



50th Anniversary Celebration
Central Church of Christ
"Growing as a Family for 50 Years"

1600 E. 29th St, Bryan, Texas

Church History

Edited by Diane Bowen

This year, the Central Church of Christ in Bryan, Texas, is celebrating its 50th year in our building on East 29th and Luza Streets. But our congregation had its earliest beginnings long, long ago—in fact, it was even before time began, when God created the universe and made a plan for all humankind to live here on Earth and then go to live with him in heaven for eternity.

Fast-forward to New Testament times, when Jesus came to the world to show us how to live—humbly and as servants full of love for everyone, friends and enemies alike. Jesus's birth, ministry, teachings, and death comprised another big step in the history of the Central family, which is a branch of the church that He established 2,000 years ago and that He has nourished every day, in every country, and for all people, ever since.

Our congregation's modern-day history locally began on April 21, 1921, when 11 adults and five children met in the Carnegie Library on Main Street in Bryan, Texas.

Among them were May Burtis, Alice Burtis, Grace Dowling, Maurine Tucker, Joe T. McGee, P. C. Key, the A. C. Steel family, Mrs. R. L. Hunt, Mrs. Schulte, Mr. and Mrs. Horn, and five children. Mr. Martin and family came in August 1921. Mrs. Covey, Mr. Durst, and Nora

Harris came in 1922.

Some of them had left the First Christian Church; during Central's first 10 years of existence, the church was divided between those who favored having a preacher and/or Sunday School, and those who opposed it.

The pro-Sunday School group, known as the Bryan Church of Christ, met only a short time at the library before moving to the Brazos County Courthouse. Services were held in the courtroom, and the two jury boxes were used for the children's classrooms.

During the first seven years, the church had no designated professional preacher. Instead, members of the congregation, including Joe T. McGee, Mr. Covey, and Mr. Horn, spoke for the group.

In 1928, while the church was meeting in the courthouse, C. A. Buchanan became the congregation's first full-time minister. He left in 1929. Ministers after Mr. Buchanan included Gus Dunn (1929) and A. E. Walker. In 1930, Percy Key and A. D. Martin, a math professor at Texas A&M College, spoke at the meetings. Mr. Key later left and started the non-Sunday School group, which built a building on Dodge Street.

From 1921 to 1931, several fami-

lies moved in and became part of the church. Among them were the J. S. Blazek family, the George T. Davis family, the Gayles, the A. B. Hopper family, Bob Hopper, Sam Hopper, the H. L. Hunt family, Cris Kellit, A. D. Martin, the McCorkles, the Leroy Parson family, and the Spurgeon Varnado family.

Through the financial help of A.D. Martin and the help of members, the church bought property in the latter part of 1929 on the southwest corner of 29th and Washington Streets. There the members built the church's first meetinghouse.

The first service in that building was on the first Sunday in November 1933, with 30 members and a number of children attending. The preacher was George A. Klingman.

A&M Church of Christ begun

In 1921, Alice Burtis and A. D. Martin met with six or seven boys at Texas A&M College. They met with the students at 9 a.m., then went back to the library for the 10:45 meeting.

Until the 1930s, there was not a congregation of the Church of Christ meeting at A&M, but members of the Bryan Church of Christ held Bible classes at various places on campus. Among those leading the classes were Sam Hopper, C. W. Land, and Mr. Martin. The cadets met in Mr. Martin's math classroom

and later in the YMCA.

In 1931, Bessie Woodward of the Heights congregation in Houston became aware of the situation at the college and built this group of Christians a building to be used for the Aggies. Mrs. Woodward contributed \$35,000 for the group's first permanent structure, which was located at Northgate and opened October 27, 1935.

In 1974, the A&M congregation built a new facility on FM 2818 south of the campus. They moved again, to their present location on Earl Rudder Freeway, in 2004.

Bryan church expands, changes name to Central

In 1949, the Bryan Church of Christ bought property on which to build a new place of worship on Glenwood Street. However, after much thought, they decided to remodel the building on 29th and Washington instead and in 10 years build a modern facility on the Glenwood property to be called the Glenwood Church of Christ.

The building at 29th and Washington was remodeled in 1949. It included a nursery, a study, a large vestibule, increased seating capacity to 320, new oak pews, carpet, a new baptistry, new paint and lighting, and a two-story addition of six classrooms. The cost was \$17,000.

The building committee for the remodeling consisted of Roy Thomas, J. T. Chambers, Ernest Wilha, and Raymond Parsons, who drew the plans and supervised the construction.

The first services in the new facility were held November 8, 1949. The church's name was changed from Bryan Church of Christ to Central Church of Christ.

The speaker for the formal opening was H. P. Showalter, whose theme was "Take Heed How You Build."

Those chosen to tend to the spiritual matters of the church were J. T. Chambers, Joe Cole, L. W. Grady, Lloyd Halbrooks, G. G. McDonald, and Raymond Parsons. Membership was about 200.

In 1950, the auditorium was air-conditioned. Mr. Parsons rigged up a system in which 100-pound blocks of ice were set behind the baptistry each Sunday, and fans blew the cooled air into the auditorium.

Cavitt Church of Christ begun

In 1958, growth at Central had reached the point that the leadership felt the church must expand. They had changed their thinking from the idea of building a large new building. Instead, they decided to continue meeting at 29th and Washington and build mission

congregations around Bryan, with the first being between Bryan and College Station, then one north and one west.

With this plan of growth in mind, the leaders asked Raymond Parsons to come up with building plans. Plans, specifications, and a 1/2-inch scale model were produced, and they were accepted by the building committee and the congregation.

The new church was financed through a church bond program, in which church members and others bought bonds in amounts of \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500, and \$1,000. Bond sales totaled \$45,000, and within a year, the members paid off the debt.

In the congregation were several members connected with the construction industry: J. T. Chambers was an electrician; Joe Cale was a bricklayer; A. C. Hawks was a building contractor; and Raymond Parsons worked at a local lumber company. These and many other members of the congregation helped build the new building. A number of the members did work such as putting up insulation and sheetrock and cleaning the building and grounds.

Vera "Granny" Parsons bought a painting of the Jordan River to hang behind the baptistry. The painting cost \$150, a large sum at the time.

In September, 55 members of the Central congregation moved to Cavitt Street with the Central church's blessings. At the grand opening on September 7, 125 members and friends from throughout the Brazos Valley assembled for the first worship services. Virginia Parsons, now 91, remembers that the speaker, Gayle Oler, gave an excellent sermon.

Move to 29th and Luza

In 1964, the congregation moved to its present meeting site. James Norman was integral in its planning and construction. The new location was touted as featuring an auditorium that seated more than 500 people, Bible class facilities for all age groups, modern nurseries, and a paved off-street parking area lighted at night. The church held an open house on September 20, 1964.

In the ensuing years, the church has been involved in many forms of outreach and service to the community, to the state, and to our world. In times of joy and sadness, beginnings and endings, enslavement and freedom, we have tried to bring the love of Christ to family, friends, neighbors, and strangers.

We have celebrated beginnings—of life, of school years, of marriage, of our Christian walk—with hundreds of baby showers, weddings, and baptisms. We come together to give a special blessing for our

students and teachers in August to buoy them with God's power, persistence, and patience in the coming semesters.

Our weekly Ladies Bible Class has for many years conducted a card ministry in which they send get-well, birthday, and anniversary wishes to members who have been ill or were marking the end and beginning of another year of life or marriage. For several years in the late 1980s, a Barnabas ministry by Becky Dean, Ginger Engeldinger, Nancy Shankle, and others also "carded" members who were going through hard times of illness or happy times of special occasions. And our church's monthly birthday and anniversary suppers enable the whole congregation to celebrate each member's and each couple's special days together.

Comings and goings are a big part of our life in a college town. We rejoice when young people buck the tide of college studies, social activities, and the shock of new life on their own, to worship with us during this season of their lives. We rejoice when they graduate too, happy that they have accomplished their education goals. And we swell with pride for them as they prepare to start their new lives in parts unknown or, better yet, right here in B-CS.

Endings—of high school, of ca-

reers, of lives short or long—are also marked. We stand by our church family members as they graduate from high school, part from mates through death or divorce, retire from the outside working world, leave prisons of brick or of addictions, or leave us for the heavenly realms.

For example, for decades, ad hoc singing groups have formed to bear up those who've recently lost loved ones. An ever-changing group of six to ten sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses gather to sing hymns at funerals, using their voices to help mourners traverse this difficult passage. When the choir count got low, Melvin Bingham would pick up his and Eloise's kids Bill, Bob, and Pam along with Jack and Virginia Gilmore's girls Jan and Lynne Gilmore (now Berny and Koening) from school to sing. And of course, women such as Evelyn Greer (and later, men too) were always faithful to bring the best home-cooked food to serve families who had lost loved ones.

But our service has not been confined to people of our church family. In 1972, the congregation bought a bus, soon dubbed the Joy Bus, in June 1972. Led by "young" couples such as Ann and Charles Nichols, the youth group helped raise money for the bus, holding bake sales and car washes and even going door-to-door to sell items.

Gladys and Ken Ashlock, Barbara and Bill Lightfoot, and Lynn White walked the neighborhoods in North Bryan to invite families to let their children come with us to worship and Bible class. Central's Joy Bus brought in 20 to 40 children per week. Other members involved included the Bingham, the Denmans, the Munday, the Patterson, and the Zimmermann. Youth group members such as Loretta and Donna Kay Munday and the Gilmore girls also helped take care of the bus kids.

To help the children feel at home and have guidance during worship, many families "adopted" children to meet at the bus, get to class, pick up after class, and sit with during worship. For a while we had children's Bible hour after communion, just for the bus children. The fellowship building was built soon after to house the bus and house a kitchen and fellowship meeting room.

Later, for any children attending, Marsha and Steve Thomas led Children's Bible Hour, which convenes every Sunday after Communion to give the young ones lessons about God and Jesus in language that they can understand. Jeannie and Steve Carver ran it for many years with the help of Tim Payne. Since then, the Walker family—Claudia, Kevin, Joshua, and Rebekah—have sacrificed their own worship time

to help fill the spiritual needs of our smallest members ... and their parents.

Also for our children, Sandra Payne has shouldered the huge responsibility of heading up the Christian education program for our youngsters. What a servant heart she has! But she couldn't have done it without the sacrifice of hundreds of women, and some men, who've taught our Sunday school classes. For example, Carolyn Naumann taught the 2- and 3-year-olds for more than two decades, and countless Central tots benefited from her time and talents.

Leadership Training for Christ (LTC) included a wide variety of activities and competitions for our children from 3rd through 12th grade. Hundreds of participants from across the state honed their skills in song leading, created Bible-themed artwork, and spent countless hours studying a different book or set of books of the Bible. Susan Guthrie and John Pitt were among the many adults who helped teach and coach our children in Bible Bowl and other LTC endeavors.

Vacation Bible School has been another venue for teaching the little ones. For a time, we held a daylong VBS called Super Saturday; now it's back to a weekday morning event commandeered by Gary and Vickie Flennikin and carried out by

a host of handy and hardy Central members and leaders.

Other youth work includes that of Sandy Payne and Lisa Whittlesey, who spearheaded a girls ministry in which they took an annual retreat at the ranch of Lisa's family in Llano. Young boys begin their training for a life of service by picking up attendance cards, reading scriptures, and leading songs and prayers.

An outreach to the community has been our Mother's Day Out program, which was led first by Beth Stanley and now by Kari Ramsey. We help the children grow spiritually and socially, and we give young moms a chance to take short breaks from their big responsibilities of childrearing.

We also have offered fun opportunities for kids in our area. For Halloween, Debbie and Ray Bomnskie and others helped organize the first of several years of haunted houses in the fellowship building. It was exhausting to set up and clean up, but it was great fun.

Nowadays we hold a Trunk or Treat night in which we invite families to have safe Halloween fun with hot-dogs, booths, and, of course, trick or treating. Sue Wolfert coordinated the event for many years; now it's organized by Vickie Flennikin.

Annual retreats have helped bind our womenfolk together in heart and boost us spiritually (and calorically!). Different women organized them over the years, but the longest sustained group included Jamie Bomnskie, Susan Guthrie, Judy Towell, and Sue Wolfert. In another series, Keepers of the Home, women shared their talents with other women in the congregation and in the community.

But we can't omit the men—they met for weekly early-morning breakfasts to encourage each other. Plans are under way to restart this group under the direction of Eric Irwin.

For the whole family, we met in home Bible studies each Sunday night for several years. Hosts included Winnie Newell, Judy and Rob Towell, Bob and Sue Wolfert, and Brent and Jamie Bomnskie; the Bomnskie home Bible study still meets.

Obedying our charge to serve those behind bars, Eloise and Melvin Bingham each taught at the local jails for almost three decades, Eloise to the women and Melvin to the men, once or twice every Sunday and often on other days. Today, Kim Sharp teaches the women at the Federal Women's Prison each week.

And in accordance with our in-

structions to serve the poor and homeless, an outreach to the Twin City Mission was begun by youth minister Chris Field and continued mostly by many of our older members—but also helped by some of the younger ones. Organized now by Larry Bowen, our church offers these people a bright spot in their week by making desserts—banana pudding, brownies, cakes, cookies, and cupcakes—and serve them each Wednesday at lunch. We have served and come to love many people at one of the worst times in their lives, letting them know that someone cares and is willing to sacrifice some of their time, effort, and skills, for them.

This year many of our older members have made room in their busy schedules to build stronger Christian relationships while having fun and fellowship together. The group was aptly named by Becky Dean: the Senior Class.

Central also hosted and helped with Great Giveaway Day, an event planned and coordinated by one of our teens, David Wall, as a part of his Eagle Scout work. Hundreds of people lined up to be blessed materially with clothing, furniture, household goods, toys, bicycles, and other donated items.

Moving our service statewide, our congregation has supported children's homes for many years. Be-

ginning in the late 1990s, youth ministers Jon Buchanan and Chris and Tanya Fikes introduced our teens to Camp of the Hills, a Christian camp for inner-city kids. On many spring breaks and every summer, our youth group travels to Marble Falls and gives up a week of vacation to work like crazy to help show God's love to young people from Abilene, Bryan, College Station, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and other cities. Some of the campers have never been shown unconditional love, and though some are scared and homesick when they arrive on Monday, many are in tears—even some in hiding because they don't want to leave—when they get ready to return home that Saturday.

Our teens have helped cook, serve meals, wash dishes, build steps, take out trash, and do all sorts of menial tasks, exemplifying Jesus's servant heart to those who've seldom or never seen a glimpse of it. In recent years the youth group has been led in this mission—and many others—by Dallas and Kari Ramsey and Cory and Shannon Teurman.

Taking our service worldwide, Central members have helped support missionaries from other congregations as well as some from our own, including Amberley and Jason Payne (Miami, Florida), Chris and Tanya Fikes (Thailand), Drew Bowen (Thailand), Jonathan Towell (Portugal), and Roy and Tiffany

Rhodes (Germany)

For a number of years we assisted with world Bible study correspondence courses. Robert Smith helped develop the first computer responses that helped us give study guides as well as mark wrong answers. Later, Mark Lamb, Mary Greenlee, and others picked up the charge and reached many African Bible study students.

But our outreach did not stop there. Our yearly medical mission—bringing spiritual and physical healing, following in Jesus's footsteps—began in Jamaica under the leadership of our elders and our minister Al Jolly. An automobile accident, which led to warrants for the arrest of two of our missionaries, Jane Hensley and James Rosier (they were innocent!), prompted a change of location to the country of Belize in Central America.

For over 20 years, our entire congregation has donated toothbrushes, money, sunglasses, time, and rivers of sweat to this mission work. After Al Jolly retired, Dan Leaf led the effort, and then Bob Wolfert took the helm, working to carry on and expand the work greatly. Bob and a changing team of ordinary (or shall we say extraordinary?) Christians, along with doctors and nurses, have brought medical care to a poor nation that has little.

To help buy medicines, our whole congregation has donated items to sell at our annual Belize garage sale, organized each spring by Judy Towell. Members of our congregation and those of many others have helped the lives of literally thousands of people, so much so that our mission work has been included in that country's national health-care system. Belizean Christians carry on the spiritual work year round at church and at a Christian school there.

Recently we acquired property on which to build a facility to be named in honor of James Rosier, who was the foreman for several building projects in Belize, including church buildings in two villages. He also headed up several projects at the Corozal Church of Christ Primary School.

Over the nearly hundred years that our congregation has existed, and in the 50 years that we've met together in our current building, thousands of people have worshipped with us, have been served by us, have blessed and helped us in our Christian walk, and have stood with us in heart from near and from afar.

Of course, we've also squabbled, as all families do, leaving hurt feelings and often broken hearts along the way. We have not done everything right during our history, and we make no claim to get everything

right from here on. Fortunately, our Father who has promised to work everything together for good, continues to be our guide.

Our current mission statement, "Seeing the world as Jesus saw it, loving the world as Jesus loved it, serving the world as Jesus served it," is our goal. And so we soldier on, trying to serve our Savior as well as imperfect people can. Until Jesus returns, we hope to serve Him and our fellow humans in spreading the Good News of His love everywhere.

Below are some of the servants who have helped lead, teach, and guide us over the years. Please let us know who we've left out so we can add them to our list and honor their contributions also (email to anebbowen@gmail.com).

Elders

W. W. Blair
Larry Bossier
J. T. Chambers
Joe Cole
L. W. Grady
Lloyd V. Halbrooks
John Hensley
R. L. Ingersoll
Weldon Kennedy
Ray Martin
G. G. McDonald
B. D. McKinney
Charles Munday
James Norman
Raymond Parsons
Wilbern Patterson
Doug Payne
James Rosier

Darrell Sharp
L. E. Sikes
Steve Thomas
Rob Towell
Dan Warden

Deacons

John Barron
W. L. Beasley
Melvin Bingham
Brent Bomnskie
Ray Bomnskie
Larry Bowen
C. L. Bristol
Steve Burkhalter
Joe Cale
Steve Carver
Donny Chappell
Ken Danford
Dan Drew
Allen Dodson
Charles Ellis
Donny Glanton
Scott Gray
F. W. Greer
Ron Hambric
L. V. Halbrooks
A. M. Hillis
Doug Hufstedtler
Frank Januse
Bob McCorquodale
Mark Mullinix
Charles Munday
Dick Munday
James Norman
Thomas Norman
R. L. Parsons
Tim Payne
John Pitt
Dallas Ramsey
Bill Rodgers
John Shankle
Stanley Sommers
Cory Teurman
Kevin Walker
Hubert Whittington
Randel Whittlesey
J. R. Youngblood

Ministers

Johnny Anders
A. J. Buchanan
Thomas Compton
Mr. Covey (member, not a paid minister)
Barton Davis
Gus Dunn
Ron Goodman
E. D. Green
Mr. Haygood
Cecil Hill
Mr. Horn (member)
Royce Ingersol
James A. Johnson
Al Jolly
George A. Klingman
J. D. Lancaster
Dan Leaf
A. D. Martin
R. L. Nolan
Joe T. McGee (member)
Marvin Perkins
C. W. Scott
F. B. Shepherd
Leroy Thompson
T. B. Thompson
Mike Vanderberg
A. E. Walker
Bob Wille
Bob Wolfert

Secretaries

Wanda Frenzel
Betty Norman
Cyndie Norman
Sandy Payne
Donnette Sartain
Elna Vanderberg

Youth ministers

Amy Alexander
Billy Berny
Doug Berny
Jon Buchanan
Chris Field
Chris Fikes
Tanya Fikes
Daniel Goodman

Russell Hill
Dan Leaf
Jason Payne
Caird Rexroad
Russell Selman
Dan Sisson
Matt Wolfert

Other leaders

Ken Ashlock (bus ministry)
Dan Leaf (family ministry)
James Norman (school board member,
kindergarten program)
Sandra Payne (children's education)
Stan Sartain (school board member, kin-
dergarten program)
Don Wiggins (school board member, kin-
dergarten program)



At top, Texas A&M campus circa 1902;
middle, Carnegie Library in downtown
Bryan; at right, the Brazos County Court-
house in 1939.

