyer explain how the One Month to Live campaign works.

One of the most exciting things is to see how God brought together 30 diverse churches for a collaborative effort, he added.

"To get 30 churches on board, all doing the same thing, all at the same time—it's been an amazing process to see how God has worked in that," Tiemeyer said.

"It's not only interdenominational; it's also interracial," Welch said of the effort. At least seven denominations, and many stripes of Baptists, as well as nondenominational churches such as Tiemeyer's, are involved in the effort, which has drawn the participation of African-American and Hispanic congregations.

Welch and Tiemeyer visited with pastors of the various congregations and said most saw the potential of the campaign far outweighed any difference they had.

"By the time we got done, they realized we had the same purpose they did—whether Methodist, Baptist, nondenominational, Assembly of God or Church of God—we all have one focus and that's to win our city to Jesus Christ," Tiemeyer said.

"And when they realized that's the heart we came in with, they were like, 'Yeah, we want to be a part of something that wins our city to Christ,' because there is no denomination specification to be involved in this or race specification.

"It's all about one thing—what can we do for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Pastors just fell in love with it."

Each participating congregation was asked to do at least two things—members place One Month to Live yard signs on their lawns and the each pastor preach on the assigned topic for each of the six Sundays.

Some churches became even more involved, using materials available to go along with the campaign's emphases. Resources include a daily devotional book, small-group studies, Sunday school materials for all ages and green

silicon wristbands that have been good conversation starters leading to even more contacts.

For example, Tiemeyer said when he sees someone in a store he doesn't know wearing a green armband, he talks to that person about what church they attend to and their church's participation.

"People are going to be listening to your conversation as they pass by," he said. "That's just the nature of people to do so."

The youth group at First Baptist Church even designed their own T-shirts to promote the event.

And while pastors are asked to preach on the same topic as the other pastors involved in the campaign, they are not all preaching the same canned message.

"We're not going to tell you what to preach. We're not going to tell you how to preach it, because far be it from me to come into your church when I don't know your parishioners to say you've got to teach this with this message and this lesson. So, we just said, 'We're asking you to preach on these topics however God leads you,'" Tiemeyer explained. "They have absolute freedom on what they are preaching and how they want to present it to their congregation."

While the campaign kicked off with a rally at the Hopkins County Rodeo Arena Jan. 31, the effort is local-church oriented.

"It's not coming to a centered event in the middle of the city where you're not in a church building. But for six weeks, it's all about inviting people to your church to take this challenge," Tiemeyer pointed out.

"The goal is, by the time they've been there five or six weeks, the body of Christ will have reached out enough to them and loved them enough to stay

actively involved become a participant in that church."

That church-centeredness is key to Welch.

"The cool thing is, it's not an event. The center of it, the focus of it is what is going on in the churches," he said. "So, we don't have to worry about having an event and after the event is over, trying to get those people touched by the event into the church."

First Baptist Church recently called Mark Bryant as pastor, but for 90 percent of the preparation of the campaign, the church was without a pastor. Welch didn't see that as any sort of obstacle.

"We had been praying about doing something that affected our city. Just because we don't have a pastor, the kingdom work goes on. It doesn't stop," Welch said.

While his church was without a pastor, other churches in the area had a variety of struggles of their own, and so they were a part of his thoughts and prayers as well.

"God had placed on my heart a concern for the churches of Sulphur Springs, so as he was dealing with me about that, I just saw this maybe as something that could unite the churches and get our focus on the cause of Christ." Welch said.

"Whether we had a pastor or not really had nothing to do with it. It had everything to do with: 'This is the opportunity. This is the time. Let's go.'"