

"For the Lord is good: His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations." Psalm 100:5

1924-2024 One Hundred Years

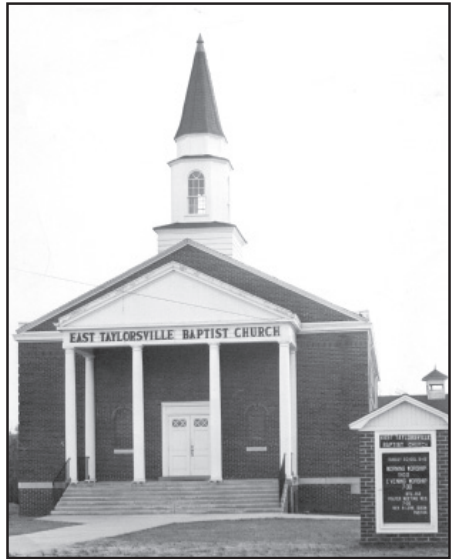
The Story of East Taylorsville Baptist Church



Church History



The first church building was completed in 1926.



The first brick structure was built in 1949.



The present sanctuary was completed in 1984.

1924-2024
One Hundred Years

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East Taylorsville Baptist Church was organized on February 10, 1924. There were 13 charter members of the church, as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. T.J. Fortner
Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Chamberlain
Mr. and Mrs. S.G. Earp
Mr. W.J. Fortner
Mr. and Mrs. Ishamel Pennell
Miss Lizzie Robinette
Mr. W. J. Robinette
Mrs. Estelle Chapman
Mr. Parker Pennell

Two others, Mr. Lincoln Brown and Mr. Thad Campbell, were received under the watch care of the church at the first service, making a total of 15 members. Some descendants of these original 15 people are members today. For example, the Ishamel Pennells have had family members who have been members through the whole 100 years. Scottie Barnes is one of those descendants.

Mr. R. L. Chamberlain and Mr. Thad Campbell served as the first Deacons of the new church. Mr. S. G. Earp served as the first clerk.

However, prior to the organization of the church, a group met in a two-room house in the North State Mill Village. They held a prayer service each Wednesday night for several months. Realizing the need for a Sunday school, Mrs. S. G. Earp urged the group to start one. They took the partition and chimney out of the two-room house and started a Sunday school with four classes: classes for

ladies and men, a young people's class, and a class for children. In 1922, they had organized themselves into a regular Sunday school, with about 50 members. Robert Chamberlain was elected superintendent and Mrs. S. G. Earp was elected secretary/treasurer, a position she held for many years. At the start, they used only the Bible in the Sunday school. But a little later, they decided to order Baptist literature to help them in the Bible study. From this small group, the East Taylorsville Baptist Church was organized in 1924. The first building, a frame structure, was erected in 1926, and used until a brick auditorium was erected in 1949 and rebuilt in 1984.

The 37th annual session of the Alexander Baptist Association was held in 1924 at Concord Baptist Church. On a call for new churches, two churches asked to join. They were East Taylorsville Baptist Church and Millersville Baptist Church. East Taylorsville was taken into the Association with 47 members. East Taylorsville's messengers were T. J. Fortner, H. T. Campbell and R. L. Chamberlain.

Rev. A. W. Wilcox was the first pastor of the church. Other pastors were: Rev. B. F. Peeler, who was ordained by the church, and served three consecutive terms, Rev. E. V. Bumgarner, Rev. A. E. Watts Sr., Rev. C. C. Holland, Rev. Maurice Baker, Rev. A. B. Bumgarner, Rev. R. Love Dixon, Rev. Ernest A. Banner, Rev. Douglas V. Willett, Rev. Gary Jennings, Rev. Craig Hamlin and Rev. Jamie Steele.

The 1933 minutes show Rev. C. C. Holland as pastor with a salary of \$158.83 for the year with total expenditures of \$240.13. The church property was valued at \$1,600.00.

The Alexander Baptist Association first met at East Taylorsville in 1937. The membership at that time was 231. Expenditures for that year were \$206.47. Church services were held on the first and third Sunday each month. There were Wednesday, Wednesday night and Thursday sessions, all at the church. When the

Association met at East Taylorsville in 1951, church membership was double that of 1937.

The 1949 sanctuary was begun May 20, 1949, under the leadership of Rev. A. B. Bumgarner, the Pastor, and the first service was held in this building on December 25, 1949. The building committee was composed of James White, R. W. Meredeth, L. G. Sweet, Maurice Barnes and Frank Watson. The Finance Committee was composed of Marvin Bowman, Garfield Childers, Nathan Davis, and Howard Deal. This new building had Sunday school rooms in the basement and two on the main floor of the building.



At the close of Rev. Bumgarner's ministry of nearly seven years, the dedication and cornerstone laying ceremonies were held. A number of ministers took part in the service, including Dr. F. A. Bowers, who had become the supply pastor until another pastor would be called.

The church experienced a remarkable growth during Rev. Bumgarner's ministry. It moved from two services each month to a full-time program of work. The Sunday school grew from a class school with approximately 100 enrolled to a full departmentalized school with 350 enrolled. A Training Union, Brotherhood and a WMU with Junior and Intermediate GA's and Sunbeams was organized. The church membership had grown from 240 to 480, and the offering had increased from \$1,400 to nearly \$20,000 a year. The 1949 sanctuary and a pastorium (parsonage) beside the church were built and paid for.

Rev. Bumgarner was a graduate of Wingate College and Lenoir-Rhyne College, served as moderator of the Alexander

Association, a member of the general board of the North Carolina State Convention and was President of the Interdenominational Pastor's Conference in the Evangelistic Crusade in Alaska.

After leaving Taylorsville, he served as pastor of Wrightboro Baptist Church near Wilmington, NC, and pastor of Spencer Baptist Church in Spindale, NC. And, after Rev. Bumgarner left, Dr. F. A. Bowers of Morganton, NC, served as interim pastor until Rev. R. Love Dixon was called.

Within a short time, additional Sunday school rooms were needed and a building fund was started for an educational building. The architectural department of the Sunday school board drew the plans. After careful planning, they completed a plan for a three-story educational building with six assembly rooms, 35 classrooms, a library, six restrooms, a kitchen and a kitchenette.

It also contained the church offices. The Educational Building was built under the leadership of Rev. R. Love Dixon who became pastor in 1953. It was named The



Meredith Building, in memory of Dessie Meredith. The building and equipment cost about \$50,000. To complete payment, they borrowed \$22,900 in December 1959, to be paid over a period of 12 years. However, the church was able to pay it off in 3½ years. Offerings increased from \$1,779 to \$3,419, and gifts through the Cooperative Program increased from \$578 to \$2,016. Membership additions during Rev. Dixon's ministry were 279, 185 by baptism and 94 by letter. The church and Sunday school grew until they were averaging an attendance of 250 in Sunday school. On October 1, 1959, they had an enrollment of 428 with 242 present. The teaching staff had grown through the years from 4 to 71, including general officers. They now had 12 departments fully graded, including a mission

station at the local rest home. Two or three more departments were later added.

Another growth was seen in the training program of the church. In 1959, 192 awards were received and 15 diplomas were earned. The 15 receiving diplomas received them in caps and gowns on August 6, 1959, in a special commencement exercise .

On December 6, 1959, Mr. Edd K. Elliot, General Superintendent of the Baptist State Convention was notified by the Raleigh office that the Sunday school had met all the requirements of a standard Sunday school. A special service was held February 7, 1960, at 11:00 A.M. in recognition of that fact. Dr. Herman Isley of the Sunday school department of the Baptist State Convention presented the standard to the church and brought a message at the morning service. Also present were Associate Superintendent of Missions, Rev. A. E. Watts, and Associate Sunday School Superintendent Rev. I. V. Couch.

The Association again met at the church in 1960 after the building was completed. During his ministry at East Taylorsville, Rev. Dixon was a faithful worker in the Alexander Association. He served as Vice-Moderator for one year, president of the Pastor's Conference for two years, and member of the general board for over five years. For three years, he held a service at the Alexander County Hospital and at the county jail. For eight years, he taught the Sunday school lesson at the Shady Rest Home every Wednesday evening at 5:30 P.M. He was a native of Cleveland County and a graduate of Wingate College. After leaving Taylorsville, Rev. Dixon became Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Gastonia, NC.

Dr. F. A. Bowers of Morganton, NC, again served as interim pastor for some time and then Dr. B. E. Morris of Charlotte, NC, was called as interim pastor. Dr. Morris also taught in the Association Preacher's School and brought the message at the annual Association Meeting. He was pastor at Greystone Baptist

Church in Durham for over 20 years. He is well known for his teaching and leadership at the Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute.

Rev. Ernest A. Banner assumed his duties in May 1964. He came from First Baptist Church, Hilton Head, SC. He had also held pastorates at Boone, NC, and Beaufort, SC. He was a native of Boone, NC.

Plans were made during the summer after Rev. Banner became pastor to completely renovate the sanctuary and to build a new parsonage at a different location. The old parsonage was disposed of and moved to another location and remodeled as a private home. Construction began on these two projects in October 1964. The renovation and the furnishings for the sanctuary cost \$41,000. It included new furnishings, new stained glass windows, new carpet and air-conditioning of the building. The construction of the new four-bedroom parsonage was done mainly by members of the church and hired labor at a cost to the church of \$28,000. The newly renovated sanctuary and parsonage were dedicated on Sunday, February 21, 1965.

Rev. Banner resigned from the pastorate of the church on December 1, 1966, effective on December 25, after serving East Taylorsville for 2½ years. He left to volunteer to enter the military to serve as a chaplain of the U.S. Army. He spent eight weeks of orientation training at Fort Hamilton, NY. After this, he began his duty at Fort Riley, Kansas. His family remained in Taylorsville until he began his duty at Fort Riley and then joined him there. After several months of duty there, he was sent to Vietnam. His family resided in their new home at Newland, NC. Upon completion of his tour of duty in Vietnam, he was assigned to Alaska.

Rev. Ernest C. Robinson, a dedicated layman from Hickory, NC, who while working with Superior Cables Co. in Hickory was also doing interim work in some of our neighboring counties, was called to supply until a full-time pastor was called. Rev. Robinson

was loved and respected by the membership during his stay, and began an emphasis on a youth program in our church.

Rev. Douglas V. Willett, a native of Durham, NC, was called to East Taylorsville Baptist Church and assumed duties in March 1967. He received his education at Palm Beach Junior College, Campbell College, and Southeastern Theological Seminary. He had also held pastorates at East Erwin Baptist Church and Carroll Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, NC. The Rev. and Mrs. Willett, the former Mary Ellen Berry, of Durham, had three children: Allen, Todd and Jatana. During Rev. Willett's pastorate with the church, Mr. Dennis Walls accepted the call of Associate Pastor. He was ordained to the ministry on Oct. 15, 1967. He had formerly served as Youth Director at East Taylorsville. A native of Lillington, NC, Dennis terminated his ministry as Associate Pastor to continue his education at Atlantic Christian.



Also, Mr. Albert R. Childress came as Minister of Music and Education during this time. Mr. Childress was ordained by East Taylorsville to the gospel ministry. He later resigned to accept a call to Bethesda Baptist in Durham, NC, as Director of Christian Education.

Mr. Lanny Smith of Mooresville, NC, became the third Minister of Music, Youth and Education. Lanny received his B.A. from Wake Forest University. From 1966 to 1969, he was Assistant Personnel Director for two textile companies in Mooresville. He was married to Sandy Rayfield during this time. In 1969, he became Minister of Youth and Evangelism at Florida Street Baptist Church in Greensboro, NC, a position he held until he joined the staff of East Taylorsville Baptist Church in January 1971. In June 1975, he

left East Taylorsville to accept a similar position at Thrift Baptist Church in Charlotte. In 1983, Lanny and Sandy moved to Morganton. Lanny became the Minister of Music, Youth and Education, as well as pianist, at Mount Home Baptist Church. He was there for the next 30 years, until his retirement, at which time Lanny and Sandy moved back to Taylorsville, becoming members again at East Taylorsville Baptist Church. The Smiths have two married children (Chad and Sheri) and five grandchildren.

Rev. Willett resigned in May of 1971 to accept the pastorate of Haverhill Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, FL. During Rev. Willett's ministry here, the Evangelistic Teen Crusaders were formed. They helped in revivals, youth rallies and crusades. Mr. Waites McLeod was business manager for the Crusaders as well as being in charge of child evangelism for the Team. Waites was a student at Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute and a licensed minister.



The fellowship hall and lower hallway of the education building were remodeled while Rev. Willett was pastor. The paved parking areas were added to accommodate the congregation.

Gary W. Jennings became the pastor of East Taylorsville Baptist Church in November 1971. Rev. Jennings was a graduate of East Tennessee State University with a Bachelor of Social Work degree. He was married to the former Linda Sturgill of Kingsport, Tenn. Rev. Jennings was pastor of Sunnyside Baptist Church in Kingsport for 4½ years. He had also served as a counselor in the juvenile court system.



During the year 1971-72, East Taylorsville Baptist Church experienced some long-awaited victories. The total baptisms were 21, with 49 total additions during the year. This was the leading church in total additions for the Alexander Baptist Association. Finances grew to provide the best year, stewardship-wise, of any the church had experienced.

Almost half of the church's remodeling plans were accomplished during that one year. The sanctuary was painted inside and out. The kitchen was completed and the nursery remodeling was started, to be finished in the 1972 calendar year. All hallway areas in the educational annex were panelled.

Under Pastor Jennings' leadership, the church continued to grow and there have been about 11 men called into full-time ministry since 1970. In September 1977, the church broke ground on a new Family Ministries Center, dedicated to Elsie Pennell. The new building contained a 10,000 square foot gymnasium, fellowship areas, classrooms and church offices.

In October 1982, East Taylorsville had to address the issue of a lack of seating for the Sunday morning worship service. The

original sanctuary was just too small. Plans were made to build a new sanctuary. The old building was demolished and the new



auditorium was built on the old basement. The enlargement of the auditorium enabled the church to seat more than 650 people. The congregation was out of the auditorium for 11 months, during which time the congregation met in the Family Ministries building, with the gym doubling as an auditorium. A number of church members did a lot of the work, enabling the cost of the project to be reduced by 50 percent. Contributions for a 12-month period during this time reached a record of \$316,000.

At this same time, the church was able to purchase two additional acres of land to provide 62 more parking spaces.

The dedication of the new sanctuary was held on Sunday, October 28, 1984. Two of the original founding church members, Texie Pennell and Estelle Chapman, were able to attend the dedication, along with former pastor R. Love Dixon. Texie Pennell actually cut the ribbon to dedicate the new sanctuary while she was lying on a stretcher. She was 100 years old! Donations from church members enabled this building to be paid for in just one year.

Building continued under the leadership of Pastor Jennings. In early October 1991, a new Children's Education Building was completed next to the main sanctuary. The building was named the Daniels Building, in memory of Lary Daniels. It contained 9,000 square feet of classrooms and facilities for crib babies through kindergarten on the upper floor, and classrooms for almost 190 children in first through sixth grade on the lower floor.

Rev. Jennings continued as senior pastor of East Taylorsville Baptist Church until December 31, 2001. During that time, he also started and served as President of Alexander Funeral Service. After he resigned from East Taylorsville, he continued to preach in over a dozen different churches throughout western North Carolina as an interim pastor.

After serving as associate pastor of East Taylorsville since December 1996, Rev. Craig Hamlin became the pastor on January 1, 2002. He resigned in 2005 and Rev. Jamie Steele, who was serving as associate pastor, became the new pastor.

Under Rev. Steele's leadership as Senior Pastor, the church continued to grow. In 2013, a large new auditorium was completed and named in honor of Rev. Gary Jennings and family. The Jennings Family Ministry Building provided new Sunday School rooms, a kitchen, offices and multi-purpose auditorium for special services and church fellowship meals. It can seat as many as 1,000 people.

In 2020, COVID became a reality. After a service in the sanctuary on Sunday, March 15, it became clear that the church could not continue to meet together in the normal way. No services were held the next week. But by Sunday, March 29, the staff had figured out how to hold "drive-in" services in the back parking lot.

When the Jennings Family Ministry Building had been built, a small outdoor fellowship "porch" had been added. This looked



over the parking lot and was a perfect place for a pulpit. On Sunday, March 29, the congregation arrived in their cars. As they entered the parking lot, they were handed a program and then directed by staff on how to park so they were facing the outdoor "pulpit." The programs told

everyone how to tune their car radios to a frequency on which the service would be broadcast. Sharon Adkins led singing and attendees sang along in their cars. Then Rev. Steele gave the morning's message. No other services were held inside the church during this time.

By mid-June, it became clear that services could move back inside. But instead of meeting in the sanctuary, the congregation met in the Jennings Family Ministry Building. Chairs were set up with extra width between each row, and the congregation was instructed on how to sit with their families but leave extra spaces. Except for special occasions like baptisms, the church continues to meet in the Jennings Family Ministry Building to this day.

Rev. Steele served until he resigned in February 2024. The church deacons asked Executive Pastor Kevin White to serve as the primary pastor until a new pastor could be found. A Pastor Search committee was selected and is continuing its work to find a new Senior Pastor. On October 27, 2024, a vote was held for Rev. Kevin White to become the Senior Pastor of East Taylorsville Baptist Church.

The current staff of East Taylorsville Baptist Church includes the following:

Rev. Kevin White – Executive Pastor
Justin Siniard – Youth Director
Elizabeth Walker – Children's Director
Andrea Pennell – Music Director
Tracy Russell – Secretary, Church Clerk

One hundred years after East Taylorsville Baptist Church began, the church membership has grown from 15 to over 1,200 members. Annual expenditures have increased from \$240 to budgets as high as \$1,154,175. Now, one hundred years after its beginning, East Taylorsville Baptist Church continues to guide people into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

This booklet was printed on October 30, 2024.

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