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## Granger church to baptize hundreds

### Granger church holds submersion ceremony on its lawn.

By **ED RONCO**  
*Tribune Staff Writer*

GRANGER — It was a no-pressure call to Jesus on Saturday night at Granger Community Church, 630 E. University Drive.

"Before you get sweaty palms, let me tell you, I won't do any bait-and-switch," Pastor Mark Beeson said before a congregation of hundreds in the huge sanctuary. "I won't say 'So, if you want to receive Christ, raise your hand. Now those of you who raised your hand, come forward. Now those of you who came forward could you speak into this microphone and tell everyone the worst thing you ever did.'

"We're not doing that."

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And a long line of church members answered that call, including Edwardsburg resident

Tina Barton, 37, who like others getting baptized, wore a black T-shirt and a name tag as she waited to be submerged in one of four inflatable swimming pools on the church lawn.

"I've always felt the pull to do this, but never had the courage to really stand up and do it," she said. "This time, the pull was stronger and I guess God just gave me the courage to do what I've been trying to do for a long time."

It wasn't a miraculous epiphany that led Barton to be baptized, she said. No bright light from above or invisible choir or James-Earl-Jones-like voice urging her to do it.

"All of a sudden, it just seemed like the right thing to do," she said.

So Barton lined up with the others, and a woman read her name: "Now entering Pool 2, Tina Barton."



Tribune Photo/GENE KAISER

**Tina Barton of Edwardsburg gets baptized by Executive Pastor Tim Stevens and Mark Waltz, pastor of connections, at the Granger Community Church during a large outdoor baptism ceremony on Saturday.**

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And she walked across the lawn, up some stairs to a platform between Pools 1 and 2, and when it was her turn, she descended a ladder, professed her faith, plugged her nose and went under.

When she popped back up, she was all smiles.

"I can't describe it," she said. "I'm shaky, but it's a good feeling. I feel really, really good."

Beeson, who founded this church 22 years ago, said the church does baptisms annually, in one day. Last year, it was held at Coveleski Stadium in South Bend.

"Twenty-two years ago when we started, our baptism might have been seven people," Beeson said. "Now, we'll baptize several hundred each year."

The event is a highlight of his year, he said.

"I love the people; I love seeing the step of faith that they're taking together," Beeson said. "I love seeing the crowd of the church supporting all of those who are supporting their faith."

The baptisms continue today after the 9:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. services. Staff writer Ed Ronco: [eronco@sbtinfo.com](mailto:eronco@sbtinfo.com) (574) 235-6353

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