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Pastor relates to youngsters while readying for church growth



By SHANE SNIDER, STAFF WRITER

WENDELL — Doug Lain likes to catch teens off guard with a quote from the movie, “Napolean Dynamite.”

Some react with surprise that the 34 -year-old head pastor at Wendell United Methodist would watch offbeat comedies that appeal to younger audiences. But for Lain, pop culture references are a good way to relate. Staying abreast of issues that affect young people is important, he said.

“I think we have to reach the audience of the contemporary culture,” Lain said in his office Monday. “Being apprised of the various television shows and musical genres helps me connect with people. It’s not a trick or a gimmick, but it’s a way to build a relationship. The kids understand that I care about what’s going on in their lives.”

Lain loves a good comedy — Steve Carrell is one of his favorite actors. But leading a growing congregation of more than 400 is serious business. With the prospect of Wendell landing a 4,000 -home subdivision looming, Lain said growth issues are taking center stage.

“How we’re going to grow is a hot topic right now, and there are a lot of different voices and opinions, ” Lain said. “But we know that growth is coming, and it will change the area forever. ”

Sitting at the corner of Main Street and Wendell Boulevard, the 83 -year-old building housing Lain’s congregation has already added on space. But the church has extended to all of the land on the property, leaving little room for expansion.

“We’re beginning to look at those questions,” he said. “We need to figure out how to best help the church grow. The church isn’t really about a building; it’s the people. We have to keep in mind that the building is just the place where we gather to worship. ”

Lain’s path to preach started when he was a high school student in High Point. “I felt God call me into the ministry when I was a teenager,” he said. “So I went to talk to a Sunday school teacher about it. During college, I had some second thoughts.”

With an undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Lain had a tough decision to make. He decided to attend Duke University Divinity School to become a minister. “At one point, I felt like I was unworthy of the calling. I now know that God calls all different types of people. ”

While trying to appeal to a youthful audience, Lain must balance the teachings of the Bible with the realities of the world. “The biggest challenge is for people to accept the gospel and see that it’s different from what the world has to offer. In the world, we say, ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme.’ In the church, we must share. It’s very different from the consumer society we live in. ”

Lain started at the church in June after leaving Salem United Methodist Church in Graham, where he was head pastor. He lives in Wendell with his wife, Tara, and two young daughters. Lain said eastern Wake is unique because it retains its rural charm, but has the amenities of Raleigh close by.

“This is an exciting place to be right now,” he said. “All of the churches I’ve been involved with have been different. Wendell is special. Each church has different strengths and different challenges. ”

As for the future of the church, Lain will look above for answers. "I really hope that the church continues to grow spiritually as it grows physically," he said. "I want our congregation to have a deeper understanding of God's Word and are receptive to God's calling."

And as Lain looks for answers, he might just catch a few movies along the way.

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