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## Philly churches get MissionsFEST boost



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During a health clinic at Trinity Baptist Church in Philadelphia, MissionsFEST volunteer Martha Knodel, a nurse from Turnerville Baptist Church in Chunchula, Ala., lends a hand. [Photo Terms of Use](#)


Posted on Dec 18, 2007 | by Ann Maniscalco

PHILADELPHIA (BP)--Kristy Carr shielded her eyes from the bright sun as she surveyed what was happening in Ezekiel Baptist Church's parking lot.

Carr, ministry consultant for Woman's Missionary Union, smiled as she watched kids and adults enjoying games, prizes, crafts and Bible stories. Nearby, a health clinic provided various screenings. Hot dogs, tended to by a church member, sizzled on a grill.

For this block party, Ezekiel Baptist, a predominantly African American congregation in Philadelphia, was assisted by 65 volunteers from 12 states as one of numerous missions activities during a WMU MissionsFEST.

Carr has seen such rewarding scenes before. Since the first MissionsFEST in 2000 in Charleston, S.C., some 4,500 volunteers have served in 23 states as well as Mexico and Canada during MissionsFEST or FamilyFEST opportunities sponsored

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by WMU.

Chuck Kieffer, pastor of The Foundry, was buoyed by the assistance his church plant in Wallingford, Pa., received during the Philadelphia/South Jersey MissionsFEST. In addition to a block party in the community, volunteers helped refurbish the church facility, baked goodies and handed out free coffee at a nearby train station and other venues, prayerwalked neighborhoods and nearby colleges, and showed church women how to implement WMU materials to develop and expand their mission strategy.

So much was accomplished, Kieffer said, "because we had more workers than ever before."

During the MissionsFEST orientation dinner, Bob Hylton, director of missions for the Greater Philadelphia Baptist Resource Network (BRN), told the volunteers that the area's populace encompasses a wide range of ethnic groups, with worship services in at least 17 languages.

And Hylton noted that the area is one of the least-reached with the Gospel in the United States. Statistics show New Jersey is about 2 percent evangelized, he said, while Philadelphia fares only a little better. With 5 million people in the Philadelphia/South Jersey area, Hylton said there is just one Baptist church for every 40,000 people.

Dwayne Baker, BRN director of church and community services, spoke of "teaching the church how to reach the community by using social services." He told the volunteers they had their work cut out for them during the Oct. 10-14 evangelistic outreach with three churches in the Philadelphia area and one in South Jersey.

Yet God-ordained "appointments" abounded at various ministry sites. A volunteer experienced with special-needs children was able to listen to and encourage a mother who had such a child. Brian Musser, campus minister at Drexel University, showed up at a campus coffee giveaway at exactly the moment a student from Colombia stopped by. Musser conversed with the young man in Spanish and invited him to the campus Bible study; the student said he would come.

A coed group of volunteers from Cleveland, Ga., labored with Trinity Baptist Church in the heart of downtown Philadelphia. They worked in the church building's interior, helped with the food distribution/health fair on Saturday morning and blanketed the neighborhood with flyers about the congregation's after-school program. The same day the flyers went out, two parents called about the program.

"We've seen God at work just from handing out a flyer," one of the workers said.

One volunteer took the opportunity to sit and listen to an elderly gentleman who was waiting to get a bag of free groceries. "Mr. P" had many health issues and seemed discouraged about his lot in life. As his name was called, he stepped forward, received the bag of food and prepared to leave. A volunteer hopped up, following him to the door. "May I pray with you before you leave?" she asked, gently touching his arm. He agreed, so the volunteer offered a prayer for his physical and spiritual well-being and for God to reveal to the man how much He cared for him. Later, while reflecting on the brief interaction, the volunteer wondered if the man had ever heard anyone pray for him.

The evening before the on-site ministries began, Melanie Hart, president of the area's Baptist Nursing Fellowship, a professional organization sponsored by WMU, gathered a group together in an assembly line.

"All the nurses brought different things to make hygiene kits of basic toiletry items," Hart said. The kits were distributed during the week as health care professionals and assistants provided blood pressure and glucose checks and health-related information at three block parties.

"You aren't going to know all that will happen because of your service here," said Gail Hallman, church mobilization director for the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, during MissionsFEST's Saturday evening celebration dinner. "Some things take time." Thus far, the volunteers learned, at least nine people committed their lives to Jesus during the outreach.

WMU's MissionsFESTs, geared for volunteers 18 and older, and FamilyFESTs, recommended for volunteers age 6 and up, are missions experiences in which lodging, most meals and ministry activities expenses are included in the planning and cost. Volunteers are responsible for travel expenses and supplies they may want to furnish.

"It frees [volunteers] up to do ministry," Carr said. And the ministries and projects have been assessed by the site leaders based on the communities' needs. "One of the things the [local] association appreciates is that we don't come in and tell them what to do and how to do it," Carr said. "We come in and say, 'What can we do to work alongside of you?'"

Reflecting on how MissionsFEST and FamilyFEST ventures benefit all involved, Carr said, "It's changing the lives of the volunteers, it's changing the lives of those who are serving in ministry in the area, and it's changing those we've come to serve." After impacting the mission sites, teams go home with a new vision and fresh ideas for reaching their communities. And they leave behind church,

associational and state staff members who are deeply appreciative, encouraged and re-energized for the task ahead.

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Ann Maniscalco is a freelance writer and a participant in the Philadelphia/South Jersey MissionsFEST. For further information about MissionsFESTS and FamilyFESTs, go to [www.wmu.com/volunteerconnection](http://www.wmu.com/volunteerconnection) or call 205-991-8100.



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