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### **Baxter Church of Christ, Putnam Co., TN turns 100**

This Sunday, May 15, the Baxter Church of Christ on Buffalo Valley Road will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Special activities, including a luncheon, are planned, and everyone is invited.

The church is believed to have started over one hundred years ago, probably in the year 1897 when Brother Jeff Boles preached a series of gospel meetings in a brush arbor located near what is now a softball field. This property is now part of Cornerstone Middle School and belongs to Putnam County. This event marked the beginning of the Church of Christ in Baxter, Tennessee.

The following year Brother Boles's son, the illustrious H. Leo Boles, conducted a similar meeting that resulted in strengthening the church both numerically and spiritually.

Two of the first members of this early congregation were Rosette Halfacre and John Riley. Among the early leaders were Ned Sybert, B. Montgomery, Lem Palk, and Louis Lee. Elders of the early church were **R.L. Gentry**, G.R. Jackson, J.L. Lee and W.E. Sybert. The deacons were W.S. Sewell, W.H. Thomas, J.G. Halfacre, John Riley, and **Elmore Gentry**.

About the year 1900, a small band of Christians erected a frame building in which to assemble. By 1904, the church had approximately 70 members. The early church contributed much to the needy by donating money and supplying various needs. The members were active in all aspects of the Lord's work.

In 1922 the frame church building, which had been severely damaged by a storm, was replaced with a brick structure. Both the frame and brick buildings were located on the present parking lot.

J. Petty Ezell conducted the first meeting in the brick building. This meeting proved very successful, resulting in thirty-five additions to the church family. As the church in Baxter was in some aspects still in her infancy, a few doctrinal problems were resolved, and a new period of development began. The congregation was better organized, and a great deal more was accomplished for the cause of Christ.

Sometime later, Charles Green, Chester Patton, C.W. Coleman, E.C. Dowdy, and O.J. Lee were appointed to serve the congregation as elders. Evangelist H. Leo Boles later appointed Louis Johnson to serve as an elder.

On July 7, 1923, at the request of J. Petty Ezell, the deed to the church property was changed. Restrictive clauses were written into a new deed barring the use of musical instruments. This agreement is still in effect.

Through the years many distinguished ministers have preached at Baxter Church of Christ. In 1947, Ralph E. Kidd, a college student at Tennessee Tech, was secured as the first regular minister of the church. Land was secured and a six-room house was built for the minister the following year.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, it was decided that the congregation had outgrown its facilities and more parking space was needed. Land across the street from the old brick church building was secured from Mr. and Mrs. Will Sadler by trading the minister's home for the land. Brother W.G. Eaton was the minister, and a house was rented for him. Mr. and Mrs. Sadler moved to the minister's home, and plans were made for a larger church building with more parking spaces after the old church building was demolished.

This new building for the church at Baxter was completed in 1962, with an auditorium that would seat nearly 500, eleven classrooms, nursery, baptistery, office and restrooms. The first services were held December 2, 1962, with John Allen Chalk as the guest speaker.

A fully equipped multi-purpose building was later annexed to the main structure serving as a gathering place for fellowship meetings, classes and community services as authorized by the elders of the church.

Land was secured and a new minister's home was built at 105 Willow Street. This eight-room brick home was completed in 1964 and occupied for the first time in February that year by the Clayton Briley family.

In the early, pre-dawn hours of August 23, 1989, the Church of Christ building was destroyed by fire. A large crowd gathered and offered their assistance to the fire department that was working furiously to extinguish the blazes and keep the fire from spreading to the nearby homes and annex building of the church. They were successful in their effort to contain the blaze, but the building was destroyed. All the fixtures in the building were destroyed except a few library books.

Many people in the community expressed their concern over the loss of our meeting place. The United Methodist Church offered their facilities when they were not using them, as did Hopper & Huddleston Funeral Home. Mr. Frank Medley, principal of Upperman High School at the time, offered the school facilities. We accepted the school facilities and expressed our appreciation to all concerned for allowing us to use them until we could rebuild.

Plans were made immediately for the rebuilding of the church here in Baxter. J&S Construction Company was secured for the drawing of plans and the building of our new facility. Construction started around the first of November. The weather as well as the delay in getting some of the building materials caused the contractor to fall behind schedule. The building was completed in May, 1990. We held our first service in the new building on Sunday night, May 27, 1990.

The building has an auditorium that will seat approximately 364, and plans call for adding a balcony to seat an additional 214, if the need arises. There are seven classrooms, minister's office, a small library, nursery and baptistery. Much appreciation and thanks is due to Troy Phillips, who served as chairman of the building committee.

Those serving as elders at this time are Troy Phillips and Ernest Dyer. Serving as deacons are Robert Vinson, Russell Dyer and Chad Anderson.

The congregation is actively involved in several facets of the Lord's work, such as foreign mission work, local mission activities, and Bible school. Outstanding evangelists conduct Gospel meetings each year.

*Editor's note: This history of the Baxter Church of Christ was compiled by church member Linda Farley.*

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