Our History

First Baptist Church Aberdeen

Original history page 5

On Sunday, May 7, 1882, a group of five Baptists, Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Alley, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Pleasants, and Mr. E. H. Randall met in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alley for the purpose of organizing a church. E. H. Alley was one of Aberdeen's first businessmen, and Mrs. Pleasants, in the fall of 1881, had presided over Aberdeen's "first day of school." These five people resolved, "That it is thought expedient to organize a Baptist Church in Aberdeen, to be called the First Baptist Church of Aberdeen. That on the 28th day of May at 3 P.M. a meeting be held to perfect the organization. That those who present letters, or experience, together with those present shall constitute the constituent members of the organization."

The Rev. Edward Ellis, Baptist General Missionary for Dakota, was present at the meeting, and he held the first Baptist service in the law office of Charles Reed.

Numbered among the charter members of the church were Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Pleasants, Mrs. J. B. Moore, Mr. and Mrs. M. P. Beebe, and Dr. and Mrs. O. M. Huestis. On October 18, 1883, the ladies of the church met with Mrs. Beebe and organized the Ladies' Benevolent Society. Officers elected were: Mrs. E. M. Bliss, President; Mrs. M. P. Beebe, Vice President; Mrs. E. L. Spence, Secretary; and Mrs. Hicks, Treasurer.



Articles of Incorporation of the First Baptist Church of Aberdeen were adopted at a special meeting held on May 28, 1884, at 8 o'clock P.M. The site of the downtown church was acquired by deed dated June 13, 1885, at a cost of $400 and during the pastorate of Rev. D. H. Bliss the first church, a white frame structure, was erected at a cost of $3,600. Dedication services were held in the new church building on January 3, 1886.

An interesting incident came to light concerning means employed to complete payment on the church. Letters were sent to churches, especially stronger ones in the east, asking for help to the amount of $2.50 each. It happened that when such a letter was read by the pastor in the church at Highland, Michigan, that H. C. Andrus, then living southwest of Aberdeen, was in the meeting. It was his old home church. He was asked to give a report of the situation

in Aberdeen, which he did, and they voted to grant the request. When he returned to Aberdeen, he carried the money to the church.

Early records of the Ladies' Benevolent Society indicate that they met to do sewing of dresses, aprons, sheets, and various articles for others and were able to apply $50 toward payment for the lots for the church building.

The membership of the church in 1902 was given as 129, current expenses $1,209.56, and benevolences $227.66, with a Sunday School membership of 111.

In November 1908 a very successful revival was held, and a large number were added to the church. On Monday night, November 30, 1908, while water was heating for the baptismal service, the church caught fire from the overheated stove and soon burned to the ground. The next evening, December 1st, a special meeting was called, and it was decided to rebuild at once. Several large subscriptions were made at the meeting, and it was decided to build a church at a cost of about $12,000. In May 1909 the rebuilding was commenced; in October the cornerstone laid, and the dedication service held on June 18, 1910. At that service $9,200 was pledged to pay for the new church. During the eighteen months the building was under construction, services were held in the public library.





On Easter Sunday, April 17, 1935, Rev. Arthur Thomson filled the pulpit for the first time. Under his leadership the church was strengthened. A unified plan of service was adopted and attendance increased. Radio equipment was installed and the church services broadcast over station KABR. Church finances improved, old debts cleared up, interest on the church mortgage paid on time, repairs made on the church roof and furnace, and a spirit of optimism prevailed. His ministry was closed in July 1940.

October 1, 1940, Rev. Jonathan Nielsen of Hope Valley, R. I., became the pastor. The church moved forward under his leadership and during a serious illness of the pastor in January and February of 1942, it was learned the esteem in which he was held over the city. As World War II continued, many people moved to the east and to the west seeking defense work, as well as losses to the armed services. This resulted in a difficult time for the work of the church. On January 25, 1943, Pastor Nielsen left for the Chaplain's School at Harvard.

A number of improvements were made in the church--the old cement floor in the lower auditorium removed, new concrete laid and covered with asphalt tile; the baptistry relocated and choir loft enlarged, and a new organ purchased.

Upon the death of Mrs. Henrietta Herrett, in May of 1938, the former parsonage had been bequeathed to the church. It has remained a rental property until 1951 when it was remodeled and again used as a parsonage. The church apartments were converted to Sunday School use, and a parlor made available for various meetings.



A call was extended to Rev. Harold E. Salem of Belle Fourche to become pastor, and he took up his work on January 15, 1958. Two of our young men, Jack Harris and Val Sauer, have been ordained to the ministry. Property was purchased on Melgaard Road, with the expectation of building a new church in that location. However, after considerable deliberation, it was decided to remain in the present location and the property resold. Purchase of a residence east of the parsonage provided space for an educational building, which was built at a cost of $180,000, and dedicated on August 29, 1965. During the summer of 1959 two morning worship services were initiated beginning on Palm Sunday and continuing through December each year.

In 1960, we began a Service of Carols and Candles on Christmas Eve.

On September 6, 1970, our church took another step forward by going from one half to one full hour live on Radio Station KSDN.

May 7, 1972, we held a 90th anniversary celebration and accepted a theme of "All New by 82."



It was our original plan to build a new sanctuary adjoining the present education unit on the site of our downtown church. After many meetings and discussions, it was voted March 1974, to move from our downtown location. The main reason was the heavy traffic, no parking on Sixth Avenue, and one way traffic on Lincoln Street. Property of ten acres on the corner of Melgaard Road and Lawson Street was purchased for $15,000.

In September 1975, we voted to have a Capital Funds Campaign for a new church. We set a goal of $200,000. The campaign was a tremendous success with $206,000 pledged.

Architects were hired and plans drawn; on March 30, 1976, our church voted to go ahead and build, to accept the plans, and to authorize the Finance Committee to negotiate a $450,000 loan.

1976 was our Bicentennial year in American History, and on June 27 our church held a Bicentennial Service at Richmond Lake. Fourteen were baptized.

October 28, 1976, was an important date when our church voted 81-6 to finalize our loan and take bids from general contractors to build the new sanctuary. This was done in spite of a severe drought in the area. As Pastor Salem said, "It was one of First Baptist's greatest hours, and stands right alongside the decision of our pioneer Baptists to rebuild the day after the church burned to the ground on November 30, 1908."

The groundbreaking service for our new church was held on April 17, 1977.









Another step of faith was taken in August, 1977. A special offering of $27,129 was taken so that we could have a new organ in our new church. In 1977 after we had voted to build our new church, the idea of solar heating was brought up. We applied for and received a grant from the federal government that paid the entire cost of approximately $75,000. Plans were changed and solar heat was installed. This has resulted in a substantial saving in fuel costs.

June 4, 1978, was a bittersweet day as we held our final service in our beloved downtown First Baptist Church. The following Sunday, June 11, 1978, was a thrilling Lord's Day when we held our first service in our new church. The formal dedication service was held on Sunday, June 18, 1978.





A second crusade with Billy Graham Associate evangelist, Howard Jones, was held in November 1978. It was a great crusade with lost souls saved and many rededicated and renewed.

A very big step was taken on January 28, 1979, when we began telecasting live our morning worship service of one hour over KABY-TV. Response from the listening audience has been very favorable, and it has given our church a great opportunity to witness for our Lord to Aberdeen and surrounding area.



In 1982, First Baptist Church celebrated 100 years of service. In the same year, the First Baptist Christian School opened its doors at the old church's educational building on 6th Avenue. Pre-k through 2nd (22 students), every year it grew 1 grade until 6th grade. In 1988, the educational wing and gymnasium were added onto the new church's building and 76 students studied here. In the mid 1990s, the 7th and 8th grades were added to the school. In 2006, the First Baptist Christian School united with Aberdeen Christian High School, and, due to its continued growth, moved into their own facility in 2013. Altogether, from conception as First Baptist Christian School to becoming Aberdeen Christian School in 2006, 597 students from 18 different churches came through our doors to receive a Christ-centered education.

In 2002, our youth building was built to house our growing and vibrant youth group. Our youth group continues to focus on helping students find their identity and purpose in Christ and His mission.

In 2010, after 52 1/2 years, Harold E. Salem retired as our lead pastor. He continued ministering, until his death in 2020, through television and radio by means of the non-profit that began in our church—The Christian Worship Hour. This ministry continues today through reruns of old Pastor Salem sermons on 82 TV stations domestically with an additional 5 networks nationwide. The ministry's reach today, worldwide, gives them access to 7.3 billion people on television and 3.8 billion people on short wave radio, which equates to 48% of the world's population.

Throughout our nearly 150 year history (150 years in 2032), God's hands have been upon us, His eyes have watched over us, His Spirit has guided us, and His Word has sustained us. We continue to labor and strive in fulfilling The Great Commission, by "Helping People Find and Follow Jesus," and we would be honored if you'd join us as co-laborers in achieving this mission for God's Kingdom.

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.” Psalm 115:1

(Images Colorized by A.I.)