

# 150 Years of Faith

## A Brief History of First Presbyterian Church of Waco

### **1855-1884: 'Provided the Way Be Open'**

It was the year when Longfellow published his "Song of Hiawatha" and the first iron Cunard steamer crossed the Atlantic. Livingston discovered Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River. Technology advanced with the invention of the printing telegraph and the development of tungsten steel.

On April 20 of that same year, 1855, Presbyterians in Waco Village petitioned the Central Texas Presbytery, which met at Oak Island south of San Antonio, to organize a church in the 6-year-old frontier town. It was recorded that "the Stated Clerk read a letter from members of the Presbyterian Churches in Waco Village and vicinity, asking Presbytery to appoint a committee to organize a church in Waco, and appoint supplies. Their petition was granted and Rev. Messrs. Taylor, Alexander and McChord were appointed a committee to organize a church, provided the way be open."

At the Oct. 27, 1855, meeting of the Presbytery at Round Top, Rev. T. Alexander reported that the Waco church had been organized. It had 17 members and two ruling elders, John McFarlane and Charles Ficklin. It was called First Presbyterian Church of McLennan County and met at first in the little Union Church building on South Second Street between Franklin and Jackson avenues. For several years congregation continued to meet at that Methodist Episcopal church building. It was led by supply pastors as appointed by Presbytery.

### **Son of a minister**

We know little about those earliest days. From the organization of the church in 1855 down to August 1858, no records of the Session are available. During that time the Rev. Levi Tenney was often moderator of the Session. Dr. Samuel A. King, who later became our original full-time pastor, first preached in Waco in 1858, riding down from his home at Milford in Ellis County. He began preaching once a month in 1863, and increased to two Sundays a month in 1867, now serving the role of stated supply minister. He was installed as our first full-time pastor some 15 years later, on June 25, 1882.

Dr. King was born in Kentucky on Oct. 11, 1834, son of a Presbyterian minister who provided the young man's education after the family moved to Texas in 1851, schools and colleges being rare in frontier Texas. Dr. King was ordained in 1856 and began a traveling ministry supplying congregations in East and Central Texas.

His salary in 1858 was \$663.10. He kept account of the presents that he received, including two shirts from the San Marcos church worth \$5, an overcoat worth \$8 and a knife worth \$2.25. He listed his expenditures in 1858 as \$461.71. They included such items as "Board and keeping horse (\$125.00)," clothing (\$121.43), books (\$54.55) traveling expenses (\$32) and "medicines for self and horse (\$3.45)."

At 8 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 19, 1859, the Rev. Hillerey Mosely of Palestine, Texas, officiated at the marriage of Dr. King and Miss Athelia Ann King. She was the daughter of Adam C. King (no relation), an elder in the church at Crockett, Texas.

### **A traveling preacher**

Dr. King was not afraid to travel. He went to the United Synod at Lynchburg, Va., in 1859 by buggy, steamer and train. The train wrecked, but he stayed at the scene of the accident until the following morning, when a new train arrived to take passengers on to their destinations. During 1859 he preached 99 times at 10 different churches.

Events in 1861 would soon overtake the little congregation in Waco. That year, U.S. population reached 32 million. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died that year, and Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations*. Civil War broke out on April 12. Eleven Southern states, including Texas, seceded from the union. Rev. King's name as moderator of the Session appeared regularly after October 1863. The first recorded statistical report appeared in 1863. One member was received on confession of faith, two on certificate, 17 as the whole number of members, three infants baptized and \$300 raised during the year for all causes. It was hard to get mail through. No church letters could be gotten on account of war conditions. The church had no elder. Several irregularities of procedure were noted at the 1863 meeting of the church.

At a Presbytery meeting at Milford in April 1865, the same month when the war ended at Appomattox, Va., the name of the church was changed to "Waco Church" in place of "First Presbyterian Church of McLennan County." Civil War veterans began returning to their homes in Texas. By 1867 there were only five original members still in the church. Presbyterian services continued to be held at the little Methodist church until it burned. The congregation then met at the old Waco Female College on South Third Street owned by the Southern Methodists.

### **Its own place of worship**

Then, in 1870, the congregation was able to erect and occupy its own place of worship. It was a brick church with basement at the southeast corner of South Second Street and Jackson Avenue. It cost slightly more than \$5,500. The basement was used for Sunday School, but in the spring of 1872, members began worshiping in the basement during, one assumes, completion of construction. The church, now with 53 members, was completed that spring.

On Nov. 29, 1874, the Robinsonville (now Robinson) church organized with 21 members who were dismissed from First Presbyterian. Dr. King ministered to both churches. One of the great events in Dr. King's tenure occurred in 1877 when the Pan-Presbyterian Council of Churches met in Edinburgh, Scotland. Dr. King, now age 43, was one of two Texas ministers attending as delegates. At the close of 1877, the church had 158 members, 144 in Sunday School. It donated \$451 to all causes, and paid Dr. King's salary of \$1,464.

By 1882, membership had outgrown the building at Second and Jackson. The church was ready to move again. It purchased a lot on Austin Avenue, between Eighth and Ninth streets, and began building a new church the following year. The congregation occupied the lecture room in the spring of 1884. The building was completed, furnished and occupied, free of debt.

*Milly Walker, January 2004*

### **1885-1914: An Impact Far Beyond Waco**

The new church building fit Waco's spirit of change as the growing community emerged from the Reconstruction era and moved optimistically toward a new century. At Morrison's Corner Drug Store, pharmacist Charles Alderton created a popular new drink in 1885, calling it Dr Pepper. A small but promising college, Baylor, moved to the city from Independence in 1886. Population had surged to 12,000, with both farming and industry flourishing.

At the Presbyterian Church, a choir was being organized and the new Women's Working Society, with Mrs. Ed Rotan as president, was carving out a stronger leadership role for women in the church. The outlook was bright, though the Session did caution in 1888 that "worldly amusements such as the social and public dance, attendance upon the theatre, and card playing are becoming more prevalent among our church members," adding in 1890 that "the Sabbath is outwardly observed by our members generally, but reading of Sunday newspapers is indulged in by many."

Dr. Samuel A. King's impact was reaching far beyond Waco, and the pastor was granted numerous leaves of absence to accommodate his travels after being elected moderator of the General Assembly in 1892. That same year the church was formally incorporated under the laws of Texas, and its property, valued at \$30,000, was placed in the hands of five trustees elected by the congregation.

### **Another Presbyterian church**

With membership at 293, First Presbyterian took steps in 1893 to launch another church to serve the growing northwestern part of the city. A small building was erected at 13th and Jefferson streets, and Rev. William Hughes of Wittingville, Mass., was hired to develop the new congregation. Forty-one of our members left to become part of the new Second Presbyterian Church, and that church served well for 25 years before it

dissolved for lack of growth and returned most of its members to First Presbyterian.

The Young People's Westminster Society showed the vigor of youth, raising \$77.80 to put a small organ in the Prayer Meeting Chapel soon after the group organized in 1892. The larger organ in the sanctuary required both an organist and pumper to operate. Miss M.S. Cooney was hired in 1895 to play the organ, direct the choir and supervise Sabbath School, all for \$20 a month. The pumper, who pumped air for the organ during worship services and choir rehearsals, was paid \$2 a month.

After the coldest winter on record in 1899, Waco welcomed the 20th century by replacing its old mule-driven streetcars with electric trolleys and completing an ornate new courthouse. Waco would become the sixth-largest city in Texas within a year, and the church had grown to 331 communicants.

Due largely to the Ladies' Missionary Association, First Presbyterian led the Synod in giving to foreign mission work both in actual dollars and in per capita giving. It was the first church to sponsor its own missionary, collecting \$600 annually to support the ministry in Korea of Dr. L.B. Tate, a relative of members of the nearby Robinson church. In June 1907, the church sent off for "a splendid, new and serviceable bicycle" for Rev. Tate's use. Ordered from Simmons Hardware in Saint Louis, the bicycle cost \$24, and the store contributed \$8 of that. The congregation also supported a former missionary, Miss Ruby Rogers, who had come home to Waco in "broken health" after 18 years in China.

Having had only one pastor in its 40 years, the church suffered quite a blow when Dr. King resigned in 1902 to join the faculty of the new Austin Theological Seminary. He left big shoes to be filled, but a pulpit committee of five elders, five deacons and five members-at-large set out to find a new pastor. Meanwhile, Dr. R. E. Vinson, president of Austin Theological Seminary, temporarily filled the pulpit.

### **A new pastor arrives**

Rev. J.E. Hobson of Water Valley, Miss., was issued a call in March 1903 to be pastor, but his presbytery refused to release him. Two months later, the church chose Rev. Charles T. Caldwell, then 38 and a bachelor. The son of a missionary to American Indians, Rev. Caldwell had studied at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Tennessee and served churches in Greenville, Texas, and Houston before being installed as pastor on Sept. 27, 1903.

Waco had grown to about 35,000 people. Austin Avenue was paved with wooden blocks, but there were only two or three automobiles in town. There were no movies, and many men attended church carrying canes and wearing silk hats, gloves and long coats. A few blocks away, the Austin Avenue Methodist Church was being organized, and a new "golfing club" was starting across town.

The women of the church, continuing to seek new projects, raised \$1,750 to have a new organ installed in time for the church's 50th anniversary service on June 4, 1905. They then turned their attention to building a manse, purchasing property at 1004 Washington Ave. for \$1,000 and starting work on a two-story, eight-room, \$5,000 home.

While the manse was being built, Rev. Caldwell took a two-month vacation to visit Scotland, England and several European countries. En route, he stopped in Leesburg, Va., to visit Dr. J.W. Lupkin, his former pastor from college years. Finding that Dr. Lupkin's daughter, Millicent, had grown into an interesting, attractive young woman, he stopped for another visit on his return from Europe. An engagement was soon announced. Work on the new manse was accelerated, and the couple married in October 1906.

With 411 communicants and an annual budget of \$7,098, First Presbyterian was thriving. Prominent preachers such as Dr. Francis L. Patton, president of Princeton University, visited to speak at the Waco church, and the pastor was honored with an honorary doctorate from his alma mater in Tennessee. He would receive another in 1925 from Austin College. The church building at 812 Austin Ave. was showing its 24 years of wear, however, and the congregation's needs were stretching its limits.

With the final payment on the manse in 1908, attention shifted to repairing or replacing the old church building. A committee of six men and four women, chaired by W.B. Brazelton, was appointed in February 1909 to deal with the location, design and cost of a new building.

### **Moving to 11th and Austin**

The site chosen was at the corner of Austin Avenue and Ninth Street, the home of a member, J.P. Anderson. The church bought it for \$20,000 and began plans for construction. Progress halted abruptly in May 1911, however, when the Waco Street Railway Company announced plans to lay tracks and run cars on Ninth Street alongside the new church site. Concerned that the rail line would interfere with "hitching of teams" and cause "annoyance by reason of increased noise," the church sold that property for a profit and, for \$10,000, purchased property two blocks farther out Austin Avenue at 11th Street.

Bids for a new building were opened July 13, 1911, with Fell & Ainsworth of Waco chosen to construct an English Gothic style church for \$39,350. The building was designed by F.M. Mann, a professor of architecture at the University of Illinois, and the local architectural firm of Scott, Pearson & Dean supervised construction.

It was a golden era for construction in Waco. The Cotton Palace had recently been completed, and the Amicable Insurance Building, which would become the tallest building in Texas, was rising to its 22-story height just a few blocks from the church site. The new church building would fit

the spirit of the times, designed to include “elaborateness not to be excelled by any ecclesiastical structure in Texas...and with every modern convenience.”

After a bleak winter with an outbreak of spinal meningitis forcing suspension of church activities for two weeks, the new building was ready in early spring. Dr. King returned from Austin to preach at the inaugural worship service on April 14, 1912. The stained-glass windows in the sanctuary, donated as memorials to men and women of that era, still serve as reminders of those who led in building for the future.

When church members donated funds to send the pastor on a trip to the Holy Land in 1914, Dr. Caldwell set out, leaving his wife and baby, Charles, with Mrs. Caldwell’s sister in St. Louis. He became ill en route to New York, however. Instead of going to the Holy Land, he spent two months recuperating in North Carolina. On returning to Waco, he returned the donated money, which the donors invested so that it doubled and allowed him to finally make the trip in 1925.

The delay in 1914 proved providential. The ship on which Dr. Caldwell was scheduled to sail collided with another at sea, and had the pastor followed the original schedule, he would have been stranded in Turkey at the outbreak of World War I.

*Jim Maxwell, January 2004*

### 1915-1945: ‘Be Thou Faithful Unto Death’

For a time, the war remained a distant rumbling to our congregation of more than 500 members. In 1915 the most serious concern in the deacons’ report was that, on the Lord’s Day, “the temptation of an afternoon automobile ride is not sufficiently resisted.”

In another two years, however, the war effort came to Waco, and the population nearly doubled when Camp MacArthur and Rich Field were established as infantry training camps in 1917. Church members worked tirelessly to offer the soldiers a home away from home. Mission emphasis continued during wartime. In 1918, the church was raising funds to buy the missionary in Korea a motorized sidecar.

Our church’s WW1 “Blue Star Service Banner” has 53 blue cotton stars machine-stitched onto it. Four of the starts had a gold satin star hand-stitched over it. Five men from our church fell in battle in 1918. The first was our gifted organist, John Wescomb “Jack” Parnum. Although he was not a member of the church, the congregation was devastated at his death and a small (individual) gold star banner rested on the organ console throughout the remainder of the war. The others were James Archibald “Pete” Edmond, for whom the Waco American Legion Post is named, Thomas Edwin Johnston, Norman King and William James Simpson.

Besides those taken from us by war, the church lost another treasure in September 1918 when Dr. King, our original pastor, died in Austin. He had just sent his farewell message to the congregation: “Be thou faithful unto

death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

After the war, an economic upsurge coupled with the blessing of a large group of young people spurred the church to build a recreational building. In 1922 a gymnasium costing \$12,500 was completed on the west side of the church. During this time of prosperity the church members also pledged a \$40,000 Dr. S.A. King Memorial Fund to Austin Seminary in 1919 and received the gift of the Pilcher pipe organ in 1923.

Following a growing pattern throughout the General Assembly, all women’s work in our church was unified in 1919 under the name “The Women’s Auxiliary.” Among the many projects this group undertook was one in 1925 to build and finance a new manse at 313 Crescent Road, costing about \$14,000. During construction on the manse, Dr. Caldwell took his long awaited trip to the Holy Land. The day after his return in June 1925, the family moved into the new two-story home.

### **Lean times to weather**

The economic shockwaves of the 1929 stock market crash were held at bay for a time, and in 1930 the church’s 75th anniversary was a two-day celebration befitting a Diamond Jubilee. All ten “sons” of the church who were serving in ministry returned home for the Sunday service on May 4, and one, Dr. John McCall, preached the sermon.

By the end of 1930, however, it was obvious that change was on its way. The Cotton Palace, a symbol of Waco’s prosperity, shut down, and soon the full effects of the Great Depression took hold. Total contributions to the church fell sharply and membership declined. The pastor’s salary was cut from \$4,000 to \$3,000, as all expenditures were reduced.

Besides economic alterations, there were other changes, including, in 1933, a new way of electing elders and deacons. Each group was divided into three “classes,” with a class designated by the year it left or rotated off the Session or Diaconate. Each officer would serve a term of three years followed by one year of ineligibility. This “rotary” system was rescinded in 1935 only to be reinstated 13 years later. Another change, unusual during these lean years, came in the form of a dramatic alteration to the Austin Avenue wall of the church. A large stained glass window, designed and built by Charles Connick of Boston, was donated in 1933 by the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Rotan as a memorial to these early organizers of the church. All of our memorial windows, as Dr. Caldwell said, “beautify the church and make it our abbey.”

The pastor’s fragile health prompted him to take a six-month leave of absence during the spring and summer of 1935. With his health still not fully restored, Dr. Caldwell resigned in January 1937, after nearly 34 years as our pastor. The following month he was elected pastor emeritus. Dr. and Mrs. Caldwell had two sons and a daughter, Millicent Jones, who is still an active member of our congregation.

### **A third pastor**

For 74 years the church had had only two pastors. The third to be called was Dr. Theodore Beckett Hay, who was installed here on Sept. 19, 1937, three days after his 37th birthday. A native of South Carolina, Dr. Hay was a graduate of Presbyterian College of South Carolina and Columbia Theological Seminary in suburban Atlanta. He and his wife, Elizabeth Browne Hay, along with their three children, were well received and instantly liked by their new congregation.

Dr. Hay's tenure was short but productive. His friendliness, energy and preaching skills served his congregation well. During his five years as pastor, membership and attendance increased, as did the church budget. Sunday School facilities were remodeled and enlarged in 1939. That same year, the church's Hispanic mission on North Second Street was cleared of all indebtedness. When the mission was destroyed by fire two years later, plans were begun immediately to rebuild on a new site at South Third and Clay.

Enrollment continued to climb, and, in 1941, the church employed a director of religious education at a salary of \$100 a month. In addition, that summer our church furnished office space to Rev. Thomas Gallaher, the General Assembly's regional director of religious education for Texas and Oklahoma. No one knew at the time that he soon would become our fourth pastor.

Meanwhile, the church continued to thrive under the able leadership of Dr. Hay, which made it a sad occasion in July 1942 when the congregation heard that he had received a call from First Presbyterian Church of Memphis, Tenn., and would leave in August. The Session minutes from that month note that Dr. Hay was "an excellent preacher" with a "lovable and attractive personality" and that he and his family would be "greatly missed."

Thomas Burke Gallaher became fourth pastor of our church in November 1942. Rev. Gallaher, "Tom" to his flock, was born in 1905, in Longview, Texas, and grew up in Dallas, where his father was a Presbyterian pastor. He received degrees from Austin College, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and the University of Texas. He and his wife, Alma Loudermilk Gallaher, were parents of a 4-year-old daughter; their son would arrive in one year. Rev. Gallaher took the church helm at a strategic time.

### **War comes again**

The years 1941 to 1945 were momentous ones for our nation, our town of 56,000, and our church family. For the second time in the century, a major war was testing our mettle. World War II brought significant changes to the area. Waco Army Airfield, later called James Connally Air Force Base, was established. The Army also located Blackland Army Air Field, a pilot training base, at the city's new municipal airport near China Spring where Waco Regional Airport is now.

Once again, our church swung into action to meet the needs of our soldiers, opening the facilities of our recreation hall, inviting them to services and socials, and holding special prayer services. To send overseas, the women of the church made hospital garments, layettes for the Red Cross and quilts for British Relief. The church parlor was open every Sunday from 3 to 5 p.m. for refreshments for the soldiers. Young people had “Fun Night” each Saturday evening in the gym and on the lawn, inviting all the local men and women of the armed services to attend. Prayer meetings were held every weekday morning at 10 o’clock. Offerings were made to the American Bible Society to supply Scriptures for the soldiers. In the vestibule, stationery was available to encourage members to write to our servicemen. The bulletin for Oct. 11, 1942, lists 95 names from our church under the heading “Pray for Our Boys.” One name was that of Edgar Jablonowski, an active member of our church today, whose brother Rev. Bill Jablonowski was the guest preacher for that Sunday.

Even during wartime, the regular work of the church continued. The Hispanic mission was reported complete in April 1943. The pastor and the men of the church had taken over the building of a manse for it, doing a substantial part of the labor themselves. In our own church building, a growing need for more Sunday School rooms and a concern about the safety of the recreation hall spurred plans for a new wing on the west side of the church. It would provide space for Sunday School, improved offices and a chapel.

On May 8, 1945, Victory in Europe (V-E Day) was declared, ending the major portion of the war. President Truman asked that a day of prayer be set aside on the following Sunday, May 13, 1945. The congregation had already planned a special service on that day to commemorate our 90th anniversary. The occasion became a poignant reminder of all that the church had experienced in its long history. Our church lost four men during World War II: Norman Morrow Smith, Thomas Jeff Wilson, Alexander Henry Beville and John Ulric Coleman, Jr. By the time victory in the Pacific was declared in September, the eventful year of 1945 was winding down. The war, which had called for great sacrifice from so many families, had also rejuvenated the national economy and revived the cotton industry in Waco. With the war ended, the church could turn its attention to peacetime pursuits.

*Carolyn Maxwell, February 2004*

### 1945-1975: ‘A Time to Reap’

#### **Outreach and mission**

Following the end of World War II, the church was involved in numerous activities, both locally and internationally, to assist those who were not “churched” or were destitute. In Waco, there were several on-going projects to take the church’s message beyond the walls of the

church building. In 1945 there was an “outpost” Sunday School near Spring Valley, and in 1947 another in South Waco, which met at the Melrose Theater. In the late '40s, the youth of the church were active in meeting with the Mexican American Mission youth at 13<sup>th</sup> and Dutton. The Women of the Church (WOC) in 1948 provided choir robes for the Latin American and black choirs. WOC activities in 1949 included assistance to the VA hospital, the Mexican Mission, Child Welfare (layettes for orphans), the Red Cross and YWCA, the “Old Ladies Home” and the Crippled Children’s Hospital.

In 1953, following the deadly tornado in downtown Waco, our church was made the headquarters for the Red Cross for six weeks, and members were involved in providing hot food and clothes, and giving “sympathetic Christian charity” to many who were in need.

The church sponsored a Boy Scout troop, which was still active as late as 1966. In October 1975, a family of Vietnamese refugees, the Phams, was taken under the church’s care. There were seven family members, including a daughter-in-law and baby of one son who was missing after their long ordeal of escape. In 1971 we agreed to let Caritas, an interfaith agency for the poor, set up headquarters in our basement.

The church supported various foreign mission workers during this time period. The WOC supported the leper colonies where Dr. and Mrs. Kellersberger worked. Blanche Sawyer, medical missionary to the Belgian Congo, visited the church in 1953 and 1956. Rev. and Mrs. R. K. Robinson, missionaries to Korea, were guests of the church in 1956 and in July 1966. In February 1962, for World Mission Month, the Sunday evening service was a playing of a tape recording from the Robinsons, along with pictures they had sent. Rev. William Pruitt, missionary to the Belgian Congo, visited and spoke to WOC group, and was guest preacher here on March 15, 1970. The church also supported the A. B. Coits, missionaries to Brazil. They were here in March 1969. In 1972, WOC members had a special campaign to provide blankets to the Coits, as there were none available where they were stationed. In 1972, church members knitted baby caps for Church World Service. The Ecumenical Missions and Relations Committee began an International Missions bulletin board in 1976, keeping up-to-date news items readily available to our members.

Our church was active in church development during this time. In September 1945, the McGregor Presbyterian Church was disbanded and its members were assigned to our church. There was growing recognition that there needed to be a Presbyterian church in the western part of Waco. Finally, in 1952, the Westminster Presbyterian Church was organized at 34<sup>th</sup> and Lyle. Sixty-five of our members were dismissed to that congregation. The new church rose on land that First Presbyterian owned. In October 1952 we transferred title of that property to the new church. In May 1963, we conveyed the property where the Mexican American Mission was located to El Calvario Presbyterian Church.

### **Building and lands**

In February 1945 the officers of the church, in a joint meeting, began discussion of a "post-war building project." In June of that year a building campaign was approved for a new education building, with authorization to borrow \$55,000. In January 1950 the congregation approved plans for spending \$125,000 on the new building (\$106,000 for the building and the rest for furnishings and equipment.) Construction began on Jan. 22, and on Nov. 19-22, 1950, services were held for the formal opening of the building.

Air conditioning was added to the church, for both the sanctuary and the education building, in 1954. The cost was \$43,820. In 1966 the church purchased the Franklin Inn at Franklin Avenue and 11th Street and demolished it to make room for a parking lot. In 1967 the elevator was installed, and hearing devices were installed in several pews in the sanctuary. In 1971, the church sold 4.65 acres on Sanger Avenue for \$20,750. This land had been given to the church. The proceeds of the sale went into an escrow account for future church development.

On Sept. 14, 1971, the Session approved improvements to the chancel area for an estimated cost of \$14,000. This was to be paid for by individual contributions and the Golden Memory Memorial Fund. The renovation was completed and was dedicated on May 7, 1972.

### **Church family**

Membership during these years varied somewhat, due in part to the changing military presence in Waco, and somewhat to the development of Westminster Presbyterian Church and the presence of other Presbyterian churches in Waco. In 1947 there were 911 members, 1,028 in 1949, 1,076 in 1951, 821 in 1958, 741 in 1960, 658 in 1972 and 601 in 1974.

In 1950, the pastor, Dr. Gallaher, announced that he was entertaining the acceptance of a call to another church. After much pleading by members, and an increase in his salary of \$1,000 a year, he decided to stay. In 1956, after 13 years as our minister, Dr. Gallaher did resign to accept a call to the Fort Smith (Ark.) Presbyterian Church. At the congregational meeting called to vote on his dismissal, some 500 members attended and voted unanimously to not accept his resignation. At a called meeting of the Presbytery on July 7, 1956, his resignation was accepted, effective July 1.

On July 1, 1957, Roy T. Sherrod became our fifth full-time minister. Rev. Sherrod previously served at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Austin. He was installed here on July 7, 1957.

Dr. Caldwell, who had retired as our minister in 1937, returned to preach to our congregation several times. In 1955, he preached in one of the services commemorating our centennial anniversary. On Aug. 4, 1963, he again was invited to preach here, three days before his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday. In addition to several supply and guest ministers we had during this time, a Scottish preacher, Rev. John Nyquist, was our minister for the summer of

1974. He and Rev. Sherrod exchanged pulpits during that time, and our minister preached at the church in Glasgow.

### **Special events and recognitions**

There are many evidences of the achievements and the generosity of our members during these years, both as individuals and as a church. There were also occasions for special celebration.

In May 1955, the church celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The week of May 1-8 was filled with activities. The General Committee of Centennial Observance was chaired by J. Franklin Smith. The observance included a play written by Mrs. Beth Ware, titled "A Time to Reap," which was performed on several occasions. Former ministers were invited to speak. On May 1, Dr. Caldwell preached on "Generation to Generation" in the morning service. Dr. Hay's sermon in the evening was titled "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." On May 8, Dr. Gallaher's sermon was "But What About Tomorrow?" The evening sermon, by Dr. Robert Gribble (a former member of the church) was on "The Voice Through the Centuries." On July 19, in recognition of the centennial year, the Synod held its meeting at our church.

Many of the furnishings and embellishments of the church were given as memorials during this time. In 1958, a memorial window in the narthex was dedicated to the memory of Merchant W. Colgin, having been given by his children. A tablet of honor for Dr. Caldwell, given by members of the church and his friends in Waco, was installed in the sanctuary in September 1958. In November 1960, a plaque remembering Roger Lacy Conger was installed. The quatre-foil windows, above the large arched windows, were given in memory of William B. Brooks and dedicated on April 9, 1961. The 11 windows are for the 11 apostles, excluding Judas. In September 1968, there was a dedication service for the chapel organ, given by Joseph Haynen in memory of his late wife, Lena Dykman Haynen. The Sturgis Memorial Windows, honoring James and Lula Sturgis, were dedicated May 13, 1973.

In April 1956, the Golden Memory Memorial Fund was started. This has been a way for undesignated gifts to the church to be used for many things outside of the church budget. In May 1966, the congregation approved creation of the First Presbyterian Church Foundation. In August 1971, the congregation approved articles of incorporation of the church.

In 1949, before the rotary system for election of church officers was begun, there was a special recognition of Norman H. Smith, who had served as clerk of the Session for 23 years. He was named clerk emeritus. On Aug. 7, 1960, the Waco City Council proclaimed Dr. C. T. Caldwell Day in Waco. This was on his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. Doctors Day was celebrated on March 30, 1964, and 16 doctors and dentists in our church were recognized. In 1967 the church was added to the 1967 Pilgrimage of Historical Waco.

### **Worship and doctrine**

Our church, like others, has seen challenges through the years in how it responds to societal changes. The Session noted on Sept. 6, 1950, that the “Pastor discussed at some length the lack of improvement of the work done by the church...his talk stressed: the church is not generous, there is no church family, too little interest in affairs of the church.” In January 1951, the Session voted to “circularize” (publish names of) the officers who would sign a pledge to tithe. As of Feb. 6, 14 elders and four deacons had signed. On June 6, 1951, the Session deferred action on accepting a beer dealer as church member. On Oct. 15, 1953, the Session voted 10-1 in favor of allowing the youth of the church to have a New Year’s Eve square dance in the social hall. On Dec. 9, there was a motion to rescind that approval. That motion failed 8-4.

In 1948 the rotary system of officers on the Session and Diaconate was instituted, ending a tradition of having the same officers for extended periods of service. In 1966, our church, along with the denomination as a whole, subscribed to the liturgical year, to emphasize the Trinitarian aspects of faith and to offer a “balance of emphasis” in preaching and worship.

In a milestone event, the first woman to serve as elder was elected to that position in 1968. Mrs. T. Berry (Pauline) Brazelton was ordained and installed on Dec. 8, 1968.

The church’s newly proposed Confession of Faith was in our Sunday morning Order of Worship for the first time on Oct. 15, 1972. In March 1974, the Session authorized formation of a Sanctuary Guild to “care for the worship areas of the church.” This was placed under the Worship Committee, headed by Edgar Jablonowski. On Nov. 20, 1974, the Session approved that “families under the care of the Session be authorized to permit their baptized children to participate in the Lord’s Supper with the congregation.” In a congregational meeting on Sept. 14, 1975, the church voted to retain the bicameral system of government, having both a Session and a Diaconate, rather than convert to the unicameral system of officers then being adopted by some Presbyterian churches.

*Joe Sudderth, February 2004*

### **1976-Present: ‘All Are Chosen’**

The years that followed saw one long-time senior pastor leave and another arrive. Church rolls stayed in the accustomed range of 650 to 700 but attendance sagged. Typical problems and divisions challenged an aging congregation.

Then, as time passed, younger faces filled the pews. Women as leading elders and deacons became the routine. We gave the church building a new wing and paid for it on schedule.

By the turn of the century, veteran members were remarking how vibrant the congregation had become and how unified it was, despite the fact that its worshipers varied in theology, political sympathies and the like. When the church called an associate pastor sight unseen in 2003, those

attending a congregational meeting voted 124-0 in favor based on the recommendation of a diverse pulpit nominating committee. Some thought such unanimity unheard of for a secret ballot in a Presbyterian church.

The year 1976 led the Session to make a policy change that reflected changing times. The ruling elders voted in October to no longer describe church officers as “men” but as “persons.” That year the church also added to its impressive array of stained-glass windows with the installation of 10 new windows in the narthex depicting the life of Christ. The project cost \$4,500.

### **Lake Shore Hills merger**

In late 1977, First Presbyterian began the process of merging with another church, the 100-member Lake Shore Hills Presbyterian on Mount Carmel Drive near Lake Waco. Earlier in the same year Rev. Sherrod had also become supply pastor at Lake Shore Hills. He conducted two worship services, described in a church bulletin as “practically identical.” The first started at 9 a.m. at Lake Shore Hills and the other at 10:30 at 1100 Austin Ave. Rev. Sherrod reported to First Presbyterian’s Session in November that Lake Shore Hills had appointed a committee to negotiate a proposed merger of the two congregations.

First Presbyterian’s congregation voted 135-24 in favor of the merger in May 1978. Worship and other church activities continued at both locations. The arrangement didn’t last. In March 1982, the merged church decided to hold morning worship at the downtown site only and Sunday evening activities at Lake Shore Hills.

By the time Rev. Sherrod’s successor, Dr. Jimmie D. Johnson, had settled in, he discovered what he described as “unresolved conflict” regarding the two sites. There had been some talk, as well, about the thought of moving First Presbyterian out of downtown Waco, perhaps to the Lake Shore Hills property to follow residential trends. But the church decided to stay put downtown. It sold Lake Shore Hills in 1991 to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Davidian Branch, for \$275,000.

First Presbyterian celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 20, 1980. A year later, in April 1981, Rev. Sherrod announced that he had accepted a call to become pastor at Casa Linda Presbyterian in Dallas. It marked the end of 24 years for Rev. Sherrod in the Waco pulpit. Interim pastors served for the next 16 months, first Rev. Mike Rehnquist and then Rev. Wes Lackey.

### **From a different mold**

Rev. Johnson moved to Waco from DeSoto Presbyterian in suburban Dallas in September 1982. Their first month in Waco, the Johnson family – Jim, wife Sherry and small daughters Shannon and Shalyn – lived with the family of Dr. Charles Gamble while the church manse at 313 Crescent Road was being renovated at a cost of \$25,000 supplemented by volunteer labor

from church members.

Somewhat unorthodox as Presbyterian ministers go – growing up not attending church, educated at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary before taking courses at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Brite Divinity School to prepare for Presbyterian ordination– the 35-year-old Oklahoma native nonetheless soon fit in. But to hear him tell it, it was a bit trying at first.

“The church was full the first Sunday (Sept. 5, 1982),” he recalled. “There was a lot of talk about how they were having to seat people in the balcony and how it had been years since that was needed. I remember being very nervous. I remember thinking how old the membership looked in the flesh. There were very few children and youth.” He honed his skills at making hospital visits. He preached, as he remembered it, “numerous funerals right away.”

As one strategy to get to know people better, he took elderly widows fishing on Lake Whitney. He impressed them by baiting their hooks. He also began to take high-school age youths – “what few there were” – out for pizza on Wednesday evenings. “I wanted to know them,” he said. “I knew the church would need a youth ministry in the future if it were to someday thrive again.” He said some members complained that he spent too much time with young folks but that he kept at it. “My plan was to try to balance attention to the youth and the elderly while being alert to visit any who were visitors in worship.”

After a year, Rev. Johnson considered leaving: “It was partly my own insecurities as well as lack of experience.” Lingering conflict also brought stresses, he recalled, as well as the question of whether to keep First Presbyterian downtown or move it.

But he stayed. “Soon a few young families were joining. Things settled down for me. My goal was to try to make five years.” At his tenth anniversary in 1992, members crowded Fellowship Hall to surprise him and Sherry with a pre-arranged trip to Scotland and England. Growing attendance led him to add an 8:30 a.m. Sunday worship service in the chapel to the traditional 10:30 sanctuary service. At his twentieth anniversary in 2002, another Fellowship Hall crowd gave him a hefty check. Although several larger churches in Texas and elsewhere wanted to hire him, and at times he considered moving, he eventually decided to stay in Waco until retirement. In 2001, the church gave him and Sherry the manse, now spruced up a second time, so that they would own residential property at retirement.

### **Women in the pulpit**

In 1984, the first full-time female minister joined the staff. Rev. Harriett Otten of Davidson, N.C., became associate pastor in April of that year and served until November 1986. She had married church deacon David Wacker and had decided to work in part-time ministry. Rev. Mary Alice Gamble Lyman, who had grown up in the church and served as director of

Christian education, became associate pastor in June 1988. She accepted a call as associate pastor at Midland First Presbyterian in June 1991. Other children of the church who grew up during these years to become Presbyterian ministers included Daryle Bush, Richard Kannwischer and Shannon Johnson Kershner.

All the while, more families joined, along with more children. Twenty- to 40-year-olds eventually became the largest age group. Infant baptisms became a common Sunday sacrament. The church needed more room.

At a congregational meeting Nov. 17, 1991, the church voted 103-41 to borrow \$1.4 million to complete its "First into the Twenty-first" campaign. This included erecting the new building wing paralleling Austin Avenue, remodeling Fellowship Hall and upgrading the organ. With the congregation looking on, long-time Treasurer Ed Walker burned the mortgage in January 2003. The church was again debt-free.

While member pledges had in the main paid for these improvements, a publication by the senior pastor chipped in a modest contribution. Net proceeds from Rev. Johnson's 1996 book of sermons, edited by member Georgia Brady, went toward retiring the building fund debt. The book's title, "All Are Chosen," alluded to Rev. Johnson's often spoken tenet that God doesn't limit his love based on one's background or beliefs.

Rev. Todd Green, an Alabama native, became associate pastor in 1998 and announced in March 2002 that he was moving to Vanderbilt University to pursue doctoral studies. Rev. David Hyers, who grew up in Tennessee, moved from the staff of Columbia Theological Seminary in suburban Atlanta to become associate pastor in September 2003.

### **150 and counting**

As throughout its century and a half, the church was affected by and reacted to conditions next door and across the oceans. Its members were major supporters of Caritas, Waco's interfaith agency for the poor, as well as of other local entities such as Meals on Wheels and Family Abuse Center. Its mission focus included the Church of South India Industrial School for underprivileged young men.

In January 1991, the church held a noontime prayer and hymn service after the United States launched Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait from invading troops of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. A dozen years later, it responded in a like manner when American forces attacked Iraq to dislodge Saddam's regime.

First Presbyterian found itself the object of overseas attention in the spring of 1993 after federal agents had fought a gun battle with and then besieged the religious compound of the self-proclaimed messiah David Koresh 10 miles east of Waco. One Sunday morning, worshipers saw cameras and correspondents for Japanese television in the balcony as they recorded our services. The idea, apparently, was to show the folks back home an example of religion in gun-toting Texas.

The church began in the spring of 2004 a year-long celebration of its

150 years, looking toward its sesquicentennial day of April 20, 2005. At the same time, its long-range planning committee focused on its future mission and physical needs, including the prospect of once again renovating the house of worship at 1100 Austin Ave.

*Bob Lott, February 2004*

*We updated and compiled this history of First Presbyterian Church early in 2004 to accompany the church's year-long celebration of its 150 years in Waco. The five of us -- Milly Walker, Carolyn Maxwell, Jim Maxwell, Joe Sudderth and I -- divided the research and writing into 30-year segments for each.*

*We express gratitude for two previous church histories, one written by Dr. C.F. Caldwell and the other by that devoted Waco historian and church member, the late Roger N. Conger. Their work contributed to this effort, along with our interviews of living witnesses and research of church and public records.*

*We also owe thanks to long-time member Bill Barnes, who organized and led a group of volunteers to pore over a century and a half of church records, including Session minutes and worship bulletins, and compile page after page of notes. In addition to benefiting our effort, the fruit of their labor will appear as historical vignettes in worship bulletins during the year of celebration. – Bob Lott.*