

Baptist Temple in San Antonio builds inclusive playground

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SAN ANTONIO—With a grant from the Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio and additional support from the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, Baptist Temple in San Antonio built an inclusive playground to serve children on the city's Southside.

Inclusive playgrounds that allow children of different ability levels to play together are designed to inspire mutual understanding, friendships and a sense of community, church leaders explained.

Studies show many children with disabilities spend less than two hours a week with their peers outside classrooms, they added. Inclusive playgrounds provide children with disabilities opportunities to develop the social, physical and problem-solving skills children gain when they play together.

A community survey estimated more than 1,000 children with disabilities live in the immediate vicinity of Baptist Temple, which also has been identified by the federal government as economically depressed.

'Making the world a more inclusive place'

Nora Gonzales, the mother of a child born missing arms and parts of his legs, remembers her son, Xavier, playing at an inclusive playground.

"I remember seeing my little boy having a good time. He could explore and excel in his environment," she said.

Xavier is now a 19-year-old college student, and his mother attributes his growing independence to services that she and Xavier were able to access. They want that access for other children with special needs.

Inclusive playgrounds “are a big step to making the world a more inclusive place,” Xavier said.

The first phase of the playground at Baptist Temple has been completed and features accessible playscapes suitable for children ages 2 and younger. Its construction was made possible by a \$7,395 grant from Baptist Health Foundation grant, along with additional gifts through the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation and from Baptist Temple members.

“We are currently raising funds for the second phase for children ages 5 and up,” said Jorge Zayasbazan, pastor of Baptist Temple.

The second phase also will include wheelchair access and features for the mobility impaired.

“We want all children to feel welcome and included,” Zayasbazan said.

Immanuel Motorcycle Ministry will sell barbecue plates for \$10 from noon to 5 p.m. on Feb. 9 at Baptist Temple, 901 E. Drexel in San Antonio, to benefit the playground.

“We are asking the biker community as well as the community of San Antonio to help us,” said Armando Acosta, president of Immanuel Motorcycle Ministry.

For more information, call (210) 533-7114.

The Baptist Temple campus is home to seven congregations, two schools and six service organizations that minister to the Southside San Antonio community at all stages of life.