

Imagine a time when there were only five white Baptist churches and no more than 500 Baptists in Harnett County. The year was 1872, and two years later "the Reverend Allen Betts began a Sunday School in a small school house located on what is now a part of the Campbell College campus, the plot near the present Kivett Building," Dr. J.A. Campbell, founder and first president of what is now Campbell University, wrote in his short history of Buies Creek First Baptist Church.

He continued, "A revival meeting was held in the fall of 1875 and a church was organized, Reverend Allen Betts, A.W. Campbell and J.M. Holloman constituting the presbytery." Mr. William Pearson, who became Dr. J.A.'s father-in-law, assisted in "organizing the church and erecting a house of worship," according to Dr. J.A. Campbell. The church, then named Buies Creek Baptist Church, first met in the Hight house, which is now owned by Campbell University.

#### A GROWING CHURCH

The first pastor of Buies Creek Baptist Church was the Reverend Allen Betts, followed by the Reverends J. M. Holloman, J.A. Campbell (40 years total), William Page, A.W. Campbell, J. Winston Pearce, Charles B. Howard, A. Paul Bagby, Ralph McLean, J. William Angell, E. Weldon Johnson, John S. Rogers, Sherrill Stevens (interim), and J. Michael Simmons.

As the church grew in membership, it likewise grew in the need for additional space and provisions for its pastors. Ground breaking for the present church building was held in October 1914. During Dr. Bagby's tenure as pastor, the parsonage was built in 1946 and paid for in full that same year. In 1995, CU purchased the parsonage, now serving as headquarters for campus security.

During the tenure of Dr. Angell a three-story educational annex was completed. During that time the church sanctuary underwent a refurbishment, as it did during the tenures of the Reverends Weldon Johnson, John Rogers, and Michael Simmons.

#### PURPOSE AND PROGRAMS

A church is much more than a building, however, and today, 136 years after its founding, the original purpose of BCFBC is reflected in the words of its current pastor, Dr. Michael Simmons: "We at BCFBC have a strong desire to let Jesus build His church with us, through us, and in our midst. Our mission is simple: to share and live out the gospel." His words echo those of Dr. J.A. Campbell, who wrote: "Through all the years the church and the school have been working hand in hand to establish the Kingdom of God on earth...."

BCFBC is a God-inspired, people-oriented church, incorporating the talents and gifts of its many members. The music program includes a cherub choir, a children's choir, an adult choir, handbell ringers, guest groups such as the Taylors, and special presentations by its organist, pianist, and other musicians. Pianists over the years have been Campbell University music majors, and today many students are members of the choir.

For example, Jonathan Lazenby, 2009 CU graduate presently enrolled in the CU School of Divinity, represented CU in the university choir trip to Italy and has been a BCFBC choir member for six years. Additionally, he is a member of the handbell ringers, continues to make mission trips, and participates in Bible School and other church activities.

Sunday worshippers are offered a wide selection of Sunday School classes from cradle roll through several adult classes. Recently two new classes were formed for adults, one for grad students and

young professionals and the other for young women. College students attend not only a Sunday School class but also a Thursday night Bible study session usually held in members' homes. A unique Sunday School class is held for special adults, those who are physically and mentally challenged. An informal group of church members, professors, and college students gather after church on Sundays to have fellowship lunch together in local restaurants.

#### AN ACTIVE CHURCH

On any given Sunday, the worship service is a blend of the traditional and contemporary, always with emphasis on "sharing the good news of Christ with people from all over the world," as Dr. Simmons has noted. Several nationalities and as many as five different races attend the church. No race is excluded.

Church membership is growing, baptisms are frequent, the church has ordained many young women and men, and the church-wide commitment to missions has produced outstanding results. Members have made mission trips to Russia, Central America, China, India, Africa, Honduras, Mexico, numerous states, and areas affected by tornadoes and hurricanes. Often, members work with the N.C. Baptist Men, an organization greatly supported by the church. Strong national and international mission involvement continues to this day.

The church has recently purchased a mini-bus equipped with a wheelchair lift, has refurbished the kitchen and the sanctuary, set up playground equipment, and replaced the flooring on the first level of the education wing. The installation of a complete sound and video system allows services to be recorded and taken to the homebound.

#### GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

Twice in its long history, BCFBC has provided the nucleus for the formation of a new church, and with its membership diminished each time, the church maintained grace under pressure. With God's blessing the parent church began growing again. Today, the congregation is supportive of its pastor, is together in its mission, and now, as historically, welcomes members from every walk of life – local and extended community, university personnel and students, and internationals.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE

In addition to service through committees and the diaconate, the church offers Bible study, prayer groups, Bible School, and special interest groups, such as the men's breakfast, women's missions study, prayer chain, Senior Adult fellowship, associate membership to students, and retreats. Known among its members and visitors as a warm, friendly church, it is also known as a church that encourages everyone to work and witness for the Lord.

Additionally, on most Wednesday nights "Keep It Simple Suppers" (or KISS) are provided at a minimal cost, and a "pot luck" supper is held on the first Wednesday night of each month, when members bring in their own home-cooked specialties. The church also celebrates special occasions, such as a spring festival, a fall harvest, and homecoming each September.

## A CHURCH ON MISSION

Consider the mission statement for BCFBC: “Buies Creek First Baptist Church is a Christ-centered family of baptized believers united in the worship of God to disciple, nurture, and equip one another to minister in a needy world, in order to share the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ.”

Dr. Simmons encourages everyone – community and university – to “see what God is doing here and how each one can find God’s will and purpose for his/her life,” and thus to “share the Good News.”

Jonathan calls BCFBC “one of the most influential and inspiring places I have experienced since coming to Campbell University.” Attending church anywhere should be an enjoyable worship experience, one spiritually uplifting and highly motivating. BCFBC opens its doors to all those who seek that kind of worship.

Sources:

J.A. Campbell: “Sketch of Buie’s Creek Baptist Church” (1875-1933)

J.Winston Pearce, Campbell College: *Big Miracle at Little Buies Creek* .Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1976 and 1985.

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