

The History and Mission of Greensboro First Baptist Church

At Greensboro First Baptist Church, we have an honorable past, a continuing zeal for God's mission, and a hopeful future. Our Baptist history dates back to 1786 when Greene County was created from the northern part of Washington County and the city of "Greenesborough" was chartered as the county seat.

Money was provided by some Christian believers to build a meeting house and school outside the city limits on a hill later known as Cemetery Hill. The building was called Siloam Meeting House and was available to all faiths. The Presbyterians organized the first church here, but the few Baptists and Methodists usually worshipped with them or met at alternate times.

On June 9, 1821, Rev. Jesse Mercer, who founded Mercer University at nearby Penfield, and Rev. Adiel Sherwood, another great name in Southern Baptist history, organized the First Baptist Church of Greensboro. Rev. Sherwood became the first pastor of eight members who came from other Baptist churches: Vincent Sanford, Thomas Terrell, John West, Jr., Jon Bickers, Rhonda Parrish, Eliza Maddox, Cynthia Ralls, and Eliza Colquitt.

Near the Siloam Meeting House was Richland Creek which was used for baptisms even in the winter months. Early accounts state that ice sometimes had to be broken in order to have the baptismal service. There is no account of postponing the service because of the weather.

In 1828, the membership totaled 106. At this time, Rev. Sherwood and the Presbyterian minister, Dr. Cummings, negotiated a charter from the State Legislature to create a Union Church. All expenses were to be paid on a fifty-fifty basis. In 1830, a new church was built on the northwest corner of East and North Streets. Methodists and Catholics also used this building.

After a "buy or sell" proposition offered by the Baptists in the 1840's, the Presbyterians sold their interest and built their own church. The membership at First Baptist continued to grow and in 1902, Mr. W. R. Jackson gave the First Baptist Church the lot on which our present facility is located and our

The bell in the new steeple was brought from the Union Church. This bell had been cast in Philadelphia in 1830. Records indicate that the people of the Union Church gave articles of silver to be added to the metal so that it would have a clear and musical tone. The bell had been shipped to Savannah by boat, up the Savannah River to Augusta and brought to Greensboro by wagon.

Rev. L.B. Johnson along with Dr. Homer Grice of Washington, GA brought the new concept of Vacation Bible School to our area. The first one was in Washington in 1923 and the next one at Greensboro First Baptist soon after.

With the Lord's blessings along with the hard work of believers and dedicated leadership, our church continued to grow, and in the 1920's an annex was built to accommodate Mrs. Maymie Bowen Rice's Sunday School students from the cradle roll through the primary ages. Still more room was needed to take care of the increased enrollment in the Sunday School and a building fund was begun for a modern building. Rev. Charles Kopp was the pastor at that time and because of the Depression, several years of fund-raising were required. When Rev. Kopp resigned in 1945, \$8,600.00 had been raised. This annex was finally built in 1947 during the ministry of Rev. Ernest Kilgore.

In 1987, the properties of Jack Baynes and H.G. Baynes, both adjacent to the church, were purchased. Located where our present parking lot is, the Jack Baynes' home, built by the Baynes' ancestors, the Jacksons, was sold to other Jackson relatives and relocated to Reynolds Plantation. The Jackson House was restored and is known for its uniqueness: it is called a "Steamboat" house because of the shape of its porches. It is believed to be the only one east of the Mississippi River.

From December, 1989 to May, 1990, Sunday services were held at the High School auditorium while the sanctuary was redecorated and a new heating and cooling system was added. During the 1990's other improvements included: renovation of the over-flow room next to the sanctuary to enable more seating space, replacement of the brick façade, the addition of two new bathrooms and a fire escape and the acquisition of the Sheppard

property on the corner of West South Street and South West Street for more space.

The Lord has greatly blessed First Baptist Church to grow and spread the gospel. Under the leadership of Rev. Michael Hardy, a building steering committee was created to build a new fellowship hall. The building committee had the slogan "Together We Can Build, God and You and Me." Psalm 127:1 was the key verse, "Unless the Lord build the house, the builders labor in vain."

In January, 2007, a ground-breaking was held for a new three level \$1.5 million multipurpose building. It was dedicated in September, 2008 with a debt of \$100,000 dollars which was paid off in less than a year.

Our church has planted three new congregations in our area. From the church's beginning, fellow black Baptist members were always welcome and had their own deacons and conferences. Some old minutes reveal that they sometimes outnumbered the white members. In 1845, there were 56 black members and 38 white members, mostly females in each group. In 1864, the black congregation established Springfield Baptist Church with the blessing of First Baptist Church and a gift of \$200.00 to build a new church building. This church continues to have a strong Christian influence and for 149 years has been a "Beacon in the Canaan Community" as was deservedly proclaimed in 1999 at their 135th anniversary.

In June, 1991, First Baptist Church voted to sponsor a new mission church near Lake Oconee. In 1993, Lakeside Baptist Church became a reality and now has a growing congregation.

In January, 2004, a number of members of First Baptist Church voted to build a new church outside of Greensboro. Many members wanted to stay in central Greensboro, so a transition team equally representing both groups devised a plan where funds and other assets would be divided. Thus, Grace Fellowship was formed.

First Baptist Church has always supported missions and several missionaries have been sent from our church. In earlier days, Rev. & Mrs. T.J. Bowen went to Africa and then to Brazil and Rev. & Mrs. J.A. Preston went to minister to the Indians in the American West. First Baptist Church also sponsored David & Glynnis Miller in South America and Kaycee Hash in Argentina. Since the 2000's we have sponsored members on mission trips to Zambia, Jamaica, Utah, Argentina, Haiti, South Korea, India and Youth Beach Missions to Florida during Spring break. We continue to seek to fulfill our slogan of "Love God, Love People, Tell the World".

We have also been blessed with a strong pastoral heritage while ordaining a number of young men for the ministry. In more recent years, Walter Crawford, Aubrey McElhannon, Jimmy Stewart, Charles Stewart, A.T. Stewart, Ronnie Parrish, Jackie Perkins, Paul Glass, Julian Hutchins, George Tumlin and Patrick Tice have all felt the call to preach the gospel, with many of them still serving.

Our current mission ministries include Women on Mission and Baptist Men. All weeks of prayer are observed and offering goals set. In addition, monthly contributions are made to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program, to Georgia Baptist Association, to Georgia Baptist Children's Home, to Penfield Christian Home and to other evangelism efforts.

Our Christian Education ministries include Sunday School for all ages and Vacation Bible School. We have recently called a Minister of Music to lead our Sanctuary Choir and our Musicians.

In recent years, a new elevator was installed, parking paved and upgrades were made to the Sanctuary sound system. Also, much signage has been put up making it easier to locate Sunday School rooms and other parts of the building.

With God's continued blessing, our future is bright. It is only through the power of our Lord that we exist today to do His will.