

The History of the Park Hill church of Christ



Part 2



Park Hill History, Part 2

Time Period 1968 to Present...

In November of 1968, after serving two enlistments in the United States Air Force, Jo Anne and I along with our two children (Both born at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi.) moved back to Fort Smith and once again began working and worshipping with the Park Hill congregation.



The elders were Johnny Mathis, Dave Roberts, and Ed Shearer. You have seen the picture of Johnny and my dad earlier. Dr. Shearer is shown at left.

The deacons were: Carl Atkins, Carl Nichols, George Roberson, and Harlan Walraven, and the preacher was Guthrie Dean shown at right.



In order to reach people that might be interested in the gospel, some of the members had begun to canvass the neighborhood talking with homeowners, and handing out literature. We joined in but after weeks of knocking on doors and meeting the residents, not one member was gained.

The whole Park Hill area of Fort Smith (about a 225 square block area) and especially that part within ten blocks of the church building, which at one time comprised about a third of the membership, was made up of elderly people who were already religiously established and not open to discussing the scriptures with us, or new home-owners who had just bought one of the old homes when it became empty. Those that were buying the homes in this area were mostly Arabic, Vietnamese, or Hispanic folks who also were already established in their religion.

Because of the language difficulty we were not successful. Some were friendly, and receptive to talking with us, but we could not communicate well enough to be fruitful. In most instances the people buying those houses were strong Catholic, Muslim, or Buddhists and were not interested in talking about religion.

Looking back on it now, I don't believe that situation was unique to Fort Smith. Jo Anne and I have traveled extensively around the U.S. and we found many instances where a church directory lists a congregation that is no longer there. I have also talked to several preachers who tell me that many of the larger cities are having that same problem. As difficult as it was to accept, a few members recognized the need to relocate to a newer area of Fort Smith. Needless to say, as the attendance waned, so did the contribution, which finally forced us to cease our support to outside preachers.

Furthermore, like so many other older churches, the membership consisted primarily of "middle age" or older families who had been attending that same congregation for years. Their children had grown up, left for college, married and began new families of their own. There were few children at Park Hill, and only a few "younger" families. When younger families moving into Fort Smith visited with us, they saw a church with few children and chose not to place membership with us.

Typically, I believe, that common problem is still being faced by some of the older churches in the larger cities today. The building is usually situated in one of the older parts of town — which was the prime place to be back when they bought the property and built their building — but now the younger families moving into the city are buying homes in the newer sub-divisions, which in most cases, are not in the older sections of the cities... and as was Park Hill, the older churches are usually in the older sections and not convenient to the younger families.

Therefore, the older congregations are finding themselves primarily comprised of "middle age" or elderly members and the number of children in those congregations becomes fewer and fewer. These things may or may not have had an impact on the minds of those who were "long time" members of Park Hill. They had seen trouble and diversity before, and always before things turned around and worked out for the better.

Below are excerpt from notes taken from the record of Park Hill's business meetings held during the early part of this period:

July 28, 1968 —

1. Brother Lloyd Nash the preacher for the North 9th Street church was receiving \$15.00 per week support from Park Hill. That would continue.
2. Brother Herbert Knight in Paducah, Kentucky needed support. It was suggested that Park Hill send \$100.00 per month for 3 months then re-evaluate.
3. Attendance was getting lower and seating was scattered. It was suggested that the back pews be roped off to force members to sit closer to front. It was determined to not be a good idea at this time.
4. Brother L. Z. Tole was appointed as treasurer for Park Hill.

July 13, 1969 —

1. Brother Burton Neugent "stepped down" from the eldership leaving Johnny Mathis, Dave Roberts, and Ed Shearer as the elders.
2. Elders to consider support in amount of \$100 per month to Bro. Jones to begin a congregation in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

November 29, 1970 —

1. It was stated that \$1230.00 per month was being paid to preachers, including our own, and that was about 2/3 of the total income from contributions each month.
2. It was suggested that more good might be done if the amount could be channeled to the full support of two preachers rather than the six or seven receiving partial support.

3. It was mentioned that letters were being received from Mexico asking for support. The elders were cautioned to be fully aware of the reputation and character of those to whom they were sending the money.

February 7, 1971 —

1. Bro. Lloyd Nash asked for Park Hill to increase his support to \$25 per week from the \$15 he has been getting. Several voiced favorable comments about Bro. Nash.
2. Support for Bro. Harold Turner in Greenwood in the amount of \$75.00 per month.

November 28, 1971 —

During the business meeting the treasurer was asked to outline the support for preaching the gospel. He reported:

1. Bank Balance as of October 30, 1971 was \$6,210.00 on hand.
2. The balance had remained reasonably stable at that amount for over a year.
3. Preachers receiving money are:
 - A. Bro. Edmundson in Searcy, Arkansas — \$100.00 per month.
 - B. Bro. Mike Rogas in Missouri — \$100.00 per month.
 - C. Bro. Lloyd Nash in Fort Smith — cancelled his support and moved away.
4. Possible support had been asked from Bro. Huff in Poteau, Oklahoma
5. Possible support had been asked from Bro. Bruce in Evening Shade, Arkansas

I included the above business meeting notes to show that in spite of my mentioning my concern that our two kids do not have more than just a few peers in the congregation to my dad and Johnny during a Thanksgiving dinner the year before, the situation was not being addressed, or even discussed in the business meetings. Attendance figures with low numbers, especially in the “younger to middle age membership,” is a concern that needs to be addressed. In the four year of business meeting notes that I have, other than suggesting the back pews be roped off in the July 1968 meeting, there was no other mention of declining membership. Perhaps this was not recognized as a “trend,” by the elders and men who were attending the business meetings.

By 1973, though, the absence of younger families was beginning to take its toll. With fewer children, we began to see children’s classes with only one or two students in them. Some classes were even eliminated because there was no children that fit into that class’s age group. Typically, younger ladies taught those classes so with fewer “younger families” the situation was compounding — not only fewer students, but now fewer teachers to teach them.

To remedy some of the problem, the elders chose to combine some of the classes so that instead of a two year span, such as a class for 1st & 2nd Grade, a separate class for 3rd and 4th Grade, etc., it was decided that classes would have a three year age span rather than two.

There was a class for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Grades, a separate class for 4th, 5th, and 6th Grades, and so forth. While it did increase the number in the classes, and reduce the number of teachers needed, combining a greater span of grades together didn’t work

well and the teachers were having difficulty keeping the interest of all of their students, and to teach at the level needed for each student.

Jo Anne and I realized that our children needed other children their age to associate with and classes designed for their age group. The Southside congregation had those things. It was a tremendously difficult decision that we agonized over for weeks, but after weighing all things, in the early summer of 1973 we placed our membership with the Southside congregation.

The situation described above was not just happening at Park Hill at that time, but is still happening in some of the older “established” congregations around the country. Perhaps, like here, the reason is because the situation is not recognized by the leadership quickly enough to make needed changes.

In Park Hill’s case, by the time the problem had grown to the point that it was recognized, there was no longer the means (funds) to make the changes needed. Perhaps, the membership thought the several “bumps in the road” over the past decade were over and things would get better soon.

In 1973, when my family left Park Hill, the regular Sunday morning attendance figure was in the neighborhood of 150 to 160 on a typical Sunday morning. A far cry from the “over 500 regularly,” but certainly enough to meet the need and relocate to a newer part of the city. Alas, it didn’t happen.

On the other hand, the Southside congregation only had a average Sunday morning attendance of approximately 85 to 90 people, but the average age was much less. That membership was comprised of younger families with children.

Some of Park Hill’s members did come to Southside in early 1974 shortly before the event described toward the end of Part 1 of this history, that formed the Old Greenwood Road church. At that time the attendance figures for Park Hill and Southside kind of “evened out” numerically with both congregations numbering in the very low one-hundreds.

With the preacher and his group gone from Park Hill to form Old Greenwood Road, the trouble at Park Hill quickly abated and the members that came to Southside went back to Park Hill. By the early part of 1975, with everyone more-or-less settled in place, I would estimate Park Hill’s membership at 100 to 125 and Southside’s membership at about 75 to 85 — a few of the Southside members returned to Park Hill with the others.

At Park Hill things were getting settled down following the 1974 “incident.” New elders and deacons had been installed, although some of the men serving in both of those offices were the same ones as before the “incident,” and they had secured the services of a new preacher, Brother Herbert Frasier shown here.



So, in early 1975 those serving Park Hill were:

Preacher: Herbert Frasier

Elders:

Boyd Keith
Johnny Mathis
Dave Roberts
Buddy Schoeppe

Deacons:

Wayne Carson
Bill Engles
Keith Ethridge
George Roberson
L. Z. Tole

During a business meeting dated June 13, 1976, Bro. Keith Ethridge read a letter of resignation from his position of deacon. He stated the reason being an increased workload in his secular job that would not allow him the time necessary to perform the duties of a deacon. His request was accepted and he was wished the best from the elders as well as others.

However in late 1976, things were not going as smoothly as thought because during a business meeting dated September 12, 1976, it was noted that prior to the business meeting Herbert Frasier had offered his resignation.

Someone asked why he was leaving and the explanation given was *“everyone at Park Hill loves both Brother and Sister Frasier, and no one could fault them in any way, but some had trouble following his lessons and thought the lessons might be too deep for the membership.”*

One month later, in a business meeting dated October 10, 1976 a response was given by Bro. Frasier that indicated a clear misreading of the conditions at Park Hill. He stated that this would be the last time he would have an opportunity to speak and listed a number of things that he felt needed serious consideration at Park Hill. This was said after he had preached his last sermon just prior to the business meeting. He left that evening for his new work in Florida.

In the November 14, 1976 business meeting it was mentioned that Bro. Roger Hendricks would be at Park Hill the following week to begin a gospel meeting. The elders asked that the membership view the meeting as an opportunity to hear him with a view toward he being hired as the next preacher at Park Hill. In the meantime several men had agreed to fill-in until they could find a suitable person. According to the minutes those who were contacted to fill-in were: Brothers Burgess, Copeland, Keith, Loum, and Roberts.

As 1977 begins, Park Hill is still struggling with finding a preacher. The membership as a whole certainly wanted Roger Hendricks. He had held the meeting for them and the membership liked what they saw. However, someone of his reputation and caliber had some drawbacks.

He would not live in the preacher's house and asked them to sell it and buy a new one with four bedrooms and two and a half bathrooms. The new house must be in the Ramsey/Southside school district, and he expected his insurance and utilities to be paid by the church. He would be willing for up to a maximum of \$200 per month out of his salary be considered as housing expense for income tax purposes. He would not come for less than \$565.00 per week salary and Park Hill could not meet those requirements. It was finally decided that if Hendricks could get \$300 per week in outside support, that would make it possible.

Hendricks typically held nine 1-week gospel meeting per year with his salary being paid during those meetings. Any monies paid to him by the church where he held the meetings would be his. He also expected three weeks paid vacation each year.

There was much discussion over the selling of the preacher's house and buying a new one. There were those that thought Hendricks was too expensive for Park Hill and wanted to look further. Those that wanted Hendricks used the analogy that if you had a need for legal help, you should find the best lawyer regardless of price. They felt they were in that sort of situation and wanted him to come as soon as possible. Whether expressed or not, everyone thought Roger Hendricks would bring in enough new members to increase the membership — and the contribution — enough to make it important that he come.

After all was discussed — over the next three months — they decided to hire Hendricks if he could get the \$300 per week support. He said he could come as soon as school was out in Florida, but as it turned out, he was not able to get the \$300 per week support — and in August of 1977 the school year began again in Florida.

Knowing that Park Hill was looking for a preacher, Brother Timothy Wells, the preacher at the Northside church of Christ in Greenwood, Arkansas contacted Park Hill stating his contract with Northside was up at the end of 1977 and he had been told his contract would not be renewed. There had been complaints from the membership about his dress and demeanor — he did not wear suits, and was “outgoing and immature.”

The early discussions of the eventual merging together of the Park Hill and Southside churches occur in 1978. Since we are at that point in the history, perhaps history would best be documented if the simultaneous history for both the Park Hill and the Southside churches be written. The record will show, these congregations, which once were one, will merge back together to again form one congregation. At the time this is being written, our number is less than a fifth of what it was at it's peak. But similar to what Park Hill had in 1953, we again have a new building, located in a good neighborhood on the south side of Fort Smith, and the building loan is close to being paid off. We are a group of Christians who love each other, are united in our belief, and are working together to spread the gospel in this area as well as beyond.

In order to continue the history of the two congregations simultaneously, permit me to quickly bring Southside's history up to the beginning of 1978:

As documented earlier, the Southside church of Christ was formed in 1962 when about 100 members left Park Hill to begin a congregation on the south side of Fort Smith. The first preacher was Harold Turner shown at left. Harold was a "Park Hill kid" having grown up attending services at Park Hill. His dad served as a deacon and later as an elder for the Park Hill congregation. The Turner family moved to California in the mid 1950's and it was Harold's idea to become famous.



Fortunately for us, somewhere along the way, Harold gave up on becoming a rich "Rock & Roll Star" and decided to become a gospel preacher instead. He turned out to be a very good preacher and has become somewhat famous, although not as he once might have thought.

The membership at Southside did not believe they had a plurality of men qualified to serve as elders, and without elders, there could be no deacons, so those offices were yet to be filled.

Harold worked with the Southside church until 1969, when he moved to Fort Worth, Texas to work with the Westside church of Christ there for about a year or so, then moved to Greenwood, Arkansas and preached for the Northside congregation there until 1977.

After Harold left Southside in 1969, there was a short period of time when several men filled the pulpit, including Charles Loum, one of the members, along with others. Eventually Mike Rogas (I am not sure of the spelling of his name and I don't have a picture of Mike) came to work with the Southside brethren, but stayed only a short time.

With Mike having left, the Southside church was, again, relying on different speakers for a short time, and I was able to help with that some, but in 1971 Stanley J. Lovett took over the Southside pulpit.

Stanley, shown at right, before moving to Arkansas was the publisher (owner) of the brotherhood paper "The Preceptor" and was preaching in San Antonio, Texas. Getting close to retirement, Stanley sold The Preceptor to Danny Brown, gave notice to the congregation in San Antonio, and with his wife, Sarah, moved to Fort Smith to be near their daughter. When Southside was needing a preacher, he agreed to preach for them "until they could find a preacher."

It was during this time, in 1973, when my family placed membership at Southside.



Stanley preached for Southside until the year ended, but decided to fully retire and not preach in 1974. We were sorry to learn that he was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. I was still doing occasional preaching for small churches around this area, as was Charles Loum. When Stanley retired, Charles Loum and I, along with several others filled in at Southside while we looked for another preacher.

Before long the members at Southside decided they wanted it to be just Charles and Ron, so we worked out a schedule whereby Charles and I, would alternate Sunday mornings and evenings preaching at Southside and that enabled us to continue to help the other congregations, and one of us was always at Southside. We were able to locate a new preacher and he would begin in January of 1977.

As 1977 began things were going exceptionally well at Southside. We welcomed the new preacher — Harold Turner. Yes, he was back at Southside! Harold's family included his wife Sarah and four daughters. Sarah Turner, Harold's wife, was the daughter Stanley and his wife Sarah, had moved back to Fort Smith to be near. They also welcomed the new preacher's family to Southside. The Lovett's lived only a few blocks from the Southside building. The Harold Turner family had bought a house in Greenwood and continued to live there.

Later in 1977 Southside held a gospel meeting with Don Patton coming, and several members from Park Hill attended. Throughout the whole period from the original forming of Southside in 1962 until the merging back together in 1984, the relationship between Park Hill and the Southside congregation remained firm and friendly.

The Merging Together — (Period covered: 1978 to 1985)

Remember that near the end of 1977 Tim Wells, the preacher at Northside in Greenwood had contacted Park Hill about becoming their preacher. They worked out the arrangements, and Tim preached a couple of times for Park Hill. They didn't find his "more casual" dress objectionable, and he brought good, fresh sermons. So Timothy Wells, shown at right, was hired and he was good for them. He also was willing to live in the preacher's house.

As 1978 came, the most important concern at Park Hill was that the lines outside the ladies restroom were too long and the time between class and services too short.

To solve that problem they designated both upstairs bathrooms



as LADIES. That required the men to use the two bathrooms in the basement, so they were designated MEN. It did cause some difficulties as some of the men were having trouble getting up and down the stairs, but they coped with it.

During the early part of 1978 the Southside membership believed, for the first time, there were men qualified to serve as elders and deacons and they were appointed. Those who were initially appointed to serve as elders were: Charles Loum, Harold Turner, and Ron Roberts. Those appointed as Deacons were: Paul Allison, Harvey Graves and Harley Rainwater.

The rest of the year was good! I will address one incident that occurred in the summer of 1978 at Southside. It is in regard to a family with children moving into the Fort Smith area, and I address it for three reasons: First, it speaks of the ongoing problem of Park Hill still being primarily comprised of elderly and middle aged members; Secondly, it bears on the current history of Park Hill now (at the time this is being written) all these years later; And thirdly, it allowed me to meet a fellow that quickly became my closest friend and ally. The story isn't too long...

It is late July of 1978, I had built two new solid wood doors for the front of the Southside church building. The building's original front double doors were hollow core doors and even though they were stained and varnished as well as protected by the roof (shown at right) which extended for 10 feet past the front of the building, they had become badly weather worn and were beginning to peel and rot. Because both of my hobbies involve working with wood I have a pretty good workshop. Therefore, to save the church some money I agreed to build new doors to replace the old ones. The new doors were made and I was at the building trying to install them. It was a Saturday afternoon after working my regular job that morning, and I was by myself.



A vehicle pulled into the parking lot — I believe it was a turquoise green Volvo station wagon, of all things — and a tall, lanky guy with a mustache unfolded himself from the small vehicle. He said something like, “Looks like you could use a little help,” and actually, at that point I welcomed his help. He introduced himself as Joe Turner and I could tell right away, by the way he talked that without a doubt he was from Tennessee. He was born and raised in northeast Arkansas.

We chatted a few minutes then Joe helped me get the doors installed and we talked while working. I learned that he was in the Army and had just been assigned to Fort Smith as an Army Recruiter. He was married and had a son and daughter about the same ages as my own son and daughter. He told me he and his family had visited with the Park Hill brethren and after services Carl Atkins, one of the deacons for Park Hill (and Billie Sue's husband) took them to an ice cream / burger place and while they talked Carl

suggested since they had children they might be happier worshipping at Southside rather than Park Hill.

I don't think I ever told Joe this, but I thanked Carl several times for directing them to us. And after all these years I still thank God for Carl sending them our way! Their kid's are grown now, married and have children of their own as are ours. Their daughter Michelle married and moved to northwest Arkansas, and their son Michael married but stayed here. Michael served as a deacon for awhile at Park Hill, and later served as an elder. Even later, he and his family moved to Greenwood and now worship with the Northside church there — which, by-the-way, is growing.

Joe and Ann Turner are faithful Christians who are willing and able to work for the Lord, and they are a big part of Park Hill being what it is today. Needless to say, we were devastated when the Army moved them away in March of 1981 – about three years later.

However, in 1984 the Turners came back! Joe had retired from the Army in June of 1984, and many grateful souls welcomed them back to Fort Smith and to Park Hill. (The merging together of Park Hill and Southside had just occurred before they returned.)

No one was more glad to see them than I. Besides being my closest and dearest friend, Joe has faithfully served the congregation, first as a deacon and has now served with me in the eldership through some difficult years. I don't have the words to accurately express the depth of my feelings for that family, but I continue to thank God for them.

As I have said, Johnny and I worked together daily in the electronics service business, Tower Radio & TV Sales & Service Co. Johnny owned the company until 1980 when Jo Anne and I bought the business, and from that point, Johnny worked for us until he retired. Contrary to most work environments the technicians at Tower TV were close and saw plenty of time to talk to each other whether sitting at the workbenches next to each other, or in the same vehicles making service calls. Most times, Johnny and I were either talking about business, family, the bible, or the church. Those were some good times. I decided to mention something I had been thinking about ever since Jo Anne and I left Park Hill to work with Southside — a possible merger.

In 1978 our conversations were not specific in regard to how we would go about such a thing, but more along the lines of the benefits as opposed to drawbacks. We never spoke about it for long periods, but we did have several conversations in which that was the primary subject.

Our consensus was that when all was said and done, we could only visualize one drawback: That some might not want to merge and would attend elsewhere should it proceed. Between the two of us we reached the conclusion that if we could prevent all

but a few leaving, the benefits would far outweigh any other negative that we could imagine, so we decided to take the next step of talking to the other elders, and the two preachers, to see what they thought.

It would be expected, I suppose, since both congregations seemed to be doing well, at the time, that any suggested change would be looked upon with less urgency than if the situation had been dire. So when Johnny outlined the result of his and my discussions with the other elder (my dad) and Tim Wells, I did the same with the other elders at Southside, which, of course, included the preacher, Harold Turner.

I guess it could be said that it was looked upon more along the lines of it being “something to keep in mind” rather than asking for a definitive yes or no. By that I mean it was not viewed as a “*something we need to do right now*” sort of thing. Looking back on that time period from today’s hindsight, I guess that attitude should have been expected.

I will pause the chronologic record here to address how the “Business of the church” was carried out at the two congregations. It was similar, but yet, significantly different.

At Park Hill the system in place was, I suppose, by tradition. The congregation was formed in the “Fall of 1918,” and it was “set in order” in January of 1919. As I have said, “set in order” meant the church had elders and deacons. So, almost from the very beginning, Park Hill had men qualified to serve as elders and I assume it was at that time when the method of conducting business was established. Ever since I can remember — and before, according to the records — their practice was, for the elders to make the decisions, and that is how it should be. But, they recognized that the membership needed to be informed, so the elders would meet with the men of the congregation monthly (most of the time) in what was termed “Business Meetings” to discuss the affairs of the church. Generally, one of the elders, but at times the elders would appoint someone else to preside over these meetings.

The procedure seldom varied to any degree. The “chairperson” would call the meeting to order, make a comment or two — most usually have a prayer — then announce the primary topic, if there was one, to be discussed. Usually, the primary topic was discussed first, but not always. The men were asked to express their feelings on any or all matters that were being discussed and to introduce any new business the elders needed to know or consider.

Any member could express his opinion, either for or against, the matter, or propose an alternative idea. This gave the elders a good insight into the way the general membership felt in regard to whatever matter was under discussion. Often these discussions only took a few minutes, but as much time as needed was used. Once the matter had been discussed fully either of three possible results usually occurred:

- 1 - Sometimes, further input was needed either from family members or more of the congregation. If this was necessary, the matter would be “tabled” until the next meeting, or until the time necessary to get the information needed.
- 2 - Having the input from the men, the elders could make their decision during the business meeting, which was often done.
- 3 - Usually, though, the elders would refrain from making their decision until they had heard the business meeting discussion, then would meet and discuss the matter among themselves. After making their decision, it was announced to the congregation.

If the matter was tabled, in most situations the men were encouraged to discuss the matters with their families so that the membership in general was aware of what was being discussed and the result, of the discussion, if there was one.

Then, during the next month’s business meeting, or sooner if the elders felt it necessary, and if the elders had not yet made a decision on the matter, the item was brought up again and discussed further – this time with the men being aware of what their families thought about the item. After that, the elders would make their decisions as they thought best.

Critical matters were, of course, handled by the elders as soon as possible, but sometimes the discussion of non-critical matters might be continued for several business meetings before a final outcome was announced. This process was often slow to show action, and the dissemination of information did not always reach everyone.

At Southside things were done slightly differently —

In the beginning of Southside’s history without men qualified to be appointed as elders, the men conducted business meetings similar to the way Park Hill did, but without elders to decide, the matters were decided by vote. It was kind of a “majority rules” thing, which, seemed to be the right thing to do in lieu of elders.

However, after elders were appointed the elders believed every member, not just the men, should equally be able to express their opinion without influence. So the elders at Southside published a monthly newsletter called *“Talking with the elders.”*

In addition to other things, that newsletter announced and explained matters that were being considered by the elders — unless, of course, the matters were private in nature — which kept the entire membership aware of things

that were being considered by the elders.

The membership was encouraged to take their views, ideas, and/or opinions to any one of the elders and they would be considered. That worked very well because in most cases, everyone knew in advance of an upcoming decision and could provide their input.

The elders at Southside felt the situation with a merger was a bigger, more important matter, with many possibilities, so early in the summer of 1979, the elders at Southside held what they called a “general meeting” of the membership to see what the pulse of the membership was in regard to merging with Park Hill.

However, you don’t surprise everyone and call a special meeting to take place after a Sunday morning service! Very likely, Sunday Lunch was baking in the ovens at home. So an announcement was made the Sunday before and also on the Wednesday night before the Sunday of the meeting, for the members to prepare to stay late after the morning service the following Sunday.

On the Sunday of the meeting Harold preached a shorter sermon centered on unified worship and the work of the church. In that sermon he mentioned the lack of numerical growth, in fact, a decline in attendance using figures compiled over the last couple of years according to the membership roster. After the prayer that closed the service, there was a five minute recess period then the meeting was called to order by one of the elders. Harold did an excellent job in his sermon, laying the groundwork and the meeting went well. A general view of merging with Park Hill was outlined and the members were asked if anyone had any comment or question. By the comments made and questions asked during that meeting, it was easy to see that everyone was not interested in a merger with Park Hill. The prevalent feeling appeared to be that it would be taken as more of an “us joining with them” concept rather than a true merger.

Understandably, emotion is a part of any change and especially was that so regarding this proposed merger. Many of the members attending Southside at that time were the same folks who had left Park Hill back in 1962 to establish the new congregation and were not overjoyed with the thought of merging back with Park Hill. They felt they would be “throwing away” all the work done to get to this point.

At Park Hill there was not much discussion at the business meeting, so we could not get the general feeling from Park Hill. Tim Wells was still doing a good work for them. The attendance figures were holding and they seemed to be happy as 1979 begun.

Repeating for the record: In 1979 the preacher at Park Hill was Tim Wells, the elders were Johnny Mathis and Dave Roberts. The Southside preacher was Harold Turner and the elders were Charles Loum, Ron Roberts, and Harold Turner.

As I found out much later, in fact while writing this history, at Park Hill the merger was apparently not being discussed openly with the men of the congregation, because the

Back to the chronology —

A few months after the general meeting held at Southside, in 1979, Harold Turner received an offer to move to Saratoga, Arkansas and preach for the congregation there. With the uncertainty of the merging of Park Hill and Southside in mind, Harold accepted the offer and agreed to move at the end of the year.

Several things happened rather quickly during this period of time and I may not have them listed in the correct order, but this is as I remember it:

1. Since Harold was preaching and also serving as an elder, his decision to leave would reduce the eldership to two men: Charles Loum and Ron Roberts. So Paul Allison was selected and with no objections from the membership, appointed to serve Southside in the capacity of an elder and began to serve with Charles, Harold, and Ron.
2. Harold's leaving also required that we locate a new preacher. A young preacher named Denny Meyers agreed to come and preach, but couldn't come for a few months. In the interim between Harold's leaving and Denny's arrival both Charles (Nub) Loum and Ron Roberts would share the preaching duties, again, alternating each week. Both of these men had still been regularly preaching for some of the smaller churches in communities around Fort Smith as well as filling in, when needed, in several of the larger congregations.
3. Sometime later, after Harold had left, Charles Loum felt it necessary to step down from the office of elder due to family issues, leaving Paul Allison and Ron Roberts as the only elders at Southside.
4. Then Joe Turner was reassigned to northern Missouri. Several of us were very disappointed to learn this, but none more than I. Joe and I had grown to become extremely good friends. The one thing that allowed me to handle the Turner Family leaving without jumping up and down screaming, was Joe's promise that once he retired from the Army – which would only be about 3 years – they would be back.

Early in 1981 a long-time member of Park Hill passed away leaving his estate to the church. The only stipulation in the will was that the proceeds be used ONLY for the support of preachers who were NOT working at the local church. The value of the estate once all was liquidated was almost \$30,000.00.

A business meeting was held at Park Hill on May 23, 1981 and the elders reported to the men of the congregation that if the church added a little money to the Reavis Brooks Fund and deposited \$30,000.00 in a Money Market Certificate, at 16% interest (believe it not, interest was high in the early 1980's) they could "Lock In" that percentage for three years.

It would yield \$397.04 per month in interest, which would effectively allow them \$400.00 per month to support preachers other than those at Park Hill without touching the principle! They did it!

Denny Meyers arrived in December of 1980 to begin his work at Southside in January 1981. (I do not have a photo of Denny.) He didn't stay long — only about 3 or 4 months. There was a difference of opinion regarding certain holidays, and Denny did not feel comfortable to stay, so he told us he was leaving as soon as he could. The "official" reason given was: He didn't like Arkansas, and didn't feel like he would fit in at Southside.

We were very fortunate to be able to find Randy King, shown at right, and asked Randy to come to Southside to preach for us. He agreed to come, but since Southside could not support him fully, he would be required to obtain "outside support" to make up the difference. Randy obtained some support from Park Hill, in the amount of \$200 per month, which made it possible for him to come. Randy and his wife Debbie, with their young boys, would arrive in late June or early July of 1981, so it was back to the "Nub and Ron" show at Southside until Randy arrived, which he did in late June of 1981 and began preaching for Southside on the first Sunday in July, 1981.



Tim Wells told the elders at Park Hill that he would be leaving at the end of the year, and begin 1982 working at a congregation in Fort Worth, Texas. Ever since the gospel meeting that Roger Hendricks held at Park Hill back in 1977 the members at Park Hill had wanted him as their preacher, so they contacted him once again. He was still willing to come, and this time his demands less troublesome, but still high.

In the business meeting held on August 8, 1982 at Park Hill, the men were told of Hendricks' requirements: He would need a minimum of \$625.00 per week. This would include housing, salary and expenses. He still would NOT live in the preacher's house! He was willing to reduce the number of paid meetings to 7 per year, but remained steadfast on the 3 weeks of paid vacation per year. He expected the church to pay his utilities and the premiums for home owner's insurance on the house. Park Hill must also pay moving expense from Florida.

The treasurer, L.Z. Tole, stated that for the seven months prior to this meeting, contributions had averaged \$694.00 per week. Expenses other than preacher's salary for that same period averaged \$245.56 per week. Based on the figures Brother Hendricks would need, it would require a minimum of \$850 per week total contribution. Without naming the individuals, the following comments were made in that meeting:

1. What about the personal work? Will he do it? The reply was: Personal work is the responsibility of each member — not just the preacher.
2. It is not all about personal work. What people hear when they visit goes far in determining if they come back.
3. We need someone who will increase our membership, especially younger people.

4. If Roger Hendricks would come, he would draw enough new members the extra expense would take care of itself.
5. Park Hill has always met its obligations and I have faith that any obligation would be met.
6. What about the possibility of a merger with the Southside congregation? The reply given was: This possibility has been brought up before and he didn't think it could be accomplished on their part.
7. If Hendricks was hired, how long before he came? The reply was: Three months notice to his present congregation, but they might agree to less.



The elders decided to hire Bro. Hendricks, shown here, and all conditions mentioned above were agreed to. He would be here in December and will begin work January 1, 1983.

There would be a period of a few months where they would get local men to preach for them. I did some of that since Randy was preaching at Southside.

Item number 6 in the meeting above was what I was referring to earlier, when I said it was 1982 when the first mention of the merger appeared in the minutes of the Park Hill business meetings. That was over two years after Johnny and I discussed it with the elders of both congregations. The men in that business meeting at Park Hill were trying to find a way to meet the financial requirement for Hendricks to come and unable to find it asked, *"What about the possibility of a merger with Southside?"* The reply from the elder conducting the meeting was, *"This possibility had been brought up before and he did not think it could be accomplished on their part."*

I assumed the "their part" referred to Southside's situation. I also assumed the answer given was because I had told Johnny about the result of Southside's meeting back in 1979. Johnny likely passed that information to others at Park Hill. I suspect, though, had Park Hill's general membership been aware of the possibility of a merger, some of the same feelings that were expressed at Southside would have been felt by them as well.

While everyone recognizes that the building itself is not the church, nevertheless, the building is a consideration. Some of the members at Park Hill had never worshipped anywhere else! They had watched every step of construction and advancement. That building was a huge part of their lives, with many of having been baptized or married in that building. Others had family members whose funerals had been conducted in that building. It can certainly be understood from the Park Hill member's standpoint, selling the Jenny Lind property and building a new building would be difficult.

In the December 5, 1982 business meeting the Park Hill treasurer announced the bank balance was \$5,491.59 after paying moving expense for Hendricks family.

Hendricks arrived in January, 1983 and sat in a meeting with Randy King and the four elders of the two churches to discuss the merger. We thought we had worked out an arrangement whereby the two congregations could peacefully merge together without losing but a very few members. It may, or may not surprise you to learn there were some (a very few) who were adamantly against the merger and told us if it happened they were leaving.

A few weeks later, in the Park Hill business meeting held January 30, 1983 the following notes were made. Without naming the individuals, this was recorded in the minutes:

With 19 men present, and after prayer, the Chairman stated that the principal reason for the called meeting was to discuss the possibility of a merger of Park Hill and the Southside congregations. He asked those present for comments.

One of the elders was asked to comment on what information he had in regard to this proposed merger. That elder stated that he had been approached by Southside, that they had already had two general meetings, and their proposal was to sell both buildings and build in a new location. They were united with the exception of one lady and her daughter. He further stated that his first principal was to do God's work and that after many hours of thought and prayer, he felt we needed to merge or not survive as a congregation. He also stated that both buildings were in need of repair, and the maintenance on the Park Hill building would always be an expensive problem.

The other elder added that he had been aware of this proposal for a few weeks and was receptive to it. He also stated that the church had done everything they knew to do to increase in number and especially young people, without results. In fact, a number with children had left in recent months in order to be with other children their own age.

One person commented that he would like to see them go through the summer and see what growth they could have and after that time would go along with the proposed change.

Another person commented on the high maintenance cost of the building and to the deterioration of the area around the building.

Another commented that he thought the merger was a good thing and would be in favor of it.

Another commented that Southside be invited to move to Park Hill and that both buildings be sold before any building project be finalized. He was in favor of the merger.

Another commented that he was in favor of the merger, but cautioned against a long-term commitment on a building.

Another commented that an effort of personal work be tried before any decision was made.

It was suggested that Park Hill revive the radio program on a daily basis to generate more interest.

It was asked what the balance in the treasury was at this time and the reply was \$5,000.00. It was pointed out that no outside support was coming out of the treasury.

The consensus was that those present seemed to be in agreement that a merger with Southside would be good, however property and a new building brought many different opinions as to the best course of action.

With no other business the meeting was adjourned.

From Southside's perspective, the overall merger plan was plain and simple: Sell both present buildings, buy a plot of land in the southernmost side of Fort Smith, and build a new building. The means to carry out that plan, however, was not simple. To purchase new property and build a new building required capital that did not exist at this time. All we had was the present properties, and two dwindling bank accounts that would later be joined into one new account, and contributions that barely met the needs of the two congregations. A loan might be available to us, but we were still hoping that we could accomplish our goal and be debt free at the end.

For some reason, one of the things overlooked in the planning, was the \$200 per month being paid to Randy. We, at Southside, knew Randy was being helped by Park Hill in the amount of \$200 per month, but we didn't know it was coming from the Brook's Trust, nor did we know the provisions of the trust. We assumed it was already in their budget and was being planned for.

Park Hill's next business meeting minutes was held on June 12, 1983. A few of the notes made of that meeting include interesting information. I will quote a section of the minutes of that meeting. The date of this meeting was a full year prior to the merger and was called to address the current financial condition at Park Hill. This first quote comes from one of the elders:

"In August of 1982, when the decision was made to hire Roger Hendricks as the full-time preacher at Park Hill, the financial condition of the church was in good shape. The bank balance at that time was over \$12,000.00. It was stated at that meeting a weekly contribution of \$850.00 would be required to meet the budget requirements. Since that date several families have left Park Hill for reasons primarily that their children did not have other children their age.

This loss of members and the lack of anticipated growth in number, plus the fact the preacher's house has not been sold as anticipated, has put Park Hill in a grave financial condition. At the present time there is \$2000.00 in the treasury and the contribution today was \$602.00. In addition, the building insurance is due in excess of \$900.00. The elders have asked the carrier if the premium could be paid in quarterly increments until the situation might improve. The closing date for the sale of the preacher's house could be in June, however it could be from 30 to 60 days before money was received and another 30 days before revenue could be expected to relieve this situation."

A question was asked, "What about the merger, and how this might improve our situation." The reply was: "This was still being planned, however a number of problems would need to be worked out before this would happen."

Those problems are: Building plans and the cost of an architect's estimate of building costs. This is usually 10% of the construction cost, which neither congregation has. Also, the approval of the agencies that govern the building of new buildings. Also, Southside is unwilling to sell their building and move in with Park Hill until all of this is resolved and Park Hill has agreed with it.

[NOTE: The next two statements were NEVER voiced to anyone at Southside. Had they been, the merger most certainly would have been delayed until resolution could have been made.]

The elder conducting the meeting said, "When this merger was proposed there would have been funds to retain both preachers — today this would not be possible due to financial conditions."

And he continued, "If and when this merger is accomplished, the payment to Bro. Randy King out of the Brooks Trust would stop, in that this fund can only be spent for evangelism outside of Park Hill.

The following comments and questions came from the men in attendance:

"The solution is more members. I ask that each individual get an old church directory to call, invite, and encourage former members to come back."

"The complaint of some who come is that the preacher is gone too much." The reply was; "We agreed he could hold 7 meetings and 3 weeks vacation."

It was suggested that the attendance figure be removed from public view as it would discourage visitors.

It was suggested that they meet in the small auditorium to save utility costs.

It was suggested that another meeting take place in two weeks to further discuss this situation.

In the follow-up meeting held on June 26, 1983 it was mentioned that the contribution was up. The week before had been \$750 and this week it was \$849. It was further stated in regard to the sale of the preacher's house, that the contract had been signed and the sale would be final on June 30, 1983. However, it was pointed out that the money would not be available for several months.

It is possible that some meetings were held during the next six months, but if so, the notes are missing. The next meeting for which notes are available is the Park Hill Business meeting that took place on February 19, 1984. There is nothing in the notes about the finances, so I assume the money from the sale of the preacher's house was paid, and the bank account was up considerably. However, the two pages of notes indicate the need of more members still exists, as several paragraphs mention personal work, and other things to increase the membership. The following note was recorded:

"The question was asked in regard to the merger between Park Hill and Southside. A number of members seem to be interested and it was suggested that we 'get back on track' with that. Johnny Mathis responded, 'Most everyone is in favor of it, but it was not progressing.'"

One month later, March 18, 1984, the following note was recorded in the Park Hill business meeting notes:

"It was stated that the merger with Southside and Park Hill is back on again and that the two building would be placed on the market. Members of the first building sold, would meet in the remaining building until it was sold, then plans would be made accordingly."

The reason for the quick change was because Johnny showed me the notes from the February business meeting, and I told him that Southside was in favor of the merger and was not the reason the merger was "not progressing." I told him the merger was "on hold" because the Park Hill elders had not yet agreed that the two buildings would be sold. Southside is firm in the commitment, but Park Hill seemed reluctant to agree with the need for both building being sold.

There was a final meeting between the elders and preachers of both congregations, and once the Park Hill elders agreed to sell both buildings, things moved very quickly.

[NOTE: I should add that during this last meeting between the elders and preachers of both congregations, the financial condition of Park Hill should have been mentioned if there was going to be a problem keeping both preachers as we had decided. There was no mention of any problems.]

Park Hill held the final business meeting before the merging of the two congregations on May 6, 1984, from which the following notes were recorded:

Park Hill's treasurer reported the bank account had \$5,082.62 on deposit. The income and expenses were about even, but the previous months showed expenses exceeding income.

The main topic of discussion was to be the merger between Park Hill and Southside. The elders of both congregations have met on several occasions with the result being that both buildings will be advertised for sale and when this is accomplished a new building at a new location will be built. The determination of what we call ourselves once we began meeting in the new building will be decided at a later date. Southside will close their building at the end of May and begin meeting with the Park Hill congregation on June 3, 1984. Their elders and deacons will be combined with the elders and deacons of Park Hill on that date.

We — both sets of elders — expected it would be unlikely for both buildings to sell quickly, but we thought, because of its smaller size, newer age and better location, plus a floor plan that could be more easily modified, the Southside building would be the first to sell. We hoped for a quick sale and our plan was to use the proceeds from that sale to buy a new piece of property that would be adequate for our needs.

One of the long time members of the Park Hill congregation was Eddie Roberson, who was also a commercial realtor. He approached me at my shop one day and offered to handle the sale of the buildings and also the purchase of the property for the new building, and he would forfeit all commission from the two sales. Of course should a second realtor be involved, it would be only Eddie's commission that would be waived. I thought that was a good deal and accepted his offer subject to discussion with the other elders.

Since we believed the Southside building would sell first, the plan was to use the building on Jenny Lind until it sold. Acting on Eddie Roberson's advice and knowledge we cautioned the membership that it might take as long as two or three years, maybe even five years to sell the Jenny Lind property. (It actually took 25 years: We first met together in June of 1984 and the building sold in June of 2010 .)

Some members of Southside were not happy about meeting in the Jenny Lind building, feeling "we may be stuck there," and I'll admit after the first 10 years I was thinking the same thing. We could not know exactly how long it would take to sell either building, but we promised the membership that even though we might need to be in the Jenny Lind building for awhile, we would definitely build a new building.

Both Roger Hendricks and Randy King, the preachers at both congregations, were agreed that the merging of the two congregations would be a good thing and they encouraged the members to go through with the merger as originally planned. Things

moved rather quickly from that point on.

We had everything in order by the end of May, and Friday and Saturday (June 1 & 2 of 1984, the classroom books and furniture were moved to the Jenny Lind building and classrooms were arranged.

We did not have a ceremony or celebration on Sunday June 3, 1984, we simply all came together in the Jenny Lind building that morning and I am happy to say it went very well. Many of us were long time friends — even family — so it was really as seamless as described. There were two adult classes, one in the small auditorium and the other in the large auditorium. All of the other classes from Preschool through Teens and the Young Adult class met in the various classrooms above the small auditorium. It was the first time some of those rooms had been used in several years.

Of course, as expected, there were a few members who chose to worship elsewhere. We had been told by two families that were not in favor of the merge that they would attend elsewhere. Over the next few months one of those families came back. The net result, after the first six months during which we lost a few others but also gained a few from other congregations and one new family moving to Fort Smith, was that our attendance figure was slightly more than the sum of both congregations before the merger, about 160 to 165 members.

There were a few discussions about what we were going to call the new congregation once property was bought and a new building built, with several expressing that we should combine the two names and call ourselves the “Park South church of Christ,” or “South Park church of Christ.” Some felt we should wait and see where the new property would be and call ourselves by the street name. The “????? Street church of Christ.” All were in agreement though, as long as we were meeting in the Jenny Lind building we should continue using the name Park Hill church of Christ.

The merging being complete the four men serving as elders of the Park Hill church of Christ were Paul Allison, Johnny Mathis, Dave Roberts and Ron Roberts. The men serving as deacons were Wayne Carson, Harvey Graves, and L.Z. Tole. The two preachers were Roger Hendricks and Randy King.

Unfortunately there were some serious bumps in the road. As stated earlier, it had been agreed upon among the eldership of both congregations as our plans to merge were coming together, that the existing elders, deacons and the preachers from both congregations would continue to serve in those capacities. We thought the financial position would be strong enough that we would keep both preachers for at least a year during which we could evaluate whether we would be financially able to keep both preachers beyond that.

The only voiced concern from Park Hill's membership, that I was aware of, was that the eldership might be “a family affair” since Ron Roberts was the Son and Son-in-Law of Dave and Johnny. In the business meeting in which that concern was mentioned, ac-

cording to the record of that meeting, “the elders of Park Hill assured everyone that we were all mature adults and that decisions made would be in the best interest of the church. Should anyone continue to have a problem with the arrangement to let it be known and it would be corrected immediately. There were no voiced opposition to the merge.”

[Note: Quite honestly, if the folks at Southside had known the true financial condition at Park Hill just prior to the merger, it is uncertain whether we would have merged with them at that time. It is understood that with the hiring of Bro. Roger Hendricks, the Park Hill elders were hoping for numerical growth, which would naturally provide a larger weekly contribution. It is also understood that they were counting on the proceeds of the sale of the preacher’s house to help them through the shortfall. What I can’t understand is why they didn’t give this information to Paul and me. I feel certain that if we had been told, what is described in the following paragraphs could have been averted.]

When I first wrote this part of the history I did not write it accurately. The reason for that is likely three-fold: Perhaps I did not want to remember and had purposely blocked the truth of what had really happened from my mind, or maybe it’s old age. I think the first is likely. In addition to that, I wrote this section before reading all of the Park Hill meeting notes. I’m sure that if I had read those notes I would have remembered the actual happening. In any event, it was not until after I sent a draft of what I had written to Randy, and received his response, that the events described here began to be remembered more accurately. Upon reading the Park Hill meeting notes, it became much more clear.

As I have said, It had been agreed upon among the eldership of both congregations as our plans to merge were coming together, the existing elders, deacons and both of the preachers would continue to serve in those capacities. We had originally thought the financial position would be strong enough that we could keep both preachers for at least a year and then we would re-evaluate whether we would be financially able to keep both.

Two Sundays after the merge the treasurer for the congregation, L.Z. Tole, came to the elders with some figures he needed to show us. That evening after services, the four elders met with the deacons to discuss our financial problem. L.Z. showed that for the past two Sundays — the first two after the merge — the contribution was not what we had expected, by about \$220 per week. Also, because of the Brooks Trust not being able to be used for the preaching at Park Hill, the \$200 per month that had been coming out of the Brooks Trust for Randy’s support, now had to come out of the general fund. If things continued with the same contribution that would mean we were short by about \$1000 per month. It was obvious we needed more income or less expense.

We didn’t know why the contribution was so low. Perhaps some members had been doing more than they were truly able and now that we had merged together no longer felt the need to continue that, or perhaps it was the loss from those that left because of

the merge, or maybe it was something else, but \$1000 per month was a lot. Asking the members to contribute anything close to that much more so quickly after the merge, we all agreed, would not be acceptable. In fact, and would likely cause more to leave, putting us in even worse shape.

This was when Paul and I learned for the first time about the clause in the Brooks Trust, but really \$200 was not the problem — the other \$800 was. We tried to find somewhere we could cut expenses, but the only monthly recurring expense that could help in that amount was the salary of one of the preachers.

The resulting discussion was not pleasant! Paul Allison and I argued in favor of keeping Randy King, while Johnny Mathis and Dave Roberts argued in favor of keeping Roger Hendricks. The deacons related what they had heard from the membership, and it was determined (reluctantly, on Paul's and my part) that Roger Hendricks would stay.

The bottom line of all of this is that we, as the elders of the church, failed to live up to our mutually agreed upon obligation to Randy King. Had we known the true financial condition of Park Hill, things may have been different. But with only about \$4000 in the bank, \$1000 per month would deplete it quickly.

Randy and his family remain friends today in spite of all that transpired back then. Jo Anne and I have visited with them, both at the congregation where they worked and in their home. During those visits nothing was mentioned about 1984. I have the greatest respect and love for Randy and Debbie and their family. After writing this part of the history I sent a draft of what I had written to Randy. The following is part of the reply he sent me:

"In early June of 1984 Deb and I and the boys attended the Southside Lectures in Pasadena, Texas. Upon our return you and Paul came by and told me that the elders had met while we were away and had decided I should look for somewhere new. We spent only three months of the one year in Ft. Smith after the merger of the two congregations. We first looked at a work in Mulvane, Kansas, but after speaking with them they continued to have other men come preach for them. After about a month or two I then went to speak with the brethren in Henderson, TX and they asked us to come and work with them. In August of 1984 we moved to Henderson. It was a difficult move because we were leaving behind so many loved ones and a city we had grown to love and call home, but we rejoiced that the two congregations had peacefully come together to be one. That this congregation still continues to faithfully serve God to this day is a testament to the excellent leadership it has had from the elders, both then and now."

I am certain Paul and I deeply regretted having to relay that message, and I can only imagine how extremely difficult it was to hear, and the pain it must have caused. Since

I am the only one of those four elders still alive, I offer my sincere apology to the King family on behalf of all four of us! As sincere as I mean that to be, I also know it isn't truly enough — that should never have happened.

History may eventually show that the uniting of the two congregations was a good thing. To my thinking though, the cost was excessive!

Also in June of 1984 the Joe Turner family moved back to Fort Smith! Everyone was glad to see them, and I confess I was the happiest of all!

I will close this segment of the history after some financial accounting:

In late 1984 Park Hill finally received just a little over \$20,000.00 from the sale of the preacher's house. I thought it would have been more than that, but the sale was begun a few weeks before the merging of the two congregations so I am not fully aware of all of the details. I have still not been able to find the complete financial record for that period. I'm still looking. I also can't understand it taking so long to see the money.

The budget that was outlined back in 1982, when Roger Hendricks was hired required a weekly contribution of \$850. In spite of a couple of instances when the contribution did get close to that figure, it had routinely been averaging much less than that. On the first Sunday of February, 1985, just a few months after a little more than Twenty Thousand dollars was received from the sale of the preacher's house, the financial statement for February 1985 was posted before services. The figures upset Paul and me, but when mentioned to my dad and Johnny, it didn't seem too disturbing to them. I didn't understand why they were not concerned. It was disturbing to Paul and me that the treasurer's report listed the General Fund as having a balance of \$10,799.12. The Reavis Brooks Trust Fund balance was shown as \$26,049.34.

The balance shown for the Brooks Trust was okay, because money was routinely taken out to help support preachers not located at Park Hill, and the interest rate had dropped, so that some of the principal was being used. What bothered us, though, was that the checking account, the General Fund, showed a balance just under \$11,000.00. We wondered where almost ten-thousand dollars went in five months?

Assuming that prior to the merge, Park Hill was averaging \$150 per week short of the budget, and even assuming the additional 80 or so members didn't raise the contribution as much as expected, the \$150 per week shortfall for five months would only be roughly \$3,000 to \$3,500. Where was the other \$6,500.00?

I asked L.Z. to bring the bank statements for the past year and called for a meeting of the elders, deacons and preacher for that night following services. It didn't take long to see where the trouble was. We knew a significant amount of money had been spent in taking care of several repairs to the building that had been needed for quite awhile, in fact we helped make the decision to have them done. There was also a slight increase in "everyday expenses" due to having more members, but the additional contribution

from the 80 plus additional members offset those. We also had held a gospel meeting and paid the hotel expense and the visiting preacher. Those things we were not questioning, even though some of those expenses were greater than we had anticipated.

There were also a few other things that were more costly than we expected, but the main thing was the advertising! Hundreds of dollars were being spent monthly on newspaper, telephone yellow pages, radio ads, and television “spots.” After quite a bit of “heated discussion” about the need for advertising from several of those present, I asked if those who were in favor of that amount of advertising to show any beneficial result from having spent that much money in such a short time? Obviously, none could, because there were no appreciable results! We had not gained one single new member that could be shown to be the result of the advertising. Yellow Page ads could not be cancelled and maintain the phone number, because of the contract that had been signed, but we cancelled all media advertising the next day to become effective as quickly as legally possible.

Not long after that Roger Hendricks asked for an increase in his support from Park Hill. I can’t remember whether he had been notified that some of his outside support was going to be lost or he felt he needed a raise, but he asked.

With the events that began with Randy’s leaving, through the next few months, and ending with the advertising expense, the elders said they could not increase his support at that time. If he attempted to gain some further outside support over the next few months he was not successful. He let us know in June of 1985 that he had accepted the work at a church in Midland, Texas and that he would be leaving to take up that work August 1, 1985. Once again we needed to find another preacher — but this time we were not going to be so gullible.



On October 30, 1985 Paul Allison, shown at left, presented a statement to be read before the congregation that Wednesday evening during the closing announcements. The statement was:

“Paul Allison requests that the Park hill church accept his resignation as elder of this congregation. Many would say that I fulfill the requirements and qualifications for an Elder very well, however my own conscience will not allow me to continue in that capacity or in the capacity of Deacon.”

Paul had talked to me previously about this and I could not dissuade him, no matter how hard I tried. From all I know, I believe Paul was well-qualified, and indeed, he served well in that position. He was a good man!

We began looking for a preacher shortly after Roger announced he would be leaving in August, and received several inquiries. There were perhaps, 15 or more men who were either suggested to the elders or had contacted us. Each who contacted us was told the salary we were offering (\$650.00 per week), the number of paid meetings al-

lowed each year (4), and that they would only receive two weeks of paid vacation time. The only concession was that we would be willing to provide a document stating that \$500 per month could be claimed as "housing expense" for tax purposes. Park Hill would not pay any rent, utilities, insurance or taxes. Those were the responsibility of the individual. Most of those men withdrew their names from consideration after learning those conditions. The men who did not remove their names (in alphabetical order) were:

Bob Bunting, Jim Everett, Larry Fain, Thomas Hogland, Ron House, Richard Montgomery, Don Patton, Jim Poppell, and Harold Turner.

After further interviews and discussions, the one selected was Thomas Hogland, shown at right, the son of Ward Hogland who preached for Park Hill during it's prime in the late 1940's and 1950's. Thomas had, more or less, grown up here, at least until he was 9 or 10 years old, so we asked him to come and preach for us and we would discuss his moving to Fort Smith.



With Paul Allison having resigned from the office of elder, the three elders felt there were other men qualified to serve as deacons for the Park Hill church. Wayne Carson, Bill Rainwater and L.Z. Tole were already serving in that capacity. Added to them were Harold Dickens, Charles Loum, Bill Spradley, and Joe Turner.

After hearing Thomas Hogland preach, and talking with him at length, we received a huge response from the congregation in favor of his coming. We contacted him and reached an agreement and he made plans to move to Fort Smith. He was to begin preaching in December of 1985. His contract with Park Hill was to be for one year, but renewable each December. In addition to the typical clause that is in most all contracts regarding the hiring of a preacher — if he persisted in teaching error or was involved with any immoral activity he would be terminated immediately, without notice — We put an additional clause into his contract for his peace of mind: Termination of the agreement by either party required a six-month notice, in writing. Thomas was here almost 12 years.

After The Merge — (Period covered: 1986 to 2010)

When Roger left at the end of July 1985, until Thomas arrived in December of 1985, the financial situation got much better. The new phone books came out in May with a smaller ad in the yellow pages. The cost was reasonable. We had successfully stopped all repeating media advertising and only used the newspaper to advertise our

gospel meetings or special events such as Vacation Bible School. With those things done and without having to pay a regular preacher \$650 per week, we gained some much needed relief financially. The General Fund had grown to \$27,565.16 as of December 31, 1985. The attendance figures were holding steady, or growing slightly. Over the next couple of years we were able to have proper repairs made to the roof where leaks had developed.

In February of 1986 the Southside building sold after being on the market for a little longer than 18 months. After all expenses we should net about \$80,000.00. As things often happen, though, the group that purchased it, being a newly formed group, had no credit standing and could not obtain financing. When it was learned that they could not obtain a loan, Eddie Roberson presented the elders with a signed contract whereby we would finance the loan ourselves until such time that enough equity had been built and their credit would be established to the point where they could obtain a loan, or for a maximum of three years. A clause was in the contract that should they not be able to obtain a loan in three years, or if their monthly payments should become 30 days late, or for any reason they could no longer make payments, or if they should quit meeting in the building, the building would revert to us and all monies paid would be considered as lease payments and, therefore, forfeited.

The group disbanded after several months.

Would you believe we sold that building three times before it finally stayed sold?

The second sale of the Southside building was to an individual rather than a group. This person was a "Television Preacher" who had about 40 or so "followers." He produced a weekly "service" that was broadcast "on satellite" and picked up by several cable systems across the country.

He had all the right equipment, and claimed to be receiving regular "offerings" by mail. He didn't have a credit rating but was willing to use all of his studio cameras, which were worth several thousand dollars each, and all of the recording, editing, encoding and broadcast equipment required to put his program up on the satellite, as collateral for the loan. The value of all that equipment was about \$75,000.

After he took possession of the building he had all the pews professionally painted white, he installed new carpeting and painted the walls white. He stood behind a white podium, wearing a dark blue suit (at least on the few programs I watched). I think he put all 40 of his members in the first few rows of pews, or maybe he paid people to come in and fill those pews, I don't know, but he was a "showman" and his crew always positioned the cameras so it looked like the building was full. On TV at least, it was very impressive.

He provided a document listing all of his equipment as well as the building with all the remodeling, as a surety for the loan on the building, and once again, Eddie handled the financing with a similar contract as before.

In the Park Hill business meeting held on August 23, 1987 it was announced to those present that the sale of the Southside building was about to be defaulted. The TV preacher had suffered a heart attack, and would be unable to continue preaching. During the time the building was in their possession there had been improvements made that included new drapes, new carpet, repairs and interior painting.

It was estimated that the improvements might add about \$20,000.00 to the value of the building. By the time we gained the keys to the building most of the \$75,000.00 worth of electronic equipment that served as collateral for the building, was gone. The building was put back on the market. Hopefully, the improvements made would help it sell quicker or for a greater sum.

It was during this business meeting that it was first voiced that we should re-consider selling both buildings. It was suggested that we only sell the building on Cavanaugh Road, then use the money to modernize the Jenny Lind building and stay here. That suggestion came from one who had been worshipping in this building for a long time.

Other suggestions were also offered, but Paul Allison (although he was no longer an elder) stated that at the time the decision was made to merge the ultimate goal was to sell both buildings and buy new property and build a new building. He thought that agreement should be honored and still be binding. I spoke in favor of what Paul had stated, saying furthermore, that the whole point was to get away from this stagnant location.

Let me pause to do a little "housekeeping" here because the men serving as elders and deacons changed several times over the next few years. Hopefully this section will help you keep track of those changes:

In March of 1987:	Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
	Johnny Mathis	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
	Dave Roberts	Harold Dickens	
	Ron Roberts	Charles Loum	
		Bill Rainwater	
		Bill Spradley	
		L. Z. Tole	
		Joe Turner	

In May of 1987 Dave Roberts resigned as an elder for medical reasons. During the remainder of the year Harold Dickens left Park Hill to worship elsewhere, Charles Loum resigned from serving as a deacon for family reasons, and Joe Turner was appointed as an elder.

Therefore in December of 1987 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Bill Rainwater	
Joe Turner	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

During the first part of 1988 Bill Rainwater moved away from Fort Smith.

In July of 1987 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Bill Spradley	
Joe Turner	L. Z. Tole	

The men listed above continued to serve until 1990. In 1988 several new families identified with the Park Hill congregation, and pushed our total membership to 177 people.

In February 1989 Bro. Grady Rice was appointed as a deacon.

In March of 1987 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Grady Rice	
Joe Turner	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

In early 1990 unfortunately, Bro. Joe Turner resigned from the eldership for personal reasons.

In July of 1990 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Grady Rice	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

During the first half of 1992 Bro. Grady Rice was appointed as an elder and Phillip Burns was appointed as a deacon.

In June of 1992 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Phillip Burns	Thomas Hogland
Grady Rice	Wayne Carson	
Ron Roberts	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

In early 1993 new deacons were appointed:

In March of 1993 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Johnny Mathis	Phillip Burns	Thomas Hogland
Grady Rice	Wayne Carson	
Ron Roberts	Olen Craig	
	Jay Davis	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

In late 1993 Johnny Mathis resigned his position as elder. His wife, Jo Anne's mother, passed from this life in early 1992 and as is natural, Johnny was sorely affected. He had tried to continue as before, but those of us who were close to him saw his effort failing. In his despondency and loneliness he met a lady that he had known in grade school, and after awhile he asked her to marry him. Knowing she was not a Christian, he felt he needed to "step down" from the eldership before the marriage.

In January of 1994 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Grady Rice	Phillip Burns	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Wayne Carson	
	Olen Craig	
	Jay Davis	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

In early 1994 Philip Burns resigned as a deacon as he was going to worship at another congregation in Fort Smith.

In August of 1994 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Grady Rice	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Ron Roberts	Olen Craig	
	Jay Davis	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

Unfortunately, in December of 1994 Johnny Mathis passed from this life. A better person would be hard to find.

In late 1995 Olen Craig was appointed an elder and Rick Hudson was appointed as a deacon, so when the 1996 church directory was printed the following existed:

In January of 1994 the following men were serving:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Olen Craig	Wayne Carson	Thomas Hogland
Grady Rice	Jay Davis	
Ron Roberts	Rick Hudson	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

In the period from 1987 through 1996 our membership grew. The 1996 membership directory listed 201 people as members. A few were aged and confined to home, and three or four were in nursing homes or assisted living centers. Even so, we would have 180 to 190 most Sunday mornings, and occasionally might hit 200 when several family members or visitors came in for holidays.

As I am writing this, I looked through several old church directories and bulletins and found a list of available teachers and the class arrangements in 1995. There were 35 men and women listed that were qualified as individual classroom teachers and were being rotated on a regular basis.

Classes were available for all age groups differentiated by age or public school grade, as outlined below:

Separate classes for:

Nursery, Ages 1 to 3	2nd & 3rd Grades
Preschool, Ages 4 & 5	4th & 5th Grades
Kindergarten & 1st Grade	6th & 7th Grades
8th & 9th Grades	10th, 11th & 12th Grades

Young Adult Class for “college ages” and early 20’s

Three adult classes:

Mixed Adults, (This was a verse-by-verse bible study.)

Men Only, (The ladies & men’s only classes

Ladies Only were special topic studies.)

And the good thing was, we had at least 3 or 4 children in each of those classrooms

In late 1995 the elders were approached by some among the membership in regard to the sermons that were being delivered. One person put it this way, *“I think we have heard all that Thomas has to say.”*

Thomas was still preaching the truth, but he had more-or-less gotten into a preaching habit that many preachers get into. Having some difficulty keeping the attention of the audience, he reverted to putting in more and more references to scripture. The elders spoke with Thomas about this and he promised to preach more lively lessons to gain the attention of the members.

He was able to do that for awhile, sounding more like what we saw when we hired him, but it was short-lived. In April or May of 1996 we told Thomas his contract would not be renewed in December. He was able to find a congregation in Texas and they needed him before the end of the year. I can’t remember exactly when he left, but I think it was in late September or October of 1996.

We began looking for replacement for Thomas, and among those who contacted us was a young man named Tony Ripley, shown here. Tony grew up in central Oklahoma, his dad was an elder in Moore, Oklahoma, and he had preached in Oklahoma and southern Texas.



As sometimes happens, coincidence plays a part in the decision of others. Jo Anne and I traveled a lot back then and we usually would spend a few weeks on Padre Island (just south of Corpus Christi, Texas) every year in the early Spring. While there we worshipped with the same congregation, and became friends with the preacher there, David Smitherman.

While there in the Spring of 1996 David mentioned having worked with Tony Ripley for a year or so before moving to Corpus Christi, and was trying to help Tony find a place to preach. David told us that Tony had suffered a bad case of depression a year or so ago, but had received treatment for it and was trying to locate a place where he could work without a lot of pressure.

So, when Tony contacted us about preaching for the Park Hill church, I relayed what I had been told by David Smitherman about Tony to the other elders and we invited him to come and preach for us so we could talk. The response from the congregation was

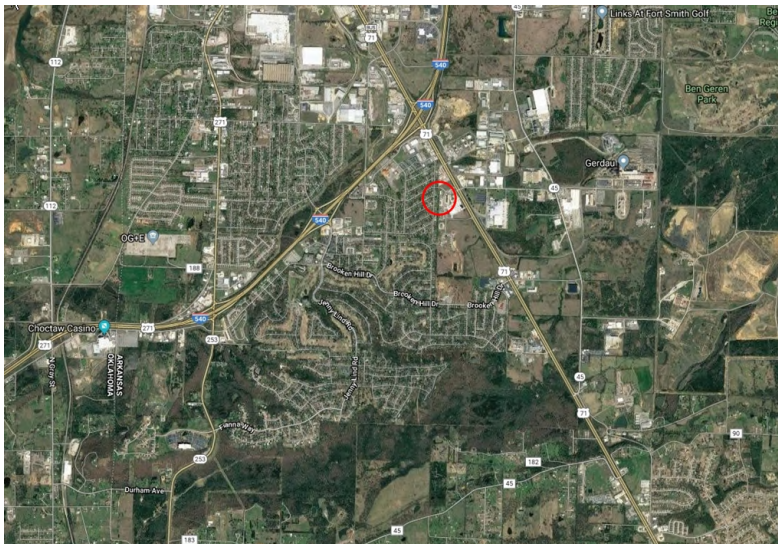
overwhelmingly in favor of us hiring him! We considered several others, but the final decision was to hire Tony.

This thirteen year period, 1987 through 2000, might be considered the “peak” period of numerical growth after the merging of the two congregations into one. Of course we are still working to grow, so there may be another “peak” yet to come.

During this period the Southside building finally sold to a group who had financing and good credit. We received the full selling price (minus commissions and other requirements) from a loan company in late 1994 — ten years after the merge.

The Southside building had deteriorated some over the years from setting empty much of the time, so we netted just a bit under \$75,000.00. However, when added to the “lease payment” money that we had received from the previous “buyers” who defaulted on their contracts, the total figure netted from the Southside building was just under \$100,000.00.

From the very beginning, the plan for the merger was to purchase of a prime piece of property on which to build a new building. With money in the bank we began our search! This photo is a screen capture from Google Earth depicting an area on the extreme south side of Fort Smith.



The property we bought is shown within the red circle on this image. This is a recent image and the area is shown more built up than it was when we purchased it.

It is one block off the main highway (US 71) into and out of Fort Smith on the south. It is next to a large housing area with new houses still being built. It is just a few blocks south of the I-540 bypass.

The immediate area is alive and growing, and we hope to grow with it.

We had done some preliminary planning in regard to building size and layout, and this piece of land would provide enough room to build a building that would accommodate us and have plenty of parking.

However, in 1995 it had become blatantly apparent that the Jenny Lind building was going to take even longer to sell. We had been together now for just over ten years and no one had made an offer to buy the Jenny Lind building. We knew we were go-

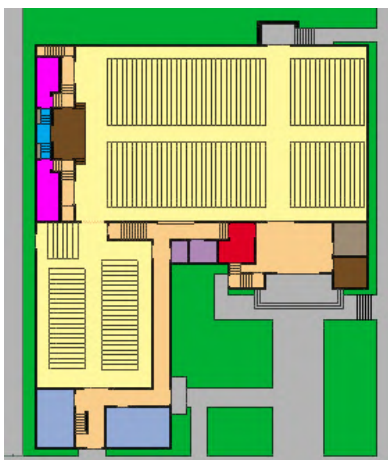
ing to have to do something to make this building more comfortable. We still had the bathroom issue and there were repairs that were needed. Our decision was to use most of the money gained from the sale of the Cavanaugh Road property to purchase the piece of property on the corner of Grinnell and South 36th Terrace. It would provide ample room to build a new building with a seating capacity of about 200 people, with parking. We made a sizeable down payment and took a loan from the bank for the balance.

Secondly, we decided to make the necessary repairs on the Jenny Lind property and to remodel the restrooms to make them larger. We had drawn some preliminary plans and that is when we discovered that the building would not pass the city of Fort Smith's building "codes" that were in place in 1995! These building codes govern just about everything about a commercial building. We argued that a church building is not a commercial building, but the city told us it was and effectively ended the argument.

We learned we could not just enlarge our bathrooms, or even build new ones. The mandate is that if you choose to "remodel" any part of a commercial building the whole building must be "brought up to code."

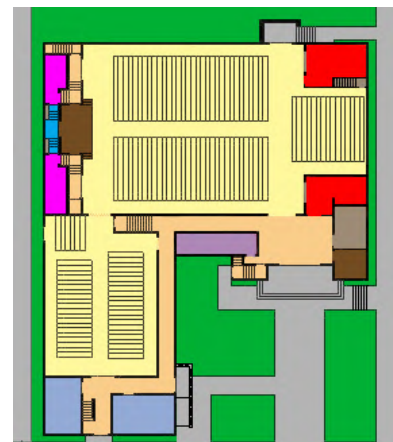
As a result, over the course of the next couple of years we had to do a lot of work to make a building that half of it was built in 1948 and the other half built in 1953, meet the current building codes – one of which was ***"there have to be adequate bathroom facilities on the main level."*** The key word there is "adequate." Adequate, as it is defined by the city, is based on the seating capacity of the building and not the number of people you have in the congregation. That would require some serious modification. After much thought and discussion, we reached the conclusion that once these updates were done it would make the building more "saleable," so we decided to do it.

One of our members happens to be an draftsman working for an architectural company so he took our rough sketches and drew a plan. We selected a reputable contractor and they started.



You have seen the drawing at left earlier. The changes mostly took place in the right hand half of this drawing. The red nursery, the two pale purple bathrooms and the grey room on the right were all remodeled. To make those changes we would need to use some of the floor space in the rear of the main auditorium.

At right is what it looked like after the remodeling was done. The floor under the pale purple bathrooms was raised to the same level as the foyer. For the main level to



be “handicap accessible” there must be a way for wheel-chairs to gain entrance and access without steps. The hall between the pale purple bathroom and main auditorium became a smooth, carpeted ramp and you will notice a porch with a wheelchair ramp at the double doors next to the blue room in the educational building.

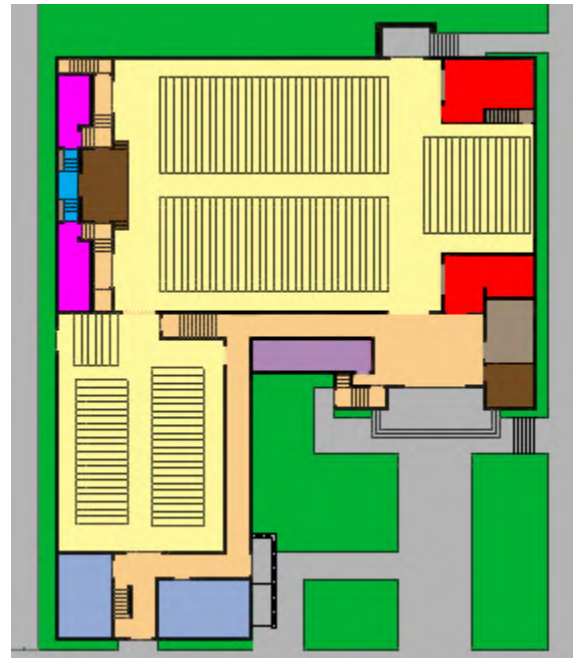
The pale purple bathroom is now the “Ladies” with six toilets in private stalls, with one being handicap accessible. There are six lavatories for hand-washing. The grey room to the right of the foyer is the “Men’s” with four toilets (one handicap accessible) and five urinals and five lavatories.

The two red areas in the rear of the main auditorium are new. The one next to the “Men’s” room is the new nursery. It has two cribs, two rocking chairs, a sink, cabinets for supplies, and a “changing station.” The front wall contains a six foot wide, double-paned, soundproof window into the auditorium and speakers with adjustable volume controls that are connected to the public address system so the adults can see and hear the preacher, song leader and the one making the announcements. Ducts in the ceiling and walls allow for heating and cooling of the room. Above that nursery is a floored room where the hot-water tanks are located to provide hot water to all sinks and washbasins in the building.

The other red area, the one on the extreme north-east corner, is a “Discipline Room” so parents can train their older children. The front wall of this room also has a six foot wide, double-paned, soundproof window into the auditorium and the room is equipped with speakers with adjustable volume controls connected to the public address system. Ducts also provide heating and cooling. This room is accessed by a door directly into the auditorium, whereas the nursery was only accessible from the foyer.

Above the “Discipline Room” is a new “Media Room.” A doorway at the extreme rear of the auditorium leads into a stairwell that goes up into the Media room. The front of the media room has the same window as the Nursery and Discipline Rooms, but also has a rectangular opening for the camera to be able to record everything without glare or reflection. There was also a “wireless” system for the hearing impaired. We had six or eight small receivers — similar to hearing aids — that were available to be used by those with hearing problems. There was recording equipment and duplicators so we could provide DVD’s, CD’s or Tapes to the shut-in members and anyone else who wanted them. Unfortunately, the media room did not have adequate air conditioning when all of the equipment was running. It was not good to wear a suit and tie up there!

Not long after the re-modeling and updates were done, several prospective buyers



looked at the building but only one offer was forthcoming. It came from a Muslim group who offered us \$400,000.00 and we take the pews and classroom furniture. At that time, though, they wanted the building right then — within a month. Two things made us not accept that offer: The first was the knowledge that we would need to find a place to meet for about a year or so until such time as a new building could be built. We suspected we would have to pay rent for at least that long — probably at a rate of about \$1000 to \$1500 per month — which would amount to about \$15,000.00.

The second reason we rejected the offer was that the building and property appraised for \$630,000 and we believed \$400,000 to be too low. Granted, keeping the pews was an incentive, but we would have to store them for the year or so, and didn't have a clue about how much that would cost. Also, the new building would not be able to use twenty foot long pews.

No further offers for the building were forthcoming so for the next few years things remained pretty much static. The membership was pleased with the result of the remodeling and with adequate bathroom facilities on the ground floor there were few problems. But beginning in the mid to late 1990's some of our members were relocated by the companies they worked for, and others found new jobs and relocated by choice.

In mid 1998 according to the attendance figures, the Sunday morning attendance was averaging between 150 and 155 with an average Sunday evening attendance being 105 to 110. Wednesday bible study attendance figures were in the mid 90's. Several families with children moved to Greenwood, Arkansas which was growing community with an excellent school system perceived to be better than that in Fort Smith. The Fort Smith school system was fighting the typical problems that came with a large, multi-national public. The smaller and more affluent society in Greenwood didn't have those problems.

During this time other families had also began to worship with us, but there was a net loss for the period. Grady Rice, one of our elders was having some concern of his serving as an elder while some things were going on with his family that needed his focus and attention. Therefore he decided to step down as an elder and agreed that if things changed as he thought they would he might be considered for a future elder.

Therefore, in May of 1999 those serving the Park Hill church were:

Elders:
Olen Craig
Ron Roberts

Deacons:
Wayne Carson
Charlie Caster
Rick Hudson
Jon Roberts
Bill Spradley
L. Z. Tole

Preacher:
Tony Ripley

Fortunately Grady was able to get those problems quickly solved and all of his family

was again faithfully attending the services at Park Hill. The fact that he did what he knew to be right, and did it properly, allowed the membership to readily accept Grady back into the eldership when it was proposed.

Tragically, in 1999 L.Z. Tole, became ill and asked to step down from the office of deacon after serving many years in that capacity and as the treasurer for Park Hill. It wasn't long after that until L.Z. passed away. After L.Z. stepped down as treasurer, Rick Hudson agreed to serve in that position.

The other event was that Olen decided to resign from the office of elder. The Craig family had purchased a home in Greenwood, Arkansas (because of the schools) and had moved to Greenwood. As had others, he felt the need to worship in the area in which he lived, but since he and I were the only elders serving at the time, he delayed doing that until such time as another elder was serving. Once Grady was installed, Olen made it known he would resign his position as elder and begin worshipping at the Northside church in Greenwood. [I had this wrong the first time I wrote it.]

After Olen left, those serving Park Hill were:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Gracy Rice	Wayne Carson	Tony Ripley
Ron Roberts	Charlie Caster	
	Rick Hudson	
	Bill Spradley	
	L. Z. Tole	

Grady and I were concerned about the possibility of the eldership being negated if one of us could no longer serve. Obviously, a congregation can not have a single elder!

We felt strongly enough about the situation that we were uncomfortable with the way things were and decided to contact all the men who had previously served as elders, as well as others we felt might be qualified to ask them to think strongly about serving if the membership would approve them. While doing that, we also looked at those men who we felt were qualified to serve as deacons and decided to talk to them as well.

The result was what we had hoped for: Almost all who we felt qualified agreed to serve if the members would accept them.

So... for the last part of 1999, the following men served Park Hill:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Jack Connor	Wayne Carson	Tony Ripley
Carl Dolan	Charlie Caster	
Grady Rice	Phil Ford	
Ron Roberts	Rick Hudson	
Joe Turner	Joey Self	

Bill Spradley
Michael Turner

Both Grady and I had been for the past several years preaching at various churches when they needed a “fill in” preacher. Only once, for a very short period of time, did I consider to become a full-time preacher. That situation occurred in the late 1970’s when I was offered a preaching job. I considered it, and quickly decided I was a better teacher than preacher, and turned the job down.

Grady, on the other hand and as I write this, is the full-time preacher for the Northside church in Alma, Arkansas. He has been there for several years, and is doing a good work and they are growing. They are planning for a new building to be built soon.

I mention that because over the next few years Grady does a lot more preaching and will eventually become the “Full-time Preacher” and will no longer serve as an elder for the Park Hill congregation. Fortunately, that was still in the future.

Therefore... as we started the new millennia the following men were serving Park Hill:

For the year 2000:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Jack Connor	Wayne Carson	Tony Ripley
Carl Dolan	Charlie Caster	
Grady Rice	Phil Ford	
Ron Roberts	Rick Hudson	
Joe Turner	Joey Self	
	Bill Spradley	
	Michael Turner	

This is a good time to address another situation: The Brooks Trust Fund. As you have learned, the Brooks trust was established upon the settling of his estate back in 1981 for the purpose of helping to support preachers that were NOT located at Park Hill. This was initially done by using the interest and leaving the principal untouched. In 1981 the facility that was handling the fund had a very good interest rate — near 18%. At that rate the yield was nearly \$400 per month.

Here we are in 2000, almost twenty years later, with an interest rate of 5.73% and going down. In addition to that the banks had begun to charge a fee for the handling of this account. We could foresee a time, rapidly approaching, when the interest would no longer cover the fee charged. Rick Hudson, our treasurer, showed us that the trust would soon no longer be able to help support even one preacher with a suitable amount from the interest alone, and the fees would decrease the account.

In order to get the fullest benefit for the preachers, we needed to get the money out of

the account where a charge was made every month for the fund's oversight. Rick showed us that by putting the Brooks Fund in our checking account which was paying just slightly less than what the money market rate was, and by Rick keeping an accurate record of the account, we could help more men for a longer period of time. So we did that.

As a matter of fact, in 2000 we were helping to support Brett Hogland with \$200 per month, Dan Peters with \$200 per month, Vernon Ripley with \$200 per month, Jack Crutchfield with \$200 per month, Michael Cornwell with \$200 per month, Gary Henderson with \$200 per month, and Marcus Stone with \$200 per month. I'm not sure how much of this \$1400 per month was from the Brooks Trust Fund and how much was from the general fund, but it allowed us to use the money in the Brooks trust as he wanted it to be used and do it with the best efficiency. Naturally, we understood the trust would not last too long, but this way it allowed more of the money to go to the preachers and less to the administration of the bank. I believe Reavis would be pleased.

We were making some headway with the plans for the new building. Several of the members of the congregation owned Recreational Vehicles and traveled quite a bit. As a matter of fact Joe Turner and his wife Ann owned a travel trailer and later three motor homes and convinced Jo Anne and I that we needed to travel with them — it did not take much convincing. They were not offering to take us — they wanted us to buy an RV and go with them. So, we also bought a travel trailer and are presently on our third motor home as well as the Turners. You know how it is: "You have to keep up with the Turners!" or was that the "Jones?"

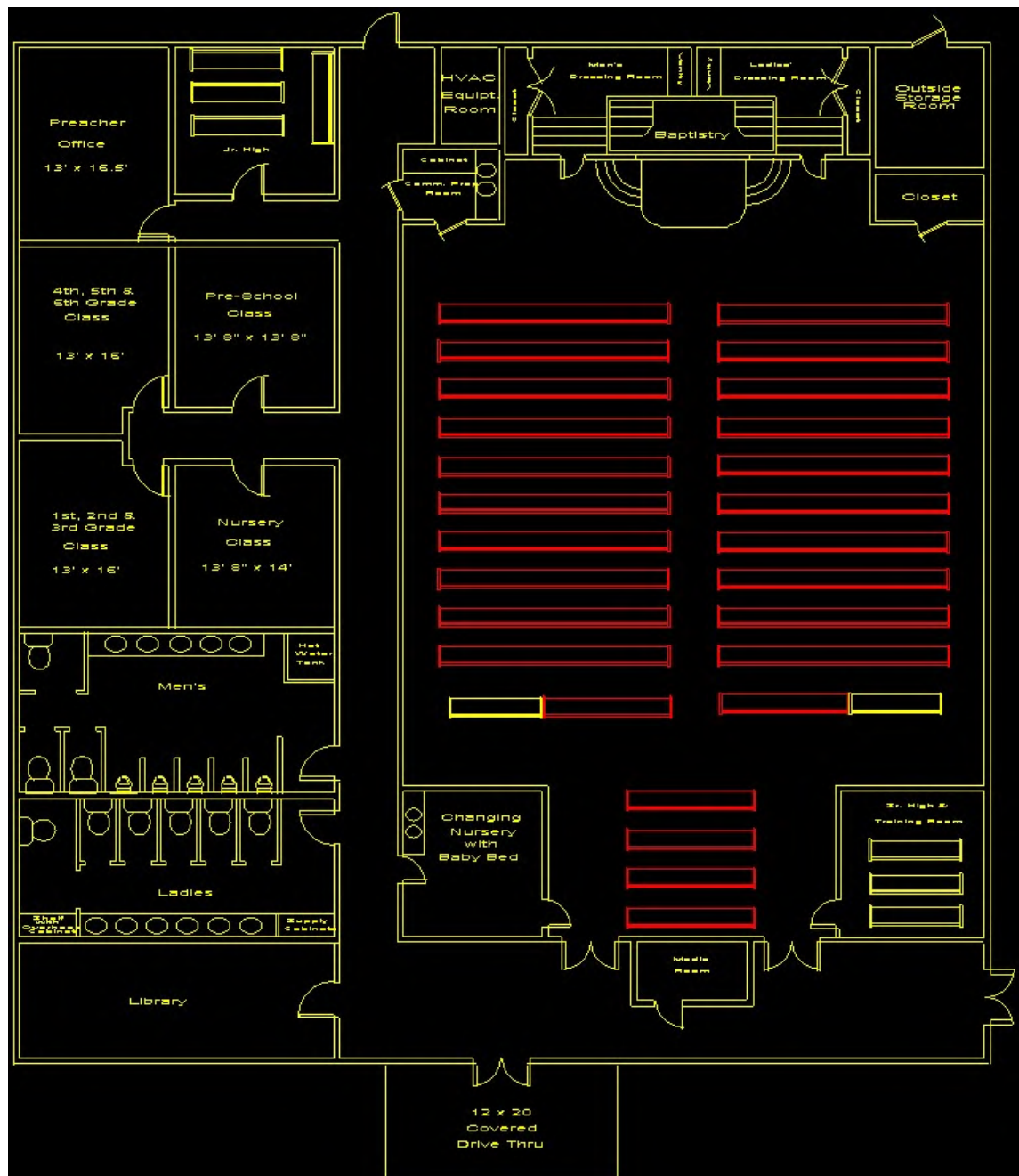
Together and sometimes with others, too, we pretty much traveled over the whole "lower 48." From the state of Washington to Florida and from Vermont to California. (Just to keep the record straight, Joe and Ann have been to EVERY state in the "Lower 48" while Jo Anne and I have missed three of them: North Dakota, Maine, and Rhode Island.) We still continue to travel and if I can find something I want to see in those three states I may get around to going.

But, during those travels we visited a fantastic number of congregations around the country — some with reasonably new buildings. Whenever we visited a place that had a building we thought might be adaptable to our needs, we asked if a copy of the plans might be available for us to purchase. Several of those congregations provided a copy at no cost, thus we obtained several different building floor plans from the churches we visited.

Combining features from several of the plans provided to us, several rudimentary floor plans for a building that included adequate classrooms, storage, and a library were drawn. There would be offices for the preacher and the elders, and a sanctuary to seat about 250 people.

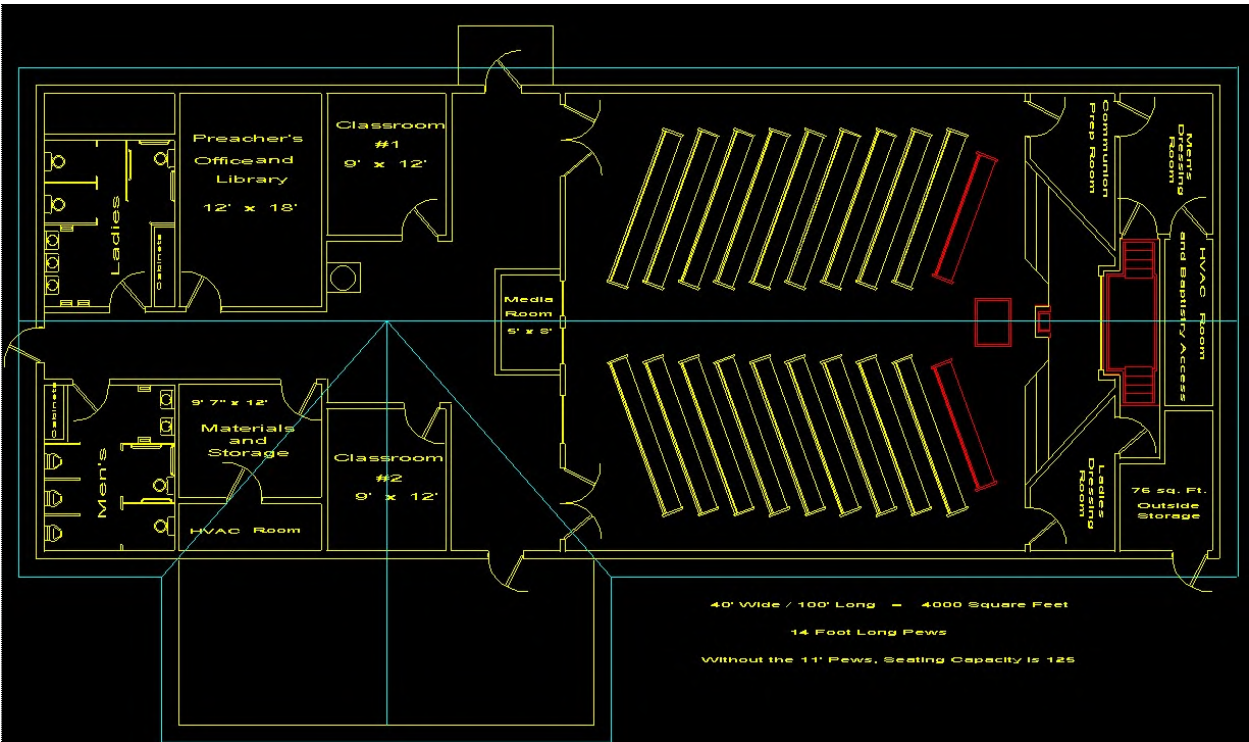
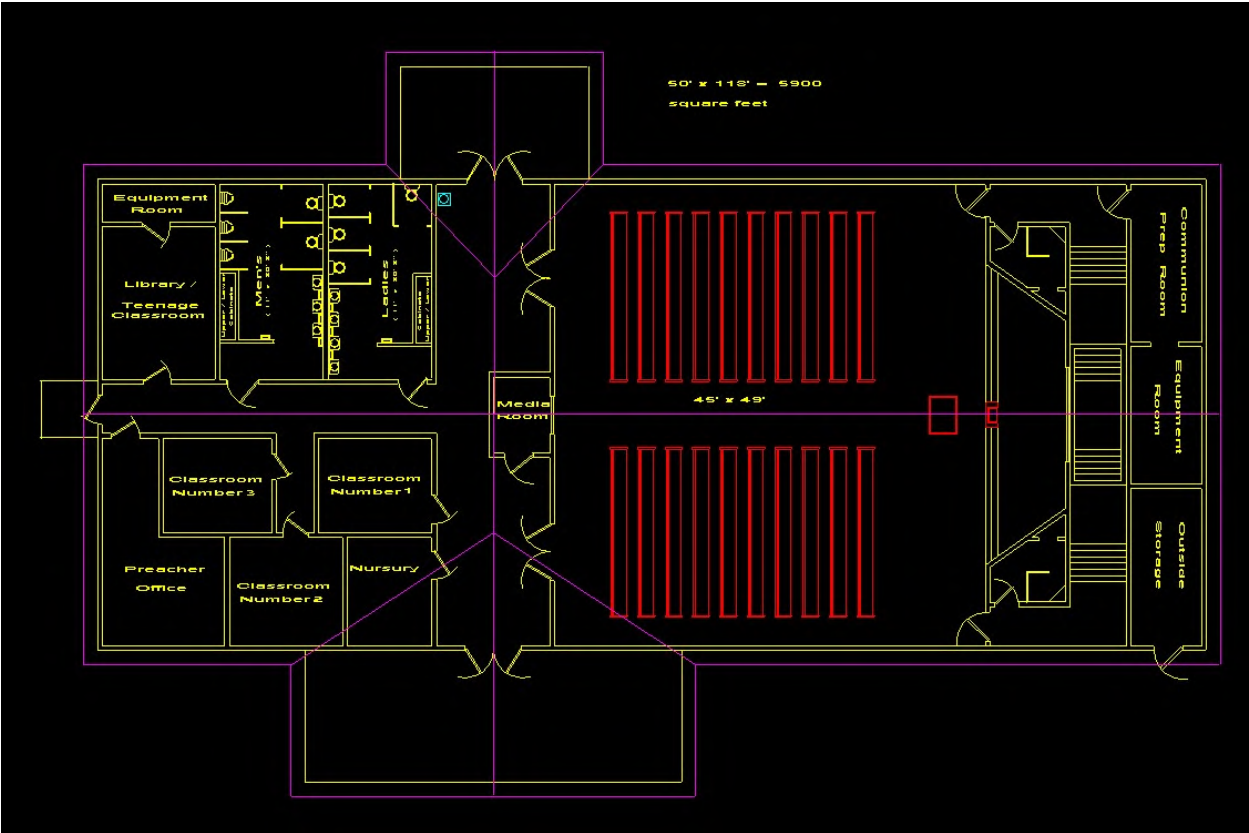
The next three pages show only three of the 15 drawings (with several modifications to

each one) we came up with. Since I already owned and used a CAD (computer aided drawing) program in the designing of my airplanes, I used it to draw all the plans. Each time the plans were re-drawn, we seemed to find the need for a change. I drew 15 different plans before we finally settled on one. Even then, the one we settled on was altered before construction was started. I'll explain that later when we get there.

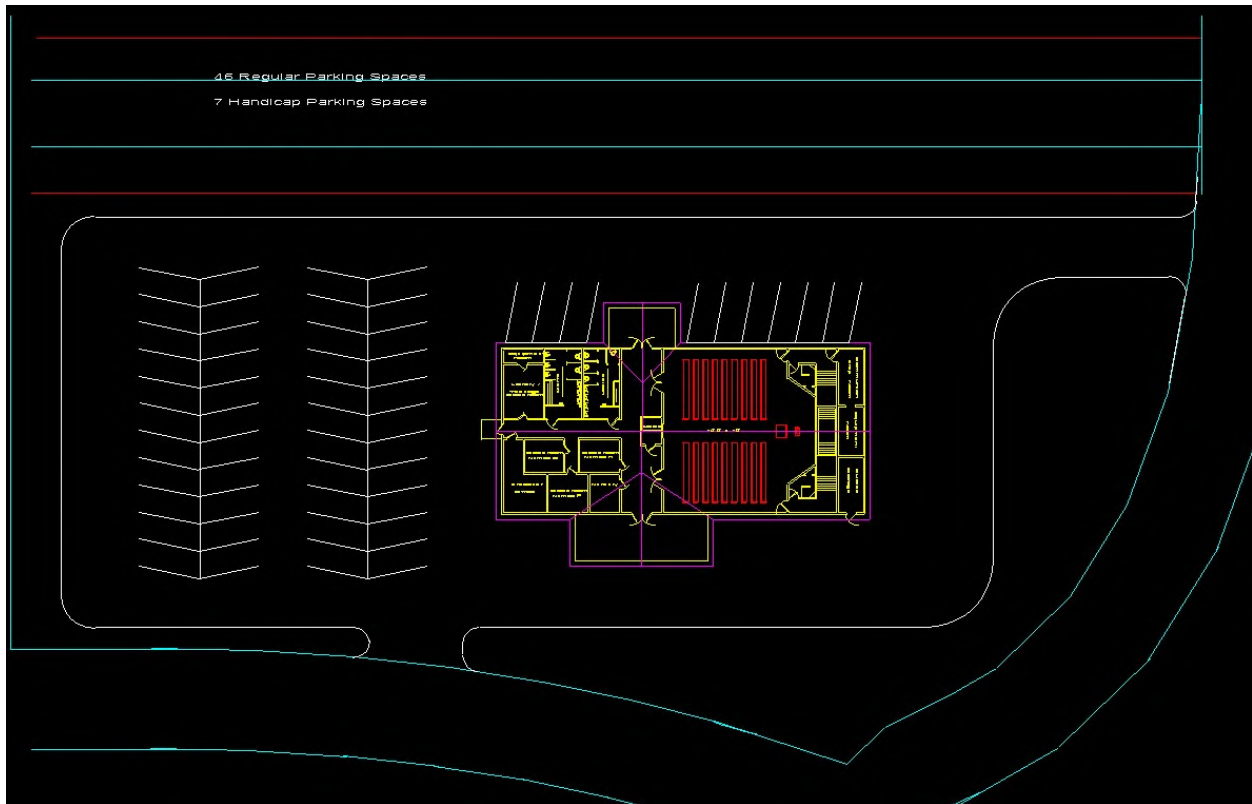


This was the initial design that was taken to two different architects for their opinion in regard to cost. Both of them provided an “educated guess” by examining the drawing and measuring over-all area. Commercial building requirements, we were told, more-

or-less set the building costs, which for a building this size would be about one million dollars not counting the price for the pews and for the land, which they estimated could easily cost an additional \$300,000 or more.



The two drawings on the previous page were numbers 14 and 15 with number 15, at the bottom, being the plan finally decided upon. As stated earlier, even it was changed before construction.



The drawing above is one of several that placed a “scaled to size” building on the plot of land so we could best arrange the layout for the needed parking. At the time these layouts were drawn we didn’t know that you can’t tell the city “the church has 100 members and on a typical Sunday those 100 members come in 32 cars, so 40 parking spaces is all we need.” The city gets to be the ones to decide how many parking spaces are needed, and they base their figures on the “total seating capacity” of the building. They have charts and formulas that tell them how many handicap spaces are needed and how the “traffic will flow” and the size of the “street access.” They tell you a whole lot more, but I’ll get into that later.

After hearing “One Million Dollars!” from the architects, not counting the land, which we already had, albeit not yet totally paid for, we knew we were going to have to cut some costs somewhere. In the mean time, the Jenny Lind building was working for us and with no prospective buyers we went about our normal business, while “in the back-ground” continued to plan for the future. At least now we were better informed as to where we needed to reduce costs while still providing for what we needed.

In 2003 Tony Ripley told the elders he would probably leave within six months. He had decided to move closer to his aging parents who lived just south of Oklahoma City and

had lost their home to a tornado. He told us to consider this as his notice that he would leave in six months.

We were also not prepared for the death of Jack Conner, one of our elders. Jack was a good man. He was one of the members who came with the rest of us from the Southside church when we merged together. Jack was a chemist for Gerber Foods here in Fort Smith and after retiring from Gerber he became a pharmacist. I don't know if he already had his license or obtained it after retiring from Gerber. He and his wife Marianne were loveable people. Marianne later moved to the San Antonio area to be closer to their daughter.

During 2003 and 2004 the preacher situation changed and we gained a few members, but we lost a few more due to age and moving away.



Tony Ripley did, in fact, leave in late 2003 and after looking for a new preacher, we hired James Dunigan, shown on the left, to work with us beginning in 2004. James was a retired Navy veteran who had, at that time, been preaching for awhile in this area, so the move was not difficult. James preached for us until November of 2008.

As typically happens when a change is made, things "perk up" for awhile, then settle back into a routine. We were comfortable and waiting for the Jenny Lind building to sell.

2004 passed rather quickly and we were looking at 2005.

For the record, as the year 2005 began the following men served the congregation:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	James Dunigan
Grady Rice	Luke Dolan	
Ron Roberts	Rick Hudson	
Joe Turner	David Meek	
Michael Turner	Craig Parsley	
	Kevin Rice	

However, as had often happened before, some of our members with school age children, had purchased homes in Greenwood Arkansas (about 10 or 12 miles south of Fort Smith) because of the better school system, and because that was a growing and upscale area. Most continued to work in Fort Smith, and continued to drive to Fort Smith for worship too.

However, with the Northside church in Greenwood growing and expanding, some of our members had to "drive right by the Northside building" on the way to Fort Smith to

worship at Park Hill. We had found that, typically, it would not be long before they began to worship with that group of Christians. Not everyone who worshipped at Park Hill and lived in Greenwood did that, but those that did were sorely missed. Now, the Michael Turner family, and the Kevin Rice family were among those who chose to worship at Northside. We can't blame them, it was their choice, but as I said: We missed them!

The 2006 church directory reflected that change as Michael and Kevin were no longer shown as serving in the capacities that they were.

In the 2006 Directory the following men served at Park Hill:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	James Dunigan
Grady Rice	Luke Dolan	
Ron Roberts	Rick Hudson	
Joe Turner	David Meek	
	Craig Parsley	

I might point out also, that 122 names were listed in that 2006 directory, which shows how great the loss was from that 201 at our peak not long after the merger.

Well, after talking with the architects, the numbers we received certainly did not bode well for our building a new edifice and come out "debt-free" as we had originally hoped. It might still be possible, but to do that we will need to sell the Jenny Lind building for the appraised price of \$630,000 and make extensive changes in regard to the new building's size, floor plan and cost of construction. It may be possible, but more likely we will still have to get a loan. After careful consideration we reached the conclusion that if we could do it and only borrow somewhere around \$200,000 the loan would not be excessive, and that became our goal.

In 2008 Eddie Roberson and his wife Joyce left Park Hill and placed their membership with the Northside church in Greenwood. Eddie's first wife had died a few years before and Joyce was a widow. Not long after they married, they built a new house in Riley Farms. It was disheartening that they left Park Hill because Eddie kind of grew up at Park Hill. His dad was George Roberson, one of the deacons early on. However, each of us has the right to choose where they want to be. Eddie was pretty much retired anyway, and suggested that he no longer act as the realtor for the sale of the building when he left. Fortunately for us, Carl Dolan's wife Debbie was a real estate agent and she agreed to handle the sale of the building.

She filled out all new paperwork and listed the building on Multi-list. Back in 2001 we had received a new "Market Value Appraisal" for the building and property and the value at that time was \$635,000. We asked Debbie to use that figure, but not to rule out any offer of \$400,000 or more. She also agreed to waive her commission.



As stated earlier, James Dunigan preached for Park Hill until November of 2008. We began to look for another preacher and interestingly, found David Deuster, shown at left.

This photo was taken in the parking lot of the church building on Jenny Lind in 1997 when the Deuster family were worshipping at Park Hill, and David was a young teen. I don't know why I don't have a later photo.

By 2006 David had received his degree from the University of Arkansas and, along with several other young men, was filling the pulpits around the area when the regular preachers were out of town, ill or otherwise not present.

During the Spring of 2008 the elders at Park Hill determined to hold a "lectureship" type of gospel meeting using those young men and David had impressed us during that series of meetings. After James left, we used David several times along with two of the other young men and after some communication with the membership and with David made an offer for him to fill our pulpit on a regular basis.

He accepted our offer and in December of 2008 became the preacher for Park Hill. We, of course, expected to have his wife Kat, but were happy to learn that in addition to David and Kat, we also got David's Mom and Dad, Sister, and Grandmother. David's dad, Eugene, was soon appointed as a deacon for Park Hill. He had served in that position at the South 46th Street congregation before returning to Park Hill.

As I mentioned earlier, Grady Rice had been seriously thinking of becoming a full-time preacher and that opportunity came when the Northside church in Alma needed a new preacher. Grady had preached for them on several occasions, and when the offer was presented in 2009, he made the decision to leave Park Hill and preach for the Northside church. He is doing a good job, is well respected, and they are growing! When Grady made that decision, of course, his whole family left with him and that was as it should be. The Grady Rice family was good for Park Hill and we miss all of them.

After Grady left in 2009 the following men were serving at Park Hill:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	David Deuster
Ron Roberts	Eugene Deuster	
Joe Turner	Luke Dolan	
	Rick Hudson	
	David Meek	
	Craig Parsley	

Things were progressing well. We were happy with David and the job he was doing. His family were assets upon whom we depended. Unfortunately, there had been no change in regard to the sale of the Jenny Lind property.

It has been 25 years since the merger and I'll admit some of us were getting discouraged. After the remodeling in the late 1990's, the building was serving us well, but the expense of maintaining the large building was taking its toll on us. Our membership has dropped to right around 100 people, and we certainly didn't need this huge building.

To cut some of the utility costs, we began to hold all services in the small auditorium and not use the large auditorium at all. (The baptistery was kept clean and heated, but otherwise we didn't use the auditorium.) All services and classes were conducted in the educational building rather than having to heat and cool the big auditorium. It did reduce the utility expense. We were still recording our services, so we took the equipment out of the Media Room that was above the "Discipline Room" in the rear of the large auditorium and moved it into the Library — the large room just behind the small auditorium.

We cut a hole in the wall between the Library and Small Auditorium and mounted the video camera to "look" through the hole. It was high on the back wall and was not too noticeable, but it required the operator to stand on a table in the Library. All in all, we were getting by.

In the late Spring of 2008 there was a severe storm with tennis ball size hail that did extensive damage to the building. The glass in every window on the west side of the building, as well as a few of the others, was broken out. It happened on a Wednesday night at the end of the service. There was strong winds, hail and plenty of rain. I don't believe there was a Tornado, but we thought there might be, so everyone stayed away from the glass and huddled in the hallway or next to the wall away from the windows. We were very fortunate that no one was hurt, but the building suffered a great deal of damage, as did the cars in the parking lot. Water had poured into the building through the broken windows, onto the aged Oak flooring, and soaked the carpet runners in the aisles and damaged the floor. The roof was badly damaged, we had many leaks, and a lot of the ceiling was water marked, especially upstairs.

Of course, the insurance company paid their part, but to save on the premiums we were carrying a large deductible. With the depreciation and the deductible we could not afford to do all the repair work. We decided to not repair the ceiling in the large auditorium so it began to discolor and have large black circles from the water. We did look into repairing the ceiling in the large auditorium, but the material used was no longer available and could not be matched. Since it would require a complete new ceiling, we could not justify spending the several thousand dollars to replace it when we were not even using it.

So as this period in the history comes to a close, we did all the repairs to the educational building from the storm and continued to use it for all of our services.

The Present —

(Period Covered: 2010 to Present)

For the first half of 2010 things were continuing pretty much as we expected. We still had not received any offers on the building even though it was shown several times. With the declining condition of the large auditorium we knew the offers would probably be few in number and low in dollars. Many, if not most, of the membership was close to giving up on the idea of building a new building. We anticipated maybe four or five years to sell this building, but it has been 25 years and we were still here.

There are not many people willing to spend half a million dollars for a building that would require extensive repairs and located in an area that is well past its prime. I was certain the building would not appraise for anywhere near that figure now anyway. We somewhat jokingly, wished we had taken the offer of \$400,000 and we keep the pews. We told ourselves that should such an offer come our way we were going to jump on it before they changed their minds.

We had purposely decided NOT to put a "For Sale" sign in the front yard for fear those who passed by would think we had closed up and moved away. Debbie assured us that the building was still being put in the "commercial properties for sale" pamphlets and that we should not give up.

Throughout this period we were able to maintain our financial condition even with the dwindling membership, but that was because we were not doing any repairs or maintenance in the large auditorium. We had approximately \$17,000 in the bank and were still making the payments on the land we had bought. I don't remember for sure, but I think the balance owed on the land was somewhere around \$30,000. Of course, the Brooks Trust has long been depleted, but we had helped support many preachers with that money.

In late May of 2010 some pieces of the ceiling in the large auditorium began to come loose and fall to the floor. Actually, it was just one or two large pieces that fell, but there was a constant "powdering" of ceiling material that looked like dust on the pews and floors. Very likely we were going to have to do something soon.

About a week later, during the first few days in June of 2010, Debbie called me and said she had scheduled a time for a group of Vietnamese people to come and look at the building. She told me the time that had been scheduled and asked if I could meet her at the building to show them around. Naturally, I was hopeful, but not really excited because with the large auditorium in the condition it was in, I wasn't expecting much. I agreed to be there and decided to call Joe (Turner) and ask if he was busy. Debbie had told me Carl was working and could not be there.

We all met at the building, answered questions as best we could and showed them around. They wanted to see everything, including the attic and basement. If there was a door, they opened it. I could not understand, nor speak, the Vietnamese language other than a very few words I had “picked up” while there. The gentleman that appeared to be the spokesman for the group was Sanh Nguyen, and he spoke very good English. As they walked through the building it was difficult to tell whether they were pleased or displeased with what they saw. They were rather animatedly speaking to each other in their native tongue, pointing, gesturing, and shaking their heads — especially when they saw the ceiling in the large auditorium — but we had no idea what was going on.

Once they were through, having spent almost two hours in the building, they went outside and looked all around the exterior of the building. Finally, everyone had seen enough and they all nodded their heads, smiled, and left. Mr. Nguyen said he would contact Debbie if they chose to make an offer. A few days later, on June 7, 2010 we received an offer!

I know it is difficult to believe, but honestly the offer was for Three Hundred Eighty Thousand dollars (\$380,000.00) and we take most of the pews!

The actual wording was:

“The back twelve (12) rows of pews in the large auditorium, plus the two (2) toddler tables with matching chairs in the upstairs classrooms are to remain. All chalkboards, microphones and speakers in the large auditorium, speakers in the small auditorium and the rearmost six (6) pews (3 on each side) in the small auditorium are also to remain.”

My own reaction without even a seconds hesitation was, “Take it!” Of course I was only one of the elders, but Carl and Joe quickly agreed. To my way of thinking, after all this time, we would never forgive ourselves if we did not accept this offer. The only stipulation that presented a problem was when they wanted to take occupancy. They wanted the building to be turned over to them on the day of closing, which would probably be sometime in the latter half of July or early August. At most it would give us only about 45 or 50 days to find a temporary place to worship and get it all set up, find a place to store the pews and excess furniture, and get everything out of the building.

They would not budge from that condition, so we agreed. Thankfully, the closing date was set to be August 9, 2010, which is on a Monday, so obviously, we would have to have a place ready by the 1st of August. That was going to be difficult to do.

We had no clue as to where we could store the pews and all the extra furniture, books, bibles, maps, charts, classroom material, copier, office equipment and everything else we would be taking. And the literal task of moving everything, especially the pews, in the short amount of time left would be Herculean.

We immediately began looking for a place to rent. We also would need to find a place to store the pews and furniture as well as everything else. The pews from the main auditorium were 20 feet long! The pews in the small auditorium were 14 feet long. We estimated we would need about 200 square feet to store everything but the pews. Of course some of the pews would be used in the temporary building, but we would need to store the rest. Finding such a storage facility that was reasonably priced would be expensive!

It took us a bit of time to answer all the questions on the acceptance forms — there must have been 200 questions, or more — but we finally met at the church building on Saturday, June 12, 2010 and went through everything and officially accepted the offer by signing the acceptance on that date. That gave us exactly 7 weeks to get everything done and set up for worship at the temporary building, and an extra few days to tidy up the Jenny Lind building if necessary.

After a few days, June 17th I think, we were able to find what we thought was the ideal place, an empty automobile dealership! The service area was plenty big enough to store everything with room to spare, and the showroom could be the sanctuary. The various offices could be used for classrooms — but it only had two small bathrooms!

We might be able to rent it for \$1500 to \$2000 a month — the building was actually for sale, but the realtor said the owners might be willing to rent it for a year at that price. It was on the extreme south side of Fort Smith, but on the west side, on State Hwy. 45. We fleetingly thought about buying it and remodeling it, but they wanted way more than we could afford... and really, it would be too big for us.

We had not yet finalized a building plan, so we would need to do that and also hire a builder. Based on past experience we figured it would take a couple of months to get the architects final blueprints — which would cost us 5% of the finished building costs. If we built a building for \$600,000.00, which is what we were hoping for, the architects fee would be \$30,000.00. So... allowing two months for the architects, while we found a builder, and at least 12 to 14 months of construction, we were looking at 16 months minimum... and possibly 18 to 20 months if the weather was bad. Figuring the worst case scenario, renting the auto dealership at \$2000 per month for 20 months would cost us \$40,000 in rent and another \$30,000 for the architect. That is Seventy Thousand Dollars that we really didn't have if we wanted to keep the loan payments reasonable.

Since August 1st was a Sunday, we set that as our first meeting date in the temporary building, and the Wednesday, prior to that as the last day we would meet in the Jenny Lind building. As many as possible that could be at the Jenny Lind building on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday — just before August 1 — would get everything that was left to be moved and clean the building to have it ready for the new owners.

Several men of the congregation had pick-up trucks and we knew of three 16 foot long trailers that could be available. The plan was starting to come together.

We also found that with some work, and by being extra-careful, those twenty foot long pews could be separated into two 10 foot pews, with one of them not having an end piece. That would make them more manageable, and way less heavy!

I was only working at Tower TV two days a week because I had semi-retired in 2003. Since Jo Anne and I owned the business, I could not totally quit, but doing the paper-work, payroll, bookkeeping, billing and other stuff took two days every week. But, that allowed me to be available most days to help set things in order at the temporary meeting place and to help move stuff when needed. Joe Turner was also retired, but he was fully retired. He became the person in charge since he was available most days.

Just about the time we thought we had things going our way, another opportunity fell into our lap. Do you see Providence here? Earlier, Debbie had talked with several realtors to help us locate a suitable temporary location for a reasonable rental fee, and one of those realtors called to tell her that he owned a vacant nightclub building “out on the south end of town” that he was considering tearing down. He told her that since we were a church, if we could use it, he would be willing to postpone the demolition and rent it to us for a “very reasonable” rate.

In its latest incarnation, the nightclub had been called “Chaser’s” and had been raided several times by the police and in the news a lot. Yes, it was a nightclub, but it was also a “strip club” with a private “members only” bar, dance floor and stage. They had live music most nights until they were closed by the Fort Smith Police. This photo was taken the day we looked at the building.



When the building was originally built it was to be a rather fancy steakhouse, but later became a family restaurant before becoming a nightclub. Ironically, this building is only about four blocks from the land we had bought.

The promise of “very reasonable” did not escape our attention, and if it would save us ten or fifteen thousand dollars it might be worthwhile. Debbie got the keys and several of us visited the place and more or less evaluated whether it would work for us.

Obviously it was going to require some walls built to divide some areas into class rooms, new drop-in panels for the ceiling, new lighting, new carpet, and a whole lot of cleaning and painting. Over the next two days, Joe and I spent quite a bit of time in the building, sketching it's floor plan, and taking accurate measurements. Both of us are “laymen” carpenters, so we talked about what we thought needed doing, and how we would do it. We estimated the cost of getting it to serve as a church would cost \$6000 or \$7000 in materials, and we could do the work. It would be a lot of work, and would have to be done quickly!

The two photos below gives you a fair idea of the condition of the place. You can't possibly imagine, however, how badly it smelled. You could get drunk just walking through the place. The carpet must have soaked up gallons of whiskey and beer over the years, and setting closed up for the last few months didn't help. Everything was sticky and felt damp. We had to open all the doors to let enough air in to breath, and to get enough light to see.



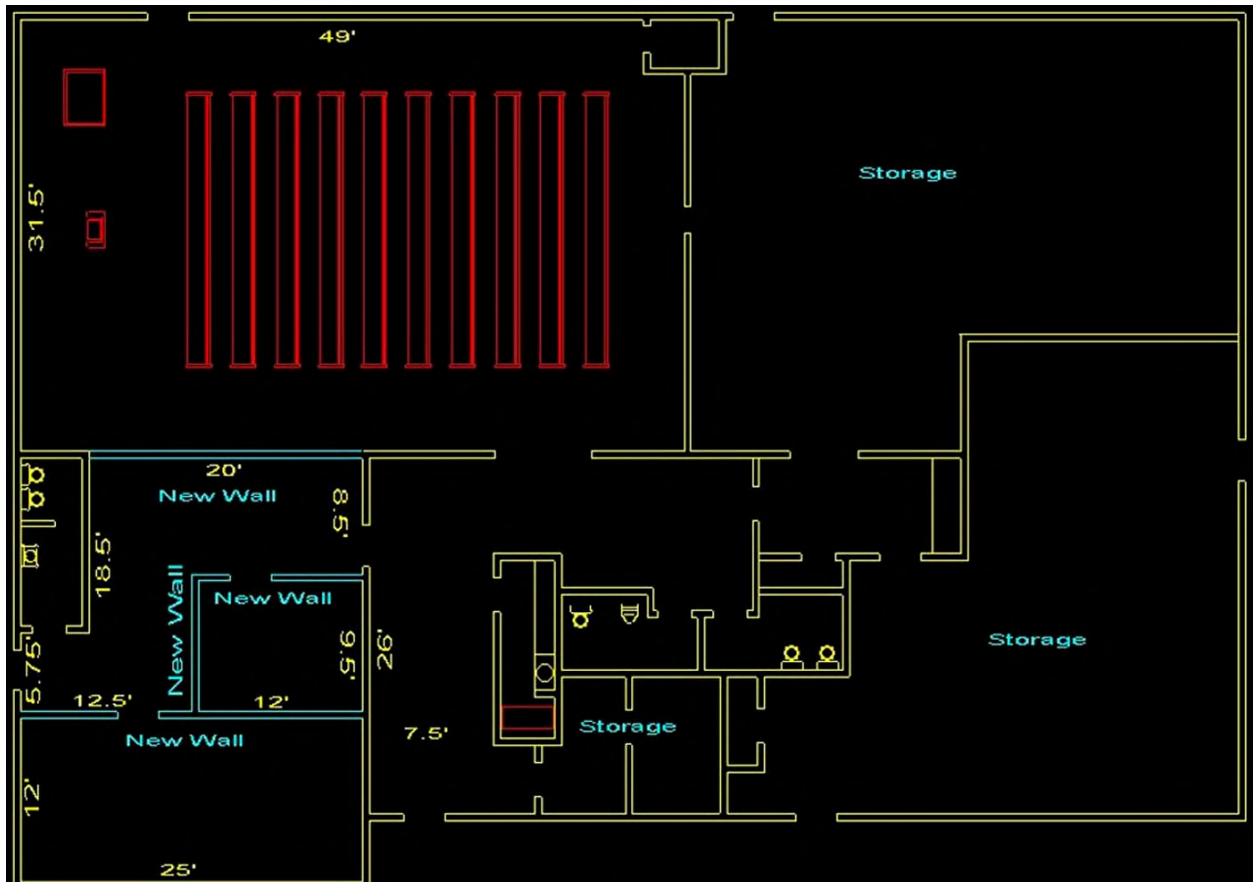
And by the way, I now know why bars are very dimly lit... it hides the dirt!

Actually, the building is huge: Almost 4000 square feet, primarily divided into three large rooms. There are also four bathrooms some space used as an office and other small closets and storage rooms. The three bigger rooms are a kitchen which was beyond filthy, a large “L” shaped room shown in the left photo above with a large “U-shaped bar” and a small dance floor, and the “private club” shown above on the right, with it's own separate bar, a dance floor and a “stage.”

The measurements indicated the pews from the small auditorium would allow seating for about 100 people in just one leg of the large “L” shaped room. We could partition the other “leg” of that room into three classrooms. Three of the four bathrooms had two toilets and one of them had urinals. The other had a single toilet and wash basin.

There was a small “Disc Jockey” room that could serve as our media room, which left the “members only” room and the large kitchen for storage. There was also a very large (maybe 15 feet by 20 feet) walk- in refrigerated closet for even more storage by leaving the refrigeration unit turned off.

From the measurements Joe and I took in those two visits, and using the sketches we drew as a reference, I drew an accurate floor plan of our proposed changes.

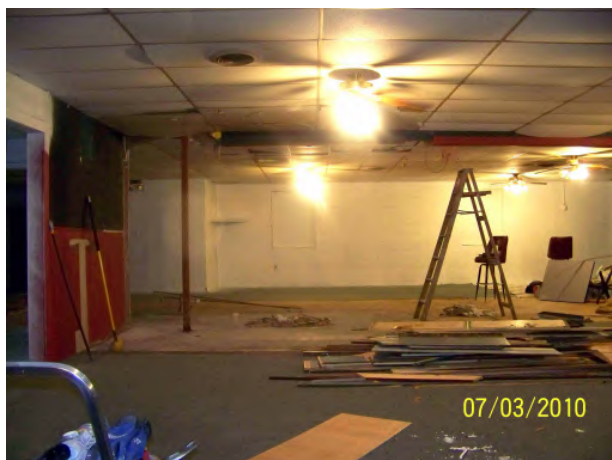


We took the drawing to show to the owner and described what we would need to do to make the building suitable for our use, and told him that we would do it at our expense, he shocked us with his reply.

This is not verbatim, but essentially he said, “If you are willing to do that, and would be willing to leave all the changes when you vacate the building, I will rent the building to you for \$100 per month.”

Of course we agreed. I see more Providence here. He would be saving us a minimum of \$20,000 to \$30,000 for the time period we would be here even counting the money we would be spending getting the place in shape. (We did notice after we vacated the building that he rented it to another church group for awhile. I wonder if the rent was \$100 per month?)

Perhaps a series of photos will document what we started with and what had to be done to make the transformation. The dates in each of the following photos will document the days spent. Of course we were working almost every day but I didn't take photos most days.



We had about six weeks to get it all done! We started the same day the owner agreed to let us use the building by tearing out the bars. We had not thought of obtaining a permit until we were a couple of days into the project.

We got the electricity and water turned on and that is when we found out we needed to get a “building” permit.

Thankfully, one of Park Hill’s former members was Wally Bailey, who was the head of the engineering department for the city of Fort Smith when we began this project, and had been the head of the plans and development department before that. He was very helpful in guiding us to the right people, telling us what we needed to do to be legal, and paving the way for us to get all this done. Even so, it was a rush.

The floor plan drawing a few pages back is the actual layout of the Chaser’s building drawn to scale. All of the lines drawn in yellow are walls that existed when we took possession of the building. There were a couple of walls that are not shown because we took them out. The lines drawn in blue are the walls we added to provide the classrooms.

The upper right corner that I labeled “storage” was the private “members only” club which is where the “strippers” performed. There was a bar on the extreme right built against the outer wall. Since there was a back door opening directly into this room we stored the pews in this area by stacking them two layers high with the top layer being set at 90 degrees to the lower level.

The Kitchen is in the lower right corner and also labeled “storage.” We cleaned it up a bit, but used only for storage of furniture and office equipment. The rest, was offices, hallways and bathrooms. Instead of the single pews shown in the floor plan, we were able to have two rows with a center aisle by using the 14 foot long small auditorium pews. You will see the finished views later.



Jo Anne, Lucille, Stephanie and others cleaned the kitchen floor and lower walls so we could use this area for storage. We saw no need to clean higher than our heads, but by looking at the difference between the walls where they were cleaned and where we didn’t, you get a good idea of what it all looked like when we first entered the building. It’s hard to judge needed space, but the kitchen almost held all of the furniture, boxes of books, office equipment and etc.

While Joe and I were working in other parts of the building, Carl was painting. He has a big spray rig and makes quick work of getting the Kilz on the walls. We deemed it unnecessary to worry about overspray — although Carl seldom worries about that anyway.



The photo on the left will be the rear of the auditorium. You can see a part of the small room that will be our “media room.” After Carl painted the walls, which are concrete block, the paint bubbled and came off. There was mold all over one area. Time was spent scraping and wire brushing until we got it clean then Carl repainted.



At left the wall that partitions what will be the auditorium is built and ready for paint. We decided to leave the window because this classroom can double as a nursery if it should be needed.

In the right photo the old “U” shaped bar was located at the left of this photo. This is one leg of the “main bar” area and after the partition shown in the left photo was built, this room will become the library / teen class at the far back and two other classrooms in the near front.



At left is the Library / Teen classroom. The red framed window looks out into the front parking area and will be curtained. The left wall in the photo is a common wall between this classroom and another.

The right photo at right is the other end of the Library / Teen classroom, and you can see the new door waiting to be installed into its opening. Another classroom is through the door.



At left, the old carpet is coming up and then the glue globs must be scraped up. We were told the glue was water soluble.

In the photo at right, Jo Anne is spraying the floor while others scrape the glue. It was not easy!



The only photos I have of what call the "Chaser's Building" were taken at my daughter's wedding in November of 2011. Removing the confetti, flower petals, lace, pillars, purple ribbon, and candlesticks, you get a pretty good idea that it turned out well enough to use.

You can see we built a small raised platform centered on the front wall for the preacher to stand on.



The podium that normally stood centered at the front of the platform, is in the front left corner.

The ceiling support shown in this photo is a steel four inch square post. This post was where the "U" shaped bar was located.

Well, we actually made it! All was done and we met in this temporary building on Sunday, August 1, 2010.

It was not without some trepidation, but it worked. Everyone worked hard to make it happen.

On Monday, August 9, 2010, we signed all the paperwork and the sale of the Jenny Lind property was done. I don't remember the exact amount, but after all the closing costs and fees, we netted about \$360,000 and was handed a cashier's check!

Several weeks before the closing I was told to take all the abstracts and bills of sale that were in the church's safety deposit box to the abstract office for them to use in handling the sale of the property. It involved six different plats of property.

The abstract office looked them over and told me they would shred them for me as they no longer provided updated abstracts. Instead, they issued "certificates of abstract insurance" to guarantee the property was free from encumbrance. I said that if they were going to destroy them, I wanted them back.

At first they were reluctant to give them back, but once they called a superior to handle the situation, it was a lady that I had known for years. I told her I wanted them for the history they provided and she gave them to me. I have gained a wealth of knowledge and a better understanding of dates, prices, people and other things I didn't know, from those abstracts. These old abstracts include the history of the land back into the early 1800's and also contains the will's of the owners of the property, and believe me when I say, that in itself is a wealth of information in regard to early Fort Smith!

Back on page 43 you saw the floor plan drawings for our new building. Not long after the Chaser's building was useable, we immediately started looking for the best way to proceed with the building of the new building. One of our members, Larry Turner, was a draftsman that worked with the Burrough-Brasuell Corp., an architectural company, and he offered to supply the needed drawings at a discounted price.

With those in hand we met with several builders and contractors but were not happy with what they told us. All of those we met with were builders that typically specialized as “home builders.” We needed a commercial builder. We talked to a couple and their price was way, way, too high. The second one, though, suggested that the dimensions of our drawing was almost exactly 4000 square feet, and there were “Steel Building” contractors that might be better able to meet our needs.

A friend suggested we talk to Andy Neal of GAN Engineering so I called them. They were very helpful and friendly. Andy and his wife Jo Anne, whom I recognized as a high school classmate, met with us at the Chaser’s building to discuss the new building.

With their help and suggestions, and altering our floor plan slightly, we were able to arrive at a building that would cost us less than \$600,000.00. It would be built on a six inch thick slab, framed with structural steel, and it would have steel studs rather than wood ones. In fact there would be no flammable material used in the structure at all. The lower part of the outside walls would be brick and the upper part of the outside walls would be new product called “DryVit,” which is basically a thick waterproof plaster applied over a one inch thick foam sheeting.

The interior walls would be covered with fire-proof dry wall and paint. And the roof would be interlocking steel panels. Andy worked with us in regard to the interior so the building would have good acoustics, yet still look good. The building we were considering would be nearly 4000 square feet. By using framework from commercial prefab steel construction the outside measurements would be 40 feet wide and 100 feet long, and if necessary, we could extend the length of the building without much difficulty.

After we talked about the floor plan Andy suggested we might want to increase the length of the building by 25 feet at the outset. He said it would cost less to do it now than to do it later. As he put it, “the additional cost of pouring a pad with 5000 square feet as opposed to 4000 square feet, would basically be the price of the concrete. The labor for the extra 1000 feet would be negligible. Also, by finishing and bricking the end of the building and installing a door, then taking that all down and redoing it would be at least double the price of doing it now. He said we would not have to finish the interior of the added space now, other than insulation to keep energy loss to a minimum.

After some preliminary figures we decided that was a good idea. The finished building is shown on the cover page, and is 125 feet long and 40 feet wide. It has a covered “drive-thru” for inclement weather, and is designed to withstand sustained wind speeds of 50 mph with 100 mph gusts. Except for cleaning and painting, the structure is virtually maintenance free — and no termites!

Ground was “broken” in February of 2012. Several immediate problems arose about the ground. In some areas it was fine, in other areas it was not. Before the huge slab could be poured the “bad dirt” had to be dug out and replaced with “good dirt.” The

back hoes dug all day, literally tons of dirt was moved. Some of it was piled up to be used later for the Berm, a raised area that the city required to shield the parking area to “block head light glare.” The rest of that bad dirt was taken somewhere. I don’t know where. Once that was done, the dump trucks started hauling in tons of good dirt to fill the hole.



For several days the dirt crews worked. Finally all the dirt that would be under the slab was good dirt and it could be packed and leveled. Then the survey people came in and put stakes and string and flags, and more strings, until they were satisfied.

Next was the plumbers, then the concrete trucks showed up.

Finally, the steel arrived and cranes were used to erect the frame. Once the framework was up and solid, the roof was installed and we had a dry area.



addition of the steel studs. As you can see in the photo above, the floor is clean and not covered in debris. Our job was to clean the floor at the end of each day.

Several helped, but Joe Turner spent



The walls began to take shape with the



hundreds of hours at the building site in order to see that everything was done. He ended up doing most of it.



Above is the back wall of the auditorium in place. The two windows are for the media room on the left and the cry room on the right. At left the drywall is going up on the front of the auditorium. The

baptistery will be behind the window centered in the front wall. That is Joe sweeping up the dust from cutting the drywall. He spent almost every day at the site. You might notice the HVAC ducts at the peak of the building that will be covered with drywall.



At left is the hallway that goes out to the south end of the building. The rooms on either side are classrooms, restrooms and two storage rooms.

The crew worked hard but were friendly, competent and willing to answer questions when asked.

This is a photo of the front part of the auditorium taken just after the carpet was laid. The door on the extreme left of the photo is the west exit. This exit is seldom used, but required by the city Fire Marshall. It is kept locked at all times, but, of course, all doors in this building can be opened from the inside without a key. Another safety requirement the city requires. The door next to the exit opens into the preacher's office, and the one on the right goes into the communion prep room and the baptistery dressing room.



The ceiling is not the typical tile, but a harder surface to enhance the acoustics. It worked!

The photo at right is the back of the auditorium showing the two exit double doors and the media room and cry room. The pews will be arranged in split rows on each side of a center aisle and will seat about 125. The neat thing is the wall with the two exit doors as well as the media room and cry room can be removed at such time we grow above 125.



Presently, we are using the pews from the old building and they are 65 years old. They had to be modified to fit into this building and still meet the city's requirements in regard to handicap accessibility and fire safety. These pews were originally built to be twenty feet long. They had two end pieces and one middle piece that were two inch thick laminated oak strips. Centered between each was a one inch thick oak "leg" that wrapped up the back of the pew. That provided support every five feet which allowed ten 250 pound people per pew. I doubt they ever saw that much weight, but it is good to know.

We had to do a lot of work to reduce the longest pews to 14 feet. To satisfy the city's code, the center aisle must be 48 inches and the two outside aisles must be 36 inches minimum. Making them 14 feet gives us a little extra room between the four places where the steel girders are covered. (You can see two of them in the photos above near the back.)

Moving these twice (once to store them, then to move them to this building) took its toll. Manhandling them to cut one section to the proper length then reattach the end piece

caused them to crack in some places. They are brittle due to their age, but still strong. We are considering the use of individual interlocking chairs, which, we are told, will increase the seating capacity by about ten percent, and be more comfortable



As you can see above, we also cut a couple down and made two “Deacon’s Benches” to fit between the wall and baptistery. I was also able to use the scraps from cutting down the pews to build the podium surround. The top is solid oak and a laptop can be put on either side and connected to the projection system. The podium itself is the one that came out of the Jenny Lind building. It was built by one of the elders in 1953. I thought it was a nice touch for an elder in 2013 build the surround — sixty years apart.

The next few photos are of this building. On the right is the Communion Prep room.

Under the sink is a small hot water tank, fed by the hot water plumbing. Instant, very hot water is supplied to the sink. The cabinets store the various supplies needed. A small refrigerator is under the cabinet top left of the sink.

All cabinets in the building have raised panel doors and are custom built for the room they are in. You read earlier in this account that the members have always taken part in helping with the construction of each building.

That was no different in this building. We, the members built all the cabinetry, and did the installation. We also, installed all the specialty items, such as mirrors, soap dis-



pensers, handicap bars, and etc. We also did all the sanding and painting of the walls and cabinets.

The preacher's office cabinets were built by David Deuster out of surplus material from the pews. David had some experience working with wood, but wanted to learn cabinet making, so he came to my shop as I was building the cabinets for the building to watch and help. The desk was a purchased item. There is another bookcase to the right that can't be seen.



At left is the Library. It is also used as a classroom when it is needed for that, but right now it is just a library. There are more bookcases to the left of what you see here, as well as a table and chairs to use while studying.

Also in the Library, in an alcove behind where we are standing is a desktop computer connected to a large corporate printer and copier.

We print the weekly bulletin and most of our materials.

At right is the 1st and 2nd Grade classroom. The table and small chairs were moved from the old building on Jenny Lind. The "Deacon Bench" is one of four we built so they could fit into spaces that were in the various places.

At right is a cabinet / bookshelf for storing class material. There is an additional cabinet on the left out of camera angle.





This is the nursery. It doubles as a Pre-school classroom during the period when classes are available. The cry room is used as the nursery when this room is not available due to Pre-school class in session. The sink has hot and cold water.

Below is another classroom. This is for the 3rd and 4th Grades. The table is higher and the chairs are full size.

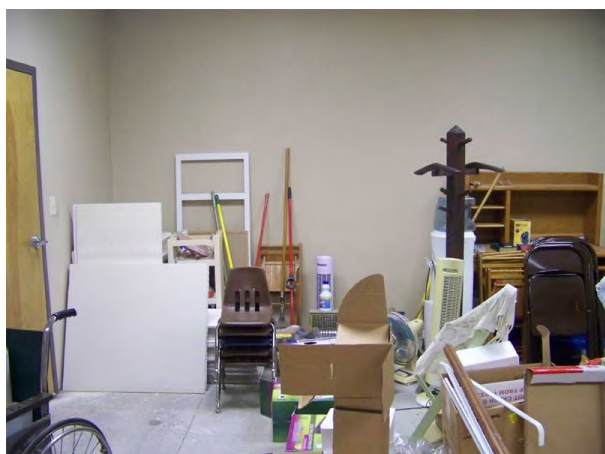


Another shot.



Above is the teen classroom. It has a power point system built into the ceiling with connections for a laptop in the wall.

At left is one of the storage rooms.





Top left is another classroom that is not currently being used. We are currently storing files and pamphlets in it. Top right is a store room full of mostly stuff left over from the building. Likely, we will clean this up and dispose of things not needed.

The bottom two photos are of the entrance foyer. Behind the camera is double glass doors leading out to the covered drive through. At the other end is another required door on the west side of the building. There is a small concrete porch. This door is kept locked at all times, but the emergency bar in the center will open it if needed by pushing.

I did not take photos of the utility rooms, closets, or the "Mechanical Room" that houses the HVAC systems (we have three, plus two "through-the-wall" systems for the preacher's office and teen classroom. This allows the rooms to be kept cool or warm when needed without running the main systems.

I also did not photograph the baptistery access or dressing room. The baptistery has a filtering circulation system with a heater and auto-level controls to keep the water at the right temperature and depth — 85 degrees and 4 feet. It also has a plastic cover to prevent humidity in the auditorium. The auditorium has a power point system in the ceiling with a 10 foot square screen that lowers to cover the baptistery opening.

In 2013 the David Deuster family left and moved to northwest Arkansas. David determined he wanted to “test the water” in the business world instead of preaching. At right is the family photo taken that year. From left to right is “Bean,” Kat, Jonathan, & David.



Not sure of the exact date, but believe David told us in June or July that he was leaving. He left in the late summer, so I guess it was August or September.



One of our members who grew up in Poteau, Oklahoma suggested we might want to see if Bryan Loughmiller would be suitable. She had heard him preach and liked his preaching. She told us that Bryan and his family were in the Texas Panhandle just north of Amarillo, and was looking to move to this area. (Bryan’s wife, Cindy, grew up in Poteau, Oklahoma and was a friend.)

We contacted Bryan and asked if he was interested. He said he was, so we arranged for him to come preach for us and we could talk. We hired him.

So, in 2014 those serving the Park Hill church were:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	Bryan Loughmiller
Ron Roberts	Luke Dolan	
Joe Turner	David Meek	
	Craig Parsley	
	Randy Sexton	

Craig and Missy Parsley moved to the Dallas Texas area in 2016.

In late 2017 those serving the Park Hill church were:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	Bryan Loughmiller
Ron Roberts	Luke Dolan	
Randy Sexton	David Meek	

For a period of time near the end of 2017 Brother Joe Turner stepped down from the eldership due to medical reasons. After what was supposed to be a relatively simple surgery, Joe became seriously ill and was hospitalized for weeks. It was touch and go for a period of time. Even after being discharged from the hospital, he still reported to the hospital for daily treatment. He has now recovered and was again installed as an elder early in 2018.

During this period, Randy Sexton was appointed as an elder and served well in that capacity. However, earlier in 2018 he resigned that position with similar feelings as Paul Allison, years ago. He is still serving as our Treasurer.

Presently then, those serving the Park Hill church are:

Elders:	Deacons:	Preacher:
Carl Dolan	Wayne Carson	Bryan Loughmiller
Ron Roberts	Luke Dolan	
Joe Turner	David Meek	

Some final comments and some closing remarks follow, but basically that is the history of Park Hill. As I write these last few remarks the date is May 28, 2018. This Fall will be our 100th anniversary.

To keep everything straight, back on April 14, 2011, after visiting with Andy Neal and his wife Jo Anne (who is the bookkeeper for the corporation) Carl Dolan, Joe Turner, and Ron Roberts signed an agreement with GAN Engineering, Inc. to construct a new church building at 3536 Grinnell Ave. That address was hand picked.

When I went to the city to get things started on the new building, an official of the city assigned it the address 3518 Grinnell Ave. I asked how they arrived at that address (I was not unhappy with 3518, I just wanted to know) and the reply was, "It is the only building on that block facing north. The building must have an even number since it will be located on the south side of the street. Since it is a corner I picked 3518."

My reply to that was, "Actually, the building will face east, not north, therefore it should have an address on South 36th Terrace." (South 36th Terrace is the cross street.)

His reply was, "When you purchased the vacant land South 36th Terrace had not been named and the land had a Grinnell address." He continued, "Really, you can have any address you want as long as it starts with 35. Your building will be the only building in the block, so it doesn't have to be 3518."

So I said, "Could we have 3536? That would be easier to remember." And that is how he registered it.

The price agreed on from GAN Engineering was \$539,935.00. That was the "turn-key" price based on four agreed upon things:

1. The size was to be 5000 square feet (40 feet wide and 125 feet long), built to the specifications laid out by Burrough Brasuell Corp (the architects) in the plans.
2. It would have 32 parking spaces (four next to building designated as handi-cap.

3. The price is based on the soil reports provided by Carl Garner of Geotech Engineering as of April 12, 2011, and the Grading reports by Robert Bowen, the architect, after a joint meeting with Andy Neal of GAN Engineering, Inc. on April 12, 2011.
4. Should any soil is found to need replacing it would be done by the contractor at a cost to the owner of \$16.00 per cubic yard for removal and replacement.

Initially, we were talking about the building being only 4000 square feet, 40 feet wide by 100 feet long. That price was given to us as \$515,446.

But we had talked to Andy during our first meeting about the members being able to do some of the things that is normally contracted out to sub-contractors in order to reduce the cost of the building. His reply was that he would welcome that if the work was done as conscientiously as a paid sub-contractor would do it -- meaning we had to meet the deadlines so as not to hold up construction, and that the product of our labor must be of equal quality to that provided by a sub-contractor. He provided a list of "deductions" that we might wish to undertake. They were:

	Optional Add/Deducts	Deduct
A.	Provide Jobsite Daily Cleanup	\$ 2,000.00
B.	Empty Dumpsters & remove trash	2,400.00
C.	Provide the Final Clean-up	1,600.00
D.	Supply paint and do all Painting	8,000.00
E.	Provide Yard & Landscape Plants	5,000.00
F.	Provide Parking Lot Lighting	11,765.00
G.	Provide 120 L. Feet of Fencing	1,440.00
H.	Provide Dumpster Pad & Screen	4,000.00
I.	Provide for and install all cabinetry	6,725.00
J.	Procure and install bathroom mirrors	500.00
K.	Provide and install all bathroom items such as soap, towel and toilet paper dispensers.	<u>460.00</u>

Total Deductions: \$43,890.00

That reduced the price of the building to \$461,646.00 but we still had to provide those services so there would be cost involved. We either paid or did the work. Our revised plan (back when we learned we were not going to be able to do this and come out debt free...) was to keep the cost low enough that we didn't have to borrow more than \$250,000.

Roughly figuring 50% material costs and free labor on the deducts, that would be \$22,000. Adding that to the \$461,646 reduced building cost we get \$483,646 total cost. Subtracting the \$360,000 we received from the sale of the building, our loan would be a bout \$124,000.

Options discussed with Andy included going ahead with the extra 25 feet during the original construction rather than wait until some later time, and also adding additional parking in front of the building. Andy figured about 47,000 to add 25 feet to the building and about 6,500 to add the additional paving, marking and bumpers for the parking – which is why the contract was signed for \$539,935.00. Taking the same almost \$44,000 deductions would still get us a loan well under \$200,000. We decide to do it.

We went to the First National Bank and talked to Jan Byrd. I had done several loans with her over the years for my business, and she pulled up the Park Hill account and found we had an excellent record, and almost \$400,000.00 in our checking account.

She suggested we set up a loan ceiling of \$200,000 @ one-half a point under the Prime rate of 6%, with a 15 year payoff. By doing that, we would never have a higher interest rate. Also, the loan would not start until our checking account dropped below \$25,000. Once that occurred the loan would automatically begin and deposit enough money to cover any check written up to the maximum of \$200,000. Once the building was complete (or we reached the \$200,000 limit) no more money was charged to the loan.

So we provided all the paperwork needed, signed all the spaces and called Andy. The way Andy wanted to be paid on a schedule as follows:

Notice to Proceed	5 %
Foundation Slab completed	20 %
Metal delivered	10 %
Steelwork done	10 %
Ready for Drywall	20 %
Ready for Paint	20 %
Ready for floor covering	10 %
Job Complete	5 %

A side benefit of Andy wanting to be paid that way allowed us to use our own money for a longer period of time which reduced the amount of interest paid to the bank because the loan would be a lower amount and a shorter term.

We had some problems as we went along... the dirt wasn't good and had to be replaced under the slab and also under the parking lot and driveway. We had to pay more for that, but the price for the extra amount had already been agreed on.

We decided to light the parking area differently so we saved some money on the amount planned for that, but we paid more for the plants and shrubs necessary to satisfy the conditions laid out by the city.

We had almost the whole auditorium painted and then changed the color, so we had to paint it all again — but Carl did that with his rig so it went pretty quickly. There were no holdups due to the members doing the work and Andy congratulated us on the quality

of workmanship and some of the ideas we used. (One or two of those ideas he incorporated into future building he built.)

Before everything was done, we went ahead and bought the flooring to finish the two large rooms that the 25 feet gave us... each room was approximately 720 square feet in size. We painted the walls, had the sub-contractor that laid the floor to lay the floor in one of the rooms so we could use it. We bought a second “through-the-wall” heat and air unit for that room.

We bought the materials to divide that room into two rooms and did the work and painted the walls. We hired the sub-contractor to put in the ceilings in those two rooms. We bought lights for those rooms as well.

As mentioned, we had dirt trouble that cost a bunch. We also installed an automatic watering system to keep the plants watered.

Including all of that AND the extra dirt work — the total price came to \$565,114.00. With the almost \$400,000 that was in our account after the sale of the Jenny property and what was left from the Southside building sale — after the remodeling done to the Jenny Lind property — the loan figure was almost \$165,000.00.

The loan was established in 2011 and here we are in May of 2018 and the loan will be completely paid off by the end of the year.

In 1953 Park Hill was approaching 450 members. The building was new and in good repair. The loan was about to be paid off.

Sixty-five years later: Our building is new and in good condition. The loan is about to be paid off. We number about 75 members and on a good day might have 80 or more.

The conditions are similar... The congregation is at peace. We are united in our effort. We are filled with love! We are very slowly growing, but also people are dying or moving away. The net result so far is positive. We pray that it will continue, but we have some elderly members.

We welcome you to visit our congregation and perhaps join with us as we continue to stand in the gap...