

'Big God' leads small church to take on complex ministries_11204

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'Big God' leads small church to take on complex ministries

By George Henson

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FORT WORTH-At one time, Pastor Howard Caver did not want to be given a nursing home, but now he and his small church are preparing to spend \$4 million to build one.

Leaders of World Missionary Baptist Church in Fort Worth eventually did take that first nursing home, but not without coaxing from God.

The nursing home was a gift, but Caver was not sure it was coming from above. An owner of 11 nursing homes decided to retire and sold all the properties. After a time of losing money, however, the new owners gave back one of the homes, saying it had too many problems to fix. The man still didn't want it and decided to give it to a church to run.

Because of its history of community ministry, World Missionary Baptist Church was on top of his list.

Caver initially was not thrilled. "I was really nervous about it because I

didn't know anything about running a nursing home," he said. "All I knew was that I'd heard it was a good way to get sued."

Although as a pastor he had on occasion visited people in nursing homes, he also had a personal aversion to nursing homes.

"I've never liked nursing homes," he admitted. "Prior to this, I would send other people out to minister in nursing homes, but I had only been once or twice myself-to see people in wheelchairs and not able to do anything for them. I didn't like that.

"The first miracle was for God to change my heart and to teach me that being there is often enough," he said.

That lesson was a little while in coming, however, because Caver still was not convinced it was a good idea for the church to take over the nursing home.

When he presented the idea to his congregation, he acknowledged its potential for ministry, but he also was open about the liability the church might be taking on. The nursing home had a history of deficiencies when state inspections were conducted and also was losing about \$25,000 a month.

Because of those concerns, he told his congregation the vote had to be unanimous. If one person voted no, the church would not take the nursing home.

"I was secretly hoping somebody would vote no, but everyone was excited about it, and the vote was unanimous," he explained. "We never would have been involved in this unless God said to, and that was what that unanimous vote meant."

Caver and his congregation now owned a building valued on tax rolls at

\$400,000 and a nursing home license valued at \$1 million.

Convinced God ordained the ministry, Caver sought to get the home running in a manner that would be pleasing to his church and God. Patient care became the priority, he said. Prayers and Scripture readings over the intercom system greeted residents each day, and gradually things began to turn around. Sixty days after the church took over, state inspectors returned to find zero deficiencies, a first at this nursing home.

That is not to say that everything was smooth sailing. Often the money coming in did not meet expenses.

“I can smile now, but God has tested my faith, and God has tested my patience. Myself and my congregation must have at least mustard-seed faith,” he said.

Caver and his daughter-in-law both went to school and earned accreditation as nursing home administrators, and the ministry began to turn around. Soon after, however, a pharmacy chain offered to buy the property for \$1 million to build a new store.

The church used the money to begin drawing up plans and buying property for a new nursing home facility. The eight acres at Village Creek and Wilbarger Roads in the Stop Six area of Fort Worth is large enough that Caver dreams of someday moving the church and its grade school to the site as well.

Having the school and the nursing home together would enable the generations to minister to one another, he said. And the school, the students and parents far outnumber his congregation, as will the number of patients in the 81-bed facility.

“If we were a congregation of 2,000 or 3,000, no one would pay attention. But when the students and parents in your school outnumber your

members and when you have a nursing home where just your staff outnumbered your congregation, people notice," he said.

The nursing home will not be the only one in the area, but it will be the first one to be built in the last 30 years, he said.

"Some will probably want to move to our facility because it is new, but what it also will do is to put pressure on these other facilities to improve their care and facilities, so in a sense it's a win-win proposition for all the patients," Caver said.

The facility, to be called Immanuel, just as the church dubbed its first effort, will include a chapel for residents and their families. The facility will continue a bold Christian witness.

The mortgage company wanted an entity to guarantee the \$4 million note to build the facility, and the regional Housing and Urban Development office has approved the project. As soon as written confirmation comes from Washington D.C., papers will be signed. The church plans to break ground this month. Construction should be completed by next fall.

While running a school and a nursing home are a large endeavor, Caver said his church is merely attempting to follow the leadership of God: "We serve a big God, and we are attempting to do big things under his leadership."

The congregation's willingness to attempt big things is based on Scripture, in particular Ephesians 3:20, which says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us."

"That just blows my mind," Caver said, "because I can think of some big things and God can do much, much more than I can imagine."