

Enthusiasm

Members had difficulty deciding on their next pastor. The field narrowed to two men, one a stranger and the other a friend of some of the congregation. Richard Gerald Moore, who preached his trial sermon on January 31, 1937, won the vote by a two-thirds majority, a vote which was immediately made unanimous. Mr. Moore assumed the pastorate on April 18, but came to Richmond earlier that week at the invitation of Dr. Theodore F. Adams, Minister of First Baptist, to be introduced to delegates at the meeting of the Dover Baptist Association.

Though small in stature, Gerald Moore was large in spirit and voice. His preaching was called strong and his Sunday evening services were evangelistic in nature. His former associates in West Norfolk and Portsmouth recommended Mr. and Mrs. Moore highly as "real servants of God, with a passion for the lost and the work of the Lord, who do not spare themselves whenever opportunity affords." They were said to be proven friends in sorrow and joy as well as great assets to the community.

In his initial year at Oakwood a male chorus started under the direction of R. A. Buchanan; the junior choir wore church owned robes for the first time; Bible study was vigorously promoted for all ages; and Wednesday evening question and answer sessions caused attendance at prayer meetings to grow to as many as 75. A second volume of church minutes covering the years 1926 through 1935 was bound by William M. Harmon and presented as a gift to the church at the September business meeting. Mr. Harmon previously bound the minutes of the first ten years of the church's existence as well as those of the same period of the Deacon Board.

The mimeographed church bulletins expanded to include artistic drawings and "Preach-O-Graphs" which offered brief words of wisdom and counsel to the congregation. "You cannot work with God and run with the devil," Mr. Moore wrote. "Let your daily speech be a chain of flowing links."

On May 23, 1937 he included a character story or sermonette in the church bulletin:

"There was once a blind man found sitting at the corner of a street in a great city. He had a lantern beside him. Someone asked why he had the lantern since all light was the same to him as the darkness. The blind man replied, 'I have it so that no one may stumble over me.'"

Mr. Moore then sermonized: "Dear friends, let us think on that. Where one man reads the Bible, a hundred read you and me. That is what Paul meant when he

said were to be living epistles of Christ, known and read by all men. I would not give much for all that could be done by sermons if we do not preach Him by our lives. If we do not commend the Gospel to people by our holy walk and conversation, we shall not win them to Christ.”

Oakwood grew rapidly in interest among its members and in soul winning. At the same time its financial situation improved slowly and stabilized. In 1938 the pastor’s salary increased to \$2,200 per year, and Mr. Moore purchased a small brick house in the neighborhood. In April a committee conferred with all church organizations before recommending that Wednesday evenings be set aside as Church Night for all meetings. Improvement of lighting in the auditorium was studied, and the Board of Deacons was given authority to grant letters of dismissal during interim periods and report their actions at the quarterly business sessions.

The annual report of 1938 showed that Gerald Moore preached one hundred and seven sermons and conducted forty-four prayer meetings at Oakwood. In addition he attended ten meetings of the Deacon Board, ten Finance Committee meetings, and nine Sunday Schools Workers’ Council meetings. He made one thousand and twenty-three visits in homes, two hundred and thirty-six visits to hospitals, and conducted eleven funerals and nine marriages. He counseled ninety-one unsaved persons and baptized twenty-two individuals. Mr. Moore led revivals in two other churches in addition to holding one in his own and wrote forty-nine church bulletins. He also represented Oakwood at the Southern Baptist Convention, the Potomac Baptist Association, a BYPU training school, and a Sunday school institute.

But the pace was too great and on April 5, 1939, he was forced to resign because of poor health. In his letter of resignation Mr. Moore wrote, “My work with the Oakwood people has indeed been a pleasant and happy one. Your kindness, your sympathy, and your cooperation shall long linger in my heart.”

After leaving Oakwood, Richard Gerald Moore transferred his membership to Stockton Street Baptist Church in Richmond’s south side and later moved to Texas where he became a student at Southwestern Theological Seminary.