

**THE STORY AND STORIES OF
ST. CHARLES AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**

**Edited and Extended by Paul R. Powell
Portions Drawn from *Our Name is Baptist* by G. Avery Lee**

PREFACE

The story of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans is comprised of the stories of its people and the pastors who have led them. Almost from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, this church has been considered more progressive than its sister churches within the Baptist family. That progressive stance was developed over many years, owing partly to its location in New Orleans, a city sometimes described as America's most interesting city, America's most European city, or the northernmost Caribbean city. Furthermore, it is a predominately Catholic city with a black-majority population, both of which have been the case from the earliest days. Additionally, St. Charles Church followed something of a Charlestonian characteristic after the earliest Baptist church in the South, First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina. That church and many others were established before the split of Baptists north and south in 1845. These older Southern Baptist churches that pre-dated the founding of the convention tended to be more mainstream Protestant than those founded later. Generally, such churches were more formal in their worship and had educated ministers. This was not the case generally as the country and Baptists moved westward. It is not far-fetched to claim that St. Charles is a unique church in a unique city, and this history of the church will reflect that. Former pastor, Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott, described the church as "ecumenical in the Baptist tradition."

How I came to be writing this revised and continuing history of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church is woven into my own personal history which includes connections to the church since 1964 when I joined the church during my second year of theological studies at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. An enthusiastic classmate invited me, and I was at home from that

time forward. When I returned to New Orleans upon retiring in 2001, there was no question that I would once again find my spiritual home at St. Charles. During the intervening years, I always found my way back to St. Charles when visiting or working in the area. Dr. Avery Lee once remarked that I had been a member of St. Charles more times than anyone else. Guilty as charged!

Although I had never held any official position at the Church, I volunteered as its Director of Christian Education early in 2011 when one of the members suggested I help the new pastor, Rev. Travis Norvell, who had no Associate.

Little did I know that within a few months this optimistic outlook would turn sour and that Rev. Norvell would resign his pastorate under difficult circumstances. And little did I know that I would be thrust into the position of trying to hold the church together through this difficult time, beginning with my first meeting as a staff member at the Church Council meeting, the one at which Rev. Norvell read a lengthy statement in which he suggested his resignation. It was my lot to have attended some eighteen or more hours of follow-up meetings not only with the Council, but also with Deacons and Trustees, and at times all these groups combined.

At the end of those meetings, I found myself volunteering as the Church's "Acting Pastor" soon after joined by Rev. Lynn Hyder as Co-Acting Pastor. These were pretty much made-up titles as we were serving voluntarily without official status or remuneration. After some four months, the Church elected me as Associate Pastor, chiefly with administrative responsibilities, and preaching duties to be shared by as many pulpit guests as desired, including members of the church.

For most of the next two years until we called Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott as our pastor, I served more-or-less as interim pastor, though not with that title. So, here I am attempting to write the continuing story of our Church, having been so completely involved in a good chunk of the last twenty plus years.

Although this will be a condensation and continuation of the earlier work *Our Name Is Baptist* written by former long-time pastor, Dr. Avery Lee, for the seventy-fifth anniversary and extended by him for the one-hundredth anniversary, this new work is designed to be in a format for continuation over the decades, and in a family-album format including stories and photos of the members and their activities. Generally organized chronologically by pastor, it is arranged so as to highlight the various areas of ministry and engagement with the surrounding community..

I am grateful to all who have contributed data, stories and photos, and I am especially indebted to life-long member Marjorie Ball who died in 2023 just a few months shy of her 99th birthday. She was not only the oldest member at the time of her death, but had been a member for nearly one hundred years, longer than any other person. I owe my deepest gratitude to Marjorie for her encouragement to pursue this extended story of our church. Finally, my thanks go to all members who have contributed information and inspiration through their personal stories of association with our beloved church.

It is hoped that as the decades come and go, others will take up the story of this historic church in an historic city as a witness of God's continuing grace and leadership.

Paul R. Powell

November 2023

]

An Historical Overview

In looking forward to the one-hundred-twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, it was suggested that perhaps a new church history was in order. Dr. G. Avery Lee, pastor for some twenty years in the 1950s through the 1970s, had first published his history of the church, *Our Name is Baptist*, in 1973 covering the first 75 years, followed by an extension under the same title in 1998 to cover the first 100 years. Much has happened in the succeeding years including a significant dwindling of the church's membership in the earliest part of the twenty-first century and the calling of the church's first woman pastor.

Dr. Lee's history spelled out in some detail the facts, organized generally by pastor and the timeframe served. As he indicated, he had originally intended to do a series of sermons on the church's history at its seventy-fifth anniversary. Because there was so much material, he eventually decided to compile his findings into a history. His very readable style lacked only in the inclusion of a significant number of stories of the people who made up the church. This book, therefore, is more of a family history with stories and pictures, organized loosely by ministries and activities rather than exclusively by pastor. From the historical viewpoint, it will cover all facets of the church's life, both the highlights and the *lowlights*.

Just two years after reaching its centennial, the Church faced the twenty-first century on stable feet financially and with a membership promising sustainability for decades to come. However, on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina blew a hole in the church's clay tile roof along with its membership and finances. The tile roof was covered by insurance and overall the church sustained very little other damage owing to its higher location close to the Mississippi River

levee and at some distance from the broken canal levees which flooded almost the entire city. Homes only a few blocks away and parts of nearby Tulane University fared much worse. The Church lost some 40 individuals who lost homes and jobs and were forced to move elsewhere, leaving a huge gap in the active membership and the church's finances as well.

In the five years prior to Katrina, the church's typical Sunday attendance ranged from 120 to 160, occasionally more. When then pastor Steven Meriwether was called as pastor in 1993, a storm far more menacing than Hurricane Katrina had already reared its ugly head in the Southern Baptist Convention. As Dr. Lee put it in his earlier history, Fundamentalists in the Convention had begun in 1987 what they said they had planned to do, that is, to "Take control and purge the liberals." In the thinking of many, there is no small correlation with the movement of conservative minorities to take over government from the local to national levels.

Old Ties Broken, New Ties Begun

Dr. David Farmer who had just begun his pastorate at St. Charles in 1987 saw the handwriting on the wall and proposed that the church join the Southern Baptist Alliance, a group formed by concerned Southern Baptists to preserve the Baptist heritage of freedom, not to split the Convention. The initial interest group for the Alliance had met at St. Charles during the meeting of the Convention in the year prior to its official organization. On July 15, 1987, St. Charles became one of the charter members of the group and the only church in Louisiana to affiliate with the Alliance, joined later by Northminster Church in Monroe and more recently by Church of the Highlands in Shreveport. To date, these are the only churches in Louisiana to have affiliated with the Southern Baptist Alliance, later renamed the Alliance of Baptists, which represents the most liberal of the splinter groups.

The Fundamentalist controversy continued to rage among Southern Baptists as well as other denominations. Litmus tests for orthodoxy centered largely around biblical inerrancy and infallibility but also around social issues such as abortion, homosexuality, ordination of women, prayer in the schools, and many others. Charismatic worship and the rise of certain styles of music in worship, particularly to what came to be labeled *praise and worship* (sometimes called *contemporary worship*), divided churches internally and externally as they came to be identified by their stances on biblical interpretation, social issues, church polity, and worship styles more so than by denominational affiliations. Individual Christians, particularly those who were changing their places of residence, searched more for a church that matched their preferences than their denominations. Or, even if they remained within their denominational heritage, looked for churches in which they felt comfortable. Churches that remained *liberal* across denominations began to dwindle in membership and to close altogether. New churches with no denominational affiliation sprang up everywhere, many times growing rapidly into *super churches* of enormous size, multiple services and multiple campuses. By about 2015, such non-denominational churches were already the third largest Christian grouping behind Catholics and Southern Baptists. They may soon become second only to Catholics.

It is no secret that St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church has maintained its so-called liberal stance for many decades, adhering to that most basic of historic Baptist principles; that is, freedom of the individual and of the local church to determine their own faith and practice. As we will discuss later, the Church has welcomed all who desire to worship and work alongside those of both similar and opposite viewpoints, working hard to maintain *unity in diversity*. We do not just *tolerate* such unity in diversity, we celebrate it, welcoming all with open minds, open

hearts, and open arms. Among our most active members are those who have come from many denominations and in some cases, none, who were looking for such a spirit of welcome openness. This has been particularly true with the LGBTQ+ community, a touchy subject among many Christian individuals, churches, and denominations.

New Denominational Connections

It was also under Dr. Farmer's leadership and that of a newly-created Denominational Relations Committee, that St. Charles affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, USA, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), the moderate SBC splinter group. Relations with the ABCUSA have been cordial but not strong. Relations with the CBF have continued, but as with the Alliance, St. Charles is the only Baptist church in the greater New Orleans area that is affiliated with the CBF. Connections within the Baptist family seem to be strongest with other individual churches of like mind, among them University and Broadmoor churches in Baton Rouge, Church of the Highlands in Shreveport, Northminster in Monroe, Emmanuel in Alexandria, University in Hattiesburg, MS, Broadway in Fort Worth, TX, and Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, AL.

Dr. Farmer's pastorate came to an end after some four years when he accepted the pastorate of University Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, in October 1991. Dr. Malcolm Tolbert, a beloved member and retired professor of New Testament from New Orleans and Southeastern Baptist seminaries was called as Interim Pastor. He resigned after some six months, and beloved former pastor Dr. Avery Lee was then named Interim and served for an additional ten months prior to the call of Rev. Steven Meriwether as pastor in 1993.

Breaking Our Ties with the Southern Baptist Convention

For several years, both before and after Rev. Meriwether became pastor, St. Charles wavered in its connections with Southern Baptists. The Fundamentalist takeover had left the church, which had long and strong ties with many Southern Baptist institutions, feeling left out of denominational life, at least at the national level. That feeling was most evident in strained relations with the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with which many members of the church had been connected, including a significant number of faculty members, as late as the 1980s. Indeed, at least three former Presidents of the Seminary were St. Charles members. Dr. Harry Eskew, Professor of Music History and Hymnology, who retired from the Seminary in 1998, was the last seminary faculty person to be a member of the Church. Seminary policy prevented the hiring of any Baptist not affiliated with an SBC church, and soon after Dr. Eskew's retirement, the Church voted to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention and the Louisiana Baptist Convention, and somewhat later from the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans.

So, it is that St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church moved from a very influential position among Southern Baptists in New Orleans, Louisiana, and beyond to an almost isolated yet still progressive church with Baptist connections limited to only a few like-minded churches within its geographical area.

At the Beginning ...

New Orleans and Louisiana had nearly two hundred years of history prior to the founding of St. Charles Avenue church, and Louisiana had existed as a French and sometimes Spanish colony for nearly a century before it became a part of the United States. The state was officially

Catholic until Thomas Jefferson negotiated the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. That area included land in fifteen present states and two Canadian provinces. Louisiana was admitted as the eighteenth state on April 30, 1812.

Only after Louisiana was admitted to the Union were non-Catholics allowed to practice their faith and to form churches. And Baptists were not generally welcomed in their earliest efforts, especially in New Orleans. However, in October 1812, the earliest Baptist church in Louisiana was established in Washington Parish near the Bogue Chitto River. This church was known as the Half Moon Bluff Church. Its first pastor was a mixed-race man from nearby Mississippi. Washington Parish is bordered to the north and the east by the state of Mississippi. This area is still known as the Florida parishes because it had been a part of the Florida territory under Spanish control, and therefore nominally Catholic, as well. This earliest church did not last long, but the second Baptist church in Louisiana was formed just a month later (November 1812) at Bayou Chicot in St. Landry Parish, a French and Spanish area west of the Mississippi River (Opelousas is the parish seat). This church, later renamed Calvary Baptist, is still in existence and therefore holds the distinction of being the oldest Baptist church in Louisiana. Other churches along the Pearl River were established by 1813.

Protestantism came to New Orleans at about the same time. St. Louis Cathedral was the only church in New Orleans until a group of Protestants of the Episcopal and Presbyterian denominations began meeting together to establish a Protestant church. That effort led to the establishment of Christ Church, Episcopal (generally referred to as Christ Church Cathedral) in 1816, thus becoming the first Protestant and only the second church in New Orleans. First African Baptist Church, possibly established in 1817, may well be the earliest Baptist church in

New Orleans and the earliest black Baptist Church in Louisiana. First Presbyterian Church followed shortly thereafter in 1818. There was not a second Catholic church in the city until St. Patrick's was established in 1833.

New Orleans Becomes a Large, Wealthy, and Diverse City

By the 1840s, New Orleans was one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the United States. Large numbers of English and Scottish people had moved into the city after statehood in 1812, moving mostly into the areas known as Central City and the Garden District. Those who had lived in the United States before Louisiana became a state were often referred to as the "Americans" and were treated as immigrants. Because Louisiana had been a French and Spanish colony, laws and customs were quite different than for the English and other European immigrants of early America. Most of the Africans in the city were initially from the Caribbean Islands and at least some of them came to New Orleans as "free men of color." It was also possible in Louisiana but not elsewhere in the United States, that African slaves could earn their freedom. New Orleans had been the site of a significant slave trade even before statehood. After the Civil War, many former slaves moved into New Orleans from the country, all of which created a wonderfully diverse population, even among the various groups of African descent. There was also a rather diverse cultural milieu in the city, and there were four resident opera companies and several theater groups in the city some years before such activities were common in the rest of the country.

White Baptists Arrive in New Orleans

White Baptists established First Baptist Church of New Orleans in 1843. Prior to that, the Triennial Convention had sent James A. Raynoldson from North Carolina to New Orleans in the

winter of 1816-1817 to explore the possibilities, but nothing came of this at that time. First Baptist was thus established even before the Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1845, largely in protest to the Triennial Convention's refusal to appoint missionaries from slave-owning families. Coliseum Place Baptist Church, mother church of St. Charles and the second in the city, was founded in the Lower Garden District in 1854. This church's historic and elegant building unfortunately burned beyond repair shortly after Hurricane Katrina. It had been a large and prominent church, and among its last pastors and families was that of John Curtis, Sr. and Jr., founders of the John Curtis Christian School. A few of the members have continued the church's ministry in Jefferson Parish meeting in homes and the John Curtis School. The third Baptist church in New Orleans, Valence Street, was established in the 1880s. Its beautiful building at Magazine and Valence St. is the oldest Baptist building in the city. Unfortunately, the church has closed, making St. Charles the second oldest Baptist church in the city proper.

These brief notes will prepare the way now for the specifics about the founding of Carrollton Baptist Church, the earlier name of St. Charles.

The Carrollton Mission Becomes a Church

According to an historical sketch written by Dr. Penrose St. Amant (Professor at New Orleans Seminary and later Dean of the School of Theology of Southern Baptist Seminary) for the 50th anniversary of our church, the Coliseum Place Church established a mission to serve the Carrollton area on April 16, 1884. This was a mere twenty years after the Civil War. Democrat Grover Cleveland was elected U.S. President that year. Although originally founded as the Medical College of Louisiana in 1834, Tulane University was established as a privately-endowed university in 1884, making it the ninth oldest in the American Association of Universities.

About six families of the Coliseum Place church lived in Carrollton at the time. Carrollton was a separate city from New Orleans and considered to be some distance from the downtown location of the Coliseum Place church. Members from that church living in Carrollton would have had to travel by horse-drawn carriages or train to attend Coliseum Place. Although records are scant, it is known that one of these members, Mrs. G.W. Haygood, deeded the corner of her property at Cherokee and Maple Streets for the building of a mission structure. It is also known that Mrs. M.J. Nelson was sent as a missionary to New Orleans from the State Baptist Convention of Mississippi to assist with organizing a Sunday School and raising funds to build a small frame building measuring 25' x 40' on Mrs. Haygood's property to house it. Because of her illness, Mrs. Nelson returned to Mississippi after only a year of service and the work was taken over by Miss Lilly Eddy. Thus, one could legitimately claim that our church was begun by women and that women were afforded places of leadership from the start.

Prior to the building of this structure, the mission apparently met for services in servants' quarters at this location, and for a few months in a wooden structure adjacent to the servants' quarters. We have no records of these mission years, but we do know that whatever that structure was like, it was sold and the proceeds applied toward the erection of a house of worship at Cherokee and Maple which is where the church was officially organized on November 16, 1898; and we do have a photo of that building. Republican William McKinley was President of the United States, and 1898 also marked the beginning of the Spanish American War.

The Coliseum Place Church continued to support the mission throughout these early years and the Louisiana Baptist Convention contributed half of the first pastor's salary of \$1,000. In 1898, Carrollton was a separate city from New Orleans and the only way to travel between the

two was by train. It would be only a short time before Carrollton was annexed by New Orleans. So, the church's original name, Carrollton Baptist Church, lasted only until 1901 when the name was changed to St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, having been relocated to the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Hilary Street.

Women in Leadership in the Early History of St. Charles

It is important to note and to celebrate that our church's story began under the leadership of women and that from our first pastor forward our pastors have been seminary trained. Both were unusual for the times and a reminder that our story has been marked by a more forward-thinking mentality than was true of most Baptist churches in the South. There were about 35,000 Baptists in the whole state of Louisiana in 1900 of which only eight churches were full-time and self-supporting, two of those being in New Orleans: Coliseum Place and Valence Street.

That first band of church members was a hardy bunch. According to a letter from the first pastor written some forty years later, they utilized their resources and members to the fullest. He reported that during their first year virtually every member attended every service and giving amounted to about \$40 per member. Sunday School teachers included a twelve-year old teacher of the girls' class and a seventy-five-year old deacon teaching the infants' class.

Rev. Albert Graham Moseley was called as the first pastor of our church in 1898. He had received the Bachelor of Theology degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1897 and the master's degree in 1898. A native of Orrville, Alabama, he had been licensed by the Baptist Church there and ordained by the Dallas Avenue Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Prior to seminary, he had pastored churches in Meridian, Mississippi, and in Huntsville and Montgomery, Alabama, coming to New Orleans directly from Southern Seminary.

Building a First Sanctuary

One of the first undertakings of the little Carrollton Baptist Church and its first pastor was the erection of a sanctuary. Charter member Fred C. Gregory reported in 1922 that the property at St. Charles Avenue and Hillary was purchased from the Woman's Industrial Association of Carrollton for \$6,000. Rev. Moseley travelled throughout his native Alabama and succeeded in raising about \$3,000 toward the cost of \$4,000 without furnishings. The lot measuring about 150' x 180' and the sanctuary were rather small, but the church was now on firm footing and headed in the right direction. We have a photograph of that lovely little building completed in 1901 which served the congregation well until the congregation grew to the point of desperately needing larger quarters. It was just after completion of this first sanctuary that the church's name was changed to St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church. Unfortunately, Rev. Moseley's health failed and he was forced to resign. Life-long member Marjorie Ball, who recently died at age 98, was brought by her parents to that first little church at St. Charles and Hillary.

Two pastors followed Rev. Moseley in quick succession. Rev. John A. Lee from Harmony, Kentucky, became pastor in 1901 and served through 1903. Not much else is known about him, except that he had been a student at Southern Seminary. At the time, the church had grown to ninety-five members, and the church property was valued at \$10,000. Present membership is only slightly more than that.

At the time Rev. John Lee left, the Coliseum Place Church had requested that the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention send two missionaries to assist with the work in New Orleans. They agreed and sent Rev. A.E. Reimer to work with the Barracks Mission (later Grace Baptist Church) and to serve as Assistant Pastor of Coliseum Place. Miss T.E.

Hunter was sent to work with the Carrollton Church. Here again, we have a woman providing leadership in our young church, although she was not an ordained pastor. Rev. Reimer served as pastor for about a year in 1904-1905, and later he and Miss Hunter married. Rev. Reimer also served as the city missionary during this time; and coincidentally, that same year the Home Mission Board employed its first secretary of Negro work.

That the church thrived under these three brief pastorates is as much a testament to God's leadership and the commitment of the church's members as that of the pastors. The membership had quadrupled in just eight years. Community outreach through those off-campus Sunday Schools was undoubtedly a major influence in this growth.

The Church's First Long-Term Pastorate

Walter Henderson Brengle was called in late 1905 and began his tenure of nine years in January 1906, which was the longest pastorate of anyone until Avery Lee and Steven Meriwether later in the twentieth century, and more recently with pastor Elizabeth Mangham Lott. Rev. Brengle was a native of Kentucky, a graduate of Bethel College in Kentucky, and had attended Southern Seminary. He was ordained by Hardin's Creek Church in Hardin, Kentucky, and was likely pastoring in Springfield, Tennessee, when he was called to our church.

Rev. Brengle's pastorate came at a time of social upheaval nationally. Theodore Roosevelt was followed by Woodrow Wilson as President. Several western states were admitted to the Union. The Boxer Rebellion in China and the Balkan War raged. Oil and gas were discovered in Louisiana. The automobile was just coming into wider use. Large numbers of immigrants were coming to our shores, including a large contingent of Italians to New Orleans beginning around the turn of the century. World War I loomed just around the corner.

Southern Baptists were becoming increasingly involved in local, national, and international missions and evangelism. Louisiana Baptists were focused on education with the founding of Louisiana College (now Louisiana Christian University) in 1906 and an orphanage begun that same year in Lake Charles and later relocated to Monroe. Woman's Missionary Union, established in 1888, became a vibrant part of our church's life. One member, Mrs. Charles Ammen, served as President of Louisiana Woman's Missionary Union from 1899-1904 and again from 1905-1908, and then later as Corresponding Secretary from 1912-1915. Another member, Miss Jessie Pettigrew, became the first missionary nurse to be sent by the Foreign Mission Board, serving in China in the late 1890's. Here again is evidence of our church's embracing of women in leadership.

In 1906 or 1907 and again in 1922, the "Little Church" enlarged its facilities at St. Charles and Hillary; that is, as much as could be accommodated on the small lot. This period under Rev. Brengle's leadership resulted in both numerical and spiritual growth and there was at the same time a growing sense of "Christian family" among the members. During Rev. Brengle's nine-and-a-half-year pastorate, the church's membership grew to 250 and the Sunday School was the largest in the city. Rev. Brengle left St. Charles to accept a call to Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Interestingly, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a set of resolutions condemning sweatshops, improper labor conditions for women and children, tenement housing, greed in corporate wealth, and graft in politics.

Growth, Expansion and a New Location

Dr. Avery Lee captioned the earliest period of our church's history as simply "The Beginning Years (1898-1915)" and the next section "The Formative Years (1915-1921)." In this overview,

the latter section is combined with events up to the time of the church's move to 7100 St. Charles Avenue in 1925-1926 and erection of the present sanctuary building.

Dr. Benjamin Perry Robertson was called as Pastor on December 5, 1915, just four months after Rev. Brengle's departure. He was from Merritsville, South Carolina, and a well-educated man having attended four different colleges and Southern Seminary. He held the Master of Arts, Master of Theology, Doctor of Divinity and Doctor of Laws degrees. Ordained at Hendersonville, North Carolina, he had pastored churches in Gaffney, South Carolina, Baltimore, Maryland, and Atlanta, Georgia, prior to our church.

Four markers of the Robertson pastorate included a concern for expanding the Baptist witness in New Orleans by establishing mission Sunday Schools, an emphasis on social outreach (particularly medical), printing of weekly bulletins, and an effort to liquidate the church's debt. On May 12, 1916, our church voted to establish three mission Sunday Schools: one at Carrollton and Claiborne, one at State and Magazine, and the other at Metairie Ridge and Stella. Two of these resulted in new churches: the Carrollton Avenue Baptist Church (1920) and the Metairie Baptist Church (1930). In 1917, St. Charles member Dr. T. B. Sellers operated a free medical clinic at the Berean mission, another of our church's Sunday School missions. This emphasis on medical services was crucial in our church's work with the Convention in establishing Southern Baptist Hospital at a later date. On October 29, 1917, the church began printing a weekly bulletin and we have nearly a complete run in our files from 1922 to the present.

It is also notable that Loyola University New Orleans, founded originally as Loyola College in 1904, was established as the University in 1912 and located at its present location. The church's location just three blocks from both Tulane and Loyola has been a blessing both in

terms of faculty and student members but also in joint efforts in educational and social concerns. Dr. Rufus Harris, former President of Tulane, and his family were long-time members of St. Charles. Dr. Kirby Godsey, President for some years at Mercer University, and his family were also members of our church, and his wife Joan served as church organist. Many faculty and staff of Tulane, Loyola, University of New Orleans, Xavier University, and Baptist Seminary have been associated with the church over the years. In recent years that blessing has included participation in our church's music program by students and alumni, particularly from Loyola.

New Building, New Ministries, Great Music

The church was successful in retiring its debt and in soliciting additional funds for a new building. A Building Committee was appointed shortly after Dr. Robertson arrived. The church was growing steadily and its facilities at St. Charles and Hilary were already inadequate. By the end of his pastorate in 1918, the membership had grown to 325. Dr. Robertson also had a great interest in education and he had strongly urged Southern Baptists to establish the Baptist Bible Institute in 1917. The school was located at Washington and Magazine and later renamed New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, now located on Gentilly Boulevard. Many of the faculty and students at BBI were members of our church, as well as after the move to Gentilly. Dr. Robertson was also instrumental in the founding of North Greenville Academy (later College) and Limestone College in his home state of South Carolina.

St. Charles was also supportive of resolutions for extending voting privileges to women delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention and in favor of The Prohibition Amendment to ban alcoholic beverages from the whole nation. From 1918, women became full voting participants in the SBC, and prohibition became the law until its repeal. The Church was also involved in the

establishment of Louisiana College in 1906 (successor to Keatchie College for women and Mt. Lebanon University for men), Acadia Academy at Eunice (1916), and Baptist Hospital in Alexandria (1917).

Dr. Robertson served throughout the years of World War I, resigning in 1918 to accept a pastorate in Paducah, Kentucky. Shortly thereafter, in February 1919, our church called Rev. Edward Davis Solomon as Pastor. He had been a military chaplain during World War I and even preached his first sermon here in uniform. He had also been a chaplain in the Spanish-American War. Serving with him were Ernest O. Sellers, choir director, and Hal Waters Mosely, organist. Mr. Sellers was on the first music faculty at Baptist Bible Institute and Professor Mosely was a professor of chemistry at Tulane. The organ in the little church at St. Charles and Hilary was a reed pump organ. Sellers composed the tune “New Orleans” for the beloved gospel hymn “Wonderful, Wonderful Jesus” while serving our church.

Although Dr. Robertson’s pastorate lasted only two years, he had an over-sized influence on our church and Baptists in New Orleans. Southern Baptists had just launched the \$75 million campaign and in line with this emphasis on strengthening finances, St. Charles was challenged to raise money, first for a parsonage, and then for a new church building. Within three months of purchasing a parsonage on Neron Place, it was sold under advice from the Home Mission Board which favored purchase of the lot at St. Charles and Audubon Place for a new sanctuary.

Within this short two-year pastorate, progressive social and church movements led to the right of women to vote, the Carrollton Avenue mission became a Church, Southern Baptist Hospital was established, the Baptist Student Union was organized nationally and St. Charles began BSU ministries at Tulane and Newcomb, Vacation Bible Schools were begun and have

continued until recently at St. Charles, and Mrs. A. C. (Ruth) Reed became the first woman to serve our church as choir director, and at her recommendation the church voted to include a least one woman on its next (and succeeding) pulpit committees. She was well trained, and so along with those who had served before her, a continuous line of well-trained musicians has produced an outstanding program of church music.

Although Rev. Solomon, who succeeded Dr. Robertson, resigned in 1921 without enjoying the results of his efforts to expand the church's facilities, the impact of his ministry cannot be overstated. Quite simply, he had led the church out of its infancy into its young adulthood firmly grounded in historic Baptist principles with a progressive leaning toward respect for an educated ministry, trained musicians with a high regard for classical church music, respect for women in church leadership, involvement in social activism, and an open-minded attitude toward biblical scholarship and church inclusiveness. No small influence on a church that continues in this same approach to making a difference in the lives of all who enter its doors.

Short Move—Long Expansion

With the relocation of the church just a few blocks up St. Charles Avenue set in motion, the task at hand was to plan a whole new campus beginning with the sanctuary building which we now enjoy nearly a century later. That task would fall to the leadership of Dr. William Wistar Hamilton. On November 27, 1921, the Pulpit Committee, including a female member for the first time, recommended to the congregation that they call Dr. Hamilton as pastor. He was at the time serving as Secretary of Evangelism for the Home Mission Board and had come to that position from the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia. He had just turned down a call to the prestigious First Baptist Church of Meridian, Mississippi. As it turns out, Dr. Hamilton

had visited New Orleans as a delegate to the 1901 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Although recognizing the great need for evangelistic work in the city, he could not imagine living in this “dirty and unhealthy and unattractive” city. Even after preaching his trial sermon, he returned to Atlanta thinking he could not possibly accept the church’s call. Yet, he did so, saying years later how much he had come to love the city and give his life in service here. He would serve as pastor of St. Charles from 1922-1928 before becoming President of Baptist Bible Institute (now New Orleans Seminary) just a few blocks away at the time.

The new building was by no means Dr. Hamilton’s only contribution to the church. He introduced and the church adopted two matters of polity shortly after he became pastor in 1922. One was a system of deacon rotation with deacons serving four-year terms. Another first was the acceptance of members from other denominations without requiring them to be re-baptized. The first such person had in fact been baptized by immersion in another denomination. At the time, immersion seemed to be the criterion, and the church voted to recommend that anyone wishing to join the church upon such immersion take up the matter with the pastor and deacons before being presented for membership. Although this was only a small move in the direction toward accepting members without requiring re-baptizing by immersion, within twenty years the church adopted as a part of its constitution that application for membership under any basis other than baptism by immersion be referred to the Board of Deacons who would examine the facts and then make their recommendation concerning any individual’s application for membership. This polity was reaffirmed in a new constitution adopted March 23, 1955. Here again is evidence that St. Charles was being truly Baptist in its local church autonomy and ahead of its time in matters of church government.

Dr. Hamilton will, perhaps, always be remembered as the pastor who led the church during its relocation to 7100 St. Charles Avenue and the erection of the present sanctuary building. Less known is the fact that he led the church to oversubscribe its contribution to the SBC's \$75 Million Campaign. St. Charles had been asked for a contribution of \$18,000 but had pledged to raise \$30,000. Going even beyond this ambitious pledge, the church raised \$38,000 for this important financial campaign that strengthened the SBC's national and international efforts in missions, educational institutions, and social ministries such as hospitals. Although the campaign was not a complete success, due in part to the national Great Depression, St. Charles not only lived up to its pledge but went beyond for a relatively small congregation.

A New Sanctuary is Built

A Building Committee was appointed in 1920 with the agreement that the building and equipment would cost not less than \$250,000, or nearly \$7,000,000 in today's dollars. By early 1923, actual planning for the new building was underway. Financing came from several sources. The little church at St. Charles and Hilary was sold for \$20,000, the Home Mission Board provided \$20,000 toward the purchase of the property, an additional gift of \$5,000, and a loan of \$100,000. The church was to raise an additional \$100,000. The building at St. Charles and Hilary would remain under church ownership until the new building was occupied. On April 29, 1925, a contract was awarded to J.A. Petty for \$130,712. The church paid the Home Mission Board \$30,000 for the property and issued bonds for \$100,000. Total indebtedness was apparently \$177,364. The new building was dedicated in early 1926. That this was accomplished before the impending Great Depression can only be attributed to divine providence and the leadership of Dr. Hamilton.

Dr. Hamilton has been described as cultured and gentlemanly and a traditionalist more at ease with evangelicals than high churchmen. His sermons were simple but the people he pastored remembered him fondly for his visits during times of happiness and sorrow. His fourteen published books reveal an understanding of how to relate ideals to action, something for which St. Charles has been known over the years. His major emphases were evangelism and missions. Perhaps it was these qualities that motivated the Baptist Bible Institute to elect him as President, which position he assumed on March 1, 1928. Membership had grown to more than 800 during his pastorate and the church had a splendid new sanctuary seating nearly 2,000 perhaps in anticipation of further growth. A desire to have a large community space for Tulane University and Baptist Bible Institute events may also have had something to do with building such a large sanctuary. In any case, St. Charles is deeply indebted to Dr. Hamilton for these accomplishments in membership and facilities. Since he remained in New Orleans, the Hamilton family continued to be a part of our church for many years.

A Famous Pastor but Short Pastorate

Within three months of Dr. Hamilton's inauguration as President of Baptist Bible Institute (New Orleans Seminary), St. Charles called Dr. Carter Helm Jones, then pastor of Second Baptist Church (now Second-Ponce DeLeon) in Atlanta, as its new pastor. Dr. Jones was unquestionably the most famous pastor of our church, although his tenure turned out to be quite short, less than two years. In his later years, Dr. Jones was called "The Dean of Southern Baptist pastors, and a prince of the American pulpit." These were not empty accolades. Never without a pastorate in a sixty-year career, he served many prominent churches such as the First Baptist churches of Philadelphia, Seattle, Oklahoma City, Washington, D.C. and Lynchburg, Virginia (a

church Dr. Hamilton also served), and others in Louisville, Kentucky, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Williamsburg, Virginia. The son of a well-known Confederate-era Baptist pastor and chaplain, the infant Carter sometimes sat on Robert E. Lee's lap during chapel services at Washington and Lee College where Lee was President and Carter's father was Chaplain. The elder Jones was in the first class of students at Southern Baptist Seminary when it was located in Greenville, South Carolina, before moving to Louisville, Kentucky. Four of his sons became Baptist pastors.

In a resolution sent to St. Charles from the Atlanta church, Dr. Jones was described as a man of quiet, gentle courtesy and unassuming modesty, and gifted as few men are with the power of speech. In addition to his preaching, Dr. Jones was invited to speak at many conferences and conventions, and he was even the youngest ever preacher at the Southern Baptist Convention when he was only 22. A Virginian through and through, it is reported that on Sunday mornings, Dr. Jones would be driven to church, enter by the door on Audubon, come upstairs to the service dressed in cut-away coat and striped trousers (zoot suit), preach, and leave immediately after. One member said that the church just couldn't tolerate all that aristocracy. Whether on that issue or others, Dr. Jones was asked to resign by the Deacons in a letter sent to him while he was on vacation, specifying that it be effective for October 1, 1930. Dr. Jones submitted his resignation in a short and to-the-point letter dated August 3. This was a little less than two years after becoming pastor. It is unclear whether the Church itself was behind the requested resignation. There was undoubtedly disappointment in Dr. Jones's leadership on more than one front. One member, Miss MacFarlane, stated that she thought it was the church's failure, not Dr. Jones's. Mrs. Anne Stephenson Penick wrote a letter to the Deacons protesting their "lack of courage and

Christianity ... in Dr. Jones' absence, as it were, behind his back." Perhaps as much as anything, the Great Depression had struck and the church was left with falling contributions while facing significant debt from the new building. Dr. Jones was left holding the bag, deserved or not, and it is not surprising that he resigned abruptly. Dr. Jones was in some ways ahead of his time, and maybe a bit too forward-thinking and too sophisticated for the congregation at the time. In Dr. Hamilton the church had a splendid pastor, in Dr. Jones a splendid preacher. Both had been pastor of the influential First Baptist Church of Lynchburg, Virginia. Dr. Hamilton had warmly embraced St. Charles and New Orleans, but apparently Dr. Jones had not. Culture shock? In any case, the church seems to have been looking for something more than a splendid preacher, and perhaps Dr. Jones had been looking for something more as well. Not the first nor the last time for our church, as it turns out. (It was this author's joy to serve First Baptist Lynchburg in the 1970s as its Minister of Music and Education.)

From Critical to Crisis

Financial struggle was not new to St. Charles, but the two decades spanning The Great Depression and World War II turned a short-term critical situation into a long-term crisis. Avery Lee devoted only ten pages to this painful period in our church's history, perhaps because there was not much more to be said other than it was a long dry spell, financially. Despite its difficult situation, St. Charles paid its entire \$18,000 commitment to the SBC's \$75 Million Campaign and plugged away at its building indebtedness. Desperate times often call for desperate actions, and the members of St. Charles stepped up to the plate in their dedication. The 1930 budget devoted \$15,000 to debt retirement, nearly half its entire budget for the year!

For leadership during this difficult early period of The Great Depression, the church turned to Rev. Thomas Daniel Brown. On January 17, 1931, the Church voted on a simply-stated recommendation “that Reverend T. D. Brown of Little Rock, Arkansas, be employed as pastor.” Notice that Rev. Brown was “employed” rather than “called.” This was the only time in the church’s history that such wording was used. Is this an indication of the Church’s expectation that Rev. Brown would alleviate their financial distress? If so, he was indeed a brave man to accept the challenge.

Although a Mississippian, Rev. Brown had spent most of his career in Arkansas where he was head of the Bible department at Ouachita Baptist College (now University), editor of the state Baptist newspaper, and Executive Secretary of the state Baptist Convention. Undoubtedly, this breadth of administrative experience appealed to the church even more than his pulpit and teaching experience. It does indicate, as well, our Church’s continuing respect for pastors with solid academic training. Nonetheless, Rev. Brown’s three-and-a-half years at St. Charles were devoted almost exclusively to financial matters.

In his fall 1931 financial report to the Church, Treasurer James S. Webb remarked that things did not look bright:

But I am not discouraged, for I have been connected with the finances of this church for a long time and I know
1931, we have \$2,520 interest to pay, and I mean we have got to pay it!

Immediately after, he gave out little cardboard churches to be used as banks for the members to save their coins to help pay this interest. However, the church did not pay that interest, because they could not. The 1933 budget totaled \$23,450 of which \$11,960 was for debt and \$4,500 for deficit, leaving only \$6,890 for local expenses. Rev. Brown requested that his salary be reduced to \$300 per month, and even that represented more than half of the available balance. With 859

members, this budget represented only \$27 dollars (equivalent to only \$36.66 in 2022) per member toward the entire year's budget. Talk about crisis!

Despite their dire circumstances, the Church members endorsed the SBC's "Hundred Thousand Club" which solicited one hundred thousand Baptists to give an extra dollar per month to pay off the Convention's indebtedness. Makes you wonder why our church received so much criticism over the years of being disloyal to the SBC, when we sacrificed in such manner at a time of the worst crisis in our church's and denomination's history. Being progressive has often taken a back seat to being cooperative when the need is great!

Unable to pay either the maturing bonds on the building nor the interest, a detailed plan to refinance the church debt of \$70,000 was adopted. The church would pay 50¢ on the dollar, refinance the debt at 4% interest, and local expenses were not to exceed \$8,000 (a requirement of Whitney National Bank). Despite its desperate financial situation, the Church maintained its concern for others, giving at least meager amounts to the Tulane Y.M.C.A., the white and black Rescue Missions, and even employed Mrs. Jane Ammen as a local missionary. Although Dr. Brown's employment spanned but three and a half years, he was credited as the unsung hero of the church at this tremendously challenging time. When some members of the church wanted to sell out, Dr. Brown responded with a stalwart, "No!" Remember, this was just six or seven years beyond dedication of the new sanctuary.

On July 11, 1934, Dr. Brown submitted his resignation to accept the "call" of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He had held the church together, refused to let the church give in to financial forces beyond its control, kept the members active in serving the community around them, and challenged them to keep their commitments to the Southern Baptist

Convention. Furthermore, in his early ministry our church joined the New Orleans Christian Council, forerunner of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, an organization which sought to coordinate the efforts of Protestant churches in the city. Thus, our Church's ecumenism has been ongoing for nearly a century, uninterrupted. Although this won no accolades from fellow Southern Baptists, it did lift our church to a position of influence in the wider Christian community of our city.

A Revived Sense of Mission

St. Charles continued to face difficult times with grace and even a bit of enthusiasm. On October 14, 1934, a call was extended to Dr. Everett Gill, Jr., then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Marshall, Missouri. The son of Baptist missionaries to Europe, Gill was cultured, cosmopolitan and compassionate, a winning combination that very closely matched the needs of our congregation at this time. He had attended William Jewell College for one year followed by two years at the United States Naval Academy, after which he returned to William Jewell for graduation. He later earned a master's degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He also spent a year at Scotland's University of Edinburgh, after which he was granted a Doctor of Theology degree from Southern Seminary.

Dr. Gill's gentle and compassionate spirit helped the members to appreciate their beautiful facilities and their mission opportunities among students and the growing numbers of Southern European immigrants. The church was both resilient in meeting its challenges while at the same time holding true to its denominational affiliations. However, St. Charles maintained, in true Baptist fashion, a sense of independence, never viewing denominational leadership as "authority" nor allowing local, state, or national denominational bodies to dictate what our

church should or should not do. Although St. Charles remained firmly associated with Southern Baptists until late into the twentieth century, we always seemed to be at the outer edge of our denominational family. This is not to say that we maintained a sense of “aloofness” nor that we believed our way was best for anyone but ourselves and our own situation.

Dr. Gill seems to have been the consummate pastor and an orderly administrator. He used a planned calendar of events, stressed denominational participation (perhaps more than any other before or since), kept the church on track financially, although not without persistent budget deficits. His constant stewardship emphasis resulted in slight but steady increases in the budget and receipts, although he had little success in getting the members to commit to tithing (nor has any pastor since).

Neither did Dr. Gill back away from forging ahead with projects desperately needed. From the occupancy of the new sanctuary in 1926 up to his pastorate, the church had no organ, only the piano. Dr. Gill proposed that a new organ be purchased that would enhance the high quality of music the church had enjoyed for most of its history. Whitney Bank vetoed the idea of extending the church’s mortgage to cover the cost, but did not object to raising the money from other sources. The church voted on July 25, 1935, to purchase an organ from the Rivé Organ Company for \$2,500. This was the old Tellers-Kent (1919) organ from the Happy Hours Theater and it would require considerable repairs, reconstruction, and money for the next thirty-six years, but it was a pipe organ of 13 stops, 26 registers, and some 1,000 pipes, and it provided many “happy hours” for the church until a completely new Möller organ was purchased and installed in 1971.

Extended Property on St. Charles

Dr. Gill also led the church to purchase the Kolb property on the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Broadway, thus giving the church the entire 7100 block facing St. Charles Avenue on the river side. Well, technically, it was three prominent members of the church, O. J. Farnsworth, Dr. T. B. Sellers, and James S. Webb, who actually purchased the property and then offered it to the church for what they had paid \$18,000. The church had no money and even if it had, would have likely faced a much higher purchase price as a church. That house and the parsonage soon became the center for church growth in many directions, especially in its work with college students. Hundreds of students passed through that old house and a good many marriages were spawned there. Examples of students reached through this ministry who went on to important church positions include Dr. Winfield Applewhite who became a medical missionary to Indonesia, Dr. James Belote who became Secretary for East Asia missions of the Foreign Mission Board, and Dr. Sabin Paul Landry who taught for many years at Southern Seminary.

Dr. Gill was apparently a careful craftsman in his preaching, using a full manuscript averaging about six double-spaced pages. His first sermon at St. Charles might well have been preached today: "Christianity and Capitalism." In it he stressed that the Depression had forced Americans to question our entire economic system intelligently and courageously, saying that "...Christians...ought to be as interested in the economic and social problems affecting the nation and world as were the Hebrew prophets who thundered against the evils of their day." He did not hesitate to point out the defects of capitalism and he appealed for a social application of the gospel, for the amelioration of human suffering, for justice in the courts, for decency in our society, for honesty and fair play in our business.

Dr. Gill was well-loved and respected, and although his pastorate was the second-longest up to that point, the winds of war were looming which would put the church into another kind of crisis. Dr. Gill, as a chaplain in the Naval Reserve, had been ordered to report to San Diego for active duty in case of war. This had led him to decline a position on the staff of the Foreign Mission Board. However, his naval physical revealed a slight disability and he was given an honorable discharge. In the very same mail as this news came an urgent appeal from the Foreign Mission Board to reconsider. Thus, on October 19, 1941, Dr. Gill submitted his resignation as pastor to accept the position as Secretary of the Latin American Division of the Foreign Mission Board. Everett Gill had served our church well and his seven years were considered “good years.” Although there was still a heavy debt, there was also financial progress and preparation for the future. As Dr. Avery Lee said, “The church was better when he left than when he came. What better legacy could any pastor desire than that.”

Just two months after Dr. Gill resigned, the United States entered the World War II conflict. It would take ten months to find our next pastor, although during this time some members of the church had prevailed on the Pulpit Committee to call Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, a professor at Baptist Bible Institute (and later President). A call was extended to him, but he declined.

On August 12, 1942, the church extended its call to Rev. Harvey T. Whaley of Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Dr. Whaley was a native of Charleston, South Carolina, and a graduate of Jonesboro Baptist College in Arkansas. He had attended Southern Baptist Seminary but was not a graduate at the time he came to our church. As had his predecessors, he inherited a sizeable debt of \$51,000 which was refinanced at an interest rate of 4 ½%. Among Dr. Whaley’s concerns was a strengthening of the church’s organizations and a concerted effort to reach new people coming to

the area with the increasing tempo of the war. He also led the church in establishing a Youth Board with greater emphasis on the Baptist Student Union. A new Constitution and Bylaws was adopted in 1943 after prolonged and heated deliberations. In 1944 a drive to raise \$10,000 between October and December was initiated. Dr. Whaley also chaired the organization of the New Orleans Council of Churches. He was the first Protestant minister in the history of New Orleans to receive a key to the city and a certificate of merit from the Mayor and City Council.

Despite his accomplishments and the church's progress on several fronts, it was apparently not a happy time in the church's life. There were personality conflicts, and a business meeting was called to ask for Dr. Whaley's resignation. A house by house canvass was conducted and although the motion was supported by several prominent families, it failed by a margin of 3 to 1.

Dr. Whaley served admirably throughout the war years and brought this long period of depression and crisis to an end when he resigned on December 11, 1949, to accept the call of Calder Baptist Church in Beaumont, Texas. As he reminded the congregation in his letter of resignation, the church's indebtedness had been completely liquidated in 1946 and there was a treasury surplus of \$60,000 at the end of his pastorate. Likewise, some 1,200 members had united with the church and approximately \$440,000 had been contributed to all causes during his time with the church. In his four decades in the pastorate, he had not only served several important churches in addition to ours, but had served in several state and national Baptist organizations, including chairman, Southern Baptist Convention Commission on Negro Seminary; Board of Directors, American Baptist Theological Seminary; recording secretary, Board of Managers, Tennessee Baptist Orphans Home; 1st Lieut., Chaplains' Reserve, U.S.A.; Reserve Officers' Association; Chaplains' Association, Army. We can only wonder why some in

the church were so unhappy with such outstanding leadership. Above all, the church had survived, even triumphed over financial and social crises.

New Decade, New Attitude, New Hope

The end of World War II ushered in a new American era of peace and prosperity, and with it a renewed sense of the American dream. St. Charles Church had weathered two decades of crisis, both financial and otherwise. Pastors Brown, Gill, and Whaley had labored under very trying circumstances, each with a certain amount of success despite the difficulties. St. Charles had not only survived, but it had also thrived in some ways, reaching a total membership of approximately 1,500, thus making it the largest Baptist church in New Orleans for a time. Although completely committed to the autonomy and independence of the local church, it had also remained faithful to its denominational connections, albeit without the recognition it deserved in many cases. Its reputation as a church where you could practice your faith without fear of recrimination, its ecumenical outlook, its engagement with the community, and its deep interest in missions at all levels were by now deeply imbedded in the psyche of the congregation. If St. Charles was somehow considered more progressive, even liberal, than its fellow Baptist churches, it was in no small part due to the nature of its congregation: well-educated with well-educated ministers, not wealthy but perhaps a bit above average, and most especially well-connected through the myriads of college and seminary students and young professionals who had passed through its doors on the way to stellar careers in many fields and in many places. Just reading through a list of religious, business, education, and even political leaders verifies just how influential St. Charles has been throughout its history.

Having successfully endured The Great Depression and World War II under good if not popular leadership, St. Charles entered the 1950s with hope, and in fact found this new decade to be one of healing under the able leadership of two pastors who each had served as Associate Pastor at the venerable First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. At the national level, Southern Baptists were already grappling with the civil rights issues and inclusion of African Americans in white churches. The national move toward such racial justice in both church and state was not a popular move in many areas, especially Louisiana. The Louisiana Baptist Convention adopted a new constitution limiting membership to white churches only. St. Charles would be among the first in both the SBC and the LBC to welcome African Americans into membership, and in fact, New Orleans would provide the SBC with its first African American president, Dr. Fred Luter of Franklin Avenue Baptist, a former white church which over a period of many years gradually became a mega-church and one of the largest in the SBC and nation. The student center at New Orleans Seminary is named in his honor.

The 1950s was also a decade of rapid expansion in the number of Baptist churches in the greater New Orleans area. Twenty-three new churches came into being during the 1950s and St. Charles provided members to virtually all of them. However, this expansion of churches along with suburban expansion had a significant impact on the dwindling membership of St. Charles. Nonetheless, the church moved ahead with plans for a new educational building, installation of air-conditioning and an elevator. Having experienced a period of hurt feelings and dwindling membership, the church was looking for a healer in its new pastor. Rev. Fred Kevetter, son-in-law of members Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Woodfin, served as acting pastor during the search process. The search committee was representative of the entire congregation, and even beyond. In

addition to the elected leadership of Deacons, Sunday School, Training Union, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood and Financial Secretary, there were two women elected by the church at large plus Dr. Roland Q. Leavell, president of New Orleans Seminary and Dr. Rufus Harris, president of Tulane University, both of whom were members at the time. By August 1950 the committee recommended Rev. David G. Evans of Atlanta as pastor. However, Rev. Evans declined the invitation, and Rev. William H. Rose, a seminary student was asked to serve as Interim Pastor.

Plans to build a new parsonage were put on hold in order to renovate the Kolb House instead. At the same time, the church voted to raise \$5,000 toward the Carver Center for ministry with African Americans, sponsored by the SBC's Home Mission Board.

A Pastor-Counsellor from First Baptist, Richmond, Virginia

Not until mid-December 1950 was the committee finally ready to present Dr. J. Lyn Elder as pastor. Dr. Elder was a native of Biloxi, Mississippi and a graduate of LSU and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, with master's and doctoral degrees, the latter in counseling. He had also been a paratrooper chaplain, and Associate Pastor of First Baptist, Richmond, Virginia. He was described as an unusually warm and friendly person of deep and active spiritual qualities with a real interest and love for people. His salary was to be \$7,200 annually and his family would reside in the Kolb house. He had the unique experience of beginning his pastorate with no church indebtedness and a surplus in the treasury.

Dr. Elder later wrote that he found St. Charles to have a great tradition of stability and had among its members a number who were not only genuinely spiritual and devoted, but who were also cultured and knowledgeable, in the best sense of the word. But he also pointed out that the

members were not quickly moved into doing things, but had a steadiness and depth that were remarkable. This description has thankfully remained true throughout the church's history. In an amazing effort to get to know his congregation, Dr. Elder, accompanied by a deacon, visited the homes of every active and inactive member of the church that could be located, all within a six-week period. Perhaps this experience led him and the church to remove some 500 members who could not be located. Not many churches would make such a sweeping hit on their statistics, but at least St. Charles was taking a realistic approach to its situation.

It was also in the early months of his pastorate that the church began making serious plans for an educational building and by ten months later, the church accepted a bid of \$131,692 for construction of the present office wing with classrooms above and the fellowship hall facing Broadway (that price is not much more than the cost of renovations to the second-floor classrooms of the office wing completed in 2017). The church had \$54,000 in hand but needed to borrow the balance of \$77,692 from the Progressive Bank and Trust (now Bank of New Orleans) to complete the process. By January 1953, the church adopted a plan to raise another \$100,000 to retire the indebtedness on this building and erect another building. However, their optimism was tempered by a ten-year delay for the construction of what is now the education building and chapel, which is currently nearly fully occupied by our non-profit community partners.

Dr. Elder soon found a place in local Baptist and ecumenical organizations, serving as moderator of the New Orleans Association and a member of the Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. He was also active in the Federation of Churches. Pastors and laymen of our church have been especially active in leadership roles within local and national organizations, at a level far beyond what is typical for a church of small to moderate size.

Dr. Elder's pastorate lasted only three years, but they were wonderful years in which the church experienced changed hearts, healed spirits, new and renewed joy in the Lord, and considerable physical progress in our property. Dr. Elder commented on the church at the time of his leaving: "The strength of the church was its recovery from the period of depressed morale that characterized the pre-1951 period, its long-standing traditions of stability and devotion, and its readiness to move forward in a more effective ministry." For its part, St. Charles would have loved for J. Lyn Elder to remain its pastor for many years to come, but on April 11, 1954, he announced his resignation to accept a faculty position at the newly-created Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, California. Another St. Charles member (and a native of New Orleans), Dr. Morgan Patterson, would later serve as President of that institution. These and numerous other members of St. Charles have served as college, university, and seminary faculty and administrators. Indeed, for many years in the middle decades of the twentieth century St. Charles was the church home of a significant number of New Orleans Seminary faculty, administrators, and students.

A Second Pastor-Counsellor from First Baptist, Richmond, Virginia

Perhaps because Dr. Elder had left the church in such good condition and good spirits, the Pulpit Committee worked much faster this time. Associate Pastor W. W. (Don) Grafton was asked to assume the duties of interim pastor. Within just four months, the committee had recommended that Dr. Myron C. Madden be called as pastor. The similarities between Elder and Madden were remarkable. Both were friends and attended LSU and Southern Seminary together. Both served as military chaplains. Both earned doctorates in pastoral counseling from Southern Seminary, and both had served as Associate Pastor of First Baptist, Richmond, Virginia.

Dr. Madden began his ministry at St. Charles on October 15, 1954. He immediately understood the needs and problems of the church, but describes the church as being a home for the spirit of Baptists who wanted to be in a fellowship of Baptists, but who couldn't accept the rigidity of the so-called "evangelicals." He saw three basic needs: a time for healing and a task worthy of the congregation; an increased ministry to students; and strengthening the image the church had of being a different congregation of Baptists, and of arriving at a point where the typical denominational "peddler of faith" could never occupy the pulpit for long.

Much of the work initiated by Dr. Elder and pastors before him continued under Dr. Madden. His warm, pastoral counselor approach both in the pulpit and otherwise, helped continue the needed healing over earlier issues. And it seems, as always, at least a few minor issues came up along with the opening of some older wounds. Never a church to adopt denominational programs, literature, and even attitudes without question, some members almost succeeded in changing the historic course of the church by pushing the adoption of "everything Southern Baptist" program, particularly in education and finance. At the same time that St. Charles was experiencing high attendance in Sunday School and giving to missions, it also adopted grading the adults in Sunday School for a short time, and the Forward Program of Church Finance. However, neither actually suited St. Charles. This was at a time when the Southern Baptist Convention seemed more interested in numbers and methodology instead of individuals and content. This was particularly true of church literature, which to some seemed more like indoctrination than education. St. Charles had long been a pace-setter, not a blind follower, and this experiment with accepting the SBC's programs and literature without question lasted only a short time, though not without tension. Thankfully, many classes and organizations continued to

pick and choose what items they wanted so as to maintain and continue the free spirit of the church.

There was even a flap over dancing which the church did not oppose as had so many Baptist churches. Some of the older members, including deacons, wanted to have square dances at the church. Interestingly, it was mostly younger or newer members of the church who didn't want these dances to be "at the church." Although the issue was heated for a while, it was eventually settled by having the dances elsewhere.

Fortunately, Dr. Madden kept emphasizing the strengths of the church, pointing out in various ways that although St. Charles might have failed at being a "big" denominationally-loyal church, it had found strength and influence in being a "good" church for its members, its denomination, and its community. Perhaps under Dr. Madden's leadership, St. Charles was finally acknowledging its being a "different" sort of Baptist church and was accepting a willingness to live with that choice.

Under Dr. Madden's leadership, St. Charles continued to participate at whatever level it felt appropriate in such evangelistic efforts as the Billy Graham crusade of 1954. Missions continued to be emphasized by underwriting the leasing of property and supervising a mission at Delacroix Island, which in 1957 became the fourth church to be founded by St. Charles. A fund for "Student Aid and Education" was set up, as was a Young Men's Council. Doyle Hamilton, son of former pastor W. W. Hamilton was hired as an Office Manager. A Drama Guild was organized. Facilities were provided for Children with Learning Disabilities. The organ was repaired at considerable expense, and there was an increasing desire to purchase a new one.

When the St. Charles Avenue Christian Church burned, we offered our facilities to them until they were able to return to their own building.

The decade of the 1950s proved to be a crucial period in the church's history, but thankfully these two gifted pastors and counselors managed to keep St. Charles focused on its strengths and not its weaknesses, thereby enabling the church to move forward with assurance that its chosen progressive path was where God wanted it to be, and that path was to be celebrated and well-traveled in meeting the needs and challenges of its people and its community.

Although local, state and national Baptists might have turned elsewhere for leadership, increasingly Baptist Hospital and New Orleans Seminary looked to St. Charles. On December 9, 1959, Dr. Madden submitted his resignation to become Head of the Department of Pastoral Care at Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans, to institute a much-needed center for certified training in Clinical Pastoral Education. In his resignation statement, Dr. Madden said that it seemed to him that this decade of the 1950s ends for St. Charles on a genuine note of peace and harmony. Furthermore, he stated that "The strength of the church lay in its ability to take its place of leadership within the community without being raucous, vulgar, noisy, or even 'outstanding'. Perhaps the church had come of age without having to 'prove' itself to the denomination or the community."

Dr. Madden was the first pastor, joined only by Dr. Avery Lee, to remain at St. Charles after his pastorate ended, and how blessed has our church been by both who remained quietly "at home" in the church until they transitioned to their heavenly home.

Turbulent Times—Sustained Leadership

With the end of the 1950s came an end to the peaceful post-war years. Drs. Elder and Madden who had followed one another as Associate Pastor at First Baptist of Richmond, Virginia, and then as Pastor of St. Charles had provided much-needed peacemaking, although there were some remnants of discord even under these two gifted pastoral counselors. The new decade of the 60s would usher in another troubled age nationally with the election of the nation's first Catholic president, the lengthy and devastating Vietnam war, the turbulent reaction to this unpopular war, especially among the young, and the rising counter-culture movements such as the hippies (or flower children) whose views of what it meant to be American and in some cases, Christian, were markedly different than their parents and grandparents. The deep-seated desire for a society in which acceptance, tolerance and love took precedence over war, nationalism, and churches who seemed distant from their own experience of life ushered in an era of globalization. The Civil Rights movement brought on further turbulence, but eventually resulted in the integration of schools and society at large, and in some church circles as well. St. Charles would become one of the first churches within the Southern Baptist Convention to open its doors to all without regard to race or national origin.

The interval between pastors was long, nearly two years. Despite losing members to other congregations, particularly in the suburbs where many St. Charles members had moved in the post-war years. But the church held together under the capable leadership of Rev. Dudley Downing, Associate Pastor, and Interim Pastor Dr. Claude Howe, professor of church history at the New Orleans Seminary. Finances held steady and there was a New Member Orientation system put into place whereby candidates for membership were voted on at a time other than the Sunday morning service. This was in part to avoid any unpleasantness should African Americans

present themselves for membership, but from that time forward the church has consistently had attendees and members from many races and nationalities. No one has ever been turned away from St. Charles based on their race or nationality or sexual orientation. And, more importantly, all have been welcomed and embraced by our congregation.

The Church's Longest Pastorate

Although the narrative in this section is heavily drawn from that of the original *Our Name Is Baptist*, that narrative and evaluation of Dr. Avery Lee's ministry, was compiled by Dr. Fisher Humphreys, a professor at New Orleans Seminary and later at Beeson School of Divinity of Samford University. Humphreys was a long-time member of St. Charles from his days as a student, and his wife Caroline was church secretary for a time during Lee's pastorate. Humphreys' first hand and detailed account of Dr. Lee's twenty-year pastorate, the longest in St. Charles's history, provides a more thorough insight than one ever could have gleaned from the records.

The search committee worked diligently even though there was some conflict over what type of pastor the people wanted. On one occasion, a candidate reported that he had received an anonymous letter, after which he declined the church's invitation to interview. The committee submitted their resignations, but the church voted overwhelmingly to ask that they continue their work. On another occasion a candidate who did preach in view of a call, said from the pulpit: "You people are wondering if I can preach a sermon. Well, I'm wondering if you can recognize a good sermon when you hear one." Evidently, the church could, and that man was not asked to become pastor.

In June 1961, two members of the committee traveled to Ruston, Louisiana, where they interviewed G. Avery Lee and his wife and stayed over for the morning service at First Baptist Church there. That church, like St. Charles, was something of a university church and Dr. Lee was noted for his preaching and stands on social issues, and was considered liberal by many. He was also looked upon by some as an integrationist. The committee was already aware of this and promptly invited Dr. Lee and wife Ann to visit New Orleans for a formal interview. On July 2, 1961, the church voted unanimously to call Dr. Lee as their new pastor. Neither could have known at the time that his would be the longest pastorate in the church's history. For the next two decades, Avery Lee served St. Charles in exemplary fashion and led our church to new heights of expanded ministry.

Avery Lee was a native of Oklahoma and had completed his undergraduate work at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, and his seminary work at the Divinity School of Yale University, in New Haven, Connecticut. His entire ministry had been in collegiate settings. He had been the Baptist Student Director at Louisiana State University and Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, followed by thirteen years at the Ruston church, that church's longest pastorate, as well. He had already established a widespread reputation both within the denomination and outside, also. He had two published books and wrote a column "Thus Saith the Preacher" which appeared in a dozen Baptist newspapers. He had spoken on more than twenty-five college campuses, and had traveled widely. Although his stances on social issues were markedly different than most Southern Baptists, he wielded a wide influence among the more liberal and ecumenical Baptists.

Because of a previously scheduled tour of Europe and the Holy Lands, Dr. Lee and his family were delayed in moving to New Orleans, but his ministry among us began officially on September 1, 1961. Once again, housing for the new pastor and his family was a problem, but the church started a housing fund in early 1962 and some three years later the church purchased a house at 27 Newcomb Boulevard for \$50,000. An additional \$35,000 was raised for renovations to the house and the Lees lived in this house throughout his tenure at the church.

During the interim before Dr. Lee's pastorate, St. Charles Church had proceeded with plans to build an education wing and to renovate the older building. At a deacons' meeting right after his arrival, these building plans were discussed with the new pastor and the church proceeded quickly with putting the plans into action. New construction, renovations and furnishing put the estimated cost at \$545,000. The church had \$25,000 on hand and authorized the trustees to borrow \$400,000 to complete the project. That building (the current education and chapel wing) was dedicated on April 21, 1963. For several decades, this building housed the burgeoning Sunday School and educational classes of the church, but by the turn of the century when the church's membership was dwindling, other uses for the building developed, including office space for Habitat for Humanity and other non-profit organizations. Today it is used almost exclusively for such community-based organizations.

Another addition to the church shortly after Lee's arrival was the purchase of a new pipe organ. The old organ which had come from a local theater was already worn out when it was purchased and required considerable expense over the years to maintain. Under the leadership of Minister of Music Wayne Hobbs, the church proceeded with plans, and in 1969 a contract was signed with the M. P. Moeller Company for a 34-rank instrument at a cost of \$57,670. The new

organ was dedicated on April 18, 1971, with church organists Dr. John Yarborough and Dick Mullins playing the dedicatory recital. This organ continues to serve the church well although its age now requires substantial upkeep.

As with many of his predecessors, Lee faced the challenge of raising and sustaining adequate finances. Many methods and schemes have been tried throughout the decades with varying success. Despite having a generally middle to upper middle-class membership, generous in their contributions to the church and its affiliated ministries, the congregation had resisted pledging and the canvassing of the members for their dedicated support of the church budget. Nonetheless, the congregation had honored its financial commitments over the years and often raised funds in excess of goals toward local and denominational causes. In 1964, St. Charles took the rather radical step of trust and faith by declaring “No more pledges to the church budget.” That policy lasted for a number of years, and insofar as can be determined, the church continued to meet its obligations. Even in this 125th year of its existence, St. Charles has not one penny of indebtedness on its campus with an estimated value in excess of \$7,000,000.

While finances may have been a little shaky without pledges to the budget, mission giving and participation continued and increased under Dr. Lee’s leadership. Hurricane relief during Betsy and Camille, chaplaincy support at the Orleans Parish Prison, assistance with the Seaman’s ministry, support for the H.E.A.D. clinic, literacy classes for prisoners and the wives of international students, and a ministry to the Japanese and Korean people living in New Orleans were just some of the many social ministries in which the church and individual members were involved. Likewise, there was a very strong program of student ministry at Tulane, University of New Orleans, and the medical schools, under the leadership of members Raymond Crawford and

Anne Earnest. Furthermore, the pastor and other members were well represented on local, state and national boards, both denominational and others. Among the membership were many well-known professionals and business leaders.

Other changes led or strengthened by Dr. Lee included changing business meetings to an “on call when necessary” basis, and quite remarkably an attitude that the church not bother with the details of church by-laws, but instead rely on guidelines and principles. A spirit of mutual love and trust had replaced the legalistic letter-of-the-law atmosphere. One can hardly imagine such freedom in light of the time devoted to constitution and by-laws discussions and revision in the ensuing decades.

It was quite obvious that Dr. Lee was more interested in the spiritual, intellectual and missional aspects of congregational life than in its administration. Youth were more involved in the church’s ministry, including some young men who were elected as deacons. At times, there was as much as a fifty-year age span among the deacons. The same held true of all church committees. Ordained ministers in the congregation were welcomed more as “laymen” than church officials and served in many capacities of the church. As late as the 1970s, nearly half of the faculty members at New Orleans Seminary were members at St. Charles. Although Dr. Lee did not specifically target these ministers and highly-educated persons, his sermons did have an appeal to the well-educated. Church records also indicate that during this period that on any given Sunday more than half of those in attendance were under 30. Young and old alike were very much attracted to the atmosphere of intellectual honesty and spiritual warmth from pulpit and people.

Women Are Ordained as Deacons and Ministers

Although women had been a part of St. Charles's leadership from the beginning, it was also under Dr. Lee's leadership that two women were elected deacons in November of 1971, a first among Southern Baptist churches in Louisiana. Those somewhat neglected church by-laws came in handy, for they merely stated that "A Deacon must be a member of the church." St. Charles would also be the first among Louisiana Baptists to ordain women to the ministry, and the first to call a woman as Senior Pastor, although after leaving Southern Baptists.

These accomplishments and advances further distinguished St. Charles from the typical Southern Baptist congregation, although the majority of its members came from those more typical SBC churches. Dr. Lee very much wanted to capitalize on the church's long-standing open and ecumenical approach, and it was he who proposed a sort-of church motto printed on bulletins and other literature for many years: "The Difference is Worth the Distance." It was becoming increasingly true, especially with the expanding suburbs, that members were coming from all over the metropolitan area just to experience that "difference." This is perhaps even more true today with a much-smaller membership, some travelling an hour just to attend a church where you need not park your brain at the door and where love takes precedence over circumstance.

Part of that difference was reflected in the church's counseling ministry. Lee's two immediate predecessors were well-trained pastoral counselors, and Dr. Myron Madden had left the pastorate of St. Charles to build the program of counseling at Southern Baptist Hospital. Dr. Lee had some training in pastoral counseling, but not to the extent of Elder and Madden, so he adopted the technique of listening for one or two sessions and then using the referral method for

those who required more prolonged counseling. Dr. Madden became the primary referral person. Lee was not a “door-bell ringing” visiting pastor, so this referral method worked well for him and the church members.

Early in 1970, St. Charles instituted an in-depth self-study to inventory attitudes, outlooks, desires, needs, what was liked, disliked, etc. A study of this survey indicated that a professional in church administration should be engaged to provide an extensive analysis of the church. At the same time, retirement and resignations called for a review of the church’s staff in line with the consultant’s recommendations. Rev. Arnold Holley was asked to take the position of Minister of Education-Administration. He began to put together both the education and business areas of the church on a better functioning basis. Rev. Holley also re-established the church’s counseling ministry.

A Well-Defined Preaching Ministry

Dr. Lee believed that the pulpit or preaching ministry of the church was of utmost importance. Having well-trained associates allowed him to devote his talents and time to this with significant results. The kind of congregation that St. Charles embodied also allowed Lee this rare privilege. It was well-known that St. Charles had an above-average membership in terms of education. Many members were university and seminary faculty and students, and many others were leaders in the professions and business.

Dr. Lee’s sermons were written in full and he preached from a manuscript, not a common practice among Southern Baptists in those times. He planned his sermon topics a year in advance, prepared his manuscript at least a month in advance, and by the time he preached a sermon, it was virtually memorized. Not necessarily a scholar, he did bring the results of

scholarship to his sermons. Copies of Lee's sermons were regularly requested by church members and others outside the congregation, particularly other pastors. Also, at this time a paid advertisement in the local Saturday *Times-Picayune* newspaper included a capsule summary of the Sunday sermon. One or two of his sermons were repeated several times, most notably one entitled "The Impossible Dream" based on the popular Broadway play and movie *Man of La Mancha*. Member and Contralto Soloist Mona Goff Bond sang the inspirational title song as part of the sermon. Dr. Lee also took on many of the theological and social issues of the day such as the "Death of God" controversy. In one such sermon he pointed out that God did not so much need defense attorneys as character witnesses, an attitude desperately needed in twenty-first century America.

This depth and breadth of progressive, even liberal, preaching was atypical of not only Southern Baptists but other denominations as well. Dr. Lee enjoyed preaching sermon series, exploring a topic or theme over several weeks duration. This was long before some Baptist churches began using the Common Lectionary of scriptural readings. In every case, he provided the staff members, especially the musicians, with copies of his sermons so that all elements of the worship service could be coordinated around the theme or scripture for the day.

Dr. Lee's sermons might be described as "life situation," that is, relating the scripture to the lives of the listeners. As a self-described liberal, Lee felt it was his duty to make Christianity intelligible, credible, comprehensive, and convincing to modern minds. Wife Ann described her husband as a "Christian humanist" and later on as a "humanistic Christian."

Dr. Lee and St. Charles Church Influence the Wider Church

Dr. Lee was also known as a writer, both before and during his pastorate at St. Charles. He wrote curriculum materials for the Baptist Sunday School Board and published at least six books, some of which were collections of his sermons. His last book, written in collaboration with long-time friend Rev. Gardner Taylor, a powerful voice for civil rights and known as “the dean of black preachers,” was a collection of pastoral hints for young ministers.

Elected as the Louisiana member of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Christian Life Commission, and serving in that capacity for fourteen years, Avery Lee, as part of that commission, pricked the conscience of Southern Baptists, particularly in the midst of the strife for racial justice during the 1960s. In fact, Dr. Lee was chairman of the Commission for two years during the heat of the early Civil Rights uprisings. Likewise, church member Lanny Goldfinch was one of the few white activists for racial justice in New Orleans during this time. Dr. Lee was also involved in local church efforts, especially the New Orleans Federation of Churches which he served as President. His preaching and social activism, however, was never overshadowed by his desire to minister to “all God’s children” and that included the affluent and privileged as well as the poor and downtrodden.

Throughout Lee’s twenty years at St. Charles there was growth in numbers and spiritual direction as a more and more diverse and scattered membership sought out a church home where they did not have to “park their brains” at the door, where community was formed despite living in widely-spread areas of the metropolitan New Orleans area, where youth ministry might include teenagers from a dozen or more high schools, where highly-educated professionals, even seminary professors, could be fed spiritually, and where all could find inspiration for living the

Christian life in all circumstances of life, and where every member could work outside the church toward the betterment of society.

In the midst of his outstanding accomplishments for the church, the denomination, and society at large, Dr. Lee and his family were suffering under the devastating illness and death of his wife Ann. Cancer had left her face scarred almost beyond recognition, yet she maintained as much participation in the life of her family and church as any human could have done. And it was in this time that our church showed its character by ministering to its pastor. Under the leadership of Deacon Stuart Langford, a hospital fund was created which greatly relieved the hospital and travel expenses both locally and in Madison, Wisconsin, where Mrs. Lee spent long stretches of hospitalization, sometimes as long as three months. Dr. Lee struggled but managed to maintain a stable home for their three children and a stable ministry for the church. Neither he nor Mrs. Lee ever blamed God for the cancer but accepted it as an unexplainable fact of life. Dr. Lee often talked of their experience as being part of a “fellowship of suffering” and he reminded all who would listen that “radiant living—without physical healing—is a far greater testimony of the miraculous power of God than even healing would be.” Ann Lee’s indomitable spirit, staunch faith, and cheery optimism were a source of constant inspiration to all who knew her, and indeed a solid part of her husband’s ministry.

Dr. Lee continued to participate in church life even after his retirement, serving as the Interim Pastor at University Baptist in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and on at least one occasion at St. Charles. After Ann’s death, he later married Gladys Selassi, and they had several years of happy marriage prior to her death. Even in his later years, Avery regularly attended worship and Wednesday services. He died not long after Hurricane Katrina, having relocated to Lake Charles

to be with his daughter, Ginny, and her family. Although a considerable part of this history has been devoted to Avery Lee's ministry, no evaluation, however long, can do justice to his influence in the ongoing life of this remarkable congregation.

The 1980s: Transition and New Directions

Following in the steps of a beloved, longtime pastor is no easy task. Nor was it particularly easy for the search committee in finding a suitable candidate. That committee was representative of a broad range of the membership and included Oren Renick, Chair, Peter Dombourian, Vice-Chair, Nelson Ardoin, Jr., Secretary, and members Mary (Mrs. C.L.) Brown, Ara (Mrs. Alex) Gwin, Edwin Hartzman, Elizabeth Lee, William Riehl, Robert C. Smith, Joe Toups, and Jean (Mrs. Don) Westbrook.

A questionnaire submitted to the membership indicated that the four qualities to be desired in a new pastor were: Caring, Preaching, Leadership and Vision. The search narrowed to Dr. William H. Elder II of Nashville, Tennessee, who was invited by the search committee to preach on July 19, 1981. At a called business meeting the next Sunday, July 26, he was invited to become our fifteenth pastor. Dr. Elder accepted the invitation and began his ministry at St. Charles on August 23. Of those fifteen pastors, only Dr. Avery Lee was a graduate of any seminary other than Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Indeed, only two other pastors to date have not been graduates of that seminary. At the time of his acceptance, Dr. Elder stated that he saw "evangelism and social action as two sides of the same discipleship coin," and that would be his approach.

William Elder grew up in New Orleans as a member of the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church. He was a graduate of Baylor University, where he became a Baptist, and had both the

bachelor and doctoral degrees from Baylor. Later, he received a degree from Southern Baptist Seminary. After a time on the faculty of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas, he had become a staff member of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Nashville. It was from this position that he came to our church, his first pastorate.

Times were changing politically and socially both in the United States and around the world. The solidly Democratic South was beginning to lean Republican. Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist and Democrat, was unseated by Ronald Reagan. Terrorism was beginning to raise its ugly head, especially in the Middle East. Likewise, Fundamentalism was beginning to make deep inroads into Southern Baptist leadership and life. St. Charles Church, already different than the typical Southern Baptist Church, was beginning to be even more ostracized from its sister churches within the denomination and especially within the Greater New Orleans Association and the Louisiana Convention.

Shortly after Dr. Elder's arrival, the church approved a new Constitution and By-Laws. There were no major changes in content, but there were some changes in the church's organizational structure. One change was to elect a Church Moderator to preside at business meetings, a task traditionally assigned to the pastor. The major change was to go to a Commission form of structure. These commissions would be elected by the church and would have the authority to appoint subcommittees of their own. These commissions would be for Administration, Worship, Education, and Missions-Ministries, the latter soon to be separated into two separate ones. This new structure was not readily accepted. Some felt the Administration Commission had too much authority, and there was a feeling among the Deacons that their role had been diminished, but within about six years this new structure was running smoothly.

St. Charles was already beginning to rent spaces in its facilities to outside groups, most notably the Gables Academy and Project Help, a learning center for educationally challenged children. An IBM computer was purchased for maintenance of records. Although the church continued to be plagued by financial instability, the budget rose from \$176, 956 in 1981 to \$312,450 in 1985, largely due to increased emphases on the Cooperative Program and other mission items, more church programming, salary increases, and inflationary costs.

Dr. Elder's background with the Christian Life Commission of the SBC fit in quite well with the church's longstanding and developing emphasis on social issues. During his tenure issues such as world peace and world hunger were emphasized, and the church hosted a food and clothing bank.

Fundamentalists Gain Control of the SBC

It was also during Dr. Elder's pastorate that the Fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, begun in 1979, was becoming more and more of an issue nationally and locally, particularly at New Orleans Seminary. In 1984, Dr. Elder put together a regional conference on "Celebrating Baptist Identity." Program personnel included Dr. Frank Stagg, noted New Testament scholar and former professor at both New Orleans and Southern seminaries and member of St. Charles; Dr. Bill Sherman pastor of Woodmont Baptist in Nashville, Tennessee; and Dr. Glenn Hilburn of Baylor University. Over 300 people from eight states attended the conference, indicating that there were some Southern Baptists neither ready nor willing to relinquish their theological heritage.

There were also some minor renovations of the sanctuary during this time and a move to substantially increase membership. However, there was continuing friction among those who

wanted to go all-out in a denominational emphasis on growth and those who wanted more emphasis on quality. In 1985, Dr. Elder submitted his goal of a 200% increase in membership over a ten-year period (netting 2,000 new members) and an increase of 500 attendance in Sunday School. Both goals were completely unrealistic, and within two months of announcing this ambitious plan, Dr. Elder resigned on April 28, 1985, to accept the pastorate of Pulaski Heights Baptist in Little Rock, Arkansas. Former Pastor Dr. Myron Madden, commenting about these goals, said that this was where St. Charles “failed to become a big church, not where it failed to be a good church.” Both thriving and surviving in the twenty-first century as a “good” church has become a monumental challenge.

In rather quick order, a pastor search committee was formed with Eugene Huffstutler as Chair, Russell Bond as Vice-Chair and Merry Toups as Secretary. Other members were Ed Clarkson, Norman Bridges, Rufus Harris III, Marjorie Ball, John Campbell, and Darla Rushing (Durham). Questionnaires were solicited and followed by a public meeting on what the congregation desired in a new pastor. The high hopes of finding a new pastor right away were not to be—it took eighteen months. The committee recommended that Dr. Eugene Hall, an active member of the congregation who was already serving as Associate Pastor for Worship-Education, be named Interim Pastor. Dr. Hall was a Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Seminary and the former President of Oklahoma Baptist University.

Dr. Hall devoted as much attention to the church as his teaching schedule would allow, but the lengthy search process resulted in something of a congregational moodiness, and after fifteen months he resigned. Likewise, the interim organist-choir director resigned shortly thereafter, and the church was left almost without leadership. Dr. Avery Lee, retired for a second time and

having returned to the church, was asked to step in as interim until the search process was completed. His first task and most significant was to assemble a Music Committee and search for a choral director to restore the music program to its high quality. Dr. Raymond Sprague, professor of choral music at the University of New Orleans, was hired as the new director. After a succession of guest organists, Dr. Jerry Aultman, faculty member at New Orleans Seminary, was hired as organist. Dr. Lee who had desired and accomplished being the church's longest-serving pastor stated that he wished this interim pastorate to be the church's shortest. And so it was, for within three months a new pastor was called. In honor of his long-time pastorate and his stalwart leadership in this brief interim, the church voted on February 22, 1987, to name Dr. Lee Pastor Emeritus.

Another Pastor with Richmond, Virginia, Ties

Dr. David Albert Farmer who seemingly appeared out of nowhere was asked to preach in view of a call on December 7, 1986, and was issued an invitation to become the new pastor in a business meeting held immediately after the service. Dr. Farmer was a thirty-two-year-old Tennessean living in Richmond, Virginia. He was a graduate of Carson-Newman College and held both master's and doctor's degrees from Southern Baptist Seminary. He was married to Lindon Fowler of Richmond who was a graduate of Campbell University and Southern Seminary as well. They had two sons, ages four and two-and-a-half at the time. The family was able to find housing with the assistance of the church, and moved to New Orleans in February 1987. On his first Sunday, the Farmers were received with an all-church dinner and an old-fashioned "pounding" to stock their pantry, brought forward with a "second line" to the strains of *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

Dr. Farmer's doctoral studies were in homiletics and he was the owner-editor of the prestigious *Pulpit Digest* which he later sold to Harper & Row Publishers but remained as its editor. He had just completed a semester of teaching at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, and was under consideration to return there as a full-time faculty member under appointment of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC. The very next day after his call to St. Charles, he was to be voted on for that position.

Dr. Farmer's pastorate began with high expectations, optimism, and a sense of togetherness. However, early on there were some shocks. The good staff that was in place began to disintegrate. Budget receipts were so short that the Administration Commission called a church business meeting on April 26 to reduce the budget, but the proposal was soundly defeated.

The sanctuary renovation which had been adopted but not yet accomplished hit a snag over a proposal to replace the original clear-glass windows with stained glass. That committee under the leadership of Mona Bond, after a year of study had recommended "that some kind of stained glass windows be placed in the sanctuary, with the specific design to be made later." This recommendation was soundly defeated. However, a large gift was received for other renovations and work began in September 1987, including reworking the woodwork and replacing damaged glass in the existing windows, lighting improvements, repairs to pews, installation of new carpeting and repainting of the whole sanctuary.

A major task Dr. Farmer faced was the rebuilding of the church Staff. In July, Rev. James Leach was called to be Minister of Education-Youth. He was a recent graduate of Southeastern Baptist Seminary and had also attended the International Baptist Seminary in Switzerland, and he had been on the staff of Myers Park Baptist in Charlotte, North Carolina. With Rev. Leach's

addition, the church was fully and well-staffed. Many of the church's extramural activities continued, such as the Arts Festival, music concerts and inter-church sports teams, as did the regular educational endeavors.

St. Charles Begins to Break Away from the SBC

By the time that the Southern Baptist Convention met in the summer of 1987, Fundamentalists had taken over virtually every denominational agency. Their chief objective was to rid the SBC of liberals at every level. There was talk of a split in the Convention, but no one really wanted that. A group of concerned Baptists met and formed the Southern Baptist Alliance (later renamed the Alliance of Baptists). Their purpose was to preserve the Baptist heritage of freedom, not to split the Convention. Both individuals and churches could join by making various levels of contributions. Dr. Farmer proposed that St. Charles join this newly-formed Alliance and on July 15, 1987, St. Charles became the first charter member in Louisiana, later joined by Northminster Church in Monroe and even later by Church of the Highlands in Shreveport. To date, these are the only churches in Louisiana affiliated with the Alliance. Other groups such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Main-Stream Baptists were later formed, and St. Charles has been affiliated with CBF from its earliest days, the only one in the greater New Orleans area. By the time St. Charles celebrated its 90th anniversary in 1988, the Fundamentalists had elected one of their own to the SBC presidency for ten consecutive years. Tragically, they also adopted a resolution which denied the keystone doctrine of Baptists known as the "Priesthood of the Believer." That resolution, more than any other, was the root cause for many churches to leave the Southern Baptist fold. St. Charles hung on for a few more years with its dual alignment and affiliations but would soon find its SBC affiliation too much to bear. In

fact, our church was beginning to feel more and more isolated in its adherence to historic Baptist principles and practices.

“First” and “Only” have been applied to St. Charles Church on many fronts. On November 9, 1980, another such event occurred with the ordination of Ms. Judy Nelson to the Gospel Ministry. Not only was this a first among Louisiana Baptists, but St. Charles is the only Southern Baptist Church in Louisiana to have ordained women to the diaconate and the pastorate, and the only historically-white Baptist church in the state to call a woman as its Senior Pastor.

Dr. Farmer’s tenure at St. Charles came to an end just as the 1990s were beginning. He had labored during a most difficult time in our church’s history and in our national history. Too much of his time was spent preaching, teaching and writing over the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. In some ways, his brilliant preaching was hijacked by these changes taking place locally and nationally. Additionally, it was a time when both the religious right and the extreme elements of the political right were wreaking havoc among all denominations and the government as well. Dr. Farmer submitted his resignation as Pastor of St. Charles in October 1991 to accept the pastorate of University Baptist Church of Baltimore, Maryland. This came as a mild surprise, many in the congregation expecting that he might resign to accept a professorship in homiletics. His departure had once again left St. Charles in a quandary about its future as it neared the centennial of its founding.

The Centennial Decade

In accordance with the church’s by-laws, a committee was put in place right away to select an Interim Pastor and to proceed with a search for the new pastor. The Search Committee was composed of Bob Marye, Chair, Dr. J. Russell Bond, Norman Bridges, Dr. Barbara Cook, Dr.

Frank Durham, Dr. Harry Eskew, Joyce Hadley, Ann Madden, and Mabel Palmer. They wasted no time in asking Dr. Malcolm Tolbert to be Interim Pastor. A member of the church on more than one occasion and a retired professor from New Orleans and Southeastern seminaries, Dr. Tolbert was an excellent preacher and New Testament scholar. However, due to his wife's severe illness, he relinquished his position at the end of April 1992. Once again, former pastor Dr. Avery Lee was asked to serve as Interim, beginning in May and serving until Rev. Steven Meriwether was called as Pastor some ten months later.

Drs. Tolbert and Lee provided excellent pulpit ministry during the sixteen-month interim between pastors Farmer and Meriwether, but it was Ms. Anne Earnest, Minister of Education, who held the church together, according to Dr. Lee. She could easily have served in both administrative and preaching duties, but she was as much the interim as either of the two pastors who officially served. Ms. Earnest was a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Seminary and had been a member of St. Charles for more than thirty years. She was ordained a Deacon by the Church and had been the Baptist Student Union director for the Mather School of Nursing at Southern Baptist Hospital for many years, continuing to serve the hospital as director of volunteer services after Mather merged with the nursing school of William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. It was Anne who indeed performed almost all the duties of a pastor except for the regular preaching, and she could well have done that. She continued to serve the Church for a few months after Rev. Meriwether became pastor, leaving only after her marriage to Dr. Charles Blackmon in 1994, moving to Bunkie, LA, where Dr. Blackmon was pastor.

The pastor search committee took quite some time to settle on a final candidate to present to the church, considering some sixty persons including women. Time and again they seemed to be

near a recommendation only to be disappointed in one way or another. Finally, Dr. Barbara Cook, one of the committee members who had been visiting family in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, met Rev. Meriwether who was then an Associate at Knollwood Baptist Church there. She came back with glowing reports and suggested the church consider Rev. Meriwether. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to visit St. Charles in view of a call, soon followed by the church's official call and his acceptance effective March 1, 1993. Rev. Meriwether was only 32 and a bachelor with very little preaching experience. However, he enthusiastically accepted the challenge and was received quite happily by the church. He was a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville as were all his predecessors except Dr. Lee. He sometimes remarked that he planned to stay longer than Dr. Lee and very nearly lived up to that, serving the church for some 15 years, the second longest in our history to date. He had been pastor for five years at the time of the church's centennial, his work already being marked characteristically by close oversight and supervision of all the church's activities, something which was very much needed at the time. His preaching style was well-matched to the congregation's expectations, and he was known for his use of literary illustrations, especially from Carson McCullers. It was also he, with the encouragement and assistance of Dr. Margaret Eskew, who established the Jazz Service on the Sunday before Mardi Gras with Dr. Michael White and his Original Liberty Jazz Band. That service, begun in 1994, continues and is always attended by very large crowds.

Steven was wise in his choice of ministerial and staff assistants. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Rev. Amy Butler who had come to New Orleans to work with the New Orleans Mission, served as the Associate Pastor for Mission and Membership until her call to be the first woman pastor of historic Calvary Baptist in Washington, DC. She was later called as the first woman pastor of the

historic Riverside Church in New York City. Rev. Austin Amonette, a doctoral student at New Orleans Seminary, served during the same time as Associate Pastor for Youth and Students. Other staff during Rev. Meriwether's pastorate included John Bellar, Barbara Meigs, Catherine Mathis, and Elizabeth Bradner.

When Rev. Meriwether began his duties the church's active membership and attendance had dwindled considerably from its heyday under Dr. Lee's leadership. Undeterred by the statistics, Steve as he came to be called affectionately, slowly rebuilt attendance and finances back to a level of secure sustainability. At the time of the 100th anniversary in 1998, the church's average attendance had moved to about 160. Steve was also quite active with neighboring churches and pastors, particularly in the group sometimes referred to as the *God Squad*, composed of neighboring clergy from Temple Sinai, St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian, Holy Name of Jesus Catholic, Trinity Episcopal, Rayne Memorial Methodist and others. Rev. Meriwether was also responsible for inviting Habitat for Humanity to locate their local offices at the church and was instrumental in coordinating efforts among the churches to participate in some of Habitat's home building projects. Little did he know then how much these experiences would prove handy when Hurricane Katrina came to town just a few years later. He was also active in establishing a medical clinic sponsored by several local churches. In some ways, he was more of a social activist than had been his predecessors. With so much of the church's building no longer needed for church activities, Steve began encouraging the use of these spaces to non-profit organizations in addition to Habitat for Humanity, including Lawyer Nick Trentacosta who worked with the unjustly imprisoned.

Hurricane Katrina Nearly Destroys New Orleans

During the years immediately following Hurricane Katrina, the church was active in rebuilding efforts, sometimes in connection with Habitat for Humanity, and at other times with volunteers from our own and other churches who sent volunteers to New Orleans to help. St. Charles housed, fed and facilitated more than twenty work groups from as far away as New York and South Dakota. Broadway Baptist in Fort Worth was especially helpful in this regard and even made a substantial monetary gift to the church. Members who had lost their homes were among the beneficiaries of these work groups. It was as if all the goodness of Christians and Americans had erupted in the face of such great tragedy, and St. Charles found a renewed sense of common purpose in serving our community and city.

Rev. Meriwether had been in conversations in view of a call with other churches even before Katrina, but he committed to staying at St. Charles until the Church's future could be put on a more stable footing. His skilled financial and administrative management of the Church made it possible for the Church to resume all services and functions after power was restored several weeks later. The first service post-Katrina was held in early November 2005 with more than 80 in attendance. Thus, once again, St. Charles was faced with rebuilding membership, attendance and income to a sustainable level. Fortunately, the Church had no indebtedness on its buildings, and also had investments approaching \$500,000. Of necessity, budgeting and spending would need to be carefully managed, and at that Steve was an expert. Katrina's damage, covered by insurance, had saved the Church from the enormous expense of replacing its clay tile roof.

With the Church's present stabilized and its future looking positive, Rev. Meriwether entertained invitations to move elsewhere. For several years, he had used most of his vacation

time travelling to his hometown in Tennessee to be with his ailing father and to help on the farm at certain seasons. Late in 2008, Steve announced to the Church that he had accepted the pastorate of Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, near Belmont University. Although it was a sad departure for both Steve and the Church, the Church gave its blessings and good wishes as he returned to his home state. Our Church is deeply indebted to Steve for his exemplary service to us and for securing our future when things looked so bleak.

Great Beginning, Sad Ending

St. Charles was blessed to have among its new members at the time the Rev. Alan Reddit who had come to New Orleans for his wife to pursue a master's degree at New Orleans Seminary. Alan was studying Clinical Pastoral Education with the McFarlane Institute of Baptist Community Ministries, and was serving as a hospital chaplain with them. Rev. Reddit was a graduate of Georgetown College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a splendid preacher, caring pastor and spiritual teacher. His time at the church, however, was limited mostly to Sunday morning and Wednesday evening services since he was a full-time chaplain. He had accepted the interim pastor position with the understanding that he would not be considered for permanent pastor, based partly on the fact that he and his wife expected to return to Kentucky at the end of their educational pursuits. There was also the factor that McFarlane's rules prevented chaplains from serving in interim positions for longer than a year, which for Alan ended shortly before Rev. Travis Norvell was called as Pastor. For the brief period between Alan's leaving and Travis's arrival, Dr. John Goodwin, retired pastor of the Broadmoor Church in Baton Rouge, was engaged for pulpit supply. Rev. Reddit was later called to the pastorate of Georgetown Baptist in his hometown of Georgetown, Kentucky.

This built-in time constraint on finding a new pastor encouraged the Pastor Search Committee to work diligently to find a new pastor as soon as possible. By July 2009 the search had narrowed to Rev. Travis Norvell, pastor of the Lime Rock Baptist Church in Lincoln, Rhode Island, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, USA, and where he had served the previous eight years. Although our Church had been affiliated with the ABCUSA for several years, Travis was our first Pastor to come from that denomination exclusively. He grew up in an American Baptist church in West Virginia and had graduated from Marshall University and Colgate Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York. His only experience among Baptists in the South was his first year of divinity school at Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond (Virginia). Rev. Norvell began his duties on July 1, 2009. He and his wife Lori, and their three young children moved to New Orleans shortly thereafter. The Church welcomed Travis and his family with open arms, delighted to have a pastor's wife and three small children, not only because we had been some years with a single pastor, but also to invigorate our children's activities as the number of children and youth in the church had dwindled considerably over the years.

The church enjoyed Travis's preaching and appreciated his outreach to younger adults and their families, which was desperately needed at the time after having suffered significant losses during the four years following Hurricane Katrina. It was obvious from the beginning that Travis was more liberal, generally-speaking, than the congregation. Whereas the tradition of pastors to that point had been to wear a robe only occasionally, Travis did so regularly, even using a minister's collar and liturgical stoles. For some years, St. Charles had been using the common lectionary readings, so this drift toward a more liturgically-oriented worship style was not

unwelcome by most of the congregation. A more-subtle difference was the cultural one between the Norvells' experience in the Northeast, particularly New England, and the Deep South, particularly New Orleans. Travis and his family did, however, come to love the city.

Rev. Norvell's forte seemed to be in casual meetings with prospective members, neighboring pastors and the community at large, very much needed and enthusiastically welcomed by the congregation. As had Steve Meriwether, Travis was welcomed by the "God Squad" ministers of nearby churches. He also wrote occasional columns for *The Times Picayune* and was recognized by *Gambit* as one of the "40 under 40" local leaders.

Unfortunately, the relationship between Rev. Norvell and the congregation soured quickly and was short lived. Eventually, amidst heated debates and hurt feelings, the Church reluctantly accepted Rev. Norvell's resignation, granting him severance remuneration of full salary and benefits from August through December, paid up front in a single payment. Rev. Norvell soon accepted the pastorate of Judson Memorial Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Several long-time church members left the church, some resigning altogether and others taking a break from active participation.

A Long Interim of Healing and Renewed Hope

As St. Charles faced the second decade of the twenty-first century, it did so in a quandary, its leadership under suspicion and sometimes derision, and there was no mechanism in place to immediately secure an interim pastor, which ordinarily would have been appointed by the duly-elected pastor search committee, according to church by-laws. Paul Powell, Minister of Education, volunteered to serve in an unpaid *acting pastor* role until the church decided what to

do. He asked Rev. Lynn Hyder to share in this role. Both were employed elsewhere and shared pulpit duties along with a few hours of administrative oversight as their schedules would allow.

The Church was in no hurry to appoint a search committee. Some members, as had been true before, questioned whether the church should sell its buildings and move elsewhere, or close altogether. Dr. Powell joined a small but supportive group in dissuading the congregation from such a momentous decision. The Church had no indebtedness, some \$400,000+ in savings and investments, and were paying their monthly expenses with only a small budget deficit.

By January 2012 when the Church had not yet appointed a pastor search committee, the Personnel Committee met with Dr. Powell and worked out an arrangement whereby he would continue to serve part-time as the church's primary administrative officer with the title of Associate Pastor. Money was included in the new budget for his part-time salary and for pulpit-supply every Sunday of the year. Paul accepted this arrangement, preaching about twice a month. Several members of the congregation and others from our denominational connections were invited to preach. Even after the search committee was elected, no Interim Pastor was engaged.

Left somewhat in limbo, the new secretary and accountant soon resigned under stress. Members Sharon Carroll and Madeleine Wallace were employed on a temporary, hourly basis to assist with secretarial and financial duties. Their work combined with Paul's being on-the-job greatly aided in returning the church to some sense of normalcy. All the usual church activities had resumed, and although there were many members still hurting from the disruption, worship attendance stabilized at about 85 and the church's income managed to keep pace with expenses.

One evidence of God's continuing grace during this difficult time was the appearance of Stephanie Little Coyne at our doorstep. Stephanie stopped by the church to talk with Paul on the

day after we had said goodbye to our part-time youth director, Elizabeth Bradner. Stephanie was not looking for a job, only a church home, but she seemed an appropriate candidate for part-time youth director. Stephanie was a graduate of the McAfee Divinity School of Mercer University and was employed as a hospice chaplain. Her husband was a doctoral student at New Orleans Seminary. Even though the salary was quite small, we were able to hire Stephanie as both Children's and Youth Director. Stephanie was indeed a gift from God, and later we were able to hire her in an expanded position of 30 hours per week with combined ministerial and administrative duties, particularly in the financial area.

Another indication of God's providential care came about in Summer 2012 when Tim Lauve-Moon contacted Paul for assistance in looking for some sort of employment in a CBF church. Tim and his wife Katie had moved to New Orleans for her to pursue a doctorate in social work at Tulane. Both were divinity graduates of the George W. Truett School of Theology at Baylor University. Tim had experience on the staff of their church in Waco and with Habitat for Humanity and was interested in missions and work with students. Although neither Habitat nor the Church had open positions at the time, Paul felt this was a splendid opportunity to hire Tim to work with students and young adults, a desperately needed ministry. We were able to adjust the budget enough to hire him part-time.

Paul, Stephanie, and Tim provided the majority of pulpit leadership during the two-year interim. The church was also blessed to have numerous guest preachers, including local and national leaders of the church's affiliations, former members such as Fisher Humphreys, former pastors such as Myron Madden, and the first female African-American pastor to preach from our pulpit, Rev. Sheila Scholes-Ross.

By January 2013, Stephanie had resigned her chaplain position and Tim had explored other part-time positions. Both had proved to be effective and productive staff members. Paul felt that funds budgeted for a full-time administrative assistant might be better spent to advance Stephanie's and Tim's positions to nearer full-time, with their sharing of administrative and financial management duties. During the budget deliberations for 2013, the Church was able to include modest salaries for both but with no benefits. This meant that until the new pastor came on board in November 2013, the church had a unique level-salary arrangement for all three of its ministers. The church soon realized what a blessing from God that both Stephanie and Tim were. The church was beginning to spring back to life and move forward in anticipation of finding its new pastor.

A Long Transition Comes to an End

Finally, a Pastor Search Committee was appointed, delayed by several months following Rev. Norvell's departure. Their work needed to proceed deliberately and as speedily as possible. From a pool of more than sixty candidates, including men and women, the committee was able to narrow these down to six highly qualified and recommended persons. By July, the search committee had settled on a final candidate to present to the church in view of a call. As was our customary procedure, the candidate is named in a called business meeting, usually on one Sunday with the candidate preaching a trial sermon on the following Sunday, after which the congregation votes to accept or reject the candidate. Just prior to the called business meeting, the candidate withdrew. However, the church met unofficially to discuss the way forward. The search committee wasted no time in recommending the next candidate, Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott.

A New Era Begins with Our First Female Pastor

Once again, St. Charles found its new pastor in Richmond, Virginia. In a called business meeting on Sunday, September 8, 2013, Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott, the Associate Pastor of Westover Baptist in Richmond, Virginia, was officially invited to preach in view of a call as our pastor. She preached on Sunday, September 15, and was immediately called as pastor. To accommodate her family's schedules, it was decided that she would begin her duties in mid-November on the Sunday that just happened to coincide with the Church's 115th Anniversary. Coincidentally, Rev. Lott joined at least five former St. Charles pastors who had Virginia connections.

Rev. Lott's husband Nathan was at the time employed as head of an agency in Virginia and the couple had two young children, Turner (age 8) and Julia (age 4). She was a native of Mobile, a graduate of Samford University and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and had strong experience with CBF and Alliance churches, including Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham where Rev. Sarah Shelton served as Senior Pastor. Dr. and Mrs. Fisher Humphreys, long-time members of St. Charles, were also affiliated with Baptist Church of the Covenant. This relationship between Elizabeth and Sarah, and the Humphreys to St. Charles, proved to be valuable in welcoming Elizabeth as our first woman pastor.

From the beginning of her pastorate, Rev. Lott has led the church into community engagement, both in terms of relations to neighboring churches, the university community, and social justice needs of the city at large. Although St. Charles had been involved in numerous local and national mission efforts, it had never been particularly confrontational in addressing justice issues through participation in demonstrations, marches, rallies, etc. Such activities had

been left to individual members, and many members had been involved in this way. Dr. Avery Lee had made it quite clear from the beginning of integration that our church was open to all people, regardless of their race, nationality, sexual orientation or denominational affiliation. Member Dr. Lanny Goldfinch had been one of very few whites in New Orleans to participate in sit-ins and demonstrations in the struggle for civil rights.

For decades, the church had accepted members from other denominations without requiring that they be baptized by immersion. So, the church was not new to controversial stances, and moving from intellectual assent to activism was not as difficult as might be expected. However, it is more difficult to differentiate between the political and spiritual aspects of justice issues, and not all members of the congregation have been approving of such activism.

Rev. Lott wisely spent the first few months of her ministry getting to know the people and developing a sense of where she might lead the congregation in this new era. Although she shared the congregation's concerns about membership and finances, it was obvious early on that she was just as concerned with developing the church's relationships with the community at large. She had the full support of her associates and both Stephanie and Tim soon involved themselves in finding ways for the church to connect with its neighbors, near and far. Tim gradually moved his work into ministry with young adults and connecting with non-church groups, which Rev. Lott called "community partners." In addition, new churches such as Redeemer Presbyterian, St. Stephen's Anglican and New Covenant Church NOLA have found welcome meeting spaces in our facilities.

Elizabeth and Tim began more actively seeking non-profits in need of office or meeting spaces. Within less than two years, almost the entire educational wing and a few other spaces

were occupied by groups such as Girls on the Run, Center for Peace Diplomacy, Positive Family Solutions, Reformed University Fellowship, Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra, KidCam Summer Camps, and several individual Counsellors and Recovery Groups. There was a desire to have a daycare or school to be located at the church, and although there were several inquiries, the regulatory constraints would have required a considerable investment to bring the building spaces up to code. Off-street parking and pickup were also concerns. Nevertheless, by 2015 the facilities were at near capacity for daily use and have remained so since. Contributions from these community partners and churches have helped considerably with church finances, particularly building maintenance.

Prior to attending seminary in Richmond, Rev. Lott had served as youth minister at Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Alabama, where Rev. Sarah Shelton was pastor. Rev. Shelton was among the first senior women pastors of Southern Baptist churches. Soon after Elizabeth began her ministry at St. Charles, she and Sarah obtained a grant to establish a mentoring relationship between the two pastors and the two churches. Several meetings and gatherings in both churches helped St. Charles in the transition to a woman pastor. This relationship between the two churches proved quite helpful and the ongoing relationship has been warmly received by both.

Elizabeth, Stephanie and Tim worked well together and there was a developing sense of renewal with more focus on community engagement. Attendance and finances had stabilized with a number of new members and congregants. Although youth and student attendance had dwindled considerably since Hurricane Katrina, Tim was able to engage a number of young adults. There was also a more open attitude toward LGBTQ+ members and their inclusion in all

church activities, including ordination to ministry and the diaconate. However, since both Stephanie's and Tim's spouses had come to New Orleans for doctoral studies, their tenures came to an end far too soon. It was the church's joy to ordain both Stephanie and Tim. Rev. Lott was for a time solo pastor after their departures, but she was soon able to hire an Administrative Assistant.

With the renewed emphasis on community engagement came the desire among several members that a center for social justice activities be created at the church. Dr. Becky Meriwether and Rev. Lott worked diligently to launch this center which was incorporated as the St. Charles Center for Faith + Action. Grant funding along with several generous gifts by individuals enabled the church to launch the Center. Soon after, Caroline Durham, who grew up at St. Charles and was a graduate of Tulane Law School, was selected as Director. Her long-time involvement with criminal justice and racial justice in Minneapolis and Atlanta made her the ideal candidate for leadership of the Center. Rev. Lott also assumed some leadership, splitting her duties between the Church and the Center.

Among Elizabeth's many accomplishments other than the Center was her leadership in obtaining the Sacred Spaces for All grant for much-needed restoration and repairs, primarily to our nearly-century old sanctuary building. That grant was for \$250,000 upon the church's raising of an additional \$500,000. That grant has been successfully accomplished and the work completed for Phase I which included cleaning and repointing of the exterior brick walls and stairs, replastering of the interior stairwells and windows, roof repairs for the whole plant, and development of refreshed and newer landscaping. Additional phases will entail planning and implementation of sanctuary renovations. Much credit also goes to husband Nathan for his

excellent work not only in obtaining the Sacred Spaces grant but also historic tax credits and other funding sources. As we approach the church's 125th anniversary in November 2023 our church campus is in better shape than it has been for decades, and much of the credit for that goes to Elizabeth and Nathan.

In August 2023, Rev. Lott announced her intention to step away from her pastoral career after a decade as our Senior Pastor and to explore other areas of ministry such as writing and speaking on a freelance basis. Although heartbroken, the congregation accepted with grace her very personal decision making. She also announced that husband Nathan who had stood by her side during this decade-long pastorate had been interviewed and then offered a position as Executive Director of the Historic Macon Foundation in Georgia. Elizabeth, Turner, and Julia would be remaining in New Orleans for the school year to accommodate Turner's high school graduation and transition to college before joining Nathan in Macon. The congregation sincerely congratulated Nathan and the whole family in this new venture, warmly sending the family on to this next phase of their lives with a teary-eyed but joyful blessing at the end of Elizabeth's final service on September 24, 2023.

The third-longest pastorate in the church's history, Elizabeth's ministry can hardly be adequately evaluated with only a few statements. However, in a Thank You note published in the bulletin on her last Sunday, the writer summed up her ministry among us quite well: For ten years Pastor Elizabeth served our congregation, leading us with thoughtful sermons, a bold sense of justice, a deep concern for the marginalized and oppressed, and a faithful witness to the deep love of God for all people. What pastor could want a better evaluation than that?

Seamless transitions in pastoral leadership are not often the case, but our church was blessed to already have on staff the Rev. Dr. Marc Boswell as our Administrative Pastor. Upon the announcement of Rev. Lott's resignation, the church voted to extend Marc's duties to serve as Interim Pastor as well beginning October 1, 2023. As we move beyond our 125th Anniversary, we anticipate continued progressive leadership under Marc's very capable guidance.

MEMBERSHIP AND MINISTRIES

Membership during the years 1998-2023 fluctuated as in past periods. However, Hurricane Katrina had a major impact on membership numbers already dwindling from other factors such as the overall decline in Protestant churches, particularly those in the progressive camp. Just seven years later after Hurricane Katrina had damaged the levees and flooded almost the entire city of New Orleans, membership declined even further with the church's having lost about forty members who were forced to move elsewhere. Attendance post-Katrina dwindled to less than 100 or approximately what it had been prior to Rev. Meriwether's arrival. By the time of Rev. Lott's arrival in late 2013, membership had declined even further with typical attendance at about 65-75, where it has remained rather stabilized to date, the church having lost some members to death or attrition, but also having gained a significant number of new members during Rev. Lott's tenure. The two-year Coronavirus pandemic has stunted church growth even further, but attendance by Zoom or in-person has remained relatively stable at about 65 in 2023.

EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES

Next to worship, the Sunday School and educational ministries of St. Charles have played a major role through the decades. Baptists have prided themselves on being more biblically literate than most other denominations. Part of this claim can be based on denominational promotion of

the Sunday School for all ages, including the provision of literature written by leading scholars. Prior to the Fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, churches could depend on having a broad range of scholarship incorporated into its curriculum materials. Unfortunately, after the takeover writers were under constraints to align their viewpoints with the conservative stance of the newly-empowered leadership. At St. Charles, some Sunday School teachers and classes had opted for a variety of study materials from many sources, both denominational and not. Some classes broadened their studies from the Bible only to other areas of interest, including doctrine, missions, social issues, etc. Some preferred studying the Bible a book-at-a-time. For some years, the three adult classes have been led by seminary graduates which has undergirded a multi-faceted but solid approach to Bible study.

For many decades, St. Charles incorporated the Training Union program on Sunday evenings. This program was originally conceived as a method for training members for leadership through doctrinal, church history, church polity, organizational and other studies. Members who participated in both Sunday School and Training Union could expect to be well-prepared for various church ministries and programs. When the Church discontinued Sunday evening services, Training Union was discontinued as well. The gap left in these study areas was covered somewhat by Wednesday evening programs, book clubs, and special programs and speakers.

St. Charles has had rather small numbers of children and youth for some decades. Children's educational activities have been primarily limited to Sunday School, mission groups, choir, and vacation bible school. The Church has consistently hired Children's Directors or incorporated those activities into the work of other staff. The last staff person to serve in this capacity was

Stephanie Little Coyne who served the church as Associate Pastor of Administration and Family Ministries [with various titles], including work with the Youth, from 2012-2016.

The youth program has followed its own programming needs largely based on the leadership of Youth Directors and interests of the youth themselves. Although small in numbers, the group has always been active with a variety of studies and activities, participating in community engagement such as crop hunger walks, AIDS-NOLA marathons, etc. A special interest has been summer camps sponsored by the Alliance of Baptists and others. During the past twenty years, Youth Directors have included Austin Amonette, John Bellar, Elizabeth Bradner, and Stephanie Coyne. Unfortunately, the number of youth has dwindled to about five and the Church does not currently have a youth program nor minister, although as of Fall 2022 efforts have been put forward to once again provide activities for children and youth.

Work with Students

A case could be made that ministry among college students is in fact an educational ministry. For many decades, especially from Avery Lee's pastorate forward, the church had large numbers of students in attendance at services, primarily from Tulane, University of New Orleans, New Orleans Seminary, and the Medical Schools. Dr. Raymond Crawford who began serving as the Baptist Student Union Director for Tulane in 1971 (and is still a member of our church) provided an excellent survey of student work in New Orleans for the earlier church history which, in part, is reproduced here.

February 1, 1922, is considered the point of origin for Southern Baptist Student work when Frank H. Leavell opened an office in Memphis, Tennessee. However, St. Charles had already proposed starting work with Tulane and Newcomb in a resolution adopted on December 12,

1920. That resolution sprang from the recognition among our church members that there was a need to reach out to these students who came from all over the state and south. We were ideally located considering that transportation at the time was limited. The resolution stated that the church felt “that there is an obligation on the church to look after and provide recreation, social features, as well as church facilities for the student body.” At the time, St. Charles was still in the facility on Hilary Street. In fact, when the current sanctuary building was being planned, some consideration was given to providing a sanctuary large enough to accommodate graduation services and other large meetings for Tulane and Newcomb and also Baptist Bible Institute (New Orleans Seminary) which until 1953 was located on Washington Avenue.

It was recommended that the church employ a “college bred assistant to the pastor” to assist in looking after the students from these two nearby colleges. The church sought financial support from both the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention for this purpose, but also pledged to employ and support such a staff person. In September 1922, Mr. A. T. Terry and Mr. A. J. Dickerson, were appointed to look out for the students in the way of finding boarding places for them, and also to see that they have a hearty welcome to our church.

In September 1926 at about the same time as the new sanctuary was occupied, a committee on student activities was formed. That committee was composed of a male student (chair), a female student, Sunday School superintendent, B.Y.P.U. director, pastor, teacher of the Newcomb class, president of the Tulane class, and the president of the Bebout B.Y.P.U. This committee was instructed to cooperate with similar committees from other churches.

St. Charles also provided facilities for the BSU and other student needs, especially a house located adjacent to the present church formerly used as a parsonage for offices and a regular

meeting space for the BSU. In 1936, Mrs. Carl Geyer was employed as part-time Student Secretary and given an apartment in the upstairs of this house. The house served as the Baptist Student Center until 1948 when the property at 7111 Freret Street was purchased. Both in these early years and for decades later, St. Charles included financial support for the BSU in its budgets.

The teacher of the Tulane Class (young men) for many years was Mrs. A. T. Terry who “mothered” the boys, taking them soup before there was an Infirmary. The boys were often guests in the Terry home and thought of it as their “home away from home.” Likewise, a Mrs. Falvey and later Kate Terry Sellers taught the Newcomb Class (young women), visiting the girls in their dorms, having them over for dinner, especially on Sundays. It was in the Sellers’s home that Mary Bolton and Charles Lafayette Brown met, fell in love and married, and remained faithful members of St. Charles for the remainder of their lives.

From the 1940s forward student work moved to a more city-wide emphasis under the general supervision of the Association and the Convention, although St. Charles maintained close ties with Tulane and the Mather School of Nursing at Baptist Hospital. During the 1950s and 1960s, changes such as more accessible transportation, the decline in Tulane’s football fortunes, and fewer students at Mather meant fewer students at St. Charles. Likewise, students were spread out through the growing number of Baptist churches around the area. After the Seminary moved to Gentilly, there were also fewer of their students travelling the distance to St. Charles. However, it should be noted that the BSU continued to encourage church participation in addition to the weekly BSU programs.

St. Charles viewed its ministry with students not only from the educational or spiritual development perspective, but also as something of a missionary opportunity in training students for church leadership. And, indeed, many of the college and seminary students who benefitted for our church's outreach and ministry have served in local church, educational and denominational leadership. By the 1990s, student participation in our church has dwindled and only a very small number of students attend worship. Members and staff have made concerted efforts to reach the students but with little success. Perhaps this is a sign of the times, or perhaps a sign of the almost wholesale adoption of contemporary styles of worship in contrast the more liturgical and traditional style maintained by our church.

CHURCH MUSIC MINISTRIES **Compiled by Harry Eskew and Paul Powell**

St. Charles has been known from the beginning for its outstanding music and music leadership. The Church has been fortunate to have access to university and seminary musicians both as directors and organists. Many of the choir members have been trained and experienced musicians. Somewhat unique to the Baptist churches in the area, St. Charles has also employed paid soloists/section leaders for the choir, mostly college students in recent years. This has enabled the church to have outstanding choral music as the number of singers from the congregation has dwindled.

Much of the historical information included in this section was provided by Dr. Harry Eskew in the centennial edition of *Our Name Is Baptist*. Church records prior to 1915 are not extant, but some indications of what church music was like have been provided by Dr. Eskew. Music among Southern Baptists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been greatly influenced

by such prominent evangelists as Dwight L. Moody, Ira D. Sankey, Billy Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver. Also, in 1915, Southern Baptists' first School of Gospel Music was established at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth under the leadership of I. E. Reynolds. In Dallas, Robert H. Coleman was also publishing songbooks and hymnals popular among Southern Baptists. Just a bit earlier in that decade, the music department at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago included among its students W. Plunkett Martin and among its faculty E. O. Sellers, both of whom were to become leaders in Southern Baptist church music and also music directors at our church. Both would also be among the first professors of church music at Baptist Bible Institute (New Orleans Baptist Seminary) when it was established in 1917.

In 1915 and for about a decade afterwards, Hal Waters Mosely was our church's organist. Mosely was a chemistry professor at Tulane and played the pump reed organ in the church which was located on Hilary St. at the time. He apparently served until the current sanctuary was dedicated in 1926. Our first choir director of record was Mrs. A. C. (Ruth) Reed, a native Texan who had studied music in Berlin, Germany, and taught music in Havana, Cuba, before coming to New Orleans. She served until 1920 when E. O. Sellers became director. Mrs. Reed continued to be a soloist and to sing in the choir for many years afterwards and was still a member of the church when Dr. Eskew wrote this essay. Dr. Sellers wrote the tune to "Wonderful, Wonderful Jesus" while serving as our choir director. That tune was named *New Orleans*. The music building at New Orleans Seminary is named in his honor.

W. Plunkett Martin followed Sellers and served for a number of years as choir director, including 1924-27 and again from 1942-47. Martin had been an evangelistic singer and a

minister of music prior to serving New Orleans Seminary as a professor and later Dean of the Seminary's School of Church Music. The music library at the Seminary is named in his honor.

From the latter 1920s until the purchase of a pipe organ in 1935, our church used the piano in services (possibly the Steinway we still use which is more than one hundred years old). Pianists during this period were Mrs. O. N. Cloud and Mrs. J. D. McGee. Our choir director during the Depression years was Maurice G. Beckwith, a faculty member at Baptist Bible Institute who was married to pastor W. W. Hamilton's sister (Hamilton later became President of BBI/New Orleans Seminary). The church's music library was named as a memorial to Beckwith at his death in 1935.

In the 1920s three musical milestones occurred in our church which are now commonplace, but were unusual at the time among Southern Baptist churches:

- In October 1923, our church had an orchestra directed by Mrs. V. W. Webb.
- In April 1925, our choir broadcast its Easter cantata, Wolcott's *The Risen Lord*.
- In December 1927, our choir performed Handel's *Messiah* for their first time.

In 1935 our church purchased its first pipe organ, a Teller-Kent organ which had been used since 1915 at the Happy Hours Theater on Magazine St. to accompany silent movies. It was purchased for \$2,500, a challenge during the Depression. Credit goes to Mrs. Ruth Reed, choir director, and Pastor Everett Gill for encouraging the church to purchase this organ.

During the first four years with this pipe organ our church was served by organist-choir director Roy Carl Seifert, a teacher of piano and organ. During his years of service, the choir became more active, presenting anthems almost every Sunday and frequently entire services of music. In 1937, the church budget included \$1,100 for "organist, music, and singers." On May 9,

1938, the choir sang in robes for the first time. Seifert played a number of organ recitals during his time, and it was also during his years that a teenage Peter Dombourian played the violin. Dombourian later became an orchestra and band leader, and later Supervisor of Music for the public schools of New Orleans. He was also the long-time director of the New Orleans Volunteer Orchestra associated with the city's recreation department. Rehearsals and concerts of the group were held for many years in our church.

Choral music during the 1920s and 1930s tended toward sweet romantic era selections, such as the works of Henry Rowe Shelley, composer of the still familiar "The King of Love My Shepherd Is." As to hymnals used in these early years, little is known. Hymnals may have been supplied by the Coliseum Place Church during the mission years. Some Southern Baptist churches were using *The Baptist Hymn and Tune Book* (1871) or *The Baptist Hymnal* (1883) edited by W. Howard Doane and E. H. Johnson, both published by the American Baptist Publication Society. It is also possible that one of the many gospel songbooks popular at the time were used. Two hymnals used and which have been identified were published by Robert H. Coleman of Dallas, Texas: *The Popular Hymnal* (1918) and *The Modern Hymnal* (1926). One other, *The New Baptist Hymnal* (1926), published jointly by the American Baptist Publication Society and Broadman Press was adopted for use in the late 1940s. Southern Baptists were not publishing full-service hymnals until the 1940 *Broadman Hymnal*.

Our two main organists during the 1940s were Gene E. Schaefer (1941-44) and Mrs. Walter J. Clark (1944-48). Mrs. Clark was a teacher of piano and organ at New Orleans Seminary during this time.

The return of Plunkett Martin brought the beginning of age-group choirs to our church. In October 1942, Martin organized a Junior Choir (ages 9-12) and a Youth Choir (ages 13-17). It was probably Martin who led the church in 1942 to adopt the newly-published *Broadman Hymnal* (1940), compiled and edited by Louisiana native B. B. McKinney who had become Southern Baptists' first national leader of its Church Music Department. McKinney had previously been the music editor for all Robert H. Coleman hymnals and songbooks and had taught for a number of years at Southwestern Seminary. Although the *Broadman* was enormously popular throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist groups, it was for unknown reasons, not so popular at St. Charles, and by 1946 the church had acquired *The New Baptist Hymnal* published jointly in 1926 by Baptists north and south. Even in the 1940s, St. Charles was developing a reputation for doing things a little differently from the bulk of Southern Baptists. St. Charles has been known for its vibrant hymn singing over the decades and has been blessed to have notable hymnologists and hymn writers among its members and staff. Two members, Harry Eskew and Paul Powell were named Fellows of the Hymn Society. During the time that Roy Seifert was musician and Everett Gill was pastor, they frequently presented "Hymn Sermons" with the pastor commenting on the texts and the choir singing the hymns.

Church music at St. Charles seems to have benefitted quite well from the services of well-trained, professional musicians from early in its history. This undoubtedly had an impact on the church's growing tendency toward a more formal worship service than was typical of most Southern Baptists. In the Choir's 1947 presentation of Handel's *Messiah*, the bass soloist was a young Loyola student who later gained international fame as an operatic singer—Norman Treigle. From 1949 to 1953 our organist was Dr. Robert Manson Myers of the Newcomb

College English faculty. Myers had a distinguished career in English literature teaching and publishing. He held a master's from Harvard and another master's and the Ph.D. from Columbia. After leaving New Orleans, he taught at Yale, William & Mary, and finally at the University of Maryland. His book *Handel's Messiah, a Touch-stone of Taste* (1948) was considered one of the best in its field. In 1972, his monumental *Children of Pride, a True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* was published by Yale University Press to wide praise.

Coincidentally with Dr. Myers's departure, New Orleans Baptist Seminary moved from its Garden District location on the old Newcomb College campus to its expansive Gentilly Boulevard location. From that move in 1953, the Seminary's enrollment and programs developed exponentially, especially the School of Sacred Music. From then until late in the twentieth century, virtually all our church's directors and organists were either students or faculty at New Orleans Seminary, including organists Joan Stockstill (Mrs. Kirby Godsey), Beatrice Collins, Wayne Hobbs, Peggy Hall, Richard Mullins, Earlene Brasher; and directors Claude Rhea, Wallace McKenzie, William Hooper, Kenneth Hartley, Wayne Hobbs, Eugene Brasher, Paul Hall, and Joel Reed, among others. Soloists from the Seminary included Frances Brown (who also directed the Children's Choir), Mona Goff Bond, and William Loyd Hooper. Many other faculty and students participated in the music programs up until the time St. Charles withdrew from the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Harry Eskew was the last seminary faculty member to be a member of St. Charles, and in fact, the Seminary no longer hires faculty and staff from non-Southern Baptist churches. Even students who are members of St. Charles would be charged out-of-denomination tuition and fees. An unfortunate turn of attitude toward our church which had a long and close association with New Orleans Seminary. In the latter part of the twentieth

century, organists, directors, and vocalists associated with Tulane, Loyola and the University of New Orleans have served St. Charles, continuing our church's legacy of great music led by professional musicians. Many of these went on to stellar careers upon leaving New Orleans.

From the early 1950s, the choir's repertoire expanded as well to include more of the larger works such as Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Dubois's *Seven Last Words*, Schuetz's *The Seven Words of Christ on the Cross* and *The Christmas Story*, Schoenberg's *Peace on Earth*, Vaughan Williams's *Hodie*, Nelson's *What is Man*, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Respighi's *Laud to the Nativity* and many others. Regular Sunday anthems have included many classical and contemporary works from a wide spectrum of musical styles. Shortly after its publication our church adopted the 1956 *Baptist Hymnal* which it continued to use until the 1975 hymnal of the same title was published. Several of our church members or former members were involved in the compiling of these two hymnals.

In June 1959 Dr. John M. Yarborough, Jr., then a Tulane student, began a very long tenure as our organist. Over the next four or more decades, Dr. Yarborough served as either our regular organist or frequent supply organist. Not only was he our organist, but perhaps the strongest supporter of our church's music program in its entire history. He was also widely known and universally loved throughout the New Orleans musical community, particularly the Symphony on whose board he served for many years. The Symphony's grand piano is named in his honor.

Although our talented organists milked the old, used and frequently repaired pipe organ for all it was worth, there was a growing concern for purchasing a new organ, perhaps as early as the 1950s. However, it was during Wayne Hobbs's time as director in the early and mid-1960s that a major campaign was mounted to fund the purchase of a new organ. In late 1966 or early 1967 an

organ committee was appointed to look into purchasing a new organ. The committee was made up of Dr. James M. Webb, Jr. (Chair), Dr. J. Russell Bond, Dr. L. J. Bristow, Mrs. C. L. Brown, Sr., Miss Frances Brown, Mr. J. Armond Cobb, Mr. John T. Curtis, Mr. Peter Dombourian, Mrs. Frank E. Durham (Darla Rushing), Mr. O. J. Farnsworth, Mr. Alton Siren, Mr. L. F. Tadlock, Mrs. Raymond C. Wilson, and Mr. Lamar Woodfin. Ex officio members were Mr. Gayle Dalferes, Mr. Wayne Hobbs, Dr. John Yarborough, and Dr. Avery Lee.

Tom Rushing, current choir director, put together a brief history of the current Moeller installation that resulted from this committee's work. It was something of a messy process. At the time the committee began its work, there was some \$4,000 on hand and a single pledge of another \$5,000. Wayne Hobbs, choir director at the time, was asked to contact organ builders to make initial inquiries as to procedures for gathering recommendations and design proposals. Hobbs worked with the Holtkamp Co. of Ohio to develop a design. That design was then submitted to three organ-building companies, Aeolian-Skinner, M.P. Moeller, and Holtkamp. The recommendation of the committee was to retain the Holtkamp Co. as consultants and ask them to submit a design, a scale model, specifications, and approximate costs. We have a photograph which depicts the model of the Holtkamp instrument as it would appear installed in the rear balcony of the sanctuary. Moeller also submitted a proposal, but no record exists of an Aeolian-Skinner one.

The entire process for developing plans and funding for a new pipe organ covered nearly five years. What appeared to be a final decision to accept Holtkamp's proposal for a rear balcony installation was rejected upon learning that the costs for the organ plus structural changes to accommodate it would be prohibitive. Holtkamp then submitted a revised proposal for

installation in the front at a cost approaching \$100,000 which the committee deemed impossible to raise. Finally, Dr. Lee, not wanting to prolong the process, asked Moeller what they could provide for the funds on hand which resulted in the current installation at a total cost of approximately \$70,000 including structural changes. Some of the structural changes were not as pleasing as anticipated, and the proposed screen coverings to match the diamond-shaped screens above the baptistry were scrapped for a plainer installation which one member complained made the front of the sanctuary look like a lumber yard!

The 32-rank Moeller installed in 1970 has served the church well despite being somewhat smaller than originally envisioned. The organ dedication was on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1970, with Dr. John Yarborough and Dick Mullins (then a doctoral student at the Seminary) playing the dedicatory recital. As our church approaches its 125th anniversary, the organ is in dire need of major renovation or replacement. Time will tell which route is taken, but replacement with a new pipe organ could easily approach \$1,000,000 or more.

Dr. Harry Eskew in summarizing our church's music program has stated that music in our church has been different from that of most Southern Baptist churches because our church is different. Our church has emphasized a reverent, yet warm approach to worship, so our music has taken place in this setting. Our church is situated in the heart of an academic community, so music of genuine sophistication has found a place here. While we have experienced music of the masters, we have never become too sophisticated to sing the simple folk and gospel hymns that are an important part of our Baptist heritage. Throughout its history, St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church has held a conviction that music is of vital importance in the worship of God and in sharing the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Four directors have served during the past thirty plus years, including Bill May, Pam Legendre, Meg Hulley Frazier, and Tom Rushing (since 2003). Organists during the same period have included Bruce (?), Andre Courville, Marcus St. Julien, Mark McCreary and Olga Ljungblom Brockett (currently). For a number of years there was a Children's Choir (sometimes called Youth Choir) directed by Diann Gardner and Madeleine Wallace, accompanied by Jack Gardner. Since leaving the Southern Baptist Convention, most of our directors and organists have been associated with Loyola University or other schools in the area, as well as our paid sectional leaders. This has allowed our music program to continue at a high level during a time when a majority of older and newer churches have adopted entirely contemporary musical styles. Likewise, we have continued to sing traditional hymns, albeit with the inclusion of new texts and tunes in a similar style. Purchase of new hymnals has been considered along with development of our own hymnal supplement for newer hymns. All in all, our music program has weathered the challenge of changing norms quite well and it is hoped that we will continue on this well-trod road.

[MORE TO COME]

MISSIONS, OUTREACH, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STEWARDSHIP, BUDGETING, AND FINANCING

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

THE ST CHARLES CENTER FOR FAITH + ACTION

WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE HEADED: STORIES OF THE PEOPLE

Powell/St. Charles Avenue / 91