

Mark Zuckerberg Investigates 'the Role the Church Plays'

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has been meeting with religious, school and business leaders in Texas—not to give a speech on new technology but to listen and learn.

"Every year, I take on a personal challenge to learn new things and grow outside of my work," he said on his new "Mark's Year of Travel" Facebook page.

"My hope for this challenge is to get out and talk to more people about how they're living, working and thinking about the future," he said.

Zuckerberg wrote that his goal for this year is to visit and meet people in every state.

He met with clergy at a coffee shop in Waco last week to talk about religious trends, *Baptist News Global* reports. The 32-year-old billionaire wanted to know how churches create a community.

Aaron Zimmerman, an Episcopal priest, attended the meeting. He explained to Zuckerberg that there is a larger community that gathers together to worship and draw people to God, and smaller ones where people connect with each other.

Zimmerman said it appeared the Facebook founder wants to do the right thing, and he's operating out of humility.

"I was impressed with someone who could have walked into the room like he owned the place," Zimmerman shared. "Not him. He was wearing his trademark hoodie and jeans."

"The clergy spoke 90 percent of the time," Zimmerman explained. "That impressed me a lot."

Zuckerberg also met with religious, education and economic leaders in nearby West, Texas.

“I thought he would give a speech promoting a charity or some technological innovation,” said John Crowder, pastor at First Baptist Church in West. “He wanted to hear from us.”

Crowder said Zuckerberg especially wanted to know how churches helped the city get back on its feet after the 2013 fertilizer plant explosion, *Baptist News Global* reports.

“We got to tell him that right after the explosion, people in town just automatically turned to the church for help,” Crowder said. “They knew that was the place they could go and that is the role the church plays—at least in a small town.”

In addition, Zuckerberg wanted to learn how churches prioritize their ministries.

“He was interested in how much the church focuses on what he called ‘religion’ and how much it focuses on what he called ‘community service,’” Crowder said. “That was actually not a bad question for churches to consider asking themselves from time to time.”

“Heading back home after a great few days in Texas,” Zuckerberg posted on Jan. 18. “We may come from different backgrounds, but we all want to find purpose and authenticity in something bigger than ourselves.”

“Thanks to everyone who has shared their stories with me over the last few days,” he continued. “I’ll remember this experience for a very long time.” {eo}

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