

Conroe church looks to Bible to plan how its garden grows_82503

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By George Henson

Staff Writer

CONROE-Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Conroe now can learn sitting at the feet of Jesus.

The church recently created a prayer garden with a sculpture by Texas artist Max Greiner as its focal point. The life-size bronze statue "Fisher of Men" was donated by Alan and Jeanie Boehm in honor of her parents, Dick and Ella Jean Schaefer, longtime members of the church.

A perpetual stream issues from the bottom of the statue and is recycled.

Judy Wilson,
church
business
administrator,
along with
landscape
contractor
Gary Heavin
and
landscape
designer
Diana Wilson,
combined
talents to
produce a
place of
prayer and
refuge at
First Baptist
Church of
Conroe.

The prayer garden was fashioned totally from biblical plants with the help of landscape architect Diana Wilson. Wilson, who has worked on projects all over the world, including the office headquarters of the Department of Defense and the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, worked to incorporate Bible plants that would thrive in Conroe's climate.

“Creating beautiful pattern gardens in Saudi Arabia and Yemen early in my career definitely influenced my work on the First Baptist Church prayer garden,” she said. “These projects involved an incredible amount of research into the spirituality and symbolism associated with various plants

and patterns. That experience prompted me to look to the Bible to find inspiration for the prayer garden design.”

Plants included are the blue lily of the Nile, pomegranate tree, fig vine, Italian cypress tree, ornamental papyrus grass, Easter lily, pygmy date palm, rose of Sharon, sweet olive tree, yellow flag iris and cyclamens.

“These are plants that Jesus could have sat next to when he prayed,” Business Administrator Judy Wilson pointed out. “Every plant and tree has a biblical meaning, which makes the garden that much more special.”

A diagram of the garden identifying each plant provides a biblical reference for visitors.

The full length of the garden faces a glass-walled passageway. Pastor Rusty Walton said it is not unusual to find people standing in the hallway admiring the garden.

The garden was meant to be used, however, not just admired. The statue and rock-bed stream are enclosed by a short cap-stoned wall that can be used as seats by those seeking a time of contemplation or by a Sunday School class in search of an outdoor setting. A bench under a trellis offers another possibility.

“We want this to be a place where people can come and pray any time they want,” Walton said. “They can even come at night if they let us know so that we can make it accessible.”

Gary Heavin, a landscape contractor and a member of the Conroe congregation, planted the garden.

Doing the work for his church and especially for something of such a spiritual nature was different than his normal work, he said. “My prayer every day was that I wasn't doing it for me, but for the Lord. It was really

me trying to use whatever talents I have to display his handiwork.”

The project took 10 months to complete.

In addition to Bible studies and prayer, the garden will be used for weddings.

Walton said he looks forward to seeing the garden mature.

“It might look a little like it did when Jesus prayed,” he said.

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