

Swansboro Church Partnership Interview

Interviewer and Video Editor: Noah Sarmiento

Interviewee: Reverend Katie Gooch

Transcript Editor: Kendall Sargent

[00:00:00] **Noah:** I've begun the recording. Can you do a quick clap please? Nice, thank you.

Katie: Okay. Is that what the point of the snap thing is? Yeah, that's good to know.

Noah: So I'm gonna start with a quick introduction. Hello. My name's Noah Sarmiento. I'm a VCU student and I'm majoring in cinema and history, and it's very nice to meet you today.

Katie: It's nice to meet you.

Noah: Would you like to introduce yourself for us?

Katie: Yeah, my name is Katie Gooch and I'm the director of the Pace Center, which is the United Methodist Campus Ministry at VCU.

Noah: The first question is going to be how are you currently personally involved in the partnership between Koinonia, LCU, and Reveille?

Katie: Yeah. I am currently involved more from a cheerleading perspective. I hear updates on how things are going, and I'm able to, you know, celebrate with them when celebrations happen. I think the biggest example of that is recently when Pastor Keith Edmonds retired and I was able to go to his retirement service and to [00:01:00] celebrate him and all the amazing ministry that he'd been a part of for decades. So it's much more of a distant space that I am in at this point.

Noah: That's awesome. The second question's gonna be, when and why did you first get involved with this partnership and for how long have you been involved?

Katie: Yeah, so I got involved over 10 years ago. When I first came to Reveille, I was told that there was this longing to be more involved in the Swansboro neighborhood, and there had been relationship with the school system, with Swansboro Elementary, that we had a few mentors that were there at the time, but the Church of Reveille had never really gotten involved in the community very much. And so the way that they were hoping to do that was they were going to be building a habitat house. So I was told when I first got to Reveille back in 2012, that [00:02:00] we were going to spend a hundred thousand dollars to build a habitat house in Swansboro. And I had been to many habitat builds over the years, and I didn't feel like I knew very much about the neighborhood that I had built in. And so I thought, well, how can we really get to know the neighborhood a little bit better? So at the time I lived in the Museum District and I walked out of my apartment and got on the GRTC bus and took it down across the river to the South Side in the Swansboro neighborhood. And I just walked around a couple of weekends in

a row and, and got to see the various community and the neighborhoods, and everything that was there. And I saw a sign for the neighborhood association meeting outside of Koinonia. And so one evening, myself and Joanne Stinson, who was the youth director at Reveille at the time, went to the meeting and it was there that we met pastor Keith Edmonds. And he was gracious enough to connect with us and we [00:03:00] told him, you know, what our idea was of, not just building a Habitat house, but inviting people to be a part of building that with us. So at the time, Keith, Pastor Edmonds, was close friends with Larry Branch and they considered themselves to be the pastors for the pastors. And because the Swansboro community has a lot of small faith communities, and so each of those faith communities have leaders and the ideas that Bishop Branch and Pastor Edmonds kind of helped to pastor those leaders. And so in the midst of this, we invited those communities to be a part of the habitat build. And many of them did, and especially LCU and Koinonia, and it was great that they helped to build, but they also helped on the ceremony where we did the prayer over the house and to kind of commission it. And so that was exciting to do that.

Noah: That's awesome.

Katie: But then we, Reveille and the mission team at Reveille, kind of came [00:04:00] back to LCU and to Koinonia and asked how is it that we could help them? And that was not always received very well. In fact Pastor Edmonds has a great line that recently Phyllis Bell helped her or remind me of, which is, what is it about us that you think we need help? Right? And it was not really a great posture that Reveille came into that community. And so I worked with our congregation and members of our mission committee to think about instead, how do we ask how to be in relationship with this community? And so what we did is we invited LCU and Koinonia to be a part of a book study. And we did the book together called *When Helping Hurts*. And I think it was a six week, every Wednesday night study that we did for six weeks and the three churches came together and we split them up into different small groups so every group [00:05:00] had representatives from each of the churches and people just shared their struggles and their hopes and their dreams and their experiences and their stories. And it was in the midst of that, that people really started to build relationships with one another. So the role that I played, I guess you might use the word instigator if you wanna use that in a positive way. But I felt like there was just such abundant opportunity between these communities and all I did was to help to create the platform to see if we could all come together and make sure it was a platform where everybody felt valued and everybody felt like this was a space of dignity and a place where relationship could be formed.

Noah: Mm-hmm.

Katie: So that was my role. And in the Methodist world, pastors are appointed on kind of a year by year basis. And in 2016 I was appointed to be the pastor at the Pace Center. And so I kind of distanced myself from that relationship so that others [00:06:00] could fill in and be leaders. And it's just been really so exciting for me to see all the different leadership at Reveille, both clergy and pastors, but also just laity and leaders who have, who have stepped up and been in just super deep relationship with those communities, LCU and Koinonia on a regular basis for over a decade.

Noah: Wow, that's awesome. So what barriers were there or maybe continue to exist with the partnership?

Katie: Yeah, I think the biggest barrier was culture. Mm-hmm. What is expected of different churches? So Pastor Keith Edmunds pulled me aside the first time that he was at Reveille and he said to me, "Katie, this is amazing that I am here right now." He said, when I was growing up, I was told that black boys do not cross the interstate highway. I'm not from Richmond [00:07:00] and so I didn't fully understand the magnitude of the gap that was being bridged. So I think the barrier that existed was folks at Revelle didn't wanna offend people and they wanted to help, but they didn't know the best way to do it.

Noah: Yeah.

Katie: I think folks at Koinonia and LCU didn't know that they were being invited, because they weren't, to be a part of the relationship. So I think the biggest barrier was just the emptiness between the relationships and that there was not a lot of connection. Right. And it's just amazing that building the smallest connection over a six week book study could blossom into what it did.

Noah: Mm-hmm. And what were some successes? Successes that maybe existed at the time or maybe continue to exist with the partnership?

Katie: Yeah. You know, I think that you could name successes like the musical Mondays. [00:08:00] I think that you could name successes like the book studies that they've done, the book club. But where I would say that I, if you really were to point, I don't know if I would use the word success, but if I really were to point to fruit of this relationship, it would be when George Floyd was murdered and that these three congregations already had a deep relationship with each other and they could come together and have a conversation on a level that they never would've if that relationship hadn't already existed. And so in my mind it's amazing that we've been able to partner with these churches in celebrating Swansboro Elementary and in celebrating different, you know, Pentecosts together and worship services together and youth groups getting together. But also when things are really hard the fact that that relationship, that those folks, thought [00:09:00] to turn to each other and to connect with each other. And another example of that would be when the shooting happened in Charleston several years ago, members of Revelle attended Koinonia church and LCU, and they were able to do that from a place to say, "we are supporting you and we are standing with you." And it would not have been appropriate for them to just randomly show up in those churches if they didn't have that relationship that following Sunday. So I think to me, those are the beautiful fruits that have been the success stories. And then just the little stuff, like when I hear that couples from this church and couples from that church get together and have dinner together, you know? Or that they go to events together or that they laugh about something that somebody said. And they're friends that love each other and they're connected to each other. That to me is hard, [00:10:00] it's a hard thing to measure, but it's immeasurable.

Noah: Yeah. And you, would you consider those as the key moments in the partnership, the ones you just mentioned?

Katie: Yeah, I think that there's some key moments that made us define who we are and what we were doing really quickly. So I think that moment that I referred to earlier when Pastor Edmond said, "what it is about us that makes you think something that we need to be fixed, or that, you know, we need to be helped." Right. I think that is a key moment in all of this and got everyone really clear about what kind of relationship are we gonna have with each other. But then I think other key moments are when people are sitting around dreaming about music. And then we find out that Kathy Rainey loves music and that there's other people in the congregation that love music and how can we come together and offer music lessons to members of congregation, but also to the neighborhood itself. So those are some small, you know, key moments, but [00:11:00] then also those key moments I was saying of when tragedy hit.. And then just the small relationships, they're not key turning moments, but they built the foundation for those moments to occur. Right.

Noah: Would you view this partnership as a whole, as a success?

Katie: Oh, yes. Hands down. It's one thing in my life that I'm so proud to have been a part of it. I feel like it is just a clear example of the spirit at work in the world and how can we just be a part of what God is calling us to do. So it is a success because relationships have been formed and connections have been made and been deepened even though there were challenges in the midst of it.

Noah: And what did you like best about the partnership?

Katie: I [00:12:00] really just liked getting to know Bishop Branch and Pastor Edmonds and their wives and their congregations and their worship style. You know, I was honored enough to be invited to, Bishop Branch at the time, he was Pastor Branch and he was being, you know, elevated to Bishop and to go to his worship service. And it was just something I had never experienced before. And I love going to Koinonia and the music that they play and the special song that they have every Sunday, what I have enjoyed most is just getting to know the people. And I actually, I will say even more than that, what I have enjoyed is watching folks at Reveille develop relationships of their own and and seeing the joy that they get and the joy that members of LCU and Koinonia get when they all three come together. That's really cool for [00:13:00] me. Yeah.

Noah: And what do you think has been most beneficial for the congregations in the community as a whole? You kind of touched upon that, you just said a little bit.

Katie: Yeah. I mean, I mentioned relationship is beneficial. But I also think what's been beneficial is people have understood each other's perspectives more. I specifically remember a conversation when we did the book *When Helping Hurts* and there was an attendee, I couldn't even know name who she was. I think that she was with Koinonia and we were talking about

poverty and living in poverty and growing up in poverty, or maybe growing up in affluence and what that looked like. And somebody mentioned that when they, I think it might have been Gilpin Court, that when their family got a chance to live in Gilpin Court, they felt like they had made it, that that was such a big deal to [00:14:00] them. Meanwhile, a lot of other folks around the table had thought that was the worst place that anyone could ever want to live, and it was just neat to see around the table people talk about their childhood and talk about how they had grown up and just give everybody else a different perspective. That to me, that's something that folks have gained, is perspective. A richer understanding of each other.

Noah: And if there was another church that were to come to you and wanting to replicate the partnership you guys have with Koinonia and LCU, what advice would you give them to help them recreate that sort of partnership?

Katie; The first thing I would do is to say is to listen to each other. Right? Go in not with ideas, go in with questions. Go in with an intention of expecting the best [00:15:00] out of each other and making sure that that other congregation would be in a position to do the same. Here at Pace, what we focus on is learning from one another. And what we say is we're gonna come together, it's gonna be a diverse group of people and we're gonna share our stories with one another. And we're gonna do this expecting to learn. I think that if you are going to create this magic again, everybody who comes to the table needs to have that attitude of expecting to learn, expecting to grow, expecting to be changed by the other, not necessarily to change the other. I think that is a key foundational piece to that relationship. And if you don't have that, I'm not sure that, you know, you will have different fruit, but it certainly won't be the fruit that has blossomed out of the relationship between LCU, Koinonia, and Reveille. [00:16:00]

Noah: That was really well put. Thank you. Thanks. That's all I have. Okay. Thank you so much for—

Katie: Yeah, I feel like I said a lot more in the last one, but is that—

Noah: No, you're okay.

Katie: Is that good?

Noah: Yeah. No, that was awesome. That was wonderful. Thank you so much.

Katie: Is there any dynamic that you feel like you wish somebody spoke more about or—

Noah: No, not really. I was thinking about external events that affected it, but you really mentioned that with George Floyd and Charleston. So I thank you for that. Yeah.

Katie: Yeah. I'm trying to think if there's anything else to share.

Noah: Yeah. Is there any one last message or something that you want to leave?

Katie: Yes, I think I said this in our first interview. What I am doing today at Pace is because of what I learned in that Koinonia and LCU and Reveille relationship. That to me was the first time I had really [00:17:00] experienced what it could look like when people came together and valued one another. And when I came to Pace, it's been exciting to basically devote all of my time towards that and to do it on a campus that's incredibly diverse and students are hungry to connect with each other, but they're nervous to do so and they don't, you know, wanna offend each other. Creating a space early on in people's lives when they're young adults and they're kind of forming who they want to be and what communities they want to have. It has been really neat to do that with thousands of students at this point. I've been at PACE for seven years and I am only able to do it because of what I learned in that relationship with those churches. And because members of those partnerships were open to learning and growing with one another. So just wanna [00:18:00] thank everyone that's been involved with it because it has affected my life and= I like to think it's been affecting actually thousands of people's lives since then. Thank you so much.

Noah: Yeah. Thank you.

Katie: Thank you.