

The story of a church is always hard to enclose in words. Like a pebble dropped into a pool, words create a series of waves that widen as they go forth. A church can only be defined, in the spiritual life of those personalities, whose hearts has been born again through the Savior Christ. The circle of the church's influence ever-widens into a greater meaning. The church does not live in days and years but in hope regained, faith deepened, Salvation accepted, joy kindled, and in a thousand fruits of the Spirit which comes to life in souls of men and women, boys and girls over the years.

On September 11, 1915, a small group of Esther citizens of mixed denominations gathered at Hoy Hall in Esther and organized a Mission Sunday School, under the supervision of Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church. As Reverend George Steele, Pastor of Flat River (Park Hills) Church presided; Aunt Cet Hunt, Brother Joe Kite and Brother Joe Hill organized the first Sunday School meeting. It was only 110 Years earlier, that the First Sunday School west of the Mississippi was organized and taught by Sarah Barton Murphy in the first protestant church.

Esther Baptist Church was organized on Sunday Afternoon May 21, 1916, at Hoy Hall in Esther, Missouri.

Present were:

Reverend J.R. Carmichael.....Pastor of Flat River Baptist Church

Reverend S.H. Hardy.....Pastor of Desloge First Baptist Church – Moderator

Reverend C.C. Gossage.....Secretary

J.A. Kite.....Deacon

L.R. Reid.....Deacon

Reverend R.G. Ramsey.....Deacon

The Fourteen Charter Members:

Frank & Rosa Center.....Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church

James Edwards.....Little Vine Baptist Church

Ada Edwards.....Baptism

Isabella Hahn....Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church

Tom Hardy.....Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church

Fannie Hardy.....By Baptism

Mary Barton.....Loughboro Baptist Church

Sidney Doggett & Wife Bertha.....Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church

Nora Lee Wood.....Chetopa, Kansas Baptist Church

Eliza Fissell.....Flat River (Park Hills) Baptist Church

Rada Taylor.....Twelve Mile Baptist Church

Mary Bone.....Carterville Baptist Church

The Last charter member, Mrs. Mary Bone, went home to her eternal reward on February 25, 1981

First Ministerial Staff of Esther Baptist Church

Reverend C.C. Gossage.....First Pastor

Mrs. Mary Barton.....Treasurer

Mrs. Mary Bone.....Clerk

The church adopted Pendleton's Manual on Church Government and was admitted into full fellowship with Franklin (Mineral Area) Baptist Association on August 25, 1916 with a membership of sixteen.

Elected Trustees

Tom Hardy

James Edwards

Frank Center

Deacons

George Winingner

James Edwards

Marvin Miller

The Body was named The First Missionary Baptist Church of Esther. Under the leadership of the first pastor, Reverend C.C. Gossage. A church building was erected on July 17, 1916 and the church was free of debt on June 30, 1918. Reverend F.M. Baker, pastor of Flat River (Park Hills) First Baptist Church preached the dedicatory service. Brother J.A. Kite of Flat River (Park Hills) was the first Superintendent and served in that capacity until October 1919.

The first Lord's Supper was observed in the church on May 4, 1919. During the time that Reverend J.C. Amos, Reverend W.A. Huie, Reverend V.E. Patterson, Reverend W.J. Bailey, and Reverend Jesse Clark succeeded Reverend C.C. Gossage as pastors. God was doing a powerful work at Esther Baptist as the numbers grew from sixteen to seventy-three.

During the pastorate of Reverend Clark the membership was steadily increasing until it had reached 150 in 1932, when Reverend R.L. Shell came on the field, as full-time pastor; he was pastor at Esther Baptist until 1927. There were then 239 members enrolled. This was the year that Brother George Winingner was elected Church Treasurer and had faithfully and efficiently prevailed up to the 1950's.

During Reverend Shell's pastorate, September 30, 1925, the six-point Record System was inaugurated. The following year, November 10, 1926, saw the beginning of the Women's Missionary

Society in the Esther Church. The first church wedding was performed on January 26, 1927, when Brother Carey Files and Mrs. George Bannister were united in marriage.

While Reverend Shell was pastor, a building fund was started which culminated in the additional building, begun on July 4, 1936 and dedicated on May 30, 1937, during the pastorate of Reverend T.M. Estes. Dedicatory Sermon was preached by Reverend Courts Redford, President of Southwest Baptist College (Southwest Baptist University) at Bolivar, Missouri.

After the resignation of Reverend Estes, Reverend W.E. Hicks of Eastern Saint Louis was elected pastor in November, 1939 and moved on the field on December 4th. The church budget for that year was \$2,005.18. On January 21, 1940, the church was totally destroyed by fire. Services were conducted in the Esther School Auditorium across the street prior to the erection of a new building, which was begun immediately. This building was completed and dedicated free of debt within sixteen months. On May 25, 1941, Reverend Hicks preached the dedicatory sermon.

On September 15, 1946. Reverend Hicks resigned the Esther Baptist Church and moved to Brandon, Florida, where he was pastor for four years. Reverend W.R. Manion of Louisville, Kentucky was called to pastor Esther Baptist and stayed on the field about three and one-half years. During his ministry, the membership grew from 404 to 498. Much improvement was made at the Baptist Camp at Bates Creek. The church constructed a spacious concrete room with a fireplace, flanked by sleeping porches on north and south sides. Sleeping rooms were furnished with bunk beds sufficient to accommodate all children and adults from the church who might be attending camp. The people of the church took part with others of the Franklin (Mineral Area) Association in radio broadcasts from 8:00 to 8:30 a.m. each Sunday morning. Likewise they were introduced to visual education, as they enjoyed many religious pictures in their own church.

Reverend Hicks returned to Esther pastorate and began work on August 21, 1950. The church had only \$4,000.00 in the building fund but felt the great need of a larger Sunday School Building. The pastor and committee appointed by the church were sent to Nashville, Tennessee to receive the plans for a new Sunday School Building. The new Educational Building was soon under way and was completed in 1952 at a cost of \$60,000.00. The second educational unit was finished in 1956 at a cost of \$75,000.00. The dream of Esther Baptist Church for many years of a remodeled beautified, refurbished auditorium was realized in 1958. This involved an enlargement of the old auditorium, remodeling and refinishing. The cost, \$30,000. The next building improvement was the air conditioning of the south wing educational building at a cost of \$4,500.

The years 1959 to 1964 were years of debt paying. All indebtedness was paid off in 1964; and at that time a new parsonage building fund was set up, into which the church contributed from \$100 to \$200 per month, until they began to build in 1965. This building was completed at a cost of about \$26,500. Its value was much greater, since the major part of the work was done by the Lead Belt Technical School at no cost to the church. In January 1966, another dream began to grow into fruition; the remodeling of the basement under the auditorium was begun, and was completed at a cost of about \$4,500.00.

Another valuable addition to the plant has been the instillation of the beautiful painting, "The Sermon on the Mount," installed under lights in the vestibule of the church. The painting, done by Clark

Noble of Weaver, Minnesota, gives silent testimony to the by-passers through the night of the teaching ministry of the church.

Brother V.E. Defreece retired as pastor of Esther Baptist Church on December 31, 1976, after 22 years of dedicated and effective ministry. His footprints can be seen not only in the buildings, but in the very organization and personality of Esther Baptist Church. He set a standard of evangelism, missions and financial stability that is till an anchor for the church.

In February 1977, Reverend Harvey Lou Barton who had been licensed by the church on July 8, 1952, was called to serve as pastor, Followed by Reverend Danny Presswood & George Ormsbee.

In 1994 Reverend Vernon Covington became pastor of Esther Baptist Church. Reverend Covington had a great impact not only on the church but on the entire community. He became the Park Hills Police Department Chaplain where many people on the streets turned their ways and gave their life to the Lord. Reverend Covington joined his Father in Heaven on March 7, 1997 of a massive heart attack.

On February 22, 1998 Dr. Charles R. Brown was installed as pastor of Esther Baptist Church. It was under Pastor Brown that the church brought the Power Team, where over 500 people came to know Christ, through the school assembly's and shows put on nightly at the church.

The church also went under a New Renovation for a New Celebration during the New Millennium. The Church Sanctuary went under complete renovation, expanding the stage and adding stairs across the front to double as an alter. The Vestibule, Sanctuary, Entrance Halls, and the Conference Room were all re-carpeted and new molding was placed. The Production area was moved to the bottom floor and seating was rearranged and added into the balcony. The church also added a projector and video screen to the sanctuary, where PowerPoint slide's soon left hymnal's alone in the pew. The entire church building was soon under renovation room by room. The Fellowship Hall was painted and remodeled, as well as parts of the kitchen.

As the New Millennium approached in 1999, the church introduced a New Celebration called the Jesus Video. As of today, this video is still given to new members, and placed in the visitation bags. Dr. Charles Brown left Esther Baptist in August 2005 after resignation in earlier months.

Reverend Jonathan D. Jones was called as pastor of Esther Baptist Church on April 2, 2006. Reverend Jones and His wife Connie, have three sons, Jonathan, David, and Justin. Pastor Jonathan left a 6-year tenure with Quinton Baptist Church, Bronston, Kentucky, to begin the next journey that God had for him at Esther Baptist Church. Pastor Jonathan preached "In View of a Call" on March 19, 2006, where the congregation unanimously approved him. He began his ministry at Esther Baptist Church April 2, 2006.

Pastor Jones was born in Simpsonville KY, on November 10th, 1959 and later moved to Somerset, KY where he attended school, met and married Connie Sue Burton who has been his wife and best friend. He attended Tennessee Temple University and Lake Charles Bible College where he received his Bachelor Degree to be followed up with a Master of Divinity Degree from Lake Charles Bible College. He has served churches in, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina for more than 27 years. He has been active in the local Ministerial Association, Baptist association in Kentucky, Disaster Relief for the Southern Baptist Convention and is a certified Southern Baptist Chaplain.

Throughout 2006, the church experienced large growth once again, experiencing GOOD problems: the church needed more space. The church completely remodeled the parsonage; as of today the Esther Baptist Parsonage has spacious a living room, dining room, and kitchen. The parsonage also has 5 bedrooms, which also can be used as offices. The parsonage also has 3 bathrooms, one of which is a spacious basement area, under the north wing of the house.

As of today, the church is still remodeling rooms and looking towards a major renovation project in the future, that would consist of completely removing and adding new rooms.

The church has been served by seven church secretaries; Bessie Lore served for some time as a part time secretary; Doris Adams served as full time secretary from May 1955 to May 1967; Gloria Hovis began her tour of services in May 1967. She served as church secretary, church clerk and church treasurer, and had been a valuable beloved member of the staff through the years. Melanie Childress preceded Mrs. Hovis as secretary during the pastorate of Reverend Covington. Debbie (Bradley) Lindsey filled in as secretary in the late 1990's until Betsy Wright took the full time position during the pastorate of Dr. Charles Brown. In 2005 Debbie Wallen became the church secretary.

In March of 2014, Nate Dycus accepted the call to become the first Full-time Worship Leader at Esther Baptist Church.

In October of 2015, Pastor Todd Buck became the Senior Pastor of Esther Baptist Church.

In 2015, Lisa Courtois became the church secretary; Debbie Wallen became the financial secretary.

From that distant day, the church has grown well beyond the fondest dream of those who organized it, from that humble beginning 90 years ago, with 14 charter members meeting in a borrowed hall with no property to its own.

Esther Baptist looks forward to even greater times ahead, because we serve a God who is in control, and who has placed us in this part of the world. May God Bless Esther Baptist Church throughout time and not only allow it to grow in numbers, but to bring the Kingdom of God glory, that is our prayer.