

Pontotoc church makes good use of expanded 'Baptism Week'

By Lindsey Williams
Staff Writer

A man and his wife approached David Hamilton, senior pastor of West Heights Church, Pontotoc, about becoming members, but the man recognized a potential obstacle – he was of Episcopalian background and, although sprinkled as an infant, had not been baptized by immersion.



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Craig Richardson, minister of music and media at West Heights Church, videoed the occasion and presented the baptism to the congregation the following Sunday to celebrate the man's public profession of faith.

Hamilton began to think that there were likely others who, for whatever reason, had not yet followed through with baptism. He and the church staff brainstormed a way to call more men and women to the baptistery and were inspired by the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptism Sunday, a date set aside yearly to emphasize the significance of baptism.

However, Hamilton said, they began to ask themselves, "Why not have a 'Baptism Week' and emphasize it all week long?"

The deacons quickly got on board and June 18-25 was selected. As the week drew near, the church repeatedly announced the initiative and encouraged people to call the church office or come by the church if the Lord was leading them to make a decision.

When the morning of June 18 arrived, Hamilton preached on the importance of baptism by immersion, unsure if anyone would actually respond to the invitation. Three people answered and were scheduled for baptism.

The next day, two women – sisters-in-law – recognized their need to be baptized and came by the church. One of them had been raised in the Methodist church and thus had been sprinkled, and the other was raised in the Church of Christ.

The families of the two women and the church staff attended their baptism that day, and their public profession was also videoed for the congregation to view the following Sunday.

As the week carried on, more testimonies were shared and more responses were made. One man in his seventies admitted to the pastor, “I can take you to the pew where I was saved at Liberty Baptist Church, and I know I had to have been baptized but I can’t remember it. That has always bothered me.”

To reconcile his precious lost memory, he was baptized again.

Another man who had previously been baptized responded to the invitation and confessed, “I wasn’t sincere before, but I’ve been saved since.”

Yet another man entered the church on Friday, surprising Hamilton as he was setting everything in order for the baptism of someone else. The man said, “I need to be baptized. I’ve always been terrified of water, but I know I’ve been saved.” He too was baptized that day.

When the second Sunday of Baptism Week rolled around, a couple

and their daughter from out of state were baptized, living out their public faith to God as a family and creating a beautifully memorable moment.

From Sunday to Sunday, West Heights Church witnessed 15 baptisms: 11 adults, one teenager, and three children. Each baptism was videoed, compiled into one presentation, and shown to the congregation.

Hamilton has served West Heights for 25 years. He is a former two-term president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and currently serves as the chairman of Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Executive Committee. He believes in baptism for a very special reason.

"Baptism was important to Jesus," he said. "Jesus was baptized, and He commanded us in the Great Commission, 'Go into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' and if it was that important to Him, then certainly it ought to be important to us."

Hamilton stressed the nature of making a public profession of faith and following the Lord in baptism to identify with the Body of Christ. Understandably, the thought of walking down the aisle on a Sunday morning may be discomfiting but just as West Heights proves, a church can adjust wherever possible and still present the faithful witness that is baptism.

West Heights' Baptism Week continued through subsequent weeks, as more believers followed in obedience in the baptistery. Because the Spirit moved in the lives of these men and women, because the church staff and congregation was faithful to obey the call, West Heights plans on establishing Baptism Week as an annual emphasis.

Hamilton noted that many adults had been hesitant to make the decision, but Baptism Week opened up an opportunity for them to recognize their need.

“It’s important we emphasize that people need to follow the Lord in baptism, in that public act of obedience. It’s a witness for that individual, but also a witness to the world. It’s a witness to the congregation.

“I think it said something to all our folks that were here that Sunday when we played the video of all those people being baptized. Some of them were people I’ve gone to church with all my life and I didn’t realize they had not been baptized. The witness of it opens a door to the church to come.”

Don Lum, director of evangelism at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, commended West Heights Church on their commitment to the holy rite. “Baptisms not only impact the Kingdom and our witness to the world, but they also give spiritual and emotional encouragement to the local church family. Every time the church baptizes, God is honored and the church is blessed.

“I appreciate the ministry of West Heights Baptist Church and encourage our pastors and church families to make baptism events special in the life of their church,” he said.

The author may be contacted at lwilliams@mbcb.org.