

# How will they hear?

New initiative aims for gospel saturation in dry places



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**S**hawn and Paige Ruffino live in Sesser, a small town of about 2,000 people in far south Franklin County. Sesser is Paige's hometown, and Shawn says he has come to love it as his own. That's why he's concerned for the spiritual future of the people who live there.

Likewise, the leaders of the church where the Ruffinos are members, Immanuel Baptist Church in nearby Benton, are continually growing in their concern for lost people in Benton and Sesser, and throughout their county. "We've been praying at Immanuel for many years for the 26,000 who are lost in our county," Pastor **Sammy Simmons** said. "I desperately want everyone to hear the gospel."

Simmons has led Immanuel Church to join a new IBSA initiative called *Everyone Hears*. In our state of nearly 13-million people, at least 8-million don't know Jesus as their personal savior. In many places lostness seems especially great. But there are pockets of hope, where churches are focused on sharing the gospel with everyone who will listen. *Everyone Hears* aims to organize those efforts, with an evangelism cycle that begins with prayer, and moves through specific activities to demonstrate caring, sharing the gospel, baptizing new believers, and where there is an emerging core group, starting new churches.

"The purpose of *Everyone Hears* is that every man, woman, boy, and girl in a certain region can hear the gospel multiple times in ways they can understand," said **Eddie Pullen**, IBSA's church planting strategist who is leading the initiative. So far, 25 IBSA churches across the state are participating in *Everyone Hears*, targeting their own communities or areas nearby.

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"How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Romans 10:14-15).

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Immanuel Church is seeking to reach their county, and Benton and Sesser in particular. At Easter, the church cancelled events at their campus and took worship services outdoors in both communities. About 200 people attended in Sesser, and at least 60 of them had no church affiliation.

The church has engaged in other activities, including praying for lost individuals by name on many occasions, giving away groceries, working to improve the park, and hosting opening ceremonies for local ball teams. Bible distribution and a social media campaign are next steps on their outreach list.

"The idea of gospel saturation really hit my heart," Simmons said. "It's not just the idea that we want somebody to hear the gospel once and think that's good enough. Surveys say sometimes it takes seven times where somebody hears the gospel before they make a decision for Christ. And so we want to saturate our area with the gospel such

that you can't miss it."

Immanuel Church is engaged in international missions, spreading the gospel in Uganda through 12 trips in eight years. But, the pastor said, "we can't ignore the reality that there are people who have never heard in our own backyard."

**Shawn Ruffino** agreed. "We believe it can happen right here; gospel saturation can start right here." That's why Ruffino is leading outreach in Sesser. He choked up as he said, "Jesus changes us, and he can save us, and he can use us no matter what we've been through."

Or where we live.

