

First Baptist Church of Lepanto, Arkansas "100 Years of Grace"

Centennial Celebration

By: MARISSA HOLIMAN
Tribune News Staff

(Sources for this article included "A History of Lepanto First Baptist Church" by Mrs. J. T. Lee Sr. and Lepanto News-Record articles.)

In 1908 the first church in Lepanto was born in a small frame house on the upper end of Main street. Just over 10 people worshiped in the same building for a year or two while exploring the possibility of building a church building.

In 1909, land was given by John R. Hirschman and in the spring construction of a building began. Construction was slow because Lepanto was still almost a wilderness with very few people and very little money.



This old photo of Lepanto First Baptist Church captures just how much the church has changed over the years.
(Photo provided)

With the building half built, money ran out. Dan McDaniel, T. W. Roberson and J. T. Lee Sr. borrowed \$1,600 to complete the building. The building was almost complete when a storm destroyed it. When it was finally completed, the one room church was about 40 feet by 60 feet. A curtain was used to provide classrooms. The church went through many pastors and had many struggles in the early years. Sometimes there were full-time pastors and once in awhile no pastors at all. But through the years from the day the doors opened for the first time for Sunday services 'til this very day, they have never closed on Sunday and not very often on prayer meeting night. In the other days money was so tight that the church couldn't afford to pay a preacher so D.S. Buck, who had the first post office on his house boat located where Potter's bridge is now, preached for the church. When the Buck family left Lepanto, Buck gave \$60 from his very limited funds to put lights in the church when and if electricity came to Lepanto.

The town was truly a frontier town in those days. The church has always done some type of mission work. If in no other way than supporting a pastor while he preached and held meetings at many different locations such as Garden Point, Etowah, West Ridge, Red Oak, Hatcher, Fry's Mill and what is now known as Bondsville. During this time, the "75 Million Campaign" came into existence. The church subscribed the quota and paid a part of it, but war and the depression hit not only Lepanto First Baptist but all Southern Baptists. It left the church with a staggering debt which was paid in full in 1945. Several members joined the \$1 a month club to help pay the last \$75 million debt.

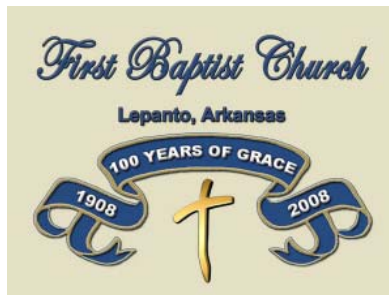
Then the church decided to enter the Mt. Zion Association. There were seven counties in this association. It, at that time, was said to be the largest Baptist Association in the world. It used to require a lot of planning, unlike now. Bear in mind that there was no means of travel between Lepanto and Marked Tree except wagon or horse over a little used trail. There was one train and sometimes it made round trips, and another time it got off the track and those times only an engine from Marked Tree could get it back on. As the church grew, more room was needed so a large shed was added to the back of the church and used for Sunday School classes. A few years later the church voted to build a new building. An offering was taken to start building, and a \$32.50 building fund created. The church borrowed \$5,000 from the Home Mission Building Fund. The loan was to be repaid five years, but the church repaid it in less than one year.

It was during that time the church withdrew from Mt. Zion and formed the Trinity association. A few years later the church had the opportunity to purchase two more lots and soon began building the annex to the church and a parsonage. With very little money and with the Lord's blessings, both buildings were completed in about two years and were dedicated debt free. Not only did the work begin to prosper in town, but missions established which built their own churches and became self-supporting including Red Oak, West Ridge, Rivervale and Fry's Mill. Edna "Mur" Hill Lee, one of the church's founding members, said she was amazed by the church. "I marvel at God's having His hand on so many consecrated men as has been our good fortune to have as our church pastors," said Mrs. Lee in a history of the church. "Each one has been wonderful and a blessing." Lee died in 1970. She and her husband dedicated the stain glass "Baptism of Jesus" that hangs in the Baptistry in honor of their children and grandchildren.

The latest edition to the church has been the Family Life Center. It was dedicated in March 2004. Inside the sanctuary there have been two new projection screens placed, and the side rooms have been opened up and renovated. "It's not about the buildings or new additions," said Bro. Jim Duffel, the church's pastor. "It's about the people. The people of this community and of our church is more important than buildings." Duffel has been the church's pastor since 2000. The church is located at 302 Kenwood Street.

In 2008, FBC will have a local mission's effort to celebrate their heritage. There will be two special events, one in the fall and one in the spring, inviting some of the former pastors and staff members to come back to visit. In addition to Bro. Jim Duffel, current church staff includes Betty Knapp, church secretary for the past 28 years; Steve Terrell, youth pastor; and deacons, Stan Hattle, Mike Jennings, Cletus Tacker, Tim Benton, Kevin Truelove, Kevin Pilgrim and David May.

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March 2009 Update: The Family Life Center was paid in full. The church voted to use the Center for a Disaster or Emergency Relief Center in times of need.

Ministry Team for 2009 consists of:

Deacons: David May, Kevin Truelove, Kevin Pilgrim, Cletus Tacker, Tim Benton, Stan Hattle, Mike Jennings & Bill Roach

Youth Committee: Ronnie & Marla Blain, Kevin & Tracy Pilgrim, Mike & Kay Jennings, Bo & Karen Powell, Kaye Holiman, Marissa Holiman, Debbie Buck, Twanna Tyler, Lisa Tyler, Barbara Pounders, Donna Richmond, Janie Hattle & Donna Pilgrim

Childrens Ministry: Mitzi Malone, Twanna Tyler, Tracy Pilgrim, Kay Jennings, Donna Pilgrim, Jamie Carpenter, Lisa Cavitt & Bobbie Smith

Nursery Coordinators: Barbara Pounders, Dannye Neal & Betty Knapp

*Sunday School Teachers: Mike Jennings Director: Melody McArthur, Stephanie Ezekiel, Pat Taylor, Sue Felks, Donna Richmond, Kathy McClure, Marla Blain, Paul Malone, Bo Powell, Cary Beth Duffel, Jim Duffel, Kevin Pilgrim, Stan Hattle, Mike Jennings, and Sadie Foote
Special Note: Marissa Holiman (author of the above article) is the great, great granddaughter of the Lees.



Article Submitted by
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Editor
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First Baptist Church Pastors

P.O. Freeman 1918-1924
Cecil Franks 1924-1925
Frank Hammonds 1926-1928
A.T. Willis 1930-1935
Leslie Rihard 1930-1935
Raymond Crotts 1954-1960
Jeff Campbell 1961-1964
John Colbert Jr. 1964-1970
Roymond Atwood 1970-1974
H.L. Barton 1974-1977
Ron Sanders 1977-1980
Bob Dailey 1982-1986
Tim Hight 1986-1990
Ron Young 1991-1994
Greg Dills 1995-2000
Jim Duffel 2000- to present

Pastor List submitted by Kaye Holiman