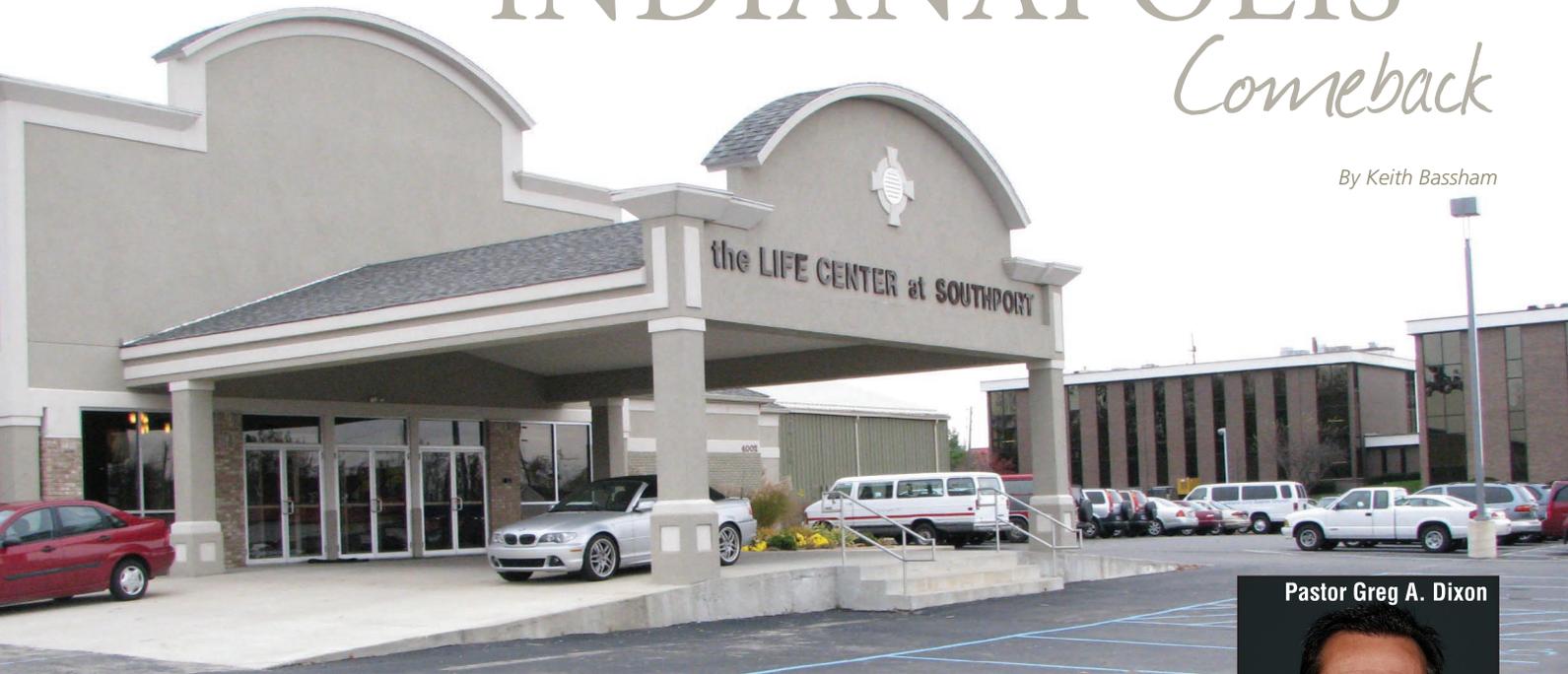


INDIANAPOLIS

Comeback

By Keith Bassham



Pastor Greg A. Dixon



Eight years ago this February 13, at 8:40 a.m., United States Marshals entered the property of Indianapolis Baptist Temple in Indianapolis, Indiana, with the intention of seizing the church property on behalf of the Internal Revenue Service for the alleged failure to withhold and pay income and social security taxes for employees of the church. The judgment eventually came to something between five million and six million dollars.

The church, pastored at first by Greg J. Dixon and then later by his son, Greg A. Dixon (since 1996), had argued for several years that a New Testament church was not subject to federal tax laws, and it continues to maintain that position. In fact, taxes were paid by the individuals who had received income from the church and school, and the government never disputed that. The church never taught that Christians should not pay taxes. The church also attempted to change its corporate status in efforts to satisfy lawful demands without compromising church integrity.

In short, the arguments failed to persuade the court the church was in the right, and after all appeals were ex-

hausted, the church's physical property was seized for the debt. That property, including furniture and books, was sold at auction March 23, 2001. Thus ended the case *United States of America vs. Indianapolis Baptist Temple*. At least, that ended the court case, and in the eyes of many, it was the end of the church. But for Dixon and the Temple church, it was a new beginning.

For example, today, on the former site of the church stands a charter school, Christel House Academy. Inside the school, members of Indianapolis Baptist Temple teach regular Bible classes. Not too far away, other IBT members are involved in inner-city ministry among children, and a little further down the street, Indianapolis Baptist Temple is helping sponsor a Hispanic congregation. On the weekends, the IBT members gather Sunday mornings and evenings at The Life Center at Southport for regular worship services, and during the week, the Life Center is host for community events. That is hardly the stuff of a failed church.

On the contrary, in a conversation with me in late 2008, Dixon said, "If the

IRS had not taken the property, I don't know that we would be the church we are today."

But that's running with the story a bit. Ecclesiology 101 for Baptists teaches that people are the church, and buildings are not. That said, in many cases, the loss of property would be considered a deathblow. Dixon had evidently planned for the eventuality. Services were held the next Sunday, and for several months after, the church met in a local school building, and then later a banquet facility in a hotel. Greg preached in a conference later that year about being a church without walls, and he and his congregation were living out the sermon.

Eventually, however, they found an alternative. Today, they lease (they do not own) a 76,000-square-foot facility into which the congregation poured tens of thousands of dollars in renovations with the idea that they would not only have a home for their church and activities, but a place for ministering

to the community. The Life Center at Southport became home for the main congregation of IBT, but the very large building is at work nearly every day of the week hosting a 6,000-foot youth center with a café and meeting rooms, sports (racquetball, tennis, etc.), a cheerleading school, counseling rooms, offices, and events for home school groups. Sunday afternoons, a Burmese Baptist church meets at the Life Center. Income from these activities makes the lease payment for the church.

The Sunday services at IBT have a contemporary feel in an attractive, modern auditorium. Four hundred to five hundred people gather for Sunday morning worship. The people sing. They teach. They support missionaries, and they had just completed a successful mission conference just days before my visit. Four students from IBT attend Baptist Bible College in Springfield (Dixon and several staff members are BBC alumni). There is no hint among them that the church ever had any struggles — no anti-government rhetoric, no trace of bitterness. And with a joy that is plainly visible to any observer, Indianapolis Baptist Temple and Pastor Dixon are focused upon reaching their city with the gospel.

Five ministries are functioning

IBT Staff Men and Women

Front Row
 Wanda Britt
 Consuelo Stofer
 Kim Dzula
 Shannon Hunsley
 Anna Biddinger

2nd row
 Doug Thompson
 Carole Sparks
 Dennis Stofer
 Greg Dzula
 Scott Hunsley
 Chad Biddinger

Back Row
 Matt Roller
 Bekah Roller
 Ellery Hunsley
 Jeannie Hunsley
 Kathy Dixon
 Greg Dixon
 Toby Digrigulliers



now, and Dixon plans for 20 more in a plan he calls Operation Saturation. He says, “What we’re doing in the city is changing hearts, changing lives, changing destinies.”

Crown of Life Baptist Church, in

Sunday services, November 2, 2008



a high-poverty, high-crime area on the east side, began with 12 or 13 people meeting. They have reached a high attendance of 158. Ministries under the leadership of Greg Dzula include outreach to children through Bible classes and youth camp.

Soon after, IBT began a Hispanic church at the Crown of Life property calling it Iglesia Bautista Betesda Corona de la Vida meeting on Sunday evenings. Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, and Colombia make up the congregation led by Pastor Herminio Lopez.

West Side Baptist Church began in

a converted house. According to leader Toby Digrigulliers, it has a laid-back and casual approach. He said, “We’ve had to become missionaries in our own land.” Dixon says by beginning with IBT people in these new congregations,

the church is doing far more than if they had stayed on one property. He said, “We would not have reached these people by simply adding. We had to divide in order to multiply.”

The church also has a children’s outreach in a property owned by Indianapolis Area Youth Ministry near downtown. IBT staff and members travel to the area Sunday afternoons to provide activities and worship for inner-city youth. Noting that most independent Baptist churches are not active in inner-city ministry, Dixon says, “I think that if murders and other crimes go down, and there are fewer teens having babies, and fewer drugs

on the street, that would be a good thing, right?”

Plans for the future include 25 churches in the Indianapolis urban area, 100 Bible studies, and more. Dixon says, “The Lord has blessed us beyond our expectations.”