

## **CHURCH EVENT REUNITES PARISHIONERS FIRST BAPTIST IN HOLLYWOOD TOASTS 50 YEARS**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Music that spanned several generations highlighted the recent 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the First Baptist Church of West Hollywood.

“We were able to use some of our original singers who sang Christian music that was contemporary in their day,” said Jim Zabloski of Plantation Acres, the church’s Associate Pastor. “We tried to select music that had meaning to each generation in the church’s history including music by the Imperials and Sandy Patty.”

“Several years ago, the song *Shout to the Lord* was very popular and affected that generation of church members,” he explained. “Today, our worship is very upbeat and contemporary.”

“We had a rule in the musical presentation,” explained Tom Kleppe of Pembroke Pines, the church’s Executive Administrator. “People didn’t have to like the music, but they had to like the people who performed it.”

The musical presentation on Saturday, January 17 was one of several special events that attracted current members and drew former members from across the country to the two-day celebration. One-thousand people attended the musical program, and over 1,400 were present at a memorial anniversary service on Sunday, January 18.

“People actually came from all over the world,” Kleppe said. “We support a lot of missionaries and they came to be with us from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.”

“The word spread about the anniversary and it was amazing the number of people who came back,” Kleppe reflected.

Music isn’t the only thing about the church that has changed over 50 years. “Style and fashion has changed,” said Mike McKinney of Pembroke Pines who has been a part of the congregation since 1978. “We used to wear suits and ties, but now we wear casual shirts.”

“The basic Gospel of Jesus Christ has not changed, but our changes have been cultural,” he explained.

Innovation has been one of the hallmarks of the church’s history according to Zabloski and others who spoke about the church. “People did what they had to do to bring others in,” he said.

Zabloski said that on one occasion, the church gave away gold fish as a promotion. “We gave people a loaf of bread and a gold fish,” he explained. “It was hard to keep 1,000

gold fish alive until we were able to distribute them.” The bread and the fish represented a biblical report of Jesus multiplying bread and fish to feed 5,000 people.

“You do what you have to do to get people to know the Lord,” Zabloski remarked.

Caring for people has been another distinctive of the congregation according to McKinney who, along with his wife Bobbie, teaches an adult Sunday school class.

“Our members care for one another,” he explained, citing the case of a class member who has suffered from cancer. “For the past year and a half, whenever she has been in chemotherapy, our members have fed the rest of the family three to five times a week.”

“That’s what Christians are supposed to do,” he reflected.

Preaching and reaching out have been important to Lucille Merritt of Fort Lauderdale who joined the church four years ago. “The first Sunday I came here, I sensed that the sermon was directed to me,” she remembered. “It was a God thing.”

Today, Merritt and her husband often stop to pray for neighbors while on walks through their community. “It’s part of love thy neighbor,” she explained.

One neighbor asked the couple what they were doing. “We told her that we were praying for her,” Merritt remembered. She said that her neighbor was touched by that gesture.

The reunion was a “significant moment for the church,” according to the church’s pastor, Bud McCord. “It was like a family reunion.”

McCord is the third Senior Pastor in the church’s history. Pastor Verle Ackerman, the congregation’s second pastor, spoke at the Sunday service. The church’s first pastor, E.R. Bowers died several years ago, but his widow, Dorothy Bowers, was present for the celebration.

The reunion offered an opportunity for long-term members to renew friendships and for new participants to sense the church’s heritage.

“It was good for us to see people who founded the church and to know about their contributions,” Zabloski said.

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