

Pieces coming together for McAllen church

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By John Hall

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MCALLEN—Pastor Thomas Whitehouse views life like a jigsaw puzzle.

“Individually, (the pieces) may be all jaggedy, but together they are beautiful,” he said.

As pastor of Iglesia Bautista Getsemani in McAllen, Whitehouse recently has found himself examining a jagged piece in his congregation’s life and pondering how God will bring good out of it.

The church’s former pastor, Otto Arango, has been accused of misusing Baptist General Convention of Texas church-starting funds, and the church has been thrust into the media spotlight as a result.

• [See complete list of Valley funds scandal articles](#)

Many church members feel the congregation's image has been tarnished by some of the reporting. One television station incorrectly reported Whitehouse was accused of wrongdoing. The front page of the McAllen newspaper had a graphic of a large hand coming out of the roof of the church and reaching upward for money.

Church members are experiencing the gamut of emotions as they think about a pastor under whom they came to know Christ. Some cannot believe the accusations. Others feel betrayed. Members of Arango's family continue serving in the congregation.

But the already tight-knit congregation has drawn closer in the midst of dealing with the accusations and the limelight, Whitehouse noted. Church members are leaning on each other and on their faith.

"People are hurting, but part of being obedient is learning what to do with the hurt," Whitehouse said.

On a recent Sunday, Whitehouse preached from Romans 8, reminding the congregation God brings good for Christians out of every situation. The circumstances surrounding his congregation are no different.

"I don't know the future, but I know God put this together," he said after the service.

BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade turned evidence against the three pastors accused of misusing funds over to legal authorities and has indicated the convention will seek restitution.

Whitehouse knows that could lead to a trial or some other extended spotlight on the situation. He recognizes church members will watch what unfolds.

But he also wants them to move on as much as possible. God continues

calling Iglesia Bautista Getsemani to serve him, Whitehouse said.

“We know some things are still going to happen,” he said. “But as much as possible, I’d like to get our minds back on business, which is pushing the kingdom.”

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