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# Baylor University expects to fill new sports stadium at Sunday prayer-worship rally

**Planners believe event will draw 45,000 to Waco on Palm Sunday  
Organizers say Palm Sunday event likely to draw 45,000 from as far off as New England and South America**

By **Allan Turner** | March 25, 2015 | Updated: March 27, 2015 9:06pm

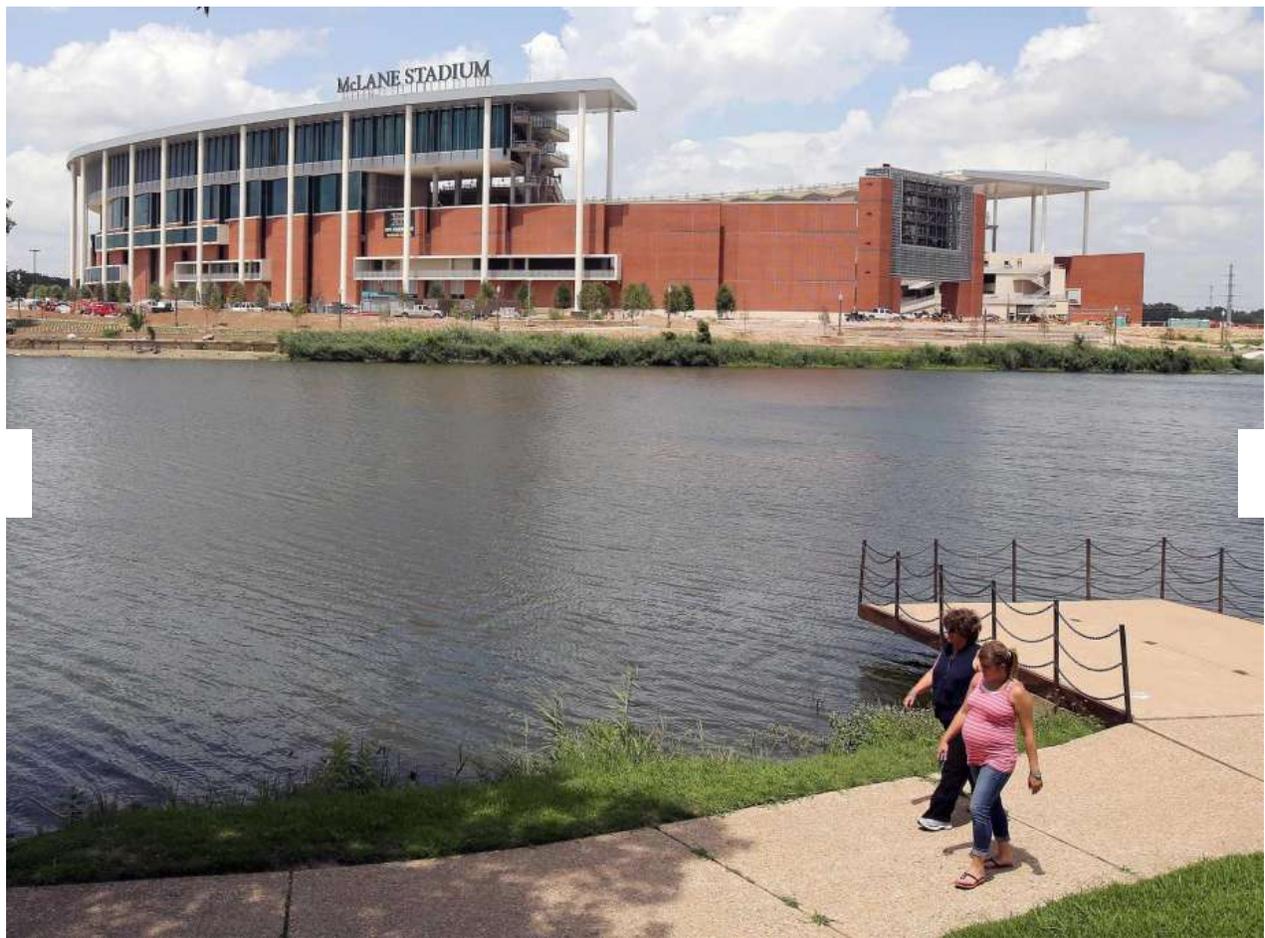


Photo: Jerry Larson, MBO

### IMAGE 1 OF 2

FILE - In this July 2, 2014, file photo, people stroll along the river walk across from the new McLane Stadium at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. The \$260 million stadium located near campus on the Brazos ... [more](#)

Easter sermons by Lakewood Church pastor Joel Osteen, Second Baptist's Ed Young and Windsor Village United Methodist's Kirbyjon Caldwell often brought capacity crowds to Minute Maid Park.

Former Astros owner Drayton McLane Jr., the impetus behind those sermons, now invites worshippers to Waco on Sunday for a religious rally at the new Baylor University stadium that bears his name.

McLane, a Baylor alumnus, regent and lead contributor to the new \$266 million, 45,000-seat stadium, said the idea came to him as he attended last fall's first game in the facility, which pitted Baylor against Southern Methodist University.

"We've got seven home games at Baylor," McLane said. "It didn't seem like a good idea just to have it vacant the rest of year. This being a religious university, it seemed we ought to do something with a great religious purpose."

With a nod to the traditional hymn "Shall We Gather at the River?," tens of thousands of worshippers are expected at McLane Stadium for the Baptist university's "Gathering on the Brazos" kickoff of Holy Week activities.

Featuring Dallas "mega-preacher" Tony Evans and performances by Houston gospel vocalist Israel Houghton and an 860-voice choir, the event is intended to address the nation's social divisions by "unifying the United States in the body of Christ," an organizer said.

McLane, who grew up in an intensely religious family in the Central Texas town of Cameron, said religion has been "paramount" in his life.

"My parents were very involved in the church," he said, "and that was one of the influences I had in going to Baylor. I wanted to go to a religious school."

When McLane suggested an Easter sunrise service, local clergy - noting that Easter services are the year's best-attended - countered with a proposed Palm Sunday observance. The 5 p.m. event will be streamed live via the Internet on [KWTX.com](http://www.kwtx.com).

"This has always been about unity," said Kevin Harrison, lead pastor of Waco's Victorious Life Assembly of God Church, the event's administrator. "We believe this is not just a service but the beginning of unifying the

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## MORE INFORMATION

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### Gathering at Waco's River

**What:** "Gathering on the Brazos" prayer-worship service.

**When:** Sunday. Pre-program begins at 4:30 p.m.

**Where:** McLane Stadium, Baylor University, 1001 MLK Blvd., Waco.

**Admission:** 2 cans of food.

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United States in the body of Christ. With Waco being the heart of Texas, everybody knows that the heart provides life."

Anybody, Harrison said, "can look at the political climate and see that we're divided socially, economically, by class, by race. ... We hope this will be the beginning of conversations between people of all races and denominations, in all walks of life. We want to see a restoration of things that have been lost in this country. We want to see a moral healing."

Harrison said more than 200 Waco-area clergy, ranging from Baptists to Vietnamese-American Catholic priests, have joined in organizing the event, which is expected to draw attendees from as far away as New England and South America. Pulpit presentations will be made by black, Anglo and Hispanic clergy.

Headlining the event will be Evans, pastor of Dallas' Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. Evans was a keynote speaker at January's "We Are One" rally in Ferguson, Mo., the suburb of St. Louis roiled by last year's fatal police shooting of an unarmed black teen.

Evans was traveling this week and unavailable for comment.

Also appearing will be Lakewood Church worship leader Houghton, whose gospel recordings have won at least four Grammy awards.

Baylor spokeswoman Terry Goodrich said the Palm Sunday event likely will be the largest prayer-worship gathering in Waco history. For admission, attendees are asked to bring two cans of food, which later will be distributed through Waco-area food banks.

Palm Sunday marks the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, an event, according to biblical accounts, that subsequently led to his trial, crucifixion and resurrection.



**Allan Turner**

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