

TBM Builders roll into southern Utah for major project

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PANGUITCH, Utah—Mountains skirt the horizon. A river rolls wide across the valley, out of its banks from the thawing winter snow. On the edge of town, a white steeple pokes toward the sky; it is not the tallest steeple in town.

Valley Christian Fellowship is a Baptist congregation that welcomes 30 to 40 worshippers each Sunday. It is the only evangelical church within an hour's drive of Panguitch in southern Utah.

Texas Baptist Men Builders leaders rolled into Panguitch in late April to begin a months-long project of helping Valley Christian Fellowship build a parsonage, with Sunday school space in the basement. The church provides the materials. TBM Builders provide the labor.



Tammi Newsted, church clerk at Valley Christian Fellowship, points to the plans for a new parsonage TBM Builders are constructing.

(Photo / Ferrell Foster)

Valley Fellowship has no pastor; they've been without for three years. The church has interviewed a number of potential pastors, said Tammi Newsted, church clerk, but each has responded similarly. "I looked, and there's nothing to rent. Where am I going to live?" And they can't afford to buy a house in the inflated housing market, she said.

Tourism has driven up housing costs. Panguitch is in the Grand Circle of National Parks, with Bryce Canyon, Zion and Grand Staircase all nearby, not to mention state parks and other recreational opportunities.

As with many smaller towns near popular travel destinations, the short-term rental market has led to homes being bought, renovated and rented for a few days at a time.

"The AirBNB market has taken over all of the homes out here," said Newsted, referring to a popular vacation rental website.

The "people who live out here can't even rent, let alone someone coming into the community. And we certainly can't expect them to come in and buy a home," she added.

Parsonage is 'a foundational need'

Valley Fellowship's previous pastor rented and "had to move three times I know of because people were selling the houses," Newsted said. "That's just not conducive to having someone who wants to be in the area."

As a result, a "parsonage is a foundational need that we have in order to bring in a pastor," she said.



Dan Maruyama is director of Henry's Place, a Christian camp and retreat center for at-risk youth. (Photo / Ferrell Foster)

Dan Maruyama is director of Henry's Place, a nearby Christian camp and retreat center for at-risk youth. He's been helping Valley Fellowship by preaching and securing pulpit supply for the church since their pastor left. Tourism has created a housing challenge, Maruyama said, but it also has presented an opportunity.

"There's a huge amount of summer tourism traffic that comes through here, and we regularly have people show up that are looking for something and they end up in this church, and they hear the gospel ... and are encouraged in their walk," he said. "It's just a great opportunity for outreach."

But the church needs a pastor.

Fortunately, the church bought a lot next to its sanctuary five years ago before housing prices rose and "there was no place to live," Newsted said. "God knew we needed it; we didn't know that" at the time,

Fellowship is committed to reaching people for Christ, and it is the only evangelical church within a 60-mile radius. It has a big task in a big area.

In the town of about 2,000 people, there is one Catholic church and three congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons.

The large LDS population creates an opportunity, Maruyama said.

“The Mormon church is basically bleeding people and a lot of people are coming out of it,” Maruyama said. “And they tend to come out of the Mormon church and go into atheism because they’re disenchanted with religion.

“If you’ve got someone standing there and saying, ‘Don’t give it all up. God is real; you were just taught some stuff that wasn’t quite right. There is a real Jesus, and he really does love you.’ That’s a great opportunity, and folks need to hear that.”

Church with a Great Commission mindset

Valley Fellowship has an outward-focused, Great Commission mindset, Maruyama said. “I think what’s happening here is God is providing for this church to be able to function, to call a pastor, to have the impact it needs to have on this local community. The opportunity for impact here is huge.”

Church members have not given up, even without a pastor.

“We have been operating for three years with pulpit supply,” Newsted said. “Just the fact that the doors are still open when most churches would have to close the doors because they don’t have a pastor, God has his hand on this church.

“He has something so very special, because we have never had to close the doors. And we have always had the funds we need to pay the bills. We

almost always have somebody to fill the pulpit, and, if we don't, we do a music service."

With that sense of purpose and God's blessings, the church decided to pursue "parallel projects"—build a parsonage and seek a pastor.

The church discovered Texas Baptist Men through a "very long process," Newsted said. "When we decided to build the parsonage we knew that we were going to have to have volunteers to do the labor part of it."

Newsted searched for West Coast ministries that would do the project, but "building a parsonage is not on the list of what most ministries want to do," she said. "If we were building a church, it would be no problem."

'So important that we want to be part of it'

Then she connected with TBM and received a different response.

"I was very grateful when Texas Baptist Men contacted me, and they said: 'You know what, we're going to make an exception for you. This isn't what we normally do, but we can see that this is so important that we want to be part of it.' And that was one of the greatest days. I was so happy. I think I was probably smiling for a week after that because I finally had a yes."



Wayne Pritchard, TBM Builders leader, applies sealant to the edge of the parsonage basement. (Photo / Ferrell Foster)

Wayne Pritchard leads TBM Builders, which includes church, camp and cabinet builders. He has coordinated the TBM effort working with other leaders and task experts in the three groups. Pritchard, and his wife, Annette, were also among the first TBM Builders to arrive in Panguitch and will stay until the project is completed.

“When I was first contacted by Tammi, I was thrilled, because I had a vision from God that our Builders programs could take on a start-to-finish project utilizing all of our groups,” Pritchard said. “This project was presented at the perfect time as we are basically off during the summer, and this one needed to be done during that time,

“God provided everything we needed to come and serve him in such a mighty way,” Pritchard said. “This church is in an area that is wide open to reach lost souls, and I have no doubt that [God] has something big planned for them. Our entire Builders group that is participating shares the same

feeling.”

Newsted said the Panguitch project has required the expertise contained in all three TBM Builders groups, and she communicated with the various leaders, with Pritchard coordinating.

“Everybody has been just fabulous in their support of this project and everything we need. It’s just been spot on; it’s been awesome.”



TBM Builders begin framing the parsonage of Valley Christian Fellowship. (Photo / Annette Pritchard)

Prior to the arrival of TBM Builders, the church arranged for the concrete work to begin. The TBM volunteers then arrived and sealed the basement, installed floor joists and decking, constructed exterior and interior walls, hoisted the roof trusses into place, provided plumbing and electrical systems, roofed, hung sheetrock, built cabinets, and provided all of the finishing touches. They started May 1 and expect to finish in July.

“One of the best things about this is that I am grateful that there are still Christians out there that are willing to give of themselves, not just financially, but they’re willing to give of their time, willing to travel 1,400 miles across the U.S. to come out here not knowing really what to expect,” Newsted said.

“That has been amazing; it’s been awesome. And I’m really enjoying working with the team, and I’m really excited.”

‘God is doing something’

Maruyama preached at Valley Fellowship the day before TBM began its work on the parsonage. He spoke from the Old Testament book of Ezra about rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, and he saw a parallel in the two building projects—Jerusalem and Panguitch.

In Ezra, God is doing “what it takes to build whatever is necessary to make ministry possible,” Maruyama said.

“The building of the temple is what reestablishes the cultural milieu that makes it possible for Christ to show up and be recognized as the Savior,” Maruyama said.

“That’s much bigger than what’s happening here, obviously, but I think what’s happening here is God is providing for this church to be able to function, to call a pastor, to have the impact it needs to have on this local community. The opportunity for impact here is huge.”

God is blessing the Panguitch congregation, Maruyama said.

“When I see all of the massive amounts of support ... and funding that goes way beyond the capabilities of this small church. I can’t conclude anything other than that God’s doing something, and that’s super exciting. I don’t know what God’s going to do with it, but he’s doing something, and it’s awesome to be a part of it.”