

Church Scraps Sunday Morning Service for Community Outreach

While many churches have gone to one Sunday service a week, Calvary Temple (Assemblies of God) in San Diego has joined the ranks, but in reverse: the congregation has stopped its morning service in favor of meeting Sunday evenings. Sunday mornings are now focused on neighborhood ministry.

Every Sunday morning, Calvary Temple's street is taken over by a large open-air market, which draws thousands of people and over the years has expanded to flow directly in front of the church building, barring parking access. As members of the church wanted to pray the market away, Pastor Jack Sampier recognized an opportunity to show Christ's love to their neighbors.

Located in the Hillcrest neighborhood, north of Balboa Park, Calvary Temple sits in the heart of the gay-lesbian community, a large homeless population, and within walking distance of major hospitals and mental institutions.

Sensing the outreach possibilities, about eight years ago Calvary Temple, which averages 102 in weekly attendance, began a coffee cart ministry during the market times, in which members provide free coffee, tea and water to passers-by.

"Our hope is to reach out and, if nothing else, say hello and let people know we're available to talk or pray with them," says church board member James Jaurez, who runs the coffee cart.

As the market has grown, so has the outreach, and the church has added a prayer canopy, where people can request prayer.

At first, the community response was hesitant and adversarial. But now many thank church members for being there, according to Jackie Romero, who oversees the prayer area.

The church is planning to expand again by adding an art show, children's ministry and free concerts.

"We're a mission outpost in a lot of ways," Sampier says. "I know that our role is to add to the weight of God's work in people's lives. We're just attempting to do what God has called us to do in this neighborhood."

Romero agrees.

"With the market continuing to expand, God is bringing the people to us!" she says.

This article originally appeared in Pentecostal Evangel.