

The History of the Church of Christ in Franklin, KY

Early History

In the 1831 issue of the Millennial Harbinger, a letter from Alexander Campbell states that he had spent the night at "McCreery's Inn, Simpson County, Kentucky, and two miles from the Tennessee line, on December 5, 1830." He does not indicate that he preached in Franklin, but it is possible that he did preach somewhere in the area.

A report filed by George W. Elley in Bowling Green, Kentucky, dated October 6, 1841, and published in the Millennial Harbinger in January, 1842, tells about he and J. T. Johnson preaching in Franklin and getting three to obey the gospel and when they left "many were solicitous for another visit". A later report also by George W. Elley dated August 8, 1842, and published in the October, 1842 issue of the Millennial Harbinger relates that since his last report in October, 1841, a church consisting of 57 members had been formed in Franklin.

Early records tell us that the Franklin Christians and the Baptists shared a meeting place which was a two story frame building located at the north corner of South College Street and West Madison Street. Before this time, which was about 1860, the Franklin congregation probably met in a small union church, which was located on the square. The deed to the property on College and Madison was from "S. C. Moore and wife to R. D. Salmons, D. Hail, E. D. Solomon, and John Hail as trustees for the use and benefit of the Baptist and Christian Churches in said town". A deed, dated September 7, 1864, transfers the one-half interest of the church building from Durham Hail to John Hail and R. C. Blakey, trustees of the Baptist Church. It seems that Durham Hail had acquired title to the Baptist's half of the building sometime after an 1862 court action ruled that some sort of debt had to be paid to A. Travelstead & Co., Travelstead & Allen, and A. J. Biggs for their interest in the church building. Durham Hail evidently satisfied the debt, and in 1864 he deeded the one-half interest back to the Baptists.

The two-story church building on College and Madison was used as a school as well as a church meeting place. It has been reported that the lower floor was used for a schoolroom and the upper floor used for church meetings with the Baptists and Christians alternating times for their services. The windows of the building were papered with printed-paper and sealed with coats of varnish. It was heated by coal stoves and lighted by oil lamps. Benches were of the Windsor style. In 1884 a bell was added. A caretaker for the building was first mentioned in 1879 with F. P. Johns being paid \$43.85 for the year of 1878. Others who were named as caretakers were John Gregory, R. C. Blakey, a Sister Gregory, John Slack, and a Brother Stinson.

M. B. Ford and G. W. Hoy were appointed trustees for the Christian church in September 1887. The early church was called the Christian Church. History of the church states that until the beginning of twentieth century no distinction was made between the Christian Church and the Church of Christ with the names being used interchangeably. However, changes in the worship and work of the two churches, especially the addition of instrumental music and use of missionary societies in the Christian Church, have brought about a distinction between the Church of Christ and the Christian Church

With the appointment of trustees for the Christian Church, the Baptist Church (called the Baptist Church of Christ in the deed) bought the church building on Madison and College from the Christian Church for a sum of \$1500.

In a deed dated October 22, 1887, the trustees for the Christian Church purchased from S. D. Neely and wife, Lovedie Neely, a parcel of land on South Main Street for a sum of \$500. The Neelys had previously bought this lot, with a church building on it, on June 3, 1885, from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The deed states that the Neelys received with this purchase all the fixtures except the pulpit furniture, chairs, tables, desks, and a bell, which was reserved. The Neelys paid \$750. for the lot and the building.

If the Christians purchased the property in 1887 and began occupying the building in 1887 as some have stated, it seems very unlikely that a new building was constructed on the lot. It is possible that a remodeling of the old Presbyterian Church was actually what happened. A map of Franklin, drawn in 1871 by E. L. Crale, shows the church building on South Main Street with a steeple. The building when occupied by the Christians did not have a steeple. It may have been that a foyer was constructed and some modification was made to the front of the building. Early records have indicated that a Mr. Blankenship was employed as a carpenter by the church. It is also possible that the church building was destroyed by fire or torn down before the Christians purchased it. In a letter dated April 24, 1972, Mrs. Lucy Wilson Gorin states that she thinks it was 1889 or 1890 before the Christians began worshipping at the Main Street location. If this is true, then a new building was probably constructed on the lot purchased from the Presbyterians. There are no records to validate this. The deed of 1887 does not indicate that there was a building on the lot.

A division of the membership of the Main Street Church occurred around 1937 when some members began worshipping at another location in Franklin. According to a letter from Kurfees Pullias, who was the minister at the Franklin church from the early summer of 1938 until January, 1940, to Paul Hodges and dated June, 1979, the division was caused by some who advocated the pre-millennial theory and some who believed in the use of instrumental music in the worship service. Mr. Pullias indicated in the letter that when the members who had withdrawn became aware that he "stood firmly for New Testament teaching"; some who had withdrawn came to him and asked for a meeting with all members so that the matters could be discussed. A series of discussions took place over the

next several weeks. During this time it came to the attention of the members that the deed to the church property was made to the Christian Church and all the trustees, when the deed was made, were no longer living.

At the same time there were rumors that a pre-millennial group was planning to take over the church. The elders instructed Mr. Pullias to consult with some attorneys in Nashville and take steps to rectify the situation. The attorneys recommended that a new deed be drawn up. Mr. Pullias stated that the membership voted on and approved the new deed, and it was recorded. The group who had withdrawn then returned to the church.

A search of deed books and court records of Simpson County has failed to find the new deed that Mr. Pullias says was recorded. Evidently the person responsible for getting the deed recorded had never completed this task.

The name on the deed to the property on South Main Street continued to distress the church. In a business meeting held on September 10, 1946, an immediate goal was approved to investigate the legal procedure for changing the name on the deed from Christian Church to Church of Christ.

In a later business meeting dated September 23, 1946, item four regarding changing the deed discussion stated, "Much discussion resulted from a report of a conference with Bethel Crow in which he reported that it would be as easy to sell the present property as to change the deed and that the same procedure would of necessity be followed in each transaction. Mr. Crow had stated that unless the doctrine, worship, etc., had changed since the church began here, there was no danger that another organization might come into possession of the property."

At this same meeting a motion was made, seconded, and approved that a petition be prepared and presented to the members of the congregation for signature in which the church would sell the present property and erect a building on the Cedar Street lot.

On January 28, 1948, in another business meeting, it was decided to give up the proffered lot and build classrooms onto the present building rather than constructing a new building. Item 4 on the agenda states, "Chairman Elliott instructed Herman W. Taylor to write a letter to Bro. Clyde Shacklett of Nashville stating that it was the good judgment of the church here that we give up the proffered lot for the time being. It was the opinion of the brethren present that the church should build classrooms to the present building instead of attempting at this time to build a new building. It was felt that the congregation was unable to meet its obligations unless contributions greatly increases." Records indicate that classrooms were built at the back of building following this decision.

Membership in the Franklin congregation continued to increase. A membership list compiled in 1955 lists approximately 302 persons as members. In 1956 two Sunday morning Bible classes were being held in the Goodnight Memorial Library because of lack of space in the church building.

With the growth of the membership the elders, Herman Taylor, David Ferguson, and Chester Bennett, began to make plans for a building program. In preparing for the purchase of land on which to construct a new building, it was necessary according to law that trustees for the church property on Main Street be elected. It was at this time that there was a dispute by a few (two of whom were vocal) as to the legality of electing trustees when, according to the few, the property belonged to the Christian Church instead of the Church of Christ.

The elders contacted J. David Francis, a Bowling Green attorney, who advised them to get testimony from charter members stating the beliefs of the church were those held by the Church of Christ, not the Christian Church.

In a brief history of the Church in Franklin, compiled by Herman W. Taylor in July, 1956 and containing data collected by David Ferguson, Chester Bennett, and Herman Taylor, Blake Gaines and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Anglea, who had been members of the Franklin church for 40 years, stated that there had been no change in the worship and that the beliefs of the church were the same as they had always been with the exception of the name.

A notarized statement by Mrs. C. R. Bethel, dated September 1, 1956, states that when the church began meeting at Main Street location, it was then known as the Christian Church as were all the congregations in the area at that time. She affirms that the name of the congregation meeting at Main Street had been changed to the Church of Christ due to the fact that the church known as the Christian Church had added instrumental music and had begun working through missionary societies and other church organizations. She affirms further that the congregation meeting at Main Street has never embraced these changes, had never had instrumental music and that the worship and organization had remained as it was from the beginning when the members first occupied the building in 1887.

Mr. Francis, the Bowling Green attorney, advised the elders of the church of the procedure necessary to elect trustees. The notice of the meeting time was published in the local newspaper, in the church bulletin, and announced from the pulpit several times. The meeting was held on January 21, 1957, with the purpose being stated to elect trustees of the church property on Main Street since the old trustees were no longer living. Mr. Francis attended the meeting at the request of the elders. Two members were very unhappy at the meeting and accused other members of stirring up trouble and usurping power of the Christian Church. After discussion, nominations were made and trustees were elected by secret ballot. Thirty-six votes were cast with two members abstaining. Those elected by unanimous vote were John Montgomery, Marvin Caudill, and George Sherrard.

Later history

In August, 1957, the membership of the church, by a vote of 150 to 3, approved the plan for the elders and trustees to purchase from Harris Pepper and wife Evelyn 4.5 acres of land, 200 ft. wide and approximately 850 ft. deep, located on South Main Street near the city limits.

Plans were then made to construct a new facility on this property. A loan of approximately \$80,000 was secured from Franklin Bank and Trust with 66 members of the congregation signing a note to guarantee the payment of \$50,000. These individuals were released from the note in 1962 when at a special meeting of church members, the trustees were given authority to issue a mortgage to Franklin Bank and Trust on the church building and lot for the amount of the indebtedness of \$58,500. This mortgage was paid off on June 18, 1969.

The contractor for construction of the new church building was Paden Construction Company of Texas with the final cost of the building, furniture, pavement, etc., being \$109,971. The new building contained 23 classrooms, a nursery, dressing rooms, a workroom, and an auditorium with a seating capacity of 550. Members of the building committee were Roy Gautier, chairman, Chester Bennett, Hoy Arney, Minister Ed Neely Cullum, James Edwards, David Ferguson, John Montgomery, George Sherrard, Earl Simmons, Palo Stanford, and Herman W. Taylor. Bennett, Ferguson and Taylor were elders of the church at this time.

The first service was held in the new building on September 27, 1959. Sunday School classes were held at 9:50 followed at eleven o'clock by worship services in the auditorium. Ed Neely Cullum preached the first sermon in the new building. At three o'clock that afternoon a dedication service was held. Jim Bill McInter, a native Simpson Countian, who was then minister of the West End Church of Christ in Nashville, TN, made the dedicatory address. Chester Bennett led the singing, Herman Taylor had the opening prayer, and Ed Neely Cullum made the announcements, and David Ferguson led the closing prayer at this service. Following the service and open house was held and everyone was invited to tour the building. A register of attendance was kept and it indicated that 683 people visited the new facility that afternoon.

The new baptistery was used on Wednesday night, October 6, 1959, when Bro. Ed Neely Cullum baptized Mrs. William Anderson. Mrs. Anderson had the honor of being the first person to be baptized in the new building.

The first gospel meeting was held at the building in October 1959. Jim David Groves of Daytona Beach, FL, who grew up in Simpson County, conducted the services. There were ten baptisms and six restored during this time.

On April 17, 1961, the church purchased 2.7 acres, located on the north side of the church property, from George and Nina Hickman at a cost of \$3000. Construction of a home for the minister was begun on October 5, 1964 at the west end of this property. The trustees, acting on behalf of the Franklin Church of Christ, took out a promissory note for \$12,750. on February 4, 1965. The loan was secured by a mortgage on the Hickman property. The cost of the new house was approximately \$22,000. The note was paid in full on March 25, 1969. The house was first occupied in January, 1965 by the Morgan Medlin family, he being the minister of the church at that time.

Membership in the church continued to grow. Membership in 1988 was listed as approximately 500.

In 1967 the church again secured additional land when they purchased from Ben and Alma Groves 2.55 acres, which lay north of the Hickman property that had been purchased in 1961. The church paid \$7500 for this acreage.

On April 8, 1967, at a special meeting of the church the decision was made to build a new educational building for classrooms and a fellowship hall. Trustees of the church were authorized to borrow up to \$50,000 from Franklin Bank and Trust to build the building. A loan for \$48,000 was secured in April, 1968 and repaid on November 26, 1976. Trustees at this time were Marvin Caudill, Guy Phillips and J. T. Whitehead. The total cost of the building was \$46,353.42.

A dedication service for the educational annex was held on March 17, 1968 at 2:30 P.M. The speaker for the occasion was Robert Kerce, a former minister from Nashville, TN. Paul Hodges, who was the minister of the church at that time, was the song leader for the service.

In 1992, with money left to the church by Pauline Dawson, the church purchased the Hickman house, which was located north of the church property. Two houses for the elderly were also built west of the Hickman home in 1994 and occupied in 1995, as requested in Pauline Dawson's will. There have been four more homes built on the church property bringing the total number of homes to seven in 2009. The occupants of the homes are church members who meet certain requirements. The property is called Dawson Homes, in memory of Pauline Dawson.

The new millennium brought many changes to the church at Franklin. After continued growth in membership, the auditorium that was constructed in 1958-1959 became filled to capacity, especially during the Sunday morning worship services.

In 2000, the leadership of the church began to explore ways to address the need for additional space. After examining several ideas, the elders made the decision to build a new sanctuary in front of and adjoining the present auditorium.

February 2, 2000, was set as a special day to kick-off the fund raising for the new building, which was estimated to cost over one million dollars.

Prior to February 2nd, several events were planned to encourage the membership in their support of this new undertaking. A men's prayer session and a women's prayer session were held. The church building was open on a Saturday to allow members to come during the day and pray for success and to ask for God's blessing in this new undertaking. There were three to five families in attendance in the building for thirty-minute sessions throughout the day. A day of fasting was proclaimed for the Saturday before February 2nd.

A goal of \$220,000 had been set for the special drive on February 2nd. The goal was met and exceeded with a total of \$240,000 given that day. One of the elders, Ronnie Ferguson, attributed the success to God working through the church because the members put their faith and trust in Him and because of the numerous prayers to God on behalf of this special effort.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the new sanctuary on the church grounds on Sunday, May 6, 2001. Following the morning worship and a potluck meal attended by more than four hundred people, the ceremony was conducted at the site of the new building. Steve Baggett, minister of the congregation at that time, served as master of ceremonies. The elders made brief remarks and the building committee was recognized. Chester Bennett gave a brief history of the church. The church members then brought out their shovels and cameras and the ceremony was completed. One of the elders at that time, Luther Hammer said, "May 6, 2001, was a day set for a bold move by the Franklin Church of Christ".

Dedication services for the new building were held on Sunday, June 30, 2002, from 2:00-3:30 p.m. Many dignitaries, former ministers, former members, in addition to present members, attended the event. David Hamilton, minister of the congregation at that time, and the elders, Frank Cardwell, Ronnie Ferguson, Dean Herndon, Charles Harrison, and Jerry Herndon, conducted the dedication of the building. The dedication worship service followed. The program featured messages, songs, and prayers conducted by present ministers and former ministers of the church. A reception and open house followed.

Total cost of the new sanctuary was \$1,330,208. The elders have set aside special Sundays of the year at which time the congregation is asked to make special contributions to the building fund. As of September 2009, the debt is now below \$100,000. The new auditorium has a seating capacity of 750 to 850.

The former auditorium has been converted into a fellowship hall with a fully equipped and spacious kitchen, made possible by the generous will of a deceased member, Reba Gibson.

In 2017, many building improvements and renovations were done. One major part of the renovations including the addition SONshine Street. It is an interactive area for children to learn about God's word in a variety of ways. The WEARhouse was completed in 2018 as the new teen youth room.

Here at the Franklin Church of Christ, we exist in order to whole-heartedly love God with the entirety of our being, to sacrificially love our neighbor as ourselves, and to be a family of disciples united in faith, hope, and love, who are dedicated to glorifying God in all things.

As you read about the growth of the Franklin Church of Christ it is quite evident that the church has had great leaders who were staunch Christians with outstanding leadership ability as well as a membership that was dedicated, committed, and willing to sacrifice in order to provide facilities to accommodate a growing church and to continue to spread the gospel throughout the community.

Other items of interest in the history of the Franklin Church of Christ

In 1949 the church purchased a house on North Main Street for use by the minister. Howard Reece was the first minister to live there. This house was sold in 1961 when it was decided to build a minister's home on the South Main property.

In 1951 the church purchased a house and lot in Harristown to be used by the Christians living there. In 1962 the church, along with other congregations in the county, helped to construct a building for these Christians. It was completed in 1963.

Records indicate that in 1950 the church was supporting missionary fields in Elizabethtown, TN and at Potter Home in Bowling Green, KY. In 1956 six missionary fields were listed. This work has continued to grow as the church now supports many missions in our effort to carry out the Great Commission as commanded by our Lord.

When WFKN began operation in May 1954, the 8:00 - 8:15 time period was reserved by the church for preaching the gospel. This continued for many years.

The membership was divided into zones, now called groups, first in 1955. There were four zones bounded by highways 31-W and 100, and the leaders were women of the congregation. These women were encouraged to select a leader for each street or road so that communication would be quick and easy.

Camps for the young people have been important to the Christians in Franklin. As early as August 1956, a camp was held in Standing Stone State Park. Other sites used as camps by the Franklin church have been Montgomery Bell, Natchez Trace, and Chickasaw State Parks, all in Tennessee. In August 1979, the

Franklin congregation approved a land sales contract to purchase 147 acres on Booker Road in Holland, Allen County, KY to establish a camping facility. The camp was called Taylor Christian Camp. It was named after Herman W. Taylor, one of Franklin's former elders who were very instrumental in creating the interest and importance of camps to young people. The first camping season was held in 1986. The church camp is under the oversight of C.R.E.W. Inc., which is made up of board of directors from surrounding congregations. It is currently supported and used by many congregations in the area for church camps, weekend retreats, and various other activities.

Past & Present time ministers of the church:

Ministers who have served the Franklin Church of Christ are: Bro. Spiegel, 1887; M. L. Moore, 1906-1915; Willis Hope Allen, 1920s; J. M. Hottel, 1920s; H. L. Olmstead, 1928-1932; Kenneth Spaulding, 1936; Kurfees Pullias, 1938-1940; H. M. Adamson, 1942-1944; Herman Taylor, 1944-1948; John H. Gerrard, 1948-1949; Howard Reece, 1950-1951; Philip Allen, 1952-1954; R. H. Kerce, 1955-1957; Ed Neely Cullum, 1958 -1959; O. D. Morrow, 1960-1962; Morgan Medlin, 1962-1966; Paul Hodges, 1967-1981; Gerald Watt, 1976-1982; Tom Maust (Assistant/Youth), 1971-1974; Richard VanDyke (Youth/Education/Music), 1982-1994; Phillip Dunn, 1982-1984; Lexie B. Ray, 1984-1989; Steve Baggett, 1989-2001; Jim Pounders (Interim Pulpit), 2001, 2008-2009; Bill Russell (Youth), 1994-1996; Jonathan Matthews (Music), 1994-1995, John Hall (Music), 1995-1996, Dewight Lanham (Music), 1996-2002; Mark Hogan (Youth), 1997; Steven Kirby (Youth & Education), 1998-present; David Hamilton (Pulpit), 2002-2008; Steve McCarley (Music), 2002-2020, Mark K. Jamieson, Jr. (Pulpit), 2009-2015, Jim Brown (Pulpit) 2016-2020, Brian Staron (Youth & Family) 2017-2019, Eli Hurt (Youth & Family) 2019-present, and Steve McCarley (Pulpit) 2020-present.

Past & Present time eldership of the church:

Some of the elders who have served the church are: Dr. George H. Widener, Edward M. Tarpley, C.R. Bethel, R.E. Ryan, Dr. James T. Carmen, H. L. Olmstead, Albert Sweat, R.O. Elliott, Herman W. Taylor, Aubrey Vaughn, John Montgomery, Guy Phillips, David Ferguson, Chester Bennett, Earl Ware, Luther Hammer, Cordell Taylor, Roger Brewer, Dean Herndon, Jerry Herndon, Ronnie Ferguson, Bobby Bennett, Jerry Wims, Mike Cunningham, Charles Harrison, Bob White, Ralph Warren, Kelly Patterson, Jim Ferguson, and Kevin Hammer.

Currently the church is under the oversight of Frank Cardwell, Mike Harris, Jeff Shrull, and Scott Walker.