

# Heath Church, Lexington, NC

## *“A History...”*

Heath Church was founded on June 17, 1956. It was incorporated as a non-profit corporation on May 20, 1976. In its Articles of Incorporation the purpose of the church was cited in the following paragraph:

*The purposes for which the corporation is organized are to teach the principles of the Christian religion and to spread its influence throughout the state and the nation and the whole world, (and) to operate and maintain a church or churches to improve the morals and the beliefs of the people.*

Though the above statement does not include and name *all* aspects of the purpose and ministry of Heath Church, it certainly sets forth the basic premise for its beginning, and the general foundation for its continued existence today. Heath Church is an organization and a place in which, and from which, the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ can be advanced. Its purpose is to encourage and edify the believers who are a part of its constituency, and to evangelize and bring to Christ, those who do not know Him.

The history of Heath Church had its beginnings when a group of 30 – 40 people, under the leadership of Mr. Dayton Jones, decided to “start a Sunday School.”

Mr. Jones, who was in the furniture manufacturing business, was not a preacher, but had been an influential Sunday School teacher for many years at other churches. Under his leadership, the new band of worshippers started a Sunday School in the home of Gurney and Effie Myers on Light Road in Thomasville, NC.

A hand-written note (author unknown), dug out of a back corner of an old Heath Church filing cabinet states,

*Dayton Jones started the Sunday School at Gurney & Effie’s home. We were there two Sundays, June 17<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup>, 1956. We found a building in Johnstontown that we could rent and moved in it July 1, 1956...*

And so it was, that The Community Sunday School (forerunner of Heath Church) was begun! Mr. Dayton Jones, its founder, continued to teach the adult Sunday School class for many years. He passed away on August 22, 1984.



**Carrie & Dayton Jones circa 1954**

The “building in Johnstontown that we could rent” was a white frame building on Lake Road that had been used as a potato warehouse. Its owner was Mr. Manley Jordan. After the rental was agreed upon, the fledgling congregation set about the task of transforming the old building into a suitable place for worship.

Trash was cleaned up, wooden straight chairs were purchased, a podium was built, and the new (old) building was filled with eager worshippers! The smell of rotting potatoes and sounds of scurrying mice were now replaced by the sight of faithful parishioners and sounds of happy worship.

A penciled note in a stenographer’s book records the vital statistics of that first official “Tater House” meeting on July 1, 1956:

Class #1	Teachers: Audrey Sechrest, Nancy Emblar	Present: 7	Offering: \$2.45
Class #2	Teacher: Effie Myers	Present: 3	Offering: \$1.70
Class #3	Teacher: Carrie Jones	Present: 1	Offering: \$1.00
Class #4	Teacher: Dayton Jones	Present: 12	Offering: \$71.75
<u>Totals:</u>		<u>Present: 23</u>	<u>Offering: \$76.90</u>

As the congregation became established in their new quarters, rather rapid growth took place within the first few weeks. The 2nd week the total attendance was 33; the following week, 39; the following, 45. By October of 1956, there were 63 on the roll as various neighbors and friends of the original congregation began to attend.



### **Sunday School Group at “The ‘Tater House” - April 7, 1957**

At the beginning, there was no pastor and the only service held each week was a Sunday morning Sunday School. However, after just a few weeks, a new pastor arrived on the scene.

Rev. H. M. “Joe” Carroll, was a ministerial student at Southern Pilgrim College in nearby Kernersville. When approached about the possibility of pastoring the new congregation at the “Tater House,” his response was, “Sure, that’s what I’m studying for; I might as well get at it!”

Rev. Carroll, his wife Hazel, and daughter Susan began their pastorate of the newly formed Community Sunday School in late 1956, and continued therein until April of 1962. During this pastorate, their second daughter, Christie was born.

Rev. Carroll was not only a capable young preacher, but also added greatly to the music ministry of the church. Before coming to the church, he had lived in Nashville, TN, where he had sung with The Oak Ridge Quartet (forerunner of The Oak Ridge Boys), had played his fiddle with the bands of Red Foley, Bill Monroe, Ernest Tubb, and Cowboy Copas, and had played on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry.

He had close friendships with famous Nashville personalities such as Little Jimmy Dickens and Minnie Pearl. The Carroll's lived in their own home in High Point, NC, during the course of their pastorate, and commuted to and from the church for the services.



**Hazel, Susan, Rev. Joe, and Christie Carroll – circa 1960**

*Pastor: 1956 - 1962*

During the young church's tenure in the warehouse, one revival meeting was held. It was conducted by Rev. J. Harold Loman, a well-known evangelist and radio preacher from nearby Salisbury, NC.

With the coming of the new pastor, the church also added to the regular Sunday School schedule, weekly Sunday morning and Sunday evening worship services.

After a year of renting the potato warehouse which was "*mighty hot in the summer and mighty cold in the winter,*" the congregation was actively looking for a more suitable and permanent place to worship. That place was found some six miles to the southwest on two tracts of land that housed an old cemetery and the shell of an unfinished block building.

The “Heath Cemetery” was a graveyard on a little tract of land along Lexington-Hannersville Road that dated back to years unknown. In addition to old graves that were dated on crumbling gravestones, there were several graves marked by nothing but cinder blocks, laid parallel to the ground and partially covered over by grass and weeds.

The locals vow that the land was formerly owned by a man whose last name was “Heath.” Mr. Heath was purportedly a landowner who owned and farmed a large plantation that included the plot known as the “Heath Cemetery.”

Local tradition holds that it was here, under a great oak tree, that Mr. Heath buried his slaves, and marked the place of their interment with plain cinder blocks. Several of those blocks are still clearly visible, and remain undisturbed in the Heath Church Cemetery today

Davidson County, NC, was formed in 1822, and before that, was a part of neighboring Rowan County. Attempts to track the progress of the sale of the land back to a Mr. Heath in the two counties’ respective courthouse records were unsuccessful.

The various hand-written records of deeds which may have included the Heath Church land, purchased by “pounds,” sanctioned by “King George,” and marked by “a white oak tree” and “a large rock” were too hazy and blurred to substantiate. Thus, the reports of the locals, passed down from generation to generation, are all we have to go on with regards to the existence of “Plantation Owner Heath” and his slave cemetery --- other than the aforementioned graves, themselves.

The uncertainty of its origin notwithstanding, The “Heath Cemetery,” (as it was known in 1957) was definitely in existence. Adjoining the cemetery was the shell of a small cinderblock building. It had walls, a roof, floor joists (but no floor), and openings for windows.

In 1944 & 45 neighbors Robert L. and M. Hester Imbler had donated two tracts of land containing approximately 2.1 acres to their friend, Rev. T. R. York, “for the purpose of building a church.”

After receiving this land from the Imblers, Rev. York had set about the task of constructing a church building, but the project had fallen by the wayside, and thus building shell, as well as the surrounding land had been overgrown with vines and weeds for several years.

On June 12, 1957, these two tracts of land and the building shell were purchased from Rev. York by the “Community Church and Sunday School” (as it had come to be known), for the price of \$600. On July 7, 1957, the new “Heath Community Church” was established at its new location. Clyde and Allie Eddinger, who attended the church, loaned the \$600 for the purchase.

Of course there was much work to be done in order to make the building and property suitable for a place of worship. Evenings and Saturdays were filled with activity as Mr. Dayton Jones and the people of the church pitched in together to clean up the property and finish the building. After weeks of hard work, the “little white church” was ready to be occupied.



**The “Little White Church” – renovated 1957; vestibule added 1965**

During the course of the next few years, various improvements were made on the little church building and property.

Due to a lack of accurate records in existence, some of the specific dates and dollars involved are uncertain. Nonetheless, the young congregation worked hard to improve and beautify their place and property of worship.

One of the first projects undertaken was the digging and building of a basement under the existing church building. The men of the church worked together to jack up the building, and with a “coal cutter” reamed out a basement underneath. After the hole was dug, the basement was built and nicely finished, providing much needed space for 3 new Sunday School rooms and a furnace room.

Soon the little congregation undertook the task of building a separate block building just behind the existing church. This building was approximately 15’ x 20’ and provided another large Sunday School classroom.



### Interior of “Little White Church”

On April 8, 1962, Rev. H. M. “Joe” Carroll resigned as pastor of Heath Community Church. He had faithfully served the church for nearly six years, and he and his family had personally loaned money to the church for various projects and improvements.

At the time of the writing of this history, the 78-year-old Carroll recalled that the attendance of the church during his ministry “had slight fluctuations up and down, but stayed between 35 and 50 on the average.” When asked about some of his outstanding memories of his tenure as pastor he related the following story with a wry grin:

*Toward the end of our pastorate at Heath, during one of the services, Christie, our youngest, and her older sister Susan were sitting on the back seat of the church. It was early in the service, but Susan was already sucking her thumb and was about to go to sleep. About that time her little sister looked at her and said, “Susan, wake up! The best time to sleep is when Daddy is preaching!”*

The circumstances of the coming of the second pastor to Heath Community Church were very similar to that of the first. Again, a young ministerial student at nearby Southern Pilgrim College in Kernersville, NC, was appointed by the denomination to come as pastor.

Bobby Freeman, age 27, was not yet ordained, but was a licensed minister and so readily accepted the appointment to pastor the group at Heath. He was installed as the new pastor on June 1, 1962.

Rev. Freeman, along with his wife Patsy, 22, and their children Tim, 5, and Martha, 3, served the church for two years. During the entirety of their pastorate at Heath, they lived at the college in Kernersville where Rev. Freeman was a student, and commuted the 25 miles to Lexington for their pastoral duties.



**Patsy, Tim, Rev. Bobby, and Martha Freeman - circa 1963**

*Pastor: 1962 - 1964*

Rev. Freeman reported that during his ministry at Heath, the attendance stayed between 40 and 50. It was also during this period that the church ceased to have Sunday evening services.

Pastor Freeman made the following statement about his time as pastor of Heath: “As a student pastor, I remember the kindness and many courtesies of the people.” The Freemans left the church in 1964.

The next pastor of Heath Community Church was much different than the first two had been. Rev. Walter Lee Cockman was 63 years of age and was a veteran pastor of many churches throughout the state of North Carolina.

He and his wife, Frances Eugenia “Jean,” assumed the pastorate of Heath on August 23, 1964. Rev. Cockman was originally from Greensboro, NC, but lived in and commuted from Asheboro, 20 miles to the east, during the course of his Heath pastorate.

Rev. & Mrs. Cockman were the parents of three grown children: David, Paul, and Ruth. During their pastorate at Heath, their daughter, Ruth attended the church.



**Rev. Walter Cockman – circa 1965**

*Pastor: 1964 - 1970*

Less than a year after the arrival of the Cockmans, another major land purchase was made by the church. On June 22, 1965, approximately 4.25 acres adjoining and adjacent to the property were purchased.

Tract III, which is the site of the present church parking lot, contained approximately 1.85 acres, and Tract IV, which is the site of the present parsonage and utility building/pasture contained approximately 2.45 acres. These tracts were purchased from M. Hester Imbler for the amount of \$1,100.

Another improvement that was made during this time was the addition of a vestibule to the church building. This was built in 1965 by Mr. James Newell of Ramseur, NC, a friend of Rev. Cockman, and proved to be a very practical, beautiful, and spacious addition to the building (see picture on p. 6). The church borrowed \$1,625 to pay for this addition.

After a prosperous and fruitful ministry which was characterized by a very compassionate love for the people of the congregation of Heath, Rev. Cockman resigned the pastorate in the summer of 1970 due to failing health.

Again, the church had maintained a relatively steady attendance of approximately 50 worshippers during this faithful pastor's ministry. Rev. Walter Lee Cockman died on June 6, 1974, at the age of 73, and is buried by the side of his devoted wife, Frances Eugenia, in the The Heath Church Cemetery.

Following the tenure of Rev. Cockman, Rev. H. B. Barger of Salisbury, NC, served as interim pastor for 3 months, commuting from his home to the weekly services.

In October of 1970, Rev. Eugene Richardson was called by the church to begin "filling in" as an interim pastor. Rev. Cockman had recommended Rev. Richardson to the church, and the church apparently agreed with his recommendation for Rev. Richardson was installed as pastor in the spring of 1971.

For the first few months of their ministry at Heath, Rev. Richardson, his wife Dorothy, and their daughters, Debra (14), and Sharon (12) commuted to the church from their home in Cooleemee, NC, some 20 miles away. However this arrangement was not to last long, for Heath Community Church was in the process of building a brand new brick parsonage.

Lloyd Hepler Construction was in charge of building the 1500 square foot, 3-bedroom structure. In addition to the 3 bedrooms, there was a spacious dining room/kitchen combination, a lovely living room, 1 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  baths, and a carport. The Richardson Family moved into the new parsonage in August of 1971.



**The "New Parsonage" - built 1971**

Soon, more construction and remodeling was to follow, for in early 1972, the “Sunday School building out back” was transformed into a lovely facility containing two fully-plumbed, modern restrooms, a water cooler, and a covered entrance. Previous to this time the restroom facilities had been simple outhouses. Rev. Richardson was responsible for much of the work on the new restroom facility.



**Dorothy and Rev. Eugene Richardson - circa 1972**

*Pastor: 1971 - 1975*

During the early '70's Heath Community Church prospered and enjoyed a wonderful spirit of revival. Rev. Richardson reports:

*One of the most memorable events is how the Lord would come on the services and the people were blessed of the Lord. The little church lived in a spirit of revival for some two and one half years while we were there and the church grew as God blessed it. There were at least two baptismal services in which the Lord manifested His presence, as several were baptized, testifying as to what the Lord had done for them.*

The church began to increase the number of revivals (or extended meetings), and various evangelists such as Rev. Fred Watson, Rev. Troy Vaughn, and Rev. Roy Bellomy preached in these special evangelistic services.

On April 30, 1975, - during the establishing of new & updated deeds - the word "Community" was dropped from the official church name, resulting in the simplified name, "Heath Church."

Three months later Rev. Richardson resigned the pastorate in July of 1975. The weekly, Sunday morning attendance at that time was averaging near 60.

From 1958 until 1974, each July had been the time for an annual Homecoming service with "dinner on the grounds." These services were marked by happy praises, special singing, excellent preaching, great food, and warm fellowship. Heath Church was alive and well!

The next 8 years were the "Parker years." Rev. Dan Parker, his wife Charlotte, and their 10 children – John, 19; David, 17; Steve, 15; Elizabeth, 13; Phillip, 11; Rebekah, 8; Deborah, 5; Rhoda, 4; Rachel, 2; and Eunice, 5 months, arrived as the new pastors of Heath Church in August of 1975.

On Mother's Day, 1977, an 11<sup>th</sup> child, Mary Naomi, was born, but sadly did not live. She is buried in The Heath Church Cemetery.

Rev. Parker - originally from the state of Alabama - moved from his pastorate at Harker's Island, NC, to assume the pastorate of Heath. He reported that even before the church had given him the call, he'd felt God was leading him in a new direction. Upon accepting the call to pastor Heath Church, Rev. Parker stated, "Without any doubt, it was God's leadership."

In addition to his pastoral duties at Heath Church, Rev. Parker accepted the office of administrator of Carolina Christian Academy, a private Christian School consisting of Grades 1-12. "C. C. A" was located approximately four miles from Heath Church and, though not officially affiliated with Heath Church, was the school where most of the elementary and high school students who attended the church were enrolled.

Carolina Christian Academy began to grow as numbers of families who were looking for quality Christian education for their children, moved from various parts of the country to the Thomasville/Lexington, NC, area to enroll their children in C. C. A. Many of these families began to attend Heath Church.

Rev. Parker was a strong evangelistic preacher and an aggressive soul-winner. As a result of these influences and the influx of families to the local Christian school, Heath Church began to grow rapidly.



**Rev. Dan Parker - circa 1977**

*Pastor: 1975 - 1983*

During Rev. Parker's pastorate, property improvements continued at Heath Church. As the congregation grew, it was apparent that "the little white church" could not handle the crowds. It was voted upon and passed by the members of Heath Church, to begin construction on a new building.

Mr. Ed Miller, who had moved from Ohio and married Cheryl Sechrest, daughter of charter members Lank and Audrey Sechrest, was employed to build the new church. Many of the men of the church came in on evenings and weekends to donate their time and efforts to the building process, as well.

Initially, a basement was dug and built beside the original church building. The old church was then demolished and worship services were held in the new basement while construction on the new sanctuary above took place.

Finally, in early Fall of 1976, the happy and growing congregation occupied their brand new 3000 sq. ft. brick church building to the glory of God! The new sanctuary had a seating capacity of approximately 200.

Heath Church did not borrow any money to pay for this large project. Members of the congregation gave liberally, but it was primarily through the selfless generosity of charter members, Lank and Audrey Sechrest, that this beautiful new structure was occupied debt free.



**The “New Brick Church” built 1976**

A year later, in 1977, it was decided that the growing Parker family needed more room in the parsonage. A major renovation was undertaken which added some 1000 sq. ft. to the existing 1500 sq. ft. structure.

The additions included two large bedrooms, a full bath, a large family room (formerly the carport), an extended front porch with white colonial-style columns, and a roomy 2-car garage.

The parsonage was nearly twice the building it had been before, and the changes were both aesthetically pleasing and practically utilitarian.



**The “New & Improved” Parsonage - remodeled 1977**

As already stated, the years between 1975 and 1983 were years of rapid growth for Heath Church. They were also times of great spiritual blessing. Of those years, Rev. Parker states:

*Our people were a praying people. The prayer meetings were the backbone of our church. There were ladies’ prayer meetings every week, Saturday night prayer meetings, Sunday morning men’s prayer meetings, and before every service the prayer rooms were full. Our services were characterized by the presence of God, the testimonies of the saints, shouts, and altar services.*

Pastor Parker also began a weekly radio program during his tenure at Heath Church. This program aired on a local radio station, and helped to represent Heath Church in the community. The program was later discontinued.

These years were also years of a great increase in foreign missions emphasis. Rev. Parker was a strong advocate of foreign missions, and brought many missionaries in to the local church services to represent various countries, fields, and organizations.

During this period, several young families who attended Heath Church felt a call of God to offer themselves as missionaries, and as a result, were commissioned by the church to go to various foreign countries to herald the message of Christ and the gospel in these lands. The missions budget ballooned as Heath Church sponsored and supported these missionary families.

The members of The Parker Family were hard workers and were involved in many aspects of the work of Heath Church. Several of the older children worked in prison ministry, street meetings, youth choir, special singing, yard work, and janitorial duties at the church. Three of the children – John, Steve, and Elizabeth – were married at Heath Church.

Rev. Parker resigned his pastorate at Heath Church in July, 1983. During the 8 years he had served as shepherd, the flock had increased from an average of 60 members to an average of 160! This number of people regularly attended not only the Sunday morning worship services, but were just as faithful to the Sunday evening services as well.

The Wednesday midweek prayer services also maintained a large percentage of the Sunday morning average attendance. The people were faithful; God was blessing Heath Church.

After the departure of Rev. Dan Parker, Heath Church began to look for another pastor. The church continued for a full year without a regular pastor, but experienced no decline in its average attendance during this time.

For a period of a few months, Rev. Lee Rickenbach, a missionary who was temporarily in the United States on a brief furlough, moved his family into the Heath Church parsonage and served as interim pastor.

Even though they knew they were soon to return to the mission field, the Rickenbach's put themselves into the duties of the pastorate as though they were planning to stay for many years. They were dearly loved by the congregation, and had a very fruitful and beneficial ministry during their short tenure at Heath.

In April of 1984 the church voted to extend a call to Rev. Daniel Downing to come as pastor. The following June, Rev. Downing, age 26, his wife, Marilyn, 23, and their children, Dana, 4, Danelle, 2, and Daniel, 10 months, moved into the Heath parsonage as pastors. A year later, their fourth child, a daughter, DeLinda, was born.

Rev. Downing, a native of Ohio, moved to Heath Church from a pastorate in Muncie, IN. (An interesting side-note is that, as a college student, he had come from Ohio to Heath Church in a singing group in 1978).

Rev. Downing was primarily an expositional preacher, often using a series of studies covering several weeks, to treat a particular passage of scripture or theme. One of his favorites which he often addressed, was "The Home & Family."

The Downing children "grew up" at Heath Church, and (as they've grown older), have been very faithful and energetic in involving themselves in many different ministries therein. At various times over the years, they have either directed or been active assistants in most every area of ministry that Heath Church conducts.



**Danelle, Marilyn, Daniel, Pastor Dan, DeLinda, and Dana Downing - 1998**

*Pastor: 1984 - Present*

The congregation, which had already been in a growing pattern, continued to grow during the first two years of the Downing pastorate. As the attendance neared 200, the church was “bulging at the seams” of its 8 year old sanctuary, and so voted to begin construction of a new sanctuary in September of 1985.

In a Sunday evening service on September 8, Rev. Downing presented the proposition of a new sanctuary to the congregation, and their response was to immediately pledge \$21,000 to be paid within the next 90 days for the new project!

Mr. Ed Miller, who was a member of the congregation and now had a thriving local construction business, was hired to build at Heath Church again. The membership voted to borrow \$180,000 and begin construction. Again, the men of the church came in on evenings and Saturdays to donate their time and labor.

On one particular Saturday approximately 40 men arrived, tore off much of the roof of the 1976 church building, leaving the ceilings and walls, and built new walls and set roof trusses for the new sanctuary right “around and over the top” of the now roofless rooms of the old building. This enabled the church to continue to use the rooms of the old building while working on the shell of the new one.

On Sunday, April 20, 1986, the congregation celebrated the first service in their brand new sanctuary. Rev. Downing preached to 192 people from the text, *“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.”* One month later, on Sunday afternoon, May 25, 1986, the congregation dedicated their brand new sanctuary which now increased the building to near 4,200 sq. ft. The new sanctuary, complete with balcony, had a seating capacity of 350!



### **New Sanctuary – Built 1986**

While construction of the new sanctuary was going on, it was decided by the church to build a new utility building behind the parsonage. The little “shed” that had been at that location was demolished, and an attractive 900 sq. ft. metal utility building was constructed. There was ample room to house all the church’s mowing and outdoor equipment, as well as provide a “barn” section for Rev. Downing’s Guernsey milk cow.

Throughout the next 3 years, the congregation of Heath Church continued to enjoy wonderful services of spirited worship, and continued to grow at a rapid pace until by 1989 the average Sunday morning attendance was near 300.

As had been its pattern, the congregation faithfully attended the Sunday evening services as well, and often the Sunday evening average attendance was slightly larger than that of the morning.

During this period, the Wednesday evening Prayer & Praise services, constituted almost entirely of “open worship” with personal praise testimonies from the members of the congregation, averaged 225.

There were frequent Bible College services, including concerts by choirs and symphony orchestras. The emphasis on foreign missions continued to grow, as Rev. Downing opened the pulpit on a monthly basis to various missionary speakers, and as the church continued to support its own missionary families in Mexico. By 1989 the Missions Budget alone was \$1,000 per week.

However, as 1989 came to a close and the decade of the 90’s dawned, rather dark and ominous clouds began to hang over Heath Church.

As the church grew rapidly, brand new converts to Christ were being added to the church. Many of the “older members” insisted that certain traditions of the church be imposed on all newcomers. Others, including Pastor Downing, did not feel that was either Biblical or wise.

Sadly, in early 1990, approximately *100 regular attendees* withdrew from Heath Church over this division. This exodus seemed to serve as a catalyst for continued unrest as, over the next few years, the division fermented, and an *additional 275* attendees left the church.

During this dark decade, God continued to give special help to Heath Church. Several new people began attending, even as others were leaving. A simple mathematical calculation will reveal that had this not been the fact, Heath Church likely would not have survived.

By 1998, only a “handful” of people remained.

In addition to the drastic decline in attendance and the difficult trauma that naturally accompanied it, another great challenge also faced the people of Heath Church. The 375 folks who had left the church had, of course, taken their wallets, purses, and checkbooks with them.

Each month the \$2,000 mortgage payment for the 1986 sanctuary was still due. Sadly, many months during those dark days it was also temporarily *past due!* Nonetheless, the “remaining few” at Heath Church prayed earnestly and rallied for the cause. Various building fundraisers were initiated, pledge plans were started, shares were accepted and paid for, and miraculously, month after month and year after year - the mortgage payments were met.

Never once was the church more than 2 months in arrears.

One of the more enjoyable fundraisers initiated during this period, was an annual concert with nationally known Southern Gospel singing groups performing. These concerts were started in 1998 and continue to the present.

Heath Church has been privileged to have such groups as *The Hoppers*, *Jeff & Sheri Easter*, *The Isaacs*, *The Talley Trio*, *The Perrys*, *Gold City*, *The Chuck Wagon Gang*, *Triumphant Quartet*, *The Dove Brothers*, and *Brian Free & Assurance*. The concerts have been met with “full-house” enthusiasm and generosity, and have generated much-needed funds for the expenses of the church.

Other improvements and additions to the church during the decade of the ‘90’s included the purchase of a 15-passenger van, the institution of a weekly Children’s Church, and an annual summer Vacation Bible School, all of which have been wonderful blessings in the areas of evangelism and outreach for Christ in the community over the past 15 – 20 years.

Another great blessing to Heath Church during this period, was the construction of a new fellowship hall. The church had always been forced to rent a local hall at another location for fellowship meetings and meals.

In January of 2000 the people of the church began to renovate several basement classrooms into a lovely, carpeted fellowship hall, complete with full, modern kitchen and seating capacity for approximately 75 people.

On November 19, 2000, the congregation enjoyed a bountiful carry-in Thanksgiving dinner as a part of their dedication of the sparkling, new facility. Because they had donated all the labor and had liberally given toward the project, the happy diners dedicated their new fellowship hall, debt free!

Throughout the beginnings of the new millennium of the 2000’s, God continued to bless Heath Church as it struggled to regain its footing. By the year 2000 itself, the attendance average was back up to 78; in 2001 had climbed to 87; and by 2002 had reached just a fraction under 90! For the next 7 years, every year’s attendance average exceeded the previous year’s until many Sundays saw 180 - 200 people gathered in for worship on any given Sunday!

A new and wonderful spirit of unity and love permeated the atmosphere of worship in the services, and it seemed the entire congregation was anxious to manifest the Spirit of Christ in humble thankfulness for God *and for one another*.

Encouraging revival meetings and ladies’ conferences with special speakers such as Drs. Marlin Hotle, Bob Whitaker, Aaron Willis, Wingrove Taylor, Mrs. Sharon Thomas, and Rev. Bruce Hawthorn were sources of great spiritual help, strength, and healing.

Video-Conferences and seminars with some of the nation's leading Christian speakers/teachers such as Tommy Nelson, James Dobson, Beth Moore, Dave Ramsey, and Lee Strobel provided invaluable instruction and blessing.

A new praise band was formed and began to add a lively touch to congregational worship in song.

One of the highest days of celebration at Heath Church dawned on March 17, 2002, as people filled the sanctuary to celebrate the burning of the mortgage that had, for so long, hung like a dark thunderhead, over the church.

*The Nelsons*, of Harkers Island, NC, rendered a stirring concert, and shouts of praise mingled with the smoke of burning mortgage papers, as both ascended to God with thanksgiving.

Pastor Downing and a church board who had been very stalwart and faithful during the dark and difficult years of debt, formed a semi-circle around the black, cast iron "burning kettle" and shouted, wept, and praised God, as the debt disappeared *forever!*

Since that date, Heath Church has been *ON THE MOVE!*

Many physical improvements to the property have taken place during the first decade of the 2000's! A complete, new audio/video system, a new picnic pavilion, new heating/ac systems and new roofs for all main buildings, a large/new/electronic/LED sign, new landscaping, 2 full-size buses and another 15-passenger van, as well as MANY other improvements to the physical plant of its campus and buildings, have enhanced and beautified the facilities and ministries of Heath Church as it has grown since the year, 2000.

More importantly, HUNDREDS of BRAND NEW ***PEOPLE*** have come to its services and received its ministries as outreach to our community and evangelism of people without Christ as well as spiritual encouragement and Biblical teaching to believers have become the order of the day! Seldom does a Sunday pass, but that a brand-new person, couple, or family walks through the doors of Heath Church!

Between 2002 and 2009 a mid-week outreach ministry to community teens burgeoned to an average of near 100 teenagers every Wednesday evening! During one summer Youth Week, over 200 community teenagers were brought in to hear the Gospel.

In October of 2009, Heath Church sponsored an entire Sunday of celebration as they thanked Pastor Downing and his family for 25 years of Senior Pastoral ministry.

Under his leadership and that of a very faithful Board of Directors and congregation, new staff continues to be added, as the church continues to grow.



**The Downing Family  
Pastor Appreciation 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
October 2009**

Most importantly, there is an air of *expectancy* at Heath Church, as we look to **GOD** for continued and increased revival, spiritual growth, and outreach!

God is SO GOOD! The history of Heath Church .. is truly .. **HIS**-story!

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