

A SUMMARY OF HISTORY FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH TAPPAHANNOCK

The complete history of First Baptist Church Tappahannock, put in a book entitled *A Journal of History: First Baptist Church*, was researched and written by Deacon Lillian H. McGuire, the church's historian. The following Summary of History of First Baptist Church Tappahannock was written by Deacon Gina R. McGuire.

We, the members of First Baptist Church Tappahannock, would like to pay homage to our ancestors and say thank you for giving us a firm foundation that we have built on, and that we continue to build on.

First Baptist Church of Tappahannock, Virginia was founded in the year 1867. You see, when our ancestors were still enslaved, wherever they could find a place to worship, that's where they worshipped – out in the woods, in a slave's quarters, or wherever they could find themselves during the spring, summer, autumn or winter months. But then one day, the slaves' masters decided to allow the slaves to worship in the same church with them and the white congregation; the church consisted of members from all different denominations – Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians. As long as the slaves governed themselves by the rule "Do whatever your master tells you to do", this newly found religious gathering would work well. A second condition of this gathering was that the slaves had to worship in the gallery and the back pews of the church.

The masters' church was called The Interdenominational Old Free Church, also called The Tappahannock Chapel; this building, where the slaves and the white congregation worshipped in together, is the exact same building where the current Modern Cleaners building stands today on Duke Street, for those who are familiar with the area. But you know, although the slaves were grateful to master that they were allowed to worship God with the white congregation, they still longed for their own church.

After they got their freedom in 1865, in 1867, the freed slaves got the mind to establish their own church, and that's exactly what they did. They called their new church First Baptist Church, and as the name suggests, the church was the *first* Baptist church in the Town of Tappahannock. From that day forward, they worshipped under the name of the First Baptist Church. They still had to worship in meager places (in the woods, a member's quarters, or The

Tappahannock Chapel for those who continued to do so), but in the year 1873, they obtained a deed to build a church that would bring them all together, and it was erected in 1874, on a new street in Tappahannock called Virginia Street.

They had a good old time in that church building with that “*old time religion*” (humming, shouting amen, stomping their feet and clapping their hands). They did it for as long as they could, until the building started to deteriorate due to harsh weather conditions and needed repairs. In 1893, the church members decided to purchase a piece of land, and that is when they established their second building, *a brand new church building*, on the corner of Rt. 17 & 360 or Marsh Street and Church Lane; this is exactly where the church building stands today...right there on the highway in the town. The church, with its *tallll* steeple, is a great beacon of light!

Over the years, First Baptist Church has been blessed with new pastors to keep watch over our flock. Some of those pastors include Rev. James T. Wynn, who served for 24 ¾ years (wife Blanche), Rev. Dr. Marion R. Tapscott, who, to date, has been our longest serving pastor who served for 25 years (wife Rosa Beale), the late Rev. Dr. Vernon Keeve who served for 5 years, and our current pastor the *dynamic* – Rev. Cornelius Ruffin Holmes, who, to date, has served for 3 years. He was elected on September 6, 2017 and installed on February 4, 2018. Our *phenomenal* first lady is Mrs. Rita Woods Holmes.

Over the years, First Baptist Church has had two sons of the church...the late Rev. Dabney Carr Winston in the 19th century, ordained July 21, 1897, and the late Rev. Charles E. McGuire in the 20th century, ordained September 11, 1983.

Over the years, there have been sooo many church members, family members and friends that have come through our church doors. Also, over the years, new organizations have been founded. To name a few organizations... the Food Bank, the Gospel Chorus, the Performance Guild, and the Vegetable Ministry. The Vegetable Ministry is the vision of our current pastor, Rev. Holmes. An abundance of fresh garden vegetables, provided by the Holmes’ family garden, are dropped off at the homes of church members and friends in the community and in other vicinities.

Over the years, some new church officers have been installed. To name a few of those positions...the Director of the Youth, the Church Historian, and the Director of Church Programs.

Also, on April 29, 2018, to our existing deacon board which consisted of Deacons Robert Tompkins and James H. Cary, the following women were added in a monumental moment by becoming the first women deacons in the 153 year history of the church. The deacons are Deacons Lillian H. McGuire, Corine Smith, Ann Cary, Blanche Washington, Rena Shipp, Troy Burton, Brenda LeBlanc, and Gina McGuire. They were ordained by Rev. Holmes.

Over the years, we have had, many, renovations to our church building. Some renovations include a whole new addition added onto the church in 1998. Inside that new addition is a first time elevator, a bigger choir room, four bigger bathrooms, and three new classrooms. Beautiful french doors were also built that leads from the new addition of the church into the sanctuary. The new addition was added under the leadership of our former pastor, Rev. Dr. Marion R. Tapscott.

The First Baptist Church Family has had some ups and downs, and some highs and lows. Beginning on March 8, 2020 (the second Sunday), due to a pandemic called the Coronavirus, First Baptist Church, by law of the Governor of the State of Virginia, was forced to close the doors of its church building. How we would carry on from that point was an unanswered question. And then, through the insight and marvelous leadership of Rev. Holmes, we began worshipping by way of teleconference or telephone. *“Be still and know that I am God.”* We went back to the *“humble beginnings”* of our ancestors and worshipped using that *“old time religion.”* Eight months later (November), *we are weathering the storm!* Our Sunday morning church services are still uplifting with scripture, heartfelt prayers, and melodious singing. Also, the sermons are still powerful and impactful!

During the Coronavirus, we have celebrated our “special occasion” Sundays by way of teleconference. To date, those special occasion Sundays have been our Family and Friends Day 1st Sunday in June, Annual Homecoming 4th Sunday in September, Pastor’s Anniversary 3rd Sunday in October, and our Church Anniversary – 3rd Sunday - November 15, 2020. And through it all – coronavirus pandemic and all - our church doors remain open...153 years later! Praise God from whom *all* blessings flow!

With the many different personalities that worship together here at First Baptist Church, our members abide by Galatians 5:22-23...The Fruits of the Spirit. We definitely have to have

love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, goodness, faith, gentleness *and* temperance. There's no other way that we could have survived for 153 years! It has been God's grace, mercy and His word that has guided us along the way!

We've come this far by faith because without our faith, we would be like "a ship without a sail", *leaning on the Lord*; He props us up on our leaning side. *Trusting in His holy word* because His word gives us solace, *He's never failed us yet* because He keeps *right on, right on, right on* blessing us. *Oh, oh, oh, can't turn around* because it's too late! We believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. *We've come this far by faith. Amen.*