

LEADER'S INSIGHT - BECAUSE PASTORS PRAYED

By columnist Eric Reed

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind." Acts 4:31-32. One part of the Columbine story hasn't been widely told. What happened before the shootings at the high school in Littleton, Colorado? We know what happened afterward. The carnage, the crosses, the testimony, the conversions to Christ, the dramatic rise in church attendance in the region. But what happened before? One pastor simply said, "We prayed."

The unity among the churches after the crisis was remarkable. Pastors from all denominations came together to minister, and attenders of all kinds of churches embraced to comfort a grieving city. In the months after 15 people were slain, the churches together sought guidance from ministers in other communities where violence had shaken schools and taken lives. The churches offered counseling for victims and families. The pastors helped each other and shepherded each other's sheep when necessary. Their unity was evident in the first memorial service. And that it continued is even more remarkable.

It continued because the pastors were praying, even before the crisis. Three years before the shots rang out, a few pastors answered a call to prayer. They had met for prayer regularly for seven years. Only a handful. Then, one pastor took the lead in bringing more of his colleagues into the fellowship. The prayer group in southwest metro Denver grew to 30 or more each week. The pastors of the same 30 churches that led the recovery ministry found, in the three years prior to their crisis, that their hearts were bonded together in true love. In prayer they learned to care about each other and each other's ministries. In prayer they learned to trust each other. And when the testing came, they were ready. Because they prayed. It's a shame that it takes a crisis to prove the value of the pastors' prayer meetings.

But in the wake of Columbine, I found myself wishing I had taken my ministry relationships more seriously. Busy with my own flock, I found reasons to miss too many meetings of the associations. The pastors with whom I developed a praying relationship moved, and finding and encouraging new friendships took time, sometimes time I didn't have. In retrospect, I see one prayer partnership that was truly nourishing, and several that I should have fed. Most pastors want that kind of koinonia -- they just need someone to take the lead and keep at it. Prayer works when we have unity in the Body of Christ. And when we have unity, we are ready to meet whatever trial may come. But if we are at odds with others in the Body, or simply too busy to keep in contact, we cannot expect God to answer our prayers. Even less can we expect him to use us in some great way for his kingdom.

One key to the success of the church at its first century birth was its unity. No, it wasn't easy. There were serious disagreements over serious matters. But somehow, God brought these people from all different backgrounds, with different angles on their newfound faith, together. And unity came when they prayed. And when they prayed, God answered.

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