

## Elizabeth Baptist Aims To Provide Members With More Than Just A Church Service



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The Rev. Vernon Swift, pastor of Elizabeth Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, poses for a portrait at the church. The church will break ground on Sunday for a new sanctuary.

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### TUSCALOOSA

On Sunday, Elizabeth Baptist Church will have the groundbreaking for its new sanctuary.

The groundbreaking, along with the accompanying church service, begins at 12:15 p.m. on the grounds of the current sanctuary at 2650 Elizabeth St.

The Rev. Vernon Swift, the pastor of Elizabeth Baptist Church for past 26 years, said he and other members of the church felt that building a new sanctuary was needed for multiple reasons.

“We’re building a new worship center to mainly accommodate a bigger audience,” Swift said. “Our church has grown steady over the years.

We had 25 members when the church was started in 1888 on Greensboro Highway [the church moved to its current location in 1913].

“We now have 2,000 members on roll.”

Swift said he contributes the growth of the church to several factors.

“We’re a holistic ministry,” Swift said. “We have a walking track, a gym, a child development program, an after-school program to help students improve their grades and a senior citizens ministry. People want more than just a church service.”

He said the church is also drawing new residents to Tuscaloosa.

In the last year, Swift said the church has seen a 20 percent increase in membership. He believes that a lot of that may be tied to the economic decline.

“People have really bought into the vision of the church, which is to expand financially as well as spiritually,” Swift said.

The current sanctuary, which will be used for other purposes once the new one is built, seats between 350 and 400 people.

Swift said the new sanctuary will seat between 750 and 800 people.

“We [currently] have two morning services and an occasional afternoon service,” Swift said. “Because we have 2,000 members, we’ll still have to have at least two services though when the new worship center is built.”

The new sanctuary has been in the planning stage for the last five years.

Construction on it started last month and is scheduled to be completed by about May 2010.

Besides accommodating the church’s growth, Swift said a new sanctuary was also needed because of the architectural barriers of the

current sanctuary and because services at Elizabeth Baptist needed a technological upgrade to stimulate its younger audience.

“The new sanctuary will be flat,” Swift said. “There will be no steps, making the church handicap accessible.”

“We’ll also have upgraded audio and visual equipment,” he said. “We really want to modernize our services to help meet the spiritual, cultural and physical needs of the community.”

Swift said technological additions to the new church will include projection screens behind the podium with song lyrics and passages from Scripture on them, better lighting, and different color lights to “enhance the worship experience.”

“The church must modernize to meet this modern age,” Swift said. “Times change, people change, but the message of the Gospel is always the same.”

Website

[www.elizabethchurch.net](http://www.elizabethchurch.net)