

# Building damaged, congregation hopeful after Little Hope fire

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LITTLE HOPE—The East Texas community bears the name “Little Hope,” but that doesn’t reflect the Baptist congregation there, despite a fire New Year’s Day that destroyed the church’s fellowship hall, kitchen and education space.

The church’s sanctuary was not damaged by the flames but sustained considerable smoke damage, Pastor Bill Parr said.

The congregation gathered the evening before to pray in the new year, breaking up at about 1 a.m., Parr said. The fire began about 8 a.m. and appeared to start through a faulty electrical box.

Firemen fight a New Year’s Day fire that destroyed the fellowship hall, kitchen and education space at New Hope Baptist Church in Little Hope. The sanctuary sustained smoke damage.

“I was reading my paper when someone called to say they thought smoke was coming from the building,” said Parr, who lives in a parsonage next to the church. When he called 911, firefighters from Canton, Ben Wheeler and Van Zandt County already were on the way.

“They were having a meeting that morning, so they were already all together,” Parr reported. “If they hadn’t been, we would have lost our

auditorium.”

The church will meet for the next month at the Little Hope Community Center as the congregation deals with smoke damage to the sanctuary.

The church will rebuild the other part of structure, constructed in 1958, and hopes to have it completed in about six months, Parr said. A committee already is making plans, and church leaders believe insurance funding will be sufficient for the project.

The group that gathered for worship Jan. 3 was a little larger than normal for the first Sunday of the month, especially since several in the congregation work at Canton’s First Monday Trade Days. If those regular attenders had been there, it would have been one of Little Hope’s largest crowds in a while, Parr observed.

“It was great. The Spirit of God was obviously there, both in the morning and evening,” he said.

Parr, who is 82, said a church he served as pastor in Tucson, Ariz., also burned.

“I’ve discovered the church is going to go on, and the church is going to grow as God intended. If the devil did it, he’s kicking himself,” he said.