

From the Tampa Tribune:

Alliance hopes to build bonds in community **Michelle Bearden, Faith & Values Columnist**

Here's a recipe for failure:

A church in Carrollwood wants to start a tutoring program in the inner city. Well-intentioned congregation members rent storefront space in the College Hill area and send out fliers announcing the new ministry. They open their hearts and their doors – and nobody shows up.

It's all about planning, partnership, and cooperation. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen in our community. There's too much "I" and "you" and not enough "we."

Here's where the Tampa Bay Area Faith-Based Alliance steps in.

The alliance was launched a year ago on the heels of the attention surrounding the faith-based initiative proposed by President Bush. It serves Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Manatee, Sarasota, and Polk counties.

The Bush initiative hasn't fared well for a number of reasons, beginning with battling politicians on Capitol Hill. Then came Sept. 11, and homeland security moved to the forefront. Add budget cutbacks (translation: less money for social service agencies), and you can see how priorities have changed.

But the alliance lives on.

Diverse Board of Directors

Boosted by a \$50,000 grant from Florida A&M University, the nonprofit group has a mailing list of about 300 addresses. Its board of directors includes representatives from faith-based groups, businesses, churches, and civic groups.

The alliance's goal is to improve collaboration across cultural, denominational, and faith lines in delivering services and programs. There's too much stepping on toes, too many repeat efforts and too many projects that wither and die because of poor planning and follow-through.

"You start by building foundations," says alliance member Ward Cox. He's the administrator of For The Family, Inc., which oversees a family referral network involving more than 40 agencies. He has had personal experience in bringing diverse groups together for a common purpose.

"The faith-based community is among the most socially conscious, yet it struggles with the concept of collaboration for a common goal," Cox says. "Good intentions don't always lead to success. A purpose without a plan doesn't work."

For more information about the Tampa Bay Area Faith-based Alliance, please call alliance chair Dee Merritt-Bell at 238-3491.