

Engage360 | Episode 23: Cross-Denominational Ministry Collaboration

Introduction: Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr Don Payne: Well, hey, Engage360 listeners. This is Don Payne, your host. And we periodically want to expose you to people in other regions who are engaging the needs of the world in some courageous and creative ways. So, for a couple of episodes, I am going to be coming to you from Amarillo, Texas, and interacting with some people who are doing what I think is some remarkable ministry that can be quite instructive for the rest of us. Many people know where Amarillo is, or at least know of it, if you don't, it's a city of just under 200,000 in the Texas Panhandle. And while it's a bit isolated from a geographical perspective, I have learned over the past few years that it hosts a really thriving and a quite creative ministry community.

So, this week we have the privilege of interacting with and learning from an interesting group of pastors from very different churches here in Amarillo. They are different yet they are involved with their congregations in some really creative and collaborative ministry together for the good of this city. And they even have a sort of group identity and a name, they call themselves 4 Amarillo. 4 – that is the numeral, 4 Amarillo. And the name denotes four historic congregations in Downtown Amarillo – First Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church, Central Church of Christ, and the Polk Street United Methodist Church. And these gentlemen have joined forces in ministry across their denominational lines, yet without diluting or ignoring their own theological traditions. So, I want to welcome them to Engage 360 and let me introduce each one briefly and then ask each one to say a little bit more about themselves and their congregation. So, we will just go alphabetically. First, we have Dr Howie Batson who is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church. We have Dr Howard Griffin, who is the Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. Reverend Allan Stanglin is the Senior Minister of Central Church of Christ, and I also happen to know that he's a Dietrich Bonhoeffer fan so he may want to weigh in on that here along the line. And then Reverend Mark Welshimer is the Senior Pastor of Polk Street United Methodist Church. So, gentlemen, welcome to Engage360. We are glad to have you here and we'll start with Howie Batson and ask you to introduce yourself a little bit more.

Dr Howie Batson: I am Howie Batson. I have been at First Baptist Church of Amarillo starting my 25th year. I am a native of South Carolina and came to Texas as quickly as I could, as I say. Amarillo is a great city. It's kind of a pioneer spirit. We are a little bit isolated here and maybe that's why we do stick together because the wind is tough and the rain is seldom and so we got to hold hands and make it through the climate and the culture that we have here. But it's a great city; great city to raise a family in and our churches in Downtown Amarillo are doing well.

Dr Don Payne: Mark.

Rev Mark Welshimer: My name is Mark Welshimer. I am the Pastor at Polk Street United Methodist Church, and I have been here about eight months. It's been a joy to be a part of the formal coalition, being a part of the VBS and part of the Maundy Thursday service, and just seeing all these different people come together as one in Christ. I am the Senior Pastor of the most, I guess the most historic church here in town, and having a lot of influence in the area and a lot of influence in the United Methodist Church has been humbling for me to be a part of this historic congregation, but also looking and seeing where the future is leading us, where God's leading Polk Street, also Amarillo, and how to be the hands and feet of Christ in a relevant way for Amarillo.

Dr Don Payne: Good, thanks. Allan.

Rev Allan Stanglin: My name is Allan Stanglin. And I am the Senior Minister at the Central Church of Christ here in Downtown Amarillo. And we've been here eight years, just starting our ninth. And it's interesting – Central is a 111-year-old church, but among us four, we are the newest, the youngest church in the group. And I am just, you know, it's big news when the Church of Christ, I think cooperates with anybody on anything. And so to be a part of this group of four – not just the friendships that we have as pastors together here but the way that God has brought our four congregations together to do some really incredible things I think is such a witness to our city and such an important thing for our people and for anybody who is paying attention at all to what the churches are doing here in Amarillo. And I want to agree with Howie – I am not sure; I am not sure I have ever lived in a town where something like this could be pulled off. And I think it's just the culture of this city, kind of that pioneer. “We've got kind of a chip on our shoulders - us against the world kind of mentality.” And so, we do stick together. And God has used that I think with our four churches in really powerful ways.

Dr Don Payne: That's great. Howard.

Dr Howard Griffin: Yes, I am Howard Griffin, Pastor First Presbyterian Church here in Amarillo, originally from Midland, Texas. I am a native West Texan. So, I know – Mark's from El Paso originally as well, so we have a couple of native West Texans but great to be back in West Texas. Doing ministry here, I agree with everything that has been said. You know, Amarillo is a unique community that we are kind of the top of Texas in the Panhandle. But what I love about Amarillo is it's a great place to raise a community, and as we collaborate together in mission and ministry, I just see how God has been multiplying its impact. And I think it's great that our four churches which are the four Downtown Protestant churches really as far as historic downtown churches not competing but really collaborating, seeing how we can make a difference for the sake of God's kingdom, and seeing how people within the city have noticed that and it was amazing. When we first started this we actually headline near, we were headliner of the Year Award for Amarillo Globe news, which we joked about the fact that it should not be headline news that four churches decided to work together. But I am afraid we live in a competitive culture and I guess that was a new news for people. But we

are grateful to be here. And I love my brothers that we get to work together and pray for each other and really be colleagues in ministry together.

Dr Don Payne: Okay, so 4 Amarillo, who came up with the name?

Rev Allan Stanglin: I am not taking credit for that. That was a collaborative thing. 4 Amarillo, I mean, it's four churches, but it's for the city of Amarillo. So, it just – that made sense, right? I remember Burt Palmer who was at Polk Street at the time. We were just out to lunch one day and just kind of drew the number four and drew our church logos around it on a napkin at Green Chile Willy's or somewhere, I can't even remember where we were. But that's kind of how that started. And then, you know, it just kind of went from there. I remember I was also the last one to come to town of these four. Howie's been here for a long, long, long, long, long time. And so, it was interesting that besides Howie who'd been here, I guess 17-18 years when this started, I came to town – no roots here, no family here. I didn't know anything about Amarillo, Texas and Howard Griffin, who had just been here three or four months before I got here, called me up on the phone and said let's go get some enchiladas. I'd like to meet you, welcome you to town. I think Howie had done the same for him. And then it just, kind of the friendship started. This didn't really start out as the churches coming together. It was our own individual friendships and collaborative friendships together and those monthly lunches and times to pray together and pray with each other just turned into what God's doing through our churches now and 4 Amarillo just seemed like a good thing – the name, the name has stuck.

Dr Don Payne: Great. Well, I am thinking you could almost make a visual brand out of that, that somebody could put on a cow's rear end, right? This could be kind of a ranch brand.

Rev Allan Stanglin: Hey, I've been called worse.

Dr Don Payne: Well, I am trying to be discreet here. But you could really go places, you know, with the right kind of marketing manager, you could go somewhere with all this.

Rev Allan Stanglin: It was interesting. The first time I think all four of us had lunch was actually at my church. My local missions pastor had a concept of a ministry opportunity in the San Jacinto neighbourhood, which is one of the poorest neighbourhoods, which is very close to our churches, where all of us were doing ministry in different ways. And it was called the Navigator Neighbour program. So, I kind of pitched that idea to these men and then we talked about the fact that VBS is happening down there as well. And now there's a Heal the City, which is a free medical clinic here in Amarillo, that's another part of the city. So, we realized all four of our churches were already labouring and trying to serve and minister to that particular community. And we said wouldn't be great if we put all of our resources together to help impact the city together.

Dr Don Payne: So, tell us a little bit more. And for listeners, we are going to do the clunky thing of trying to share two mics among five people here. So indulge us on

this but y'all weigh in and tell us a little bit more about some of the ministry projects that you collaborate on as congregations.

Dr Howie Batson: One thing I'd say first Don is the four churches have been able to collaborate on these mission projects before because the four pastors have come together. So, if anybody's going to do this, you have to have four pastors coming together or however many before you can have four churches coming together.

Dr Don Payne: Okay.

Dr Howie Batson: But churches have always been here, but it was only when this group of men were pastors that this happened.

Dr Don Payne: Okay.

Dr Howie Batson: And so, people think it's a remarkable thing. But if you get four people together by doing that, now we've got, you know, 8000 people together, but it took four coming together to start with. So, the beginning of this thing is getting pastors to love each other, pray for each other, and want to work together. And then that blossomed out into these ministry projects.

Dr Don Payne: Yeah, what a concept – Body of Christ. Who would have thought?

Dr Howie Batson: Great concept. We've done several things. One thing is that Thanksgiving we have a sort of a gratitude service for all that God has done in our individual churches, in our community, and in and for Amarillo, and that's a wonderful thing – the choirs come together, the ministers of music come together and we really find that, for Amarillo extends beyond these four churches. It's really just a paradigm or a model for bringing the whole city together because I'll have someone say now, Howie, I don't go to any of those four churches but can I come to the Thanksgiving service? We say, "Sure you can. And so, and we've even encouraged other churches to get in groups of four and come together throughout this city. And so, the reality is, it's really just become a paradigm or a model for the whole city working together.

Dr Don Payne: Okay. Okay. Other things going on. What are – I mean I guess this is triggered by some of the needs of the city. But you obviously have a good sense of the pulse of the city and of what's going on and what are the needs that you need to partner together to address?

Dr Howard Griffin: So, First Baptist had a tradition of hosting a Vacation Bible School at a local elementary school. And so, our four churches decided to collaborate on that. And then Allan's church at Central had an opportunity to help rehab a house as well. So, we had kind of a construction project and we had Vacation Bible School, the last week of June we all did that together the first year and we decided to allocate different rooms. I thought it was kind of funny. The Presbyterians got the most expensive room – the kitchen. I was later told that I was predestined to take that one. So anyway, but yeah, so we worked on that and then we did some ramps, a ministry and we helped rehab an apartment complex for the Downtown Women's Center recently,

where all of our churches painted and rehabbed. So, every year we do – this is the last week of June; we do a Vacation Bible School at two local elementary schools and then we do some type of construction or rehab project as well as a part of that.

Rev Allan Stanglin:

Remember, one of the parts of the genesis of this thing is that during one of our monthly lunches together, I think Polk Street was thinking about doing a food pantry and doing some kind of a food giveaway. And I said, well, good night, we've been doing that at Central for years. We got a really cool thing going on Thursday mornings. Why don't you send some of your volunteers over to us, and we'll figure that out together? There is no sense in reinventing the wheel. And I know us at Central we were thinking about an ESL program. And Howie said, well, my word we've been, you know, we've been teaching ESL at our church for a long time. Why don't you send your volunteers over to us and we can work on that together? So, it turned into just a thing where we didn't want to reinvent the wheel. Why, why not just work together and come together? And so, it's really, you talk about us not being non-competitive and being collaborative. First Baptist just runs those Vacation Bible Schools, but then we pull our volunteers and First Baptist trains us. And then we do that together. We are feeding kids and feeding families and playing kickball and basketball together, but then also teaching them Bible verses. And I don't know how many kids come out to that every year, but it's two different elementary schools. And in addition to the service projects, we've done a community garden together and the Downtown Women's Center thing was beautiful. But the school supplies – that's right, we've always collected school supplies together. Each of us kind of has an elementary school that we work with individually. And so, we'll do that together as well. But like you said, Don, we try to identify what the needs are, and they are many here in Downtown but what we realized as a group, you know, our churches are all within five blocks of each other down here, and we are all involved in similar ministries. We are all ministering to the same people in the same kinds of conditions. And so, it just feels real natural for us to be together like this.

Dr Howard Griffin:

I'd say one of the most meaningful experiences has been that 4 Amarillo VBS at night – that was the one that I was more involved with. And a lot of my people came, they cooked dinner one night. But the fun thing was seeing all the people who are volunteering in the different green shirts – it's all the same shirts but different people and coming together and playing with kids being a part of it, not being territorial about who is going to do what, but being very gracious. And you are seeing people work together from different perspectives; you could obviously tell that they had different traditions. But as they came together, they were willing to serve some of the kids who in our community aren't served, aren't blessed. And you could tell that the community around the school came together and they came. And they came in, they enjoyed VBS. They heard about the gospel. They were fed every night from different groups. And it was a very compelling message to see all these green shirts come together as one and serve some of these people. So, it was a blessing for us.

Dr Howie Batson: We also did a diaper collection for the Crisis Pregnancy Center. In fact, as we are sitting here just talking, I am kind of remembering all these things we've done and it really is more than I had remembered. You know, one thing I thought about was, we naturally assume that churches or bodies of Christ cooperate best along denominational lines. And that is no longer a safe assumption in our culture. The word Baptist can mean a million different things. And I think even Presbyterian can mean many different things and maybe even Church of Christ. And so I would say honestly that I have some more affinity with these brothers at this table than I would some other Baptist churches in town and so it's not always best that churches most easily or naturally cooperate along the state denominational lines, maybe ours is really a proximity or geographical union working in Downtown Amarillo versus the churches that have moved out to the southwest part of town where the middle class or suburban houses are. We've stayed right here where the real heart of ministry is. And that gives us a commonality that I wouldn't have with a Baptist church that's on the southwest part of town. And so, we all call Jesus Lord, we all have a passion for the Great Commission. And we have enough basics in our theology that we can work together and leave the differences to the side.

Dr Don Payne: Well, that's such an incredible model and that really aligns with some of the language we like to use at Denver Seminary, which is charitable orthodoxy – being very clear about the basics of the faith that are the pylons that we have to commit to, we can rest our lives on and then giving a lot of space in the middle of that framework for, you know, different theological traditions and commitments that are not unimportant, but they are not the thing worth dividing or killing over, right? I am glad you brought that up, Howie because I want to look back to that here in just a moment. Allan, what are you going?

Rev Allan Stanglin: Well, I just wanted to add to what Howie was saying about just – the camaraderie that we have together as opposed to in our own traditions here in this town. Our church, our people as Central Church of Christ have learned so much from worshipping at First Pres and at Polk Street. I remember the very first-time good night – this was 6-7 years ago when we were going to do a Maundy Thursday service together at Polk Street at the Methodist Church. Well, Church of Christ – I mean we are non-liturgical, we are non-creedal. I mean, we don't...

Dr Don Payne: What's that?

Rev Allan Stanglin: I didn't know what Maundy meant, you know, and I am trying to tell my church, you know, the Sunday before – look, it's Communion, okay. We are good with Communion. We do Communion. And I said I don't know anything about Maundy Thursday. I don't know what we are in for but I am preaching, and, you know, I am preaching at the Methodist Church at a service that I had to have somebody explain to me what Maundy Thursday even was. But now I've got a couple of hundred of my people who are just so blessed by that experience, so blown away by the richness of that night and the Ash Wednesday services now that we attended at First Pres at Polk Street, we don't do those at Central. But on a Wednesday night, I've got

people coming in into my church with black crosses on their foreheads. It is such a foreign thing. It's something we are having to get used to. But it's so, it's just rich, and it's deep and it's meaningful to us. And there is no way any of us experienced that without this, without this collaboration together. And I praise God for it.

Dr Don Payne: You know one thing that really impresses me about all this is that all four of your congregations are relatively large, largish and influential within this city. And I know from some of my own experience – I've served quite a few years ago on the staff of a pretty large church that was in many respects self-supporting, self-sustained. And we see this in many parts of the country where larger congregations that are pretty well resourced are able to kind of do their own thing and insulate themselves and don't really have a need to collaborate with anybody else unless something forces them to. But they become kind of world unto themselves. Now that's – I am trying to be more descriptive than evaluative in that. I get it. I understand that. But what really impresses me about what you all have done is gone beyond that as how we've mentioned where you probably didn't have to do that, and yet saw our needs that transcended your own denominational purview and distinctives and moved in a real kingdom sense. Or it will move together and then moved out toward those. Now I am curious – kind of in that vein of thought I am curious what have been the longer way some of the challenges that you have faced in all of this?

Dr Howie Batson: I think we've tried to respect core differences. For example, when we have the Thanksgiving service at First Baptist Church, we have the instruments which the Church of Christ would normally not use in their worship. They have beautiful voices and harmonize so beautifully because they are not dependent upon the instruments. But even in that service, we sang some a capella songs to make them feel comfortable, and their worship leader came up and led some of those songs. But when we move the service over to the Church of Christ, we realize and we actually even ask them not to use instruments because that really wasn't their culture. And we didn't want to offend anybody within their congregation that might be offended by instruments and so you got to, whatever might be essential to someone, you got to be respectful of that. And so, if we are in the Baptist Church, we are going to – the pipe organ is going to bless 5000 pipes but if we are doing it over Central Church of Christ, the Baptist are going to just miss the instruments and everybody is okay because it's not offensive to us not to have instruments but it might offend some of his members if we brought instruments. And so just being respectful of each other and not making a major over minors, those kind of meat sacrificed to idols, a Corinthian conversation – they just respect, you know, people's boundaries.

Dr Don Payne: Okay.

Rev Allan Stanglin: I was thinking about this, Howie that first time we had the Thanksgiving services at Central. We talked about it as a staff and elders and said we need to reciprocate the same kind of hospitality the First Baptist showed us last year. We need to get these other three churches to put a band together, put a choir and a band and a symphony, whatever we need to do – we need

to do the same thing. And Howie would have no part of it. And I remember that and I am so grateful for that that Howie said, no way, we are not going to take that chance. And I think we four look out for each other that way. And by extension, we look out for each other's churches that way. I can't think. And I think this goes back to just the city of Amarillo. I can't think of a problem or a challenge or a hurdle that we've had to overcome at Central because of this. But I think that's just the nature of our community. That first night and again, this is seven years ago now but when our people, our elders and our ministers all got together to pray together, it was like a Thursday night before that first Thanksgiving service. You know, you walk into a room of a 100 church leaders from four different churches, everybody knows everybody already. You've already got those friendships, you've already got those relationships – we coach our kids together, we went to school together; our grandparents, you know, farmed this same land together. You already kind of had that built in which made it just, I think really easy for us.

Dr Howard Griffin:

I was thinking about the fact that many of my members, I have family members over at Polk Street or First Baptist and then like you said the first time we got together for Prayer, there is like, oh, we are lawyers together and just that sense of connection and I think it's allowed – our relationship, our close relationship where we meet monthly together, the four of us, it's allowed some of our members to really realize their light of Christ in the community wherever they are, and they can collaborate together as lawyers in different ways in different venues. I know it's been an encouragement to my people to know that oh, you know, so and so is from First Baptist and, hey, we work together on that mission trip and hey, we are both attorneys at similar firms. And, you know, it's great to see that there's that spiritual connection as well as the body of Christ and I lift up with. Allan preached and I still remember the first time he preached at First Baptist – that first Thanksgiving service – you know, was John 17, the ultimate prayer of Jesus was that we would be one because by our unity, everyone would know that Jesus is from the Father and it's our unity that points to the divinity of Christ. And so, we want to lift up the unity of Christ that we have much more in common than we have differences. We may have a different opinion on Baptism, the way it's done, but you know what, the Gospel is the same – the good news that Jesus died and rose again. That's the focus of our ministry. That's what we share and what we try to emphasize.

Dr. Don Payne:

Yeah, here, here. Mark.

Rev Mark Welshimer:

And I think the Amarillo culture doesn't just tolerate differences. They celebrate them. So I have people who tease me because they will go to the Presbyterian service, the first service on Sunday, they go to my church or they'll go to my church and then to the Baptist Church – literally every Sunday because a Baptist married a Methodist or a guy works with another guy that and wants to go stay with the doctor's kid at First Pres. And so just that deep connection, people know how different they are. And they know the differences because you are right – people have known each other really well here and they have seen each other grow up. But they are also very generous not only financially, but relationally. They know each other and they know the differences and they celebrate them.

Dr Don Payne: Okay, let's push that a little bit further because another feature of all of this that really impresses me is that each of you and your congregations are still working from within a posture of commitment to your theological tradition. You are very generous within that, within the framework of Christian historic orthodoxy. And yet unlike, and again I am not being critical, just descriptive, but unlike many congregations in many parts of the country that have either been non-denominational altogether or have maintained a denominational affiliation but have kind of soft pedalled that or subscribed that in some way for the sake of outreach. And again, it's very understandable. Interestingly, you each and your congregations remain clearly anchored in your own theological tradition. And I am curious to have you speak to how your own theological tradition helps you interpret this engagement and not only some of the things you do together more intramurally but some of the external ministries you engage in – how does your own theological tradition help you and your congregation understand what you bring to the table in these efforts? Does that make sense?

Rev Mark Welshimer: I guess Polk Street is very diverse to begin with. So, we have a very wide variety of people who come to Polk Street. And so, a lot of churches might be nervous about that and anxious about that, especially in this day, especially United Methodist circles. But Polk Street isn't. And I love serving a church that's very diverse, not just one viewpoint. And so, because of that, I think that our church loves celebrating that diversity, those differences of opinions, differences of ideas. It doesn't mean that they subscribe to them but they celebrate them. They understand them. They can even articulate them in beautiful ways. But the thing is that as we go to these different churches, what I have noticed is that people are anxious about it – even if they say or hear something that might be different than their theological perspective, they don't feel like they have to go to bat. They don't get anxious about it; they don't have to defend it. We stand for who we are, and we celebrate who other people are without having to change another person.

Dr Don Payne: Okay, interesting.

Dr Howard Griffin: I would say, part of the identity of the Four Amarillo is that we do understand, respect each other's denominational traditions, and so we are not trying to convince anybody in any church to believe anything they don't want to believe. We kind of celebrate the unified core of theology. And I will have to give Allan a whole lot of credit that quite frankly, historically, I hope this is fair to say the Church of Christ have not held hands with a lot of people. And that church of the four wants to hold hands the most. And so, when you have a Church of Christ, that's that embracing and loving to man, you just jump on board. I give a lot of credit to Allan leading his people to – once I realized we could hold hands; they are ready to go.

Dr Don Payne: Wow.

Dr Allan Stanglin: You know, you are talking, Don about just how our denominational beliefs and practices kind of play into this, I guess. I remember when I was talking to

our elders about this, you know, hey, I've got these three friends, and we've got these three churches and we've got some ideas. And my elder said, well, let's go for it, let's do it, you know. And we were talking about John 17 that night that the world may know this will be an undeniable witness to our city that Jesus is bigger than our differences. And He really is the Prince of Peace. If we can get these four churches together, I said, well, they won't be a problem. But we did have to talk to our church about it. And what was helpful to us – two things I'd say as Churches of Christ, part of the American Restoration movement, we were a unity movement a long time ago. Believe it or not, we were established to bring all Christians together. And I had to remind my people of that, hey, we are going back to our roots, you know, we are going to unify.

Dr Don Payne: Yeah, not a new thing, really.

Rev Mark Welshimer: That's right. And this is in our DNA. Even though we are the, you know, the World Champs at dividing, we are going to get back to our roots, and we are going to unite. And so, reading some Alexander Campbell and reading some Barton Stone, you know, about unity and about all Christians that are uniting in the Lordship of Jesus – that was helpful for us. The other thing that I did with our church that I thought was helpful was giving them a scenario and I asked the question, you know, do you think the Churches of Christ have everything figured out? Are we perfect in everything – all doctrine, all belief, all practice? I mean, surely, we don't think we've got all the answers to everything. And after 30 minutes or so, they agree, you know, we don't have it all figured out. Yeah. And I said, well, what covers us in the place is that maybe we have a misunderstanding or what covers us in the areas we don't have everything exactly figured out. Well, it's a grace of God. And I said, you know that same grace, covers every Christian and every church, the Baptist, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, it's the same grace of God. They don't have everything figured out either and it's the same grace and if we think we get more grace than they get, well it doesn't get more arrogant than that. You know why? Cause we're more sincere? Give me a break! So, that's kind of the tact that we took with my church, but I'll say this, when we announced that we were doing this at the Central Church of Christ, there was almost a – there was a standing ovation that morning in the worship service and here's why – I think it gave us language to articulate with our mouths and our brains, what we already knew in our heart.

We know that we're united, we know that we're all Christians, we know that God through Jesus loves and saves every one of us through faith, so we already knew this in our heart, we just didn't know how to say it. And so, once we gave our church the language, it was the sense of not just relief, although relief was part of it, but it was celebratory.

Dr Don Payne: Wow, well said.

Dr Howard Griffin: Yeah and I want to add to that, we do say the Apostles Creed almost every Sunday and we're in the lines of the apostles creators I believe in the holy catholic church, catholic being small c universal church, everyone who confesses Jesus is Lord is a part of that church and so for us this was kind of

a natural thing. We have lots of new church members, we're never trying to change ship but occasionally someone will move to town and they married a Methodist and the person was a Baptist and they find the Presbyterian Church to be kind of the nice middle way. Denominations form so they find their way to us or their former Church of Christ – I joke with these guys, some of our members they're Baptist or Church of Christ who just want to have a beer and that's okay in the Christian world but anyway, there's differences but they're nearly not that significant cause for us we're all focused on Christ and Christ for one.

Dr Don Payne: We're just going to stop the podcast right there, that's a great note to end on. Howie?

Dr Howie Batson: What I'm going to say may sound strange, but I found it easier to tolerate theological differences with people from other denominations than within Baptist tradition. You asked us how we each kind of carry forth our own traditions, let me give you an example. I would expect my Baptist brother to baptise by immersion. I understand that not always is Poke Street going to baptise by immersion and I wouldn't try to change their tradition, that's who they are, it's part of their identifying element, to baptise a child, so I get it and I'm okay with it. I might be a little impatient with the Baptist who was really heavy in the reformed theology, I understand the Presbyterian tradition, I have some appreciation for it and I can learn something from it, but coming from the Presbyterians, I'm great with it. I would expect a Baptist church to have a band or an organ or a piano and might think, that's really odd if they were singing A Capella every Sunday, but what I understand is coming from a rich tradition the Church of Christ and how beautiful the a capella music is, then I'm okay with it. So, in the strangest way as a Baptist, being partners with people from different ecclesiastical cultures has allowed me to be more diverse. Does that sound strange?

Dr Don Payne: No, not at all, it sounds remarkably redemptive.

Dr Howard Griffin: In fact, Howie was such an influence on us we actually purchased a portable Baptistry that allows you to do immersion, so we do both modes of baptism now, thank you Howie.

Dr Don Payne: But it's portable, not permanent.

Dr Howard Griffin: Yeah, its portable not permanent, that's right. We still sprinkle too.

Dr Don Payne: Yeah okay what advice would you men offer to those – maybe in other contexts who would love to consider something like this where they are, but they may be at a very different place with regards to congregational capacity or openness or other challenging factors. What would you tell them? How is this potentially a model for people – again maybe in different parts of the country, different cultures, but they see the hand of God, the redemptive imprint on this kind of thing. Where do they start?

Dr Howard Batson: You start by finding a friend in ministry that can be your prayer partner and someone with whom you share an apostles theology, a core theology and

then if those two pastors can get together, then it won't be long until the churches can have a Thanksgiving service together, or maybe its three, maybe its four, maybe its five it doesn't matter, but it starts pastor to pastor. Not church to church. If the church is trying to push this on the pastors to get together, you're going to have a disaster. It just has to start with leadership and if you can get a pastor to – you don't even have to have an agenda to start, just call – just start it with pastor calling, inviting one pastor to lunch, you call and invite another pastor to lunch, you call and invite another pastor to lunch so you start at the head and then it can include the whole body.

Rev Allan Stanglin: I was going to say it starts with cheese enchiladas.

Dr Don Payne: What doesn't?

Rev Allan Stanglin: Yeah exactly, only good can come from that. You know, it's interesting to me that when we are – when you go to a funeral, you're holding hands and praying with people from other denominations and nobody ever asks a question. When you're in a hospital room you're holding hands around that sick person and praying to God and worshipping God and nobody is asking any question about how much water you use at baptism or how many organs are in your church, I mean we don't – but when it comes to a worship assembly, you know the doors are closed on that deal and that seems to be the last barrier. And for some reason the most important barrier. And so, I think all those other things have to come first but for some reason I think in this town, in this city of Amarillo, the fact that we were worshipping together, not collecting school supplies, not doing an ice-cream supper for elementary kids, but the fact that we were actually worshipping together in each other's church buildings, on Sundays, to me that was just this loud undeniable testimony that God was at work and those other things have to come first, but those worship assemblies have been so powerful.

Dr Don Payne: There's a rich theological statement right there. That how much grows out of our doxology.

Rev Allan Stanglin: Just to add to that, one specific thing and I think Howie is right, he was very kind to invite me to lunch the first time and I just wanted to pass it on and invite Alan and eventually invited Bert and through that friendships form but what was also powerful was that we did a pulpit swap, to say hey, could you come and preach in my pulpit and Alan did the same for me and I've been over to first Baptist and – that's huge. When your congregation can see that you're allowing a pastor from a neighbouring church to come and share the word of God and realize there's a lot more in common than there's different when it comes to understanding Scripture and God's call to make disciples of all nations.

Dr Don Payne: So, what is the – Mark go ahead.

Rev Mark Welshimer: I just say, be aware of relationships, be aware of those around you because if you're a pastor, you're going into a new church or new area, you're not like the new thing, I mean the church has been there, is there and probably

will be there after you're gone. Look and see what relationships are already there and kind of form into them because probably there's a ministry of alliance, there's probably other churches that have collaborated for funerals, for weddings. There is already relationships. So, if you walk into something like that, notice what's going on, be self-aware. Understand the dynamics and try to fit in and kind of work into it. I came into this – this was already going seven years before I started, so it's like I come the new day. You know what I mean, I'm the new spouse or whatever, like wow! You know, I'll tell you about all the new history, well okay, good for you guys, but it's a learning statute and so part of it in any community, and in most communities that I've been in, there's a strong ministry alliance where people want to join together. They want to work together. No one has enough resources. Every church needs to collaborate and do great things for the kingdom of God, not only within the denomination, but within differences and geographical locations. So, I would just say for a young seminarian or for someone who is about to start church, if you're looking around, look and see what's already there. Then also, geographically or within your denomination, but what works, what fits and what would be conducive for your people.

Dr Don Payne: So last question – almost last question. What would you'll like to do in the future? Where do you see the partnership headed in building on the strengths and the relationships, the track record you already have. What are some of the needs of this city that you really hope to be able to address in the future, as for Amarillo?

Dr Howard Griffin: Well you asked about the city, I was actually talking about a global trip that Mark and I have talked about. my church has not done a trip to the Holy Land in a very long time and we were talking about maybe collaborating on that but I know, the global mission is where I was kind of going of what I would like to see next cause we serve all over the world as well and I think that would be powerful for us to begin to introduce each other to the partnerships we have around globally. Cause I know as a former mission pastor when I went to Cuba, there weren't any Presbyterians. We worked with Pentecostals and we worked with Baptists about [inaudible 39:36] they would say in Spanish, because they were focused on Christ and trying to make disciples. So, denominational barriers are almost – they don't exist globally. In the global church, cause it's all about Jesus and trying to lift him up. So, I was thinking globally but maybe you guys have an idea for local.

Dr Howie Batson: Globally I was going to say, we take mission trips all over the world every summer and I may have two slots that I need a nurse to go on, so probably if we ever get to the point where we can kind of merge our ministry opportunities more so that their folks can go on some of our trips and we can go on some of their trips and really as far as the city, I think the city now comes to us and the reality is, we never had to sit and think of new things. People know that the four churches are doing things together, so everybody who's got a ministry idea says, hey how about the four down town churches, and so we don't have to manufacture ideas, in fact we're having to filter ideas because – you know we are busy individually and so that hasn't stopped. I mean First Baptist still has a full functioning slate of missions and

ministries from here in town to around the globe and that's true of each of these churches and so it's trying to find the thing that we can do better together than we would do individually and there's still some things we do better individually because we just wouldn't fit. They're sheer numbers, you know there's not one space to house all the people of these thousands of religious folks of downtown Amarillo. So, once you get it going, you're going to find that the community is going to come to you because that's a one stop shop.

- Dr Don Payne: Well put, well put. Okay. Final question, lots of folks as I said in the intro, lots of folks know where Amarillo is and have probably driven through here on I40 going somewhere else, and I want to put in a plug for the culinary culture of this city, as I've kind of immersed myself in it here and there over the last few years. There are some good eats here and for all the people who as yet may drive through here on I40 and need to stop and get a meal, other than the big chain places, forget those – what should be on everybody's culinary bucket list when they come to Amarillo. Howard?
- Dr Howard Griffin: This is Texas, you've got to go Tex Max. I would say get on route 66, 6th street specifically, it's actually in the neighbourhood, it's called Berseros, it's a Mexican restaurant. Excellent, excellent fajitas.
- Dr Don Payne: I just had lunch there today. So, I'll give an Amen to that.
- Rev Allan Stanglin: I'm partial to Tyler's barbecue. One of Texas monthly's top 50 barbecue joints in Texas, I think the only one that they've rated in the pan handle and you can't beat that, good stuff. Get there early though because they run out.
- Dr Howie Batson: Well I'm the skinny boy of the group.
- Dr Don Payne: Somebody is going to pay for that comment.
- Dr Howie Batson: My favourite place is a place called Eat Right where you get the good fruits and vegetables, really good plant-based salad bar there. Oh boy! They're going to line up out down the block for that.
- Dr Mark Welshimer: If you're travelling through Amarillo, I'm going to challenge you to eat the big Texan, eat the 72-ounce steak and it's free!
- Dr Don Payne: If you eat it all in one hour, along with everything else.
- Dr Mark Welshimer: Go for it, check it out online, you can watch it. It's comical. But I'll tell you we're the best barbecue cook offs here, I was a judge at one of them this year and out of 12 ribs, all of them were spectacular. So, if you get to come to a festival or party here, come and eat some barbecue, you will love it.
- Dr Don Payne: This is great. We could make a whole other podcast just on this, just a culinary Amarillo eats. But we'll maybe save that for another time. Gentleman thank you. Howie Batson from First Baptist, Mark Welshimer from Polk Street United Methodist, Alan Straglin from Central Church of Christ, Howard Griffin from First Presbyterian here in Amarillo Texas.

Gentleman thank you very much and God bless you all for what you're doing. May the lord just make your tribe increase and continue to make this work flourish. This is Engage360 from Denver Seminary, I'm Don Payne your host and we're glad you've been with us and hope that you'll join us again for another conversation next week. Take care.