

Denver Churches Unite for Prayer, Worship Outside DNC

Rather than protesting hot-button issues, an interdenominational church coalition opted to serve Democratic delegates.



[] During this year's Democratic National Convention (DNC), the most coveted protest location is not being used by anti-war activists but by more than 60 Denver-area churches that are praying, serving and worshipping together outside the Pepsi Center.

Leaders of One Church Metro Denver say they can enact more change through prayer than protest. "We really want God's presence to be known in this city," said George Morrison, pastor of Faith Bible Chapel in Arvada, Colo. "It's more than a physical thing that is taking place. There is spiritual warfare that goes on over the city.

"[We want to] make people aware that prayer changes things. Change just doesn't happen, so we believe in prayer."

Since Sunday, more than 300 volunteers from an array of denominational backgrounds have been hosting 24/7 intercession in an office building across from the DNC, participating in prayer walks throughout the area and holding corporate prayer and worship in Creek Front Park, the only public entrance to the convention center.

The group insists that their goal is not to support a specific issue or party but to show the love of Christ through service. "We're not endorsing," said Steve Chavis, a spokesman for the group of loosely affiliated Denver churches. "We're not rejecting. We're saying, 'How can we bless the delegates, the activist and the residents that live downtown?'"

The idea for the outreach was sparked when Reece Bowling, senior pastor of Orchid Road Christian Center in Greenwood Village, Colo., noticed that churches seemed to be missing from discussions about the upcoming convention. He said he felt "inspired" to enter his name in a lottery being held to determine who would secure protest locations.

"I wasn't seeing anything about what we were doing, from a faith community standpoint, to reach out to the delegates that were coming in for the convention," Bowling said. "We felt we had a message of hope, and we believe God wants good for America. The love of Jesus will break down barriers. The nation is very divided now, and we feel the church needs to take a leadership role.

"We could not have gotten a better park," he said of their location. "We literally can stand in our park and see the Pepsi Center from where we are at."

High security measures have been enacted at the DNC, with police officers

from as far away as Los Angeles on duty beside FBI and Secret Service agents.

The surrounding perimeter of the Pepsi Center has been enclosed, and Creek Front

Park is the closest drop-off point for bikes, trains and cars though it is at

least a half-mile from the center.

"You can't drive closer. You can't ride a bike closer," said Steve Van

Diest, chairman of One Church Metro Denver. "About a third of the whole Pepsi

Center is walking by us."

The group says their efforts are based on Micah 6:8, which says, "He has

shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do

justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Van Diest said they hope to show delegates and protestors alike a different

side of Christianity, one that highlights service and love.

From 9 a.m. until

after the DNC events end, volunteers have been distributing pocket maps,

sunscreen and free water, and picking up trash in the area.

"Thousands of people are walking by, and we're just handing out water

bottles, and people are just like, 'Are you serious?'" Van Diest said.

"Everybody in town is trying to make a buck. You have people with their suburban

bike, with their baby carriers full of water bottles, saying \$1 or \$2. It's kind

of a stark contrast."

Worship services are held every two hours, with 45 different church worship

bands leading the ministry times. Van Diest said even the

police have
acknowledged the impact.

Van Diest said one officer told him: "'Thank you so much. Your music every day has gotten me through my 12-hour shift. Your worship band, your music and lyrics just carried me through.'"

During the worship services, participants pray over a PA system for the delegates, the city of Denver and the upcoming election.

"We're praying for wisdom, and we're praying that [government leaders] would make wise choices," Bowling said. "If God can lead Nebuchadnezzar, He certainly can lead the Democratic Party or anyone else. So we're praying the Lord would lead them, that the Lord's will be done regarding the elections, and that we have godly, good government regardless of what label they wear."

One Metro Church leaders believe their outreach this week was the best way they could share the message of Christ during the convention.

"We feel that there is a presence for the church in community leadership that entails not necessarily advocacy but servant evangelism and showing that side of Christ," Bowling said. "We're not against advocacy—we're certainly not against promoting issues that we feel are consistent with Christian message. But the Christian message is not about issues, it's about loving people the way Christ teaches us to love people."

The convention ended Thursday night at Denver's Invesco Field,

where Sen. Barack

Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for president.

–**Felicia**

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