

True Vine Baptist Church growing like kudzu, baptizing 120 in 10 months _22304

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By George Henson

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SAN ANTONIO—True Vine Baptist Church has grown like kudzu, nourished by the richest of sources—its baptismal waters.

Pastor Jesse Grice started the church in his home in 1993. But the congregation soon outgrew his living room, and it moved to a storefront facility.

Last April, the 95-member church moved to its first permanent facility. Since then, the church has baptized more than 120 new believers in Jesus Christ.

Recently, the church added an early worship service. Combined attendance at the two Sunday morning services averages about 270.

"There's no other explanation other than the grace and power of God," Grice said. "We try to preach messages that touch people's hearts with the

love of Christ, but it's God's power that is making the difference."

The church is located on the west side of San Antonio about two miles from Sea World. The area is booming with new residential areas, Grice said, and his church is concentrating on meeting the new families.

"We're consciously not going after people who already have church homes, so these new families are perfect because most of them either don't have a church or have moved away from it," he said.

Growth in attendance indicates most of those who are baptized are remaining faithful. "We're working very hard to close that back door of the church, so to speak," Grice said.

New members go through a five-week course in which they not only learn more about their new found faith and church, but also their responsibilities as a Christian.

True Vine traditionally has been an African American church, but that is changing as Anglos, Hispanics and Asians are now a part of the congregation.

Grice said that presents no problem. Instead, seeing people come to know Christ on a regular basis has brought a sense of excitement to the congregation.

"We come expecting God to do something and he does as each week more people come to know Jesus as Savior. "

Many who become Christians make their profession of faith outside the context of a Sunday morning worship service, Grice said.

"For example, a woman came to me one Sunday and said she wanted to talk to me about being baptized. Well, when she came for her appointment she brought her three children—ages 12, 14 and 16. Before we were through

talking, all three of them made professions of faith and were baptized too," Grice recalled.

"We're just preaching the gospel. God is doing the rest."

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