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## Carpenters for Christ

More than 100 men framing Berea churchBy Bill Robinson

**By Bill Robinson**  
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BEREA — Jesus grew up in the home of a carpenter and may have practiced the craft himself.

For the past few days, more than 100 men from 10 states have been following Jesus' earthly profession to erect a house where He can be worshiped and His teachings propagated.

The men, who volunteer and pay for their own travel and meals, call themselves Carpenters for Christ. When they leave Berea this week, the framework and roof for Faith Decision Baptist Church's new building will be in place.

On Monday, the building's 16,000 square feet of space was a beehive of activity as men guided a crane operator to set trusses in place to form a roof. Some hammered nails through particle boards, attaching them to trusses already in place. Others cut right angles into large boards that would support stairs. Still others attached outlet and junction boxes for electrical wiring.

A few wore T-shirts with the slogan "In God We Truss."

Once the structure is under roof, another team of volunteers based in Conyers, Ga., will drywall the interior, said project coordinator Mike Montgomery of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

The congregation could begin meeting in the new building sometime in September, but the facility will not be dedicated until later, probably in October, said the Rev. Jimmy Closterman.

The church, founded in the mid-1980s has seen rapid growth in recent years, said Closterman, who has been pastor for more than four years. When Closterman became pastor, less than 20 would attend Sunday morning worship. Attendance now averages more than 100, he said.

No more than 120 can be squeezed into the church's current sanctuary. The new one will seat about 380. The structure also will include up to 16 classrooms.

With lots of volunteer labor, the church hopes to keep cost of the structure between \$350,000 and \$400,000, the pastor said.

Fair weather allowed church members and visiting carpenters to gather on the concrete floor under the unfinished roof for worship this past Sunday. "We had about 250 then," said Closterman, who holds a full-time job with Riley Oil Co. in addition pastoring the church.

The volunteer carpenters came in two waves of about 65 over two weeks, said Dave Tidwell of Cherry Street Baptist Church in Attalia, Ala., home base for this team of Carpenters for Christ.

As the two teams converged over the weekend, there was a surge in building activity Saturday and worship attendance Sunday.

Most of the men are from Alabama, but volunteers in Madison County this week also came from Kentucky, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri and Ohio. The represented about 45 church, Tidwell said.

Several volunteers belong to churches that Carpenters for Christ helped build in recent years.

Kevin Phillips, a civil engineer from Centralia, Ill., is lending his expertise to the project. "I'm happy

to do my part on this Carpenters for Christ project," he said. "They helped build the church my family attends in Illinois."

Phillips said he enjoys carpentry as well as engineering work. "My dad was a carpenter, and he used to help with projects like this one," he said.

About half of the Carpenters for Christ volunteers are retired, Tidwell said. "The others take off from their regular jobs to help build churches."

About 100 such teams are affiliated with the Alabama Baptist Convention. The Attalia-based team help with two or three building projects each year. "We worked on a church in Slidell, La., earlier this year," he said.

Montgomery said the Kentucky Baptist Convention has been involved with Faith Decision Baptist since it began assessing its building needs. "We've advised them on building design and financial planning," he said. "I'm coordinating the various building teams that will be helping them."

The Tates Creeks Baptist Association and individual churches from Berea, Richmond and Paint Lick also have been supportive of the church's efforts, Closterman said.