

Fort Hood-area church ministers to 'temporarily single' parents_53005

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Fort Hood-area church ministers to 'temporarily single' parents

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

BELTON-Family ministry at First Baptist Church in Belton includes helping

meet the needs of a special breed of single parents—military spouses from nearby Fort Hood who function in that role temporarily.

When a parent in the armed services is deployed and the rest of the family is left at home, the remaining parent must learn how to fill multiple roles and single-handedly balance competing schedules, ministry leaders at the church noted.

“We offer a parenting class because we see the need to teach them how to be single parents for a time,” said Preschool Minister Tricia Kimbrough.

First Baptist provides a course called Enjoy, Not Destroy for military spouses, teaching them how to discipline their children properly when the nondeployed spouse is pressed into the role of being the only disciplinarian left at home.

While parents are in class, children participate in Kingdom Kids, an age-appropriate Christian education program.

Volunteers in the Kingdom Kids program and in Sunday school classes give special attention to children who may feel short-changed for affection from time-crunched parents.

“When a parent is deployed, that puts a stress on the whole family,” Kimbrough observed. “It puts a stress on the parents and their relationship, and the children pick it up. As a result, the children tend to act out.”

Children express their concern in a variety of ways, ranging from misbehavior to repeatedly asking for prayer for a deployed parent, said Children's Minister Joy Ferrell.

Unlike single-parent families in which one spouse is removed permanently from children's lives, military families live with the knowledge that the single-parent role is temporary. But they also face the reality that with one

parent serving in harm's way, it could become permanent.

"We're very sensitive to that, and our teachers provide a lot of one-on-one attention to the children in Sunday school," Kimbrough said.

At the same time, the church offers discipleship programs to help stateside spouses deal with the on-again, off-again nature of their roles.

"The wife of a deployed soldier learns to become a single parent and head of the household. Then her husband comes back, and she has to relinquish that role," Kimbrough said.

"It can be hard for her to give it up. It's a big transition, and that puts the marriage on edge."

Recognizing that financial problems also can strain military marriages, the church offers Financial Peace University, a 13-week course to help families get out of debt, Minister of Business Administration Craig Pearson noted.

In addition to offering prayers, emotional support and discipleship opportunities, the church also offers such practical services to military families as lawn mowing and car maintenance.

Volunteers in the church also have videotaped and mailed personal messages to deployed troops from their stateside families, as well as videos of their children's ballgames and performances in church musicals.

"We love our military personnel and their families. They are incredible men and women," Pastor Andy Davis said. "They serve their country, often at great cost, but they also serve the Lord so faithfully through the church.

Those connected with the military are, almost without exception, some of our most loyal and faithful servants, assuming significant leadership roles in the church. The small things that we can do for them are a great blessing to us."

To expand its ministry to military families, First Baptist Church plans to bring a military intern chaplain on staff.

Capt. Will Alley will complete his initial term of military service in July and then begin his studies at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary in the fall to prepare for military chaplaincy.

His role at First Baptist will be to work in harmony-not in competition-with the chaplain's office at Fort Hood, Pearson emphasized.

Pearson, a retired Army colonel, learned during his 26-year armed forces career the support churches can provide to families of military families.

“There's nothing like having Christian friends to gather around you when challenges arise and when there are times of loneliness,” he said.

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