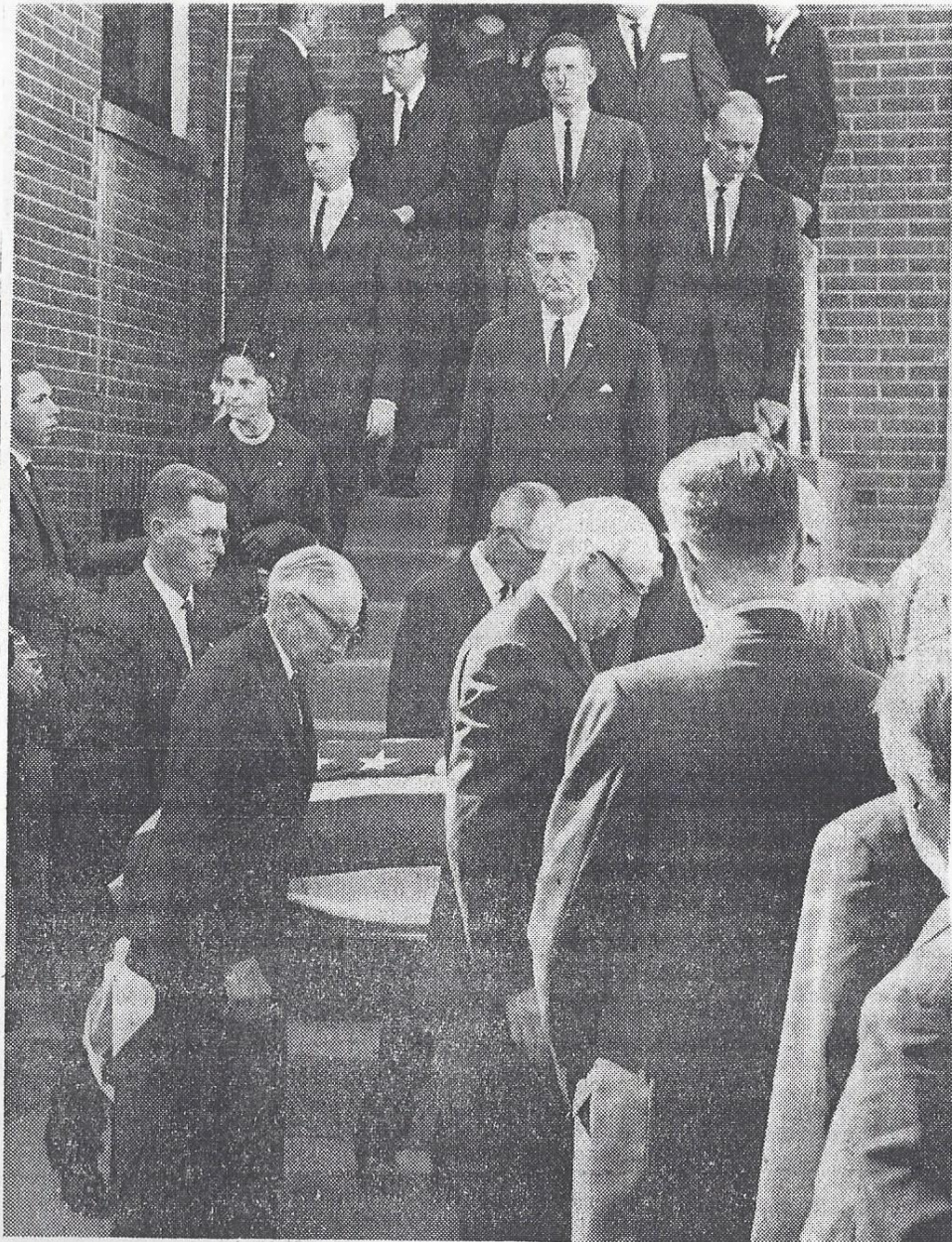


The First Baptist Church of Elsberry (originally the Elsberry Baptist Church) began on October 27, 1883, when six men and six women, members of Baptist churches in neighboring communities, gathered for the purpose of establishing a Baptist church in the new community of Elsberry (established 1879). Initially the church met in a building intended for use by all denominations on land donated by the city founder, Robert T. Elsberry. In 1884, C.A. Mitchell was called as the church's first pastor. Its first deacons were charter members John R. Cannon, father Elsberry's most famous son, Congressman Clarence Cannon, and John W. Waters. The church was initially a member of the Salt River Association, but later withdrew and joined with the Cuivre River Baptist Association (now called Twin Rivers). In 1887, the Baptists made an arrangement to move the Mt. Horeb [Cumberland] Presbyterian Church from two miles north of town to the corner of Sixth and Dubois in exchange for part ownership of the facility. The Baptist Church worshipped in that building until 1892 when they sold their interest to the Mt. Horeb congregation for \$350. Land was purchased and construction began on a new place of worship that winter. The congregation moved into the new meeting house in 1893 and dedicated it debt-free on January 27, 1896. For 48 years the Baptist congregation was well-served by this two-room white-frame structure. In 1889, the church organized a Sunday School under the oversight of R.B. Sanderson (Elsberry's fourth public school superintendent).



Common for the time, most of First Baptist's pastors were also responsible for the pastoral duties of other Baptist congregations, such as New Hope, Star Hope, and Winfield. Thus, a major milestone in the life of the church was calling a "full-time" pastor in 1940. That same year a visiting evangelist recognized the need for larger facilities, and one month later, through the cooperative efforts of its members, the church set about an extensive renovation plan. In addition to building maintenance and repairs, the church dug and poured a full basement (under the existing building), moved the pulpit from the north side to the west with a choir section and baptistery sharing the area, added an office and nursery on the south side as well as an upper level which provided three additional classrooms. Adding to the beauty of the remodeled building were arched stain glass windows bearing the names of those in whose memory they were given. The building was also covered with a brick veneer. The original sanctuary ceiling with its 144 wood panels was left unchanged.

Perhaps one of the most attended and high profile events in the history of First Baptist occurred on May 14, 1964, with the funeral of Congressman Clarence Cannon who was a member of the church his entire adult life. Cannon's congressional career spanned 41 years. An expert parliamentarian, he served as head of the House Ways and Means Committee for some time, and died while in office. His funeral was attended by President Lyndon B. Johnson, and former President and Mrs. Harry S. Truman. According to a story in the New York Times, about 225 persons were seated in the sanctuary, another 275 were seated and listening to speakers set up in the basement, and three to four thousand persons gathered outside the church where they lined the street for several blocks. Many were standing on the roofs of houses along Fifth Street, and some had climbed up trees. The two U.S. presidents sat on the second pew on the right, facing the pulpit. To this day, this pew bears an inscription "The Presidents' Pew".



By Lester Linck, a Post-Dispatch Photographer

President at Cannon's Funeral

A somber President Lyndon B. Johnson following Representative Clarence Cannon's flag-draped casket from the First Baptist Church at Elsberry yesterday under the watchful eyes of Secret Service agents. Pallbearers were farmers and bankers. (Other pictures in Everyday Magazine.)

In 1971, roughly 30 years after its last construction project, the congregation once again felt the need to expand its facilities and began a building program resulting in the addition of an education wing with eight classrooms, two restrooms, and a library. The cornerstone, containing a handmade wooden box with church documents, was donated by the O'Garlan Ricks Family [founders of Carter-Ricks Funeral Home]. Within six years, the \$63,000 debt on the new addition had been paid in full. The records show that in the five years following the construction of the education wing, financial gifts almost doubled those of the preceding five. And the increase was almost twice the cost of the new addition.



The church was healthy numerically through the mid-1980's with attendance of 160-180 persons on Sunday mornings. However, for a number of reasons, membership and attendance began to decline over the next twenty years and by the mid-2000's the congregation was worshipping on Sunday mornings in the basement of the church facility to save on energy cost. Attendance had dwindled to less than 20 people. The church called David Rubemeyer to be their next pastor, and slowly, things began to change. A number of people made professions of faith and were baptized and new members were added to the congregation. The church also received a large financial gift from the estate of a local resident and paid for some needed repairs on the building. During this time, in an effort to minister to the community, the congregation purchased the building at the corner of Third and Griffen, which had formerly been a Kroger, a dollar store, and a restaurant. The church used the facility for youth ministry, community events, and a food pantry ministry which it operated for close to seven years, feeding approximately 100 households each week.

Five years later, Rubemeyer resigned the pastorate and Greg Pflasterer (owner of Berni's Pizza in Elsberry), who had also been serving as the church's youth minister, filled the pulpit and functioned as the interim pastor for ten months. At the end of that time the church members called Sam Byers to be their pastor. In the years that have followed, the church has embraced historical Baptist polity by transitioning to elder-led congregationalism with the ordination of Greg Pflasterer. It has adopted a new confession of faith based on the 1689 London Baptist Confession and updated its constitution along with addition of bylaws. The church has also sought to restore a regenerate church membership; one of the main tenets of the Baptist faith. Today 63% of the church's members have joined since 2013 and the one-third of the church's members are under 40 years age (adolescents and children not included).

In 2014 the church did a complete renovation of the nursery area and two children's classrooms, in addition to adding a playset in the courtyard, with funds donated by the family of the late Charlotte Maupin Brooksher, a long-standing member of the church. Two years later in 2016 the church was again the recipient of money from the estate of another long-standing member with the passing of Floyd Lorenz. In response, the church created a five-year strategic plan with the goal of starting a new congregation out of First Baptist within a 30 mile radius by the plan's end. In 2017, as part of the plan, the members called a recent graduate of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Thomas Murphy, to

full-time ministry as an outreach, discipleship and music ministry assistant. As of the writing of this history, the church is in the process of calling another young man to serve as a part-time youth minister to the young people of the community. The congregation has also voted to approve an addition and extensive update of its facilities including a new foyer and grand entrance, street level access to the fellowship hall, a complete renovation of the kitchen and fellowship hall, a historically sensitive restoration of the sanctuary, handicap accessible restrooms throughout the facility, a renovation of the passageway connecting buildings, additional windows, and new exterior doors.



With over 135 years of ministry and witness in the Elsberry community, by God's grace, the congregation of First Baptist Church is looking to the future as it seeks to carry out the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ until His return.