

Country church believes new life may rest on the other side of the nearby cemetery_40504

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By George Henson

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SOMERSET-New life for Old Rock Baptist Church may rest just the other side of the cemetery, Pastor Melvin Schupp believes.

The church, built in 1866 after the congregation moved from another community, always has been small and rural. Even though a highway now runs within earshot, the church remains hidden from passersby.

Most of the drivers have other destinations anyway, but soon that will be changing.

Toyota plans to build a new plant nearby.

Old Rock Church, Somerset.

Already, land values are rising, and new homes are beginning to pop up.

"That Toyota plant is going in, and the population around here is growing like mad," Schupp said. "What we're trying to do here is look to the future."

For now, Old Rock Church's facility is big enough. "Twenty is a pretty good crowd," Schupp admits. But the 74-year-old pastor is looking a few years down the road.

"We've set a goal to raise \$200,000 in five years to build a new building. Where we are now, we have no room to build and no education space either," he said.

The church is bounded closely on all sides by land. Part of the land belongs to a family not currently wanting to sell.

The rest is a cemetery that has almost as long a history as the church.

Schupp hopes one day the land on the backside of the cemetery can be secured for a new building—a site that would make the church visible from the highway and afford a larger footprint for a new facility.

While acknowledging some reluctance to leave the building where they have worshipped for many years, Schupp said the congregation realizes the need to prepare for the future.

"We don't want to move the church, but we don't have any room to build," he said.

"They like the church they've been in for all these years, but they're ready to do what's needed.

"When you have people who have sat in the same pew for 50 years, it's a little difficult to move, but they're behind the idea."

In the meantime, the church is investigating the possibility of erecting a tall cross at its current location so it can be seen from the road.

The Toyota plant is expected to employ more people than the current population of Somerset, and a number of support companies also are being built to service the plant.

The automobile plant should be completed in 2007.

"We're trying to get a jump on things so that we're prepared," Schupp said.

He doesn't want the church's historical marker to be mistaken for a tombstone.

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