

Swansboro Church Partnership Interview

Interviewer and Video Editor: Noah Sarmiento

Interviewees: Bishop Larry and Executive Pastor Lynette Branch

Transcript Editor: Carol Hampton

March 3, 2023

Running time: 1:03

Noah: [00:00:00] So I'm beginning the recording. So, I'm just going to start out with a quick introduction. Hi, 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 both today.

Larry & Lynette: Likewise. Nice to meet you, Noah.

Noah: And would you guys introduce yourselves?

Larry: Okay. Yes. I'm Bishop Larry Branch. I'm the pastor here at the Love Center of Unity of Full Gospel Church. And we've been here for 30, 30 years at least.

Lynette: Okay. And I'm Lynette Galloway Branch. I am the executive pastor at this church, and we are, I've been married to him for 49 years this year. 49 years.

Larry: Yes. Next year.

Lynette: Exciting! so you know why he wants to throw me up sometimes.

Noah: Okay. So, the first question's going to be: How are you currently, personally involved in the partnership between Koinonia, [00:01:00] LCU and Reveille?

Larry: Okay. Well, our involvement at Reveille is in our partnership with projects, meetings. We, we come together for worship service. We come together for book discussions. We have topics that relate to racial issues. Some of those are focused on current events that, that have happened. And also, a little bit more personal. We, we've developed some individual relationships with persons from Reveille, which has been very rewarding.

Lynette: We started out with our meetings; it was more of a getting to know you kind of thing. And we developed some teams to address how we wanted to meet with each other. And like he said [00:02:00] we would meet, we would share worship services, which is always nice, and meet maybe several times during the year to either address issues or to fellowship. We've even had a couple of picnics, which are very good and informal and allow you with that, getting to know each other kind of thing in an informal way. Yeah.

Noah: So, when and why did you first get involved with this partnership and for how long have you been involved?

Larry: Well at least 10 years, I'll say that. Don't know exactly the date. But I was invited to a meeting with Pastor Keith Edmonds from Koinonia. And that way I was involved, got involved. There was Kathy Rainey and Sheelagh Davis, who were acting as liaisons from Reveille, to get some [00:03:00] involvement in the community of Swansboro. I think Reveille was already involved with the school, but wanted to get involved with the community. And so, speaking with Pastor Keith Edmonds, the invitation was given to me. And so, we began to talk about things that were going on in the community and how Reveille may be of some assistance. And so, looking at the church, you know, community and, I think when we looked at that, we think, okay, well there's some things we could do, you know, in the church and with the church. And, and, and that's how we began. And it moved from there. You know, there was a need here in the building that Reveille satisfied - a roofing issue. And so, we were blessed to be able to receive assistance from them in that effort.

Lynette: And of course, once he's introduced, then he introduces it to us. And I guess I get to hear it first because I get to hear it at home. But our members [00:04:00] wanted to be a part of it as well, and that's kind of critical to get buy-in from, from members. And it's like with anything, you don't always have 100% in either way, but the fact that your people want to come and not only get to know Reveille better, but get to know Koinonia better. I mean we know them for a while, but it's different because you spend more time together.

Noah: So, what are some key moments in the development of this partnership and when did they take place?

Larry: Well, the fact that we initially got together, that was a key moment because the theme and vision of this church was to move into developing a unity among churches and among races. So, if you can see our banner there speaks to love and unity. And [00:05:00] so meeting Kathy and Sheelagh was a great opportunity to advance the vision that we had for the church. So that initial meeting was key in it in itself. So, we went from there to meeting the new pastor, Doug Forrester. And that helped to expand and develop our meeting because, again, in order for us to have this partnership, the leadership needed to be on board with it. And he was very instrumental in maintaining and developing and pushing and expanding. So, I really appreciate, so meeting him was a great opportunity and a key moment in the development of the partnership.

Lynette: And then I, I was thinking about it in terms of a key moment for me as it related with all of us was the murder of Mr. [00:06:00] George Floyd. That put, I'll just say, put racism right there so that you could see it, feel it, internalize it. And, of course, we knew of these things as African-Americans, you, you're very much aware of it. You're pretty much aware of it most of your lives, particularly as you get to be more adult. But that was there for the world to see and it was obvious that Reveille felt that as well. So that allowed us to come together and address issues even of police violence, that type of thing. And to be maybe begin to talk a little bit more about racism. We had an opportunity to in this. We had a policing group. I was a part of that. We had an opportunity to interview some of our leaders in the community and in the [00:07:00] state, and to get some answers about policing in the state of Virginia. Of course, we can only talk about local. But that, that stood out for me. And I, I guess because it, it really impacted me

so much. It was good to be in a place where you're not only talking to African Americans about this, but you're talking to others. And their visualization of that episode, I think highlighted some of the things that we really needed to address.

Noah: So, I guess this leads into the next question. What barriers were there and/or continue to exist with the partnership, if any?

Lynette: So, I, I would say one thing that I addressed just a bit you never get 100% of the people to come together. And you have to allow [00:08:00] that people have the opportunity to feel and think the way that they want to think. And I think that's on both, on both sides. So, you move forward with who you have, but it would be nice if everyone came to the table. So, so that was kind of a barrier.

Another barrier as I saw it, and I'm gonna be very transparent here, was that I think there can be a discomfort if you're not African American in coming to this community. Maybe even fear. So, if that's the case, then we are more likely to come to your site. Now that doesn't go for everything.

Larry: Well, when you say your site . . .

Lynette: We, we would go to Reveille for most of our engagements. Thank you for the clarity. And I did recall in the conversation, actually [00:09:00] hearing some people say that they were uncomfortable coming here at night. So, it's not that we don't understand it. We do. But then that limits some of your space and your experiences because experience is different here. I mean, you can come here, you're here now, you see this is LCU, it's very different. So, the entire experience is different. So, I think that got into the way of some activities that we would have because they were held at night.

Larry: Mm-hmm . . . and cultural differences still exist. Okay. And, logistics in the sense that, you know, Reveille is in the West End area of our city, and we're in the South Side. So, we have, you know, we are in different spaces, you know. Different spaces create different cultural experiences and atmospheres and all of that goes on. So, I think that that still is a barrier in itself that enhances, you know, [00:10:00] our cultural history. And I think that when we talk about what goes on in our country all of us have been affected by what we've been, what we have experienced, what we've grown up in. There is a different experience of most of the members of Reveille than we are since, again, we're talking about a majority white congregation and a majority of black congregation.

We, we are different. You know, a lot of us grew up really not experiencing where Reveille is. So that was kind of Windsor Farms that, that particular area, western area. It wasn't an area where many blacks actually lived or frequented, you know, from our historical perspective. So it was that, that kind of a barrier.

And so, I think that what we would, what we experienced traditionally, what we experienced culturally, our educational background, you know, you can tell now that many things that are [00:11:00] happening in our society, which you seem to have selective memory when it comes to history. You know what, you know, so those kinds of things are still there. So when you talk

about being uncomfortable with this partnership we, we'd have to recognize that we have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable if we are going to address the issue as well as develop a really, really good relationship, being transparent and honest, really feeling like, you know, we, we have an ease, well, not an ease, I don't use that word that, that, that we are willing to address some uncomfortable subjects. Yeah.

Lynette: You know, I, I was thinking today actually on my way here, and I don't know if this relates to this, but I really was thinking about it that when you come together [00:12:00] from two different cultural backgrounds, and let's face this none, neither of these communities or races are monolith, you know, very different experience for many whites and for many blacks. We all don't come from the same background, but if you want to come together, together and truly develop relationship and start to talk, because we, we do want to address what's going on, it requires a nakedness.

And I think that that takes time. And I think relationship building where I'm willing to trust you with my nakedness and you are willing to trust me will help us to move closer together and gel and even understand each other, each other [00:13:00] better. So. Those are things that I think, you know, we've had kind of like 10 years to work on it, and I would daresay we're definitely at a different place . . .yeah. . . right, than where we were at the beginning. And that's a lovely thing.

As an aside, someone shared on Facebook an activity that we, many of us went to - retirement of Pastor Keith - and one of the members at Reveille put it on Facebook. And I said that I love these people at Koinonia, the pastor, and it was Jill. And I said, by the way, Jill, I love you too. So, so it just gave me that, you know, that developed because of us coming together.

Noah: And that really leads well to the next question. Okay. What successes were there or continued to exist today?

Larry: No. No, no. I, I think that well, [00:14:00] I, I, first, when I first got this question, I wanted to get an understanding of what you may have meant; or are you asking just what I think success is,

Lynette: or even what they meant by success?

Noah: Right. Yeah. I think for me, I would like to know what you think. Yeah. As a success. Okay. Per it could be personal or, yeah, for the church or overall.

Larry: Well, it's interesting. I think usually when you're trying to measure success, you know, you've had some goals. Goals and some objectives and, and we really didn't set off in the beginning with goals and objectives written down to say, we are trying to meet this and meet that. But I do think that the mere fact that we are continuing and have continued, that's a success. The fact that we are able to have some difficult conversations I think that that's success.

You know [00:15:00] meeting some persons and developing some personal relationships, as I said with pastor Douglas Forrester. That was, that was awesome. Pastor Moon, Pastor Moon,

the present pastor. Yeah, man, you know, we are really working at developing that relationship. Some others, as well, and I don't want to just name persons, you know, but they, they're often persons that we really have developed relationship with. And I think that when we discuss issues because of the time that we spend together; we can see that there has been some empathy, because of our sharing our experiences, you know, together. So, I like to think that just the fact that we have the relationship and a continuing to do it is a success in itself.

Lynette: And I guess I, you know and I had that question as well, what does success, success mean? In particular [00:16:00] but I do like that some lines of communication are open and they're relatively consistent. I think there's always more growth and more people to know. But I think that the fact that there's this desire to continue because it, what is it? Attrition, you know, Is that something? Yeah. And in anything you can have an attrition rate, you know? Yeah. So, the fact that, that there's people who are still invested. And I think this is interesting because this is almost a little bit of review, so what do we do next and how do we pull back even some people that maybe you know, are less invested?

And, you know, when you talked about Covid, COVID was an issue for us too. It's always wonderful to continue to meet, even when you [00:17:00] meet by Zoom, but it's something special about being in the same place. So, I think those, those times that we're together and we're at the same place and we're truly eye to eye, have an open discussion, has been an excellent opportunity for growth and for learning and to hear other stories.

Because, you know, we we're not the only ones with stories. Other people have stories in that. Yeah. And I want to hear, yeah, I want to know those stories too.

Larry: And, and you know, I, I, I think also when you, when you, when you use the word success and, and, and, and I don't know, did you say what success is? Or success? Yeah. I, I guess the idea is that we can say we've come a long ways. And we have a long way to go out there. We're not where we were at the beginning. Yeah, yeah, yeah. A good old church saying is, I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not, what I used to be. [00:18:00]

Noah: I like that. So, you guys talked about, I guess, successes you thought personally happened, but the next question is do you view the partnership as a whole, as a success?

Lynette: I do. I think that again, the fact that we are still together and still coming and that we learn some things, you know, even worship, types of worship are different. Yeah.

Larry: All preacher churches have different worship styles. Yeah.

Lynette: And to, to go in as a noisy group of people to a place that's pretty quiet, and it's a different, but it's, it's always nice because you always knew that you were welcome space. So [00:19:00] those things are always good. I think you always have to know or to determine the next steps. How to make it better. Things that we need to do to be more transparent because I think the transparency is kind of key. But the fact that we say: partners, hmm, is an awesome word. That means there's adjoining together. And there's Koinonia's hand, and you got Reveille's hand, you know, you know that we are together. And if you, if you even think about it

in a law firm, by the time you reach partner, your name goes up on the building, you know. So you know, in a medical practice, I'm medicine so you know, at first, you know, the lower guys don't always come in and ladies don't always come in with their names there, even [00:20:00] though they participate. So, so that means that there's a voice. For each group that you don't have to be the same, because we aren't; we don't have to agree on everything, but we agree that we are gonna talk about whatever we talk about and have the experiences that we do, and still maintain partnership togetherness.

Larry: That was pretty good.

Lynette: Bless. Yes. Thank you.

Noah: So, I guess for you guys personally, what did you like best about the partnership?

Larry: Well, I guess, can I put my finger on one thing? I guess the fact that we have a partnership. You know, that's an understanding that there's still some things to learn, you know? [00:21:00] I think when you have people from different cultures, different backgrounds it's easy to develop stereotypes and rely on those stereotypes as you have interacted with, with, with persons. And then finding out that some of those stereotypes just aren't true. And, and it's not just what you think about somebody else, but what somebody else, you know, may have thought about you. So breaking down those stereotypes, mm-hmm, I think is something personal that, that I have.

I also am acknowledging my own issues when it comes to race relations. You know the things that I thought was and wasn't the things that I thought that I may have gotten over and hadn't. And acknowledging that there are some things I need to change in an effort to make [00:22:00] this thing work. So that was pretty much a personal success, you know, in the sense that breaking down these barriers was not just one sided, but with both sides.

Lynette: I like that there are relationships. I like that. And it's not just, you know, the people make up the congregation, so it's like with anything else, you develop some relationships. With those groups with individuals. And it offers an opportunity to even get to know others better outside of just when we meet, because I think that helps to, that's a more one-on-one. And if you start there and you say, well, I don't think this is gonna [00:23:00] work. You know, we've not had that. But I just think I like that because I am a relationship person.

I think that we will never miss out of all that goes on, the fact that you've developed and touched and had some interaction, some real interaction with people, that's, those are things you don't, you don't miss. So I think that's been very much of a success. I think that the fact that we've had to listen, we've been in positions where we've had to listen and had to not only speak and we both are native Richmonders, Richmond's history, as it relates to race relations.

It's heavy. And when he said people didn't go into Windsor Farms, our people did go into Windsor Farms, but it was to [00:24:00] work. It was not to visit someone that we knew. So it's a different kind of relationship. So here we are. I'm a descendant of my parents and their four

parents. Establishing something that my parents and four parents did not have the opportunity to do for the most part.

That, that it is, that there is an openness to do that, is a success. And it, of course, it says we are thankful at a different time, not exactly where we need to be. I was just listening to NPR, so you know, you, you know, I know what kind of nation we are in. We're divided. So the fact that we have one group that's not divided or working against the divisions, with intentions. With intention is a success. And [00:25:00] one that I would hope to continue to do as I deal with all of the other things that everybody else is dealing with in this culture.

Larry: Yeah. And I think too, that we made an effort to be spiritual going to the neighborhood together with ministry in mind, you know, praying, giving out food. There's some things we've done - we have done, excuse me - from the church side or Christian side or spiritual side, that kind of helped us too, I think. See that we all need and we all can be a representative of God. And when we put our efforts together, we can move the Kingdom of God, right?

Lynette: And that we are on one accord with that. Doesn't mean that our theology is the same because it's not, there are differences. But when your concern is for a soul, an [00:26:00] individual, the whole person, then you do that, you address the needs of the heart, and, and we have gone as a group in our partnership in the community, like he said to go house, to house and of course to feed. Reveille is very supportive. We have a food ministry. Mm-hmm. and Reveille is very supportive. So those are always great.

Larry: Yeah, that's true. You know, but what we didn't do that kind of ministry in that Reveille community though, as far as that. Right. Knocking on doors or standing on the corners and praying that that was not something that we did. Don't really know why, but we didn't.

Lynette: Well, well, that, that was out. You say what I no, no, no. You saw what I was getting to because this is what you know there. Okay. We're good. Okay. There are needs in every community. Mm-hmm. Needs of the soul now. No, I don't expect people who live in Windsor Farms apartments need food.[00:27:00] You know? Although I don't know anything. One thing you're taught, and we talked about this as a group at Reveille: make no assumptions. You know, you have to assess everything so you don't make assumptions. And I'll throw this in. That was something we were told when our food bank. Don't assume that a person who drives up in a Lincoln Town car doesn't need food.

So you, you serve, but this isn't the only community. Even though we are connected because of this community that reach out the needs, God absolutely . So people in Windsor Farms, you know, they, they need to, many of them need God too. Stress impacts everything. Heartache impacts everybody. Yes. Loss of [00:28:00] finances impacts everybody, even when you have money.

Larry: Loss of family, sickness, you know?

Lynette: Yeah. I always say the richest person will give up every cent for health because it's so critical. So that wasn't. We did not do that. It was always directed here, and I think that it just has

to be directed in all the communities that we touch because there's a need. But again, the fact that we were doing this as a team and each had a voice, sometimes you have to think it and process it and realize that your way is not quite my way. But let's see how we can come together and, and fit, make it fit for both of us. So if those were successes without objectives and standards and all of that think so. So good.

Noah: Okay. We're back. Okay. [00:29:00] So I guess this is kind of similar to the other questions, but what has been most beneficial for you, the congregations and the, I guess we can talk about more of the community as a whole. What's been most beneficial?

Larry: Wow. Hmm. Well, I, I guess to answer that question would probably be repetitive, you know, be redundant, in the sense that you know, just again, expanding the church, expanding my own self, you know, expanding you know, the experience of the relationship, you know? Seeing an opportunity to really, the vision that we have for the church to develop unity and break down some barriers, not only from a racial perspective, but a religious perspective.

You know it is stated and it's such a statement that the [00:30:00] most segregated hour in America is 11 o'clock Sunday, on Sunday morning because you have so many different churches, so many different people races going, you know to their house of worship. And, and so this gave us an opportunity to really address that in a practical way, and we did more than just pray about it. We actually did something about it. So that was one of the greatest benefits that I received out of this partnership. Right.

Lynette: And, and actually as I thought about that question I thought about the time that we went to knock on doors in this community and I had a member from Revel as my partner. And these two diverse women came to the same door to offer the same thing in this community. I like that we, that our community saw that. Now, mind you, this community [00:31:00] is changing. Yeah. Constantly. It's not the community we met when we came here those years ago. It's evolving.

Larry: So coming more diversified.

Lynette: Yeah. You know, more Latinos more Anglos, more, more whites. So but I liked it that we were two, there's different people with the same mission and the same mission to touch this community with not only our prayers. But how can we serve you? So that was that's a good thing for the community to see that you, that you're touching, particularly if you're diverse, that it's just more than one group that wants to bless you.

Noah: And if, say another church were to come to you and ask and they want to go about a partnership similar to yours, what advice would you give them on [00:32:00] how to do it successfully?

Lynette: I think first of all, that you have to have the right fit. That may come with getting to know each other a little bit before. But you have to have two churches with a same mission in mind. . Even if things evolve and you just decide to address other things as you come together, it's gotta be that openness and willingness to be a part, to be a partner. And that may take some

time. I think Reville might say they sent out to a lot of different churches and did not get a response. I think that that the two or more churches who agree to be partners, there has to be an agreement to be open and transparent. And very often it may start just [00:33:00] like this started with pastors. Yeah. Getting to know each other.

Larry: Yeah. Yeah. Because they are, they are who the people see, and it needs to be, have the appearance that these guys look like they're connected. Or they're communicating, or you can see something that's growing. So that might be the first start before trying to engage the entire congregation. Yeah. Yeah. I think practically, you know, the idea that you have a similar goal, you know, so if churches want to come together, I would say, okay, what, what would you like to do?

What would you, what's your goal here? What's your thinking process? Definitely need leadership, you know to be able to say, okay, we are working together in this. I mean, it, it wouldn't be frequently, would be fatal to have the, the leaderships not wanting to do it and the congregation want to do it, or the, or vice versa, you know? [00:34:00] So that would be I think the number one, you know, that you have that leadership and that goal similar goal. In order to get that done to be, to understand that you're going to be uncomfortable. Let's be willing to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. I wanna say that again.

You know and also if you are in a learning process, you can't come into a relationship with I'm right. I've got all the answers. You know I know and not understanding that if you are in a learning process, there, there may be some things, or there will be some things that you may disagree with, but it's not a disagreeing from the standpoint of that of who's right or who's wrong. It may be different, and you can learn from that, from that difference, you know? So I think that that willingness to [00:35:00] be open and transparent and willing to learn. I think that that's important.

Lynette: I think you always have to acknowledge where you are, where you stand, what your beliefs are, even if they're biased even if they don't sound Christian, meaning there's no love in there, you know? I always believe you have to start, you have to see you. You've got to see you and know what you're bringing into to any relationship with people. But having said that, you also have the mindset that I know what I think and I know what I feel. But I'm in, I'm here to find out if what I think and I feel is totally correct. [00:36:00] Have I been in error in some ways. So you have to be willing enough to be introspective, but to know that if I, if I want relationship up, I wanna get to know these people or a group of people then I've gotta be willing to be open and acknowledge that everything that I thought and everything that I believed just may not have been accurate.

So I encourage it. I really encourage it in these times because, you know, we're divided from Washington throughout and this is what we see and this is what we feel. I think this too, that it can be very challenging because we live in a very political society where, you know, where what you stand on and what you believe in. And, you know, I'm [00:37:00] writing in today and I'm hearing about banning books and that kind of thing. All of that, you're going to find out those ideologies are in the church. So you bring that and you have to be aware when you're being

totally political because that will defeat the coming together, regardless of what side, what side it is.

And we know it, it's kind of like a marriage. When I married him, he was completely whole, but he brought in everything that his family and society had taught him. Everything. Same thing with me. And then we, you know, come together and we kind of get to learn each other. We're still learning, even though it's been a long time. But the intention was to learn and to develop a stronger relationship. So I think [00:38:00] intention is critical. You've gotta come in with the right intention.

Noah: So I guess a quick, if you would like to give us a quick summary of the story of your church and where they came from.

Larry: Well, who our church started with me again, it was 30 years ago. We were a part of another ministry and it, actually, that church I was in split. Okay. And out of that split is where I got the idea, or I believe I was a shared division of unity coming together. And there was a need, I thought for, intentionality about addressing the divisions that's in the church.

And as I spoke to the division that was in my particular church, it expanded to the Christian world as a whole, how [00:39:00] divided we are. And we call those divisions, denominations. But we are so proud of those things, but it is still division. And so as I spoke to that, we also saw that racism and the different races was a part of that division and in some cases, foundational to that division. So we had to address those things. And so we started with a Bible study and we started you know, maybe one day a week in a church. We started in a hotel, you know until we moved to the place that we are now, you know, and our congregation has flourished and diminished.

I think that the you know, the pandemic has done some things. So I, we've been in here for say 30, 30 odd years. And you know, I think that as time has gone [00:40:00] on, I'm 70, you know, two years old at this time, and you know, you're looking at, you know, the next space and place for ministry. And so it's been an excellent and exciting journey and it is never ending. You know, it may transition, but it's never ending. So, I'm excited about it.

Lynette: And I think once you do ministry you know, you call it church, but you're here to minister to people. And all of us, he taught us, all of us are ministers. All of us are ministering to someone. And that to me makes it clear that ministry is diverse. And that they're many ways to minister outside of the walls. And I would dare say most of the ministry occurs outside of the walls, [00:41:00] particularly for me that my touching or attempting to heal in some way. I'm a nurse practitioner, so that's what I've done. But it expands greater than just medicine because of what you find out about the needs of people. So that's the good thing that as we transition, because he says he's 72, I'm 71. We not spring chickens anymore there is a, there is another level. And to begin to share that ministry with some more cultures internationally as he's done more than, than I have. So it's been wonderful. You learned so much about people. You learn so much about human beings and as he has had a pastoral group, you learn that what he experiences, other pastors are experiencing the same [00:42:00] thing.

Larry: So I think also that in the journey you find there's more to God than what we have, I guess, focused on. You know, a lot of times churches are about perpetuating an institution and not really focusing on the purpose and the ministry of God. So, so that's, I guess what has been really exciting about the church. Understand that the church is an institution. A lot of times churches basically bricks and mortar, and some persons put it God in that box, you know, that, that kind of thing. But their experience with Reveille, just the experience with Koinonia, my journey these years that we've been, you know, in church or partnership walking with God, I find that there's more to God. There's more of God to you. [00:43:00] and the thing about that, the exciting part about that, is that the more you know about God, you find out there's more to know. Yeah. Oh God.

Lynette: But you yet don't know. Our former pastor as children would say go to the ocean and take out as much water as you can and keep pulling the water out until you're tired and look back at the ocean. Doesn't look like you've had any impact on it. So what we think we know about God is, yeah, there's still God in the ocean. You didn't pull out all the water. Yeah. There's a lot. Yeah. That's right. And we're just in the Atlantic Ocean. So there's so much to learn about God. And I think you learn that too in other cultural experiences. Yeah. Yeah. And what their [00:44:00] perception is.

Noah: I like that. Ocean. Oh, I like that one a lot. Yeah. We're gonna move to the Swansboro Elementary School. So how and when did Reveille get started at Swansboro Elementary with volunteering and mentoring?

Larry: Well, actually I don't really know the history of Reveille with Swansboro. I guess for me, when we moved into the area, we were about three, four blocks from Swansboro Elementary School, and just connecting with them, they had community action. We had some of our members, some of the children to go to the school. So we got a chance to meet some of the teachers.

They wanted a safe place for their children to go if something were to happen, you know? And as you know, lots of stuff be going on, you know, unfortunately, you know, [00:45:00] but was this a safe place they could use? Well said. You know, of course. And then part of my educational journey, I had an opportunity to do some internship at the school. So we are able to meet some of the counselors and principal, teachers, you know, do some things. You know there and we actually had a member of our church to be a liaison, you know, from our church too. So when they had community meetings, you know, they would go, we would go even some PTA meetings, you know that kind of thing. Did some reading over there.

Lynette: Supplies you know, they may need clothing for the children or whatever.

Larry: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, sometimes, you know, schools have some need of just school materials, books, pencils, people supplies. Yeah. Supplies, you know, so we did, we did some of those things. We had cook out here in the yard and invited the school to come over and teach us to participate. Yeah. We did that. That was a great time. You know, so we've had a partnership, you know? Things really [00:46:00] changed, man, when we had the pandemic.

It made a whole difference. And so we are trying to reestablish some of that. You know, we were there, was it last week?

Lynette: Last week for their heart health month to support a class. So and we have done teacher appreciation. Yeah, teacher appreciation as well. Yeah. So we do that and we do that as a church. Bishop branch and I adopted another little school to support because they're kind of on the periphery, so they're kind of our babies. So we just support both.

Larry: Yeah. So I think Reveille again, in trying to get into the neighborhood Swansboro Elementary. That's a way of doing. It was a way of doing that for them and also a way to segue way to get connected with us.

Noah: So, [00:47:00] yeah, I guess that kind of answers also the last question: How and why did Reveille become involved in Swansboro community beyond the school. But was there anything else you wanted to say about that?

Larry: Well, lemme just say that the habitat house has talked to the Pastor Peter Moon and we got a correspondence from Reveille not too long ago about their desire to build a house or help build a house with a Habitat for Humanity.

Larry and Lynette and Noah: And, but, but. Did you meet them when you helped with the house? Oh, you talking over here? Okay. Yeah, I did. Yeah. that's what I, oh, you talking about me? Ok. Ok. You might wanna cut . No, that's okay. Yeah, yeah. No. Yeah. That, that they built the house and so yeah, I was over there and this was probably I don't know how long it may have been, but they built the house Nice.

Larry: I did the prayer for the house and met persons who helped establish that. So the house is still there, as a matter [00:48:00] of fact. I hope so. Habitat did it. Yeah. But those are, those are some of the things, you know, that we did. And you know, community is always you know, once you get into a community, you find that there are people who have, you know, needs.

There are people who can help. There are persons who have you know, their own ideas about what the community needs. And so one of the great things you can do in getting involved with the community is to get involved to where they can tell you exactly what it is that they need. And you are probably a better asset if you would listen, if we would listen and be able to focus on the issues that the community has identified as issues that they want to address and, and understand that in communities.

Lynette: I don't believe communities are just wanting to [00:49:00] be served. I think they bring something to the table always. But listening has to do with that as well. That there are treasures. There are treasures in the community and people. Yeah. And that and it's, and for us, it's You know, hard not to be involved. And you find out that it's a little broader than, you know, kind of what you think it is.

Larry: Sweet. Oh yeah. Cause I actually, well Koinonia housed the neighborhood association. And so we're meeting there once a month, you know, to address the issues in the community. Right. So that was part of our working in the community outside the school, if that's

Lynette: Then most recently it's probably been a year now in the apartments, Atlantic Belt. Atlantic Belt apartments, across from George Wythe, actually, yeah, there's just, there had been some murders and [00:50:00] one in particular was of a mother and a child, which just touched the community. So we helped in the collection of funds to bless the community. We just allowed them to use our gifts and, you know, we just made sure that we gave, even paid all of the fees so that nobody would have to do that. Right. But all of those things start to come up. And then I think, and we and I missed this because, I don't know, you know, you at first. I think part of our direct outreach with this community might have featured a focus on many of our seniors because they were the ones who would come to our food pantry. So they were my aunties and my uncles. You know, you just adapt these relationships and so many of them are not here. But another way that I think there has to be work at, because we don't. See as many children [00:51:00] as we used to in the community. And then you have to gotta learn where the pockets are because that's always a way to try to get a relationship with a parent. Right. So those are the things that are yet needed. Yeah. Even as you try to address the community or learn, I'll just say learn the community and then you learn again. That's how you learn whatever riches, richness you have right inside there.

Larry: And we also work with the second precinct here, police department off of Belt Boulevard. And the faith based kind of how we and the police could work together. And we did a lot of walking in the neighborhood together. We did outreach, we did in the park. You know, we'd have food and singing and giveaways and those [00:52:00] kind of things in an effort to connect the community with the police and the churches, Koinonia specifically, and myself and some others as well. We were able to bridge some of that gap and hopefully dispel some of the mistrust that had developed in the community and the police department. So that's something that we, you know, have done and kind of was active in that very, very heavy.

Lynette: And even had them to come here. I do remember, yeah. We there were sessions offered with the churches. Yeah. And the police would address some of the very things that are at issue. Right. Right. What do you do when you're stopped? You know, because again, yeah, African-Americans, ask the question, you know, how community, yeah. You know, you, we, we have three sons.

You know, you have children, you want, like your moms, she wants you to come home, you know? Yeah. So [00:53:00] what, what can we do, you know, kinds of bridges? We not I remember that there was an activity, well, Faith Lipper was, I liked her a lot because she was, you know, when you can touch, when you feel like you can touch police it just adds to, to relationship.

So . . . and then I think that that this wasn't done as a, a group I believe. But even here there was English as a second language. That's a way to bring in some of the Latino population. And oh, we did classes as well, G classes as, yeah. So those were some practical things that, that,

that needed to be done. And we were able to provide some of that, you know, in the community.

Noah: And I guess just for the last thing, is there any closing remarks or any message you would like to send to anyone watching this?[00:54:00]

Lynette: I think that partnerships, particularly those of diverse groups will go a long way to help us to mend some of the things that we have going on in society. And I think it's worth the time and intention and work that's required to get it done. I'm very happy that we met Reveille. Of course, you know, again, we've always had a relationship with Koinonia, but it's been lovely to even get to know their members better. But it's been rewarding to do the work because sometimes it's work, the inner work so that the outer work can be [00:55:00] done and benefit.

Larry: Yeah. And I echo what she says. You know that the effort, the results are beneficial. And when we look at the overall fragmentation that exists in our country, politically, spiritually, economically, educational, all of those things we can be part of the solution.

And I think that this effort to partner with Reveille, Koinonia can be a model for other churches, other persons to see that the work to do it, the effort to do it, and the results of it, can be beneficial on a personal as well as, I'll say, city, state, and even global level. But the purpose is to just begin, you know, where you are doing something that's going to enhance, and I like to use the term, [00:56:00] the Kingdom of God.

Noah: Okay, thank you. Thank you. I'd like to thank both of us. That was, you guys are very, both very well spoken. This is probably like one the best interviews I've done so far. Oh, thank you. No I really liked what you all said. Thank you so much for coming out and spending time with me this Friday. It's been my pleasure. Yeah. Yeah.