

## **Swansboro Church Partnership Interview**

**Interviewer and Video Editor: Noah Sarmiento**

**Interviewees: Reverend Dr. Pete Moon and Reverend Doug Forrester**

**Transcript Editor: Bob Downs**

[00:00:00] **Noah:** So, hello, my name is Noah Sarmiento. I'm a VCU U student and I'm a majoring in history and cinema. And it's very nice to meet both of you today. Will you introduce yourselves very quickly?

**Pete:** Sure. I'll, I'll start off. I'm Pete Moon, lead pastor here at Reveille United Methodist Church. I've been here for about three years, and served as a United Methodist pastor for a bunch of years all through Virginia.

**Noah:** Nice to meet you.

**Doug:** And I'm Doug Forrester. I'm the district superintendent of the Valley Ridge District of the United Methodist Church, which is in Southwest Virginia.

**Noah:** Well, nice to meet you both today.

**Pete:** Good to be here.

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

**Pete:** I am certainly happy to start that, Noah, and Doug, you can jump in whenever you feel appropriate, but I'm the pastor of Reveille [00:01:00] church here. I followed Doug here, so I have the benefit of taking advantage of all the very good work he did investing in the partnership before I even arrived. But in that role, I kind of oversee a lot of the joint work that we do with our partner churches and in this partnership. And as an example, just today we had a planning meeting with our Reveille folks about how are we going to do a joint service. We're gonna have a joint worship service with our partner church churches here on June 11th. And we're real excited about that and looking forward to that. And putting all the plans together like that. And that's just one example of many things that we do with our partner churches.

**Noah:** That's awesome.

**Doug:** And I was pastor of Reveille from 2014 until 2020. And you know, one of the things that we tried to [00:02:00] do when I was there was to lay a lot of groundwork as well as build on this partnership that had existed for longer than or before I was ever connected with Reveille. And it was like Pete said, it was meals that we shared together, studies we did together, worship we did together. One day I joined with Koinonia Christian Church in Swansboro, and we walked around the Swansboro community and knocked on doors and asked for people to let us pray with them. We did that.

**Doug:** So it, it really had, I, I really found the relationship with these partner churches Love Center of Unity and Koinonia Christian Church to be one of the greatest blessings of my time in ministry. And not only my time at Revelle, but in the entirety of my 26 years I've been doing this work.

**Noah:** And when and why did each of you first get involved with this partnership? Or I guess you guys both kind of answered that earlier. And like for how long have you been involved? I guess you kind [00:03:00] of touched on this at the end. What's been most beneficial for you, the congregations of the community as a whole with this partnership?

**Pete:** I'll tell two brief stories in, in my short time, Doug was here longer than I have been. But one is just one of the things that has been really beneficial is working with two African-American churches in the midst of racial tension in our Richmond community. When I first arrived in June or July of 2020, we were pretty we were a pretty divided city and we were struggling.

*[Pete: We, you want me to keep going? No, I know we just lost Doug, but you want me to keep going? Noah: Yeah. Can you just start from the beginning, from that story and then we'll just, well, Come back in when he joins back again. But yeah, you can just answer this question if you would like.]*

**Pete:** Okay. So anyway, when I first arrived we were dealing with this substantial racial [00:04:00] division in the Richmond area and nationwide. And so it was very difficult to enter into a Richmond City church in a white church in the context of all this division and try to get to know everybody. But the point of all that is to say that these two partner churches and the conversations the church was having before I got there, and after I arrived, helped me enormously in trying to move into a space with the church so that I could, we could, as a church, despite me being only here a couple months, we were able to, in a reasonable way, take on and preach on and have conversation around the racial issues in our, in our community.

*[Pete: So there's another story, but I'll get to that one later. I'll, I'll leave some room for Doug. Welcome back. Doug, welcome back. Right. Thank you for bearing with my internet issues. No worries.]*

**Noah:** The question was, what's been most beneficial for you, the congregations and community [00:05:00] as a whole?

**Doug:** For me, the benefit in many ways was it really broadened my personal, spiritual, and ecclesiological boundaries. I mean, it's very easy when you're in a denomination that's connectional like the United Methodist Church to become very insular and sort of stay in your own bubble with your own people in your own world and think about your own issues, and it opened the door to me to be able to meet not only pastors of different races, but different denominations and different traditions and different perspectives through a ministry that was started by Bishop Larry Branch at Love Center of Unity called Pastors for Pastors, where once a week we would gather together and just talk about our lives and our ministry, and pray for one another. And that really helped me to see a larger world than sometimes I see when I'm kind of

in that United Methodist [00:06:00] framework all the time. But beyond that, I think the benefit was, it, it really helped us as a congregation to think differently, to learn about the world on the other side of the river in Richmond, to learn about cultures different than our own. And to learn that they have things to teach us. It's not about just what we bring to Swansboro, but it's about what Swansboro and its people and the school and its churches can bring to us. And, and other than that, I would just say it was our witness to the world. That we believe in a God who celebrates diversity and made all of humankind in God's image.

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

**Pete:** I'll jump in, Doug, unless you got something on the top tip of your tongue. I was gonna, I, I was gonna [00:07:00] go underneath and, or on top of Doug's comment about the prayer walk he spoke of that was that was like a key moment for me. We had a, you know, I mean, we, we traditional Methodists, sometimes we don't, a lot of us don't pray unless it's out of a book sometimes, right? But the, the, the, those black churches, they pray all over. So it was just really helpful to go on a prayer walk with them. We went, as Doug said I followed in his footsteps, and was able to take a prayer walk through that community and I was assigned to the local convenience store and we got there, it was 11 o'clock in the morning and we were praying for the people who came to this convenience store in this very challenging area of South Richmond. And so all the time at 11 o'clock in the morning, sometimes there, there's a whole lot of people coming in there for beverages. And let me tell you, it wasn't coffee. But we would pray for them and ask 'em what we, what we need. And I'll never forget, you know, it was very intimidating for me. [00:08:00] And so I did that and I met with them and I prayed with these people going in and outta the convenience store. And one guy came up to me and he was, he was not looking great. And I said, how can I pray for you? He looked at me, he says, man, I need some help getting off these drugs. You know, and the point being that I would've never experienced that being in my neighborhood at Reveille Church. And, and to Doug's point, it just exposes you to a whole different world. Gets us out of our sort of insular pretty white bubble to show us that there's this whole other world that doesn't think like us, live like us or look like us.

**Noah:** Was there anything you wanted to.

**Doug:** Yeah, I would just add that you know, one of the things that you learn pastoring churches is to pay attention to the stories you hear repeated. And one of the stories I heard repeated in my interaction with Koinonia Christian Church and Love Center of Unity was they felt like that the, the relationship with the partner [00:09:00] churches began with Reveille folks saying, what can we do for you? Now I, and now I wasn't there when that conversation took place, but that's what they heard. And they've told me that story, you know, year after year when I was at Reveille. And I think that it was, what was beautiful was how over time, starting really from the beginning, watching this relationship morph into a ministry with, not a ministry to or for. And remembering that, because, you know, one of the things that Keith Edmonds from Koinonia Christian Church used to say that he was told as a child, you know, never to cross I-195. So for him to be embraced in a congregation like Reveille was eye-opening for him as well. So there really was a mutuality to it.

**Noah:** And what were some barriers that might have existed [00:10:00] during the, the, like conception of the partnership or maybe continued to exist, if any?

**Pete:** I mean, we're, we're doing very well. I mean, we're having, there, there are minimal barriers at this point. I, I, I would say you know, we don't think the same. Right? We at Reveille, we think of Reveille - we're made up of sort of folks who, you know, are, are, have it pretty good. We got, we're content. We don't have a lot of needs. We have some recreational time, some modest recreational time. But it the world in which we live at Revelle is just very different from the world they live in, in their churches. And so I think one of the barriers is just the different sort of paradigm of life between the two and make, trying to think and remember.[00:11:00] You know, when they have a two, like for example, we had a, at Reveille, I mean, we, we can, we can, folks will give us an hour and five minutes, an hour and 10 minutes, and every once in a while we can, we can get an hour and 15 on a Easter Sunday, which we did this last week. But you go to an event down there, I mean, you're down there for two, three hours. And it's just a whole different way of thinking. So one of the barriers is making sure we, we understand that when we walk in the door..

**Doug:** Yeah, I would say the one barrier that we had which is unfortunate, wasn't really a it really wasn't a, a Swansboro barrier. It was just when I was at Revelle, there was so much denominational turmoil that was going on that we got caught up in that it was just finding time to do this really beautiful and fruitful ministry with the folks from Swansboro and, and we did a lot. But you know, it, I would love to have done even more of that because it was such a, you know, [00:12:00] such a, such a special relationship that was cultivated and it, and, you know, and it got to a point where when we first started having like meals together, you know, people would sit at tables with the people who they knew, and then after a while we got to know one another in the other churches well enough that folks would come and they, they would say, oh, hey, let me sit with you. And it wasn't someone from their church, it was from one of the partner churches. So we really got to, you know, laugh and cry with each other and just, you know, share important things about our lives with each other.

**Noah:** And you kind of took us to the next question, which would be, what successes were there or maybe continue to exist with this partnership?

**Pete:** I, I think one success for me Noah, is that, is what's gonna, what I mentioned earlier, we're having this new joint worship service on the 11th, where our whole church, all our three services are gonna join in one service with each of these churches. And [00:13:00] just doing that together. And, and the fact that our, our folks are not just, eh, we're doing it. They're excited about doing it, and it's gonna be a great day. It's gonna be a great day. And you know, it, it's gonna, it's gonna work well.

**Noah:** All right. That's awesome.

**Doug:** Yeah, and from my perspective, the, the benefit was just, like I said earlier, just the deepening of the relationships. The fact that we got closer, we got to know each other, we

learned each other's names and stories. And that, that was, hopefully that was a foundation that Pete and the church have continued to, to build upon.

**Noah:** And would you view this partnership overall as a success?

**Pete:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Now, now I will tell you that we're going through some challenges. I mean, okay. Koinonia in particular is going through some leadership transitions and we're trying to figure out what does a partnership look like with as they try to figure out new pastoral leadership at Koinonia. And, and so it has some [00:14:00] challenges, but you know, every everybody, there's been no indication of that partnership faltering in all that we're, the question is how do we move it forward?

**Noah:** And would you also consider this partnership a success?

**Doug:** Yeah, absolutely. Everything about it, you know, what we've talked about before, the, the expanding of horizons for all three churches, the witness to the world, the relationships that have been built. It's, it's one of the things in, again, of my 26 years in ministry that I'm the most proud of all.

**Noah:** And I guess the last question is going to be if another church were to come to you and wanted to basically replicate the partnership you guys had with LCU and Koinonia, what advice would you give them?

**Pete:** Oh, I, I, I bet, Doug's got an answer for that one.

**Doug:** I was gonna say, when it comes to wisdom, I always let Pete go [00:15:00] first.

**Doug:** But now, what I'd say is that make it a true partnership of equals and to take it slow and make it all about relationships with one another and with God? I think if you, those three things are the, have been the most essential ingredients of, of the success we had with that, of this partnership when I was at Reveille.

**Pete:** I would underscore that I, I think one of the healthiest things that's occurred in the last generation or so, there's something they call the A B C D model where you, you basically, you're trying, before you go in and do ministry to a community you make sure you are doing ministry with a community. You're in other words, before you go in, you sit and you listen. You listen to the perceived need, the felt need. What would he be helpful to from their perspective so that you avoid what Doug talked about earlier That was, that's easy to do for a, for you [00:16:00] go in and do ministry for the people, to the people, instead of being with them and listening to what they think would be important. I, I think that's just an important lesson that that we learned here that Doug named earlier, and that I would certainly want to continue.

**Noah:** And was, would there be any last, I guess, message that you would like to leave with this interview?

**Pete:** You know, it's just a gift to be able to listen to the, the perspective. And I'm speaking as, as the benefit of, of clergy here, of seasoned African-American pastors. You know, I mean their perspective and their experience and their life experience and their relationships with their community. I mean, it creates this very unique subset of wisdom that is just really helpful to, in, in [00:17:00] engaging, to listen to. I'm just really, I celebrate the wisdom that I get particularly, I, I spend more time with the clergy than I do with the laypersons, but the wisdom I get from clergy on this has, has been a gift.

**Noah:** That's awesome.

**Doug:** That was my experience as well. And I kind of alluded to that earlier. But I, I would just hasten to add, you know, it's, it's such a reminder for churches today of all denominational and non-denominational stripes that it's so important for us to be out in the community. You know, it's, it's, there's always a temptation to circle the wagons when things get hard and things are very difficult in churches right now. But I really believe that before people are gonna want to hear us talk about Jesus, they're gonna wanna see us live and act like him and make important to us the things that were important to Christ. And. This partnership has certainly been a way to, to do that and experience that and to cultivate a [00:18:00] desire for more.

**Noah:** I'd like to thank you both so much for coming out and doing this interview with me, especially doing it again.

**Pete:** All good, Noah. It's all good. Doug, always good to hang with you and have time with you.

**Doug:** Yeah.

**Noah:** Thank you so much for your time, both of you. That's all I have.