

East Texas church develops leaders from among young members

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HUNTSVILLE—Pastor Richard Rogers sees young members as vital to the church's health and survival. So, [University Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville](#) launched a program to employ young members in leadership roles.

Located near Sam Houston State University, the church has the opportunity to start building leaders at a young age, he noted.



Richard Rogers “We have an internship program, and we were trying to help them discern where they go from there,” Rogers said of the college students in his church. The church uses interns in various ministries to help them find their niche. The students receive a small stipend while they earn their undergraduate degrees.

But neither formal education nor hands-on ministry training at University Heights stops when a student earns his or her bachelor's degree.

The church also employs two to three young members as associate pastors while they pursue seminary education. These individuals serve as salaried

employees who take on independent ministry responsibility in the church through a two-year contract.

Eager to serve

The associates do not necessarily have ties to UHBC, but they are eager to serve in a healthy church with room to grow their ministry skills. They also take classes online through a seminary of their choosing, such as Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The students benefit from hands-on experience, and the church benefits from their fresh ideas and enthusiasm, Rogers noted.

"The passion that young followers of Christ who are pursuing their education and learning new things bring is invaluable," he said.

The church needs to develop leaders within its body for its own survival and for the benefit of God's kingdom, Rogers said. The best way to create these leaders is to mentor them, to give them the tools they need, and give them real responsibility, he added.

Rogers has noticed young staff members using what they learn in seminary, intellectually challenging their older coworkers.

Learning 'soul-care'

On the other side, older ministers can teach the younger staff members how to do what Rogers calls "soul-care"—a skill students don't learn in seminary but gain from experience in hands-on ministry.



Chris Millar Both interns and associate ministers learn to develop an important attribute—flexibility. The church structures the programs so that if an individual initially serves in one area of ministry but seems more suited to another, neither the congregation nor the student minister resists a job change.

For instance, Associate Pastor Chris Millar served as an intern with UHBC while earning his undergraduate degree at Sam Houston State University. After graduation, he decided to move forward with UHBC and served two years in ministry to small groups, but he recently transitioned to college ministry.

“Getting to experience the ins and outs of a church has been great,” Millar said about not being locked-in to small-group ministry and having the flexibility to be moved around.

Taking classes and being a fulltime minister is a challenge, but the young ministers benefit from the atmosphere the church has created, Millar noted.

Well-rounded experience

“I’m counseling families,” he said. “I’m doing pastoral ministry, leadership, teaching, equipping—getting to actually see how a church works.”

University Heights encourages the academic discipline seminary education provides, but Rogers believes young ministers learn soul-care—for others

and themselves—through hands-on ministry experience.

“It’s our hope that we’re able to establish leaders and get a taste of a healthy church and train them in their spiritual transformation,” he said.