

How This Senior Pastor Is Shaking Up Her Church

"We live our lives as 'sent ones.' Our focus is on how to 'be' the church instead of how to 'do' church."

That's the way Tina Spellman, senior pastor of Living Way Network (Adairsville Foursquare Church) in Adairsville, Georgia, describes the major shift from "tradition" to "mission" that's occurring with her congregation. "I tell our people: 'You are Plan A. There is no Plan B. You are God's plan [for introducing people to Jesus],'" Tina says.

Tina and her husband, Jon, who serves with Tina as co-pastor, assumed the pastorate of the church 20 years ago, with Jon serving as senior pastor at that time. Six years ago, however, the Lord asked them to change their roles, and Tina became the senior pastor.

Living Way had always been a tradition-rich body modeled on Sunday and midweek services, with traditional programs. The church was strong, but it wasn't growing. Tina knew a change was needed. "I started hungering to know what it meant to be a 'transformational church,'" she explains. "So I prayed: 'God, make our church what You want it to be for this community.'" Church health and transformation is, in fact, one of Foursquare's key missional objectives. Tina began to implement Community Gatherings—weekly meetings held at various locations, such as businesses, schools, military bases and courthouses, across Greater Adairsville.

Gatherings differ from the usual church small group in that their primary purpose is not ministry to existing members but "mission": inviting new people into Living Way's community of faith to build relationships with them, introduce them to Jesus and disciple them. "Community transformation happens as

we share our lives with others,” Tina explains, “by inviting them into authentic relationships where the transforming power of Christ’s love can be experienced. Community Gatherings are all about creating an environment where disciples can be made.”

Tina soon realized, however, that her congregation was so used to meeting on Sunday mornings that they viewed Community Gatherings as secondary in importance and often declined to attend them. To “shake the tradition,” she changed the church’s corporate worship-service time from every Sunday morning to two Saturday nights a month.” Moving the service time was to help the people understand that we were moving away from ‘doing’ church because God was calling us to ‘be’ the church to our community,” she says.

Change was underway at Living Way, and not everybody was happy about it. Nor did Tina’s new role as the senior pastor sit well with everyone. “People left the church; some because of my being a woman pastor,” Tina says. “Ministry is a man’s world. I try to work with men in a way that is respectful while being confident and true to who I am as a leader. Humility has broken down many walls.”

Today, Living Way is becoming just what Pastor Tina prays it will be: a “transformational church” that is growing again because it is transforming not only Adairsville but other locations as well. The nearly 125 members of the multigenerational church make up the Living Way Network, a multisite body of mission-minded “sent ones” who have extended their Foursquare family from Adairsville in northwest Georgia to South Carolina, New Mexico and even South Korea. The church’s Adairsville building, Living Way Community Center, hosts the twice-monthly Saturday night services and, during the week, is home to Living Way Christian Academy and KidZone after-school club. It is also the site of Living Way’s Community Coffee Shop, which has become Adairsville’s hub for coffee lovers.

“There are no other coffee shops in town!” Tina says. “It’s another way for us to build relationships.” Today, the story of the Living Way Network is one of putting mission before tradition so that God can make the church what He wants it to be for the community. “It would be so much easier to do ‘normal’ church!” Tina says, laughing. “But we are committed to live life on mission.”

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