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Graham mission builds upon unity of city churches

*By [Carla Hinton](#)
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When Oklahoma City's Christian community entered into a partnership of faith with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, it promised to provide people and prayers.

[Graham Mission](#)

City leaders and residents have lived up to their end of the bargain, organizers of Mission Oklahoma City said this week.

As of June 2, the evangelistic event with the Rev. Billy Graham has amassed 656 volunteer ushers, 2,773 counselors and 2,350 Kidz Gig choir members. Plus, 449 Oklahoma City churches have participated in ongoing mission preparatory meetings, along with another 64 ministries from outside the city limits. Also, 1,691 are on the mission database and mailing list, said a spokeswoman in the Mission Oklahoma City office.

The people behind the scenes, from a diverse group of denominations, have come together to ensure the success of the evangelistic event with Graham, beginning Thursday at the Ford Center, 100 W Reno Ave.

The faith community's unified effort should come as no surprise, said John Benefiel, director of the Oklahoma Concert of Prayer and pastor of Church on the Rock.

"What we've seen for such a long time is that the Billy Graham organization would come in and they would bring the unity," Benefiel said.

"This is different because the unity is already here. They didn't have to come in and build the unity."

Benefiel said more than 500 churches across the state are part of the Concert of Prayer, an organization focusing on prayer and unity that he and other pastors started after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

The group's common objective is "to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven and His will is that all would be saved," said Benefiel, who is one of the mission executive committee's vice chairmen.

He said Mission Oklahoma City fits in with efforts that have already been under way among the state's religious community.

"I see Billy Graham coming in as an important part, a very important part, of something that God is doing in this city to transform it, and it is good."

Anthony Jordan, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said the Gospel itself is the unifying factor in denominations and churches coming together for the mission.

"We know that when Doctor Graham stands to preach he will not be preaching doctrinal distinctives. He will communicate the simple yet powerful good news of salvation in Jesus Christ," said Jordan, also a vice chairman with the mission's executive committee.

For Mark Henderson, senior minister at Quail Springs Church of Christ, the mission's emphasis on imparting the Gospel to those who need to hear it played a big part in his church's decision to become a part of the effort.

Henderson, a member of the mission's executive committee, said people are to be baptized as soon as they accept Christ into their hearts, according to Church of Christ doctrine based on the New Testament.

The mission places emphasis on encouraging people to make decisions for Christ, but Henderson said the Graham evangelistic association believes baptisms are to be the local churches' concern at a later time.

He said he agrees with the association that the local churches are to conduct baptisms.

"I don't want them to construct a baptismal in the middle of the Ford Center," Henderson said.

He said he and dozens of members of his congregation will be taking part in the mission effort to win souls to Christ.

"I don't see how it serves the kingdom of God generally and for us, particularly, to sit on the sidelines for this," Henderson said.

"If we have opportunities out of this to make disciples then we're going to baptize them. If we don't get involved, we won't have any opportunities. Billy Graham has preached the Gospel to more people than anyone else in the Christian world. He's had a very public ministry for over 50 years. I'm honored to participate in something with him."

The Rev. Major Jemison, senior pastor of St. John's Missionary Baptist Church, said his church also wanted to be an active part of the mission effort.

"Anytime you get an opportunity to be a part of something you know is going to yield fruit for the kingdom, you ought to seize the opportunity," said Jemison, a mission executive committee vice chairman.

Marty Grubbs, senior pastor at Crossings Community Church, said the mission has helped denominations focus on what they have in common -- the message of Christ -- rather than their differences.

"I've loved watching our city and churches work together," he said.

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