



A group of men carry a truss for the roof of the new building. Volunteer labor and donated materials have made the project possible.

The church that God built

Cindy Richardson
TD Staff

The spirit in the small community of Alicia has been recently revived thanks, in part, to a building project at Alicia Baptist Church.

Serving as a mission to the residents of the Alicia area, the church has now found itself as the beneficiary of mission work and donations to construct a new sanctuary and provide much needed space for its outreach ministries.

Pastor Monroe Baldwin said that about two-and-a-half years ago he and his wife, Tammy, started getting involved in community ministries. It started out with a drug recovery program.

"As we started looking at some of the situations and how the people were living, we decided to expand the drug recovery program and implement a community ministry, which would be a separate program and not coincide with the church budget," Monroe said.

They began working with the Arkansas State Baptist Convention. Two representatives from the Convention came to Alicia and had a meeting to discuss what the church was doing and its needs. At that time, the church had started a Community Ministry Account, which consisted of \$135.

The Convention donated \$1,000 to the account, which was used to refurbish homes in need of repair in the community. Then the church was offered a chance to be involved in the Mississippi River Valley Ministries Program, which encompasses a five-state area and includes "Bridges Over Poverty."

Monroe said that the church was able to submit a proposal through "Bridges Over Poverty" indicating needs for the church and the community. Tammy prepared the proposal describing a need for Bibles and more space to conduct Bible study groups, men's groups, women's groups, Sunday school classes, youth activities, etc.

The proposal also told what the church was helping to offer in the community, such as GED classes, a food bank, drug and alcohol recovery and counseling, vacation Bible school and a clothing closet. One of the main needs was more space for the youth and their activities.



Volunteers work to frame up the new building at Alicia Baptist Church. The building will house a sanctuary, freeing up space in the current church building to be used for outreach ministries.

Tyler, Texas, church Steps up to help

"We were having so many youth coming on Wednesday nights, and our space was so limited," Monroe said. "Tammy had gotten permission from the city to walk the youth over to the community center, but that had gotten to be a problem when the weather was bad."

So, the initial proposal requested to add a Community Outreach Center. Monroe said they didn't hear much of a response, until the end of this past year when two churches began showing strong interest in helping. One of those was Southern Oaks Baptist Church from Tyler, Texas.

The other church had a change in their mission scope and was not going to be able to participate; however, Southern Oaks Baptist stepped in to help. Monroe met with the church's Building and Grounds Committee and it was decided to use the existing building for Sunday school classes and the Community Outreach Center and to construct the new building, a 50x70 foot structure, as a sanctuary.

"It's really significant to note that the church had no building fund, no building plans, no building vision, no spot of land chosen," Tammy said. "There were no physical plans

in place at this time."

Monroe said they started the project with about \$3,200. Two church fund-drives and an independent donation brought the total to \$20,000 to begin the project. The congregation from Southern Oaks donated about two-thirds more than that to help with the mission.

"God had already begun to prep people's hearts to donate things," Monroe said.

Sam Allen donated all the dirt, and Stanley Corbett donated the spreading and the packing. Mike Duckworth and Donnie Barnes of Duckworth's Tree Service donated their services by removing a tree.

Then a skeleton crew from Tyler visited, and one of the men leading the crew, Dexter Jordan, voiced a concern about not having blueprints. They needed state-approved blueprints within a very short period of time to be able to get the project underway.

"This was very troubling because we didn't have an architect and didn't know any architects who could come in this period of time and be within the budget," Tammy said. "I was sitting and praying about this when the phone rang."

The call was from a man she had never spoken to before or since who was calling to speak to the pastor on an unrelated issue. Because of the man's line of work, she asked him if he knew any architects and he gave her the names of two architectural firms, one of which was Stuck Associates in Jonesboro.

"This firm made this project a top priority and not only had the blueprints ready in the allotted amount of time, but did it at a cost that easily fit into the budget," Tammy said.

Dexter Jordan has been an essential part of the project ever since, participating in every crew that has come and helping to build the new structure. He also donated a new baptistry for the church. His brother, Buddy Jordan, donated all the batting and formwork, and all of the labor of the "finishing crew" was donated. The trusses were given at about

half price from a business in Tyler, and all the doors, windows, plumbing and electrical work were donated by people in Tyler, as well as the roofing trim, the building trim, the insulation, the concrete and the termite treatment.

In addition, two five-ton AC/heat units were donated from Tyler. Monroe said, at the time of this interview, that the only outstanding bill was on the cost of the lumber. Since then, Southern Oaks Baptist has paid the lumber bill in full.

Besides the physical materials donated by the new friends from Tyler, they also keep giving of themselves personally. More than 50 men and women came with the last crew to work on the building, help conduct vacation Bible school and minister to the community. They have been housed in the Honor Students Apartments at Williams Baptist College.

"The folks at WBC have been a tremendous help," Monroe said.

Many others have donated their time and efforts on this project. Those who have worked on the construction include Mike Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church in Newport; Dave Jackson, the music minister at First Baptist Church of Newport; Chuck Fitzgerald, pastor of New Life Cathedral in Hoxie; as well as several men from the Alicia community.

In addition, the deacons from First Baptist in Newport did a "prayer walk" around the church.

Rob Phillips, pastor of Southern Oaks, has also been working on the new building. "I came because of Alicia Baptist's interest in mission work and the good they are doing for their community," he said.

Many local businesses have donated food for the work crews and discounted services for this project, as well.

Tammy said a couple of weeks ago a woman who lives in Alicia made a \$100 donation to the project. She had never attended Alicia Baptist, but told Tammy that she felt led to make a donation.

Efforts shift to church interior

The building is in the dry now, and efforts are shifting to the inte-

rior of the church. Longview Baptist Church of Olive Branch, Miss., donated 25 church pews. All of the Sheetrock has been donated by Southern Oaks Baptist. Rick Hart, pastor of Cache River Pentecostal Church in Sedgwick, and a group of men from his church have donated their labor to hang the Sheetrock. Different area churches have also donated 50 new pew Bibles.

"The Lord put his final signature on the project a couple of weeks ago," Monroe said. "A man from the community, whom had never regularly attended church, came over on a Sunday morning and was saved. The man said he had seen all their work and knew that it was truly of God, and he wanted to give his life to the Lord because of it."

Monroe went on to say, "All of the volunteers from Tyler were there and got to witness this, which made it all the more of a miraculous salvation."

The average Sunday morning attendance at Alicia Baptist Church was approximately 16 just prior to the Baldwins' arrival three years ago. Now, the average Sunday attendance is approximately 65. In the last three years, there have been 88 people brought to salvation.

Monroe said, "All of the help, donations and prayers have been of great necessity, but it is only because of Jesus Christ that any of this has taken place."

He said it is important to note that statisticians who do studies to see if a church or community is growing enough to warrant a new building would say that there isn't a reason to build this new structure, based on the numbers.

"God desires it to be built," Monroe said. "It is His building. He is building it. He is laying it on people's hearts to donate and to help. It is absolutely the church that God built."

He went on to say that it has been with the help of the servants at Alicia Baptist Church and Southern Oaks Baptist Church, but "Jesus Christ is the Supreme Authority over this entire project. It is because of Him and Him alone that any of this is happening."



Dexter Jordan (left) and Pastor Rob Phillips, both of Southern Oaks Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, have been instrumental in progress at the Alicia Baptist Church. Southern Oaks has taken on Alicia Baptist as a mission and has contributed monetarily and through volunteer labor.