

**Offering undergirds church planter reaching people ‘falling through the cracks’**

**In Wakulla County**

Eric Davis and his wife, Marrisa, returned to Wakulla County to plant The Mission in their hometown for “people falling through the cracks--people other churches are not reaching.”

It was the last place the 28-year-old thought they would be after leaving the rural county south of Tallahassee to attend classes at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

But when several church leaders from the Florida Baptist Association invited the young man back to the community and showed him pockets of people living in wooded areas off the highways and main roads, he found “places I didn’t know existed and people who are forgotten, thousands of people, many living in poverty.” No church was able to penetrate these communities.

Davis has “a passion to see people reached for Christ and find the forgiveness and salvation He offers,” he said. And God made it clear that Wakulla County was the place He wanted the family to be.

The young man was employed as a chaplain at the faith and character-based Wakulla Correctional Institute while his wife Marrisa was hired by the Florida Department of Children and Families, helping resettle refugee families.

They began holding Bible studies in their apartment, reaching friends and others within his “pool of influence.”

The Bible study quickly outgrew the apartment and began to meet in a community center in downtown Crawfordville, organizing as The Mission church in 2014.

But the center was limiting to the new-planted congregation, offering only a large room and available only on Sundays.

When a 3600 square-foot office building in foreclosure became available just south of the county seat town on Hwy. 319, church leaders began looking for avenues to purchase the property.

Instrumental in the purchase was the Florida Baptist Convention, which gave the church a $100,000 interest-free loan from the Maguire State Mission Offering and another $60,000 loan to purchase the office building.

The loans from Florida Baptists “mean everything,” said the church planter. The congregation had paid $1,000 in monthly rent at the community center. Their monthly mortgage payments through the convention are $500, decreasing their monthly expenses by half.

Davis said having not grown up in church and coming to know Christ in his teen years, he was unaware of the generosity of Florida Baptists. “I am so thankful for Florida Baptists,” he said.

The remodeled office building now serves as a worship center that seats 90 people comfortably and houses classrooms for Bible study, rooms for babies, preschoolers and youth, and a kitchen. The facility now offers a meeting location for the church’s outreach and other Christian groups and during the week.

The nursery has become a great resource for the 40-member congregation composed mostly of millennials in their 20s and 30s. The young adults are reaching others like themselves, who are increasing their own families through births. In recent months five babies have been added to the church family, including Elizabeth Grace, who was born to Davis family in 2015.

Matt and Jill Puckett both work as lobbyists in Tallahassee, and moved back to Crawfordville about three years ago to be closer to their family, enjoy the slower pace and recreational activities the area affords. Like many in the community, they make the 30-35 minute drive into the Capitol City each day.

In their 40s, he acknowledged they are among the older members at The Mission. He is drawn to the church by “the intimacy of the small group of young believers,” he said. “We know each other in a more intimate way. We pray earnestly for each other. I am inspired by the kids that go here.”

As they look toward the future, Davis said The Mission plans to continue in their outreach in the community, seizing opportunities to share the gospel through meeting physical and spiritual needs. “We pray that we can transition from the incubator stage to be a sending church locally and worldwide.”