

The Gathering opens door to building new friendships



Sherry Holmes prays during the Gathering at Gaylord Entertainment Center last Sunday night. Organizers said an estimated 8,000 worshippers attended the nondenominational multicultural worship service. The Operation Andrew Group is the annual event's sponsor.

PHOTOS BY SHELLEY MAVS / STAFF

Operation Andrew's most visible event just one example of group's outreach

By BRIAN LEWIS
Staff Writer

When the Rev. Janiro Hawkins of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church first met the Rev. Bob Cook, he didn't expect much.

Cook, who is the pastor of the Church at Grace Park in White House, could have been just like many other white pastors Hawkins had encountered in the past.

"We have had so many of them to come into our community and promise us one thing and then after the event was over we didn't see them any more," Hawkins said.

"This is one brother from the faith community who actually came and stayed. He wasn't there just to get some black faces or to get some token brothers. He was after some genuine relationships."

Hawkins and Cook met through meetings held by the Operation Andrew Group, the organization that sponsored the Gathering, a large nondenominational multicultural worship event held last Sunday in Nashville. But the Gathering is only the most high-profile of the events that Operation Andrew does.

Operation Andrew was founded after Billy Graham came to Nashville in 2000. Its goal was to maintain the momentum and the unity that was needed to pull off that event. Operation Andrew also sponsors educational workshops and networking opportunities for pastors.

But one of the most important

things the group does, officials say, is building partnerships such as the one between Hawkins and Cook, who is vice chairman of the board of directors of the Operation Andrew Group.

After his church moved into a new building, Hawkins said, its Friendship Community Outreach Center moved to its previous sanctuary.

Now, the mortgage on the outreach center's building is paid mostly by two businesses and a church, through a partnership established through the Operation Andrew Group. Hawkins said the relationship with Cook was instrumental in making others aware of the church's need. Now the church has more money to use for buying computers and supporting a tutoring program.

"We were not in a financial position to sustain the mortgage on both locations," Hawkins said. "The fact that they are providing mortgage assistance, it enables us to utilize our funds in other areas related to the program."

For Hawkins, working with Cook and other members of the Gathering has been an inspirational experience.

"Bob Cook is a very sincere brother," he said. "He has re-instilled my respect for ministry."

At the Gathering on Sunday, Howard Harvey, chairman of Operation Andrew Group, said any surplus from the offering would go to the Friendship Community Outreach Center and another ministry that works with youth in north Nashville, the 18th



Marie Resha of Antioch, right, prays at the Gathering last Sunday. Resha's daughter, Sabrina Hirsch, lifts her hand in praise.

To learn more

"The Operation Andrew Group exists to build a better community of unity, peace and joy by demonstrating Christian love and truth to all who live here ... to the glory of God" — To read more about the organization, go to www.operationandrew.org.

Avenue Enrichment Center. This year's offering did not generate any surplus funds, Harvey said.

However, he said the Gathering remains committed to working with various ministries and

building bridges and relationships as it has with Friendship's outreach center.

"Those are the things we like to do, to bring folks together in the community," Harvey said. "That's one of the reasons we exist."

In addition, Harvey said, there were results from the Gathering that were priceless.

Specifically, he said, 12 people accepted the Christian faith for the first time; 81 people made a reaffirmation of their faith; 68 people filled out cards asking for specific prayer requests.

"These things, Harvey said, "I don't think you can really place a dollar value upon." ■

the GATHERING 2002

worship in song	featured musical artists
worship in praise	Michael W. Smith
welcome/prayer	Reverend Henry Coles Pastor Eliu Maldonado
worship in adoration	Marco Barrientos
video	Operation Andrew Ministry
comments/prayer	Jimmy Pickel - Chairman Pastor Bob Cook - Vice Chair
worship in thanksgiving	CeCe Winans
worship in teaching	Dr. Ravi Zacharias
worship in song	featured musical artists

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