

## Church in manufactured home is located in apartment complex

By Connie Davis Bushey  
*Baptist and Reflector*

MEMPHIS — There's hardly any crime here now, said James Williams, pastor, Hope Fellowship Baptist Church here.

He refers to the time 11 years ago when he and his wife Sandra started coming to the Bent Tree Apartments in southwest Memphis on their time off. The sprawling 550-unit complex is located near the airport.

Williams, a Federal Reserve banker who had preached some, and Sandra, his wife, started coming here and just picking up beer bottles and visiting with folks. They soon felt called to minister here. Sandra left her job as a public school teacher in 2001 and he retired in 2004. She felt God wanted her to help the many children here who couldn't read. Williams noted she was ready to take the step of faith before him, he noted. "We haven't missed a meal," he observed.

They started a Bible study for kids on the floor of an apartment loaned to them by the complex owner, Jay Hollingsworth.

"I had no idea this was going to be a church," said Williams. His plan for retirement was to just "sit on my back porch and drink Kool-Aid."

He is so glad fellow members of Faith Baptist Church, Bartlett, caught his vision and decided to sponsor the missions work here.

"I'm on the mission field," he explained.

### Situation

Today they serve from two manufactured homes or double-wides which house Hope Fellowship Baptist Church and the church's Hope Center. The Hope Center also operates out of three apartments loaned to the church by Hollingsworth. He also leases the property where the church and center are located to the church for a very min-

imal charge. Williams said without the support of Hollingsworth the church and ministry wouldn't exist.

On three afternoons a week about 100 children gather around tables or in front of computers in the apartments as part of the church's Homework Assistance ministry. James Williams proudly reported about 35 of them are on their school's honor rolls. Some of the students coming are Muslim. Some are former residents who are brought to the apartments by their parents. About 98 percent of these students don't have computers in their homes, said Williams.

In addition the Hope Center provides school supplies, GED preparation classes, clothes and shoes.

Tutors are members of Hope Fellowship Baptist; Faith Baptist; other churches and AGAPE Child and Family Services. Faith Baptist is the main sponsor of Hope Fellowship. Others helping the church recently include AGAPE; Leewood Baptist Church, Memphis; Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova; Mid-South Baptist Association and the Mississippi River Ministry of Southern Baptists.

Williams is past president of the National Association of Multihousing Ministries and Congregations of Southern Baptists.

One key to the ministry of Hope Fellowship is that it "creates the environment and they can walk into it," he said referring to the residents.

He said he also has learned that Christians "should go out and get people to go to church. You can't just sit there and minister to those coming. You're going to die," referring to the church.

One day, he said, he saw some drunk men hanging out on the back part of the complex which is where the church buildings are located. He

approached them and asked them to come in and visit with him. He said they just talked about life. He didn't bring up God or their need for salvation because of what he perceived were their needs.

He performs many weddings, he said. The people will be living together, come to church and realize that is wrong, Williams explained.

He said the children here also have issues. The homework assistance ministry and the other ministries of the church may not address their issues, but it gives them something good to do, he observed.

Another way Hollingsworth supports the students and the work of Hope Fellowship Baptist is to give each family \$5 off their rent for each "A" earned by one of their children. Williams proudly reported he hears from some of the former students of the church who are now in college.

Williams said he doesn't focus on the many problems he sees. "I keep my eyes on the prize that brought me here — Jesus."

He said he has begged a lot for help and continues to beg because of the many needs.

He has never feared

for his or Sandra's safety, he said, noting the adults here are thankful for the help their children receive from the church.

Baptists can support the ministry by serving as volunteers, supplying snacks for the children involved in ministries here and leading missions group here in the summer. Currently a computer lab technical manager is needed.

Williams encouraged ministers or a group of Baptists to

choose an apartment complex and begin ministering there.

But he had a warning.

"If you're not serious don't go. It's not an event; it's a lifestyle. People have been disappointed for too long.

"There's no reason a church should just have church on Sunday morning," stated Williams.

"The problem is they (Christians) want to be a part of the body of Christ but they don't want to sell out." □



**SANDRA WILLIAMS**, wife of James Williams, pastor, helps Amadou Fofana during the Homework Assistance ministry of Hope Fellowship Baptist Church, which is held in several apartments of Bent Tree Apartments, Memphis.



**STEPHANIE STROM**, a member of Hope Fellowship Baptist Church, and a resident of Bent Tree Apartments, helps students during the church's Homework Assistance ministry. The girls discussing their homework together are Chamiera Carradine, left, and Kieunna Baggett.



**STANDING IN FRONT OF** Hope Fellowship Baptist Church, Memphis, and the Hope Center is James Williams, pastor. They are located in Bent Tree Apartments in southwest Memphis.



**JAMES WILLIAMS**, pastor, Hope Fellowship Baptist Church, Memphis, stands with Faye Smith, the first member of the church's Tuesday night Bible study. She attended it for a year before others joined.