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It takes about 60 minutes round-trip for members of the Christian Student Association and Gainesville Christian Church to drive from their dorms on the University of Florida campus to their new church home.

Gainesville Christian Church used to rent out a space at Campus Church of Christ, located at 2720 SW 2nd Ave., right across from the Levin College of Law.

Bi-weekly, the Christian Student Association (CSA) meets with Gainesville Christian Church for regular church services on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Campus Church of Christ, the old meeting place, was just under a mile walk from the Reitz Union, CSA's central advertising place.

At the Reitz, CSA gathered a few days a week for group meetings and small groups. They would also use the Reitz to set up a table and spread the word of the church and what they believed.

From the Reitz to Campus Church of Christ was an easy walk and even easier car ride. Students could get from campus to the weekly Wednesday service without a hassle, which gave attendance a boost and allowed for visitors to quickly drop by if someone had wanted to check it out.

Now, Gainesville Christian Church no longer rents out the Campus Church of Christ space. It was known that the lease period was coming to an end. A year prior, the church bought a property on Archer Road and began to build.

The new building of Gainesville Christian Church is located at 13020 SW Archer Road, seven miles past Interstate 75.

President of the Christian Student Association (CSA), Josh Dhanpat, estimates that the growth of the church will continue.

On Aug. 1, the opening day of the new building and first church service, the building was packed and had more members than any other time.

Three of the four ministries available at Gainesville Christian Church have nothing to do with UF, Santa Fe College or even college students.

These ministries include: the “Pros” ministry for singles who have graduated college, the married ministry for couples with children and the high school and middle school ministry.

Dhanpat said that it would continue to grow because it is closer and now friendlier to adults and neighborhoods. Visitors from around the state also came to support the grand opening, as the organization of Gainesville Christian churches spreads statewide.

“Since the beginning, the campus ministry for college students has always been the strongest and brought in the most numbers,” Dhanpat said. “Although it’s not about the numbers, rather the amount of lives we touch, we would have a better chance with that if we reached out to students more.”

Due to the distance, the college students will no longer lead in numbers, Dhanpat said. It will be an easier commute for adults, but many college students do not have cars. As of now, there is no bus route that goes near the new building.

Dhanpat assumes that the campus ministry will decrease in size due to the remoteness of the new location. However, he plans to create a carpool system to keep the numbers high.

“However, I must not let my faith in God slip,” Dhanpat said. “Our members are loyal and I know God will provide ways unknowing to myself for members to continue to come to our church.”

Dhanpat, along with the rest of the members of CSA, will be making themselves known on the UF and Santa Fe campuses in an effort to “share the love and message of Jesus Christ” as well as make their church available to anyone in need of a church home, Dhanpat said.

As president and liaison to UF, Dhanpat has worked to set up events on campus for the upcoming fall semester.

There will be about 10 meetings called “Bible Talks” held throughout the week at the Reitz Union Monday through Thursday, beginning fall semester.

These talks will be general forms of discussion lead by two leaders for each group. Each meeting will have a different theme, although there will always be the possibility of straying and speaking out on another subject.

Other upcoming fall events will be held mainly throughout the first weeks back to school for the fall semester. These events will include Ultimate Frisbee matches on Aug. 21, Xbox night on Aug. 24, CSA’s most popular yearly ice cream social event on Aug. 28, a Gatorball tournament on Aug. 29 and 30 and the “Welcome back Devo” for college ministry on Aug. 31.

Aug. 6 will mark the first service for the college ministry since the break after spring semester.

Annai Santi, secretary of CSA, is most looking forward to the volunteer and outreach for this upcoming fall.

“We go around to apartment complexes and dorms, basically wherever we are needed, and help students to move in to their new places,” Santi said. “We also hand out waters and it has proven to be a great experience and really good way to meet new people and share the word of our church and what we believe.”

As everyone could use extra hands while moving in, be sure to be on the lookout for CSA members or call Santi and she will send members out to help. Santi can be reached at 786-280-7200.

“I’m just looking forward to all the new opportunities the fall semester will bring,” Santi said. “I refuse to let the distance of the new church building be a hindrance to CSA.”

Sources:

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Information about location and times and event dates.
<http://gainesvillechristianchurch.org/>