

Unity Baptist Church History

Several years ago, a senior member of the church stated that Unity Baptist Church was organized in the 1840s. There are no longer any records to confirm this date; however, records show a deed made in 1872 to Unity Baptist Church. The Lord has blessed this church, down through the years, with many good pastors, deacons and lay members. Some have stood many trials and testing for the faith.

The following is a very condensed history of Unity Baptist Church:

Unity Baptist Church Pastors

Bro. J. M. Herring
Bro. Tom Murchaud
Bro. Henry Rampley
Bro. George Darling 1908 - 1909
Bro. C. A. Gilbert 1910 - 1912
Bro. W. O. Thornley 1913 - 1915
Bro. C. C. Clark 1916
Bro. W. G. Gray 1917 - 1920
Bro. G. S. Rayburn 1921 - 1922
Bro. W. G. Gray 1928 - 1928
Bro. Frank Hobson 1929
Bro. C. C. Kerr 1930 - 1932
Bro. W. G. Gray 1933 - 1934
Bro. C. C. Hughes 1935 - 1936
Bro. O'Neal Estes 1937 - 1945
Bro. Sylvester Barber 1946 - 1948
Bro. O'Neal Estes 1949 - 1950
Bro. Buford Chilcoat 1951 - 1952
Bro. Buford Harper 1953 - 1963
Bro. Jodie Ishee 1964 - 1966
Bro. Lonnie Myrick 1966 - 1967
Bro. Elbert Boutwell 1968 - 1970
Bro. H. L. Gardner 1971 - 1972
Bro. C. V. Thompson 1973 - 1978
Bro. Charles G. Thompson 1979 - 1980

Bro. Eddie Boutwell 1981 - 2019
Bro. Toby Smitherman 2022 - 2024
Bro. Matthew C. Pharr 2025 - Present

The first Sunday School was organized on February 7, 1920. The teachers were: Bro. Will Gillentine - Superintendent; Bro. J. T. Horton - Bible Class; Mrs. Ozie Lesley - Primary; Miss Mattie Farrar - Card Class. During this period services were held only one weekend each month. Business meetings and preaching would be held on Saturday, with preaching services also held the following day on Sunday. This was most likely due to inadequate means of travel and poor roads. The preacher usually spent the night with a family in the church.

Unity Baptist Church was affiliated with the Judson Association when the first local missionary was chosen in 1929. Bro. G. 8. Rayburn was endorsed as the full-time missionary of the Judson Association. Bro. Jim Young was General Sunday School Superintendent of the association.

The church building burned sometime before 1930. During this time, the church met in the Unity School building. Under the leadership of Bro. C. C. Kerr a new church building was erected; a square building with double doors in front and windows on the north and south sides. It had a large wood stove in the middle and a raised platform for the pulpit. This building was used until 1951.

Bro. Buford Chilcoat led the church in the construction of a new church building in 1952. This building was dedicated on the fourth Sunday in April 1952.

During Bro. Buford Harper's tenure as pastor, services were held twice monthly and shortly thereafter full-time services began. The first series of revival services were held during Thanksgiving Holidays. Sunday school rooms were added to the back of the church auditorium in 1953. BTS was organized on January 16, 1953. Unity Baptist Church became a part of the Harmony Missionary Baptist Association in April 1955. The Brotherhood, Royal Ambassadors, Women's Missionary Auxiliary and Girl's Missionary Auxiliary

were organized in September 1957. Bro. Earl Brown was ordained as a deacon in the mid to late 1950's. The pastor's home was built in 1960. A new church sanctuary was built in 1962.

Some of the earlier deacons were Bro. L. A. Herring, Bro. J. R. Raper, Bro. Lawrence Magers, Bro. Everett Hodges, Bro. John Stanford, Bro. Lawrence Barnard, Bro. J. C. Newman, Bro. Sherman Holcomb, Bro. Cecil Lansdell, Bro. Bobby Williams, Bro. Steve Parham, and Bro. Tim Nichols. Early church clerks were Bro. L. A. Herring, Bro. C. A. Hodges, Bro. J. C. Raper, Bro. C. C. Roper, Bro. W. E. Hodges, Bro. Bobby Williams, Bro. Johnny Letson.

Unity Baptist Church has been blessed over the years by several men of its' membership being called into the ministry: Bro. D. R. Raper, Bro. Frank Hobson, Bro. Lawrence Magers, Bro. D. L. Byrd, Bro. Dennis Knight, Bro. Walter Brown, Bro. Junior West , Bro. Chris Lansdell and most recently Bro. Bryan Letson.

In 1974 Unity Baptist Church extended an arm of support to a mission church at Baldwyn. Parkview Baptist Church was later organized in 1976.

A fellowship hall was built and finished in 1979. It was dedicated on November 11, 1980. Shortly thereafter, the pastor's home was bricked and central heat and air was installed.

On March 4, 1984, the church voted to cooperate with the WMA in a project to have the pews padded in the sanctuary, During this same year the need of more deacons was discussed. Bro. Johnny Letson, Bro. Jerry Palmer and Bro. Wylie Parham were elected and then ordained on December 16, 1984.

On August 16, 1987, the church voted to build a new educational wing on the church. The building was completed in the early part of 1990. The old white church building that had been built in 1952 was sold and moved. This building still stands on the west side of Highway 145 south of Okolona, MS.

The decision was made on March 4, 1990 to elect two more deacons. Bro. Terry Hinds and Bro. David Long were elected and were ordained on June 6, 1990.

In October 1992, the church hosted a Homecoming for all former members and pastors. A note burning service was held to celebrate final note payment on the Educational building.

In 1995 plans and discussions began for renovation of the sanctuary. Work began in October 1995. During the renovation bathrooms were added to the front of the building, walls and ceilings were replaced, the choir loft expanded, new pews, carpet, lighting, pulpit and baptistery were installed. A large front porch was added and the brick veneer was torn off and replaced. Beautiful stained-glass windows and a new sound system were added. The newly remodeled sanctuary was first used and dedicated on Mother's Day - May 12, 1996. God blessed and the church paid off the note in a short time!

Work began on a new Family Life Center in the spring of 2004 and was completed and first used on Memorial Day 2006. We were thankful to God for this new facility. God blessed and the church paid off the note for the FLC in January 2017. A note burning and prayer was held after morning services on April 23, 2017.

Bro. Bryan Letson was licensed in the ministry on August 2, 2015.

On January 17, 2016 the following Deacons were added to the church: Bro. Tony Holcomb, Bro. James Young and Bro. Jason Letson.

On September 22, 2019 Bro. Eddie Boutwell retired from the ministry as our pastor. Bro. Eddie is noted as being the longest-serving pastor at Unity Baptist Church. He, along with his wife Jan, served our church faithfully for thirty-eight years.

God is still blessing Unity Baptist Church. Souls are still being saved by God's wonderful grace. Unity Baptist Church has stepped out on faith in God many times. He has met and exceeded our needs. May we at Unity Baptist Church always seek to honor God in all that we do.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Proverbs 29:18