

## PIGEON FORGE BAPTIST CHURCH

During the year 1914, J. A. Householder, Colporteur (Missionary) of the Sevier Association of Baptists, collected \$407.31 for building a Baptist church at Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Sevierville, Millican Grove, Boyd's Creek, Emert's Cove, Gists Creek, Wears Valley, Dupont, Walnut Grove, Beech Springs, Laurel Grove, Union Valley, French Broad Valley, and the Sevierville Women's Missionary Union gave a total of \$232.31. Added to that was gifts from individuals amounting to \$175. The generous gifts were added to those of Pigeon Forge Baptist citizens, making possible the construction of the Pigeon Forge Baptist Church.

The first recorded meeting of the Pigeon Forge Baptist Church was held in September of 1914, the day and month not recorded. In this first meeting, the Reverend S. C. Atchley was elected to serve as pastor with a salary of \$100 per year.

Inadequacy of early records makes it impossible to know the number of charter members, but it has been estimated at from 10 to 35 with 35 seeming to be nearest correct. A membership of 35 was reported to the Sevier Association of Baptists held at Zion Grove Baptist Church September 30, 1914.

Charter membership was held open for six months and anyone joining by March 1915, qualified as a charter member.

The first building, located at the corner of Householder Street and Country Club Road in the upper edge of the Baptist Cemetery, was dedicated October 4, 1914, with the Reverend S. C. Atchley delivering the dedication sermon. Following the services, \$200 was received through public offering, collection, and subscription for paying off the church indebtedness. The remaining debt was assumed by individuals, leaving the church debt free.

The first revival meeting began on the day of dedication and closed the night of October 15, 1914 with 27 new members being added to the church roll.

The Pigeon Forge Baptist Church was mindful of a worldwide missionary obligation even at the first recorded meeting when \$3.47 was received for the first offering for missions. The missionary spirit was also reflected in the 1914 church minutes where a gift of \$10 for missions from the Woman's Missionary Union was recorded.

The church moved to the present location at 303 Parkway in October of 1959. The new building provided a sanctuary with seating for 900 and educational space for 312. The name was officially changed from Pigeon Forge Baptist to the First Baptist Church of Pigeon Forge.

Located on eight acres of land purchased for the new building, the church shares the use of the land with the City of Pigeon Forge for a football field and with the Pigeon Forge Little Leagues for baseball fields.

Official groundbreaking for a beautiful two-story brick pastorium was held July 3, 1970. By December 27, 1970, the new home was ready for open house. The pastorium, with nine rooms and three baths, was valued at \$75,000 in 1970 at completion.

An educational annex, increasing the educational space of the church to 650, was completed in the summer of 1976 and open house was held August 22, 1976.

The church officially observed a 50th anniversary October 4, 1964, and the following statistics were noted in the program and minutes of that anniversary: Church membership grew from 35 in September 1914, to 532 in 1964. Sunday School enrollment grew from 76 in 1914 to 437 in 1964.

In 1978, the church reported a resident membership of 796 and a nonresident membership of 172 for a total of 969. Sunday School enrollment was 802.

On May 1, 1970, the church opened a Child Care Center licensed for 50 children. The full-time staff of seven is headed by Mrs. Glenn (Linda) Whaley. The center has been operating at capacity since shortly after opening. Plans are nearly complete for expanding the program to include enlarging the number in day care and a special summer program for older children.

The present pastor, William W. Cope, assumed the pastorate June 3, 1964. The Reverend Wyatt M. Parker, returned to the United States after 18 years as a missionary in Brazil, became Minister of Music and Youth October 1, 1977.

Pigeon Forge Baptist church pastors from 1914 through 1964 were:

Reverends S. C. Atchley, W. W. Weaver, S. M. McCarter, J. T. Barbee, L. S. Carnes, W. A. Masterson, Walter Ownby, R. L. Marshall, W. E. Watson, Sam P. White, A. A. Carlton, Vernon Dutton, Charles Crawford, Willard Little, Clyde Whaley, James Lauderback, and William W. Cope.

Pastor, Reverend W. W. Cope, 1989.

Information from Rev. Cope and 50th Anniversary bulletin.