

Church Planting in Nebraska

Roger & Sheryl Ridley

Dear friends and supporters,

Wow! 2008 has been both an exciting and challenging year of ministry! It began with a physical challenge for me. On Tuesday, December 4, I went into the hospital for a heart catheterization and had a stent placed in my main artery that goes across the front of the heart. The doctor said it was 95-99% blocked. I also had had a balloon done to the main branch. In February, I was again having chest pains, which took me back to the hospital for another heart procedure. The ballooned artery had collapsed and I needed a second stent. I completed 3 months of rehab in March, and my tests since then have been good.

The last Sunday of February was our Annual Friendship Sunday. We had been praying and working toward it being a big day so there was an expectation that good things would happen. They did! Dr. James Maxwell III, President of Faith Baptist Bible College & Seminary was our guest speaker. He spoke on the theme of True Friendship based on the book of Proverbs. We had 102 in attendance. The most exciting part of the day was that 32 of those present were visitors, many of them for the first time!

In March, Easter was a huge day for us! We started the day with an early Praise Service, followed by a Church Breakfast. Both were well attended and encouraging. Our Easter Service reached a new high in attendance with 168 present! In the fall we launched two evangelistic campaigns with the goal of reaching new families by Easter. It was exciting to see good results from both campaigns. The church choir was a big part of the service, presenting a cantata with a powerful message on the death and resurrection of Christ. Saturday, May 10, a group of 14 men and women went door-to-door with invitations to attend our Mother's Day Service. We started with breakfast and prayer and finished with lunch together. The weather was beautiful and we got a lot done. A total of 1800 homes were reached. This was the most we have been able to accomplish in a Saturday morning. The Mother's Day Service was a huge blessing with 127 in attendance! We recognized all the mothers present, had special prayer for them, and presented each of them with a nice gift. The message was about The Characteristics of Joyful Motherhood.

The third Sunday of June was our Annual Father's Day Service. The message came from Psalm 103:7-14, on the characteristics of our heavenly Father that others, especially our children, should see in us. With 103 in attendance, the majority stood at the close of the service to make decisions of commitment in their walk with God and testimony to others.

Vacation Bible School was July 7-11. The Youth Group of Camden Baptist Church in Wellington, Ohio came out and helped us for the week. They did a great job! On July 7, we left VBS literature at 2400 homes! We did three clubs during the week: a two-hour club at the church in the morning, and two, one-hour clubs at two different parks in the afternoon. We had a total of 84 children attending and a staff of 24. It was a great week!

During the spring and summer months the Deacon Board and I met on several occasions to make changes to the Covenant, Articles of Faith, and Constitution of the church. Many of these were recommended to us during the Recognition Council of the previous year. It was time well spent and provided good discussions around God's Word. These changes were presented to the congregation, and adopted in an August Business Meeting.

On Sunday, September 7, Gretna Baptist Church graduated from mission status. This was a big day in the life of our congregation. Graduation marks the point when a new church has a stable membership, solid leadership, sufficient finances, a permanent place to meet, and ministries to meet the needs of the congregation. The day marked the eleventh anniversary of the church with the first service having occurred on September 7, 1997. Many guests were present from churches around the Midwest to celebrate the day with us giving us an attendance of 135. I spoke in the morning service about the unfinished task, and Pastor Roy Cupples of Fullerton, Nebraska gave the graduation challenge.

Often, a church planter leaves a ministry at the point of graduation but Sheryl and I decided to stay with Gretna Baptist Church through the summer of 2009. This decision was based on a number of factors. (1) My wife and I believed it to be God's will. (2) We did not think it wise to move and start another church until released from my doctor's care. (3) Although we have good insurance, our out of pocket hospital expenses were over \$10,000, we believe it best to pay this off before the expenses of moving and starting another church. The Lord has enabled us to make good progress on this bill. (4) Before starting our building program, I promised the church I would not leave with a debt over \$200,000. We should reach this goal very soon. And (5) we are currently planting a church out of Gretna Baptist, since I am overseeing this project it is not a good time for me to leave. Based on these, I hope you agree an extended stay is the right decision.

Our ministry focus for October was the start of Chalco Hills Baptist Church. The launch team made up of members from our church and students from Faith Baptist Bible College had a practice service on Sunday, October 12. On the following Saturday a group of us went door to door leaving invitations at approximately 1000 homes inviting them to attend the first service. During the week a postcard was also sent to approximately 10,000 homes with the same invitation. On Sunday, October 19, they had their first service with 40 in attendance. Until March we are only having one service a month and then will begin weekly services. Pray for Pastor Barfknecht and the launch team as they follow up with visitors, develop ways to reach more people, and prepare for weekly services.

Sunday morning, December 14, the Gretna Baptist Choir presented its annual Christmas Cantata. The title of the Cantata was *Come, Let Us Worship the King*. I liked the music and the message. Some drama parts were added this year using children and adults in the church to reenact the nativity scene. The service was well-attended with 121 present, several being first-time visitors. The choir also did a special presentation Saturday afternoon, December 13, at the Gretna Community Living Center. With most of the residents present it was a wonderful ministry to men and women often neglected.

Here are the average attendances for 2008: Sunday School – 52, Worship Service – 92, Sunday Night Bible Study – 29, Wednesday Night Service – 24, Kids Club – 13, Youth Group – 9, Men’s Group – 11, Ladies Group – 14, and MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) – 32. It was exciting to have seven of the final eight Sunday morning services of the year with attendances over 100.

In October and November, tests confirmed what was already obvious to me and many others. I have lost all my hearing in my right ear and have very little that remains in my left ear. My interaction with people has become very difficult. After consultation and much reading, I decided to have a cochlear implant done in my right ear. This is not a miracle procedure, and is not without problems, but it holds the promise of restoring much of my hearing. I have two hurdles to overcome before proceeding. First, because it is an elective procedure, I will need special permission from my insurance company. Without their approval I will not be able to afford this procedure. Second, because of my heart problems and medication, my heart doctor wants me to wait for now. In February he will schedule me for further tests and if everything looks good will consider giving approval for the implant. I am grateful for his caution. Of course, I am hoping the tests on my heart are positive. What good is hearing if the heart doesn’t beat! However, I am hoping to proceed with the implant surgery in March. After the implant there will be approximately three months of adjustment. Please pray for the process and results.

Thank you for your prayers, gifts, and participation which have helped make this ministry a success. Ultimately the glory belongs to God alone. He has worked in and through our lives to accomplish His will. But I am thankful you decided to be sensitive to His leading and get involved with us and what God has done here in Gretna.

Please continue to pray for us, we have big decisions to make in the year ahead, and want to be sure we make the right ones. Pray about my heart tests in February and the possible implant in March. Pray for the timing of our transition from Gretna Baptist. Pray for God’s leading in the choice of a new pastor. Pray for God’s leading in the choice of a new church plant location. Pray our financial support will remain stable. If possible we would like to keep deputation to a minimum before starting another church. And continue to pray for the well-being of our family.

Finally, we thank God for the gift of His Son and the salvation we enjoy by faith in Him!

Wishing you a Happy New Year filled with God’s blessings!

With a HEART for Church Planting,
Roger & Sheryl Ridley