

Cooperation makes East Dallas church possible

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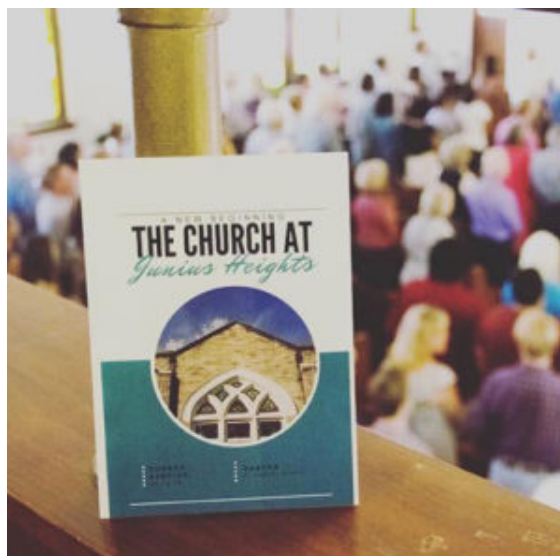
DALLAS—Cooperation can be a catalyst for change and a powerful tool for community ministry, and everyone involved in the birth of The Church at Junius Heights can bear witness to it.

Jerry Carlisle, vice president of the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, connected a donor and a matching grant with a church at just the right moment.

With the cooperation of the Missions Foundation, Dallas Baptist Association, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and a partner church, The Church at Junius Heights is now equipped for ministry in East Dallas.

A special place in his heart

Junius Heights Baptist Church was founded in the 1940s, and longtime residents recall its rich history and ministry of community engagement. Sam Dennis, former pastor of Parkway Hills Baptist Church in Plano, had a special place in his heart for Junius Heights, since he and his family attended the church when he was a toddler in the 1950s. Several months ago, Dennis observed the building in poor shape.



The Church at Junius Heights held its first service Sept. 16 with a gathering of more than 220 people. (Photo / Texas Baptist Communications)

He called Bob Dean, executive director of Dallas Baptist Association, and learned the association had been praying about the church. Not only was the building in poor shape, but the church was struggling to keep its doors open with only a handful of members left.

Dean and Clay Jacobson, Texas Baptists' church starter for the Dallas area, both desired to find an alternative to the church selling the property and closing its doors for good. Dennis expressed a willingness to go back to his roots, help launch a revitalized Christian presence in the community and guide the congregation until new leaders emerge.

Simultaneously, Carlisle was working with a donor who wanted to provide a \$50,000 matching/challenge grant, spurring members of a congregation to give by knowing their dollars would double. Carlisle approached Jacobson to see if he knew of any potential churches in need of the money, and Jacobson told him about Junius Heights.

After building a relationship with Bud Seitzler, pastor of Junius Heights Baptist Church, the project was approved, supported by the donor who offered the matching grant. Junius Heights decided to start a mission and serve as sponsor for that congregation—The Church at Junius Heights.

Passion for ministry ignited

The building needed a new roof, floors, windows and electricity, among other big projects. With support from Parkway Hills and the Missions Foundation, a passion was ignited among members of Junius Heights Baptist church, Dennis said. With help from its members and the community, together with the matching grant, the church raised \$160,000 and began work in April on the renovation.

With a portion of the money raised, the church replaced floors, rebuilt the sanctuary platform, installed handicap ramps, installed a new roof, plastered walls, painted the entire building, repaired all of the eaves and replaced rotten wood.



Since its launch in mid-September, The Church at Junius Heights consistently has averaged close to 70 members in attendance, with visitors every week. (Photo / Texas Baptist Communications)

Currently, the church is seeking donations to replace their larger stained glass windows and have held classes for members to learn how to help repair the smaller ones.

After months of work, The Church at Junius Heights held its first service Sept. 16 with a gathering of more than 220 people. Junius Heights Baptist Church continues to meet for worship with fewer than a dozen members remaining.

Since then, The Church at Junius Heights consistently has averaged close to 70 members in attendance, with visitors every week. The diverse congregation reflects its East Dallas neighborhood, with members from varied cultural backgrounds.

“Our goal is to create a congregation that’s indigenous to that community,” Dennis said. “We want to reach people in our community, disciple them and have them run the church.”

The Church at Junius Heights has partnered with a local elementary school and high school. At Christmas, the congregation will work with the elementary school to host a concert, and students from Woodrow Wilson High School will help with a live nativity. The church also will hold Christmas Eve services to reach more people in the community.

In the future, Dennis hopes to raise up a young pastor and turn the church over to his leadership. With a sanctuary that seats about 350, his prayer is that the church will grow to between 400 and 600 members.

More than anything, Dennis said, “We want this community ignited.”