

CARPENTERS FOR CHRIST

The History

By Kent H. Roberts

On September 24, 1995, Reverend Mark Craig gave a sermon on his vision for Highland Park United Methodist Church. He recalled HPUMC's great history of ministry in less fortunate parts of Dallas, particularly West Dallas, with the Wesley-Rankin Center, and East Dallas, with the East Dallas Co-operative Parish. He then challenged the church to "look south." "As we look to the South . . . , we have an opportunity to serve at this church like no one has ever served. You have an opportunity to serve Christ individually and as a church. You can change Dallas for Christ."

The sermon electrified the congregation. Within a few days, a handful of members led by Doug Reinelt, Philip Wise, Stephen White and Kent Roberts met in committee to explore whether the church should start building houses for the working poor in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. The first meeting of the committee was held October 30, 1995. Members from all parts of the church -- the Choir, Disciple Bible Study classes, and Sunday school classes -- were represented. Reverend Craig signaled his strong support by sending Reverend Steve Matthew, who would later join the HPUMC staff as Executive Pastor, to the meeting.

The committee established four goals for the project: that it be an all-church project; that the houses be built in the distressed urban areas in South Dallas; that Habitat for Humanity would be the vehicle for the work and that fundraising for the houses would be separate from other missions of the church. To distinguish the church's involvement from the Habitat for Humanity organization, the committee took on the name of "Carpenters for Christ." The name applies to each person who contributes to the ministry, either with money, work, food, time or prayers.

The leaders wanted to create a ministry which could operate for many years if the Holy Spirit so dictated. The committee decided that it was important that the ministry not be dependent on the energy and commitment of any one person. To ensure constant renewal, the committee decided that the chairmanship would be limited to a single one-year term. Doug Reinelt, a choir member and seasoned Habitat volunteer, was selected as the first chairman of Carpenters for Christ to serve during 1996. Reverend Craig assigned Reverend Eric Folkerth as the ministerial liaison for the committee. Reverend Craig remained personally active during this crucial start-up period with fund-raising and obtaining the approvals for the new ministry.

The Carpenters for Christ project was formally announced to the church on April 12, 1996. The breadth of the response, which included young and old, new members and long time stalwarts, was quite extraordinary. The fundraising goal was met within three months. Work on the first house began in October 1996. Volunteer sign-up for the first house was so enthusiastic that Sunday school classes had to be limited to a certain number of volunteers and the work undertaken in two shifts to accommodate everyone. Others who couldn't work helped by providing lunches.

Kent and Susan Roberts were chairs of Carpenters for Christ in 1997. That year, Carpenters for Christ built four houses. The enthusiasm of the church grew. Every Sunday School class in the church participated either with workers, funds or food. The children took up a collection for the houses called "Nickels for Nails." The fall build included the first All Women's workday at HPUMC, a huge success.

The ministry drew wide attention in its second full year. Habitat for Humanity International designated one of the 1997 HPUMC houses as the 60,000th Habitat for Humanity house worldwide. Millard Fuller, the founder and president of Habitat for Humanity International, came to Dallas to help begin construction of this milestone house. In 1997, HPUMC partnered with the Dallas Masjid of Al' Islam, the first involvement of American Muslims in Habitat ever. These events were extensively reported locally on television and in the Dallas Morning News, and nationally in the United Methodist Reporter and the Muslim Journal.

David Epperson was the chairman of Carpenters for Christ in 1998 and Dr. John Pickens was named the chairman in 1999. At the end of 1998, Carpenters for Christ was invited to participate in the building of the T. R. Hoover Community Center in the Ideal Neighborhood, just north of the area where the first Carpenters for Christ houses were built. The Ideal Neighborhood had been one of the main centers of African-American home ownership prior to World War II. It was actively revitalizing itself during the 1990s. As part of that effort, the Ideal Community Association, with the help of the City of Dallas and Habitat for Humanity, started work on the Community Center in December 1999. It was completed in 2000.

On Sunday, November 28, 1999, Millard Fuller returned to Dallas and was the guest preacher at all three services in the Sanctuary of Highland Park United Methodist Church. He personally thanked HPUMC for becoming, in three years, the single most active Habitat homebuilder in Dallas, Texas. He then challenged HPUMC to set a goal to build 100 houses! Reverend Craig readily accepted that challenge on behalf of the church.

The chairman of Carpenters for Christ in 2000 was Joe Overly and from 2001 to mid-2002 was Will Frome. Reverend Linda Roby became the ministerial liaison in 2001. Bill Reeves was chairman of Carpenters for Christ for six years starting in 2002.

In 2000 – 2001, the so-called “dot com” bust in stock prices created fund-raising challenges for the Carpenters for Christ. The one hundred house commitment to Habitat for Humanity International came under serious review. Philip Wise intervened to argue passionately that the church maintain the commitment. Joe B. Fortson joined the church staff in June 2002 taking on the daily administration of Carpenters for Christ. He was able to renegotiate the one hundred house commitment so that it would be more feasible for the church. As part of this process, Habitat for Humanity International promised that HPUMC would be involved in the first Habitat house built in Afghanistan, which had been newly liberated from the Taliban following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The house in Afghanistan was built in 2002.

The Carpenters for Christ ministry has been an opportunity for bridge-building and Christian witness. It especially attracts young people drawn to the immediacy of the impact in the lives of the families. One such young man was Willie Tichenor, whose family was an early and generous supporter of the ministry. When Willie tragically died of cancer, his family established the annual “Willie Build” to honor his passion. The first Willie Build house was dedicated in 2007.

Carpenters for Christ makes only two promises to its volunteers – you will work hard and your life might be changed forever. Carpenters for Christ has broken down walls within the church and walls

between the church and the rest of Dallas. By the end of the twentieth century, HPUMC was known in Dallas as “that church that builds houses.”

The true history of Carpenters for Christ is written by the families living in the dozens of homes made possible by the ministry since 1995. At the time of this writing (May 2012), eighty-two homes have been built with these families by the Carpenters for Christ. The families and Dallas neighborhoods blessed by this vital ministry are listed in the Appendix to this history.



The distinctive logo for Carpenters for Christ was created in 1996 by Jeanne Reinelt. The name was suggested by Dallas Miles.

APPENDIX

Carpenters for Christ have built the following homes:

- Villa Family, December 1996, Bon Ton
- Christopher Family, June 1997, Bon Ton
- Blanton Family, September 1997, North Fair Park
- Ruiz Family, September 1997, North Fair Park
- Lopez Family, December 1997, North Fair Park
- Perez Family, June 1998, North Fair Park
- Bernal Family, September 1998, North Fair Park
- Newsome Family, September 1998, St. Philips
- Ramero Family, December 1998, Bon Ton
- T. R. Hoover Community Center, 2000, Ideal (counted as 4)
- Morin Family, January 2001, Bon Ton
- Madrid Family, March 2001, Bon Ton
- Facundo Family, March 2001, Pinebrook
- Novoa Family, June 2001, Bon Ton
- Rojas Family, August 2001, Pinebrook
- Ross Family, April 2002, Greenleaf
- Chavez Family, April 2002, Greenleaf
- Girmatsyion Family, August 2002, Greenleaf
- Romero Family, November 2002, Greenleaf
- Alarcon Family, December 2002, Greenleaf
- Torio Family, December 2002, Greenleaf
- Jones Family, March 2003, Philips
- Vasquez Family, June 2003, Greenleaf
- Hernandez Family, July 2003, Greenleaf
- Mason Family, November 2003, Greenleaf
- Adame Family, February 2004, Exeter
- Anderson Family, May 2004, Paul Quinn
- Hearn Family, May 2004, Paul Quinn
- Manning Family, May 2004, Paul Quinn
- Robinson Family, November 2004, Exeter
- Barrientos Family, December 2004, Greenleaf
- Brown Family, February 2005, Exeter
- Craddock Family, June 2005, Paul Quinn
- Connor Family, July 2005, West Dallas
- Bertha and Smith Families, October 2005, South Dallas
- Delgadillo Family, December 2005, Limestone
- Carraway Family, December 2005, Limestone
- Macias Family, February 2006, Pleasant Grove
- Hardy Family, May 2006, West Dallas
- Arnold Family, May 2006, Joppa

- Evans Family, May 2006, Joppa
- Sexton Family, October 2006, Bon Ton
- Humphrey Family, December 2006, Exeter
- Junior Family, March 2007, South Fair Park
- Drake Family, March 2007, South Fair Park
- Rubles Family, April 2007, Joppa
- Montgomery Family, May 2007, West Dallas
- Johnson Family, October 2007, Pleasant Grove
- Silva Family, December 2007, Exeter
- Butler Family, March 2008, Joppa
- Cisneros Family, March 2008, Joppa
- Valdez Family, April 2008, Cedar Creek Ranch
- Solis Family, May 2008, West Dallas
- Hardy Family, October 2008, Frazier Court
- Williams Family, November 2008, Joppa
- Estifanos Family, March 2009, Greenleaf II
- Haregewoin Family, March 2009, Greenleaf II
- Cooper Family, May 2009, Cedar Creek Ranch
- Corres Family, May 2009, West Dallas
- Vasquez Family, May 2009, West Dallas
- Chambliss Family, October 2009, Frazier Court
- Martinez Family, December 2009, Frazier Court
- Hernandez Family, February 2010, Frazier Court
- Omar Family, February 2010, Frazier Court
- Garza Family, May 2010, West Dallas
- Vargas Family, July 2010, Greenleaf II
- Thomas Family, October 2010, Bon Ton
- Tessema-Getahun Family, October 2010, West Dallas
- Cuevas Family, December 2010, Bon Ton
- Hannah Family, December 2010, Joppa
- Narvaez Family, December 2010, Joppa
- Young Family, March 2011, Cedar Creek
- Coley Family, March 2011, Cedar Creek
- Moore Family, May 2011, West Dallas
- Allen Family, October 2011, South Fair Park
- Henderson Family, December 2011, South Fair Park
- White Family, March 2012, South Fair Park
- Another Family, March 2012, South Fair Park
- Norah-Williams Family, May 2012, Bon Ton