

HISTORY OF HARDEMAN COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Hardeman County Baptist Association was formed by churches formerly affiliated with Unity Baptist Association. The Unity Baptist Association was organized in 1858 at Unity Baptist Church near Huron in Chester County. It was composed of churches in Madison, Chester, Hardeman and McNairy counties and the western part of Hardin County (west of the Tennessee River).

The Unity Association in its 66th Annual Meeting at Selmer in 1923 passed a resolution to make two or more associations from its 57 churches. On Oct. 23, 1923 in a meeting at First Baptist Church, Bolivar, messengers from the following churches were present for the organizational meeting: Bolivar First, Clover Creek, Enon, Ebenezer, Hebron, Hickory Valley, New Union, Parrans Chapel, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Rocky Springs, Silerton, Saulsbury, Toone, Walnut Grove, West Memorial, and Whiteville. Thirteen of these churches voted to organize Hardeman County Association of Missionary Baptist. The Constitution adopted stated that the association "...shall be composed of the churches of Hardeman County, Tennessee and contiguous territory."

The 1925 annual meeting listed the following churches affiliated: Bolivar First, Bethlehem, Center Point, Ebenezer, Enon, Grand Junction, Harris Grove, Hornsby, Hickory Valley, Hebron, Middleton, New Union, New Bethel, Parrans Chapel, Porters Creek, Piney Grove, Pleasant Grove, Rocky Springs, Saulsbury, Silerton, Toone, Walnut Grove, West Memorial and Whiteville. Bolivar First and Whiteville were listed as full-time. Bethlehem, Grand Junction, Middleton, Parrans Chapel and Saulsbury reported preaching two Sundays a month. The other churches listed reported preaching once each month. The report showed 136 baptisms, 110 received by letter, one received by statement, nine by exclusion and 32 deaths.

The 1932 annual meeting reported 199 baptisms, 3,736 members; Sunday School enrollment 1,767, BYPU with 320 enrolled; \$1,404 for Cooperative Program; total missions \$1,987. According to the best available records Brother Cooper, a Tennessee Baptist Convention employee, served the association as Director of Missions (D.O.M.) prior to the depression and World War II.

During the depression and World War II years, the Association did not make much progress to the fulfilling of Article 4 in employing an Associational Missionary. However, in 1944, an agreement was entered into with the Tennessee Baptist Convention and Fayette Association. Reverend Clyde Cobb served in the position in 1947-48.

The 1954 Annual Meeting voted to call Reverend Teddy Evans to serve as the D.O.M. During his ministry the Dixie Hills Mission was started. It was sponsored by First Baptist, Bolivar. Brother Evans was instrumental in lead-

ing in many ministries that contributed to strengthening the work of the Association. He led in starting a fund for the building of a home and office for the D.O.M. and family.

Brother Evans resigned in May 1961 to accept the call to serve as D.O.M. for McNairy County Association. Hardeman Association called Reverend Fulton Robertson of Dover, Tennessee. Brother Robertson, wife Emogene and children, Fulton Jr. and Ruthie moved on the field Aug. 3, 1961. The home and office was built, with the Robertsons moving in Feb. 20, 1962. The 1962 Annual Meeting reported 206 persons received by the churches by baptism.

The 1964 reports show 26 churches reporting Vacation Bible School. A Seminary Extension Center was established jointly with Fayette County. The classes met in First Baptist, Bolivar. A World Mission Conference was held with good participation. Also, there was good participation in the Crusade of Americans.

Reverend W.W. Clark ministered for many years teaching in the Seminary Extension Center. The enrollment for the classes taught in 1984-85 was 42 representing 12 churches.

In 1983, the Association voted to purchase properties at 204 S. Jones Street, Bolivar for the Association Office and Conference Center.

Brother Robertson retired, effective Dec. 31, 1985. He served 24 years plus as D.O.M. for Hardeman Baptist Association. The Association at the Annual Meeting, Oct. 22, 1985 extended the call for Dr. Deryl G. Watson to serve as D.O.M. with his ministry to begin Jan. 1, 1986. Brother Watson requested permission to work with Brother Robertson during the month of December 1985.

The Association in the 1985 Annual Meeting voted to move to a new committee system with appropriate job description. Ongoing goals were set. These continue to be implemented. A successful World Mission Conference was held in 1988. There were 27 churches participating.

1989 saw the homecoming to Heaven of Mrs. Fulton (Emogene) Robertson. The 1989 Associational Minutes were dedicated to her memory. 1990-1995 saw the development of the Disaster Crisis Relief Team Association, by the Brotherhood. This team has ministered in the name of Christ from home to California, Florida, North Carolina, Illinois etc. The Building Team led in the construction of the new jail chaplain for Hardeman County in 1999.

November 1996 the Executive Board, in a called meeting, voted to purchase three acres on Vildo Road in West Bolivar for the building of a new Association Office and Mission Center. Most of the construction of the new building was done by the Crisis Building Team of the Association. The new center at 755 Vildo Road is an adequate building with full size basement. The upper level houses the D.O.M.'s office, secretary's office, workroom, library, conference

room, assembly room, kitchen, entrance hallway and the "Prophets Room" (a room adequately furnished and provided for overnight guests of the Association and the churches).

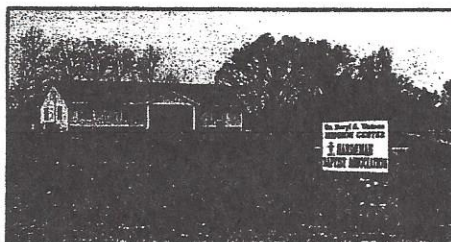
A successful World Mission Conference was conducted the first week of November (1-4) 1998. It was during the World Mission Conference, Nov. 3, 1998 that Dr. Deryl G. Watson, Director of Missions for Hardeman County Baptist Association died. His death was sudden and unexpected. The 1998 Associational Minutes were dedicated to his treasured memory. A Memorial Service was held Jan. 10, 1999 at First Baptist Church, Bolivar. The Association voted to name the new Associational Building, the Dr. Deryl G. Watson Mission Center. This was announced at the Memorial Service.

The Apr. 13, 1999 Executive Board accepted the report of the Associational Nominating Committee, Chairman, James Pulliam to elect Fulton Robertson, Bolivar First; Carolyn O'Hara, Parrans Chapel; Elynor DeBerry, Hornsby; Jimmy Garrett, Dixie Hills; Ernie James, Bolivar First; Charles Manley, Trinity and David Martin, West Memorial to serve as a D.O.M. Search Committee.

The committee presented Dr. James G. Koonce, pastor, Spring Branch Baptist Church, Houston, Texas to the 77th Annual Meeting of Hardeman County Baptist Association, Oct. 19, 1999. The Association voted to call Dr. Koonce. He and his wife Charlene moved to Bolivar Jan. 7, 2000. They live at 1039 West End.

A profile of the Association in January 2000 reveals the following: 33 churches; 13 full-time; 20 bi-vocational; 15 provide houses for pastors; some providing housing allowance. Eight or more pastors live outside the county. 26 churches reported 194 baptisms for 1999. Seven churches reported no baptisms; additions by letter, etc. 179; membership, 7,808; Sunday School enrollment, 3,657; average weekly attendance, 1,940; total receipts, \$2,906,646; amount given for missions, \$404,451; gifts to Association \$81,047.

Quotes from previous history by Deryl Watson, "It is impossible to list all the things the Association has accomplished over the years... There are triumphs and tragedies that any history records, this history is no different." We are deeply indebted to those who have gone before us. We honor their memory. *Written by Fulton Robertson, D.O.M. Emeritus.*



Hardeman County Baptist Association, Bolivar.