

# Church innovates ways to attract members

BY MEGHAN GAMBLING  
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM — In theater No. 5, Senior Pastor Marty Cauley spoke as if preaching in any typical sanctuary.

Sans a traditional pulpit, Cauley stood on the area partitioning two seating sections at the Streets at SouthPoint Cinemas and talked personally to the parishioners dotting the seats in front of him.

Behind Cauley, the pastor of Morningstar United Methodist Church, was not the group of hymnal-carrying, robed men and women that one might expect.

Instead, Polaris, a band equipped with electric and acoustic guitars, percussion, three backup vocalists and a lead singer, stood waiting for their cue to begin rocking.

On the movie screen above, PowerPoint slides displayed lyrics and information for the audience, headed with messages such as "The Living Savior. He ain't dead."

Morningstar's first church service took place in early March, and since then, the congregation has grown to between 65 and 75 weekly attendees who will have the opportunity to pledge membership officially May 23.

"We are trying to develop a congregation designed to reach people not connected to a faith community," Cauley said. "Movie theaters have fast become the crossroads of our culture. There are people from a myriad of different strata who go to movie theaters."

The congregation, which is about 65 percent white and 25 percent black, is a rarity when many churches are racially homogenous, Cauley said. But although Cauley supports it, diversity is not the primary mission of the church.

"Diversity is not the cause we will die for," Cauley said. "The cause we will hold our banner up for is Christ. If we teach the gospel we will naturally be diverse."

Cauley was sent to the Chapel Hill area, where he searched for a nonthreatening place to draw people who do not consider themselves churchgoers. After his arrival, Cauley explored many different community spaces, including restaurants and schools.

When Cauley discovered that he could rent space at the SouthPoint Cinemas, he decided to go for it. The auditorium space was perfect for the music the church used, had handicapped access and was in a convenient location.

Cary resident John Ramsey said that although he is not usually a churchgoer, he has attended the theater services since early March.

"The kids like the music at the beginning," Ramsey said. "And I enjoy being around people connected with God."

Sunday's service, which lasted about an hour, had a casual flavor and included solo vocal performances by some Polaris members.

As parishioners rewound a karaoke tape for vocalist Annette Newkirk, she described Jesus' hand in her daughter's rapid recovery from a car accident that left the child in a coma and near death.

"I took the facts and brought them to Jesus," Newkirk said, explaining that she prayed after doctors told her that her daughter would need to walk with a cane for the rest of her life.

Newkirk said that, with the help of Jesus, her daughter no longer needs a cane and is recovering better than the doctors expected.

Cauley is not sure what the future holds for Morningstar, but he wants to find a permanent location for his congregation. Included in his plans for the church's future facility is a coffee shop where college students can enjoy a non-threatening religious environment.

"(Morningstar is) an opportunity to reach people in a way that normal churches don't or can't,"



DTH/NANCY DONALDSON

Pastor Marty Cauley gives a sermon Sunday to members of Morningstar United Methodist Church in theater No. 5 at SouthPoint Cinemas.

said Skip White, a second-year student at Duke University's Divinity School and interning pastor with Morningstar.

kicks it. They play anything from Jesus music to Guns N' Roses."

"And the praise band definitely

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