

The History and Future Direction of First Baptist Church

THE HISTORY OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The migration of Baptists to our area and the history of First Baptist Church share similar historical points. When Alfred Holland moved to Winston in 1871, there were only three thousand people in the combined communities of Salem and Winston. He ran an advertisement in the local newspaper to find out if there were any other Baptists in the area. The ad, which ran in November, 1870, read: "Are there any other Baptists in Winston? If so, they are invited to meet at my house on next Saturday night." At that time, one person, Mr. Aquila Jones, who was not of the Baptist faith, responded. From this beginning First Baptist Church was born.

A small group of Baptists soon began to meet. On September 22, 1871, five Baptist residents gathered at the courthouse to organize the first Baptist congregation in town. That same year Mr. Holland, the only male charter member, secured the services of Rev. F. M. Jordan, an itinerant Baptist missionary, to preach twice a month first at the courthouse and later at a schoolhouse.

The church was called the Winston Baptist Church. The first convert was an African-American woman, Phyllis Gates. She and nine others were baptized in Belo's Pond before 1000 interested spectators to whom baptism by immersion was a curious spectacle.

Rev. Jordan served this congregation and several others simultaneously. During his four year ministry the church met in the courthouse, the first communion service being held there. A Sunday School was organized in a log building on the corner of Cherry and Third Streets. During these years, the church was a mission station, partially sponsored by the State Mission Board. Rev. Jordan resigned in February, 1874.

Rev. W. R. Gwaltney was the second pastor from 1875 to 1877, when with fifty members a lot was purchased on the corner of Second and Church Streets for \$250. They began the task of building the first Baptist house of worship in the township of Winston. Several Baptist families moved to Winston and the lot was paid for by members and friends. The church building was begun and dedicated on October 8, 1876 - a triumph of faith and sacrificial giving.

The membership was small and poor, most of them being women, and the contributions of the 105 members were largely in produce from their land or in their labor. Many worked on the building at night and at least one mortgaged his home to contribute.

Rev. Gwaltney resigned in September, 1877. Both Rev. Jordan and Rev. Gwaltney served the church well, although neither could serve full time.

Dr. H. A. Brown was came as full-time pastor in December, 1877. He was one of the most beloved and respected ministers in the city's history, serving for forty years, until December, 1917. His ministry was best characterized as mission oriented. In 1879, with the assistance of Dr. Brown, the handful of

African-Americans who were members of the church organized a church at Sixth and Chestnut Streets. This church continues today as First Baptist Church, located on Highland Avenue, a member of the American Baptist Convention.

He often admonished his members to "swarm." He used this bee-keeper's term to describe the act of going into an area and starting a new church. Among the many "swarms" of this period were Salem Baptist Church, Southside Baptist Church, and North Winston Baptist Church. In 1889, a number of members left the Winston Baptist Church to organize the Broad Street Baptist Church. In honor of Dr. Brown's service, Broad Street Church changed its name to Brown Memorial in 1909.

During the twenty years after his arrival, the church grew from a tiny church of 50 members to a city church with 400. With the rise in the number of Baptist congregations in the area, the name of the church was changed in 1892 to the First Baptist Church of Winston. In 1898 the church began a building project that resulted in a large new building in 1901 adjacent to the old one. Through Brown's growing influence the Baptist State Convention met in Winston in 1881 and local Baptist churches organized the Pilot Mountain Association in 1885.

In 1913 the towns of Salem and Winston united to form the twin city, bringing together the old, traditional customs of the former and the progressive pace of the latter. Factories and businesses developed all around the church. The quiet, residential neighborhood in which the church began had disappeared and the church became even more aware of the critical needs facing a downtown congregation.

The next pastor was Dr. J. B. Weatherspoon, who served from the spring of 1918 to the fall of 1921. He envisioned the need for developing the church into a larger, stronger congregation in response to the industrial growth and population increases brought about by the city merger. He urged the church to move to a better location for expansion, but the members were slow to take the step. He resigned to accept a call to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

In the spring of 1922, Dr. John Jester was approached about becoming pastor of First Baptist. He understood the difficult situation which faced the church. He told the pulpit committee candidly that he would not consider coming to Winston-Salem unless the church members would agree to move to a new location and undertake a building program that would compliment the future needs and potential of the church. The church accepted his challenge in May of that year and extended a call to Dr. Jester. He came as pastor in July, 1922. Shortly thereafter, plans were finalized for a new church building (our current sanctuary).

Our history is full of stories of sacrificial giving of time and money. Our current sanctuary building is a testimony to this story as it was the result of many sacrificial gifts by church members. The building was erected at a cost of \$600,000, with an additional cost of \$50,000 for the spire. The cornerstone was laid on February 3, 1924, when the membership was 675.

By 1935 there were two large downtown churches - Brown Memorial on the corner of Fourth and Spring Streets and First Baptist on the corner of Fifth and Spruce Streets. Both of these churches had memberships of 900-1000 and both were in need of a pastor. Brown Memorial had lost its pastor, Rev. S. H. Templeman, because of ill health. First Baptist's pastor, Rev. Jester, resigned on February 11, 1935, but agreed to serve until June 30.

On June 2, 1935, these two churches merged, with the members from Brown Memorial joining First Baptist. The church's membership doubled. Remembering that Brown Memorial was originally the Broad Street Mission, established in 1889 as a mission of First Baptist, and that it was named for its founder, Dr. Henry Brown, this merger brought home an infusion of strength that came from the experience of 46 successful years as a separate body.

In April, 1936, Dr. Ralph Herring became the pastor of this merged group - a 2000 member First Baptist Church. He served twenty-five years, ending his ministry in July, 1961. During his ministry, the Children's Building was built in 1954 and the Educational Building in 1961. Many gifts have been given to enhance these structures. The Reich Memorial Chapel was given by the John L. Reich family and, in the same building, the Brown Memorial Room was given by Mrs. H. S. Stokes in memory of her parents. In the original building the conference room was given by the J. N. Davis family, the library was made possible by a \$10,000 gift from the estate of E. L. Eford, and the lower auditorium was a gift from the Ed Kelly family.

Outside the church building itself, closely related services expanded to citizens in the community. Under the guidance of Rev. Luther Matthews, Assistant to the Pastor and Missions Pastor, and under further development by Rev. Ronald Rice, the Patterson Avenue Mission began to take shape (this later became Crisis Control Ministry) as did the Immanuel Chapel (which became Pfafftown Baptist Church). First Baptist established in 1957 what was to become Knollwood Baptist Church.

Membership in the Stanleyville Mission, also sponsored by First Baptist, increased so fast that this project soon became a self-supporting church. A further missions outreach was given to the church when the W. T. Eaton family built a lovely cottage adjacent to the Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center (in Black Mountain, North Carolina) for the use of any church members attending a conference or retreat there. The church also received an estate gift from the Alverson family which included a three bedroom home located in the Ardmore community, to be used as a Missionary Residence for missionaries on furlough.

Dr. Randall Lolley served as pastor from 1962 to 1974, leaving to become president of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The church made significant impact in the local community during these years. Dr. Lolley's theology of ministry was expressed succinctly on the church bulletin (worship folder) when he said, "This gathered-scattered church gains its life and shares it through worship and work." Recognizing that full use of the new building facilities and the realization of his dream for community ministries required skilled leadership, Dr. Lolley led the church in developing a capable staff to assist him in equipping the members of the church.

A bequest from the late B. F. Huntley provided the funds to establish and equip our Child Development Center. This ministry, designed for both church members and those in our community, continues to provide quality day-care for children ages two- four. Scholarship funds are available through our church. This provides for families with limited income, who otherwise could not afford child-care.

Recreational and community ministries continued to grow. First Baptist joined with six other downtown churches to form the Downtown Church Center on West End Boulevard, a ministry that focuses specifically on the needs of those living in the downtown area. Our media ministry also expanded during Dr. Lolley's ministry, as we began a televised worship service with the local television station in addition to our radio ministry, begun with Dr. Herring. In 1964 we rededicated the sanctuary following a \$225,000 restoration project.

Dr. Dan Griffin served as pastor from April, 1975, to January, 1979. During his ministry, women's rights in the church became an issue among Baptists in North Carolina. He became convinced that this issue had precedence in biblical teaching and was something that our church should pursue. During his pastorate three women were ordained to the ministry - a first for Baptists in Winston-Salem. Soon thereafter women also were ordained into the diaconate, due to the groundwork and seeds planted before.

Rev. Reed Polk became the ninth pastor and served for fourteen months, from September, 1979, to November, 1980. He was known for his faithfulness in visiting the older members of our congregation who were confined to their homes or nursing homes.

Dr. Paul Craven served as pastor from September, 1981, to May, 1989. During his pastorate our church continued its involvement in downtown ministries, opening in our facilities a shelter for the homeless. Since that time, Samaritan Ministries was formed and now sponsors a shelter for the homeless. Many of our members continue to participate in this ministry, serving as volunteers at the Samaritan Inn. We have sponsored, since 1984, a Korean congregation with its entire church program meeting in our facility. First Baptist was instrumental in beginning the Friends Baptist Mission during Dr. Craven's ministry. This congregation is now Friends Baptist Church and serves the Clemmons community.

Dr. David Hughes, our current pastor, began his ministry in May, 1991. Shortly before his arrival, the church was faced with the need to repair its 150 foot tower. The anticipated costs led some to question whether such money should be spent on the current facility or if First Baptist should relocate and move out of the downtown area. The church reaffirmed its downtown presence and repaired the tower. As a part of the repairs, the weathervane that had been atop the tower was replaced with a cross, indicating to all of Winston-Salem that First Baptist was committed to spreading the gospel to our community and around the world.

Since becoming our pastor, Dr. Hughes has led the church in strengthening our missions involvement (both financially and in terms of "hands

on" involvement) and calling our congregation to a more intentional ministry of evangelism and missions.

Our history points to the strong pastoral leadership First Baptist has had since its first gathering in 1871. In addition to our pastors, First Baptist has grown and developed under the leadership of a variety of other ministerial staff members, including Associate Pastors and Mission Pastors as well as Ministers of Administration, Children, Christian Education, Media, Music, Recreation, Senior Adults and Students. Finally, our history points to the sacrificial giving - in time, energy, and financial resources of a select group of lay leaders as well as the congregation as a whole.

Our history serves as an affirmation of our current mission statement: to be a family of faith seeking to know Christ and make Him known.