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## Long Beach church sells land to developer, and begins a new chapter

By Andrew Edwards, Press-Telegram

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A church with unconventional origins — a Long Beach drive-in theater — has committed itself to a mission of public service while trying to rebuild its membership in a new city, its lead pastor said.

The Rev. Jeff Ludington has led the congregation now known as [Generations Church](#) for nearly six years. The congregation now meets at Los Alamitos High School, a short distance from its longtime sanctuary near the eastern edge of Long Beach, after selling its land to a developer who wants to build 40 high-end homes.

In the nearly six decades that have passed since the church was formally organized, American society has changed so much that Ludington says he ministers to “a post-Christian culture.”

Embracing a service-focused mission, he says, is his way of trying to reach out to a community where people may have grown up without religious influence and may view the church as being too much of a political or judgemental force.

“We’re trying to be the complete opposite of this. How can we serve the city?” he asked.

### Generational change

Generations Church, formerly known as El Dorado Park Community Church, Los Altos Drive-In Church and Park Church, has a history that goes back to 1957 when the Rev. Bill Miedema first led worship services at [Los Altos Drive-In](#). The church was formally organized the following year and in 1961, it found a home at 3655 N. Norwalk Boulevard. That address is in the Dorado Park Estates area, a part of Long Beach that extends east of the 605 Freeway near the city’s boundaries with Hawaiian Gardens, Cypress and Los Alamitos.

The congregation crossed the county line following the \$6.5 million sale of its Long Beach property to [Preface](#), a Newport Beach developer.

The move across the county line is a natural progression in its history, Ludington said.

“Even though they’re Long Beach, they kind of identified with this community more, on this side of the 605,” he said.

“We’re increasingly connected with this city,” Ludington continued, referring to Los Alamitos.

After the move to Norwalk Boulevard, El Dorado Park Community Church’s membership grew to the point that some 1,100 active worshippers attended services there by 1975. In 2008, however, when the congregation celebrated the church’s 50th anniversary, weekly attendance had fallen to some 225 people.

When Ludington arrived at the church in December 2010, its prospects of increasing membership seemed slim. As he recalled, the sanctuary was a place where worshippers often gathered for funerals, but not for baptisms.

“They were a dying congregation. Everybody was 70, 80, 90 years old,” he said. “No young people.”

About one year after Ludington’s arrival, El Dorado Park Community Church combined with another congregation, called Revolution Church. El Dorado Park Community Church had planted the other church, which met in its fellowship hall before meeting at Artesia High School in 2006. Talks of bringing the congregations together preceded Ludington’s tenure.

The combined church took on the name Park Church and continued to worship in Long Beach, although its sanctuary and other facilities were in rough shape.

### **A pastor’s journey**

Ludington, who grew up in the Ontario and Rancho Cucamonga areas, said he came to faith after drug addiction caused him to spend much the 1990s in and out of jails and prison until he found himself in a cell in 1997, watching others pray and deciding to follow their example.

“This was the first time I prayed since I was a kid,” said Ludington, who believes he could not have recovered from addiction without God’s intervention.

Ludington said that after regaining his freedom, he reconnected with and eventually married his wife, Lisa, his high school sweetheart. He began to study for the ministry in 2004 following a conversation at Rock Harbor, a Costa Mesa church, where he was asked what he would do with his life if he had unlimited time and money.

That’s a “setup question,” Ludington said, concluding the object is to come up with a reason why one isn’t already doing what they would like to do. And for Ludington, the answer was the ministry.

“I think the Bible has real answers,” he said.

Now, in a leadership role, Ludington said Generations Church mission is to serve people who have grown up in what he calls a post-Christian culture. The pastor said that means offering Bible-based services like marriage or financial counseling. That, he said, provides a means to introduce the unchurched to Christianity.

“I think the spiritual need in this community is, people need something bigger than the world that they live in,” Ludington said.

“It doesn’t mean life will be perfect, but it will not fail them.”

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