

First Missionary

Bellflower, CA
(Los Angeles County)

33° 54.033' N 118° 08.184' W
Organized May 13, 1928
First pastor John M. Tate
Current pastors Ruben Guerrero
Eric Brown

I.K. Cross, great historian and well known school leader and face of the American Baptist Association for many years, wrote an early brief history of the First Missionary Baptist Church of Bellflower. That history was written for the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the church's organization. He quoted heavily from the autobiography of the founder of the church, Elder John M. Tate. This article is in large part an adaptation and updating of that account.

Elder John Martin Tate was born in Jackson County, Missouri, on May 10, 1858. He became fatherless on September 6, 1863, when his father was killed by a band of Kansas Jay-Hawkers, irregular Union guerrilla fighters during the Civil War.

In his autobiography he gives the following testimony of his first preaching and ordination. "I became one of the preachers, preaching my first sermon for the Missionary Baptist church in Sarcoxie, Missouri in Jasper County the second Sunday in January, 1892; my first text from Amos 4:12. I was ordained in July that year by the Sarcoxie church whose house I helped to erect, acting as treasurer and collector for the building committee, Jim Davis, Chairman. The ordaining council consisted of deacons S. T. Campbell and J. T. Read, Elders N. O. Sowers and J. M. Wheeler, my pastor and Miss Mollie Mize, church clerk: all have gone on to glory. I was then 34 years old."

As he mentioned houses that he built for his family and church houses that he erected, it seems he was a skilled carpenter as well as a school teacher and farmer. He even ran an "auto camp" and conducted tours in the Colorado Springs, Colorado area, but the passion of his life was preaching. His wife died February 13, 1926. His health began to fail, and at the age of 69 he came to Long Beach, California, to live with his son. He describes this experience in great



Current Building



Elder John M. Tate
first pastor

detail.

Coming back to Haisington, Kansas I took the pastorate of a country church five miles northwest; preaching for them every Sunday, boarding with a P. J. Stucky two miles from town until October. My health failed-- not very good-- I resigned and went to my son's in Long Beach, California. Here, with nothing to do, I became discontented.

Not knowing of an open pastorate, at the suggestion of a policeman, A Baptist, working in Long Beach, but living in Hynes 10 miles north east, I went there to see about organizing a Baptist church. Finding the man to whom directed, Charles Whaley; He said- " I have been here thirty years, if there is another Baptist in the community besides my brother-in-law and his wife, George Scott, living two miles north near a village called Gloria Gardens, I do not know of it. This (was) not encouraging, but I was out there to see what could be done. I said to him-"If you and Mr. Scott will keep me two or three days, I'll see if I can find some more Baptists." There are four villages adjoining, viz : Hynes - Clearwater - Hollydale - and Gloria Gardens; all with several hundred people without a Baptist church. Hynes had a Methodist and a Lutheran, Clearwater a Presbyterian, also Hollydale a Presbyterian. The Hollydale pastor said-"We do not need another church, our house will hold all that come." This was my answer-"If you had a half dozen church houses and no Baptist house, you need another. " So I began canvassing; about the first house I called on was a Baptist, husband, wife, mother. If all the names were like this I would have been discouraged; listen-H.H. Hobbensiefken. There may be something in a name. These folks were good to me and kept me for a month.

I finished my canvassing, finding 70 calling themselves Baptists. I re-canvassed to see how many would agree to form a Baptist church. I found 30 of the 70. We had been running a Sunday School, meeting in the Chamber of Commerce Hall free of charge (rent) including firelights-chairs and piano. All this was stranger than fiction; my first

sermon to this people was in an old dance hall, borrowing chairs from the C. of C. hall.

The next Sunday we were invited to hold our service in their hall (Chamber of Commerce) by the head man who is a Catholic, but good to us. This, another time the goodness of God is shown to His poor people. On the 13th of May, Mother's Day, 1928 we met to organize a church: only 16 of the 30 were present.

A council of ministers and deacons were invited to recognize us as a legally constituted (organized) Baptist Church. We had a small beginning, 16. I left them with 30 members. Now, 1943, the church numbers over 200. We continued to meet in this hall (C. of C.) until we moved into our own house of worship just east 1/4 mile into a village or division called Gloria Gardens. We had bought two lots for \$500, built a small chapel 24X36 ft. paying for it mostly as we builded. Later we needed more room. I said to the church- if you will allow me to live in them, I will build on three rooms and a baptistery at my own expense.

The rooms were built. I lived here until some of the members thought they needed a stronger man. Strange how some people act; especially some Baptist preachers and deacons. I had worked for these people over 4 years; My salary while here was the freewill offerings. What I did not live on, I gave back to the church. I also put over \$600 in cash into the building and lots, besides my manual labor.

Though Bro. Tate had resigned as pastor of the church in March of 1930, he had stayed with the congregation as an active member until 1936 when he decided to return to Concordia, Kansas. At the invitation of the church he preached his "farewell sermon" on the evening of Feb. 2.

According to the records the organization was formed in this manner: "On May 13th, 1928 a few Baptist people met in the 'Sales Pavilion,' in Hollydale, California, to organize themselves into a (Missionary) 'Baptist Church' assisted by members of Lynwood and Bellflower Baptist Churches." The organization called itself the First Baptist Church of Gloria Gardens, California, and was constituted with the following charter members: J.M. Tate, H.H. Habbinsiefken,

Mrs. E.H. Habbinsiefken, Mrs. Louzina Stettler, Warren McPherson, Mrs. Warren McPherson, Dan Holland, Mrs. Dan Holland, S.L. McClure (by baptism) Mrs. S.L. McClure, Mrs. J.A. Rosser (by baptism), C.M. Whaley, Mrs. C.M. Whaley, Mrs. N.J. Bickly, G.O. Trammel, Mrs. G.O. Trammel and Bernice Whitaker.

Though at this time in California there seems to have been no clearly drawn lines of denominational affiliation, it was made clear in the organization that this was to be a "Missionary Baptist" church. The declaration of faith adopted was that historically held by Baptists through the centuries, and the charter members also pledged themselves to the standard Baptist church covenant.

On July 8, 1928, the church voted to "indorse the idea of an independent association", the first meeting of same to be held at San Diego, and elected messengers to same. On March 16, 1929, the church voted to "incorporate under the laws of the state of California". At the same meeting the question was raised as to whether they would "subscribe to the doctrine of the American Baptist Association", and on June 5, 1929, a motion carried to "affiliate with the American Baptist Association". At this time the American Baptist Association had only been meeting for five years.

In the section of their incorporation document, signed by the Secretary of State June 15, 1931, dealing with property rights, the following statement appears, making clear the church's stand on the convention issue:

"In case at any time a part, or even a majority of the membership should oppose the maintenance of the present articles of Faith, and should have this church to cooperate with the Northern Baptist Convention, or have this church receive alien immersion, or practice open communion, or deny the inspiration of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, the Deity, the Blood Atonement, the Bodily Resurrection, the Second Coming of Christ, or any other Fundamental Doctrine of the Bible, then any one or more members who believe in the present Articles of Faith, the Fundamental Doctrines of the Bible, shall hold the title and be legally regarded as the Gloria Gardens Missionary Baptist Church, Gloria Gardens, California."

At the time of this incorporation the church had endorsed Pendleton's Church Manual in action taken Jan. 7 of the same year. In the same annual business meeting it is noted that the total

membership as of January 1930 was only 26, but that in a revival meeting held in August by R.W. Miller there were "27 conversions and restorations. Conversions and restorations since the meeting was 56 making a total of 83."

On Jan. 14 they voted to pay off the balance of the indebtedness on their lots and to purchase an "adjoining lot from Mr. L.S. Duke," and on Feb. 4 a motion carried to "represent at the A.B.A. meeting at Little Rock, Arkansas. "

Upon the resignation of Bro. Tate as pastor, the church called a Bro. J.A. Peters on April 23, 1930, but he could not come for some time and the church rescinded this action in August. In the meantime they called Bro. J.W. Watson, July 13, as supply pastor and also voted to ordain him.

In 1931 Bro. J.E. Kester was called as pastor and the church voted to pay him \$14.42 per week, but later that year excluded him "on grounds of heresy."

There appears not to have been another regular pastoral call until Bro. L.W. Wright was called by unanimous vote, June 8, 1932. This pastor, serving the church during the years of the "Great Depression," gave a report on his income from the church in June and July of 1933, which averaged between two and three dollars per week. Following this report a Bro. Trammel made a talk on finances. It is also noted in this same meeting that a Bro. Hall was paid \$22.70 for a meeting which lasted three weeks. Further evidence of financial struggles in those days is seen from the fact that in December of the same year, Bro. Tate loaned the church \$5.00 to help purchase song books; to be repaid the following month.

On June 3 of the same year Pastor Wright, with 14 other members, were granted letters for the organization of a church in Pomona, and Bro. Clarence Hardin was called as pastor for a three month period, and in December was called as pastor for a period of one year.

Bro. Alanzo Yancy was called as pastor in December 1937 and served until his resignation in May of 1938, when Bro. G.M. Workman was elected to finish the year. He was called as the regular pastor in December of the same year. The church experienced a good revival under Bro. Workman's ministry in the fall of that year

"with 10 professions, 6 united by ...baptism and 1 by letter and 2 by statement."

Many other pastors were to follow, each contributing to the ministry of the church in his own way. Time and space do not allow a description of their activities, but let the record show that they served as follows : Bro. Workman continued as pastor until 1940 when Bro. Lester R. Noles was called for a period of two years. He was followed in 1942-45 by Bro. E.L. Thurman. In 1945 Bro. C.C. Middleton accepted the call of the church and continued to serve until his resignation Jan. 2, 1952. A Bro. A.E. Ford served as supply pastor for a brief period, and Bro. Arden Johnson accepted the call of the church April 6, 1952. Bro. Lloyd Hill became pastor in December 1953 and served until he was succeeded by Bro. K.G. McKellip in May of 1956.

Bro. McKellip pursued a fruitful ministry until his resignation in June 1958, to be followed by Bro. W.H. Banks. It was under the ministry of Bro. McKellip that the California Missionary Baptist Institute was begun under the direction of the Bellflower Church. Under the pastorate of Bro. Banks, on Dec. 3, 1958, the name of the church was changed from the Gloria Gardens Missionary Baptist Church to the First Missionary Baptist Church of Bellflower.

Bro. Allen Adkins became pastor of the church in June 1960 and served faithfully until his resignation in November 1962. Bro. Adkins did not choose to serve as president of CMBI as his predecessors had done, and Bro. E.A. Sharver was called by the church to serve as president of the school during this period.

At the recommendation of Bro. Adkins, Bro. Roy M. Reed, was called as pastor October 14, 1962, and also elected as the president of the California Missionary Baptist Institute and Seminary; a position he continues to fill as this history is written on the 50th anniversary of the church, May 13, 1978. Under his leadership the church has vastly enlarged its ministry and greatly increased its property holdings.

After Bro. Reed died in 1986, Bro. Jerry Coffman had a fourteen year ministry with this church. After Bro. Coffman, Bro. Bro. Butch Shipp was elected pastor and served until June of 2004. It was during his time as Senior pastor that Ruben Guerrero and Eric Brown came on the pastoral staff as associate pastors. Bro Guerrero

in the fall of 2001 and Bro. Brown in March of 2002. After Bro. Shipp resigned, the church decided to add Bro. Kris Cash to the staff (Sept. 2004).

Bro. Brown described the multiplicity of pastors in this way:

At that time, we did not technically have a "senior" pastor. Instead, all three of us worked together with equal "status" in pastoring the church. In August of 2008, Bro Cash resigned. Since that time, Bro. Guerrero and myself have been the two pastors of the church. Again, neither one of us is considered to be the "senior" pastor. While our responsibilities primarily fall with myself shepherding the English speaking members while Bro. Guerrero shepherding the Spanish speaking members, we are both involved with ministering to the entire congregation. We continue working toward a one church mentality, and seek to be viewed as equal in position and responsibility rather than one pastor being over the other."

So the church continues on, actively involved in missions and ministering to this ever changing area of southern California. "The church has endorsed state missionaries, interstate missionaries to several continental states and Alaska, and foreign missionaries to many foreign countries including Japan, Korea and South America through whom innumerable churches have been established."²

² Calhac Book, Part II, Twentieth Century, Chapter 11

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