

Tucker Church Rises From the Ashes

Congregation Overcomes Loss of Building to Fire

By Donna Williams Lewis
Staff Writer

Last June, members of Tucker's Midway Baptist Church were devastated when arsonists set fire to their church, gutting the 74-year-old building attended by generations of their families.

The small congregation of about 200 learned too late that the church's insurance was inadequate to cover the loss. Members wondered whether they would be able to rebuild.

But last Sunday, the worrying was over as members held their first service in the rebuilt church in its original location at 2254 Henderson Mill Road.

"After going through the situation we went through, I think it's going to be a great relief," said Unzell Priest, 53, a member of the church from the age of 7 when he had to walk 2 miles to it over a dirt road.

Mr. Priest continued to be a faithful member even after he moved to Madison — 60 miles away — several years ago, attending Midway Baptist every Sunday for prayer meeting and every Wednesday night for choir practice. While he leads the choir, his wife, Mary Shir-

ley, plays the organ, and his 86-year-old mother, Eva Bell Priest still looks on from the congregation.

For the Priest family, the church has been home. "We've had some heartaches going through this ordeal," Mr. Priest said. "It's going to be great to get back in it."

"We just felt like it was the Lord's work that we were able to [rebuild the church]," said church treasurer and clerk Robert Boggs, a Midway member since 1951. "We're coming up short on the contents, which had depreciated. But, financially, we'll do all right."

Church members were less than happy, however, to learn that two juveniles suspected of having set the church afire have escaped retribution — at least punishment by the state.

"It wasn't arson officials who dropped the ball," said Chuck Johnson, spokesman for the DeKalb County Department of Public Safety. "The arson unit had a good strong case, and they turned over all their information to juvenile authorities. It was just not prosecuted in a timely fashion."

The juveniles were arrested in August and charged with arson after one of them admitted to setting the fire and implicated the other, Mr. Johnson said.

The boys should have gone to

trial no later than October, but "apparently for whatever reason the juvenile solicitor didn't take it to trial by that date," Mr. Johnson said.

The boys' attorneys agreed to postpone the trial, but one of them stipulated that the case come to trial within 30 days. The other did not stipulate a time limit, the spokesman said.

Then, there was a change of personnel at Juvenile Court, and the 30 days lapsed without a trial. So, a judge dropped the charge on the case that had the 30-day stipulation, Mr. Johnson said.

Prosecution witnesses could not be located in the case of the other youth, and his charge was dropped as well, he said.

Meanwhile, Midway Baptist members have been picking up the pieces, trying to keep faith that they could build back what they lost.

Midway Baptist's pastor, the Rev. David Singleton, led services in a fellowship hall at Scottdale's Corinth Baptist Church while waiting for the church to be rebuilt. During that time, the active membership dwindled from about 110 to about 75, Mr. Boggs said.

"We lost about a third of our congregation. I don't know whether we're going to gain them back or not," Mr. Boggs said.

subject file:
Churches
MIDWAY BAPTIST

Written by Walter G. Knight Sr.

Sept. 14th, 1915.

Meeting called for the purpose of
organizing a Baptist Church to be
known as Midway
Rev. S. G. McWilliam, Pastor.

Invocation by Rev. James Young
on call for membership, 23 reported
bringing letters, the coming week
with care until letter could be
received

those desiring membership and known
as charter members were

- W. G. Knight Sr. (and wife) Sarah Jane
- H. F. Jackson " " " " " "
- C. D. Hall " " " " " "
- C. W. Knight " " " " " "
- R. B. Pleasant " " " " " "
- P. H. Weaver " " " " " "
- J. A. Knight " " " " " "
- J. M. Higgins " " " " " "
- H. J. Jackson " " " " " "
- J. W. Traeger " " " " " "

Rev Perry J. Fields and Chas an
Mrs E. J. Peyton

Pastor without opposition.
George C. Knight elected Clerk,

Board of Deacons composed of
H. F. Jackson - G. C. Knight
A. D. Peyton - E. J. Hall

Invocation by Rev. S. G. McWilliam.

Meeting 15th and 16th days.
Next - I am glad when they said
could see; let us go into the house
of the Lord. Closing prayer by
Rev Charles Stephenson.

Written by Walter G. Knight Sr

Sept. 17th, 1915.

Meeting called for the purpose of
constituting a Baptist Church to be
known as Midway
Rev. J. G. McWilliam, Pastor.
Long Association by Rev. James Young
on call for membership, 23 responded
bringings letters, by coming under
with can until letter could be
returned

Those desiring membership sent names
as shown members were

- W. G. Knight Sr, (and wife) Sarah Jane
- H. F. Patton " " " "
- C. G. Hall Nancy Ann
- G. W. Knight Emma Lou
- M. B. Plant Lilla Mae
- J. H. Leavelle Lilla Mae
- J. C. Knight Lilla Mae
- J. M. Higgins Nettie Emma
- J. G. Webb Merry Nell
- J. H. Franquin Lilla Mae

Rev Perry F. Fields and Chas on

Pastor without opposition
Henry C. Knight elected Clerk.

Band of Beacom Congregation of
H. F. Patton - G. C. Knight
A. D. Payton E. G. Hall

Message by Rev. J. G. McWilliam.

Meeting 1st 2nd and 3rd
Next - I know glad when they said
unto me; let us go into the house
of the Lord. Learning Prayer by
Rev Charles Stephenson.