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Luis Otoniel Saez works with Faith Fellowship, Citrus Springs by hosting a Hispanic Bible Study and church service.

Young church plant helping launch three churches in Florida

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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.”

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.”