

## THE BEGINNING

July of 1973... with no building, property, or offices, five families believed God was able and willing to do His work through them. They decided to start a church in northwest Houston that would be dedicated to reaching people in their community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It would be called Northwest Memorial Baptist Church.

Wayne Tucker was called as the first pastor. The founding group first met in two homes and 19 people were present. Those founding families then made plans to contact every person in northwest Houston, and at their first service on July 1, 1973, in a local school, 236 people attended.

During the first two weeks, they borrowed buses from Northline Bus Company. By week three, the church had purchased 11 used buses from a church in Louisville, KY. On the drive back to Houston, the brakes went out on the bus the pastor was driving. They made it to Memphis by gently letting the bus tap the lead bus enough to slow it down for stops until they could make the repair. Two of the buses broke down in Tennessee. Other buses had to have their batteries charged every hundred miles or so because their alternators were not functioning.

To reach the children – and ultimately their parents – the young church combined promotions with its visitation to attract bus riders. They hired a professional clown. They handed out balloons and kites. They held picnics and puppet shows. The goal was to reach the lost and minister to families. By its seventh Sunday, the church recorded 197 bus riders.

By May 17, 1975, Northwest Memorial Baptist had a record high attendance of 969 people. By June 1976, the church had purchased 15 acres, built a 33,000 square foot building, and operated 14 buses.

In his 1978 book *Miracle Church*, Pastor Wayne Tucker said, “The most wonderful thing in the life of a born-again believer is to know that he is in the center of God’s will and to be doing what God wants him to do. I have never doubted for one moment that God has had His hand upon this church, that He wanted to build a strong body of believers in northwest Houston. I think all of God’s people have the desire deep in their hearts to be where God is working. The good news is that God is not only working in northwest Houston, but all over our land. Anywhere people get together in the name of Jesus and let Him control their lives, miracles will happen.”

## EARLY YEARS BY KITTY SANDEL

It was May 1974. Mike and I had just gotten married, and after our honeymoon we visited Northwest Memorial Baptist Church at the request of Mike's aunt and uncle, Sue and Howard Leverett. The church was meeting at Hancock Elementary School, located in the Prestonwood Forest subdivision.

I remember traveling to church from our apartment on Antoine to FM 1960, which was a two-lane road at that time. Inevitably, we'd leave a few minutes late and then get behind someone who was out for a "Sunday drive."

As we became more involved in this start-up church, Mike and I joined a group on Saturday mornings that went around to neighborhoods to invite people to church. We would knock on doors to see if parents would allow their children to ride our buses on Sunday mornings. Most people were all smiles and receptive to our visit, but not all.

Our new building was built, but we were growing fast! I remember Sunday School classes being taught on the school buses. It was great until summertime hit.

Christmas on the Parkway was a fun community-driven event. So many people helped to put the "stations" together. We had a singing Christmas tree – where the children gathered on the steps built with a Christmas tree shape behind them.

I remember playing in the bell choir and eventually leading it for a while. So much fun!

I remember raising money for our new education building. Brother Billy felt the Lord leading him to raise the cash to pay for the building: \$1 million. Mike and I were sitting in Brother Billy's office (toward midnight of the last day) when a call came in. Someone was asking what amount was left to meet our goal. Once Brother Billy told him and heard his reply, he looked at us with that big grin and said, "Well hal-le-lu-ye!" The total amount had been raised. What a lesson we learned from all of that.

One other memory that changed my outlook on "giving" forever... This happened 2-3 times that I can remember.

On a Wednesday night, while we were still meeting in the gymnasium, Brother Billy asked that the men pass the offering plates. He told us to give as the Lord directed us. So, people gave and the plates were full!

Then, Brother Billy said he wanted the men to pass the full plates around, and people were to take the amount of money they needed to pay a bill that week or to purchase food. Most of us prayed, not wanting to watch as this was a private time.

Brother Billy said there was a problem. There was more money in the plates than when we passed them the first time. He admonished our people to let go of pride and take as the Lord led to cover what needed to be covered that week. So the plates were passed again and we prayed. With much relief, it was noticeable that pride was stripped away and people "received from the Lord" what was needed for the week. Many of us left in AWE of God's goodness.

People were so giving and caring toward one another. As very young adults with children, times could get tough. We would get together and surprise a family with an old-fashioned "pounding" – groceries to help them get by. One family came up to us one year with two pencil cases with a few items for school and \$25 tucked into each one, to make sure our boys got what they needed. The bond between members was tight. We did life together.

I remember passing out roller skates on youth nights so the kids could skate in our gymnasium!

JAM night was always the place to be! Great music and down-to-earth, applicable teaching from Nathan Gordon. Just about every seat was taken on those nights.

When a tragedy hit, losing our youth pastor's wife, it affected every one of us. She was such a bright light as she helped to love on and minister to the youth. The funeral was in Galveston, and there had to have been more than 100 cars in the procession to Galveston.

So many things happened throughout the following years. New friendships made, happy news, sad news, yet there is still that loving bond which is deep-rooted in our fellowship. My prayer is that as we grow larger in members, we keep that "smaller fellowship of members" mindset as we minister to not only each other, but to visitors who are seeking the Lord and/or close Christian fellowship.

## KINGDOM WORK BY RON J. DUDLEY

My wife and I began attending Houston Northwest Memorial Baptist Church in 1979 during its infancy. The church had recently moved from meeting in homes to meeting in the Prestonwood Elementary School cafeteria. We dropped our baby girls off at the Grant Road Childcare Center and took our young boy to church with us. We had to put up the chairs for the service, take them down after the service, and sweep the floor to make it as clean as it was before we used it for worship. HNW has always had the personality of a start-up church to me (versus a big or mega church), always hungry to find and bring in the lost.

It was not long until that small group of families had grown big enough to buy a wooded plot of ground with no entry way. We could not get to our church without the approval of the YMCA. They had a road across their property that reached to the wooded land we owned. The YMCA has always been a good neighbor to our church. They have allowed HNW to use their buildings and parking throughout the years.

Our first building had a large common area, a kitchen, and a dining area that was used to teach children on Sunday. My wife taught first graders for twelve years in the rooms upstairs over the kitchen of the main building at that time (due to Hurricane Harvey, that building has been removed and is now the green space). I helped with children and the nursery. We did not have paid workers in the nursery during these early years, so church members took turns caring for the children. Our congregation was so prolific that our nursery space was never big enough!

The dining area was used for the buffet of food that everyone brought for fellowship meals. The auditorium also served as a basketball court. The choir loft and pulpit were on the front wall, and the basketball goal would come down when we wanted to play. On Saturdays every family that could brought their yard mower and tools to take care of the church lawn.

As we grew in numbers, we added teaching space with mobile offices. One of our adult classes met in an abandoned house with a fireplace. No lights and no heat. Members had to bring firewood to church in the wintertime so they could stay warm while studying the Bible.

Our first piece of property was not big enough for our growth, and we needed more land. As a church we prayed for this land a long time. One day our church members lined up holding hands with all of us praying for God to bless us with the land we needed. As we walked around the adjoining wooded property belonging to someone else, we prayed and claimed it for His Church. God granted most of the land we claimed in our prayer walk.

Three ministries (“kingdom work”) started in the early years were for widows, the needy of this church and community, and New Life Adoptions for women with unplanned pregnancies.

While I don’t remember the beginnings of the widow ministry, I am grateful for those who stepped up to serve in this important ministry area.

Six couples were asked to start a benevolence ministry to meet the needs of some of our congregation and the poor of our community. The first group to put it into action included Harry and Connie Porter, Bill and Norma Goulet, Neal and Nancy Fahmy, and a few others along with Myrtis and me. We developed the program according to the Scriptures as best we knew. We always had special offerings over and above normal giving of the congregation. We met after every Wednesday night prayer meeting. We gave away food from the pantry and money for utilities, travel expense and sickness. It did not matter if those in need were members or not. Each person was interviewed, and we shared Jesus with them.

Our church was passionate about the unborn. Nearly the entire congregation lined up on a major roadway, held hands and asked God to show us how we could love mothers with unexpected pregnancies and point them to choose life for their child. In September 1983, our Assistant Pastor, Beau Henderson, led us to start the New Life Children’s Services ministry in an old building behind our church. The name was later changed to New Life Adoptions, and the organization still exists to give hope and offer choice to empower pregnant women to make the best life-affirming decisions for themselves and their babies.

I ask myself after 49 years of being here at HNW, would I join this church today? In many ways HNW is still the same as before. It has been this old man’s experience that the work of the church requires hard work, sweat and tears, but nothing brings greater purpose and joy. When you commit to love and serve a local body of believers, God’s power indwells you. He is your words, He is your strength, He is your life!

## TOGETHER WE PROVE HIM NOW BY KIMBERLY HORTON

One of the greatest blessings I have had in my spiritual walk is to see how God moves individuals one at a time while at the same time He brings these individual assignments together in uniformity to bless the whole body of Christ.

A prime example was when I had just entered my teenage years. Northwest Memorial Baptist, where my family had been attending for years, had grown to the point that we were bursting at the seams in Sunday School. As a youth we had to set up and take down our Sunday School area before each service because of the lack of space. As a result, the leaders knew it was time to build an education building to accommodate the families that were coming to worship with us.

Plans were drawn up and it was determined the cost for a new building would be \$1 million. That was a very high price for a church consisting of mostly young families. We considered working with a church fundraising organization, but our leaders ultimately decided that God would provide the funds needed by simply challenging our church members to be generous.

“Together We Prove Him Now” was the challenge presented based on Malachi 3:10 - “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

We were asked to prayerfully consider as individuals what God would have us do and/or give to prove He was capable of such a miracle. We would regularly receive reports of people feeling led to give items (fur coats, jewelry, etc.) or of an unexpected financial blessing that came to a member of the church family. It was the incremental acts of sacrificial obedience that had the church in a position to build the needed facility debt free and in a much quicker way.

As an adult I often think back on that time and realize now how unusually blessed we were to be a part of such a sweet move of God. It is not easy to explain just how in tune with the Holy Spirit we all must have been to see this and other miracles come about, and for that I am so thankful. May God continue to bless this group of believers.

## TOGETHER WE PROVE HIM NOW BY SUSAN MCHENRY

During the “Together We Prove Him Now” effort, the song “It’s Beginning to Rain” written by Aaron Wilburn and Bill and Gloria Gaither became our theme song. As the music began to play, people rose to their feet holding hands raised high and sang expectantly.

One Sunday night we had a visiting musician come for a concert: Aaron Wilburn – the author of our theme song! As he began to sing the lyrics, one can only imagine his surprise when the congregation rose as one, hands lifted high and joined him in proclaiming the promise God had given in Acts 2:17. We truly believed in one accord God’s promise “to pour His Spirit out on our sons and daughters.”

To this day, people who were there that night cherish the memory and not only remember the goodness of the Lord but look forward to seeing the fulfillment with generations to come.

Then came New Year’s Eve of 1983 or 1984. As “Together We Prove Him Now” came to a close, a special service was called to see the fulfillment of our young church reaching the goal of raising \$1 million for the new education building.

We prayed and sang praises, and prayed more and sang more. As the night wore on, children fell asleep on the chairs or on sleeping bags their parents brought just in case, and we waited with eager anticipation.

People gave, pledged, and believed that God would fulfill the promise of Malachi 3:10. The Word said to bring all the tithes and offerings into the storehouse and prove (Him) now. And He did just that as the clock struck midnight.

The education building was going to be a reality. Tears of gratitude, shouts of joy, and humble praises celebrated what God had done.

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In 1990 an amendment was made to change our name to Houston Northwest Baptist Church.



## MEMORIES BY SCOTT AND MARY LARSON

We began attending NWMBC in 1983 at the invitation of Randall Sims, Mary's co-worker at Safeway Foods. Our first Sunday was the dedication of the education building that had been built without borrowing a dime. It was quite a celebration. The parking lot was a sea of cars with red bumper stickers that read "God is love."

Billy Crosby was the pastor at that time, and both Mary and I were unsaved. He was a large and imposing figure with a barrel chest and a booming voice. Having come from a Lutheran background which emphasized High Church, seeing and hearing Brother Billy every Sunday morning was quite the contrast. He would begin his sermon decked out in one of his solid colored, three-piece polyester suits when he would utter his usual preamble: "I believe the Bible is the Word of God, and in Hebrews 4:12 it says that the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And in Romans 10:17 it says that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. And so I believe that for those who are lost to be saved, that comes from hearing the Word of God. And for those who are already saved, to grow up into spiritual maturity, comes from hearing the word of God." Soon after that, as Brother Billy was getting to the heart of his sermon, things would begin to heat up and the suitcoat would come off and then you knew you were in for some serious attitude adjustment.

During those early years, our Bible study leader was Roger Goza and his wife, Shirley. He was the principal teacher of the Young Marrieds class. I have never met a man I admired more than Roger. We were unsaved when we first attended his class, but by listening to the preaching of Brother Billy and the teaching of my friend Roger, I came to faith in Christ Jesus in 1983. I will be forever indebted to him. The Young Marrieds class was a hit with everyone, and it was there that we first met the Tates, Lechingers, Fraleys, Collins and Gordons.

Our second son, John, was born in 1984 followed by Sarah in 1986 and finally Caleb in 1989. Eventually, they were all baptized in our church. We were at the church for Sunday morning services and Bible study, Sunday evening events or activities such as Royal Ambassadors, Girls in Action or AWANAs. We served in every capacity we could. We had found a home. On Wednesday evenings, Sue Leverett and her ladies cooked and hosted a meal at the church taking advantage of the small commercial kitchen installed in the rear of the fellowship hall. Everyone sat and ate at the round card tables that were set up, sang old-time gospel songs, and just fellowshiped with each other as families. This was an important event in the life of the church as she grew.

During those years as the church continued to grow, some of the teachers moved out into the YMCA to make room for others on campus. Under the leadership of Dan St. Andre, the church began the Christmas on the Parkway weeklong event that brought many new people to the church but also strengthened our church family as we all had to pull together to bring it to pass. It was a real joy to see all the families of the church coming together for that purpose and even though we were dead tired at the end of each evening, I truly believe we had more fun working than anyone who attended.

As our children entered their high school years, we became involved with the youth ministry and a young pastor, Chris Mayfield. Chris was the youth pastor to all of our children and they heard the gospel from him, learned how to serve from him and how to have fun and be accountable in service to the Lord. During Chris's tenure, and with the gifted leading of the girls' youth minister, Casey Curtis, Area Bible Studies (ABS) was instituted. As a host home for the Cy Creek and Tomball area, we would often have 50-60 kids at our house on Wednesday night for a meal (thanks to McDonald's 50-cent hamburgers), Bible study and games. In addition, Mary and I went to at least two weeklong youth camps each summer (senior high and junior high) and a couple of elementary camps for Mary. Interspersed with the other events were Big Toe weekends and the perennial favorite, HSABSFFBCS. This was the annual High School Area Bible Study Flag Football Bowl Championship Series. The teams were made up of boys and girls and I think the girls had more fun than the boys.

The church has called several godly men to her pulpit, and we have enjoyed the teaching of each one. Following Brother Billy was Dr. Bill Bennett who started our God and Country July 4th celebrations and brought many prominent national figures and Christian entertainers to our stage. Dr. Bennett was followed by Dr. Steven Wright and Dr. Mark Howell. A constant through many of those years was our beloved music minister, Dr. Stuart Sheehan. He helped hold us together through some trying times as a church. And we have held together and seen our church go through many trials, and yet she stands among the lampstands and she will endure to the end of the age.

All I have shared has spoken to the heartbeat of HNW's entire history: love of God and love of people. Our family experienced this love and care firsthand with the loss of our son Scott in April of 2004. The church ministered to and cared for our family so well during this time by providing meals, helping with funeral arrangements, praying for us, and being a constant reminder of what the church is designed to be: family. They never ceased to love us and remind us of their love for our family and our son. And while our home was filled with grief and loss, it was also filled with the families and faces of our church, lifting us up and reminding us of our hope in Jesus Christ, a debt to which we will never be able to repay.

## REFLECTIONS BY SHAWN MYERS

In 1997 Houston Northwest Church adopted the phrase “A Different Kind of Church for Our Community.” This phrase fit HNW perfectly. When Kristi and I arrived that summer, we found a deeply sincere worshipping church, not bound by traditions. The people of HNW were warm, friendly, and open to try just about any way to reach the people of their community. They were not easily offended at change or being viewed as a different type of church from the others in the area. The unchanging constant was, and has always been, a deep desire for genuine worship rooted in the firm foundation of God and unashamed teaching of His Word.

This church had enjoyed many years of community outreach through the annual Christmas on the Parkway. This was an all-hands-in ministry gift in December that was known throughout northwest Houston as the place to go for a refreshing experience of Jesus’ birth and celebration of the Christmas season. Attendees would spend hours experiencing numerous vignettes including adult and kids musical performances, delicious food, a passion play featuring live actors and animals, children’s activities, a country store and much more.

In 1998, the worship ministry began a multi-year tradition of Christmas Café. This was an indoor musical event including jazz music at the top, which encouraged table conversation with guests while enjoying specialty coffees and cheesecakes. At the second half, this event would include more choral works of multiple genres, telling the story of Christ’s birth and concluding with a Gospel presentation.

Another timeless tradition the church enjoyed was our Good Friday services. Set as musical and dramatic scenes, the worship ministry provided a new way each year to remember the sacrifice of our Savior, concluding with communion. A few years, we added additional elements of self-guided prayer, confession, and stations of the cross. The worship center displayed moving works of art among candlelight and somber music from dusk on Maundy Thursday through dusk on Good Friday. This provided a journey through the timeline of Jesus’ final evening before His death.

HNW was growing so quickly that a major building project was created called Time to Build, Time to Believe. The church campus began to see many changes including infrastructure, roads, parking and building plans. The first building to open in this time was our current Student Building. This was always planned as a dedicated building to those in junior high and high school. The church was grateful to use the larger side of this building for adults as the Worship Center was being constructed. We opened a third service on Saturday evenings to accommodate continued growth for this season and enjoyed the benefits from this extra service. In 2001, the Worship Center was completed. We held our first service there on Easter Sunday of that year. This was such a joyful time for the church as we were able to open up so many more seats for our guests and growing families.

## HEART OF GRATITUDE BY JENNIFER WUELLNER

I came to Houston Northwest church in the spring of 2003. I had only been attending for a few months when my ex-husband decided to leave our family. I was left with an 11-month-old and a three-year-old to raise on my own. Even though the church had only been our home for a short time, they came alongside us in such a powerful way.

The Friendship Tuesday ladies embraced me and took me in as did the young singles group. A year later we needed to move, and as many single parents can attest, raising children, holding down a full-time job, running a household, and preparing to move, can be quite a challenge. That being the case, at the time of our move, I had not packed a single thing. The church came over in full force, packing everything we had. They even took down the children's swing-set and hauled everything over to the new house. Once there, they set the swing set up and installed a ceiling fan. The young singles even helped watch the children and our dog. To this day, it all remains quite a blur as to how all of that got done.

Over the years, I have seen God use this church in many ways. Another example came when my daughter Allison turned two years of age. She was diagnosed with glaucoma and needed surgery on one of her eyes. At the time, our finances were stretched very thin and we were unable to afford the deductible required for her to have surgery. The church came through yet again. A Sunday school class heard about our story and raise the funds needed for the deductible so that she could have the surgery.

Years later, we needed help with part of our fence and some of the men came over to help with that.

Even recently, our family has experienced yet another challenging season and we have seen the church body come alongside us.

We will be forever grateful for the members of Houston Northwest and how God has used them and continues to use them in our family.

## MAKING HOUSTON MORE LIKE HEAVEN

Since the 1990s we have sent out and supported multiple missionaries, planted a church near Seattle, WA, and continued to train and equip pastors for church planting in the Houston area.

In 2017, the HNW campus suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Harvey. The worship center, the only building that didn't flood, became a hub for community disaster relief assistance. By 2020 the rebuild was complete with renovated adult and student space, a new "green space" at the site of the original worship center, and a new Commons area and Kids Building.

Three months after the new buildings opened, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. As the world learned how to navigate a season of shutdowns, shortages and social change, HNW adapted to minister to our community in fresh ways. Services were held online. Food was distributed to families in need. Neighbors helped neighbors. As restrictions eased, people slowly began returning to in-person church, and today a typical Sunday sees around 1,600 on campus with another 200 attending online services.

Dr. Steve Bezner celebrated 10 years as senior pastor at Houston Northwest Church in January 2023. He says, "Houston Northwest was called the *Miracle Church* in her earliest days. By the grace of God, we still see miracles today. In the last decade alone, hundreds of people have come to faith in Jesus and follow him in baptism here at HNW. That, by itself, would be enough to declare our God and our church to be a home of miracles.

"But God has done so much more.

"God has created a church that includes people of all ages, from all sorts of ethnicities, from different walks of life—all who have committed themselves to following Jesus. People who—on the surface—have nothing in common are all learning and growing in faith and obedience to Jesus, loving one another with great sacrifice. In today's divided world, that's absolutely a miracle.

"God used Houston Northwest in the wake of Hurricane Harvey to love her neighborhood and her city. Hundreds of people gave generously of their time to work in the flooded homes of neighbors, to pray and grieve with those who lost everything, to distribute relief supplies, and to help rebuild our community. God then used those same people and their miraculous generosity to rebuild our church building so that ministry in this community could continue. The church's recovery after Harvey is a miracle.

"The Lord has allowed HNW to minister through counseling and prayer, seeing countless relationships healed and bodies restored. God has used our church to reach the nations through her legacy of missions, partnerships, and generosity. God has used HNW to help start multiple churches in Houston—and beyond. God has used HNW to help those caught in addiction and sin cycles. The Bible is taught every single week, and people are changed little by little at the same time. In a world of hopelessness and cynicism, every single changed life is a miracle.

"As grateful as we are for what God has done, we believe HNW's best days—her best miracles—are ahead of us. We are trusting the Lord for even more miracles for this *Miracle Church*."