



GROWTH THROUGH YOUTH AND EVANGELISM

Reid Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church

Glenn Dale, Md.

Senior Pastor: **Lee P. Washington**

Attendance: **7,500**

Launched: **1964**

Affiliation: **African Methodist Episcopal**

Locations: **2**

Website: **ReidTemple.org**

Growth in 2011: **+1,500 (25%)**

FASTEST-GROWING NO. 17

LARGEST NO. 72

Rhonda Vann has been a Christian most of her life, but she was not growing spiritually when she relocated to Maryland from New York with her two children in 2007.

Although she was looking for a small church to call home, she found herself in the decidedly large Reid Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church instead. It only took the 40-year-old single mom two visits to Reid Temple's north campus to know this was the church she wanted to join, regardless of its size.

"My children actually paid attention in church, and when we got back in the car, we discussed the sermon," says Vann, who now serves on the church's steward board. "Reid is a large church, but you feel like you know everyone."

A focus on developing strong personal connections like what Vann and her family experienced and ongoing evangelism and outreach ministries have fueled growth at the predominantly African-American congregation with two campuses in suburban Washington, D.C. Although the Northeast traditionally is not a region where churches thrive, Reid Temple breaks the trend with 1,500 to 1,800 people joining the church and 500 to 750 conversions each year.

Youth ministry has accounted for much of the church's growth in the last year, reaching students and their parents. More than 200 young people have made decisions for Christ in less than 12 months, Youth Minister Russell St. Bernard says. And at a recent new members class, when the adults were surveyed on how they heard about the church, an overwhelming majority said it was because their kids wanted to come, Executive Pastor Matthew Watley says.

In October, the church launched Remix, a Saturday night alternative to what teens would normally experience in a traditional Sunday service. The sanctuary is shifted to accommodate the typical 150 middle and high school students in attendance with couches, intelligent lighting and a disc jockey.

Although Remix gives youth a unique experience designed for them, Reid Temple still wants youth to worship with their parents and other adults on Sundays and learn from that experience as well, St.

Bernard says.

One girl was very shy and did not want to be involved with the church, but St. Bernard met with her and her parents to talk through some family issues. The family made progress, and the girl started attending Remix, where she eventually accepted Christ, St. Bernard says.

The church also reached youth by partnering with three other local churches for a summer retreat for 400 middle and high school students, with 42 decisions for Christ.

“When I started as youth minister, we had a handful of students involved in the ministry,” St. Bernard says. “We now have doubled or more than tripled each area because of the leadership team that is now in place.”

Providing educational opportunities for kids also is a key focus for the church.

“Education is pivotal, and historically it is the game changer for African-Americans to be able to climb upward in society,” Senior Pastor Lee Washington says.

The Glenn Dale, Md., campus runs an accredited school for 300 students in prekindergarten through eighth grade, with a focus on science and technology. The church also awards more than \$150,000 annually in scholarships.

In addition to youth ministry and education, Reid Temple emphasizes sharing the Gospel locally and abroad. Tony Cusak, a volunteer commission-

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er of evangelism and outreach, says the church provides evangelism training for members; spreads the Good News in places no one wants to go, such as prisons and street ministries; and shares Christ’s love in global missions.

For example, “Harvest Warriors” go out twice a month in Maryland and preach the Gospel, including holding an annual outdoor community crusade. Reaching out overseas, the church adopted a village in Malawi two years ago, providing clean water, feeding 200 kids a day and building a community center.

“As a layperson, the time that I spend is worth it when you see lives changed and smiles on kids’ face when you are in the villages of Africa, or tears from those whose life has been changed when they have been delivered from drugs,” Cusak says.

—Rhonda Sholar

FASTING FORWARD

Free Chapel

Gainesville, Ga.

Lead Pastor: **Jentezen Franklin**

Attendance: **13,568**

Launched: **1953**

Affiliation: **Nondenominational**

Locations: **2**

Website: **FreeChapel.org**

Growth in 2011: **+931 (7%)**

FASTEST-GROWING NO. 74

LARGEST NO. 24

Brad and Denise Ross of Alpharetta, Ga., started the year by going on a three-day liquid fast, followed by an 18-day “Daniel Fast” of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and water. But unlike many others across the country, the Rosses were not motivated by resolutions to lose weight.

Free Chapel, the Gainesville, Ga., church the Ross family began attending a year ago at the invitation of a friend, begins each year with a 21-day fast—one of several dynamic ministries that attracted the Rosses to the church. Although the Rosses’ youngest son, Jacob, 4, did not participate, brothers Brenden, 9, and Bradley, 11, gave up Wii, Xbox, iPod Touch and candy.

“We’ve been experiencing blessings since the fast,” Denise Ross says. “My husband just told me this past month was his best month ever at the company he’s been at. In this economy, that says a lot. In every area of our lives—from marriage, children, finances and just peace and joy—fasting has made a huge difference.”

Ross says her family also really enjoys Pastor Jentezen Franklin’s “life-changing messages.”

“You can feel the Lord’s presence at Free Chapel,” Ross says. “Pastor Franklin’s messages bring truth and healing to people. You can see his heart for the lost and hurting. When he preaches, Jesus’ love just floods out of his messages.”

The church has experienced rapid growth since Franklin became pastor in 1989, when attendance was about 250 people. Today, Free Chapel welcomes more than 13,500 attendees each week at its Gainesville campus and an Irvine, Calif., site that opened in 2007.

Known for his unique style of preaching and use of powerful illustrations, Franklin says several factors have contributed to the church’s growth, including his lifelong commitment to the church and systems put in place to recruit, train and equip members of the congregation.

“There are so many gifted and talented people in every church willing to be used by God,” Franklin says. “So as leaders, we must always leverage our influence by getting them involved. When I look at the events we do—our dramas, our outreaches, our conferences—they’re suc-