

Changing Times

While the pulpit supply committee searched for a minister, the church extended its modified unified budget plan indefinitely and set a policy that money contributed to the building fund should be used to take care of future expansion of facilities rather than for maintenance and upkeep of property. It repaired and redecorated the parsonage and adopted a total budget of \$18,736 for the year.

William Emory Trainham came as minister in March 1952. The young cleric wore a robe in the pulpit and started the use of a silk hanging on the lectern which was changed in color with religious seasons. His formal services marked a departure from the custom of Oakwood and the informality of a Baptist church.

The BTU was reorganized in April and a fellowship hour was instituted. A Planning Committee was charged with determining the advisability of making arrangements for future expansion of church facilities and with setting goals for building fund efforts. The committee immediately proposed that the nursery be carpeted and air conditioned; that electrical service and fixtures in the church be modernized; and that the chancel and sanctuary be redecorated.

As the work progressed, winds of social change stirred. Some church families moved from the area and several of them clustered in the vicinity of Brittles Lane although they did not leave Oakwood Church. Others moved to different areas of the city and county.

A time of flux and uncertainty approached. The church became concerned about its future and its need to grow in order to survive. The members along Brittles Lane reported that a fast growing residential section was evolving in the Eastover, Gilbert, and Lewis Garden areas near them and that no Baptist facilities were available. On November 16, 1952, at the urging of the pastor Oakwood voted to provide additional facilities at its existing location, to organize and staff a chapel extension ministry in the Eastover area, and to secure a student as a part time pastor's assistant.

Organizational services for an extension chapel were announced in the church bulletin and in the new area. On Sunday, January 25, 1953, people gathered at 4 p.m. at Montrose Elementary School at the intersection of Williamsburg Road and Brittles Lane. Seventeen persons indicated their desire to join the new chapel. One week later on February 1 at 3 p.m. a Sunday School was born. Gordon Bruce Nelson, a student at the Union Theological Seminary who became the pastor's assistant in November, conducted this first service while Mr. Trainham preached.

Sunday school teachers and other officers shared their time with the extension, but when W. Coley Costin came as Associate Minister on February 22, the chapel changed its hours of Sunday services to coincide with those of the main

church and passed its first test. No longer could officials from the main body lead activities at both locations and most of them chose to remain at the church. The chapel folks, therefore, had to assume responsibilities of leadership quickly.

Nothing seemed to daunt their spirit, and chapel members were soon performing tasks they never imagined they could do. Two of the ladies, who had simply been attending services at the main church, volunteered to sing an offertory. Mrs. J. O Allen and Mrs. Annie Collins (Mrs. Emmett Jenkins) selected the familiar "Jesus, I Come" for their acapella duet. Their courage stimulated others and in a few weeks the Extension Chapel choir grew to ten members with pianist.

People remaining at the Chimborazo location became accustomed to seeing Pastor Trainham dashing in and out of the back door on Sunday mornings as he tried to service the chapel and handle the main church at the same time. The minister and associate minister soon scheduled a pulpit exchange on the fourth Sunday of each month. By May chapel attendance had grown to forty-one and some members said that "being in the chapel membership is a pleasure because everyone shows his love for each otherIt seems you can feel the Holy Spirit there maybe it is because we are so small a group of people."

As in the early days, homes of chapel constituents became the sites of a variety of weekday activities such as prayer services, committee meetings, and choir rehearsals. Although facilities at the main church were available, it was more convenient to meet in the neighborhood.

The associate pastor's wife assisted the ladies of the chapel in the spring to organize a Woman's Missionary Society unit, the Mae Davis Circle. Mrs. Costin was known to old Oakwoodians as Frances Roach, daughter of the pharmacist who started the community drug store a half block up the Avenue from the church building. The Circle, named for a Baptist missionary to Mexico, was first headed by Mrs. E. L. Peaco.

But the main church soon faced a new dilemma. While the extension ministry slowly grew, the faces of Church Hill, particularly in areas adjacent to the main church, began to change racially. Fear, anxiety, and a sense of unrest developed among old residents. Yet business men and some home owners believed that the church was the bulwark against too much change. Decisions were necessary and the congregation became entangled in the possibilities: on one hand the extension folks were anxious to have a building and debated if they should even remain a part of Oakwood; some members felt that an addition to the main church should be constructed to provide modern, functional space; others felt that the two ministries should be consolidated at some neutral location; and still another group felt that nothing should be altered.

Investigations and conversations were long. Speculation on the dollar value of the property ran the gamut. A large plot of land was found near Williamsburg

Road; perhaps this could be purchased and the excess land subsequently sold. Dark clouds of uncertainty overshadowed the community, the church, and the people. Mr. Trainham often found himself in the middle of the controversy. He understood the deep-rooted interest and nostalgia in the preservation of the old; he understood the needs of the extension group; he suggested a compromise and the church as a whole voted for "The Program of Advance".

A fund raising organization was hired to guide the members in their campaign to raise \$75,000 while a Richmond architect depicted the main church with an annex on the south lot and a spire topping the original building. The proposed budget included \$40,000 for this construction plus \$13,000 for land and a building for the chapel. It was estimated that \$14,000 would be needed for furnishings and \$8,000 for debt service.

Interested church and chapel members were invited to a kick-off dinner for the campaign and received an explanatory booklet with pictures and a plea from the minister for action, commitment, and sacrifice. But the campaign was not as successful as had been hoped. Pledges amounted to only \$39,906.50 and under the arrangement would not be received in full until the end of a three year period. When the fund raising organization left, a special committee of members was named to continue

Activities went on at both church and chapel during the waiting period. The Vacation Bible School brought out a record 388 registrants. During the first week it was conducted at the main church with Mrs. J. Fleming Robinson as principal. The following week the staff moved to Montrose School with Mrs. E. L. Peaco as principal. The two ladies alternated as assistant principal.

Associate Minister Costin left on September 6 as was arranged at the outset of his association with the chapel in order to enter a seminary. Francis D. Coker, Jr., replaced him on October 4.

On January 26, 1954, for the first time in history a break-in occurred at Oakwood Church. Three doors were pried open after entry was gained through a window. The thieves took the pastor's safe containing his sermon file and his valued stamp collection. The church immediately doubled its burglary insurance as apprehension grew in the changing community.

Three days later the congregation voted to purchase land on Gay Avenue. An option was included which gave the congregation six months to find a way to build on the lot. If it were not successful by that time, the property would revert to the owner, W. R. Knowles. One month later, after further negotiation, the option was removed and the church voted to purchase the lot for \$5,000 as a building site for the chapel.

Joy and sadness marked April 4 for many members. During morning services the church announced that it had purchased the 3.46 acres of land fronting 371.35 feet on Gay Avenue at the corner of Hillbrook. At the close of the service Mr. Trainham read his resignation as pastor. He had accepted a position as assistant minister at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mr. Coker, who served the Fulton Chapel of Barton Heights Baptist Church before coming to Oakwood, was soon named Interim Pastor, a position he held until mid-October.