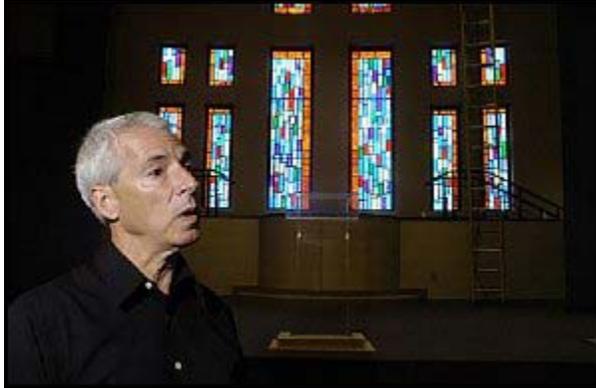


Local

Congregations make way to the sprawling Southside

Local churches follow growth in population

kathryn garcia Caller-Times
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To the Southside.

With burgeoning growth and development on the Southside, churches of all denominations are following their moving congregations, dotting Yorktown Boulevard and other far south thoroughfares with their spires and stained glass.

"Most churches are usually set up for neighborhoods, so the churches are going where their congregations go," said Matthew Cravey, president of NAI Cravey Real Estate Services Inc. "They are there to serve their customer, their congregation. They need to be located where they are closer to serve."

And the Southside's population is booming.

Corpus Christi's Southside population is 81,134 residents, according to the 2000 Census. Census tract 54.05, a portion of the Southside bounded by Yorktown Boulevard, Staples Street and Oso Creek, grew from 723 in 1990 to 3,552 in 2000.

By 2020, city officials estimate the Southside's population will reach 138,031 and 165,000 by 2040.

Bay Area Fellowship on South Padre Island Drive near Ennis Joslin Road is bursting at the seams and ranks No. 36 for the fastest growing churches nationwide by Outreach Magazine.

Choosing the church's new location two years ago was a no-brainer, said Pastor Bil Cornelius. The 95,000-square-foot church is being constructed now on Ayers Street past Saratoga Boulevard and will be completed by January 2007, he said.

"We knew we wanted to be on the Southside because that's where all the growth is," Cornelius said. "If you go out to the churches, it looks like farmers are out there but almost every piece of it is owned by developers. We are going to meet them out there."

Cornelius said 80 percent of Bay Area Fellowship's congregation lives closer to the new Ayers Street site than its current site.

In early April, Kings Crossing Church of Christ on Yorktown Boulevard opened its doors, leaving behind both a 51-year-old name, Windsor Park Church of Christ, and building on the 4400 block of South Staples Street.

Kings Crossing Church of Christ preaching minister the Rev. Mark Pugh said the land was purchased five years ago, before the boom of subdivisions and shopping centers. The name was changed from Windsor Park Church of Christ because the former name was associated with an area, he said.

"It's a godsend," said Pugh, who has seen membership grow from 250 families to 400. "We borrowed on the symbolism of Kings Crossing, the king, Christ and the cross."

Pugh said the move, although difficult for some older members, mostly has been positive and won't result in members leaving.

Nearby at Everhart Road and Yorktown Boulevard, 4-year-old St. John the Baptist Catholic Church sits after being founded to serve the Southside in 2001 as a mission and two years later dedicated as a parish, said Father Paul Hesse.

"We have always tried to go out to where the people are to meet their spiritual needs," said Hesse, who has seen a dramatic growth since becoming a parish - jumping from 160 households to 422.

In 10 years, Cravey said, far Southside streets such as Yorktown Boulevard, Ayers Street and the small two-lane county roads leading out to Chapman Ranch might not be recognizable.

"It's going to be a slow process," Cravey said. "We're going to look up 10 years from now and wonder what happened. While they are taking place, you don't notice them, but you look back and it's all changed."

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