


A CITY OF *Churches*

Katy's legacy of strong churches continues today through the unity and service of local congregations

Written by Meagan Clanahan and Susanna Donald

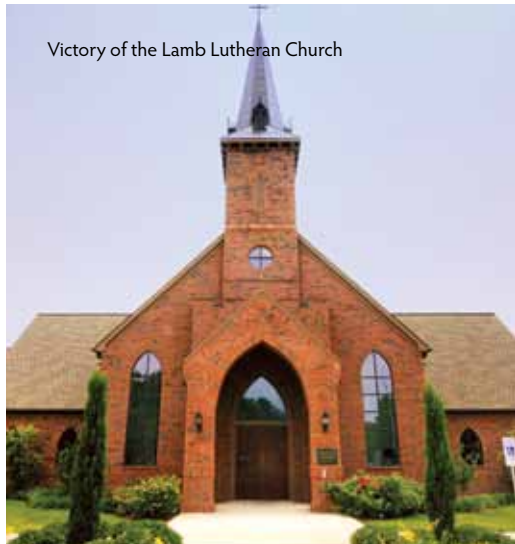
In Katy's earliest days, dozens of different cultures and religious heritages influenced the budding community. When a group of settlers led the charge to put aside religious differences in the name of Christian unity in 1898, Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Apostolics, Methodists, and others came together to form the Union Sunday School. The Methodist Episcopal Church (now First United Methodist Church Katy) and Zion Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church) were also formed that year, and Katy's first church building opened in 1904. From those humble beginnings, Katy's legacy as "a city of churches" was born.

A photograph of the Grand Lakes Presbyterian Church, a large brick building with a prominent red-tiled roof and a central tower with a cross. The church is surrounded by greenery and flowers.

Grand Lakes Presbyterian Church

A photograph of the Iglesia Fuente De Dios, a white wooden church with a tall, pointed steeple. An American flag flies on a pole in front of the church.

Iglesia Fuente De Dios

A photograph of the Victory of the Lamb Lutheran Church, a brick church with a tall, pointed steeple and large arched windows.

Victory of the Lamb Lutheran Church

A large photograph of the First Baptist Church of Katy, a modern brick building with a large, flat roof. A tree is in the foreground on the left.

First Baptist Church of Katy

“People want to know, ‘What is the meaning of this life?’ Churches have grown because of a need for us to connect with others looking for that same purpose.”
—Doyle Lowry, Kingsland Baptist Church executive pastor

What's in a Name?

While no one knows who first coined the phrase “a city of churches,” the sign welcoming residents and visitors into town in the 1950s displayed the epithet. As people continued to migrate west of Houston, more and more churches established themselves in Katy as well.

“Early on, Katy’s reputation as a city of churches was less about the number of places to worship and more about the fact that almost everyone who lived here was so actively involved in church life,” says Carol Adams, a Katy Heritage Society board member. “In fact, church membership was so important that a list of the members who attended each church were enclosed in a time capsule in 1929 and placed in the cornerstone of the new school building,” Adams explains. The list is currently on display at Katy Heritage Park.

Today, with more than 500 churches registered in the Katy area, the “city of churches” title is as much about the number

of churches as it is about the importance of church to many Katyites. Katy offers residents and visitors alike a wide variety of churches to choose from: small, large, medium-sized, contemporary, traditional, contemplative, brand-new, established, family-oriented, non-denominational, formal, causal, Protestant, Catholic, and everything in between. Large churches like Second Baptist and Grace Fellowship

United Methodist Church have started new churches and campuses to extend their reach into new, growing areas of Katy. Twenty-six local churches meet in various Katy ISD schools on Sunday mornings, while others meet in venues like movie theaters and other rented spaces.

Katy Churches Today

While Katy’s population boom has contributed to the growth of new churches and the attendance spike for established churches, people are also seeking true connections with others. “In the mobility of our society, we sometimes hold people at arm’s length,” says Doyle Lowry, executive pastor of Kingsland Baptist Church. “But people want relationships that are real and faith that is real, not just an organization or fancy program.”

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—Carol Adams,
Katy Heritage Society board member



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Be joyful always; pray continuously; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Everyone is searching, says Lowry. “People want to know, ‘What is the meaning of this life?’ Churches have grown because of a need for us to connect with others looking for that same purpose.”

While helping people discover purpose and meaning, Katy churches have also had to adjust to the fast-moving pace of Katy society. Many of Katy’s newest churches are mobile churches, meeting in rented facilities closest to the rapidly-growing neighborhoods in the area. Multiple worship times, shortened services, and casual dress codes are all mainstays of many Katy churches today. However, according to Mike McGown, pastor of Parkway Fellowship, “It’s not a watering down of the gospel. We are just putting it in terms that everyone can understand. We strive to make God’s message practical. What you hear on Sunday can be put into practice Monday morning.”

Meaningful Connections

As Katy churches have expanded, pastors continue to discover methods to build meaningful connections. Parkway Fellowship believes small groups, typically gatherings of six to 12 people who meet in homes during the week, are the most important method for this growth. “Small groups are where you get into the nitty gritty and deal with real issues, all in a caring environment,” say McGown. Different Katy churches offer variations on small groups, from Sunday school classes and Bible studies to ministry teams and discipleship courses.

Besides offering places for coming to know Christ and developing significant relationships, many Katy churches also create and cultivate care ministries. “These ministries show people that God’s love for them is real, no matter the circumstances,” says Mitch Pearson, executive pastor at Grace Fellowship UMC. “People still face real problems, troubles, and marriage struggles - we are just as prone in Katy as anywhere else,” he says.

Reaching Out

Many Katy churches go beyond the walls of their buildings and reach out through local service projects, international mission trips, outreach activities, and work weekends. Some churches, like Grace Fellowship UMC and Kingsland Baptist, close their doors one Sunday each year and send their congregations out into Katy to work with the less fortunate and the overlooked. Throughout the year, Katy churches deploy thousands to work on projects like home repair, nursing home visits, playground construction, and food pantry assistance. Compassion Katy, headquartered at The Fellowship at Cinco Ranch, partners with over 20 local churches to provide hours of donated time and thousands of dollars in materials during their biannual Katy ServeFests.

Katy churches don’t stop with local missions, though. Kingsland Baptist alone logged 15 international mission trips in 2012, spanning the globe from India and Cambodia

Photo by Nicole Prosser



to El Salvador and Nicaragua. Large churches and small churches alike mobilize their congregations to reach out, sending teams of youth and adults to serve in countries around the world.

Many Churches, One Mission

When the early settlers came together back in 1898 to form the Union Sunday School, they couldn’t know how their example would set the tone for what was to come. Today, Katy carries on its “city of churches” nickname through the unity among the local churches and especially the pastors.

For more than 17 years, pastors from every denomination across Katy meet every Wednesday at noon to pray for each other’s churches, congregations, and the city as a whole. Representatives from the largest church to the smallest, come together in unity for the sake of the mission of churches. Katy pastors also meet each year to pray for Katy schools and teachers in front of the Katy ISD administration building. For the past three years, they have also organized the National Day of Prayer, where thousands of Katyites gather in the Katy Merrell Center to pray for the community and nation. Jim Leggett, senior pastor of Grace Fellowship UMC, says, “I think God honors it when churches come together in unity.” In that case, Katy is blessed indeed. **KM**



MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mother who is blessed to live in this “city of churches.”



SUSANNA DONALD is an editorial assistant at Katy Magazine who loves learning about the history and significance of local churches.

Notable New Churches

Churches in this category are relatively new to the Katy area (five years or less) and are meeting in rented facilities.

The Commons United Methodist Church

Meets at The Tuscany Villa
commonskaty.gutensite.com

Creekside Community Church

Meets at WoodCreek Junior High
thecreekside.org

Four Winds International Church

Meets at Griffin Elementary
fourwindsinternationalchurch.org

Grace Anglican Community

Meets at WoodCreek Elementary
graceanglicankaty.com
See ad on page 83

Grace Community Fellowship of Katy

Meets at Exley Elementary
gcfkaty.org
See ad on page 85

Grace Fellowship North/Norte

Meets at McRoberts Elementary starting January 5
gfnorte.org
See ad on page 68

New Creation Lutheran Church

Meets at Irene Stern Community Center
newcreationfulshear.org

Westpark Church of Christ

Meets at Bonnie Holland Elementary
westparkcoc.org
See ad on page 76

WordServe Church

Meets at Shafer Elementary
wordserve.org

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