

Each new member brings a needed piece of the puzzle_62804

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Each new member brings a needed piece of the puzzle

By Craig Bird

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SAN ANTONIO—Unity can be tough to come by in a Baptist church. And when it does arrive, it can be downright scary.

At least that has been the experience of the leaders of The Fellowship at Westcreek, an almost-one-year-old Texas Baptist congregation in Southwest San Antonio.

Ken Noles, pastor of The Fellowship at Westcreek, leads singing
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“I've lost count of the times the hair has stood up on the back of my neck when someone says the exact thing I am thinking,” said Pastor Ken Noles. “We finish each other's sentences, articulate each other's dreams. Somebody will say, 'I've been praying about this, and this is what I feel God wants us to do.' And the rest of us will look at each other and then say, 'Me, too.'”

The principle works even when money is involved.

“We'll be discussing some expenditure, and we agree to all say aloud and at the same time the figure we think is the right one—and we'll all have the same figure,” explained Scott Damron, who works for the U.S. Air Force when he is not co-leading the evangelism team with his wife, Kim.

“We were drawn together. Each of us has been given a piece of something God wants to do in this place at this time. It is so neat to look at your friends and fellow church members and say, 'Hey, you've got my other piece—together we can do this.'”

But while they may have different and complementary gifts, the leadership team has one dominant trait in common—a desire to step outside the traditional way of doing church in order to reach their neighborhoods for Christ. For Westcreek, that meant a streamlined decision-making process and a focused commitment to be a means for people to respond to the call of God upon their lives.

Of the first, Noles notes: “We make decisions in two or three minutes that usually take two or three hours of debate at most churches. Of course, the fellowship before and after that decision can last for two or three hours!”

The second is best illustrated by one of Noles' recent sermons. Preaching on recognizing and using spiritual gifts, he challenged the congregation by asking: “What is your gift? Whatever it is, we have a ministry for that. Or if we don't, we'll start one, and you can lead it.”

Westcreek launched last August after two hot summer months spent “hand placing” 4,000 flyers (“because we couldn't afford to mail them,” a member explained). Though they bought enough Krispy Kreme donuts and Starbucks coffee for 100, the common expectation was for a crowd of 15 to 20. Instead, 55 people showed up at the elementary school meeting place.

The next week, the student ministry, Foundations, kicked-off. “We had three teenagers in our core families, and that was what I thought we would start with,” said Andy Scott, a physician's assistant who leads the student ministry.

Instead, seven teenagers church members had never seen before happened by as the church met outside (because the school janitor failed to show up and open the building), stuck around for the service and came back that evening for the youth program with five of their friends.

Ten months later, Foundations averages 25 to 30 students at its weekly meetings. The Sunday morning worship attendance is pushing 80, and three “community groups” gather weekly for small-group sessions.

A men's prayer breakfast, Teaching Guys Infinite Wisdom, is a twice-a-month event, and a comparable program for women is in the planning stages.

This summer features a full-fledged Vacation Bible School at a community sports park and a mission trip to the Rio Grande Valley-part of the Kids Heart effort sponsored by Buckner Baptist Benevolences and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Missions volunteers will deliver 500 backpacks filled with school supplies, a Bible and gospel tracts in English and Spanish-one for each student at the elementary school in Progreso.

Since January, The Fellowship at Westcreek has held Sunday morning worship services at the Blazing Star Luxury RV park.

“We couldn't use the school after December, so I went to Blazing Star to see about renting their dining hall,” Noles said. “Instead, they said we could use it for free because we would be providing a service for their customers.”

Sure enough, several RVers have stayed an extra week or two to worship with the Fellowship, and others now stay at Blazing Star whenever they pass through San Antonio for that reason. Several have even donated to special offerings, with the backpack project being especially popular.

Even better, the new location “puts us in contact with folks who aren't like us, folks we wouldn't have the opportunity to meet anywhere else in our community, so we are richer,” Noles explained. “At the same time, it gives people a chance to meet God who wouldn't usually go out and look for a church while they are traveling.”

Blazing Star is just one example of “how God keeps giving us stuff,” Noles added.

That includes key leadership team members. Both Foundation's leader Scott and Doug Loundry, a project manager for Boeing who heads up the finance ministry, were visitors at the Westcreek's first service.

It includes facilities. When Foundations outgrew the Scotts' home, a woman asked if they could use a two-acre site she had with a large storage building and corrals—quickly converted into a sand volleyball court.

It even includes teaching materials. A couple from California moved in down the street from Noles and brought a garage-full of Kid Blitz Bible study curriculum with them, which they donated.

God also has provided a constant stream of “spiritual seekers,” church leaders note.

“This is evangelism heaven,” said Kim Damron, who has a master's degree in cross-cultural evangelism and church planting from Columbia International University. “It's like fishing in a pond that's just been stocked. We are literally surrounded by people who are hungry to know God. All kinds of spiritual seekers show up—we even get Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons—asking: ‘What is going on here?’”

In the early planning stages for Westcreek, two prime community needs were identified that could mesh with evangelism. The area does not have quality childcare, and there is no safe place for the countless “kids on skateboards” to congregate.

In late May, representatives of a nearby subdivision contacted Noles about Westcreek partnering with another area church to develop a paintball park and a walking trail on a seven-acre tract.

“I haven't mentioned it yet, but I think they also need someone to put in a day care—and a skateboard park,” he said, smiling.

With all the ministry opportunities, Westcreek is moving slowly—if not standing still—toward permanent facilities.

“Not having to pay for a building right now really frees up our resources to do evangelism and community ministry,” Laundry pointed out.

“Plus,” Scott Damron added, “not being tied to one location keeps us out in the community where we come into contact with more people. People who need to know God.”

“Besides, we don't really need to worry about that right now,” Kathy McKee said. “We're just going to wait and see what God gives us.”

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