

North Topeka church offers new Sunday night service — ‘sleep-in church’

By Phil Anderson

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A North Topeka church is offering a new Sunday night service in hopes of reaching a different audience with its message.

Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1029 N. Kansas Ave., started its new service, called “The Well,” at 5:30 p.m. this past Sunday. A free community meal precedes the service at 4:30 p.m.

The church, located just north of the NOTO Arts District, had a banner in front of its building announcing the new service. The banner features a picture of the church’s pastor, the Rev. Shawn O’Trimble, and his wife, Teri.

A sizable gathering of about 120 people turned out for the first service, and about 80 people showed up for the dinner. The service was located in the newly renovated lower level of the church.

A couple of dozen volunteers from both Kansas Avenue and Oakland United Methodist churches, as well as other local congregations, volunteered to do everything from preparing the evening meal to running the sound board and lights to serving as ushers or playing in the praise band.

O’Trimble, who serves as pastor of both the Kansas Avenue and Oakland United Methodist churches, said the new service was a vision two years in the making. He described The Well as a kind of “church within a church.”

Rather than catering to people who already attended church on Sunday morning, he said, The Well aims for another group — one that may not have a congregation to call home.

“God said ‘go’ this spring,” O’Trimble said as he explained the timing of The Well’s launch. “I was waiting on that, and just people stepping up and God sending people to make this happen.”

O’Trimble said The Well is “for anyone that’s ever been hurt, abused and not welcomed by a church. We’re the Island of Misfit Toys. This is where all the broken toys go.”

Some members of the praise band and other volunteers have come to The Well from other local churches.

O’Trimble said The Well doesn’t concern itself with a person’s church background. All are welcome, he said.

“We don’t see denominations or non-denominations,” O’Trimble said. “We just see Jesus. That’s all we want to see. We’re all broken, and we all just come to learn what perfect love is and how to share it.”

O’Trimble said holding the service on Sunday nights provides an opportunity for people to come to worship God, particularly those who may not be inclined to attend a morning service.

“This is sleep-in church,” O’Trimble said. “No one said Sunday morning is the only time for church.

“We need for church to be for the people and the culture. Sundays are times for people to rest and relax, so instead of having to hurry up, they can come as they are to an evening service in the arts district that caters to those who are willing to step out of what the norm was and try something different.”

Vince Bateman, a Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church member who dressed as the biblical Moses for the service, said The Well is a much-needed ministry in the North Topeka area.

“I’m real excited about this,” Bateman said. “I think it’s a great, needed asset to the neighborhood. It’s something we’ve been looking forward to doing for years. But now we’ve come together to do it.”

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