

First Baptist Church

History

404 Avenue E - Farwell, Texas

Matt. 18:20 – “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Early 1953

In early March 1953, a group of people met in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack McManigal to discuss the possibility of organizing a church in Farwell. The early organizers were mostly members of the Texico-Farwell Baptist Church in Texico, New Mexico who felt the need for a church on the Texas side of the state line. Many longtime Farwell residents, including Dick Geries, Willie Hardage, Joe McWilliams, Dickie Magness, Jack McManigal, and W.M. Roberts were instrumental in planting this new church.

March 1953

On March 22, 1953, the group met with names of 126 people who expressed a desire to organize and become members of a Baptist church in Farwell. Of this group, 114 came on promise of letters from Texico, 1 from West Camp, 7 from Oklahoma Lane, and 4 from Lubbock. The meeting began with singing led by Walter Hardage and followed by Bro. W. F. Markham reading a scripture and leading in prayer. Bro. M. D. Durham, pastor of First Church Bovina was elected moderator and the First Baptist Church of Farwell was organized. Bro. Markham introduced Bro. Otis Holiday from Vernon, Texas who brought the message, “Camping in the Wilderness”. April 5, 1953 was set as the deadline for charter members, and by this date there were 136 charter members.

The newly formed congregation voted that ordained deacons in the fellowship be installed as deacons. Sterlyn Billington, Dick Geries, Willie Hardage and Joe McWilliams thus became the first deacons in First Baptist Church of Farwell. The first elected officers for the church were:

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| Church Clerk | Letha Jo (Mrs. Willie) Roberts |
| Church Treasurer | Joe McWilliams |
| Sunday School Superintendent | Dick Geries |
| Sunday School Secretary | Elsie (Mrs. Willie) Hardage |
| Choir Leader | Walter Hardage |
| Training Union Director | Willie Hardage |
| Training Union Secretary | Sterlyn Billington |
| Pianist | Audie (Mrs. Jack) McManigal |
| Finance Committee | Otis Branscum, Johnnie Williams, Walter Hardage, Murry Dial |
| Building Committee | Charlie Hromas, Jack McManigal, Dickie (Mrs. Clyde) Magness, Claude |
| | Rose |

Later Bill Garrett was also elected to the building committee and Joe McWilliams as treasurer of the building committee. Claude Rose, Sterlyn Billington, and Joe McWilliams were elected as trustees. The first pulpit committee was composed of the deacons.

August 1953

Initially the group met in the Farwell school gymnasium, using school classrooms for the different Sunday School departments and other church organizations. August 2, 1953, was a joyful day for members of the First Baptist Church! They saw a dream become a reality and now had their own building for worship. This was “move-in day” and Sunday School and worship services were held in the new (but unfinished) two-story educational building for the first time. Following the morning service, a basket lunch was served in the school cafeteria.

June 1953

The parsonage was also built in **1953**, and on June 10, Bro. J. D. Horton accepted the call to serve as the first pastor. He and Mrs. Horton were the first residents in the new parsonage.

August 1953

The first revival meeting for the church was held in August 1953 with several additions to the church including 16 baptisms. The first anniversary celebration was observed March 21, 1954. There were 184 in Sunday School that day and morning worship was followed by a basket lunch at noon and afternoon services. There were 15 additions to the membership that day. In May of 1954, the first Vacation Bible School was conducted with 8 young people giving their hearts to the Lord.

Bro. Horton served as pastor until July 1954. He was followed by E. J. Keith who led FBC from August **1954** to May 1958. Under Bro. Keith’s leadership, the educational building was completed and plans for the auditorium were studied, revised, and finalized. A cabin was built at the Plains Baptist Assembly near Floydada, Texas in June 1956.

The sanctuary construction was begun in July 1959 and was completed in the spring of 1960, during the tenure of Sidney Cox as pastor. Bro. Cox pastored the church from **1958** to 1961.

In **1961**, J. L. Bass became pastor of First Baptist Church. He served until November 1971. During this time, the church purchased a building for a mission in east Farwell. This mission later became the New Light Baptist Church. It became self-supporting in 1978. The second unit of the educational building was added in 1963, consisting of new classrooms and the pastor’s study. The library was started in 1963, and in 1971 the lot between the church and the parsonage was paved for parking.

In **1972**, Dr. Cliff Ennen succeeded Bro. Bass as the pastor of the church. In December of that year, the church began a bus ministry. In 1973 the church voted to redecorate the auditorium with new furniture and lights and also to purchase new choir robes and update the choir loft. In December 1974, Dr. Ennen led a group from FBC on a mission trip to Guatemala. In 1976 a mission trip was made to El Salvador. During Dr. Ennen's ministry, the church began sponsoring two churches in the Phoenix area. In 1976, the church resident membership was up to 576, and the church had 8 paid staff members. Dr. Ennen resigned in March 1977.

Dudley Bristow was called to be pastor of the church in **1977** and served until June 1982. Prior to Brother Dudley's move to Farwell, the church remodeled the parsonage. Missionary activities continued during Bro. Bristow's tenure, including the founding of the El Rancho De Los Ninos Children's Home in Guatemala. In 1977 a puppet ministry was formed by Pam Monk and Karen Bristow and the high school youth. The growing library was remodeled in 1981.

Pat Riley came to Farwell in October **1982** and served as pastor of FBC until 1987. In 1983, the church sent a group to participate in the building of a church in El Peten, Guatemala at El Rancho de los Ninos. In 1986, a new fellowship hall, kitchen, parlor, and additional classrooms were added to the church building. Also in 1986, Oklahoma Lane Baptist Church merged with First Baptist, adding 25 new members to the FBC enrollment. In 1987, the parlor was furnished and decorated with memorial funds.

In **1987**, Rick Sullivan came to pastor the church, and mission and building activities further expanded. During this time and through the 90's, the church made several mission trips to various locations including Brazil, New Mexico, and Arizona. In 1990, the church began a major remodeling project which included a new choir room, new offices, restrooms, and an expanded library. A local jail ministry was begun in 1992 and developed into a Sunday Bible study time for the inmates.

In December **1995**, Richard Laverty began his pastorate of FBC. The mission-minded congregation participated in mission trips to Spain, Michigan, Colorado, and New Mexico. The radio and jail ministries continued and a nursing home ministry also became part of the outreach activities. A class for teaching and nurturing new Christians gave special training to over 50 people. The Senior Adult group traveled together to several special events, and the young adults in FBC became actively involved in teaching and ministering to the people in our community. Children's Church became a vital part of worship each Sunday morning. In 2000, the church purchased a home to be used as a parsonage for the Youth Director.

Randy Mullin moved to Farwell in August of **2003** to be the new pastor. He served FBC until March 2006, faithfully continuing the mission-minded traditions of service to God, the church congregation, and the community.

Kyle Clayton was called to FBC to serve as the youth minister in October of 2005, and in July of **2006** he was called to be the new Senior Pastor. He has a heart for missions both locally and abroad. His greatest desire is to see God's people sharing their faith and seeing lives changed. In 2006 the Church Constitution and Bylaws were revised, and FBC also had a Silent-Bid Piano Auction selling several pianos which were not being used by the church. In 2007 an auditorium renovation was begun with the installation of florescent light fixtures. New carpeting, a new sound system, and new pews are planned projects for the near future. In July of 2009, he was called to Quail Creek Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas to be their youth minister where he is still serving God.

Dale Cain was called to FBC in the early fall of 2009. He came not as a pastor or interim pastor, but as a "transitional interim pastor. His purpose was to get to know us as a church, and to assess our needs so that we could grow and become a healthy church. He made us take a hard look at ourselves and helped us not only to identify problem areas, but also recognize our strengths. He served here until the July 17, 2011. During the period of time that Brother Dale served here, we did a complete renovation of the sanctuary, updated the kitchen flooring, completely remodeled the church parlor, did some updating to the church parsonage, and sold the Youth Pastor's house.

Russ Ponder was called to FBC in June of 2011 from the First Baptist Church in Hamlin, Texas. This was not Russ's first ministry here at FBC. In the prior years he had served as our youth minister, where our youth program began to blossom and grow thanks to his spirit filled commitment. Russ's complete and total faithfulness to God led him back to Farwell so serve as our Senior Pastor. God has given Russ a heart for this church and it's continuing to grow us. Since his arrival, we have seen the addition of a new Sunday school class, several new Bible studies, and the building of a new church website. Our media advancements include offering free internet services and also adding a QR code to our bulletin. We've hosted our first live Simulcast and are currently in the process of forming a committee to update our church roll. We have added sound panels to the fellowship hall, and added a beautiful handcrafted cross made by Stan Austin to our baptistery.

The first Church Secretary was Billie Blain. Before she joined the church staff, volunteers came in each week to print the church bulletins and take care of other secretarial jobs as needed. While Bro. Bass was pastor, Billie began working mornings only and just "temporarily". In just a few weeks Billie agreed to become a regular half-day staff member. After a few years the position became a full-time job and Billie served in this capacity until her retirement in 2003.

Holly Kirkland was the next church secretary. The job title was changed to Ministry Assistant, and Holly served a couple of years.

Sheran Martin became the Ministry Assistant in August 2005 and still served through July of 2009 when her family found a new church home.

David Pollard became the new church secretary in the fall of 2009 and continued in that position until January of 2012 when he moved with his family to Plainview, Texas. During the time that David served in this position his duties were many as we did not have a full time pastor during much of this period. He was quick to adapt to the needs our FBC and always willing to serve.

Leigh Ann Woods became the Ministry Assistant in January of 2012. After 25 years in the accounting business, God called her to this position and she is currently still serving.

Joe and Beulah McWilliams were the first church treasurers. They began their duties when the church was first chartered, and served in this capacity until 1985. Doyle and Susan Johnson next accepted this responsibility, serving from 1985 until 1998 when Kendall and Tracy Devault accepted the job. The Devaults continue to serve as treasurers at this time.

During the church's first 4 or 5 months while FBC was meeting in the Farwell School facilities, R.S. Tucker, who was the custodian for Farwell Schools, agreed to act as custodian after church services on Sundays and Wednesday nights. When the church moved into its first building, Ysleta Brown (Kittrell) was the first building caretaker. She was succeeded by Mabel Martin. Nadine Langston was the next custodian who served for many years. Leon London had been helping Nadine before her retirement and when she retired, Leon and Mary London took over the custodial duties of the church and are still keeping FBC clean today.

The building contractor for all the different phases of building was charter member Charlie Hromas. Throughout all building projects there were paid workers and many church members who volunteered their time and labor. From cleaning up building debris, to sanding, painting, or feeding the workers, many church members were always involved, enjoying a time of fellowship as they worked.

Since March 1953, First Baptist Church has been used by the Lord to make a difference in the community of Farwell. The church's building has been the site of many joyful celebrations as well as God's shelter in times of heartache and grief. FBC's Missions Committee's vision for this church is based on Acts 1:8, which reminds each one that we should be reaching our *Jerusalem*, which is Farwell; our *Judea*, which is Texas; our *Samaria*, which is our nation; and *The Ends of the Earth*.