

## Return to Normalcy

Carl Alvin Collins, Jr., accepted Oakwood's call a few days later and assumed the pastorate on December 1, 1945. Former servicemen took their places of leadership with enthusiasm under his forceful guidance.

With the end of World War II American teen-agers claimed the limelight. Young people were fairly hanging from the windows when the congregation voted in the summer of 1946 to purchase a building directly across the street for additional classrooms and a neighborhood recreation center.

Friendship Corner, named in a contest among the teens, was one of the first of its kind in Richmond and was unique in that much of the labor and equipment was donated by Oakwood members. The house at 927 Chimborazo Boulevard with its store front and side entrance to the bedroom and second floor areas was formerly the neighborhood dry goods, notions, and penny candy store. The wife of the owner, Bernard R. Marlowe, was a member of Oakwood Church. He was a member of the nearby Methodist church, but attended Oakwood with some regularity. The neighborhood frequently congregated at the store, and the children were especially pleased one summer when they could pay a penny, discover a pink center in that special candy, and win a "jeweled" ring. One strict Baptist mother in the church felt that this was a wicked form of gambling; but her children enthusiastically enjoyed squandering her pennies secretly in this "den of iniquity." Many an Oakwood adult as well as youngster developed a taste for those delicious peanut block and peppermint patty sandwiches in Marlowe's store.

The church spent nearly one thousand dollars in removing the partition between the store and the former living room, repairing the building structurally, and modernizing heating facilities. The dining room with the addition of a counter became a snack area. Ping pong tables, checkers, dominoes, Flinch, and Rook were purchased. Virginia Nicholas (Mrs. Thomas C. Sanders) and Gertrude Flippen directed teen-age activities on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays from 7:30 to 10:00 p.m. On the other week nights the two young ladies directed the city's teen-age program at East End Junior High School. Miss Flippen also served as Chairman of the Church Recreation Committee, coordinating social events for all organizations. She represented Oakwood on Richmond's first Federation of Religious Education Leaders, an interdenominational group.

The bedroom on the south side of the ground floor became the first formal nursery facility of Oakwood Church. Even this was unique because planned activities were featured for the tiny children. Workers rotated so that all might have an opportunity to attend services across the street at least part-time. The second floor of the building, vacated six months later by the tenants, was

converted into a parsonage for Pastor Collins and his family and as temporary living quarters for the succeeding pastor.

But the church building in 1946 was not ignored. With installation of a new oil burner, space behind the old furnace became a room for the pastor's recently organized young men's class. Members of several Sunday school departments painted the traditionally white pebbly plaster walls of their areas with soft colors. The back wall of the chancel was enhanced by a member's gift of a decorative wooden panel designed and constructed by Custodian of Building and Grounds, J. E. Christian.

Hervey L. Blanton, Jr., received permission to use the church basement as headquarters for a Boy Scout troop, and the church pledged \$400 annually for the next three years to the endowment fund of the Richmond College Library. The following year authorization came for a Junior Board of Deacons, and R. A. Puckett was elected honorary life deacon when his health caused him to retire from activity. Similar commendations were previously bestowed on several men during the Twenties.

Pastor Collins was recalled to two weeks active duty in 1947 with the Reserve and upon his return reported that the Army wished him to devote some time each week in connection with the return of the war dead. He was subsequently elected second vice president of the Baptist General Association, a distinction of which the church was proud.

During this period, music in the church flourished and the choir's reputation spread throughout the neighborhood. One concert featured Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus", a difficult selection for the volunteer group of non-professional voices. A former neighborhood resident, Edwin Childress, recorded the concert in the days before home recordings were usual.

The year 1948 began with a typical message from the Pastor, Mr. Collins:

"The new year is a time of new beginnings and fresh resolve for many people. As Sir Bulwer-Lytton says: 'What is past is past. There is future left to all men who have the virtue to repent and the energy to atone.'

Something more than good resolution is needed in order to handle successfully a new year. Inner changes must accompany spoken resolutions. Changes in conduct can only be effected by changes in character - - old patterns of thought and action must give way to new.

One of the greatest assurances of The Bible is that no man need stay the way he is. The miracle of conversion is at the heart of religion."

With keen regret the congregation accepted the resignation of Mr. Collins on March 15, 1948. He returned to graduate work at Southwestern Theological Seminary.

In this interim period Letcher Reid supplied the pulpit. He was a young man, a student at the University of Richmond, who was well liked for his to-the-point messages. He declined a call to become pastor and later to become Oakwood's first assistant pastor because he wished to concentrate on his studies.