

Park Plaza Church of Christ, Tulsa, Okla.

LOCATION: Metro Tulsa, south of Interstate 44.
WEBSITE: www.parkplaza.org.
MINISTERS: Pulpit minister Mitch Wilburn, associate minister Ed Mosier, children's minister Will Spoon, youth minister Aaron Loney, youth minister Jay Mack, Hispanic minister Francisco Davila, deaf minister and counselor Carl Moore, college minister David Skidmore, Celebrate Recovery coordinator Ryan Pope, counselor Kevin Nieman and worship leader Keith Lancaster.
ELDERS: Bill Bequette, Craig Loney, Charles Mahaffey, Gary Medley, Don Millican, Jack Reese, Joe Reese and Roy Riggs.

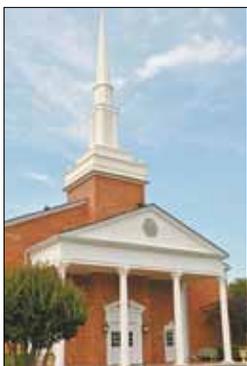
ABOUT THE SERIES

The Christian Chronicle launched Churches That Work in 2005. The staff consulted the Faith Communities Today (FaCT) study, an examination of the character and vitality of



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religious congregations in the United States. Churches That Work should be: **evangelistic**, reaching the unchurched at home or abroad; **biblical**, making Bible instruction central to their mission; **united**, possessing a spirit of internal vitality; and **visible**, known and appreciated for service in their community. Read the complete series online at www.christianchronicle.org.



LYNN McMILLON



PHOTO PROVIDED

More than 300 members of the Park Plaza church participate in an annual, two-day "Crossing Paths" all-church retreat on the shores of Lake Hudson.

Growing where God leads

PARK PLAZA CHURCH credits divine guidance, not strategic plans, for its wave of recent growth.

BY JOY McMILLON | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

TULSA, Okla.

From outside, the stately, colonial-style building at East 51st Street and Sheridan looks much the same as it did when built in 1966.

But inside, the Park Plaza Church of Christ has changed substantially. Since 2005, attendance is up nearly 50 percent. About 1,200 people attend each Sunday. Leaders said that the church has a heightened interest in missions and a new zeal for reaching the lost its community. "Their outreach to us was huge," member Joe Hough said. "They opened their arms from the very beginning."

Hough, a 29-year-old petroleum engineer, found out about the church after a friend, Brent LaBiche, invited him to join a volleyball team. Several Park Plaza members played on the team. The Christians were kind, took the time to get to know him and didn't pressure him to come to worship, Hough said. Soon, he and his wife, Katy, visited the church. Nine months ago, after a Bible study at LaBiche's house, they were baptized.

Park Plaza's growth isn't the result of a far-reaching, all-encompassing strategy, agreed upon after months of surveys and committee meetings. "Intentionally, we don't have a strategic plan," said Don Millican, one of the congregation's eight elders. "What we try our best

to do is discern where God is leading us. Then we try to follow and help facilitate his plans. "It was a learning experience to witness what God was doing here and not get ahead of him," Millican said. "We would never have planned what has happened during the past five years. ... God did this."

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STAYING PUT
 One of the things God did was grow the church in spite of its location and facilities, elders said. The church building is near the geographic center of Tulsa, a former oil boom town that today has more than 1 million souls in



Millican

its metropolitan statistical area.

A few years ago, the landlocked church was outgrowing its 850-seat auditorium.

Church members considered a move southward, into a rapidly growing suburb filled with affluent housing developments. But that move would have required millions of dollars for a larger piece of land and a bigger, megachurch-style building.

The elders decided it was best to remain where they were and move to two worship services.

"It was a gut-wrenching decision," said elder Bill Bequette. "But we really felt the Lord was calling us to use our building to its capacity."

As a result, Park Plaza has had no building debt for 10 years.

CONTINUED



Nearly 1,200 people attend the two Sunday morning worship services in Park Plaza's 850-seat auditorium. In its nearly 45-year history, the church has renovated its auditorium and classrooms to accommodate growth.

Empowering members to do ministry has led to increased interest in missions, abroad and locally, church leaders say

CONTINUED
Even with two services, the church, taking about bricks and mortar, paint and parking space. The elders decided to wait and see how the Lord might address the challenge. And they believe he has.

Earlier this year, they signed a five-year lease on a 350,000-square-foot building. The church has a large office and a large furniture store next to the facility houses all the church offices, the campus ministry, the counseling ministry, child and nurture ministries and worship services on special speakers and the hearing impaired.

EMPOWERING MEMBERS
The decision not to move allowed elders to concentrate on the people they serve.

"We used to spend a lot of time talking about bricks and mortar," said Millean. "But we decided to spend the majority of our time dealing with people, not things."

The elders have tried to empower decisions and church members. Ministry leaders have budgets without micromanagement by the elders, Loney said.

Millean, who also serves as chairman of the board of trustees at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, said that empowering members is the church's number one priority.

"People feel empowered if they have a passion for something and they can do it," Millean said. "We have people running around everywhere involved in ministry."



The order of worship for the hearing impaired service at the Park Plaza church.



Minister Francisco Davila conducts the Spanish-language worship service.



Mitch Wilburn shares the Gospel with the Park Plaza church, where he has served as a minister for 20 years. He became pulp minister in 2005.



Deaf minister Lewis Perry signs for the hearing impaired worship at Park Plaza. Services are conducted in the newly-renovated Ministry Center.

'We used to spend a lot of time talking about bricks and mortar, paint and parking lots, but we decided to spend the majority of our time dealing with people, not things.'
— Craig Loney, elder

'We are sensitive to the changing demographic we serve, including foreign nationals. God is truly blessing us as we make a feeble attempt to bless others.'
— Ed Mosler, associate minister

Coordinating all the ministries through the church office can be a challenge, Loney said. "It's controlled chaos."

MISSIONS-MINDED
Through the classes, church members show a renewed interest in missions.

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When Swoyer for Eternity — a one-day contribution for the missions budget — began the years ago, leaders estimated the offering would be \$100,000. To their surprise, the missions contribution was \$350,000. "That blew everyone away and changed everything," Wilburn said. However, in short-term missions has mushroomed. In 2009, 250 to 300 people went on missions trips to 13 foreign countries and 11 U.S. cities.

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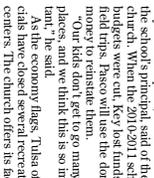
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Children gather Easter eggs at the Park Plaza church's annual Eggstravaganza.



Jesse Hendricks talks with a student at the church's annual Pumpkin Patch event.



Ed Mosler, associate minister, is seen in a meeting with other church leaders.

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