Gapway BC

1918-1920 - Rev. J. W. Owens
1920-1922 - Rev. C. C. Hancock
1923-1926 - Rev. W. E. Cooper
1927 - Rev. D. R. Hickman
1928-1929 - Rev. S. W. McClelland
1930-1932 - Rev. W. W. Dossey
1933 - Rev. J. T. Rawlins
1934-1943 - Rev. S. W. McClelland

When Rev. Steve W. McClelland resigned, the church extended a call to Rev. T. F. O'Steen. This man was known as the "walking preacher," traveling all over the area from Groveland to Lakeland mostly by walking. During his ministry, 1944-1946, Gapway made excellent progress. A revival was conducted in the spring of 1945 by Rev. Hubert Barnes, who at the time was pastor of Berea Baptist Church, Plant City, Florida. God gave a great revival and many of those converted at the time are still members, some in places of leadership. Others are in the ministry, at least one of them, Rev. Paul Parrish, now pastor of North Rome Baptist Church in Tampa, Florida. Paul's father is Brother Flem Parrish and also the father of our organist, Mrs. Louverne Fallin. Brother Parrish served in this church as a deacon, clerk, music director, and a loyal member many years. He was sadly missed when he moved to Bradley. He has since gone to be with the Lord.

There was a need for more room to take care of the crowds desiring to come and it was under the leadership of Rev. O'Steen the present sanctuary was begun. The leadership, Deacons, etc., were opposed to the church going in debt, so this building was erected on a pay as you go basis. Therefore, several pastors had a part in its erection. It was several years after it began before the first service was conducted in the new sanctuary. Brother O'Steen was the first fulltime pastor to move on the field. The church by this time had grown to the extent they felt they could afford to have the services of a pastor on the field. The arrangements for paying the pastor was on a percentage basis. The pastor was to receive 75% of the offerings while 25% was for the other expenditures.

In 1947, upon the resignation of Rev. T.F. O'Steen, Rev. W. Hubert Barnes was called and served a little less than a year. The salary for the pastor was set at $50.00 a week with a house furnished.

Rev. H. C. Harvey was then called and at the end of 1948, upon his resignation, Rev. Steve E. Simmons was called. One would think the church had reverted to the annual call by the record. However, this was not the case. This was a time of unrest, and it carried over into every area of life. Rev. Simmons remained for a year and upon his resignation, Bro. Roy Reynolds served as supply pastor until Rev. Raymond Yeater was called in 1950-51. The church passed through a storm during the ministry of Brother Yeater, and several members left, going to other churches in the area.

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In 1952, Rev. Robert Lawson was called. He served until the end of 1954 and Rev. S. E. Simmons was called for the second tenure. He remained as pastor for the six-year period 1954-1960. The church made tremendous progress during these years. The two-story education building, patio, and the educational buildings to the south of the auditorium all were erected during this period. The church had a purging of membership and through all of these experiences many were added through baptism and transfer of letter.

In April of 1957, Mrs. Marion Jones was elected as Church Clerk, a position she has held with honor and distinction, still serving with superior form.

During most of the time after the church went full time, a house was rented for the pastor. Some time during the early 50's the parsonage, still in use, was erected.

In the year 1954, Cecil Combee became Church Treasurer, a position he still holds. We would be remiss in our duty if we did not express sincere appreciation to him, his wife and family, and all the others who have served so faithfully in these unpaid areas of church life and activity. Beside being Treasurer for all these years, doing an excellent job there, Brother and Mrs. Combee have been for many years custodians. He and Thelma have served well in many other activities and responsibilities.

Another step forward in progress was the hiring of secretarial help. Mr. Charles Canady was employed on a part-time basis. The following secretaries served also for short periods during 1963-1970; Phyllis Denker Suggs, Mary Colson, Barbara McCranie, Ellen Nicholson, and Diane Fields Gann. On January 5, 1970, our present secretary, Mrs. Alma Phelps, was employed. How our churches ever accomplished the tasks they did without efficient secretarial help is a mystery. We pay tribute to all of these who have served in this capacity. A special tribute to Mrs. Phelps who has served so long and in such an efficient way. We trust she will continue to serve for years to come.

In 1961, upon the resignation of Rev. S. E. Simmons, the church extended a call to Rev. Elvin Hall. By this time the membership had grown to 577, and the annual pastor's salary was $5,200.00 per year. These were great years in the progress of our church. During Brother Hall's ministry the church, under his leadership, completely renovated the present auditorium, putting in stained glass windows, new padded pews, carpet, central air conditioning-heating, and the like. This was done in the spring of 1963 at a total cost of above $28,000. A loan of $36,000 was approved, which would clear former indebtedness and also complete the renovation. This was a giant step for Gapway in the area of stepping out on faith. Many before had been very opposed to a church debt.

When Brother Hall resigned a call was extended to Rev. Thomas E. Hicks who served through 1965 into 1970. Gapway continued to prosper as God's blessings came daily. Under the leadership of Brother Hicks the parsonage was equipped with central air and heat, the educational building housing Preschool through the Children's Division was equipped also with units to cool and heat.

God's blessings continued to flow. Brother Guy P. Anderson, who had supplied and served as Interim previously, was called as Associate Pastor, a position he held until his resignation to take an extended vacation in 1973.

Upon the resignation of Rev. Hicks, a call was extended to Rev. W. Hubert Barnes, who moved into the parsonage in January, 1971 and began his ministry the first Sunday in February, 1971. God has continued to bless our fellowship in every way. Across these 100 years of rich heritage we reminisce with deep gratitude in our hearts. May 10, 1972 we called Brother Walter Pearson to become the first full-time Minister of Music and Youth. What a marvelous giant step this has been for us. God certainly has been leading us all the way. We are grateful for His leadership in securing Brother Pearson and Naomi to work with us in this area. Just before our Homecoming in 1973 we moved into the lovely new building consisting of our offices and Choir Room. This building was constructed in 1972-73 at a cost of approximately $30,000.

In the building plans, there was to be included a space for a Library. This space turned out to be the rooms originally used as church office and pastor's study. A gift of $2,000 was given in memory of a loved one deceased, for the renovation and equipment of this facility. As a result, we have one of the best-equipped and most attractive libraries to be found. Others have joined in providing equipment and books in memory of loved ones who loved this church and have gone home to be with the Lord. Time and space does not permit us to give individual honor and credit. However, we pay tribute to the memory of every member who has joined the heavenly hosts. We express heartfelt gratitude for what they did, and to their families who continue to carry on in the advancement of God's Kingdom.

As we observe our Centennial at this Homecoming, May 18, 1975, Gapway members numbering over 700 can be justly proud and humbly grateful for the vision of our forebears who lit the torch in 1875 and passed it on decade after decade to the present. We have excellent facilities, a well-organized Sunday School, Church Training, Brotherhood and Royal Ambassadors, Woman's Missionary Union and Auxiliaries and a Graded Choir Program. Our Budget for 1975: $70,000.

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