



Our Beginnings and Our Story

Why was Fellowship Church planted? What have been some of the defining “moments” in the life of this fellowship? What have been some of the enduring themes throughout the years? What “doors” did God open for us and which ones did He close? Which qualities have been congregational strengths? What, in our opinion, has God confirmed about Fellowship? This is our story and how it answers these “vision questions.”

The Plant - A Radical New Beginning

Since the very beginning, Fellowship Church has had a desire to be an obedient, aggressive and sacrificial community of Jesus’ disciples determined to help fulfill His great commission. A church planting team from Houston came to College Station in 1977 with this heart attitude and began this ministry with a month-long evangelistic outreach on the Texas A&M campus. Pastor Herschel Martindale commissioned the team a few years after he had made radical changes in his own life and ministry. Herschel’s defining moment came when he was challenged at a conference by Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright to do what it took to fulfill Jesus’ great commission in his lifetime. He walked away from a secure pastoral position in a Houston church to begin raising up young people for church planting.

Herschel and those with him saw the strategic importance of reaching students at major universities in Texas to carry out the great commission in this state. Herschel ordained and sent out Ron Tewson to lead the team of about a dozen young people to College Station. Ron was a young married man gifted in leadership and evangelism.

The Early Years- Developing the “Next” Generation

Through much evangelism by church members and Pastor Ron’s open air preaching, many students joined the new church and it quickly became necessary to meet in local school building auditoriums on Sundays. Many of the church members moved to live within just a few blocks of one another on the north side of the Texas A&M campus so they could have daily fellowship. Some of the core practices of Fellowship such as HOMEGROUPS and PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP were established in those early days. From early in our history, Fellowship was also committed to the core practices of RAISING UP NEW LEADERS FROM WITHIN the church and CHURCH PLANTING. For example, Fellowship participated in Invasion ’85, an aggressive church planting strategy by the Great Commission Association Of Churches (GCAC). Three teams from Fellowship set out to campuses across the south to establish church plants. Here in College Station, Ron was multiplying his life by training up future pastors. Lee Jarrell and Ray Muenich both became believers as young married students just a couple of years apart. Ron led both to salvation and then spent much time discipling them in the faith and developing them in areas of leadership. Lee was ordained in 1986 and Ray in 1988. Lee and Ray took over pastoral responsibilities for Ron when the Lord led him to the Washington D.C. area. Then, in 1989, Lee left to plant a church in the Dallas area as part of another church planting strategy of GCAC. Ray took over as the lone pastor for the next few years.

This scenario has been repeated over and over again in the history of Fellowship. Young college students away from home get involved in the homegroup life of our church, receive personal discipling, become part of a homegroup leadership team, and then move into greater leadership roles to help shepherd Fellowship Church or move out on another church plant. Of course, most students move to another city after graduation. Even in this case, it has always been our desire to train them to become committed members wherever they go. This is all part of our “TRAIN & SEND” strategy.

A growing influence in the early years was our connection with the GREAT COMMISSION ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES (GCAC). This association of churches was built primarily on the relationships between the pastors of the different churches, but as God blessed the association, the ties became more formal. It seemed prudent, effective, and God-honoring for Fellowship to be part of this association for the purpose of mutual support, training and collaboration in world evangelism. The branch of Great Commission we are currently working with is called Great Commission Ministries Churches (GCM Churches). Although we are a self-governing church, we do hold ourselves accountable to GCM Churches in the areas of doctrine, ministry and ethics & we share a vision to continue to reach college campuses across the world.

The 90's- Growing Pains & New Opportunities

The primary outreach of Fellowship has always been to A&M students. Our passion to win and disciple college students for Christ only continues to increase. However, by the late 80s a good number of our graduates had begun careers in the area and started families and befriended other families in the community. Thus we started some COMMUNITY HOMEGROUPS made up of families or working singles.

These community homegroups have participated in various evangelistic and service projects throughout the years. A couple of notable examples are the city-wide distribution of the Jesus movie and active participation in the Franklin Graham Festival. Also, they have distributed thousands of gospel tracts throughout Bryan/College Station throughout the years and have led Fellowship to be a regular financial supporter to various community ministries that help the poor and needy. The biggest contribution over the years made by the community members has been to provide much of the direction, oversight, finances, examples and experience for a church with lots of students. Fellowship Church could not maintain and grow its passion and mission of reaching and training Texas A&M students to fulfill the Great Commission without the year after year dedication and hard work of mature, sacrificial servants in the community homegroups. We are committed to caring for them and their children, primarily through homegroups. One specific example of this is a ministry designed for MARRIED STUDENTS. James & Neva Lund have helped dozens and dozens of young married and engaged couples get off to a sound start in their marriage.

The 90's also saw the beginning of Fellowship's INTERNATIONAL STUDENT OUTREACH MINISTRY. Although Fellowship Church held a welcome picnic for international students for years prior, it wasn't until the 1995 picnic that a long-term outreach began. From the names obtained through this event, John Schmid and others began a Bible study for the internationals. Eight students showed up - all Chinese! It was the beginning of a ministry that would become a mainstay with the church and eventually lead to an overseas strategy called the EAST ASIA PROJECT. Through Friday night Bible studies and an ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLASS, many Chinese students have become Christians, been discipled, and a few have even been developed into leaders.

A big step forward in these years was the ordination/recognition of long-time member and leader Rodger Lewis in April, 1996. Rodger stepped into the role of overseeing business operations, & sharing teaching responsibilities. Although Fellowship went 7 years without it, one of our core practices is to function under a PLURALITY OF ELDERS/PASTORS. In the Spring of 2003, John Schmid was also ordained and became part of this plurality.

The 90s were a time of trying to figure out what Fellowship was supposed to do as its part in building God's Kingdom. Diversifying into the community and international ministries was an exciting development, but it also led to a period of confusion about our mission and vision. Possibly due to this confusion, we went through a time of declining membership. The "vision" and "strategy" questions prompted Pastor Ray to pull together church leaders to regularly pray through and think through and discuss how we were supposed to "do church", what our focus was supposed to be, how we were going to raise up mature disciples, how we were going to be a part of practically fulfilling the great commission, etc.

It was during this time that many of the church's strategic plans were developed. Afterward, we felt we had a working blueprint.

The Present Era- Working the Plan

The last decade has seen Fellowship Church establishing systems and strategies that we believe will result in ever-increasing outreach both locally and abroad while at the same time improving the quality of the disciples we raise up and send out. In short, we began working the vision and plan we felt God had led us to develop. Three parts of this strategy are 1) better equipped disciples and leaders; 2) practical and recurring steps in missions and church planting; and 3) renewed commitment to the undergraduate college student ministry.

One core practice that has never changed with Fellowship is our commitment to HOMEGROUPS. It has always been the centerpiece of our way of doing church. The homegroups are our "method" of seeing lives transformed into Christlikeness. It is our conviction that what is missing in most believers' growth plan is discipleship through genuine community. Our desire is to grow disciples through these homegroups and then grow the church by starting more and more of these homegroups as they fill up with mature disciples.

One area of discipleship that is difficult to develop in the homegroups is deeper theology and some ministry skills. Fellowship's EQUIPPING CLASSES were greatly broadened during the last 10 years to now include such courses as Old & New Testament Overviews, Church History, Essential Bible Doctrines, Discipleship Class, Apologetics Class, Outreach Class, Hermeneutics, Biblical Financial Concepts, Young Wives Studies, Marriage Builders, Theophostics, New Leaders Training, Mid Leaders Training, etc. Although all of our members are encouraged to receive this equipping, these classes are now offered on a revolving 3 year basis so that a new college student can conceivably take most of them during their years at A&M.

Our foreign missions outreach has also grown tremendously over the last 15 years. Although our SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS date back to 1993, they became an annual high priority beginning in 1997 when the leadership unveiled our COMPREHENSIVE MISSIONS PLAN. Then, with the recent addition of Pastor Steve Kessler, we have been able to commit to 4 MISSIONS PARTNERSHIPS in Nigeria, Monterrey Mexico, Italy, and East Asia. Our commitment to these partnerships includes sending over short term teams, prayer & financial giving to assist with their needs, and training up individuals and even church plant teams to better reach the peoples of these places.

CHURCH PLANTING continues to be a passion of Fellowship. The pastors personally disciple potential church planters, continue to recruit & train teams to go out, and are committed to overseeing the new churches' health. We have sent out 3 church planting teams in the last 13 years. Our most recent venture in May 2010 was the commissioning of 21 adult members to plant a church at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. Plans are in the works for future church plants to East Asia, UT Austin, & Nigeria.

Here in Bryan/College Station God continues to use us to expand our college student ministry which has been a major emphasis since the beginning. A&M CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, the campus outreach of Fellowship, currently has 15 homegroups with more than 325 involved. This number is double what it was just 6 years ago! The campus ministry continues to be the training ground for most of our leaders and the incubator for our ventures in church planting and foreign missions.

A change that has had long-term ramifications upon Fellowship was the beginning of the GCM STAFF PROGRAM. In 1989, Great Commission Ministries (GCM) began a support-based missionary program modeled after Campus Crusade for Christ. Fellowship benefited greatly because our tithe base didn't allow for multiple church-paid staff. These support-based staffers have helped Fellowship grow its campus outreach, expand into international and married student ministries and send out church planting teams to other campuses. We see the GCM Staff Program as an extremely significant key to the future missionary and church planting expansion that God has put on our hearts to pursue.

As we have "worked the plan" under the Lord's guidance and with His strength, steady growth in membership and attendance have resulted.

This has brought up a question that we didn't have to deal with for the first 25 years of our history - where will we office a growing staff and where can we meet for weekend services? A big part of God's answer to our facilities questions was the expansion of BRAZOS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL. In the mid-90s, we began a mutually beneficial and rewarding relationship with the school. In April 2008 the school completed a new full-sized gym which can seat up to 700 and should meet our "weekend needs" for years to come. As for the rest of the week and other initiatives, the Lord blessed us with 2.5 acres at an ideal location. Through members' gifts, we were able to buy the land outright in December 2010! Our current capital fund drive, THE NEXT STEP PROJECT, seeks to build a facility for our offices and for meeting space to help us in leadership, missionary and church planting training.

The Future- Accelerated Multiplication

God willing, our desire is to excel in the primary areas mentioned above. Three church plants (two overseas!) are currently in the works. We are working to develop leadership to grow to 50 homegroups by 2020. We are sacrificially giving to build our training center. In the midst of all of this, we are developing qualified leadership to take over the current senior staff so that the Lord's work may continue to progress in greater ways for generations to come! All of this will require vast resources, tremendous sacrifice and enduring courage on our parts, and the grace of God to provide direction, provision, protection and empowerment. To Him be the glory forever and ever!

Fellowship Church