

Rebranding brings cowboy church to the city

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IRVING—[Western Heritage Church in Irving](#) bustles with activity on Sunday mornings. A cowboy band prepares for worship in the sanctuary as other people prepare pots of coffee, set out breakfast pastries and greet each other in a fellowship hall full of smiles, hugs and handshakes.

It's a place where people gather because they want to be there and want to feel loved. People there say they feel like family—whether it's their first time to visit or if they have a long relationship with the congregation.



Jody Nichols, pastor of Western Heritage Church in Irving.

But less than two years ago, there wasn't much demand to be there. That's when Faith Temple Baptist Church in Irving clung to life with about 18 aging members. The church had baptized only a handful of people in three years, Pastor Jody Nichols said.

Young families occasionally visited, but they didn't return after they discovered the church offered nothing for their children. The congregation

faced a crossroads—change in an effort to reach people for Christ or count down the days until the last person closed the doors.

The church decided to do whatever it took to share the hope of Christ with a community it felt called to reach. Members discovered God was calling them to do more than change. The congregation rebranded itself as a cowboy church in the heart of urban Irving, and Western Heritage Church of Irving was born.

Almost as soon as the sign changed, people started arriving. A cowboy church in the city intrigued the community. Visitors and members alike discovered a place where they felt comfortable—an environment where they could connect with the newly formed cowboy band and relaxed worship.



A cowboy-style praise team leads worship at Western Heritage Church in Irving. (PHOTO/John Hall/BGCT)

"It just surprised us," said long-time member Jere Ward. "People we'd never seen before started coming. There'd be four or five visitors in this service and four or five different ones in the next service. Then people began signing up."

From that point forward, growth came naturally. Members easily share information about the church with people in grocery stores, courthouses

and other places during their daily routines. Irving residents want to know more about it.

"You tell people 'I go to the cowboy church in Irving,' Ward said. "Immediately they stop. They say: 'Where is it? Tell me about it.' There's interest in it."

Many who asked questions have visited the congregation. A large portion of people who check out the church either have fallen away from church or never attended one before. In the past 15 months, the congregation has baptized 20 people. More than 100 people came for the one-year anniversary of the church's rebranding.

"It's just thrilling the way it's growing," said Chuck Campbell, one of the initial core members of the church.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c0uWb4Pg>

The congregation now averages about 80 people of all ages who participate in Sunday worship service. The congregation regularly refers to itself as a family where people are accepted.

For Bing Money, a member who has seen the highs and lows of the congregation, the hustle and bustle of the growing Sunday morning crowd is a beautiful sight.

"I'm on cloud nine seeing all these good things happen, all these people coming in," he said. "Some of them haven't been in church in years. Some of them are looking for a church they feel comfortable in and loved in. We've got that to offer. I'm so glad things are going the way they are. I'm just looking for better things to happen. I believe they will."

As pastor, Nichols prays Money is correct. He credits the congregation's impact for God's kingdom to God's wisdom and glory, as well as church members' willingness to follow wherever God calls them. When times were

tough for the church, they had the "spirit of Caleb," referring to the Old Testament Israelite who saw the promised land and believed God would take his people there.

"It's been an awesome experience as a pastor to see a small group of about 18-20 people, primarily senior citizens, and how in a real sense they were renewed with a spirit of Caleb even in their serving the Lord these many years," Nichols said. "This whole transition, rebranding so to speak, reinvigorated them and renewed them."