

Charismatic Christians reach Mormons in Salt Lake City

THE PASTOR OF SALT LAKE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IS EVANGELIZING THE CITY'S MORMONS-BUT NOT WITH A SELF-RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDE.

Welcome to Salt Lake City, a base for Mormonism where

evangelical Christians make up less than 2 percent of the population. Being such a spiritual minority might make some Christians want to circle the wagons in defense against the surrounding culture and doctrine. But in Salt Lake City, several charismatic churches have instead banded together to offer ministry and friendship to spiritually hungry Mormons.

Since first arriving in Utah in the mid-1980s from his native South Africa, pastor Corky Seevinck of Salt Lake Christian Fellowship has noticed how Christians have changed their attitude about their minority status in Salt Lake City.

"There is a greater viewing of Mormons as a potential harvest field," Seevinck said. "They are needy, needy people. They need the grace of God."

As an outgrowth of this change, Seevinck's church-based in the Salt Lake City suburb of Sandy-meets monthly with several other charismatic churches for worship and prayer for the city. Citywide, there is a greater desire for united purpose among churches.

In May, Salt Lake Christian Fellowship hosted churches from

around the city for the Salt Lake City Glory Fire 2000 conference with speakers Mike and Cindy Jacobs, Dutch Sheets and Chuck Pierce. In addition, the approach by Salt Lake City's Christians toward witnessing has changed, Seevinck said.

"I think we are learning to 'speak Mormon,'" he said. "There are a lot of resources written about Mormonism where we are told the way to reach them is to prove to them that their doctrine is wrong, that the book of Mormon is not inspired. And while all those arguments are true, they are ones that hit them on their sharp edge and not in the area where they are weak."

Mormons learn from an early age how to defend their theological positions, Seevinck said. Too many times Christians use confrontational witnessing methods geared toward forcing Mormons to face their faulty theology.

"We are starting to understand that the approach to reaching them isn't to hammer them in the areas of disagreement, but to minister to their needs like Jesus did with people," Seevinck said.

Salt Lake Christian Fellowship members rub shoulders with Mormons at work and in their neighborhood. And when reaching out to Mormons, Seevinck tries to address biblical teaching to their point of need.

Depression and suicide continue to plague the Mormon community. Seevinck believes that's a result of the high expectations placed on followers who aren't capable of living up to all the rules and obligations.

"The requirements that Mormonism places on women are extremely high," Seevinck said.

In the Mormon Church, husbands wield significant power over their wives. According to Mormon theology, marriages on earth continue into eternity. Thus when the dead are resurrected at the end of time, a husband decides whether or not to "call" his wife into heaven.

"The man has an actual role in her entering into eternal life," Seevinck said. "So if you get mad at your wife, and she doesn't obey you in every area, you can threaten her with, 'I won't call you.'"

"That creates a climate of oppression and a climate of tremendous performance orientation," Seevinck said.

God's unconditional love for people is a foreign concept for Mormons, he explains. They talk about God's grace, but with a twist that doesn't match the Bible's description of grace.

"After you can do everything you can do, God makes up the difference with His grace," Seevinck said, explaining the Mormon process of becoming right with God.

"Yet the question I ask of them is, 'Can you remember one single day in which you have done every single thing you can do?' I can't," Seevinck said. "There is never a sense of having come to a place where they can now rest. Yet that is the essence of the gospel. Yes, we are to die to ourselves—but then we can rest in the work of Christ on the cross. That's not there for them."

Many Mormons who become Christians at Salt Lake Christian Fellowship do so after moral failure, a failed marriage or another life crisis. According to Seevinck, they think they can't make the grade within the Mormon Church and consequently become open to the gospel.

Active Mormons in "good standing" with their church rarely become Christians.

"I've heard of them," Seevinck said, "but they are extremely rare."

Seevinck believes that with Christians gathering together for concentrated prayer for their city God will lift the veil of deception from the eyes of unbelievers.

"It's like people are drugged by the spiritual environment that they are in. They cannot see the truth," Seevinck said. "We will get through if we go after their needs."