

## **Creating an inclusive community for all who seek Jesus**

When Pastor Larry Gipson moved to Seguin, TX with his wife Kelsey for her job two years ago, he felt adrift.

There were no places of worship in the neighborhood that were hiring for leadership positions and aligned with his values, primarily that of LGBTQ+ inclusion and having a heart for those who don't attend church.

Then Kelsey suggested he start his own faith community. Taking it as a nudge from the Holy Spirit, Pastor Larry launched [Springs of Life](#) in central Texas, which builds on the house church model to welcome everyone who seeks Jesus.

On May 17 and 24, your participation in the [Pentecost Offering](#) supports emerging and affiliating congregations—like Springs of Life—that are putting love into action.

### **The radical love of Jesus**

Since seminary, Pastor Larry had wanted to start his own church that served those who had suffered from religious hurt.

His inspiration not only came from a personal experience when he was young, but also from the churches and people he found himself drawn to as an adult.

In his childhood, his family's pastor had an affair with the spouse of one of the deacons.

“That led me to be deeply distrustful of churches and pastors,” recalls Pastor Larry, “and losing my relationship with God for a long time.”

When he was 14 years old, he reconnected with his faith in a parking lot. After shopping with his mother all day, he convinced her to leave him in the car while she went to Target. Turning on the radio, he not only heard the song “Calling All Angels” by Train, but God's voice saying, “Serve me.”

Years later, that led him to Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, GA, where he met Rev. Susannah Davis, who was beginning to bring together folks who had gone through church trauma. Over time, this local coffee shop gathering became [Kirkwood United Church of Christ](#).

“Seeing a church that was intentional about ministering to people who otherwise wouldn't show up to church was deeply inspiring for me,” explains Pastor Larry.

But it wasn't just congregations in the [United Church of Christ](#) (UCC)—where he was ordained—that were tired of the old guards protecting problematic systems.

As he and his family were making their move to Texas, Pastor Larry was working with a preaching coach who suggested that he talk to Rev. Dr. Katie Hays of [Galileo Church](#) in Fort Worth, TX. When he met Dr. Hays, not only did he realize that they were second cousins by marriage, but that partnering with the [Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) in the United States and Canada](#) might be a way for him to create the church he had dreamed of.

So, he reached out to Rev. Dr. Darren Phelps, the Community Regional Minister for Church Growth at the [Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) in the Southwest](#). At the same time, he identified neighboring San Marcos as the city where he would answer God's call: it didn't have a UCC presence at the time and had a population that was mostly unchurched.

In the end, Pastor Larry was supported by both denominations in spirit, but they couldn't financially support his idea without proof it would work. So, he hit the ground running.

In August 2024, he joined several online neighborhood groups in the area, introducing himself and his idea for a church that welcomed unchurched folks and affirmed members of the LGBTQ+ community. By October, he had his first gathering at a local campus ministry building, where he and participants brainstormed what their church could look like.

That same month, he started receiving [coaching](#) from us, a program that helps new church pastors stay accountable to the goals they have set for themselves and their faith communities. Thanks to the Pentecost Offering, this service is provided free of charge to those who attend [Leadership Academy](#), an event that brings together pastors and core teams to learn from Church leaders.

“Coaching has been helpful because I have someone who listens, provides me with a different perspective, and asks questions when I'm in the middle of a difficult issue as a church planter,” shares Pastor Larry. “[New Church Ministry](#) has been helpful to me by connecting me with resources and navigating the wider Church, especially as somebody who was not raised Disciples.”

Pastor Larry attended Leadership Academy 2024, joining other movement initiators to tour [Greenhouse Church](#), a micro-church network community based in Gainesville, FL. Its model of small groups as house churches coming together to make up the larger church community, made him rethink what he thought church meant.

“For me, if somebody is able to attend their small group meetings faithfully, even if they've missed a worship service or two, they're more of a disciple of Jesus than somebody who's only attending worship,” points out Pastor Larry.

In December 2024, Springs of Life held its first monthly worship service and in January 2025 it had its first small group pre-launch. That summer, it became recognized by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and began running weekly services.

### **Putting Jesus at the center of all things**

Today, Springs of Life empowers people—from members of the LGBTQ+ community to ex-evangelicals to unchurched folks—to follow Jesus by worshipping God, seeking justice, and coming together in community.

Worship is attentive to church hurt and problematic teaching that many attendees have encountered in the past. Potentially triggering songs are scrapped from the playlist and Pastor Larry's sermons are focused on what individuals can do to strengthen their faith and think about it from a different perspective.

As for justice, the congregation shares God's love with its neighbors by joining forces with local organizations that have the expertise and ability to serve vulnerable communities.

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One of these organizations is a therapy collective for young LGBTQ+ adults at or near the poverty line. This partnership provides free or reduced therapy and community events such as family dinners and art-based therapy, made possible by a \$6,000 grant from the [National Benevolent Association's Mission and Ministry Grant Program](#).

The church also partners with the [Southside Community Center](#), serving 60-70 meals a month—an initiative started by church members' concerns about cuts to government food security programs.

But by and large, the most important part of the congregation's work is its small groups. People come together in four groups of three to 30 people that meet in homes, cafes, restaurants, and a Christian camp. Each group is facilitated by a leader trained to guide conversation and each group has its own mission.

“We believe that in order for you to deepen your walk with Jesus, you need a small group of people checking in with you, praying for you, and challenging you,” says Pastor Larry.

When looking to the future, he sees the congregation continuing to add small groups as it reaches more people. By the end of 2026, Pastor Larry estimates that his faith community will have between six and eight groups.

“I tend to overcomplicate things. My goal is to not add anything unnecessary to worship, justice, and community,” Pastor Larry concludes. “If we can do those three things well, we'll be doing what Jesus has called us to do.”

*When you **give** to the Pentecost Offering, half of it stays in the region in which it is received to support local new churches. The other half goes to **New Church Ministry**, which trains, equips, assists, and multiplies emerging and affiliating congregations and their leaders.*