



12/23/02

Seventh week sees 359 drawn to new church

ENGLEWOOD -- Just a few months ago, Garry Clark and his family waited for divine direction about their future.

Clark had resigned his assistant pastorate at Calvary Baptist Church after 17 years and was not sure if the family would be staying in the area or moving on.

They stayed.

Yesterday was the seventh Sunday Clark ministered to the newly-formed Fellowship Church of Englewood, which meets in Lemon Bay High School's Performing Arts Auditorium.

Bible study and prayer begin at 9 a.m. and the main worship service at 10:30 a.m. The church's hospitality center serves free Starbucks coffee and Krispy Kreme donuts between study and service. These treats, though tempting, don't account for the dramatic increase in worshipers since Nov. 3, when 273 curious Christians attended the first services.

On Sunday, 359 people attended Fellowship Church.

"The Lord is really blessing us," said Edna Doughty, who greeted worshipers at the door with a warm hand and even warmer smile.

People crowded through the lobby dressed casually or dressy, on foot, on crutches or in wheelchairs; all ages were well-represented.

"This church is going so well," said Joy Clark, the minister's wife of 19 years and general manager of WSEB 91.3 Christian Radio. "We have the Power Point/Screen instead of traditional hymnbooks; we're using new technology and the same old Gospel message.

"The Fellowship Church is Baptist as far as our doctrine goes, but we're nondenominational," said Clark. "We rent space on a weekly basis and hire sound technicians and a custodian, too. The LBHS auditorium is a comfortable, great place to meet. We want to build, though, someday.

Clark later announced offerings from Dec. 22 and 29 would go toward purchasing land for a new building. The total raised in one service: nearly \$6,000.

"We're looking out toward Englewood East or Rotonda because that's where the people are," said Joy Clark. "We did a lot of research before committing to this, and the congregations are off the charts. I think probably one-third of our worshipers followed us from Calvary Baptist. Some of the older people may find it harder to leave there, but generally, if any of the younger people have come, they've stayed. We're fresh and appealing to people with kids, especially; we have a nursery, a toddler nursery and children's ministry here."

Sunday's service was musical in nature. Clark, an accomplished musician, let his voice tell the sermon of Christmas -- and included poignant songs from Joseph's point of view.

"Jesus. He's the perfect gift," concluded Clark.

There were other sacred solos, duets, quartets, ensemble work and a special selection with the church's youngest worshipers. Haley Maylor, 7 years old, captured hearts when she stood alone onstage to sing "When I go down to the river to pray," best known from the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"

The Clark children, Mitchell and Elyse, sang with the choir, and Mitchell also sang solos and in mixed groups during the service. Their mother said they were happy not to have to move, as the children told their parents how much they love living here.

Regarding special projects, Joy Clark said the church hopes to add home fellowships, Sunday evening home studies instead of services, much the way early churches functioned. Down the road, they hope to set up a shelter for abused women.

When asked how many people the free coffee and donuts bring in, Clark smiled broadly.

"Sure, we make use of marketing, such as the coffee and donuts. You know, using marketing is not always evil."

To learn more about Fellowship Church of Englewood, phone (941) 475-7447.

By GRACE GILBERT

Staff Writer