

Swansboro Church Partnership Interview

Interviewer and Video Editor: Noah Sarmiento

Interviewees: Sheelagh Davis, Mary Ann Ramage, and Kathy Rainey

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[00:00:00] **Noah:** Okay. So I'm just gonna start with a quick introduction. Hello, my name's Noah Sarmiento. I'm a VCU student and I'm majoring in history and cinema. And it's very nice to meet you all today. And can each of you introduce yourselves please?

Sheelagh: I'm Sheelagh Davis. What do you want me to say exactly? Sorry.

Noah: Just say your name. We can cut, we'll, we'll, we'll cut that out.

Mary Ann: Okay. I'm Mary Ann Ramage.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy Rainey.

Noah: Okay, thank you. Okay, we'll start with the first question. How are you currently, personally involved in the partnership between Koinonia, LCU, and Reveille?

Sheelagh: Well, I'll start if you want. With the partnership between Koinonia and Love Center of Unity my main contact is with what we call the spirit team [00:01:00] task force, and that is two representatives from each of the partner churches. We meet every month just to catch up, to hear what's happening in everyone's churches and so on, and then to organize events, joint events that we hope that, you know, a lot of people will participate in.

Mary Ann: I'm no longer involve. This one is for the community.

Kathy: I am working as the director of children's ministries here at Reveille. So we've done some things like parties, last summer we had a pool party with the partner churches. We've done some other events with combining Reveille's children programs with partner churches and also with our vacation Bible school and kids camp. We do some combined things, some activities with them.

Sheelagh: I'm involved with the afterschool program at [00:02:00] Swansboro as well. And that's called Marvelous Mondays. And every Monday during the school year we go over to Swansboro and we help. We kind of take care of the kids for about an hour. And during that time they do either crafts or play. We play board games or do puzzles or whatever. And that gives a break to Miss Holiday who runs the after school program. And it's something different for the kids as well. And we really enjoy that. So that's the, that's a program run by parks and rec actually, but it's very much something we do for the school.

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

Sheelagh: Well, I was surprised [00:03:00] to learn that we've actually been involved for 10 years because we are going to be celebrating our anniversary this summer. The way I got involved was that Katie Gooch, who was at the time the assistant pastor here at Reveille, visited Swansboro and went to a civic association meeting. And she met Pastor Keith from Koinonia, and she became excited at the idea that wouldn't it be great if we formed a partnership with Koinonia and even possibly another church. And that's really how it came about. She asked me and another woman from Reveille, Gail Basta, to really investigate that. And the way we went about it is that we [00:04:00] phoned each church in Swansboro. You'd be amazed how many churches there are in Swansboro. Love Center of Unity came back to us and so did, of course. Koinonia, because they'd already had that link with Katie. And so it went from there. We met with the deacon, Phyllis Bout and Pastor Keith, and ultimately with Bishop Branch. And then Kathy and I did this together, we were on board together for quite a long time, weren't we? I don't know exactly how long. So that's how I became involved.

Noah: Thank you.

Mary Ann: Why don't you say, because you've got it all.

Kathy: Well, I became involved because of Sheelagh. I signed up for a Bible study here at Reveille and Sheila and I had talked with Katie. I had helped that summer with the youth, had done some work in [00:05:00] Swansboro Gardens, and had done some things with Swansboro Baptist. So I told Katie, I said, "I think we need to nurture these relationships and really cultivate these." She said, "I want to connect you with Sheelagh Davis." So I signed up for a Bible study with Sheelagh and Gal Basta, and Sheila said would I like to go to lunch. And they said they had met with some of the churches in Swansboro and they needed a piano teacher and someone to teach drums and guitar. And I said, "well, I'm not great. I've got maybe four, five years experience of piano. I could teach piano." One of my sons plays guitar and does drums, so we could do this. So, we show up at Koinonia one Saturday night when they were having a fellowship, and we started teaching the children music. They had two pianos in their fellowship hall and they were just so loving and welcoming, and we decided to do it on Mondays about 4:30 or 5pm, something like that, on Monday evenings.

Sheelagh: Yes.

Kathy: So we would show up on Mondays and we [00:06:00] did it. My older son Cole and I would go and he would go to the sanctuary and do drums and guitar with the children, and I would do piano. And then we had been doing it about a year on Monday nights. I think we'd had maybe one recital or we were close to recital. And then Mary Ann and Joe Ramage came to help. And that was such a wonderful thing because Mary Ann and I could teach piano at the same time and Mr. Joe could help the kids with their homework while we also were teaching drums and guitar. And then Carol Ann Lee started coming with crafts. So it just kind of evolved into this wonderful Monday night time, and the children loved having, you know, social time and fellowship and learning things that they wouldn't normally be able to learn. And then it was right at the end of the school year, we would have a recital and let them show what they had been doing. So Mary Ann.

Mary Ann: I [00:07:00] started off at Swansboro school volunteering. And I did that for most of the time that I was with you on Monday nights.

Kathy: And Mr. Joe, your husband too. Yes, he was, he was there on Monday night. Yes.

Kathy: At the school, I remember being at the school and him showing up to see his mentee and mm-hmm.

Mary Ann: After he retired.

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

Kathy: It was a gradual, I think, progression. We kind of started, um, I remember we would take some youth over to visit LCU and Koinonia on Sundays. Sometimes we would visit for their Sunday service, and then one Sunday some people from Koinonia came here. And then we started, we got together an activity night here where people from LCU and Koinonia came here and we had Reveille people. We did activities in the gym and had pizza. And so [00:08:00] we just started kind of, it was a gradual progression as we started forming relationships and then thinking, how can we serve together. One summer we did a sidewalk Sunday school outdoors, and it turned into outdoor vacation Bible school really for Swansboro with members from Koinonia and LCU. We all teamed up and had an outdoor Bible school on Saturdays at Swansboro Elementary playground. We did, I'm trying to think some of the other things we did.

Sheelagh: We did well, we did Lenten studies, actually, that were very well attended by our partner churches. We came to the conclusion that that was something that, well, as they told us, that they really wanted to do and that they really enjoyed. And so that would be on a Wednesday night and then we'd have dinner and then we would break into groups and do studies, or we would have a joint study in the fellowship hall [00:09:00] and study. I remember we studied a book called *When Helping Hurts*. And that was really about doing mission work. It was a very interesting book and people seemed to really appreciate it. That sort of thing became fairly regular. I think we've probably done Lenten studies at least five or six times and it has been very well attended, and I think they have enjoyed it a lot. So, other high points? I think, well, for me, something that always gives me joy is when I see the three churches together. And one of the high points for me was when Reveille members and Love Center of Unity came to Koinonia Christian Church in Swansboro. And this was Ash Wednesday and we had 32 [00:10:00] members from Reveille that came for the Ash Wednesday service, which was held at Koinonia. So that, for me, was really special because it is quite hard sometimes to get people to cross the river and to go to Swansboro. So for me that was a real high point. But there's been, there have been many actually. Lots of events where we've, whether it's been a cookout, when there's been an enormous turn up from every church to something called messy church that we've also done together. And again very, very well attended. So there's been a lot of high points, I think.

Kathy: We've also done some work with their Girl Scout program on Wednesday nights. We've had people go and volunteer to help with that at Koinonia. [00:11:00] And let's see, there was something else I was thinking of.

Sheelagh: There's been the prayer walk. We've actually done the prayer walk. Is that what you're thinking of Kathy?

Kathy: Yes.

Sheelagh: The prayer walk was, actually, this was a very brave thing to do, I think. Members of Reville and Koinonia met at Koinonia in Swansboro and we literally went from door to door, knocked on people's doors, and explained who we were and where Koinonia is and welcoming people to go there, and asking them if they would like us to say a prayer for them or their family, or for something that was worrying them at that time. So that's a pretty hard thing to do. But in fact, I think it was quite successful. Of course, not everyone answers the door, but it was quite successful, I think. And we have repeated that. We've done that two or three times, I think.[00:12:00]

Kathy: I think it was last fall, that we did at LCU, Koinonia, and Reville that some of us went to the little convenience stores in the community, and we would have different members of the churches together in little prayer teams. And as people went in and out we said, "would you like us to pray with you?" The service together has been one of the high points. When we're joining together and serving together, that's what creates relationships that are really lasting and make a big impact, I think, on all of us. I know when we used to host Caritas families here, which is a program that's been reorganized now, but we would host families in our youth center for a week at the time. Members from LCU and Koinonia would come over and help us feed dinner to our guests from Caritas and play with the children. And so just those moments of serving together have been, [00:13:00] been very powerful and meaningful to all of us, I think.

Noah: That's awesome.

Kathy: I taught piano for maybe three, four years. Cole taught for three or four years, guitar drums, but the change and the ease I think that we all felt. Because at first it was a little, they were a little uncomfortable. We were a little, you're not quite, and then it's like just gradually you realize we're all part of the body of Christ and this is what heaven is about, that we're all, all of us representative in God's kingdom. And so it was gradual. And one thing that Bishop Branch said to, I think Sheila and I were over there one time talking with them. They had an issue with the roof in their youth center and we were trying to problem solve and figure out how to get that space usable. And he said a lot of times people will come into the community and tell them what they think they need [00:14:00] instead of asking what do you need? Where are your needs? How can we support you? And where are your assets and gifts in your own congregation? And that really stuck with me and I thought, how would we feel if someone came into this community and told us what they thought we needed to make it better. And I thought, wow. It really gave me a new perspective and a new lens, and that really stuck with me. And so I think that tearing down the walls. One Sunday our youth group went over to Koinonia and they sang, one of the

songs they sang was, "Let's Tear Down the Walls," something like that. And it was so beautiful. It was really moving. And Koinonia hosted all of us for lunch after. So it was like, this is so cool that we're all, you know, so, but it's gradual.

Noah: Mm-hmm.

Kathy: And I think it took just time and trust and staying with it. And Kelley Lane has been wonderful after Katie Gooch left. Kelley Lane has [00:15:00] really continued to nurture and continue those relationships. And Sheelagh and others who've been, Jill Gaynor, who've been steadfast in maintaining those relationships. We still are good friends with the Allens from Koinonia and we'll meet them for dinner. In fact, at Christmas we met for dinner with their family and went to the Walk to Jerusalem, and so we still will meet for lunch. And so it's just been great to have these friendships that have, it's hard to believe it's been 10 years, but I think the whole thing that I learned from this has been being willing to say yes to something that's outside your comfort zone, and that God has already paved these ways and has this plan to really create wonderful things if we make ourselves available.

Sheelagh: But I think it's very important to listen to what the churches say that they would like to do and what they [00:16:00] can contribute, rather than us going in there all the time because we're much bigger than any either of the two churches, it must seem a little bit sort of overwhelming when we keep coming up with ideas and so on. They only have so many people in their congregation. As willing as they are, and they are willing. So I think it's important to listen to them, and I think to pace the relationship so you can develop trust, because you can imagine that when we first went there, I think they must have felt that it was a little bit strange. Why? Why was this white church coming into Swansboro and why are they sort of offering to form a partnership? So it was something very unfamiliar and it was [00:17:00] unfamiliar to us too. So you had to develop that trust. And I think the main thing is to listen and to go very slowly, I think.

Kathy: That's a great point Sheelagh. And I think respect, just having respect for each other and the gifts that everyone brings. And I laugh now when I think about one of the children I taught piano to was playing her saxophone, Taniya, at Koinonia one Sunday. And my younger son and I went to hear her play, and we walked in the door and they gave my son a tambourine or a maraca. He said, "what do I do with this?" And I said, "shake it!" Because it is so joyful worship. And it was just joyful and wonderful with tambourines and maracas and really a new style of worship that we had never been a part of before. And it introduced us to a wonderful, just vibrant, joyful service. But I'll never forget that first Sunday, because he said, [00:18:00] "what do I do with this in church?" I said, "we're joyful and we praise God." And they taught us a lot.

Noah: Okay. That kind of leads into the next question about the successes that there were and continue to exist. Was there anything else you wanted to add to that or do you feel you covered that already?

Sheelagh: I think one of the huge things actually is the group that's been going at Reveille for years called Women of Spirit, which is a Bible study group. But in the last maybe two, certainly

two years, it may be longer than that, half of the members of that group and about, I don't know exactly 10 or 12, but at least four or five members of Koinonia attend that group regularly. And I think on both sides it's been a very [00:19:00] enriching experience. I think having the perspective that they bring and also their amazing faith that is really remarkable. And so I think that has been great. So, what was the other part of the question?

Noah: It was just what successes were there or continue to exist?

Mary Ann: Well, I think one thing about the music Mondays was it introduced kids to music that, with the schools now, you don't get it. And so by the time, you know, from September or October to May, they can play a simple song and they know they can play it. And so it's introducing them to something that maybe they want to continue. And one family had three boys and all of 'em were absolutely excellent. [00:20:00] I mean, they could play both hands starting off and that's almost unheard of.

Sheelagh: Yeah. I'm a great believer that you can sow seeds and you'll never know what it's going to lead to. And I think with music it's the same.

Noah: It definitely is. So would you view the partnership as a success? Sorry, as a success? Why or why not?

Kathy: I think absolutely a success. And I think too that in keeping the focus on God and keeping that all three churches having the same Christ-centered mission of the church and fellowship and enjoying being together, but also having hearts of service. And that seems to be their churches as well. They have the hearts of service, just like people at Reveille do. It was wonderful, I know the first Sunday [00:21:00] Pastor Keith Edmonds spoke in the sanctuary and I think he mentioned something to our pastor and Pastor Keith said, "I can't believe I'm here." It was huge for him to be here in this part of Richmond and speaking from the pulpit and Reveille. I think he mentioned as a young boy that he would've never thought he would be preaching from the pulpit here at Reveille. So some really significant changes and significant advances and just I think strengthening of all of our churches and all of our faith and we're all better by joining together and being partners together.

Sheelagh: I agree. I, it's a big word, but I think it's about reconciliation. And I think if we can work towards that and Kathy wasn't gonna say this, but for Pastor Keith to be able to, to preach to a white congregation, it's unheard of in many places. [00:22:00] So, yes, I think it's a step by step towards some kind of reconciliation and opening up people's hearts and minds to the idea that we are all God's children. We're all the same. And so I think it has been very successful actually.

Kathy: And I think Sheelagh's accent has really helped. It's so beautiful and soothing, and I think people are taken in by her accent. So I think that's definitely been a plus.

Noah: It's very hard to say no.

Kathy: I mean, hey, it's hard to say no to someone with that beautiful accent.

Noah: So if you had to choose one thing, what do you like best about this partnership?

Sheelagh: The people. [00:23:00]

Mary Ann: I would say the people, but also you, you learn more about the community where they live, which is so different from where most of the people in this church live. And so you learn and they learn that we're not so different either, you know? I think that's the main, the main thing you want to do is just everybody is doing their best.

Sheelagh: I remember a point that Mary Ann made actually previously, and she said that until we went over to Koinonia, some of their kids over there had really never had any interaction with white people. And so for them, that was a great thing, we felt. I remember you said that last time.

Mary Ann: That's right. They don't, you know, they don't have transportation, most of them living around there. So they don't get outside that [00:24:00] circle.

Kathy: That's true.

Sheelagh: So, what was the question again?

Noah: What did you like best about the partnership?

Kathy: I think that the people and the relationships that we formed and I know my older son who taught guitar and drums there, oh, Bob Bowden taught guitar there too. He came and helped us there on Monday nights too. I don't wanna forget him. But some of the kids who Cole would teach, my son, they would text him at, you know, 10:30pm at night, "Cole, what are you doing?" And he was like, you need to be in bed. You know, he's like, how did you get my number? And just having that time and seeing the rapport. Like Sheila said, I think a lot of them probably did not have many white friends who they spent time with and hung out with. Some of our students and friends, one day I remember we had a picnic and we went out to Maymont together [00:25:00] and we just all sat out there and had sandwiches and talked and it was just fun. And some of the girls who took piano actually, and their mothers, joined the youth here at Reveille when they took the bus mission trip to Oklahoma, I think Toni and Taniyah and Taisy.

Sheelagh: Yes.

Kathy: They went with Reveille's youth and that was wonderful. And it was great we were there visiting the Sunday that they allowed Taniyah and Taisy to share what they had learned on their mission trip, and it was really powerful. So the relationships, the people and we are so much richer for those partnerships as people and as a church. What a blessing. And that's why I always tell people to just say yes to something that you're a little uncomfortable about, because God will equip you. God will provide. He's already got something in the works and it's great to see what he's got planned out there if you [00:26:00] just say yes. Say yes I'll teach a child to play piano and see what God does with that.

Noah: And if other churches came to you and wanted to do a partnership similar to this one, what advice would you give them?

Kathy: That's a good question.

Sheelagh: I would say listen and go slowly. God has a plan, it will evolve and it will become clear. But there has to be willingness. Actually there has to be willingness on the part of the pastors as well. I think you do need that support of your church leaders.

Kathy: Absolutely.

Sheelagh: I think that's very important. But if you have that and they do say yes, then I think it can work because [00:27:00] God has a plan.

Kathy: And I think I was very proud to be a member at Reveille. It was during the height of Covid. Everyone was having church online and there were all the racial tensions and rioting with all of the monuments in Richmond. And our lead minister, Pete Moon, invited Reverend Keith Edmonds and Bishop Larry Branch, and they spent a Sunday just talking about, you know, their feelings and the history here in Richmond. And I was very proud of Reveille that day just for that, and I've told Keith that that took a lot of courage and I was so glad that we had established those relationships already, so they felt comfortable coming and sharing and the whole service that day was just the three of them talking. Because it was very, you know, it was [00:28:00] Richmond was a really tenuous time and I was very proud of Reveille to be a part of that.

Noah: That's awesome. I guess the last question will be what has been most beneficial for you, the congregations, and the community as a whole?

Mary Ann: Well, I think you make new friends by going and asking what they want you to do and then doing it. You know, I think that leads to friendships that, you know, you, I still hear from people at Koinonia at Christmas or whatever. And so it's lasting and I write them and, you know, call them. So, you know, it's a friendship that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Kathy: And I think, was it your, what anniversary was it? One Monday night. We were all there and it was Joe, the people at Koinonia found out it was your [00:29:00] 50th or 60th anniversary, I'm not sure which. But they had got together a tree with little gifts and cards and money. And they were so excited. They loved Mary Ann and Joe so much. They were so excited to present them with this little anniversary. Do you remember that?

Mary Ann: I don't remember.

Kathy: Celebrating when they found out it was their anniversary. And one of the, Miss Iris, she had gotten together the tree and they had all put a little something on there because they just loved them and appreciated them giving up their Mondays to come. But that was really beautiful to see.

Sheelagh: So I think it's been very enriching. I think for our congregation, of course, not everyone is on board and we have to accept that. But there has been though a surprising amount of participation and forming of [00:30:00] relationships, which, you know, is a joy to see. I have been so impressed just personally by the faith of those folks in those congregations that is so well expressed and so open. And I think that can be a lesson to us as well. So it's definitely been for me, a win-win situation. And, and I do hope we can, we will go on, even though there will be changes because there will be changes of ministers and we hope that won't make any difference to our relationship, that we can continue and that the ties will be stronger.

Kathy: We hope so.

Noah: I'd like to thank you all for coming out today. That'll conclude our interview. Thank you so much for coming out.

Kathy: It was a pleasure. Thanks for recording and thank you for listening. Was that the practice round or [00:31:00] the only one?

Sheelagh: We did have a little bit of a practice. We are talking maybe 20 to 30 people from our partner churches. And if you consider that their congregations, I would think are around 40 at Koinonia and fewer at Love Center of Unity. So the fact that you get 25 people from those churches is pretty amazing on a Wednesday night, or actually to, to most of the functions that we've done together with most of the activities.

Kathy: Yes, it's been great. Just the love, I think the love that every time we've been to those churches, they make you feel so loved and so welcomed. I hope [00:32:00] we have done the same. Sometimes I think that we could take a lesson from them and be more welcoming and embracing. And I think they're so good at that and making you feel—

Mary Ann: Yes, but I think they've gotten better because we've been there. You know, at first there was a little—

Kathy: They weren't quite sure.

Mary Ann: they were a little apprehensive.

Kathy: And we weren't either.

Mary Ann: As you get more familiar and more comfortable and realize that we're all the same.

Sheelagh: We used to feel so embarrassed we'd go over there and that maybe to a service of some kind to Koinonia, and Pastor Keith, if anyone from Reveille went there, it was usually you and I and they would single us out. I said to him one day, "please don't say, say, you know, oh, very nice to see Miss Sheelagh and Miss Kathy. We're just part of the group, you know, [00:33:00] the gang."

Kathy: Yeah, don't single us out. Yeah. And I know when his sister died, Toni's mother and it was a big funeral downtown. Grayson and Cole went with me. Don't do that, Mary Ann. And then I think we had our three ministers from here come and we, it was like, we kind of felt what they must feel at a lot of places because we were the very few and the boys were like, wow. Think about this is how they feel when they come to Reveille. And it was very welcoming, but it was, you look around and it's very, it gives you a new perspective when it's a different situation when there are five or six of you and then, and so it just, it's been a real time of learning too.

Noah: I can take care of the chairs.

Kathy: Is Carol taking you home? [00:34:00]