

Gift of pews offers new life to South Texas church

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The Easter hope of resurrection came early this year to Iglesia Bautista Avondale in Harlingen.

The prospect of new life for the Hispanic South Texas church arrived in a U-Haul truck loaded with pews donated by a predominantly Black North Texas congregation.



Volunteers from Community Missionary Baptist Church load pews their congregation donated to a flood-damaged church in Harlingen. (Courtesy Photo from Community Missionary Baptist Church)

Community Missionary Baptist Church, with campuses in Cedar Hill and DeSoto, gave 58 pews and \$5,000 to help the Harlingen church return to its flood-damaged sanctuary after more than three and a half years.

On June 24, 2019, the lower Rio Grande Valley received 15 inches of rain in less than six hours. Floodwaters destroyed or seriously damaged more than 1,100 homes.

Pastor Roberto Reyes and his wife Lorena live about half a block from the Iglesia Bautista Avondale facility. When he waded from his home to the church the day after the storm, he found the building filled with water.

The floodwater soaked the carpet, irreparably damaged pews, destroyed interior walls and left the building uninhabitable.



Ray Becerra and Jimmy Jimenez, volunteers from First Baptist Church in Weslaco, replace flood-damaged drywall at Iglesia Bautista Avondale in Harlingen. (Photo courtesy of First Baptist Church Weslaco)

Texas Baptist Men damage assessors and Jorge Zapata with [Fellowship Southwest](#) and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Texas saw the damage for themselves and let other churches know about the need.

TBM volunteers removed damaged sheetrock, buckled paneling and soaked insulation from interior walls.

Zapata directed a visiting mission group from Murfreesboro, Tenn., to the Harlingen church, where they helped remove wet carpet and water-damaged furniture.

Volunteers from First Baptist Weslaco Español, worked alongside a team from New Beginnings Fellowship in Sinton in partnership with the Mennonite Christian Aid Ministries organization. They [replaced the interior walls](#) at Iglesia Bautista Avondale with drywall provided by TBM.

Other volunteer groups were scheduled to help in the months that followed, but then COVID-19 brought progress to an abrupt halt.

“The groups stopped coming, we did not have much income, and we lost three faithful members to COVID, including our only deacon,” Reyes said. “We all became pretty discouraged.”

Reyes looked at the possibility of moving to another church, but “God closed that door,” he said.

Call for the church to ‘rise up’

Disheartened, he wondered if Iglesia Bautista Avondale could survive. Then the son of the deacon who had died returned to Harlingen from military service.

“He told us that this church had to rise up,” Reyes said. “He really put our feet to the fire.”

After three years meeting in the church annex, Iglesia Bautista Avondale began to look at what would be required to move back into the sanctuary.

About that same time, Community Missionary Baptist Church replaced its sanctuary pews with chairs.

So, Pastor Oscar Epps contacted Dallas Baptist Association and the Baptist General Convention of Texas to see if another church could use those pews, and the BGCT posted notice online about the available pews.



Two brothers from Iglesia Bautista Avondale in Harlingen rented a U-Haul they drove to the Dallas area to load pews donated by Community Missionary Baptist Church. (Photo Courtesy of Community Missionary Baptist Church)

A representative from Iglesia Bautista Avondale responded quickly, and set up a time to pick up the pews.

“Our deacon’s son and his brother rented a U-Haul and drove to Cedar Hill,” Reyes said. “It was the dream, the hope and especially the prayer of our deacon who had passed that his sons would return to serve the church, and that’s what’s happening.”

Volunteers from Community Missionary Baptist Church spent several hours helping the brothers load the pews into the moving truck.

As they worked, the men from the Harlingen church told Epps about the floodwaters that devastated their church.

They also told him about other problems that had developed in the past three and half years due to deferred maintenance since the flood, including plumbing issues and a roof leak around the church's steeple.

"That touched my heart," Epps said.

He promptly contacted his church's trustees and finance committee, and he presented the representatives from Iglesia Bautista Avondale a \$5,000 check.

"It's a blessing for us to be able to bless others," Epps said. "When God has blessed us, he wants us to be a blessing to somebody else who needs help.

"In the process, we receive a blessing. It breathes new life into our church, too."