

# **Voices: Revitalization put fizz back in our church**

April 10, 2024

Rosebud is a small town east of Temple and southeast of Waco. Consequently, ours is a small church.

It's easy to think not much happens in small towns and small churches. Sometimes, that's true. But big things are happening here through revitalization.

We recognized our church was flat—like a Dr Pepper that lost its fizz. Our church needed revitalization from the inside before we could proceed in any other area.

First Baptist Church in Rosebud was invited to participate in the Baylor University's Soundings Project. We were honored and wanted to be good stewards of the money, yet we seemed overwhelmed and struggled for quite a while to determine how best to apply the grant.

We felt it should go toward spreading the gospel to further God's kingdom. With the guidance of the Soundings Project leadership, we were able to state our goal.

## **Revitalizing within**

Our Soundings Project goal was divided into two phases. The first phase was to revitalize our own congregation. We wanted and needed to be a healthy church, so we could address the ultimate goal of reaching out to our community with the love of Jesus Christ to further God's kingdom.

We began with an "in-house" three-day revival. The Soundings grant

allowed us to bring in an outside speaker for a Friday through Sunday event. The topic was “Recharge, Revitalize and Re-unite.” Every congregation member received a special invitation to attend. We served food, provided child care, and minimized kitchen prep and clean-up so all could hear the speaker.

The second phase involved many varied events. For example, members volunteered to place advertisement-type signs in their yards stating, “Jesus Loves You.” The church hosted several singing groups for the community, which were well attended by several church denominations. The community was invited to attend an Easter lunch provided by our church.

## **Revitalizing without**

Our interim pastor has been instrumental in revitalizing the ministerial alliance in our community. In keeping with our Soundings goal of community outreach, our church was instrumental in the alliance organizing a free Thanksgiving meal in 2023 for anyone in our community.

Members of area churches donated the food and worked together to serve all who attended. To emphasize the meal was a ministerial-alliance sponsored event, the event was held at a city-owned property rather than at a specific church.

The ministerial alliance established a goal of providing school supplies for the 2024-2025 school year for elementary students who live in our district. This is a community-wide project well on its way to reaching its goal solely through donations. No Soundings grant money was used for the event or for the school supplies.

One of the simplest, yet powerful, events was a prayer walk that took place over several Saturday mornings. Congregation members walked the streets of Rosebud to pray over every house, church and business in the city.

We did not knock on doors; however, if people were outside, we told them who we are and asked them, “How can we pray for you?”

Advertisement-type signs stating, “How can we pray for you?” were an offshoot of the prayer walk. The signs include our church’s name and phone number. Congregation members have placed the signs in their front yards, and the signs are placed outside in front of the church as well.

## **Other revitalization efforts**

The Soundings grant enabled us to purchase Thom Rainer’s book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. We read and discussed the book over several weeks on Sunday night during fall 2023.

Our men invited friends, family and neighbors to attend a men’s retreat in Waco in October. About half of the attendees were from our congregation, and half were from the community.

In early 2024, the Soundings grant purchased T-shirts with our church’s name for every student and adult volunteer for our Wednesday after-school program for pre-K through 6th grade. The majority are minority students and are not from our church. Students typically wear the shirt to school on Wednesdays.

First Baptist Rosebud is in the active planning stages of a church and community revival set for April 26–28. The theme of the revival is “Will You Take the Dare?—Dare to Obey, Dare to Speak Up Boldly, and Dare to Stand Strong.”

We are incorporating music in a variety of styles, some from area churches. One of the groups will be singing in Spanish and English. Soundings is providing food each night, breakfast Sunday morning, and providing for the speaker.

We are in the early planning stages of a fall 2024 women's retreat. The goal is to reach out to community members to hear about Jesus and to spread the gospel to further God's kingdom.

## **The whole church blessed**

Since the Soundings Grant has been implemented, seven individuals—three adults and four young people—have made professions of faith followed by baptism. There have been six adults who have joined the church either by statement or by letter. These individuals are remaining faithful members actively serving the Lord in the church.

In addition to these, there has been a non-English-speaking individual who has made a profession of faith and is wanting to be baptized. She has been attending faithfully.

Most members of the congregation have participated in events, and most have contributed in some way to make the events possible. Consequently, most members of our congregation are aware of the Soundings grant and the blessings we have received because of it.

The Lord has blessed First Baptist Rosebud. There is fizz back in the church.

*First Baptist Church in Rosebud participated in Baylor University's Soundings Project. Soundings is part of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the authors.*