

Pastor empowers team-led multi-ethnic ministry

FORT LAUDERDALE (FBC)— It is a pastor's worst nightmare – to be in danger of losing his voice. But that's what happened to Guy Melton when nodules developed on his vocal chords.

His voice can no longer stand the strain of preaching



Fort Lauderdale youth are drawn to the multi-ethnic worship services at the Church at Pembroke Pines. **FBC photo by Ken Touchton**

multiple sermons at The Church at Pembroke Pines in Fort Lauderdale, a 1,500-member congregation that has grown to three Sunday morning services and one on Saturday night.

But instead of seeing this as a limitation, Melton has chosen to use it as an opportunity to draw his staff together as a ministry team.

The staff not only shares the weekly preaching responsibilities, they corporately craft each Sunday's message. During staff meetings, they discuss the sermon theme and develop creative illustrations, such as "tag team" preaching in which the staff alternate making sermon points.

"What started out as a negative with my voice has turned out to be a positive in the long run, creating a situation that God used to build up the church as a whole," Melton said. "I never wanted a ministry built around one person. I always wanted to build a team in which the pastoral staff and laity would share leadership in ministry."

After attending a "Building Powerful Ministry Teams" seminar offered by the Florida Baptist Convention, Melton decided to implement the strategy churchwide. Melton asked Bob Bumgarner, director of the Convention's Pastor/Staff Leadership Department, to teach the seminar during a church council retreat then again to more than 200 lay leaders.

The strategy centers around six main principles: establishing a common purpose, clear roles, accepted leadership, effective processes, solid relationships and excellent communication.

"In everything we do, we try to apply these principles," Melton said. "The strategy allows us to take what we were already doing to another level and to pull the pieces together in a more organized way."

Melton has created an atmosphere in the church where input is not only welcome, it's encouraged, said Jeremy Higdon, director of student ministries.

"He listens to others' opinions and develops a strategy based on what the whole team is saying," Higdon said.

Church members are encouraged to serve at least one three-year term on the church council, an advisory board to the pastor on budgetary matters.

"If a decision isn't unanimous, Guy might shelve the matter until there is agreement or find something else that works," said church member Bob Goodwin, who serves as church financial consultant for Gulf Stream Baptist Association. "He is wise in how he uses decisions to bring the church closer."

Goodwin and his wife, Judy, were among the core group that helped start the church 10 years ago.

During the church's first year, members represented 12 different nationalities. Now, more than 60 nations are represented.

"When we started to celebrate our diversity, to incorporate it into the life of the church through things such as international friend days, that's when it really took off," Melton said.

Each light post in the church's parking lot facing the Flamingo Road thoroughfare contains a grouping of international flags representing the native countries of its church members.

"When some people see the flags, they think we are having an overseas missions focus, but the flags really represent who we are," Melton said.

"The church definitely has a friendly, welcoming nature that tells you they are truly feeling what they are saying, that it's not just a function," said Jose Becena, who was a member of a mission church that merged with the Pembroke Pines congregation.

At the same time that the Pembroke Pines congregation is expanding building plans to accommodate its own growth, it has begun a mission, The Church of Hollywood-Downtown, which held its first service on Easter.

It was church starting pioneer Bill Billingsley, the late pastor of Sheridan Hills Baptist Church in Hollywood, who first encouraged Melton, a native of the area, to start churches locally.

"He gave me a deeper understanding of missions, especially what is possible in South Florida," Melton said. "He helped me see the area where I grew up as a mission field."



A servant spirit that empowers leadership skills in others characterizes Pastor Guy Melton's ministry. **FBC photo by Ken Touchton**