

'Stronger together'

FBC Sutherland Springs dedicates new worship center built by Alabama firm

By Jane Rodgers
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Sherry Pomeroy, wife of Pastor Frank Pomeroy, quoted from Jeremiah 33 to the standing-room-only crowd at First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, in Texas, on Sunday, May 19: "In this place which you say is a ruin ... there will be heard again a sound of joy and gladness" (vs. 10-11a).

It was a fitting passage as the congregation dedicated its new worship facility 18 months after the Nov. 5, 2017, shooting that claimed 26 lives and injured 20.

The celebration featured Texas and national dignitaries, Southern Baptist leaders and friends of First, Sutherland Springs, joining together in prayer, praise and remembrance.

Community beacon

The morning included a private service before the 11 a.m. dedication. Overflow crowds watched livestreams from both services in the new fellowship hall adjacent to the sanctuary. The hall was part of a design addition made two months into the 14-month process, said Scott Gurosky of Birmingham-

based firm Myrick, Gurosky & Associates, which led the construction effort.

As doors opened for the dedication Frank Pomeroy greeted crowds filtering in to the auditorium.

Speakers included the Pomeroyes, Gurosky, local pastors, Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President J.D. Greear, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and, via videotape, U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz.

Gurosky recalled Pomeroy's insistence the new church be a beacon to the community and incorporate the church's bell.

The result: twin towers containing a light and the bell, respectively, that are now the tallest buildings in town.

Gurosky introduced architect Mike O'Kelley, project manager Gary Nazaruk — who came out of retirement in nearby Boerne to oversee the construction — CFO Paul Head and general supervisor Tom Durham.

The project involved "hard work and commitment from people all over the country, from Oregon to Ohio to Alabama," Gurosky said, mentioning many of the companies

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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott



Photo by Jane Rodgers/NAMB

Texas pastor Paul Buford closes in prayer as survivors of the 2017 shooting at FBC Sutherland Springs are surrounded by guests including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (center, right) and Scott Gurosky (center, back).

that donated materials or services.

Especially rewarding was the construction of the memorial room just off the main entryway designed by Birmingham designer Ivy Schuster of Birmingham's Hatcher Schuster Interiors.

Praising the welcoming spirit of the congregation throughout the project, Gurosky called the experience "life-changing," noting he told Nazaruk, "This'll be one we carry with us."

The worship center is built on donated land referred to as "Karla's corner," in memory of victim Karla Holcombe, who often walked the perimeter of the once weed-filled land, praying the tract would somehow be given to the church.

The building site and construction costs were paid for by donations, including Cooperative Program (CP) funds provided by Southern Baptists through the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

"NAMB told us to give them what they need," Gurosky said.

Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina, and current SBC president, affirmed the CP's importance.

"When the worst evil and the

worst darkness intruded on this small congregation I am glad but not surprised to say that the best of who Southern Baptists are stepped forward to help," Greear said, applauding the cooperating entities.

"Our world is broken" Greear said, suggesting that tragedies such as that of First, Sutherland Springs, will not be prevented by legislation, education or prosperity but only through Jesus. "Better laws may certainly help us contain the damage but only the gospel can heal the soul."



Photo by Jane Rodgers/NAMB

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a man Pomeroy introduced as "with us from the very first day," spoke next.

Citing several Psalms, Abbott expressed empathy with the victims.

Transcending tragedy

"Only God can help a community transcend the type of tragedy that struck Sutherland Springs," Abbott said.

Along with the videotaped message from Sen. Cruz, Sen. Cornyn shared during the special service.

"The church is not four walls and a roof. It's the people," Cornyn said. "In a stunning building like this or in a tent on a baseball field, this church refuses to quit and let evil win."✠



Photo by Jane Rodgers/NAMB

Kris Workman, FBC Sutherland Springs worship leader and survivor of the 2017 church shooting, talks with a child in front of the memorial wall designed by Birmingham designer Ivy Schuster. The memorial displays pictures of the 26 victims.