

The History of Inman Park Baptist Church

In 1886, evangelist and businessman, Dwight Lyman Moody created the Chicago Evangelization Society, for the "education and training of Christian workers, including teachers, ministers, missionaries and musicians who may completely and effectively proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ." After the founder's death, the college was renamed in honor of Moody.

Our church was formed in The Year of our Lord, 1930. It was led by J.R. Kirby, who was a graduate of The Moody Bible Institute. Kirby and nineteen charter members joined together in worship in the vacant storefront of Browning's Furniture Store. This congregation called itself "The Florence Villa Baptist Church".

It was a humble beginning. The previous year, on "Black Tuesday", 29 October 1929, the Stock Market experienced a catastrophic crash. The year 1930 marked the beginning of The Great Depression. The worldwide economic decline would last for over a decade and would see a 25% unemployment rate in The United States. It was a dark time for America and for the world. It was a time of dire physical and spiritual need. Many took solace in their Faith. This small body of believers at Florence Villa Baptist did all they could to minister to the impoverished community.

The small Florence Villa Baptist congregation initially had no money for pews, so they sat on orange crates as they worshiped in their little church. The Central Florida area was beginning to become a major producer of citrus, so there was an availability of these makeshift pews. One of the area's first citrus processing centers was The Florida Machinery Company in Lucerne Park, which started about the same time as the church. In the 1940's the need arose to create techniques to produce frozen concentrated orange juice to provide a source of Vitamin C for our troops in Europe. This need spurred the economic growth of Central Florida through the citrus industry and aided in the recovery from the Great Depression. As the little town grew, so did the little church. After outgrowing their original building, the church was granted permission by the local school board to have services in the Florence Villa School.

In 1938, tragedy struck. The Florence Villa School was completely destroyed by fire. The church records and hymnals perished in the flames. Undaunted, and with their Faith unshaken, the congregation reorganized and rose from the ashes. Focusing not on the tragedy, but upon the opportunity to serve God in a greater capacity, they began construction of their own church building.

The sanctuary was constructed by the funds and the labor of the community of Believers. In August of 1938 the first service was held in the new church. There was insufficient room for the Sunday School classes, so classes were held on the front porches of the homes of church members. Later, makeshift structures of rough-hewn lumber and palmetto-thatched roofs were made. Burlap bag cloth was used for walls to protect the group from sun, wind and rain.

After moving into the new building, the group officially called Kirby as pastor. He declined the formal position, but continued to lead the church until a minister could be found. The church still could not afford to pay an adequate salary for a full-time pastor. In spite of this, in 1939, the Rev. Harry Giles accepted the call as the pastor of Florence Villa Baptist. He led the church until 1941.

The Rev. Walter Matheny served as pastor until 1944. During this time, the church became affiliated with The Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC was formed in 1845 in Augusta Georgia. It is the largest Baptist Denomination in the world and the largest U.S. "Protestant" group.

One Sunday, the pastor had a young friend come as a guest speaker. Giles' friend had attended Bob Jones College in Cleveland Tennessee and had transferred to The Florida Bible Institute (Now Trinity College of Florida) in 1937. The 22-year-old student was named "Billy Graham". By 1949, Graham would attain celebrity status and would eventually become the most prolific evangelist of the 20th century.

The Rev. Harrison Crews served as pastor from 1944 to 1947. During this time the church constructed an off-site educational facility in a nearby location.

The Rev. Leslie Horn served as pastor from March 1948 until the September of 1949. He departed to continue his studies at The New Orleans Seminary.

A pastorium was built during the ministry of B.A. Hawkins (1949-1954).

In the June of 1954, the Rev. Henry Ross took over as pastor. Construction began on the present (2013) sanctuary in March of 1955. The church was build adjacent to Inman Park. This city park is named after Dr. F.W. Inman, who in 1887, built the Florence Villa Hotel near Spring Lake, just to the south of the church's current location. The church would change its name to reflect its new location. In late 1955, Inman Park Baptist Church opened its doors for worship.

Ross departed in 1957 and in October of the same year the Rev. Clyde Kendall became pastor. On August 31, 1961, he departed to become a full time evangelist.

In October of 1958, the Salvation Army opened its headquarters in the former Inman Park Baptist Church building.

The Rev. Ormond R. Wolfram served as interim minister for four months beginning on March 12, 1961, before accepting the full-time position. He resigned in 1964.

The Rev. Jack Nightingale began his eleven-and-a-half year ministry in the June of 1965. From 1970 until 1972 Bill Baker served as Minister of Music. The Rev. Raymond Bishop took over this position in 1972 and also served as Youth Minister. He resigned in 1973. Mrs. Ernestine Taylor served as music director from January 1975 until April of 1977. Mrs. Diana Doughton served as Education and Youth Director from October of 1975. Her husband Walter Doughton served as (part-time) Assistant Pastor between February and September of 1976.

The Rev. Jimmy Rogers began his service as pastor in June of 1977. Harlan Thorne was called as Minister of Youth and music during Roger's time as minister. He held that position until 1979. Thorne was replaced by Jeff Wilson. He served as part-time music director until 1980. Robin Tomberlin then assumed the position. He was in turn, followed by Jim Keating. Keating resigned in 1982.

In 1981 Rev. Rogers resigned as pastor, and was replaced by The Rev. Mike Holland (June 14, 1981- 1983). Upon leaving Inman Park, the Rev. Holland accepted the call to pastor a church in Jacksonville.

Paul "Pepper" Puckett, Jr. took over as part time music director after Keating's departure. During this time, Rich Stewart served as Director of Education and Family Ministries.

In 1981 the church purchased the Reed property and renovated Conerly Hall into the church office.

On August 1, 1984, Hal Rose became the pastor of Inman Park Baptist. He remained until 1986. In October of the same year, the Rev. Harold Lippart was called as interim pastor. The Rev. William R. Elrod assumed the full-time position on July 1, 1987. James T. Lochridge served as associate pastor from November 9, 1987 until May of 1990.

On February 3, 1991 a fire in the balcony of the sanctuary caused extensive damage. It was only by the grace of God that the entire building was not lost. During renovations, services were held in the Educational Building. It was not until June 16, 1991 that the congregation was able to resume worship in the main sanctuary. On August 11, a rededication ceremony was held, reaffirming the church mission to serve The Lord.

We are still adding information on our history from 1991 to Present

Pastor Randy Elrod

Matthew Monroe

Our current pastor, Wade Singletary, was born and raised in Sanford, Florida.

He is a graduate of Carson-Newman University (BA) and Reformed Theological Seminary (MA in Theological Studies and MA in Biblical Studies). He has also studied at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Oxford University (UK), and Hindu University of America.

Wade has pastored churches in Tennessee and Florida. In 1991, he was honored with the Cult/World Religions Consultant of the Year Award by the Southern Baptist Convention.

Wade is professor of World Religions, Ethics and Humanities at Polk State College in Winter Haven.

[This history of Inman Park Baptist Church was graciously compiled by Mark Edward Cody.](#)