Different faiths often join forces

Baton Rouge is a melting pot of religions and places of worship. There is a place to worship here for almost every denomination. Congregations are becoming more and more aware of the needs of their physically challenged worshippers and are making appropriate accommodations for them, including large-print pew materials, hearing devices and shortened pews for wheelchair occupants.

Members of the major Christian denominations — Roman Catholic, Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran — will find it easy to locate a church. Smaller denominations, such as Quakers, as well as non-denominational, interdenominational and independent groups also have congregations here.

There are a number of African-American churches, including the Mt. Zion First Baptist Church on East Blvd., Shiloh Baptist Church on Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive, Neely United Methodist Church on Thomas H. Deloit Drive and Greater King David Baptist Church on Blount Road. The worldwide reach of Baton Rouge is represented by several services conducted in foreign languages, including Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Hearing services signed for people who are deaf are also available. In addition, First Baptist Church, the Catholic Deaf Center on Brightside Lane and Northside Baptist Church in Baker conduct separate services for the hearing impaired. Other churches have interpreters for the deaf.

Two Jewish congregations, B'nai Israel and Beth Shalom, call Baton Rouge home. B'nai's, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims also have places of worship.

The once nationally popular Jimmy Swaggart Ministries is no longer the giant enterprise it once was, services continue at the Bluebonnet Drive complex.

Those looking for a large non-denominational church might choose Bethany World Prayer Center at 13855 Plank Road in Baker. Bethany will be building another church in the southern part of the parish.

If a smaller congregation might be more appealing, that's possible too. Some are so small they meet in homes.

Baton Rougians don't just worship together. They're also actively involved with mission projects. People of different faiths frequently join together for interdenominational efforts.

For example, the Greater Baton Rouge Federation of Churches and Synagogues was instrumental in starting a Habitat for Humanity chapter. Plus, the Federation's Helpers for Housing program that works on elderly people's homes is quite active.

First Baptist has a weekly Bible study with meals on Tuesdays at 11:40 a.m. and First United Methodist has First Monday, which includes vocal and instrumental presentations plus a meal the first of each month.

Lenten meals are served by St. James Episcopal on Fridays during that part of the year.

Churches have become known for special presentations during the year. Zachary First Baptist is living Christmas tree. Built in 1853, St. Joseph's Cathedral, downtown at Fourth and Main streets, is the oldest church in Baton Rouge.