

# Fire destroys most of Kerens church buildings

October 23, 2009

KERENS—Fire burned down most of the facilities of First Baptist Church in Kerens Oct. 18.

The blaze incinerated the sanctuary, children's area, nursery, office and library. Only the youth and education building remains standing.

"Everything was completely destroyed," Pastor Wes Johnson said of the burned buildings.

The congregation gathered for worship the next day at the Kerens Ex-Students Association building, ending the service by driving to the church campus and circling in prayer.

"The spirit is great," Johnson said about the congregation. "We had a wonderful service Sunday. We had three more additions to our fellowship Sunday."

The church is a group of Christians who come together, not the building they meet in, Johnson stressed.

"The church here is doing great," he said. "It's the building that's not in such great shape."

Most of the buildings are insured, and other groups already are pitching in to help the congregation. A Methodist church donated 150 Baptist hymnals and people in the community have brought by microphones they can use.

Texas Baptists have given the congregation \$5,000 in the form of a disaster relief church building recovery grant from the Baptist General Convention

of Texas church architecture office, with \$1,000 designated to replace the pastor's reference library that was destroyed in the fire.

BGCT Congregational Strategist Bill Claiborne, who is connecting the congregation with convention resources, praised First Baptist Church for the way it is handling the situation.

“These are people who are already moving ahead,” he said. “They are not dwelling on the loss. They are looking to the future. They are very appreciative of the outpouring of concern and assistance that has come their way.”

The church will continue holding services at the Kerens Ex-Students Association building and all Sunday school classes have been moved into various locations across the city, including homes and a restaurant.

Johnson hopes the classes outside the church facilities will create opportunities for church members to share their faith with people who are not part of a church.

“It’ll give us a chance to be witnesses outside the traditional walls of the church,” he said.