



Grace Fellowship Baptist Church Impacting Its Community

by Randy Aldridge, Church Planting Strategist, Southwest Region

In late summer 2009, Jeremiah Sluss and his seven-member church planting team began ministering to residents of the town of Haysi. In this poverty-stricken area, 60% of residents earn less than \$18,000 annually. With the economic situation as it is, ministry opportunities are numerous for those who understand the culture.

Prior to launching Grace Fellowship Baptist Church in Haysi last August, the planting team approached the mayor and town council about possible projects on which they could assist. After input from city officials, Pastor Jeremiah led his team to start an after-school program for kids. The team conducts Bible studies and plays games with the children until parents return from work. In addition to the after-school program, they conducted a coat and Bible distribution in early winter with support from another SBCV plant and helped beautify the town by cleaning and painting local government properties.

Pastor Jeremiah and the team value personal and corporate evangelism and have made them priorities in the church plant. While Grace Fellowship

began with just seven members, it has grown to a current average worship attendance of twenty-eight. Many of these attendees have come to faith in Christ as a result of intentional witnessing. Nancy and Chastity came to faith in Christ, and both mother and daughter were baptized in a river near Haysi last October. They were so excited about their newfound faith that they shared the Gospel with their friend Rocky, a local contractor who serves on the town council. Skeptical at first, he often ridiculed the efforts of the small group. Chastity, however, convinced him to attend their baptism service. Rocky later shared, "God began dealing with my heart during the service. I felt more love from these people than I have ever felt from any church people I had ever known." In January 2010, Rocky prayed to receive Christ and, in the words of Pastor Jeremiah, has "been on fire" ever since.

Grace Fellowship has had such an impact on the community and its leaders that, in December, Pastor Jeremiah was asked to join the town council in an advisory position. In his words, "we live in a very religious community, but religion doesn't save the soul. Most families have been involved in church but do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Our goal is to transform our community one person and one family at a time."

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(l-r) Nancy, Chastity, and Rocky



Pastor Jeremiah and family

RESOURCE

Website:
www.sbcv.org/multiplying

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