

## **CGGC eNews: Two Rural Churches Focusing on the Future Instead of Living in the Past**

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Spring brings the annual conference season to the CGGC. Last week I was fortunate enough to travel back to my home area (east central Illinois) to be a part of the Midwest Region's "One Day Conference" at Casey White Oak Church of God (<http://www.cwo.cggc.org>) near Casey, Illinois. The Midwest Region will actually have four different One Day Conferences over the course of four weeks at strategic locations around the region.

I got to spend Saturday at the Casey White Oak Church of God and on Sunday I worshiped at the Moriah Church of God (<http://moriahchurchofgod.org>), which is located eight miles south of Casey.

These churches are rural congregations located near a small town of about 3,000; Casey has gained recognition over the past several years for its big things in a small town (<http://bigthingsmalltown.com/>). Both of these congregations are doing good ministry in their community and I was struck by some observations.

**Both churches are led by multiple staff who are all bi-vocational.** Casey White Oak is led by senior pastor Tom Toner, missions pastor Tony Cargle, youth pastor Justin Janney and Lighthouse worship pastor Brian Miller. Moriah is led by senior pastor Jeff Lakins, associate pastor Cliff Shaw, visitation pastor Larry Howard, youth and worship pastor Jerad Ridge, and Reach pastor Steve Jenkins.

With bi-vocational pastors, these congregations benefit from a mix of gifts and talents from their pastoral leadership. These pastors live and work in their local communities which increases their ministry potential as they are not just focused solely on the needs of the church. The churches benefit from not having to bear the burden of supporting four or five pastors on their own.

**Both churches have launched alternative worship services or locations to reach people who wouldn't typically attend their church.** The Casey White Oak church offers its Lighthouse service on Sunday evenings. The service is more casual and offers a different style of music and preaching than what is offered in their Sunday morning worship service. The new service is reaching people who do not attend church on Sunday morning.

The Moriah Church of God has planted a new congregation eight miles away in downtown Casey. The congregation realized that there were individuals who would not come to them and so they've opted to go (live sent) to where the people are and so the Reach church is located in the heart of the community with a focus on reaching people who don't like church.

**Both congregations are sending their young people out on mission.** Both Casey White Oak and Moriah have had multiple young people serve in short-term missions with the ACTS Teams and are preparing to send more young people to serve this summer. They're exposing their kids to what God is doing in the world and giving them opportunities to be a part of what God is doing in the world. They are investing in the next generation and raising them up to live and lead on mission.

These are two congregations aren't just maintaining the status quo. They're living on mission and taking risks to reach people for Christ to see the kingdom of God advance! They're not just cherishing their past, but pressing forward into the future. We need more churches who will grab hold of God's mission and do whatever it takes to pursue that mission to the glory of God and the good of the world! Keep up the good work Casey White Oak and Moriah, keep up the good work.

Christ's Peace,

**Lance**