

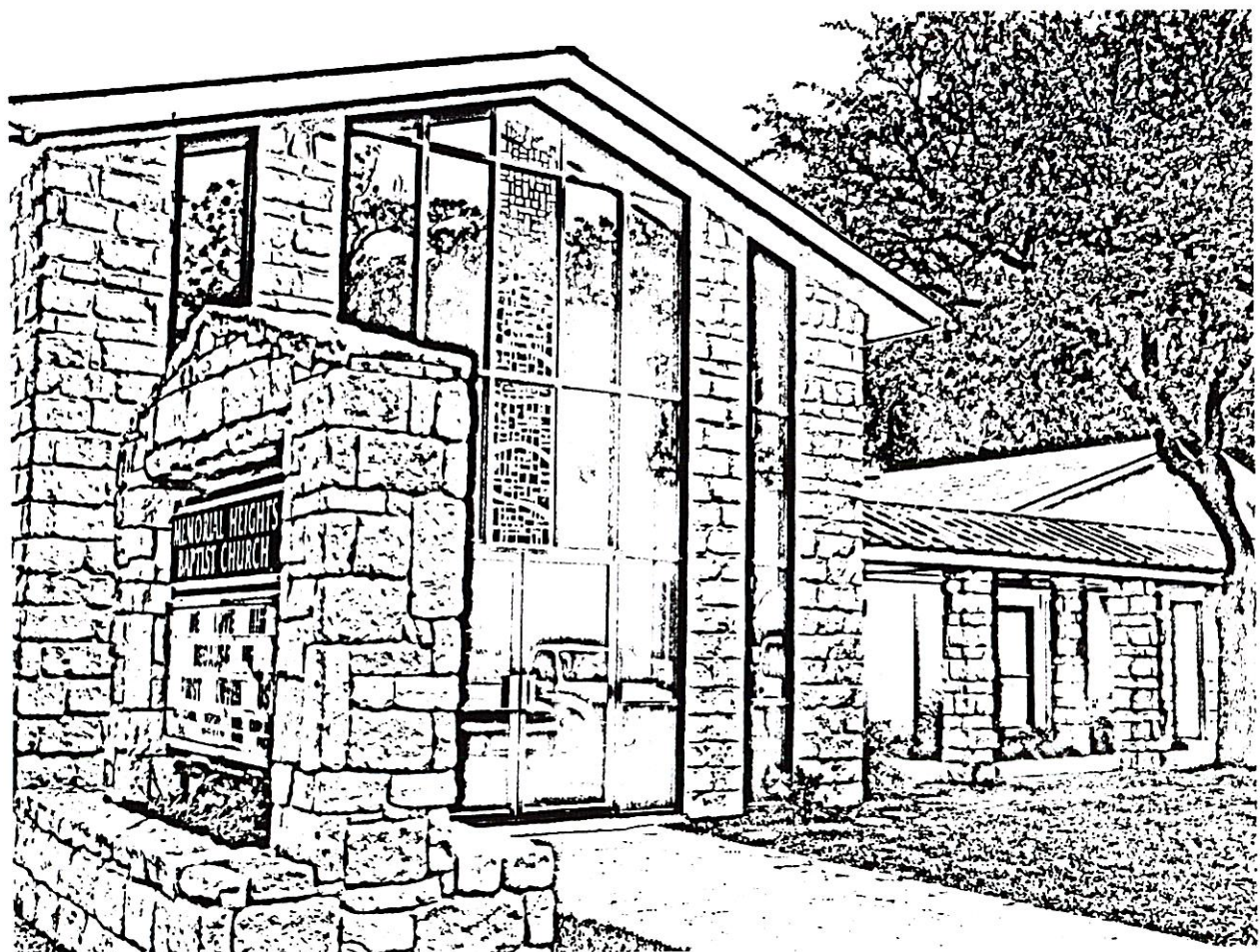
A

Brief History of

Memorial Heights Baptist Church

Gonzales, Texas

1957 – 2007



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A history of Memorial Heights Baptist Church would not be complete or accurate without first telling a little of First Baptist Church of Gonzales, which was one of the first churches established in the State of Texas. Their work began in 1840, but due to the uncertainty of the times with Indian raids, Mexican uprisings and the like, the members became scattered and reorganization was necessary. This took place in 1847 with nine charter members signing the covenant.

In 1914 it became First Baptist Church of Gonzales. These are the roots or ancestors of Memorial Heights Baptist Church which began as a mission because Mrs. Charlie (Mollie Spooner) Mason, deceased member of First Baptist Church, left in her will money to build a mission on the north side of Town.

Lots were purchased from the late Mrs. Edna Scheske Bell for \$2,200 and the building was erected. The building faced North College Street. Sunday School and church services were held in the same building. Later when more room was needed, this building was moved back to its present location facing Tate Street. The old Slayden Baptist Church building was given to the mission and the two were adjoined. Brother E.C. Cummings, pastor of the First Baptist Church, was supply pastor of the mission until the mission called its first pastor, Brother Oscar Thompson, Jr. of Gonzales, Texas.

On August 18, 1957, First Baptist Church voted to liberate and give blanket membership to all mission members present at the organizing of the church. The letters of others will be called for later. August 19, 1957, the mission members met with Brother Joe Bryant, pastor of First Baptist Church, acting as moderator. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to organize the mission into a church. There were 105 charter members. Members of the new church, Memorial Heights Baptist Church, then called Oscar Thompson, Jr. to be pastor. He accepted and remained until 1962.

The first officers of the church were:

- Sunday School Superintendent - Vernon Gilbreath
- Training Union Director - Nile Blundell
- Building Program Chairman - Earl Johnston
- Pianist - Mrs. Robert Tate
- Secretary/Clerk - Mrs. Mack Schultz
- Treasurer - Mrs. Robert Tate
- Librarian - Mrs. Bill Smith

The first teachers elected were:

- Adult men - W.O. Thompson, Sr.
- Married Couples - Mrs. Robert Carnes
- Junior Leader - Edith DeLoach
- Junior Girls - Mrs. Carl DuBose
- Junior Boys - Bill Smith
- Primary Department - Mrs. R. Glover
- Beginners Department - Mrs. Walter May
- Nursery Department - Mrs. Nile Blundell & Mrs. Earl Johnston

On October 27, 1957, the church voted to secure an architect to view the situation and advise them as to what to build and how to finance their new building. On February 5, 1958, they voted

to place their growing building fund in Gonzales County Savings and Loan until it was needed for its specified purpose. On February 22, 1958, a special meeting was called at which time Rev. Oscar Thompson, Jr., pastor and moderator, introduced the Broadway Bond Plan. This plan was to sell \$20,000 bonds to be paid back semiannually at 5%. This plan included printing, security measures and legal measures, thus eliminating the need to engage an attorney. The plan was accepted and then the church voted to build a new building at a cost of \$20,000. The Broadway Plan required that the church be incorporated and on March 5, 1958 they voted to do so.

In July of 1958, the church began to consider the election of deacons. A motion was made to select some ladies to serve as deaconesses, but was tabled for a later date. It's still tabled!

In one year's time the working budget advanced from \$4,401 to \$7,990.

In January of 1962, Brother O.G. Barrou was called as interim pastor, but the following month Brother J. E Clark was given a unanimous call as pastor and he accepted. Between May and August of 1963, Brother Clark resigned and went to Broadway Baptist in Pueblo, Colorado. In September of 1963, Brother Joe Jetton was extended a unanimous call which he accepted. The budget by now had grown to \$11,937. It was during Brother Jetton's ministry that the church voted to air condition the building. Brother Jetton served fourteen months as pastor and on November 11, 1964, resigned. He became pastor of First Baptist Church in Dilley, Texas.

Brother Richard Porche was given a unanimous call on July 4, 1965. He accepted and remained until September 1971. In 1966, the budget was \$13,151. About this time, the educational building was air-conditioned.

During Brother Porche's six year ministry, the church participated in the Encounter California Crusade, several revivals, began recreation fellowships, made two sizeable donations to Alto Frio, gave away 400 Good News for Modern man Bibles, completed a telephone survey, placed 20 hymnals in Green Dewitt Village and added sidewalks.

For several months between Brother Porche leaving and Brother Ken Dewey's call to the pastorate, Mickey Hampton served as interim pastor. Brother Dewey began his ministry at Memorial Heights in June of 1972. One of his first projects was radio time on Sunday afternoon and another was to engage a paid song leader. This was accomplished on September 17, 1972, when Bill McCarley of Luling accepted the position. Next Brother Dewey proposed that a good sound system be installed. The church voted to install the sound system. Brother Dewey left in March of 1973.

Brother Kenneth Wellman became interim pastor in August of 1973 and was called unanimously as pastor in November of 1973. Though the church had entertained the idea of building or buying a parsonage at various times over the previous sixteen years, nothing concrete was done until November of 1973. A parsonage at 223 Botts Street was purchased in March of 1974. Bro. Wellman's ministry at Memorial Heights ended in September of 1978. He and his wife, Marjorie, were granted letters to First Baptist of LaVernia in April of 1979.

Bro. Bob Harding was called as pastor in March of 1979. Bro. Thomas Tharp was voted in as Sunday School Superintendent and T.J. Reid as Training Union Director. A new visitation program was also started. Bro. Harding served as pastor until March of 1980.

Brother Richard Sparks served as interim pastor after Brother Harding's departure.

In July 1980 the church called Brother Gerald Evans as pastor. In 1981 the area mission's office was put on the Memorial Heights property behind the educational building. Brother Scott Crenshaw served as Music Director and worked with the young people from December 1981 – August 1982. Walter L. (Buzz) Carter served as Music Minister in 1985 – 1989.

The Oscar Thompson Education Building (Fellowship Hall) was constructed in the early to mid eighties and was named in honor of Memorial Heights first pastor, Oscar Thompson, Jr. In April 1986, Jerry Smith served as Minister of Youth and Out Reach. Brother Ferrel Massey was recognized as staff evangelist in June of 1987. Brother Evans resigned at the end of 1988.

Brother C.C. (Buddy) Miles served as Interim Pastor from February 1989 – June 1989.

In July 1989, Brother Clint Lowery was called as Pastor of Memorial Heights. Brother Nathan Gordon served as Music Director. A new Church Start /Hispanic Mission was established in 1993. Brother Eli Domingues pastored the mission. Brother Steven Scott began serving as Music Minister on September 1, 1996. Brother Clint Lowery resigned with his last Sunday being December 22, 1996. He accepted the pastorate at Valley Baptist Church in McMinnville, Oregon.

Brother Stanley Lohse served as interim pastor from February 1997 – July 1997. Central Heat and Air was installed in the parsonage.

In August 1997, Brother James R. Wade was called as pastor of Memorial Heights. New tile flooring was installed in the Oscar Thompson Education Building (Fellowship Hall). Plans were under way at this time to build a new foyer on the front of the church and to construct a nice church sign in the front yard. Brother Wade resigned in July 1998.

Brother Clint Lowery returned as pastor in October 1998. In the fall of 1999, a new foyer and covered walkway was constructed on the front of the church building. A sign was built in front of the church in the year 2000. The parsonage on 225 Fair St. was sold in March of 2002. In May of 2002, Brother Clarence Bahlmann, Jr. began serving as Associate Pastor.

Grace Christian Academy, a ministry of Memorial Heights, was established and held its first class in September of 2003. Mrs. Kathy Bahlmann was the academy's first teacher. A preschool class, ages 4 & 5 years, was taught. The class had four students. In June 2004, the church voted to purchase 5.731 acres on Hwy 183 North from Raymond F. Zella, Jr. for \$110,000. Memorial Heights will build and relocate as the Lord blesses. On August 29, 2004, a Church Constitution and By-Laws was voted on by the members and accepted. Brother Clarence Bahlmann, Jr. resigned his position as Associate Pastor in December of 2004. Brother Steven Scott resigned as Music Minister in September 2005. Brother John Rinehart lead the music May-August of 2006. Mrs. Melanie Hull began leading the music in August of 2006. The Land Purchase, future site of Memorial Heights Baptist Church, was "Paid in full" in March of 2007.

On August 27, 2007 Grace Christian Academy begins its fifth year and has grown to include 29 students, grades Kindergarten – 4th and has three teachers.

Thus far this history has been one of physical and tangible evidence, but we are well aware of the far more important history, that of the many persons who have come to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior, the many who have moved their membership here and enriched this work, the countless others whose lives have been spiritually blessed through this ministry and these are, after all, the real, the true, the meaningful purposes for the existence of Memorial Heights Baptist Church.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie Wellman
Mary Schultz
August 21, 1977

Revised and updated:
Johnnie Quinney
August 21, 2007