

NEW PASTOR SHARES VISION FLAMINGO ROAD CHURCH LEADERS FOCUS ON GROWTH

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Troy Gramling has a vision for reaching people. “You start where people are and you help them to transform themselves to what God wants them to be,” he said. “We want to help people grow.”

Gramling is the new lead pastor at Cooper City’s large Flamingo Road church. “We try to reach people by what we teach, our music and the atmosphere of the church,” he explained. “We meet and seek people by presenting ideas that people can understand. Through understanding what is said and what we are singing, people hear about the ability of Christ to transform their lives.”

The church’s techniques are paying off. Today, over 2,300 people attend five weekend services. In addition, the congregation has planted 23 mission churches over the past decade, 16 of them in south Florida.

“We repositioned ourselves in the community to grow,” said Dan Southerland, Flamingo Road’s former pastor who now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. “We went after those who were seeking and developed a contemporary service and God took over.”

To help communicate to a contemporary audience, the church makes ample use of people’s own testimonies or stories about how God has helped them in their lives. “People have huge struggles every day,” Gramling said. “People’s stories help illustrate what we have taught and explain what the Bible is about. They show people’s experiences in real life.”

Gramling took over executive responsibility for the church three months ago, but he is hesitant to be called the Senior Pastor. “Our approach is team based,” he said. “The concept of Senior Pastor does not carry out that idea.” Gramling said that he prefers the concept of Lead Team Pastor.

Gramling has been with Flamingo Road Church for eighteen months. He relocated to South Florida from Arkansas with his wife Stephanie and three children. The family lives in Davie.

While the church has been intentional in its style of worship and evangelism, it has also been innovative and a bit controversial in some of its decisions.

During Southerland’s tenure, the congregation dropped the word Baptist from its name. “Baptist isn’t a popular word among some people in South Florida, especially among the unchurched crowd,” Southerland explained. “Some people think that Baptists publicly stand for what they are against, not what they are for.”

“When you use Baptist as part of your name, it says that you are after Baptists, not after people,” Southerland adds.

“A denominational tag says style, not doctrine,” Gramling said. “We don’t want people to prejudge who we are. We want them to come and see for themselves.”

The church remains affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and participates in the denomination’s Cooperative Program mission outreach.

Both pastors say that the rapid growth of the congregation does not mean that they have compromised the Christian message to gain new members. “Some people think that quantity rules out quality,” Southerland said. “But, being successful means doing a good job,” he explained.

Gramling said that part of his job is to set a direction and vision for the church. “We will continue to grow,” he said. “Cooper City is a growing area and we are building a new building.”

“This is a diverse area,” Gramling said. “I would like to see the church become more diverse ethnically and among generations.”

Referring to the ethnic diversity around the church, Gramling said that he would want Flamingo Road church to “look like heaven, where all walks of life come together and are unified under one cause.”

While the church’s services are in English, the congregation sponsors several small study and support groups in Spanish and Portuguese. “We may even consider starting some services in Spanish and Portuguese,” he said.

Southerland, who is heading up a Charlotte-based organization that helps churches in transition, thinks that the church is on the right road with Gramling as it’s new leader. “God sent the church a great guy in Troy,” he said.

Flamingo Road Church
12401 Stirling Road
Ft. Lauderdale,
954-434-1500

Worship Schedule:
Saturday: 5:30 and 7 p.m.
Sunday: 9, 10:15 and 11:30 a.m.

**NEW PASTOR SHARES VISION, FLAMINGO ROAD CHURCH
LEADERS FOCUS ON GROWTH, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Sept 6,
2002**