

Swansboro Church Partnership Interview

Interviewer and Video Editor: Noah Sarmiento

Interviewees: Pastor Keith and First Lady Michelle Edmonds

Transcript Editor: Jane Tucker

Noah: [00:00:00] I've started the recording now. Hello, my name's Noah Sarmiento. I'm a VCU student, and I'm a major in cinema and history and it's really nice to meet both of you today. And can you introduce yourselves for me?

Michelle: My name is Reverend Michelle Edmonds. I am a minister here at the Kononia Christian Church. Nice to meet you. You as well.

Pastor Keith: My name is Keith Edmonds and I'm a recently retired minister appointed. Nice to meet you too.

Noah: So the first question's going to be how are you currently personally involved in the partnership between Kononia, LCU, and Reveille?

Michelle: For me, I have been involved since basically the inception. Mm-hmm. And so, my involvement mainly entails attending events that might be sponsored by the partnership. Or events that one of the churches may be having on their own, but just trying to support the, the different [00:01:00] churches. And so there's always, you know a need to support when there's a partnership and showing that you are involved with what's going on.

Noah to Pastor Keith: And how are you involved?

Pastor Keith: I said, well, my, well, my, myself, I met with a couple of our brothers and sisters who just do regular actions. And we came into a friendship that I believe God set. This was during the pandemic. So I think God was setting the stage for a new year for not only us, but for Reveille, too. And they, and we started just talking at first and having talks and [00:02:00]. I, I just enjoyed the people. People, people that are nice, just great people. We were. Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Noah: And when did you first get involved and for how long? You said from the very beginning?

Michelle: Yes. Since the very beginning. 2013. Wow. And so celebrating 10 years. This year, right? Yeah. I remember the person who was very instrumental in starting the partnership. And that was Katie Gooch. And so she had attended a meeting of our civic group--at the time my husband was the chairperson of the [community] civic group that met here at, at Koinonia. And so Katie was out in the neighborhood and just trying to outreach Swansboro School right around the corner [00:03:00] and she attended the civic meeting and that's how she met my husband. And from then it's like it just took off. You know, Katie introduced some of Reveille's members to Pastor Keith and he introduced some of us to, to them and and brought in Bishop Branch and, you know, it just warped into something, what it is now, right?

Noah: Yes. And so what were some key moments in the development of this partnership and when did they take place?

Michelle: We have tried several things [to reach people]. To, to, you know, not everybody. You're not gonna reach everybody, right, by doing the same thing, but, by the different things that you do do, you may reach somebody that you didn't reach with the other event that you may have planned. We have had women teas and so from that we developed prayer partners. From that we [held a joint worship service] and at the end of it [00:04:00], I believe it was, we started different groups--like there was a worship group, a transportation group, an activities group. And it was one more, the name of that escapes me, but we got together and we planned different things.

But one other thing that was instrumental for me was when the George Floyd incident happened. That was an eye opener for everyone. Black and white. To the, to a white church who probably had never experienced or even knew anything like that. Our dialogue was very instrumental in helping them, I believe, to heal from what was being seen, what was being heard. And so that was instrumental, that, that was very important for me.

Because if you're talking about partnering a white church in the black church most, well, some people may wonder, well, how we're gonna do [00:05:00] that? You know, we're different, but not necessarily. Not necessarily. Right. You have to learn each other to determine what we have in common. And I feel we have more in common than what our differences are. And so whenever there were incidents like that, we always tried to bridge the gap to see what information we could bring to our churches, what we could learn from that and each other to make each other stronger in, in, relation to it.

Pastor Keitih: But also during that time it was little things. Going around and I run into them (folks from Reveille or LCU). I might run into somebody out, out there in a store or something. They, they remembered my name. It was, it just gave me a good feeling, you know, and I just [00:06:00] kinda they, they're some nice people. Real nice people. Doing, doing good things for somebody like when we were delivering wood to someone.

Michelle: But yeah. We often, we, we found out that once we got to know each other's names we used them regularly, you know? Right. And, and that was so very touching for me, you know, to go to Reveille and, you know, and you go to the door and it's like, hi Michelle. Hi Michelle. I didn't know their name, but it didn't matter. And so then, and I noticed that they use name plates, name cards, or tags. And so then I would start peeping at the name tag so I could be able to call them by name as well. But it does feel good when you get called by name.

Noah: And what were some barriers that were there or maybe continue to exist with [00:07:00] the partnership, if any?

Michelle: I don't know if this is a barrier or not. Our church is located in South Side and Reveille is on Cary Street. Right. And so the neighborhoods are different. I don't know if that was a barrier for some of the parishioners there or not. They may not have felt comfortable.

Coming to this side of Richmond, the south side or not. Because we always tended to see usually the same people, but not as many people would visit here as it would be when we visited them. So I don't know if that's a barrier or not. But just something that I guess you could say I, I paid attention to. It wouldn't have stopped my, my involvement with it, but, you know, just something I [00:08:00] noticed. So, and like I said, I don't know if it's a barrier. I'd be curious to know, you know, is that really, has that affected attendance sometime? I don't know.

Noah to Pastor Keith: And were there any that you noticed?

Pastor Keith: Well, the only, only thing I noticed is that when, when we interlocked with different things that everybody kind of put a hand in and tried to be a help in it. And I just, I just like dealing with those, those kind of people who don't mind putting their hands in and getting dirty doing right. You know? I think, I think that's what, that's how we bonded so well. Cause we were reaching forth our hands. [00:09:00] To help others. Right.

Noah: And what successes were there or continue to exist with the partnership?

Michelle: That we're still together. Yeah. And like I said, it's been 10 years and we're still, we still enjoy each other. Right. We, we still enjoy being around each other and planning new activities and events. To me, that's a success in itself. Yeah.

Noah to Pastor Keith: How about you? Do you agree?

Pastor Keith: Uhhuh. Oh yeah.

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

Michelle: Definitely. Definitely. I would. Why so? Because we're still meeting, right? Because we're still here and we're looking for, we're looking at ways [00:10:00] to keep it going. New and fresh and innovative ideas that, you know, that we can do to get our children involved, all generations. And I think that's what will help to build not only the partnership, but it helps us and our relationship as Christians. One to another.. You know, holding your hand up, holding your, your neighbor's hand up when they need help.

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

Michelle: What did I like most? Hmm. Always when we got together to eat. It's just something about breaking bread with one another. You know I [00:11:00] don't feel comfortable just eating at a table with anybody. And so for me to be able to sit at the table with my friends from Reveille, my friends from LCU, and feel comfortable, you know, breaking bread together, you know, sharing stories, crying together, laughing together. To me that speaks success. And so I believe that this is something that, that will continue. Right?

Noah to Pastor Keith: Yes. And was there anything that you personally liked about the partnership?

Pastor Keith: I like the other ministries, those two ministries coming together with us. It, it was just great fun. When we get all three churches together like that. And, and it could be for a service, but everybody is up for it. Right. You know, and it, [00:12:00] it helped me to want to do more interaction. Yeah. Yeah. Seeing Bishop Branch, a friend of mine, as a pastor and just the way he handled his pastorate, the way he pastored. I liked the way Reveille's pastor pastored, too. I just enjoy it. Yeah. Yeah. It gives me another view. You know what I see? We are all Christian. Exactly. And we are God's children and we are all one. All of us. [00:13:00]

Michelle: That was one of the things that I looked for when we first started meeting--what were our commonalities. I didn't look for what we were different in but what can I connect with in this person that is similar to me or similar to how our Christian virtue should be. And so I think that's another reason this partnership is gonna last.

Noah: And what has been most beneficial for you, the congregations, and the community as a whole with this partnership?

Michelle: We organized a prayer walk. And the first year we did it, of course, this was before Covid, we were able to actually knock on doors and talk to people and prayed with them and, you know, walk the street and pass out flyers and pass out tracts and things like that. I think that was just so instrumental for me, [00:14:00] that as a whole, you know, the three churches were coming together to win souls for Christ. And for me, that's like the home run right there. You know, that's the Super Bowl right there--when we get together, we are winning souls for Christ. And I'm hoping we can get back to that since Covid is beginning to die. No, it's not gone. But that we can at least find a way to do it again.

Noah: I guess the last question's going to be for both of you. If another church were to come to you wanting to replicate the partnership that you guys had with LCU and Reveille, what advice would you give them?

Michelle: Just like I said earlier, look for commonalities instead of differences. We all have our own things about us that people may not [00:15:00] like. You have to get to learn people. And that's the thing, getting to know people takes time. You know, it's not gonna happen overnight. But the very one that you may feel is least like you may turn out to be the most like you.

And so I would advise any other churches that's looking to form a type of partnership like that first go in there with prayer, you know, making sure that you have the covering of God. Your people, the leaders in the group, if they and the pastor set the example, I believe their parishioners will follow what they do

Pastor Keith: Well for me, I think that you get a group like that, you have to put your whole heart in it. [00:16:00] Put your whole heart in and treat people like you want to be treated. And let's do those type things and be open to new suggestions. On, on anything you can think differently. I think this scripture is good and another person likes another one better, you know? That's okay.

Our differences can be the best part of us. That's right. We could go at it in a way that we are looking for the positive. We can strike the bone. That's right.

Noah: Is there any last message you would like to leave with?

Michelle: I appreciate this [00:17:00] opportunity to share how we feel and what we've gotten from the partnership and what the partnership has given to us. And I just look forward to many more opportunities.

Noah to Pastor Keith: Is there anything you'd like to say?

Pastor Keith: Yeah, I just would like to thank Pastor Moon of Reveille coming to us and taking us by the hand, and praying with us. Some churches, you know, you can't even go into them unless you somewhere close to them to what they want, you know? But I, I really enjoy, and I thank God for them and all that they do. Because they are active in the community and come by. Anytime you can see them going down the street. They been by somebody's house [00:18:00]--not the church. They been by somebody, one of our members' houses. Cause they seen them and they talk. That's right.

Noah: I'd like to thank you both for coming here today. Thank you so much for your time. And thank you for your well thought answers. It was a pleasure interviewing you and I hope you have a good day.

Pastor Keith and Michelle: Thank you so much. Thank you, Noah.