

A History of Faithful Steps

Denison, Texas • From Armstrong Avenue to Park Avenue and Beyond

A congregation does not begin the day it moves into a new building. It begins long before — in the faith of the people who first gathered, the decisions they made, the ground they consecrated with their prayers and their presence.

**Pre-
1987**

The Church on Armstrong Avenue

For more than seven decades, they were the Armstrong Avenue Church of Christ. The address was more than a location — it was an identity. Generations of Denison families had been baptized there, married there, buried from there. Children had grown up in those classrooms who now brought their own children back to sit in the same pews.

The building had absorbed decades of Sunday mornings, Wednesday night prayers, and potluck dinners that ran long because nobody wanted to be the first to leave. It was, in every sense that matters, home.

But congregations that are alive eventually outgrow their containers. The question of a new building — more space, a different location, a chance to plant a flag in a part of the city that was growing — had been turning in the minds of the leadership for some time. You do not walk away from seventy years of history without counting the cost.

They counted it. And they went.

1987

The Move to Park Avenue

The move to Park Avenue was, by any honest accounting, a leap of faith. There was genuine optimism about what a new location could mean — the families they might reach who had never found their way to Armstrong Avenue, the possibilities that come with a fresh start and more room to grow. But there was trepidation too, the kind that lives alongside optimism in any honest act of faith.

Would people follow? Would the thing that had made Armstrong Avenue home survive the move? Could you transplant seven decades of community into new soil and expect it to take root?

Anthony Bryant served as preaching minister through this pivotal transition, shepherding the congregation from Armstrong Avenue to Park Avenue from 1981 to 1993. His steady leadership during those formative years helped ensure the move was not merely a change of address but a continuation of everything the congregation had built.

The answer, as it turned out, was yes — though the early years tested that confidence. The congregation that arrived on Park Avenue in 1988 numbered 320. Then the numbers began to slide.

1993–
1999

The Turn: Growth and New Life

By 1993 the Sunday count had dropped to 249 — the lowest it would ever be. The people who paid attention to such things grew quiet. Something needed to change.

In January of 1994, they hired a new minister. He wasn't a magic solution — no preacher ever is — but he was the right person at the right moment. There was energy where there had been uncertainty, direction where there had been drift.

The congregation was lean, familiar, and had been enough for a season. But growth creates needs that good intentions alone cannot meet. Families needed more than a Sunday sermon. Children needed more than a borrowed classroom and an overworked volunteer. Carefully, intentionally, one position at a time, the ministerial staff grew — adding a worship and outreach minister, then a family minister, then a children's minister. Each addition represented a decision that this congregation was serious about reaching people at every stage of life.

Growth came from unexpected places too. In the mid-1990s, a group of more than fifty members from another local Denison congregation came and made Park Avenue their home — a significant infusion of people, relationships, and spiritual energy that accelerated the congregation's momentum and deepened its roots in the community.

As attendance climbed through the late 1990s, the congregation responded practically: pews were added to the worship center, then the worship center itself was expanded, and parking was extended on both the east and west sides of the property. The building was being asked to keep up with the people.

~2000

A Courageous Break with Tradition

Around the turn of the millennium, the leadership looked honestly at what Sunday evenings had become and asked a hard question: was the form still serving the purpose?

For generations, Sunday night worship had been as fixed a feature of church life as Sunday morning. You went in the morning. You went in the evening. That was simply what you did — tradition in the deepest sense, not merely habit but identity.

But real community — the kind where people know each other's names and carry each other's burdens — was not happening in rows facing a pulpit. It was happening around kitchen tables, in living rooms, in the ordinary proximity of people who had chosen to let each other in.

And so they made a break with tradition. Sunday evening worship gave way to small groups meeting in members' homes — what would eventually be called Discipleship Ministry Communities, or DMCs. It was not a decision made without conversation, and not everyone greeted it without reservation. Traditions that run deep are surrendered with difficulty, and rightly so.

The leadership believed that the purpose the tradition had always served — genuine connection, mutual accountability, shared life in Christ — could be served better in a living room than in a sanctuary on a Sunday night. Time would prove them right.

The small group structure became one of the defining features of Park Avenue's congregational culture — a system of connection that meant the church was not just a building people visited on Sundays but a network of relationships woven through the week and through the city.

2004–
2016

Years of Growth and Expansion

By 2004 a gift arrived from across the Red River — a struggling church in Durant, Oklahoma sent a group of roughly twenty-five people south to find a new home. They came and stayed, adding not just numbers but stories, relationships, and the particular richness that comes when a congregation grows by adoption as much as addition.

By 2005, the Sunday count had crossed 400 for the first time. The congregation dreamed bigger.

In 2007, they launched a capital campaign to build the Family Life Center — what members would affectionately come to call 'The Ark.' The facility opened new possibilities for ministry, fellowship, and community service that the congregation could not have imagined from Armstrong Avenue. God had provided in 1987. He provided again in 2007.

The growth continued through the early 2010s, reaching a peak attendance of around 500 in 2016 — the high-water mark of the congregation's modern history.

2016–
2024

Honest Questions in a Difficult Season

After the peak of 2016, attendance began a gradual decline that would occupy the congregation's honest attention for the better part of a decade. The reasons were not simple, and the leadership was wise enough not to pretend otherwise.

Was it an unfortunate staff situation that shook the congregation's confidence? Was it a complacency that had quietly crept in after years of growth? Was it the 80% rule at work — the widely observed pattern that a church stops growing when its worship space reaches 80% of capacity, because newcomers sense there is no room for them? Or was it something larger — the broad decline in church attendance being felt across American Christianity, a cultural tide that no single congregation could reverse on its own?

The honest answer is probably all of the above, in proportions that varied by season. What mattered was that the congregation did not look away. They asked the questions. They sought counsel. And they began to plan for what came next.

2025–
Present

A New Chapter: Vision 2035

In 2026, Park Avenue launched a new capital campaign — its third in the congregation's modern history — focused on expanding and modernizing the worship center and facilities to accommodate a new season of growth.

The timing is not accidental. The Texoma region is in the middle of one of the most significant economic expansions in North Texas history. Billions of dollars in semiconductor investment in nearby Sherman are expected to bring thousands of new families to Grayson County over the next decade. The mission field is arriving at the doorstep.

The 2026 capital campaign is Park Avenue's answer — a declaration that this congregation is not finished. That the city is growing and they intend to grow with it.

Vision 2035 sets a goal of 700 members — not as an end in itself, but as a picture of 700 people whose lives have been transformed by the gospel, 700 voices lifting praise together, 700 souls equipped to serve and carry the message of Jesus Christ throughout Texoma and beyond.

It is, in other words, the same leap of faith that carried them from Armstrong Avenue to Park Avenue all those years ago. The same mixture of optimism and trepidation. The same conviction that the story isn't finished — that the next chapter is worth writing, that the God who had been faithful through seven decades on one street and four more decades on another can be trusted with whatever comes next.

Key Milestones at a Glance

Pre-1987	Armstrong Avenue Church of Christ — seven-plus decades as a cornerstone of Denison faith life
1981–1993	Anthony Bryant serves as preaching minister, shepherding the congregation through the move to Park Avenue
1987	Capital campaign and move to current Park Avenue location; 320 in attendance at opening
1993	Attendance reaches lowest point at 249; congregation seeks new direction
1994	New minister hired; renewed energy and growth begin
Late 1990s	Worship center expanded; parking added east and west; staff grows to include worship, family, and children's ministers
~2000	Sunday evening worship replaced by home-based small groups (DMCs) — a significant break from tradition
Mid-1990s	A group of 50+ members from another local Denison congregation joins Park Avenue
2004	~25 members from a Durant, Oklahoma congregation join Park Avenue
2005	Sunday attendance crosses 400 for the first time
2007	Capital campaign to build the Family Life Center ('The Ark')
2016	Peak attendance of approximately 500 — the congregation's modern high-water mark
2016–2024	Gradual attendance decline; congregation engages in honest self-examination and strategic planning
2026	Third capital campaign launched for expanded worship center and modernized facilities
Vision 2035	Goal: 700 members, thriving ministries, and a congregation ready for a rapidly growing Texoma region

The story wasn't finished. It never is, with a church that's still alive. What had begun on Armstrong Avenue, continued on Park Avenue — and the next chapter would be written by the people who showed up next Sunday.