

Joy and Laughter in the Streets

Maranatha throws Block Party for Neighborhood



By Pastor Susan La Clear, Farmington Maranatha Fellowship CRC

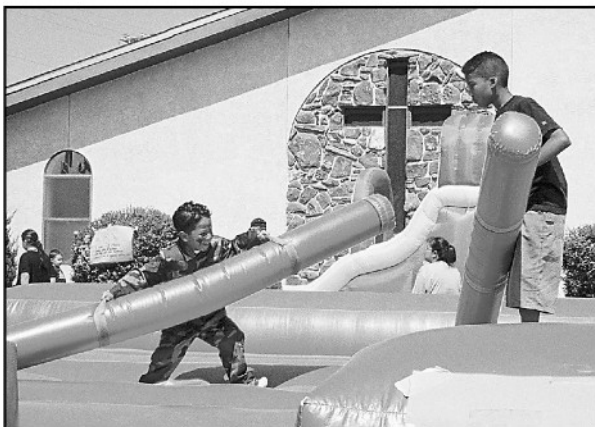
If you walk through the neighborhood where our church building sits, you will see a wide variety of people. They are Hispanic, Native American, Anglo and African American; some live in trailer parks, some in hotels, homes, and some even on the streets. As a church, we have been praying about how to extend the love of Jesus Christ to our neighborhood in a way that meets the wide range of needs that are represented there. This seems sometimes to be an almost insurmountable challenge. But as our leadership team pondered this, we realized that we might not have a church full of dynamic street preachers or evangelists, but we have a lot of servant-hearted, loving people who make some pretty killer fry-bread! We have developed some strength in drama and music that we thought might also be used in evangelism. So, somehow the idea surfaced that we should throw a huge “Block Party” for our neighborhood. We’ve all been to carnivals that are held in the city where it cost \$4 to ride one ride, and no parent in their right mind dares to stay more than an hour or they’ll go broke. And yet people still turn out to these events in droves because they are fun and they bring a sense of community to a city. We decided that if we could make ours equally fun, but sell game tickets for 10 cents each and food for 50 cents or a dollar, people could experience the love and joy of Christian community and spend the whole day at hardly any cost to them.

It took us about 3 months of planning, but by September 8th, things had come together. We had three large tents set up (thanks to the Cottonwood Pass Committee)--one with a stage for continual live worship, drama, and dance. One tent was devoted to toddler games, and another was set up with tables as an eating area. The street in front of the church was blocked off with the city’s permission, and in it sat four giant inflatable games like you see at carnivals--a waterslide for kids to

get drenched and stay cool, a bouncer, a “bungee-run, and a “joust”. There were food stands for fry-bread, hotdogs, cotton candy, snow cones and popcorn. Police cars were giving the kids rides in the parking lot and letting them yell out the mega-phone, and a fire-truck came to spray them at the hottest part of the day. We had free-throw contests for the teens, face-painting for the younger ones, and a dunk tank where we dunked the ministry leader from National Day of Care, to raise donations for his ministry to AIDS victims in Africa. (Pastor Susan and Donnie Edwards took turns getting dunked too for a good cause). This was the only area of the Block Party that was a “fund-raiser”. We went into it with the intention to bless the community not get money from them, and we knew that we would spend much more money than we earned back in 10 cent ticket sales. People were surprised at this, and some asked us about why it was so cheap and how we could make any money on it (apparently, the church of Jesus Christ has earned quite a



name for itself as a group who likes to fund-raise and always “wants your money”). We told them that we were spending money on them, not profiting, and that it was because of the love of Jesus.



We didn't know quite how many people to expect, but throughout the day (as we continually had to make runs for more hotdogs and more sodas), we realized that there must have been 600-700 people that attended our Block Party. And we could sense a spiritual hunger in many of them that we made contact with. There was a prayer tent set up next to the stage where people could come if they needed prayer, and during the last hour of the event, there was a long line of people waiting to get in the

prayer tent! One homeless man received Jesus as his Savior, and many others experienced the power of prayer. We saw the hand of God at work, especially in the way He brought others from other churches and ministries to help, adding their strengths to ours. Three other churches and a few other ministries and city organizations were involved in pulling off the event. We thank God for the connections that were made with our neighbors, and with other churches and ministries, and we hope to make this an annual event.

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