

Mansfield church provides affordable senior housing

July 15, 2019

MANSFIELD—After a dozen years of planning, [Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield](#) opened an affordable housing complex for senior adults across the street from the church campus.

“There was a lot of fasting and praying that went into this,” Pastor Michael Evans added. He described the project as “too big for us” but “big enough for God.”

The church celebrated the grand opening of [Bethlehem’s Pioneer Place](#)—a 130,000 square-foot, 130-unit complex—on July 7.

Only 15 of the new residents are members of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Evans noted. The complex has drawn interest from senior adults from as far away as Lubbock and Chicago, but the church designed it particularly with its community in mind.

No longer can afford to live in a city they built

The average apartment rent in Mansfield is \$1,500 per month, but Pioneer Place offers units on a sliding scale from \$325 to \$900 per month.



Michael Evans

“Some of these senior adults are the people who helped build Mansfield, and now they can no longer afford to live in this city. To us, that seems sinful,” Evans said.

Leaders of Bethlehem Baptist talked with other Texas Baptist churches that launched similar housing ministries, said Evans, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“A friend in Amarillo said, ‘It’s going to take time,’” Evans said. “I thought he meant a year or so. I didn’t know it would be 12 years. God did not give me the spiritual gift of patience.”

‘God sent us people’ to help

But along the way, “God sent us people” with expertise in finance, legal issues and low-income housing tax credit programs, he added.



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Pioneer Place
Mansfield, TX.

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Aerial view of Bethlehem's Pioneer Place in Mansfield

After the church raised \$20 million for the project, Pioneer Place received \$15 million in assistance from the 9 Percent Tax Credit Program for Affordable Housing from the [Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs](#).

Bethlehem's Pioneer Place offers a wide range of amenities, such as a fitness center, a library, a wellness clinic and a business center. A retired chaplain from East St. Louis is coordinator of services and activities.

Bethlehem Baptist will hold regularly scheduled chapel services at the complex, and volunteers from the congregation will provide transportation to the grocery store or a local discount center for residents who are unable to drive.

'What God wants us to do'

Evans described the opening of the complex as the fulfillment of a vision God placed on his heart.

"It grew out of looking into the eyes of senior adults, crying with them when they didn't know how they could afford to stay in their homes. It

came from missing them when they had to move away," he said. "We believed we could help senior adults live out their golden years in comfort and security. ...

"We believe this what God wants us to do in the place where we are planted."