

**Saturating Community with the Gospel**

**Chris Hanley, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 036**

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Chris Reinolds:

Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection, a podcast where you can go to get valuable, relevant and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100-family churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, Strategic Leadership Coach and Executive Director with the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, and I'm Chris Reinolds, Certified Church Consultant and Lead Pastor at Killian Baptist Church.

Chris Reinolds:

Joining us this week is Chris Hanley, Pastor at Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood, South Carolina. Sandy Level is a 250-year-old church with a passion for building community connections to show and share the love of Jesus.

George Bullard:

Chris Hanley, thank you very much for being with us today and in this podcast.

Chris Hanley:

Absolutely, my pleasure.

George Bullard:

We're pleased with all that we see going on at Sandy Level and know that each day's an opportunity and each day is a challenge, both and. But we're pleased to have you here as a part of one of our Columbia Metro Baptist Association churches.

Chris Reinolds:

You're a native South Carolinian. Is that how they say it, South Carolinian?

Chris Hanley:

South Cackalackian.

Chris Reinolds:

I don't know. Is that really?

Chris Hanley:

No, no, it's South Carolinian, yes.

Chris Reinolds:

Listen, there's some weird pronunciations. Before we moved…because you're in Blythewood at Sandy Level, and I was pronouncing it Blythewood for the longest time and I was corrected and said, "No, that's not correct"

Chris Hanley:

Yes, you should have been rebuked.

Chris Reinolds:

Well, and I was adequately.

Chris Hanley:

Okay.

Chris Reinolds:

So you've been at Sandy Level for a couple of years now, since 2014?

Chris Hanley:

Yes.

Chris Reinolds:

What brought you there?

Chris Hanley:

We transitioned off of work on the mission field. When we came back to the States, we began praying about opportunities to get involved in ministry. Previously had been church planters and really wanted to do that. God closed doors, and after a couple of years we acquiesced to the opportunity to serve in church revitalization, and God brought us to Sandy Level.

Chris Reinolds:

Yeah. Acquiesced, I love that-

Chris Hanley:

Acquiesced, absolutely.

Chris Reinolds:

... terminology there.

Chris Hanley:

Yeah, there was some, "Are you sure, Lord?" opportunities and moments because we hadn't been a part of a traditional church for quite some time. So, that's what brought us to Blythewood, Blythe.

George Bullard:

How about that? Yeah, I've heard it said at times that the urgent can crowd out the important when you're not watching. So after being at Sandy Level for a little while, did you find that happening?

Chris Hanley:

Absolutely. Yeah, we've had several moments where the urgent has impeded us in pursuit of the important, that's for sure. And so it is, it's a very challenging balance because at times sometimes the urgent matters that came to us were connected to people. And so trying to sift through that, trying to understand how do we keep our focus on what's most important, what God wants us to do, and making disciples that make other disciples amidst seasons where there's struggle or instability, those kinds of things. Certainly, we've experienced that.

Chris Reinolds:

What's one of those situations that maybe you had the opportunity to work through initially, and that you fully flushed out since you started there at Sandy Level?

Chris Hanley:

I wonder if I fully flushed out any of them at this point in time. It seems like the flushing out is just a constant ongoing process. But we came in, in the midst of a season where there was just an immediate need for personnel in terms of some administrative help, and that was just an urgent need. That urgent need realistically led us to make some poor decisions and choices that impacted some of the next couple of years that created other urgent issues for us, so that's one thing.

Chris Hanley:

Following that, we just decided to move slower, make a little more informed and just better decisions, and we're postured better now for that. And the same exact thing can be said within the framework of our other ministry position that we have, other full-time ministry person. We had somebody who was serving with us, just a blessed or just a neat guy but just not a great fit, and the Lord moved him on to another position. But we took a significant amount of time finding somebody who we felt like the Lord had called to bring to minister in Blythewood, and that's been a blessing.

Chris Hanley:

It was hard, though, working through because there was a sense of urgency. We need somebody! But at the same time we just said, "Hey, we've got to slow it down, so that we are where we need to be in the future."

Chris Reinolds:

Right, right. And as a part of that process of sifting through stuff, eventually, you get through those urgent matters, and you start to pursue those other things that are absolutely essential. So one of the areas in which you all really began pursuing, which is one of the primary callings of the church is taking on more initiative whenever it comes to evangelism and making that a primary focus for Sandy Level.

Chris Hanley:

That's right.

Chris Reinolds:

So, what led you all to that, and so what processes are you all going through as you develop that?

Chris Hanley:

The means by which we arrived where we are, understanding the need was just the Lord just working on me, sensitivity to the Spirit, I guess more and more maybe the conviction of the Spirit in my life. Just saying, "Wow, you guys are doing a horrible job at reaching people for Jesus."

Chris Hanley:

We were really focused on some of the existing functions of the church or ministries that were going on. Even though we were trying to do things and reach people, we were really connecting with folks who moved into the area. Just given the dynamics, we could just exist in that manner just reaching out to believers who moved into our zip code, and just continue to exist as a church. But we also just saw, "Wow, we need to reach people with the message of the Gospel." Because even though Christians move into our zip code, there are a whole lot more that aren't believers that we aren't reaching, and a lot of other people aren't reaching, either.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. Right.

George Bullard:

So talk to me about your involvement in the Saturate evangelism pilot and what you're doing there.

Chris Hanley:

So, yeah, that's been a great process for us. When did we begin that? It's kind of blurry for me. Is it six months ago?

George Bullard:

Well, September, October is when we began having the training and stuff like that.

Chris Hanley:

Yeah, so, it was a great beginning from the perspective of that we are excited about the opportunity to get some leadership and guidance from George and from Lee Clamp, some other guys at the convention. We began that journey with just great plans, great hopes. But just as soon as we began to build any momentum at all or even build plans, we just had some crazy stuff happen within the framework of my family; a healthy parent that within just 20 days of entering the hospital just went on to be with the Lord.

Chris Hanley:

And that just really left me asking questions. "All right Lord, what do you want? What's going on?" Because that was just an earth-shattering thing. My mom, who went on to be with the Lord, she was just a huge, huge influencer in my life, helped in my personal spiritual development. She's led as many people to the Lord as most pastors that I know in one-on-one relationships, and just in praying and seeking the Lord's direction.

Chris Hanley:

It just came to my understanding we don't need to step away from Saturate, this emphasis on evangelism. We need to keep our foot on the accelerator, and along the way, we just continued forward as best we could. We made plans, and along the way, these plans got totally rearranged. Opportunities that we thought were there for us were pulled off the table, but other ones presented themselves. Lee Clamp, Melanie Ratcliffe, those have been just some great resources, along with George, in helping us to figure out where do we go from here, just continually evaluating the opportunities that are in front of us to tell people about Jesus, and just try to infuse some new, fresh DNA in our church.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. Now, you all have actually started some, and correct me if I'm wrong, you started some strategic prayer emphasis in your church. What is that looking like as far as this Saturate plan goes, and you all doing the strategic prayer?

Chris Hanley:

Well, the prayer focus is really the Who's Your One emphasis. We began that before we were even selected for the Saturate pilot program. We just asked, and with this idea of expectation, that every member from our church would choose at least one individual who is far from God and begin praying for them. And we communicated, "If you don't know who that person is, then you need to begin praying that God would put that person on your heart."

Chris Hanley:

And so, in the beginning, we just said that. They heard it every week from the pulpit, "This is what we've got to do. Begin praying, continue praying, keep praying." Then, also, now it's like a monthly reminder when we're making sure we're continuing to have that emphasis. We bring down the names, and we bring those before our midweek prayer warriors. We're saying, "Hey, we got to lift these folks up."

Chris Hanley:

And then I try to reach out to... Realistically, there are a few more people who are just more intentional and deliberate in the effort of praying for people, and then turning around and reaching. So, I'm trying to invest and spend time with some of those folks, and trying to help these people in our church be more successful in strategically praying, but also just praying that God would use them as part of the solution for seeing people come to know the Lord.

Chris Reinolds:

Right, right.

George Bullard:

So you seem to be reaching out through these people who are cutting-edge people in terms of evangelism, they're the ones that have the practice. Are you using them to mentor others or coach others in that process, or how's that working? What are some of the specific goals you're trying to accomplish in this pilot?

Chris Hanley:

To be honest with you, we had plans and we developed within the framework of our plans some of what you're describing.

George Bullard:

Right. Okay.

Chris Hanley:

We said, "Hey, we want to form groups and do training, and we're going to start with this group that entered into this 12-week evangelism training process." And we thought, "Oh, this is going to be a great launching pad for us, or launchpad just to take off."

Chris Hanley:

And it just didn't happen the way we planned. It was, perhaps you could call it organic, we had some people from this group that they essentially didn't do what we were asking, but they were forming their own groups and reaching out to people and with the intention of telling them about the Lord.

Chris Hanley:

I don't know if it was, "Hey, we're not interested in your structure," but we're like, "Okay, look, I'm not going to fight the fact that you're not doing exactly what we asked, but you're telling people about Jesus." So we're just going to work with what we've got, so that's exciting, especially one guy, in particular, just reaching out to some very far-from-God students on the University of South Carolina campus here. They're Chinese students. So he's got a couple of groups that he's working there. So we're really stoked about that.

Chris Hanley:

So now we're at the point we're like, "Okay, how do we create or maybe infuse some DNA that has some potential for replication in the future?" But that leads us to the point where we need to be all about the strategic prayer, and continue not just to pray for the people who are lost, but praying that the people who are lost would become the disciples that can reach out to the generations who are still lost.

Chris Reinolds:

Right. And I know it's still in the early stages. Have you started seeing people actually telling you stories about, "Hey, I was able to share the gospel," or "I'm building this relationship with this friend of mine."? What are some of the stories that you're hearing around your church?

Chris Hanley:

So a couple. We've heard a couple of stories, and one lady, in particular, prior to us even beginning this emphasis, she's always just been our most fervent evangelist. She has her own beauty shop, so she's got a captive audience. "Unless you want me to shave off your hair, you got to listen about Jesus."

George Bullard:

I love it.

Chris Hanley:

No, she's not like that. She's not like that, but she, oh man, she'll just call you on the carpet, and just tell you like it is, and just tell folks, "Hey look, you're lost, and you need Jesus." And she does it in a way that people appreciate and respect. It's born of love and relationship that she's able to do much of this stuff. If she has somebody who's never sat in her chair before, then she would approach it differently.

Chris Hanley:

So she, on a regular basis, literally, just about every week will tell us, "Oh, well, you guys, I want you to pray for this individual." And she'll give us their name, and so we'll pray for him, so that's just an ongoing thing. Sometimes the stories are absolutely hilarious because it's accompanied by, "Yeah, they're just so far from the Lord right now." But yeah, that's where we are, but hoping to hear more stories.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good. That's good.

George Bullard:

As we think about Sandy Level and the whole comprehensive nature of your ministry, tell us a little bit about Dios es Amor. Tell us about them and Samuel Hernandez, and that you house the Spanish congregation there.

Chris Hanley:

Yeah, the Dios es Amor church, they are just the neatest partners in the world. We love them. Pastor Samuel Hernandez just a great brother in Christ. They actually came to Sandy Level before I did, so I can take no responsibility in bringing them there, though we are thrilled that they continue to worship on our campus.

Chris Hanley:

Recently, they've made some decisions and choices that have led them to consider... In one way, shape or form, they're probably going to be permanently a part of who we are, either by way of this existing partnership or something different. But we try to get together on a quarterly basis for our church bodies. We come together, and we do some fellowship-type things together, bringing our church members together.

Chris Hanley:

But then we also get together with Pastor Samuel. He's probably the best evangelist we have on our campus, maybe. He is just a phenomenal guy. He came in during some of our evangelism class training. At the end of every class, we would walk through the three-circles method of sharing the Lord, or we'd even do it at the beginning, but he would be someone that they would have to share the Lord with. There's one time he pretended to be an atheist.

George Bullard:

Oh, wow.

Chris Hanley:

Oh yeah, that totally threw some people for a loop. But yeah, that's been a great partnership. We try to encourage them, and they certainly are a huge source of encouragement to us. We would love to see that continue to grow and develop, but right now, we're thrilled to have them on our campus.

George Bullard:

Well, that's great. That's great.

Chris Reinolds:

That's good.

George Bullard:

Well, we certainly hope, and it is part of the intent of Saturate evangelism pilot, that the evangelism culture of your church might incrementally over a period of time develop to be more focused on evangelism.

Chris Hanley:

Absolutely.

George Bullard:

Again, with your continued efforts that God might break through and do something miraculous that maybe none of us had expected. We knew that you were involved in the Who's Your One before you got into this process.

Chris Hanley:

That's right.

George Bullard:

We know that you have a great commitment in this particular area, and we want to affirm that strongly, Chris.

Chris Hanley:

Well, I appreciate it. I appreciate it.

George Bullard:

Yeah, absolutely.

Chris Hanley:

Thanks for your leadership and service to so many of us who are in churches, and like Chris, it's great. Chris is right down the road. We never get to see one another, but I'm just excited about the things that God's doing throughout, in our neck of the woods in the Midlands, and just praying that we certainly see that just explode.

George Bullard:

Good.

Chris Reinolds:

Great. Thanks so much for being with us today and we really appreciate you coming out and speaking with us.

Chris Hanley:

It is my pleasure. I appreciate the opportunity.

Chris Reinolds:

And to all of our listeners, thank you for joining with us, and please be sure to check out the show notes for more detailed information about today's show. Also, if you found this podcast helpful for you and your ministry, share it with others so we can get the word out about what God is doing. Until next time from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the Good News in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.