

Grace Community Church bound by strength of prayer

By Kelly Donaldson
Editor

Rising gas prices, a struggling economy, and living in wartime are only a few reasons people in the community are concerned about their futures. One place these concerns are often voiced is church. At Grace Community Church in Cashiers, that is certainly no different.

Pastor Steve Doerter says these and many other issues are often on his congregation's mind, and he is there to counsel in any way possible.

"People don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care," said Doerter. "Prayer is a way of manifesting care towards people."

A recent visit to simply observe Florida's Fresh Fire Ministries, led by controversial pastor Todd Bentley, made some in the Cashiers community wonder if Doerter was moving Grace Community Church into a direction similar to the eccentric Bentley's style.

However, Doerter said nothing could be further from the truth.

"The fact that we're doing something different here (is wrong)," said Doerter. "I think my whole congregation would say this is what we've always done. I can't identify that we're doing something different."

Florida's Bentley focuses

his services and message around healing. Doerter said where the line of healing is vague is how certain denominations choose to accept or reject healing as part of the atonement, and whether they simply pray for healing, like Doerter does, or rather physically attempt to heal individuals on stage, like Bentley.

"As far as Todd Bentley, (Doerter's service and Grace Community Church) has nothing to do with Todd Bentley and what's going on down there," said Doerter. "If people are saying we're following Todd Bentley, that would be an extreme exaggeration. Todd is an extreme guy and he does extreme things. A lot of people pass judgment on him. I don't. I think he's got something going on and (may the) Lord bless him. But as far as that impacting what we're doing here, that would be an extreme exaggeration."

"It's always been our desire to pray for people and not be so concerned about how much we know, but how much we care," said Doerter. "That's what we're all about."

Doerter said not only at his church, but most churches



Doerter

deal with individuals at the end of their rope trying to save a sick loved one from cancer or other medical ailments, when nothing else will work and all avenues have been pursued.

"Some word has gotten out about some medically verified healing, not subjective," said Doerter. "They try medicine and they try this and they try that and they're desperate. That's where you are when you have a child that is sick or something like that. We have medical verified cases of tumors disappearing and there was no need for surgery. But, we've also had people that we've prayed for that have died from cancer. The families of those who lost loved ones are very close to us because of the care and patience and time and energy we give in support of the fight."

Doerter said he is not the only church in the area that prays for healing, as the Cashiers United Methodist Church also has prayer for people on Tuesdays and several healings.

"It's not something new in the community and it's not what our service is about," said Doerter. "Our focus isn't healing. Our focus is Jesus Christ. We do believe that healing is part of the atonement that Jesus Christ accomplished for us. We believe we have a right to pray for healing. Our praying for healing is because we care for people

and want to see them get better no matter what it takes."

Doerter said that is part of the reason his church supports Relay For Life, which greatly benefits the American Cancer Society.

Explaining his services, Doerter said, "We have a lot of visitors. We say at the end of the service, if anybody has a need for prayer, come forward and we'll be glad to pray for them. There's no hoop-de-la. It's very low key. But one thing we've found is that the more we pray, the more we see happen. Just like the less you pray, the less you see happen."

Asked how he handles when prayer for healing doesn't work for some individuals and how they deal with the disappointment, Doerter said, "That's an excellent question. It's a question I think a lot of us will ask Jesus when we see him. We're not called to heal, we're only called to pray. Our focus is Jesus, not healing."

"Just like the American Cancer Society, we see cancer as an enemy we want to see defeated," said Doerter. "We just believe in God enough to step out and ask him for healing from cancer. We move on a rule here, just for fun, that is if there's something that is serious enough in someone's life that needs prayer and we pray and then something happens, it's against the rules to call it coincidence. Because

that's a big temptation too, because if that happened, maybe this will happen or maybe that will happen."

Doerter said most people do not understand how much of a counseling role most pastors serve at their respective churches. Doerter said he spends a tremendous amount of time counseling individuals and families.

"The economy is affecting everybody," said Doerter. "We definitely pray for families that are struggling."

Doerter has been in Cashiers about six years. He said the Cashiers community and its churches form a unique religious bond.

"The churches have a unique relationship here in Cashiers," said Doerter. "The pastors get together once a month and we have at least two services all together throughout the year. The pastors are friends and we're working together for a common cause. We don't try to steal each other's membership and we actually discourage "church hopping" so to speak."

You can visit Grace Community Church on the Web at www.gracecashiers.com. The church posts its sermons online as well. To contact the church via phone, call (828) 743-9814.