

# **Sabinal churches celebrate life, share hope with community**

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SABINAL—Two years before Leah Radford said she heard God speak to her, he already was working well ahead of her.

In 2007, ministers from all seven of Sabinal's churches began praying for God to work in their city.

"We wanted to see God move and bring some reconciliation and some harmony," said Monty Benson, pastor of First Baptist Church.

Volunteers from all seven churches in Sabinal worked across denominations to produce an event at the local park. The event was designed to share the hope of Christ with the entire community.

That prayer laid the groundwork for an effort that would bring the city together. Two years later, God built on that foundation when he laid a burden for the town on the heart of Leah Radford, a Bentwood, Tenn., resident who formerly lived in Sabinal.

The burden remained on her heart until she shared it with her father, James Love, a former pastor of First Baptist Church in Sabinal. He in turn shared her feelings with Benson, who was moved almost to the point of

tears.

"I said to Jim: 'We've been praying for two years for God to do something. He's answered our prayers. Your daughter is his instrument to get something done,'" Benson said.

In a few months, area churches had organized and began planning an event in the park that would bring the community together for free food, games, demonstrations and a service where Christians could share their faith through music and preaching.

Throughout the process, God connected the town to other Christians, Benson said. In addition to Radford and her family in Tennessee, Christians came from Boerne and San Antonio, and even from as far away as Missouri. God seemed to work out all the details.

Christians walked every street in Sabinal and prayed for every home. They prayed for the area, which has been in a drought. As a result of their prayers, they were able to connect with people in the city and invite them to the event in the park. The temperature dropped significantly the week of the event, and it rained twice.

"This is God's movement, not ours," Benson said. "He set this in motion, not us."

Several hundred people turned out for the park event. Smiles beamed from children's faces as facepaint dotted their cheeks. Hugs were given out as often as the free hot dogs.

Don Snyder, pastor of First United Methodist Church, said the Christians were "presenting the Lord, maybe in a different way than the people of this town have seen the Lord in recent years. We're trying to bring the town together and bring the community together behind one common cause, and that is Jesus Christ."

Benson was pleased to see the town come together for the event, dubbed "Celebrate Sabinal." Christians were able to share the gospel though the activities, a pillar of Texas Hope 2010, a Baptist General Convention of Texas initiative to share the hope of Christ with every Texan by Easter 2010 and meet urgent human needs.

"Our purpose has been to reach this community, to share that this community of faith cares about you," he said. "We really do care about you. We've been praying for you. We want to share the gospel with you. It fits with the Texas Hope 2010 prayer, care and share."