

Churches can minister through schools, inner-city pastor maintains

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ARLINGTON—Churches once again can become the center of communities across Texas, but they may have to hit the books to do it, an urban pastor said.

Schools bring communities together, said Eddie Sanchez, pastor of Ross Avenue Baptist Church in Dallas. Children and parents regularly are involved in school-related activities, creating a ministry opportunity for churches willing to lend a helping hand.

Teachers need supplies. Students need mentors and tutors. Administrators need help with various duties around the school.

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And churches need a place to minister. It seems like a perfect fit to Sanchez, who has led his church to do just this kind of ministry.

Volunteering at schools through mentoring programs, school boards and parent-teacher associations helps Christians connect with and invest in people who may not come to their church, Sanchez said. Although it is not an openly evangelistic opportunity, it can become one if a student or parent asks why a person volunteers.

“The people are in the school,” Sanchez told the Baptist General Convention of Texas Hispanic Evangelism Conference.

“They are looking for something. They want something more than just education.”

School ministry can radically change a church and the way a community views it, said Patty Villareal, director of community ministries for Buckner Baptist Benevolences.

Church members are energized by ministry opportunities, she said.

They feel a responsibility to minister to others. They begin to pray for people in their community.

Members of the community notice when a congregation is taking an interest in them, Villareal said.

They begin to believe the church is a place that cares about them. They see church members listening to what administrators say are the needs of a school, and then they see the needs met.

People's lives can change when a congregation gets involved in its community, Villareal said. It should, because it is the same model Jesus used.

"When we read the story of Jesus, we see the importance of what happens in the church," she said.

"But much of his testimony happens with people in the community."

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