



Writer Jeffrey Cody
Photo by Michele Celentano

PASTORS/CHURCH LEADERS COLLABORATE AT SWEAT

Collaboration for a good cause isn't new to Anthem. We turn out in numbers to volunteer in support of We Care, the Salvation Army, Relay for Life, Team W.I.S.H., and many other causes. In fact, we have organized new service groups looking for ways to serve and support those in need in our community. These groups now have a new resource for their charitable work, and it all began with Sweat.

It is December 21st, and I am meandering through the machines of the Sweat gym on 41st Street in Anthem. The twenty pastors and church leaders who, back in October, accepted a challenge to lose weight, get in shape, and raise money for local charities are lined up for their final weigh-in. Collectively, they have lost almost 400 pounds. Individually,

they have met personal goals of weight loss and physical fitness. It has taken a great deal of determination and dedication to stick to the rigid program outlined by Josh Rogers, Owner and Trainer at Sweat. Over a twelve-week period, participants have shared a minimum of thirty-six training sessions, twelve boot camps, and three cases each of shakes instead of solid food as they kept personal journals and learned the basics of maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. But, something else is evolving.

It all began when Jamie Nollette, Business Development Coordinator for Sweat, called Ted Baird, Lead Pastor at Fellowship Church at Anthem. She was looking for a means to not only promote the gym, but also for a way

to do something good for the community. She suggested a group challenge- money to go to a program at the winner's church. Ted broadened the idea to a group challenge where local pastors would work together for the community. Since that day, Jamie has, "found it very rewarding to work with the pastors. Many of them did not know each other before beginning the challenge, and it has transformed them. Since being involved in this program, they have agreed to continue working together to help the community." Pastor Ted agrees that, "One of the most valuable things to come from this experience is the collaboration of churches as businesses. Churches tend to compete. For pastors to collaborate is impressive. Not only did we lose weight, but we raised \$10,000 for local charities."

Josh feels that Pastor Ted provided not only the catalyst but also the cohesion needed for this three-month long endeavor. "He took the role of team captain and kept everyone involved and attending the meetings. He took the initiative to break down the barriers with me and within the group. They all came together on the same team. They didn't see that option before, and they all had amazing results." This notion of being on the same team became a theme by the end of the challenge.

Laurie Smith, Children's Ministry Director at Cross of Christ Church, felt that, "The most important result of the Pastor's Challenge was everyone meeting for the first time in some form and uniting for a common goal." Toby Ray, Pastor of Heritage Christian Assembly, "enjoyed the camaraderie of all the pastors. I find it much easier to work out with people I love." This was the common thread in the tapestry of assembled, fit, and energetic religious leaders in the gym. They all exuded vibrant energy and enthusiasm for what they had achieved personally and through collaboration.

Josh hopes their example will serve as models for their congregations. "We have started a referral program that will help the ministers stay fit and introduce their parishioners to a program that can benefit both," he noted. If the response of participants is any indication, his hopes have a good chance of becoming a reality. Laurie Smith agrees, "It is important to send the message that we need to be healthy: spiritually, physically, and mentally." If it is personal testimonials Josh is looking for, they are abundant in the group.

"While the weight loss was great," confided Rick Casto, Director of Teen Challenge of Arizona, "what I really enjoyed was working out with Mark and Josh. I really appreciated their encouragement and the fact that they held me accountable. They push you to another level, even though they sometimes have to be hard on you. I

never thought I could do any of this, but now I have signed up for three more months." When questioned further, Rick admitted, "I never realized how bad I felt until I started feeling good." And John Lunsford, Young Life Pastor, will continue to work out because, "having just turned forty and knowing that my family has a history of heart disease, I need to be here for my kids." Yes, the results are laudable. Rick Casto achieved the most impressive weight loss, as he dropped forty-nine pounds. Matt Molinari, Pastor at Cross of Christ Lutheran, lost over thirty-five pounds, and Ryan Mitchell, Pastor at Grace North, lost just under thirty-five pounds.

The total money to be divided between We Care and the Salvation Army amounts to almost \$10,000, and this highlights the most significant achievement- the ongoing collaboration among the religious communities. "I'm very excited that we met outside of Sweat about further opportunities to make our community better," said Pastor Ted. Yes, Anthem hasn't heard the last of this collaboration.

Everyone involved united in thanking those in the community who supported them by buying T-shirts. Almost \$1,000 was raised through this initiative. Even greater thanks are extended to Anthem businesses and the community leaders who sponsored the challenge. Their generosity amounted to over \$9,000 for the benefit of charity. Alphabetically, they are: **Boates & Crump, Daisy Mountain Dentistry, Econo Lube, Our Kitchen to Yours, Professional Insurance Brokers, St. Rose Catholic Church, Sam Crump, Subway, Sweat, Todd Ninneman with RE/MAX, West Valley Pediatric Dentistry of Anthem, and Wood Orthodontics.**

The entire team consisted of the following pastors and church leaders:

- AZ Hills Community Church** >> Jon Hatch, Bob Lehman
- Canyon Church of Christ** >> Tom Riley
- Cross of Christ Church** >> Matt Molinari, Laurie Smith
- Christ's Church at the Crossroads** >> Chris Dodd, Doug Lake, Maribeth Dodd
- Fellowship Church at Anthem** >> Ted Baird, Scott Foreman, Eric Sass
- Grace North Foursquare Church** >> Lisa Orr, Ryan Mitchell
- Heritage Christian Assembly** >> Toby Ray
- St. Rose Catholic Church** >> Bill Clower, Lori Nicholson, Matt Sicarra
- Teen Challenge of Arizona** >> Rick Casto
- Young Life** >> John Lunsford, Michael Robinson

The Pastors' Challenge has ended. Now is the time to organize your own team. Remember, it is "much easier to work out with people you love."