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RiverPointe names 'em and claims 'em

By John Hall

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CONROE-Forget "Cheers." At RiverPointe Baptist Church, everybody really knows everyone's name. It's written on their nametags.

Every person who walks through the doors of the 3-year-old church sticks a nametag on his or her shirt and is asked to fill out an information card.

The uniform actions create a sense that everyone is equally important and welcome, according to Pastor Dane Riddle. The barrier of not knowing anyone's name is immediately knocked down, and it is easier for people to connect, he said.

Although everyone goes through the same motions, church members recognize and welcome guests to the service with warm handshakes and caring conversation, Riddle said. The pastor encourages several people to meet each newcomer, so that every visitor feels comfortable in the close-knit congregation.

This allows the church to be "extraordinarily friendly" without embarrassing anyone, Riddle said. "You can't sneak in and sneak out." □

Ola Williams, a founding member of the church, has seen the nametags help visitors immediately feel like they are a part of the congregation. She

and several other women send handwritten notes to people inviting them to church, thanking them for visiting the church and congratulating them on their new babies.

Occasionally new people will enter the church, connect her nametag with the signature on one of her letters, give her a hug and thank her for writing, Williams said. She sits with them during the service, and a relationship develops.

Jovana Young, who joined the church earlier this year, found the nametags particularly accommodating. She admitted she has trouble remembering names, so the identifiers help her recall people and eliminate awkwardness with other people in the church.

The church, founded by believers from West Conroe Baptist Church who felt a call to start a new work, continues its outgoing spirit in missions as well. It sets out to reach unchurched people by personally building relationships, helping them with needs and inviting them to church.

The congregation continues following God's call to support new churches, Williams said. Inspired by the 13 churches around the state that sponsor RiverPointe Baptist Church, the congregation now is helping sponsor a new church itself.

The church's outreach has been enhanced by a recent move to a more visible location near Interstate 45. People can easily see the church as they drive by and have no trouble getting to it.

"There's nothing we've done to get people to visit more than location," Riddle said.

And visit they have. The church averaged 55 people while it met at a YMCA building, but attendance surged to 75 after the congregation moved to its new location. The church has served as many as 120 people in Sunday

services since Easter.

People are entering the church through several ministries, including the Wednesday prayer time.

Riddle credits the success of the church to the power of God and the loving spirit of the congregation.

"It's in the genetics of people who start a new church," Riddle explained. "They want to reach people."

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