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## Brentwood Chinese ministry marks a cultural milestone

### New group meets for first Sunday service at Brentwood Baptist Church

By Harriet Vaughan  
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BRENTWOOD — A search is under way for a Chinese minister to lead Brentwood Baptist Church's growing Chinese ministry.

Until then, the ministry will have to rely on an English-speaking minister and a Chinese translator to carry it through its Chinese worship services.

"The Chinese word is very condensed. It can capture in one word in Chinese that is a paragraph or several sentences in English. When we say it in Chinese, it reveals to us a deeper meaning, so that's why it's important to worship in Chinese," said Suk-Lee Winsor, a founding member of the Chinese ministry.

Winsor was one of 80 who this past Sunday attended the Chinese ministry's first Sunday service in Brentwood Baptist's newly built Baskin Chapel. The goal is to grow the separate Chinese Sunday service from a monthly worship service in the Sunday school rooms to a weekly service in the chapel. Members of the Chinese congregation attend a weekly Sunday morning Bible study. Afterward, a handful of English-speaking members join the rest of the church at the regularly scheduled Brentwood Baptist Sunday service while the rest of the Chinese members go home.

## Interest goes beyond language

The plans for a separate service go beyond the language barrier. It mirrors a cultural need as well.

"Most of our families, they have their kids and teens in Brentwood Baptist Church programs. There are a lot of children's programs available for them. They can get involved pretty easily. We also don't want them to only adapt to the English culture. We want them to keep the Chinese culture. That's why we have our own group, but we want them to be involved with both, not one or the other," said Lixin Chen, another founding member of the Chinese ministry.

Though much of what the Chinese ministry does is separate from the other church activities, Winsor says it is very much welcomed and integrated into the main body of the church.

"They always invite us. They always include us and we always invite them to come to our Chinese gatherings and to enjoy our Chinese cooking. We are very much a big family," Winsor said.

## Special groups abound

The Chinese ministry group is among more than 20 different ministry groups at Brentwood Baptist Church. The Hispanic and deaf congregations, which, combined, have close to 200 members, help make up what church leaders call special people group ministries. The ministries have separate meeting times and activities.

They speak to the growth that is taking place not only in the church but also in Williamson County. According to county government statistics, an estimated 8,124 Hispanics reside in Williamson County. A five-year projection shows the Hispanic community growing to 12,864 residents or 6.4 percent of the population. Meanwhile, Asians and Pacific Islanders make up another growing community, with 3,522 living in Williamson County. In four years, that figure is expected to grow to 4,149 or 2.1

percent of the population. Scott Harris, missions minister at the church, says they are all welcome to make Brentwood Baptist Church their place of worship.

"I think it reflects the changing demographics of our society. We see this as something exciting and to be celebrated. Heaven will be diverse. So should the church here on Earth," Harris said.

"Over the years, Brentwood Baptist has always been open to people of any race, but in the last five years, we've seen more and more people from a variety of backgrounds join us. We have people attending our church each week from well over 20 countries — from Azerbaijan all the way to Venezuela. Like our Chinese congregation, these groups are not our guests. We are one body with a variety of ethnic and cultural expressions."

## Mission began with newcomers

The Chinese congregation, much like the rest of the church, is a tight-knit group. The ministry that started in 2004 with four families was more about helping new residents and immigrants adapt to the culture and not so much about worship, according to Winsor. During the process, they discovered that some of the older members could not understand English. As a result, they began hosting weekly Bible study groups at members' homes. They eventually began hosting Sunday school at church. The group is made up of people from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

"We are very close. When someone's moving, everybody comes to help. When a new family comes in, everyone helps to settle them down. We have a couple of people in the group that are undergoing health recovery. Immediately the Chinese group starts our 24-hour prayer chain," Winsor said.

The women's group gathers for Chinese cooking lessons and parties at least every other week. The women host discussion groups about raising their children and how to make sure their children do not lose their Asian roots while adapting to American culture. The men's group will meet just as frequently, to watch sports or go fishing.

The Chinese members are in contact with each other during religious-related activities and outside. But Chen says at the end of the day, everything goes back to the core purpose of the group: bringing people to Jesus.

"We work together. To work together closely, that's the key thing for inside our group," Chen said.

"We work closely together to bring more people to Jesus. To make this happen, we have to work together and get everyone to realize that that's God's way to live."

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