

Friends plan revival for women

Multiracial, Christian gathering to draw 12,000

By Lindsay Melvin

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

The friendship between a white woman from Memphis and a black woman from Dallas has blossomed into a multicultural revival expected to draw 12,000 women Downtown this month.

"We thought, 'This has to go on, on a larger scale,' " said Priscilla Shirer, Christian author and international speaker.

Shirer's face is plastered across city buses and church Web sites promoting Redemption 2009, set for Memphis Cook Convention Center March 27 and 28.

The daughter of well-known Dallas minister Dr. Tony Evans, Shirer is keynote speaker for the event.

Ellen Olford, director of women's ministry at Central Church in Collierville, met Shirer four years ago.

Their friendship took off after Olford shared the idea for an evangelical gathering in Memphis to promote racial reconciliation.

"She said, 'You have a new best friend and it's me,' " Olford recalled.

They spoke for hours about the revival and met in various cities over the years to continue the planning.

"Our hearts were just knit together," Olford said.

Event organizers have been spreading word of the gathering in mega-churches, poor churches, Hispanic churches, Vietnamese churches, Baptist churches, Presbyterian churches.

More than 300 congregations in Memphis and surrounding counties have since pledged to take part.

With Memphis' top-ranking crime rate and its recent designation by Forbes.com as the second-most miserable city in the United States, church leaders agree it's time for healing.

"This is a great city that has broken relationships," Olford said. "There needs to be unity."

The two women presented plans for the evangelical revival at an afternoon press conference Tuesday at The Peabody.

Because Olford and Shirer are experienced in ministering to women, they decided to focus on those with whom they best connect.

Redemption 2009 will inform women how different congregations can come together to work in their communities, as well as pray together.

There will also be 20 booths set up for organizations that minister to women.

Impressed by how the event is coming together, three other cities have already expressed interest in hosting similar events, Olford said.

"All of the country looks at Memphis because of what we went through with Dr. King," she said. "If (women at the revival) are encouraged, it will affect the whole city."

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Redemption 2009

Free multicultural revival

Date: March 27 and 28

Contact: 255-8113

Info: redemption2009.com

