

Reaching the World from Central Illinois

story by
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Viki Scherer, writer and teacher, believes is going to use Central “the hub of a wheel of the end times.” Along with she also believes we are in those days. Viki’s father, was the founding pastor Prayer Ministries, which another church to form Center, currently pastored Henneberry.

God Illinois like revival in many others, actually living Jerry Henneberry, of the House of joined forces with Harvest Christian by her brother, Kirk Henneberry.

Foursquare Church (now called Life Foursquare Church) was the “Rick Warren of that era,” according to Reverend Mark Dreistadt, former Executive Director of WFHL, Christian Television in Decatur, and current President and CEO of Infinity Concepts in Pennsylvania.

So what is the spiritual significance of our little piece of the world? A number of significant occurrences have taken place in Central Illinois dating back over two hundred years.

One of those occurrences was in the early 1800’s. Viki’s research revealed that, “Reverend William S. Crissey dreamed of building a Methodist college on the hill” where the Staley and England Mansions stand in Decatur, Illinois, today. The England Mansion, 401 North College, was the Henneberry family’s original House of Prayer. “It was Crissey who bequeathed the name ‘College Hill’ to that mound of earth, which was also where the first meeting of the Illinois Sunday School Association took place,” says Viki.

Secondly, within a couple blocks of College Hill, Reverend William Ashley Sunday, better known as “Billy Sunday” held revival meetings in the early 1900’s. According to memorabilia in the possession of Pastor B.G. Nevitt, Glad Tidings Church (GT Church), a special structure was built on West Eldorado, which housed the revival meetings. The structure was later dismantled and sold to cover the expenses of the events. Thousands attended and came to Christ at those meetings

Then in the 1950’s and ‘60’s Decatur’s

“People would come to the church to see what was going on there. Pastor Jack Hayford literally began his ministry in Decatur, Illinois” says Mark. “Pastor Jack Hayford was actually ordained into ministry at Decatur Foursquare.”

“The concept of Christian television family programming actually learned to crawl in Central Illinois,” reflects Mark. “In 1989 the whole idea of pre-evangelism and progressive messaging may very well have been birthed at WFHL.



Reverend Billy Sunday preaching in Decatur. February 16, 1908.

We took a lot of heat for that at the time. That was radical thinking back then, but now it's what seeker-sensitive is all about."

Referring to the show "Touch Point", which was a call-in prayer show, aired live on WFHL, Pastor Mark remembers, "The whole Touch Point thing became a model for other stations around the country. What happened with Touch Point was amazing! To get thirty pastors, even Catholic priests, to come together to pray for the community was unprecedented. The churches responded, the pastors responded, and the community responded...and that was revolutionary. I remember talking about how, out of things happening in Decatur, that people would have a resonating. We were impacting the people, who were impacting the world."

"When I first moved to this area, it was an era of transition around 1991," reflects Pastor B.G. Nevitt, "There were a lot of new pastors, new leadership. That was a season when it seemed like most of the churches were not clinging to the past or to wounds of the past. It was an era of fresh starts, there was great unity in the church."

Pastor B.G. was among those who impacted the Central Illinois area through WFHL. "There were some amazing seeds planted in this region at that time. I think some things were starting to be birthed at that time. There were some healthy things that started then. I run into people all over the place who see that seeds of unity have continued between church people since that time."

While WFHL was active, "we focused on what we agreed on," remembers Pastor B.G. "We rejoiced with those who rejoiced and wept with those who wept. I've repeatedly told our church (GT) we WILL NOT be in competition with other churches. When we see things like common bonds happening—greater unity—that's when God begins to do amazing things."

And amazing things are happening. In 1987 Evangelist Darrell C. Porter moved to Decatur. "One of the things that



Reverend Billy Sunday

God had revealed to me was that Decatur is like the center of the United States, and that it was going to be like a hub and a central outreach for reaching the world," Pastor Darrell reflects. After his tenure in Decatur, Pastor Darrell began a new ministry in Las Vegas, Nevada, called Ichthus Ministries, Inc., designed to empower Christians to deepen their faith walk and reach out to the world. He continues the Prayerline Newsletter, which literally goes to many nations, including an e-mail version.

Christian Punches, missionary and evangelist, grew up in Central Illinois. He and his wife, Emily, are now missionaries for Youth With a Mission (YWAM) out of Texas, and also work with Living Alternatives, a ministry to young women in crisis. "You need to go where God calls you," says Christian, "You may not be able to move into your vision immediately."



Pastor B.G. Nevitt

That message is echoed by Lynn Cazier, missionary to Kenya, Africa, "Well, when you make commitments before the Lord, He's not going to forget them—even if you do." Lynn has very personal experience in that area. He committed to God at Urbana 79 (Urbana is a yearly InterVarsity Christian Fellowship event, at which students are challenged with the call to cross-cultural missions.) that he would go wherever and do whatever He called him to do. But he managed to keep God at bay with that calling for some twenty years. "He had to pretty much kick me out of the rut I was in to give me the wake up call. God's plans are bigger than what yours' are."

Lynn and his wife, Dori, continue to personally serve in Kenya, and are learning to facilitate others coming to "taste" missionary work. "I remember about a year and a half ago, I heard that there's gonna be twenty people coming [to Kenya] on a work team. I'm feeling like there is no way, but God is telling me to say 'yes.' They came, and everything was fine. Now at First Christian Church in Decatur, they're telling me that we've got forty people, whom God has called to come to Kenya. We expect the impact to be great, because it's God."

From small beginnings... "I think a lot of people look at this part of the world [Central Illinois] as down-played, like can anything good come out of Central Illinois? I hear people talk about L.A., New York, Dallas, Chicago, but I just see [in] scripture that the 'least of these,' using the humble things, are least expected. If I didn't believe that God was going to do something significant in Central Illinois, I wouldn't be here," declares Pastor B.G. "I wanna be smack dab in the middle of whatever God's doing."

"It's remarkable to me the spiritual history in Decatur; the unity of the churches in Decatur; there just seems like there's really something significant about Decatur," reflects Christian Punches. "It's so much like God to use Decatur instead of New York or some other big city. Back when Pastor Dale Downs was at Decatur Four Square, his wife, Patty felt like revival would start in the heart of our nation, here in Decatur and spread world wide."



Lynn and Dori Cazier and family.

So what are a few practical ways you can get involved in reaching the world?

1) Consider adopting or supporting adoption:

Pastor Travis Bodden from New Beginnings Church of God took a trip to Ghana, Africa, during his sabbatical. "I felt like I needed to go to Africa," says Pastor Travis, "to minister to orphans and widows. The church stepped up to collect money to build one home while I was there, but far exceeded their goal, allowing us to not only build the home, but to dig a well and provide food for a number of orphanages in need."

One way Pastor Travis and his wife are reaching out is through adoption. Pastor Travis used to think if they chose to adopt, it would need to be a healthy child. His views along that line have changed dramatically. "I really had my eyes opened as to the needs of children," he remembers. "I would get down on my knee and they wanted to touch me and touch my hair. All those barriers [I had] went away. There are many special needs kids that might be infectious. Go, let those kids hang on you and all those hang ups [will] go away."

Pastor Travis encourages others to become aware of the need for adoption. "Either you directly adopt, or you can at least support someone else financially, who is preparing or planning to adopt."

2) Go where there is need:

Going directly to where the needs are, and witnessing them first hand is another way to get involved. A short visit during your vacation may be in order. Keep in mind there may be language barriers, so make sure you or your group is going with someone who knows the language, the people, and the geography. Pastor Travis says, "Get out of your comfort zone and try to see through God's eyes how others have to live. Going to view the true needs of others will help you to be more content with your own needs. Go to the inner city, go to Appalachia. There are places here in the United States that need help. I don't think you can go and not come back changed."

3) Support missions:

But going to view the needs first hand may not work well for everyone. "In the southern part of Ghana they are still developing, but in the north, there's no power, no water. Most of us could not get past our American life-styles. We would view it as un-sustainable, but they live it--they know how to make it happen," Pastor Travis points out. Viki agrees, "We cannot go to every place, but we can support missions."

4) Pray:

For Pastor B.G. the most obvious first step to getting involved is, "prayer." Prayer is the easiest, yet most powerful thing any of us can do. He also recommends that we "be real and build relationships with people who have not yet come to know Christ. Get involved in people's lives," suggests Pastor B.G. "Too many Christian people just stay in the 'holy huddle.' I try to live it. I dedicate a significant amount of hours each week in getting involved in the lives of people not connected with the church."

"Give to missions, but just as importantly BE a missionary," declares Pastor B.G.

5) Connect with an outreach:

Pastor Mark Dreistadt says, "The greatest channel of communication is the internet and it's also the least expensive. There are all kinds of opportunities to interact on the web, to plug in and share, or even create an outreach. The movement toward mobile phones and the iPad will probably revolutionize the television world. In the next few years, there will probably be wireless TV stations."

"There are ministries all over the country who are looking for people willing to get their hands dirty in missions work," observes Pastor Mark, "People who are willing to not just give of their resources, but of their time and energy."

Perhaps Christian Punches sums up how you can get involved most succinctly, "There's the classic three-fold way: pray, give and go."



Christian and Emily Punches with their children.