Faith Fellowship Ocala Off To Great Start

Written By: David Moore
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When First Baptist Church of Dunnellon began to pursue a new church plant, Pastor Russ Randall wanted to get 100 percent participation from members in launching the new church known as Faith Fellowship Ocala.

"We thought anyone who understood missions, who understood what the great commission is, would have a desire to participate at some level," Randall said.

FBC Dunnellon came up with three levels of commitment for members to consider in supporting the new church plant:

Level 1 – I am willing to pray for this endeavor. Over 400 people agreed to this level.
Level 2 – I am willing to pray but also willing to commit for one year a monthly gift of up to $25. "We were not interested in big gifts, we were interested in a large number of people participating," Randall said. "We had hoped to get 30 or 40, we got about 150."
Level 3 – We will give one year of missionary service to this church. This meant attending the church, tithing and giving your talents and abilities to the church for at least one year. Hoping for 10 or 12, they got 26.

That core group of members began meeting and planning 18 to 20 weeks before the soft launch of the new church on July 21. Services are now being held at 5 p.m. Sunday at FBC Dunnellon. At its first service, there were about 85 in attendance, a great start for this new church.

The church plans to begin holding services in its own building in October. It will be located along State Road 200, a populous road between Dunnellon and Ocala. A developer bought a tract of land that included a vacant church building but had no use for that building. He offered it to the church for a "fraction of the cost" of similar spaces in the area.

"It's definitely a benefit," said John Ryman, pastor of Faith Fellowship Ocala, about the great location. "We want the location to be beneficial for us but it's not the be-all-end-all of where we start to gather on Sundays."

Like its multigenerational core group, the church hopes to attract people of all ages to the church. Despite the presence of many retirement communities nearby, demographics show the median age in the area is 49.

“One of things that really encouraged my wife and I was to see the generational difference of the core launching team,” Ryman said. “We’ve got everything from 3 months old to 83 years old and probably an equal category of each generation.”

Both Ryman and Randall are excited and encouraged about Faith Fellowship Ocala and the impact it can have on the community.

“We’ve done the demographics and there is a huge need there,” Randall said. “With the folks we have in place, we’re just confident that God is going to bless the efforts there.”

Faith Fellowship in Citrus Springs ready to reach millennials

Written By: David Moore
October 5, 2020

CITRUS SPRINGS–Church planting is not for the faint of heart. It requires confidence in things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. It calls for faith.

Just ask Pastor John Ryman of Faith Fellowship in Citrus Springs. Almost one year ago, the pastor and his core group were set to move into their first church building in southwest Ocala. But two weeks before their first Sunday they learned the property had been sold to another buyer.

Such a setback may have dissuaded some, but Ryman and his team relied on their faith and perseverance as they combed Ocala for the right location for their new church to meet. They searched schools and colleges, warehouses and shopping centers, all to no avail for various reasons. Meanwhile, they continued to meet Sunday evenings at their sending church, First Baptist Church in Dunnellon.

Pastor Ryman, Faith FellowshipWhen Ryman learned of a small church in Citrus Springs, located about 40 miles southwest of Ocala, he met with the pastor and heard the church was built in 1993 for a Korean congregation. Most of its membership had moved away over the years. While the congregation was interested in selling the property, the asking price was beyond what Faith Fellowship could afford.

So, they were back to square one, still searching for property. But then two weeks later Ryman received a call from the pastor.

“He tells me that he’s been praying and fasting about this and says ‘I feel confident that you are the answer to my prayer. God has sent you to me. We’d love to sell you this facility.’”

That was back in April. With $80,000 raised by the congregation and $100,000 in financial assistance from the Florida Baptist Convention, the church closed on the property valued well over the purchase price in early September and began holding services there. The commissioning service was held at First Dunnellon on Sept. 27.

“God knew where he wanted us to be the whole time,” Ryman said. “It just took a little while for us to get on his page and he made that perfectly clear with this facility.”

And what a facility it is! Located on six acres, the building offers 3,400-square-feet of space with a 2000-square-foot sanctuary, as well as office space, a nursery and kitchen. Ryman said the sanctuary can double as a fellowship hall when the need arises.

Plans for a second phase of construction have already been approved by the county. Phase 2 includes plans for a 9,000-square-foot facility – 5,000 for a sanctuary and 4,000 for a wing with Sunday School classrooms.

As for demographics, Citrus Springs is one of the fastest growing areas in Citrus County, Ryman said, with lots of new affordable homes being built and plans to construct a new public high school just three miles away. The location is ripe with potential for the church's target audience of millennials, those between the ages of 22 and 38.

"There is a huge unreached millennial generation that is waiting to be reached with a different style and different atmosphere of church," Ryman said. "I think we're going to attempt to do great things for God with reaching an untapped generation. And our church service will be geared for that generation."

The church has a core group of about 35 people who are continuing to meet each week for worship. The group is also working three mornings a week to renovate and update the building, with plans for a full launch around Christmas.

"There are some things that require time before we can hit the ground running with both feet," Ryman said. "I'm hoping our Christmas Eve service kind of kicks us off for the new year and we're running full steam ahead in that direction."

Young church plant helping launch three churches in Florida

Written By: Scott Anderson
August 18, 2022

Pictured Above: Pastor Luis Otoniel Saez, is shown with Issac Rosa and Pastor John Ryman of Faith Fellowship in Citrus Springs. Saez will begin hosting a Hispanic Bible Study and church service this month at Faith Fellowship.

Faith Fellowship in Citrus Springs started as a church plant in 2019 and now – just three years later – this young congregation is helping launch three church plants in Florida, including a Hispanic and a Korean congregation.

"I don't see how we could not do this," said Pastor John Ryman. "We don't gather to represent a church; we gather to represent a kingdom. He wants to advance His kingdom, not just grow a church."

New Hispanic congregation

A growth statistic spurred Ryman's interest in planting a local Hispanic church. The Citrus Springs area is expected to grow about 22% in the next few years, with the Hispanic population expecting to increase by 80%, from the current 11% to almost 20%. Ryman contacted Marion Baptist Association to see if there were any Hispanic churches looking to grow or expand in the area. That's when he was introduced to Luis Saez who was looking to start a Hispanic church in the area.

Plans call for Saez to begin hosting a weekly Bible study and church service at Faith Fellowship in late August. Ryman's vision is to see the two congregations eventually become one multicultural church, rather than two churches sharing a building.

"I don't want it to be us and them," he said. "This is a 'we.' This is who we are. This is who the church is. We're all part of the same congregation."

His long-term goal, he said, is a multicultural service. He wants to start with the church's family worship days, which occur on the first Sunday of each month with a blended service. Ryman would preach one month, and then Saez would preach the next month, with an interpreter for each service.

Church plant in downtown Orlando

Ryman was at a North American Mission Board training event in Atlanta this spring when he overheard Andrew Stucker sharing his plans to start a church – Redemption Orlando – in

downtown Orlando. Stucker explained he was having challenges with fundraising efforts. Ryman then shared that he and his church might be able to help.

“I told him our church can help solve some of these problems,” he said. “I introduced the idea to our church three months ago, and everyone has embraced the idea. He’s come here to preach for me a few times.”
Members of Redemption Orlando are shown during a community outreach event in Orlando.

A group from Faith Fellowship recently went to Orlando to spend time with Redemption Orlando’s core team and do some prayer walking in the neighborhood.

Stucker said the focus of Redemption Orlando will be to reach the de-churched – those who have some knowledge of Jesus and the church, but who are no longer practicing or active in church.

“We want to show people that Jesus is more than just a religious figure. He’s someone to transform your life.”

Redemption Orlando, which has been doing pre-launch activities since September 2021, will launch in October and will hold services on Saturday evenings as it is sharing space with another church that meets on Sundays. The church plant currently has about six church partners, including several new plant churches like Faith Fellowship.

Also assisting in the prayer walk were members of First Baptist Church of Dunnellon, the host church that helped plant Faith Fellowship and is now helping plant this new church.

“This is such an exciting time. It’s like our sending church – First Baptist Church of Dunnellon – will get to see their grandchild in the making,” he said.

Korean congregation in The Villages

Faith Fellowship is located in what was formerly a Korean church. The few remaining members of that church sold the building to Faith Fellowship in 2020. Ryman has stayed in contact with members of the Korean congregation who have since joined a Korean church in Ocala.

Now Ocala Korean Baptist Church is seeking to expand into The Villages. Faith Fellowship will offer financial and spiritual support for this new Korean worship service at First Baptist Church of The Villages.

“They are part of a new work that is beginning in The Villages, and we are looking for ways we can help them,” he said. “This brings it back full circle. My hope and prayer are that we continue to invest in kingdom work like this.”