

Pick a Church—Any Church

✖ **April 6, 2009** —On Saturday members of all but three churches in Collinsville, Ill., hung flyers on every door in the city as part of a campaign to get residents into church-any church-on Easter Sunday.

Dubbed “Pick a Church, Any Church,” the citywide effort is an attempt to unite churches to impact Collinsville, a town 12 miles from St. Louis, Mo., with a population of 25,000.

“We have come to believe that no one single aspect of the ‘church’ will be able to serve the total needs of a community,” said David Amsden, pastor of 200-member SonLife Church and organizer of the campaign. “Therefore, it takes multiple churches with different worship expressions and various preaching styles to appeal to a vast array of individuals as well as display who God is.”

Since Feb. 23, the churches of Collinsville have taken out full-page ads in the newspaper, made personal phone calls and sent out mailers to homes. Collinsville Mayor John Miller even got involved, sending an automated phone call to some 11,000 residents, inviting them to go to church on Easter Sunday.

Amsden said the idea for the campaign originated as a way to increase attendance at SonLife, which he began leading two years ago when his father retired as pastor. But he soon realized that a random invitation to attend his charismatic church would resonate with only a limited number of people.

“Rather than my small congregation getting excited about inviting people, we have every church,” he said. “It’s amazing every time I talk to somebody how excited they are.”

Located in a city known as home of the world’s largest ketchup bottle, SonLife drew national attention in 2007 when it built the world’s largest ketchup packet—a 10 foot long, 4 foot wide

container filled with 1,000 pounds of ketchup—and hosted a festival to celebrate the feat.

He said the effort didn't increase church membership, but that wasn't the primary goal. He said he wants SonLife to grow in influence.

"We want to be on precinct boards and school boards; we want to help council members who are Christians, mayors who are Christians," he said. "But at the same time we want to hold festivals that do things to help our community."

Amsden said he has received calls from leaders in neighboring communities who want to host similar campaigns in their cities. Among them is the mayor of Maryville, Ill., where First Baptist Church of Maryville pastor Fred Winters was gunned down during a worship service March 8.

Of the roughly 20 churches in the city, 17 were expected to participate, with each contributing \$600 to cover the estimated \$9,000 cost of printing fliers and yard signs, and buying ads. Amsden said the Pick a Church campaign demonstrates that no one congregation's way of worshiping God is the best. "I actually think we're closer to portraying who God is to our community doing it this way," he said.