

Irving church steps up to the plate with sports outreach

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IRVING—Members of Oak View Baptist Church in Irving have stepped up to the plate with opportunities to meet needs in their community and connect students to the life-changing love of Christ.

By developing a sports outreach program designed to encourage student athletes to press on towards the goal, the church began sponsoring the [varsity football team from Nimitz High School](#).

However, it wasn't long before the church was given another opportunity—to [sponsor the boys' and girls' basketball teams](#).

As word has continued to spread about the positive impact this program is making on the teams, Oak View now is sponsoring the softball and baseball teams. Oak View's student minister Jack Teel sees this as only the beginning.

Professing faith and assuming leadership

Over the past year, several of the student athletes have started attending Oak View and have made professions of faith.

"Five students were baptized last year as a result of this outreach," Teel said. "It's been exciting to see these students grow and become leaders in the student ministry.

"It's a big deal for our church to be a part of an outreach like this. I think

this outreach has made our church more diverse, and that's encouraging to show that church isn't just for a certain type of kid, it's for all kinds of kids."

Teel has seen some of the older athletes become role models and encouragers to younger student athletes.

"Some of the benefits you get from sports teams is that the students are used to being in team type situations. So, they bring that element to the ministry where teamwork really is evident. It's been great to watch the athletes jumping in and encouraging younger kids and getting to know them," he said.

Change lives through small acts

The sports outreach program provides opportunities for church members of all ages to be actively involved in various ways, including putting together weekly care packages for the team, writing encouraging notes and attending home games.

"So many students are headed down the wrong path, and something as small as a gift bag with a small note saying we are praying for you can change their whole life," said Wes Cravey, who coordinates the baseball and softball outreaches.

"A lot of sponsors now go to the games so they can see their player out on the field. This part means a lot to the players because many of them do not ever have a parent show up to their games. I want to be able to show these students that they are not alone in this crazy world.

"We are showing them that even though we have never met them, that we love them. By doing this, students can start talking to each other about the love of Christ, and it can spread like wildfire. Some of these players now

attend Oak View, and our sponsors are able to talk to them on a weekly basis.”

With doors opening to reach students and their families, church leaders recognize the opportunity the sports outreach provides to influence the city for Christ.

In addition to the sports outreach, the church has been given the opportunity to host Nimitz’s choir concerts for the past three years, and Teel is looking into additional ways to partner with other groups.

“I think the ultimate goal of this outreach is to reach the whole school,” Teel said. “There are kids who are overlooked, and it’s easy to reach out to the athletes, because they kind of put themselves out there, but I’d like to find a way to reach the kids who aren’t as easy to see. We are looking into ways to do that and connect with them.

“Jesus died for all of them. So, I think we really are putting our focus on finding ways to connect with each student. We’ve partnered with First Irving, Christ Church and some other churches. Now that other churches know it’s possible to get into the schools, it makes it easier to go citywide.”