

Historic church moves outside its walls, embraces missional approach

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McKINNEY—Some churches build their ministry around attracting people to their campus through special events, concerts and programs. But First Baptist Church in McKinney has chosen a missional approach—going where people are. And in the process, the church has underscored its commitment to exist for people outside its walls, not for those within them.

The congregation sponsored The Church has Left the Building, a Sunday when 3,000 of members skipped the morning worship service to go into the community to do yard work, host Kids' Clubs, plant flowers at low-income apartments, serve others and love people in the name of Jesus.

“We put in place a clear commitment to serve others—the lost, the least, the broken,” said Bryan Doyle, minister for missional life. “We’re trying to break the cycle of consumerist church—of serving only our needs.”

In the weeks prior to the special day of community service, the church’s staff challenged members to transform their world. The emphasis was based on transformyourworld.com, an Internet site that links mission and service projects with people all over the world. The emphasis ended with The Church has Left the Building day.

“For the first time in the history of the church, we did not run a church service on Sunday morning,” he said. “We deployed 3,000 people in the city to serve. It was fascinating to see an empty parking lot on a Sunday morning, because people were painting houses, building HIV kits, serving children (at) Kids' Clubs and feeding migrant workers. ”

The idea was to engage the congregation in the missional lifestyle Pastor Jeff Warren had preached about for the past nine years—to get people away from the attractional model of “come and see the church” into the incarnational model of “go and be the church.” Warren insists he has sought to lead the church to become others-focused and kingdom-minded—moving from being an institution to becoming a revolution.

“The God of mission has a church in the world,” Warren said. “God was the primary missionary, and he sent his son to the world. He was incarnational. He showed up in the flesh, and we are to be incarnational. We are to go out, not in. We are to align our lives with the mission of Jesus.”

The incarnational model not only takes Jesus’ love to the community, but also fosters discipleship and missional lifestyles within the congregation, he stressed.

“If we really want people (to understand), let’s give them a week, a month, at least one Sunday to just do it,” Warren said. “People come back from those experiences saying: ‘Now we get it. We were among the poor, and we found the presence of Jesus there.’”

“When you displace yourself and put yourself in the position to serve others, you allow yourself to be put in a fast track for missional discipleship. ... A big piece of the puzzle for us is getting outside of the building.”

This shift came by changing the whole structure and attitude of the church, even going through a “decentralized and messy” process. For Warren, this meant asking tough questions about what the church is and what the church should be doing.

“Our message up front is die to yourself and come save the world,” he said.

The church generally has been receptive to the changes, understanding

that each member is a missionary in his or her daily life. Throughout 2008, members are serving on more than 30 mission trips, compared to seven last year.

The changes haven't come without challenges. Even with its longstanding missions commitment, the church lost a few members over the change and is having to rethink its structure, Warren acknowledged.

"We talk about courageous leadership a lot, but we do not talk about courageous patience," he said. "We are talking about turning an institution that's been around for 130 years.

"The mission of God and his movement has moved beyond the structure of our church. When people start going on mission trips, it's \$1,500 they may not give to the church. We are having to reengineer and reallocate our programs, staff and budget. ... If it's not about an institution and dragging people to a big crowd, it impacts the way you look at your buildings, the way you do programs, the way you build or don't build."

For Jerry Byrd, a church member and supporter of the missional movement, change is difficult but necessary to be a God-following church.

"If you have a staff, structure, organization and schedule that is attractive, you have to figure out what we need to abandon—what doesn't fit us anymore in the new church God wants us to be," Byrd said. "I firmly believe that a kingdom church will always be on the journey of shedding things that aren't as important for this time. And that is hard to go through."

Realizing these things, Byrd still said there is no better way to follow.

"This is scary and wonderful and painful and feels good and all those opposite kind of items," Byrd said.

“It is the exact thing that God would have us do, and I am very comfortable with that. We will never get the (whole) picture until we get to glory, so we are in transition from now on.”