

The Next Fifteen Years-A Period of Stability 1936-1951

Rev. John H. Geer was called to be leader in 1936. It was during his tenure that my awareness of the church and its meaning became apparent. The church became a very important place for the youth in the community as he focused so much attention to the building of programs to enhance their spiritual growth.

During these fifteen years, the church really flourished. The church was used frequently during the week for church and community meetings. Rev. Geer led the members in many fund-raising activities. These funds were used to provide many improvements to the church and parsonage; a baptismal pool was installed in the church and a coal-burning furnace was purchased as well as an electric water fountain and a new piano.

A brief description of some of the various programs that were already established as well as other new ones follows showing how Rev. Geer's leadership enhanced them.

Sunday School

At ten o'clock every Sunday morning, many adults and children were found in Sunday school. Rev. Geer attended these sessions on the second and fourth Sundays as he pastored other churches on the first and third Sundays. I can remember the superintendency of Deacon Willie Luscious Pope who served well until he moved away in the mid-forties. Following him was Deacon Miles H. Brittain who helped make Sunday school a place that young people wanted to be.

The sessions were very organized and a no-nonsense atmosphere prevailed. Many of the teachers were regular teachers in the schools and many students attended because of this. Some of these teachers were: Mrs. Nellie Stanglin Brittain, Ms. Hattie Freeman, Mrs. Essie T. Bell, Principal John H. Jackson, Principal Williams, Ms. Sarah J. Marsh, Mrs. Rosa G. Warthen and Mr. Reese Booker.

Members had the opportunity to attend and participate in the regional Sunday School Union which was held on the last week-end of those months that carried a fifth Sunday. These were held at various member churches and it gave us an opportunity to visit other sections of the county. Delegates who were sent were expected to return the following Sunday to give a full written report.

Vacation Bible School

The second and third weeks in June were devoted to Vacation Bible School which was held from 9 'til 12. It was run very much the same as Sunday school. We were expected to know all of the books of the bible and other pertinent information in order to receive a Certificate of Participation. Springfield held its sessions first, then the Methodists and Presbyterians held theirs. Sometimes we attended sessions at the Catholic Church and we were taught by the Catholic Sisters. By the time all these sessions were over it was time to return to regular school and we shared what we had learned at Vacation Bible School.

Special Events

Every special holiday/event was a celebration at the church. One event we were expected to attend was January 1, New Year's Day and celebration of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. This program was always well

attended and the church was filled to capacity. There was always a representative from First Baptist Church who reminded us of the relationship of Springfield to them and how they supported our growth.

At these meetings portions of the Emancipation Proclamation were read and we were reminded to value our freedom and to continue to seek to gain as much knowledge as possible. We were reminded of our forefathers and what they had endured as slaves. Rev. Lewis Williams and others were remembered as those who had survived this institution and had not succumbed to self-pity and hopelessness, but had moved forward to help uplift their people. We always sang **all** verses to "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" and we had to know who had composed it if we were asked. The last part of the service was devoted to the singing of spirituals.

Usher's Boards

There were Junior and Senior Usher's Boards. The Junior ushers served on the Fourth Sundays during Junior services and assisted the Senior ushers for special occasions. We were very proud of our uniforms and we performed our duties well. We were responsible for knowing and using proper parliamentary procedure. Under the leadership of Miss Hattie Freeman, the home economics teacher at the school, we held many fund raisers toward the purchase of the electric water fountain for the church.

The Baptist Training Union

These sessions were held from 6-8 p.m. on Sunday evenings and were an extension of the Sunday school. They were well attended for it gave the young people something to do as there were no movies on Sundays and we did not own televisions.

Regular Service

The second Sunday of each month at 3 p.m. we gathered for the main service. Sometimes we, the young people, would attend the prayer service that preceded the regular service. There the songs were usually raised to be sung in short or long meter; this was left to the discretion of the leader. Whoever volunteered to pray always knelt at the chair that had been placed at the front of the church. At the end of the prayer service the Senior Choir would march from the vestibule to the choir loft while singing "Holy, Holy, Holy." Rev. Geer's wife, Eileen, was the pianist and she played with a jazzy beat. There were many soloists who could set the congregation on fire as they raised their angelic-like voices. Some of the soloists were: Laura Emma Finnell, Deacon Eddie Finnell's mother, who could sing "Precious Lord" and "Something Within" like none other: Nellie Stanglin Brittain, youngest daughter of Nellie Williams Stanglin, did a rendition of "When I've Done the Best I Can" that would have many of the members clapping and shouting; Carrie Bell Stokes Chapman, niece of Nellie Williams' Stanglin, would set the church a rocking with "Yes God Is Real."

After the good singing had paved the way for a moving sermon, Rev. Geer would take the floor. The a-men corner was on fire by then. His messages always carried words of encouragement for all, then he would address whatever problem the community was facing at the time. The youth were challenged to be good and to prepare themselves for life.

Then came the Communion service which was begun as always, with the singing of "There Is a Fountain." As the bread and wine were served somebody would burst into song;- sometimes it would be Sister Isabella Richardson, whose voice was very strong in spite of her being in her eighties. (She always sat on the left side of the church, second row, first seat.) If anyone sat there before she arrived, they would have to move to another seat.) She was never opposed. As soon as she paused at the end of what seemed the fifth stanza of a song, Mrs. Judy Hill, or Mattie Lou Mays or Carrie Fanning would burst into the singing of their favorite hymns or spirituals. There were others too who would join in this celebration. This continued until the pastor raised his hands for the benediction. The congregation would then join in fellowship by shaking hands with each other and embracing. The service was closed with the singing of "God Be With you."

Revivals

Revivals were held annually the second and third weeks in September. The church would be filled to capacity. Young and old sinners found their way to the "mourners bench." Ministers coaxed them "to leave their sins behind." Among the ministers who were favorites included Rev. Adam Welborn, who had been born and raised in the community, and Rev. Harvey Smith. When I was eight years of age, September 1942, I answered the call when Rev. Smith was the guest minister. When the ministers came down to receive us and to hear our testimony, Rev. Geer put his arms around me and said, "Cecelia, we are glad that you have come forward tonight. Welcome." He had a way with youth that endeared us to him.

Baptisms

These were performed in the pool that was constructed in the woods. It was located at the bottom of the hill behind the school. The stream that flowed over the rocks was diverted to run into the pool. Every baptismal service was begun at the church with a prayer, then we followed the pastor to the pool. We were all dressed in white robes and as we walked we sang "Take Me to the Water to Be Baptized." Following the ceremony, we would, sing hymns all the way back to the church, where we received the right hand of fellowship.

A Special Singing Group

Two years before Rev. Geer resigned, he asked for the organization of a group of singers that would combine the Junior and Senior Choirs. This was done and the group was called, "The John H. Geer Chorus. They sang exceptionally well and they had the opportunity to travel to many neighboring churches in the region. They helped to further spread the message and history of Springfield.

Good-Byes to the Church

The members were very saddened when Rev. Geer submitted his resignation in 1951. It made up focus on all the many, good and exciting programs he had enhanced and implemented while he was in service at Springfield.

His farewell to the church was a farewell for me as well; I graduated from high school and I left for Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia.