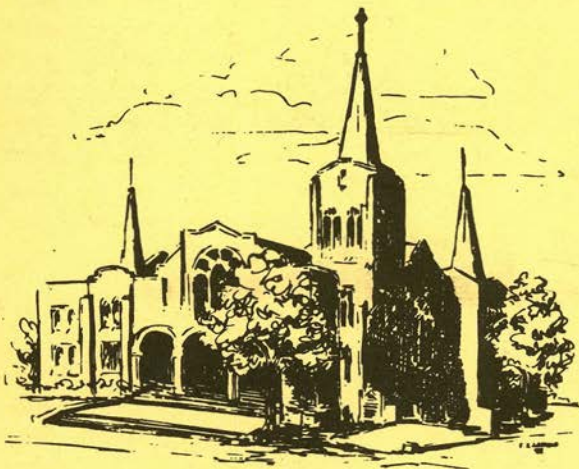


HISTORY
Of The
**Benson United
Methodist Church**



Benson, North Carolina

*76th Anniversary September 16, 1974
1898-1974*



— The Crums —

Kay

Jack

Bart

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus . . . Hebrews 12:1-2

The Pastor's Message

On September 16, 1974, the Church's 76th Anniversary

During the last twenty years we have lived in a time when events have leapt up all around us and run off the pages of history. The biggest war ever fought had ended but the longest war ever engaged in by American troops seemed never to end: Vietnam. A President and a Senator were assassinated: the Kennedys. The legal segregation system was broken in the United States by the Supreme Court and the Congress: the 1954

Decision and the Voting Rights Law. Exploration expanded beyond all dreams: through space to the moon. A Vice-President and a President resigned: Agnew and Nixon. Such was secular history.

Salvation history also jumped up and ran.

It was seventy-six years ago that the Benson Methodist Church began with six members. Twenty years ago the membership of the charge was 312, and now it has grown to 385. During the last year the increase in giving on the charge has been phenomenal.



Rev. J. H. Crum

The amount of money received and paid out during the conference year of 1973 increased by 25% over any previous year. During 1974 with the Elevation Church and the Benson Baptist Church we had a great Lay Witness Mission which crowded our sanctuary with people on May 31. More than 350 people came to the opening dinner. As a result of this mission we have more people participating in more sharing groups than ever before, and overall interest has expanded. At the Sunday morning worship service on September 8 we had almost one hundred people in attendance.

The events of both secular and salvation history have had high and low moments. This has always been so. But Christianity emphasizes the people in history. All through the Old Testament there are long lists of people because our faith regards them as important. Paul ends his letter to the Roman Church with a long list of greetings to people he regards as important. In the history of the Benson United Methodist Church you will find long lists of people because they are important in our history. They belong to a great company who set out to live for God. People, not events, are the most important things in our history. With John Henry Hopkins you and I might speak:

"I sing a song of the saints of God,
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and thought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew:
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
But one was a shepherdess on the green;
They were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too."

With love,

J. H. Cumm

The Beginning

On September 16, 1898 the Benson Methodist Church was organized with six charter members: Mrs. Mary F. Ryals, Mrs. Casandra Johnson, Mrs. Emma N. Jones, Mrs. Lula E. Benson, James W. Benson, and Mrs. Fereby Holmes, none of whom are now living.

Mrs. Mary F. Ryals was a teacher in the primary department of the Sunday School until her death in July, 1914. A handsome stained-glass window in the vestibule of the church was placed there as a memorial by her husband, the late Add Ryals.

On December 6, at the annual conference following organization, the Benson church was placed on the Dunn charge and the Rev. D. B. Parker, then serving the Dunn charge, was given the new unit in Benson as a part of his service. He remained with this charge until the following December when the Rev. W. A. Forbes was sent by the conference to the Dunn charge. The Rev. F. A. Bishop was the presiding elder of the district and the Rev. R. K. Hargrove was the bishop. The first quarterly conference was held that year at Erwin in December.

Worship services were held in the small frame school building on the site of the present elementary school building. Sunday School was held in an upstairs room of the Boykin Hotel, later known as the Blue Heaven, and recently torn down. Now occupying the site is the modern building housing the Benton Printing Company.

Mr. Sim Morgan, originally from Smithfield, was an outstanding leader in the organization of the Sunday School. Many of the first attendants recall that they attended Sunday School at the Baptist Church on Sunday morning and went to the hotel on Sunday afternoons to attend the Methodist Sunday School.

The Church Site Given

A few months after the organization of the church, James W. Benson, a druggist who established the Benson Drug Company, (he was a charter member) donated the corner lot on Church Street on which the present church stands. A frame building, of the style then popular for small town and country community churches, was begun; and as soon as the walls and top were in place Sunday School and worship services were held in the building. Over a period of three years work was continued on the building as funds were available until it was eventually completed and painted.

The Rev. W. A. Forbes, second pastor of the church, served in this capacity for three years. During the three years of his ministry he received 24 additional members making a total of 30 with the six charter members. The new members were W. S. Utley, Ella M. Utley, Nannie E. Utley, E. F. Utley, U. J. Blackman, Mrs. Rosa Neighbors, Calvin L. Johnson, Lula Johnson Royall, Bertha Johnson Canaday, Miss Stella Benson, Delia Holmes, Mrs. Nathan Porter, Irene W. Lucas, O. Marshburn, Haywood Lucas, W. E. Raiford, Mrs. W. E. Raiford, Daniel Edge, Mrs. Weeks, Mr. Weeks, C. E. Holmes, James Oscar Johnson, and Anson Holmes.

It was during Mr. Forbes' pastorate that the Rev. Rob Leak of Rockingham, a consecrated man of strong convictions and wide influence and an exceedingly eloquent speaker, preached a series of revival sermons. In addition to the several who united with the Methodist church there were several who joined the local Baptist church as a result of this meeting.

At the annual conference held in 1901, the Rev. E. M. Snipes was sent to the charge. He served two years and received six new members: Mrs. Annie F. Davis, Mrs. Henriette Stancil, Miss Lochie Stancil, Carl Ryals (son of the charter member) Dr. George Hood, and Mrs. Daisy D. Allen.

About this time Elevation church and the Benson Church along with the Erwin church were combined into a charge. The Rev. W. A. Forbes was returned to the charge as pastor in November, 1903, serving two years and receiving two members, Dr. J. C. Johnson and Mrs. C. T. Johnson.

The next pastor was the Rev. J. M. Daniels who served four years during which time 16 new members were received into the Benson church: Mrs. W. R. Denning, Mrs. George Benson, Mrs. Kate Elkin, Miss Eula Porter, Mrs. Meta McLamb, C. T. Johnson, Mrs. Edith Parker Putnam, Mrs. Sallie Stewart, Mrs. Geneva Parker Graves, Mrs. Lovie D. Parker, Miss Bertha Johnson (Mrs. Walter Strickland), Miss Florence Johnson, and James Hutchinson. Benson was placed on the Four Oaks circuit at the following conference.

Next as pastors came the Rev. T. H. Sutton, the Rev. R. F. Taylor, and the Rev. George Starling, 46 members being added during the three pastorates. The new members were: E. F. Moore, Mrs. Dave Bryant Denning, Rufus I. Austin, R. T. Surles, Mrs. R. T. Surles, Willie C. Ryals, T. Marvin Johnson, Earl Fonville (the first RFD mail-carrier here), Mattie Fonville, Byrde Fonville, W. R. Denning, Edgar Johnson, John R. McLamb, Gertrude Surles, Wade Royall, Evelyn Boone, Paul D. John-

son, Brosia Porter, Atty. James R. Barbour, James E. Wilson, Mrs. Esther Johnson, Mrs. Martha Jackson, Miss Vinnie Jackson, Mrs. Mattie Smith Pope, Mrs. Brosia Porter, Mary Jackson, Mamie L. Grant, J. Ernest Johnson, Callie Barefoot, Herman Barnes, Lillie V. Barnes, Mary E. Edmond, Mrs. William E. Utley, Ridley Heath, Mrs. Bettie Heath, the Rev. Daniel J. Hill, Annie Hill, Mary E. Dixon, C. T. Johnson Jr., Elitha E. Barefoot, Lottie E. Royall, Maude Benson, and Pansy McLamb.

Brick Building Erected

The membership and the Sunday School having steadily increased during its 17 years of existence the need of more spacious quarters was felt; and during the pastorate of the Rev. J. T. Stafford (3 years), who next came to the charge as pastor, the present magnificent brick structure was erected at a cost of \$50,000. So loyal and interested were many members that the building debt was soon liquidated. The last payment on the building was made following a board meeting held late one afternoon when there was a balance due of slightly over \$4,000. Present at the meeting were laymen C. T. Johnson, W. R. Denning, Charles Johnson, and J. E. Wilson, who upon the suggestion of one of the four, wrote out their personal checks for more than \$1,000 each to wipe out the remaining indebtedness. The parsonage, which was acquired later, is of brick.

During Mr. Stanford's three years as pastor 22 members were received: Evett Denning, Annie Lee Denning, Linwood Johnson, Mrs. J. R. Barbour, Mrs. Mamie Holmes, William Boone, Alene Coats, C. C. Creech, Mrs. C. C. Creech, Miss Vallie Hill, Mary Hill, Mabel Johnson, Maude Johnson, Walter R. Strickland, Milton Smith, Ezra Parker, W. O. Rackley, Mrs. W. F. Smith, Chellie Mae Royall, Maude Fonville, Pearl Hill, Mrs. Blanche Stanford, I. Pat Roberts, Mrs. I. Pat Roberts, and Mrs. Swannie Tart.

The Rev. Mr. Stanford was the first pastor to occupy the parsonage and the first pastor to reside in Benson.

The Rev. Edgar M. Hall was sent to the Benson charge in December 1918, and with his wife who was a gifted singer, added much to the spiritual life of the community during the five years of his service in Benson. Mr. Hall received 43 members as follows: Dr. A. S. Oliver, Mrs. A. S. Oliver, Mrs. Ella Hall, Vernon Jackson, A. B. Hudson, Phillip Ed-

mond, W. F. Smith, D. Ed Hill, Charles Roberts, Esther Mae Hill, Irene Hudson, Charles S. Collins, Nora Creech, Clyda Ryals, Charlie Johnson, Mrs. Walton Johnson, N. E. Rashe, Mrs. Pearl (Paul) Johnson, Miss Ruth Cox, William Moses, Robie Porter, Prof. Ralph Weaver (school principal), Donald Kanoy, Mrs. Nettie Kanoy, Hampton Royall, Joseph Johnson, Kenneth Johnson, John Allen, Leta Gold Johnson, Lillian Benson, Cornelia Benson, Louise Denning, Edgar M. Hall Jr., Mrs. Vernon Jackson (Lola), Katie Gold Surles, Florence Helen Denning, Murle Johnson, Mary Belle Wilson, J. Ralph Burgess, and Florence Boone.

The Rev. J. E. Blalock served as pastor the following four years receiving 41 members: H. I. Horton, Nannie Roberts Blalock, Katherine Blalock, Alene Horton, Bettie Horton, Mrs. Hallie Woodall, Todd H. Caldwell, Willis Powell, Mrs. Willis Powell, Bruce Powell, Adlai Oliver Jr., Mrs. Tim Eldridge, Meredith Eldridge, Paul Johnson, Dr. Roy E. Perkins, Mrs. Foy L. Perkins, William B. Whitley, Mrs. Lela Dees Whitley, Thelma Owenby Lucas, Maude Coats, W. A. Jones, Mrs. W. A. Jones, Cyrena Allen Parker, James Creech, Miriam Creech, H. B. Grantham, Richard Colvin, H. B. Graham, Raymond Johnson, Earl B. Bowman, Iola Stephenson, Alphonso Parker, Claudia Denning, Eunice Wilson Blalock, W. E. Smith, Edgar A. Johnson, N. G. Woodlief (school principal), and Mrs. N. G. Woodlief.

During Mr. Blalock's ministry the church building was dedicated by Bishop Collins Denny.

At the November 1927 conference the Rev. B. H. Houston was sent to the Benson charge. He served three years and received 29 members: O. P. Raiford, Mrs. O. P. Raiford, Lewis Raiford, Lillian Raiford, J. W. Wilson, Mrs. C. T. Johnson Jr., J. L. Barbour, Howard Denning, Mrs. Howard Denning, L. D. Creech, Margaret Burgess, Harry Burgess, Harold Scarboro, Mansine Whitley, Iva Belle Surles, Ida Mae Raiford, Evelyn Canaday, Eloise Smith, S. C. Stanley, L. J. Lane, Mrs. L. J. Lane, and Mrs. Howard Wings.

The Rev. J. H. Frizzelle served the church the following two years during which time six new members were added: Mrs. Pearle Denning Stephenson, Lina Pearle Johnson, Louise Parker Boone, Erma Elise Benson, Jake Whitley, and Junius Kornegay Johnson.

In 1932 the Rev. W. C. Merritt came to live among the Benson people and to serve the Benson and Elevation churches. In addition to the blessings of his dedicated service the Benson church profited greatly by the services rendered by his gifted and noble daughter, Miss Ruth

Merritt, a graduate of Scarrett College who had spent a number of years as a Christian teacher in the missionary field in Brazil. During Mr. Merritt's four years in Benson he received 43 members: Elizabeth Rackley, Julia Johnson, Margaret Lovie Parker, Mrs. W. C. Merritt, Ethel Merritt, Edith Louise Tate, Ella Mae Tate, Ruth Merritt, Woodley Merritt, William Robert Denning, Thurston Price Johnson, James Harold Johnson, Sarah Frances Whitley, Gladys Neal Johnson, James David Denning, Golden Douglas Parker, William Franklin Smith Jr., Mrs. Doris Gardner Canaday, Mrs. Golden Parker, Doris Elaine Lambert, William E. Norris, Mrs. Statha Jones Lambert, James Sherrill Jackson, Woodrow Wilson Smith, William Brantley Woodall, Roy Preston Woodall, Edgar Allen Johnson Jr., Vernon Leroy Jackson, Stella Creech, Mrs. Ruth McGuffin, Estelle Stephenson, Ernestine Johnson, DeLara Surles, L. M. Nobles, Mrs. L. M. Nobles, Agnes Gunter Johnson, Mather Dorman, Oscar O'Neil Johnson, Earl M. Canaday, and Mrs. Lawrence Parrish.

It was during Mr. Merritt's pastorate that our first pipe organ was installed at a cost of \$800. Some years later this organ was replaced with another organ at a considerably higher cost.

At the November 1936 conference the Rev. J. C. Whedbee was sent to the local charge. His pastorate covered a period of two years during which time 11 members were received: Mrs. Thaddeus Barbour, Everett Green, P. P. McGregor, Mrs. J. C. Whedbee, J. C. Whedbee Jr., Miriam Whedbee, Donald H. Parrish, Kyle V. Stephenson, Mrs. Kyle V. Stephenson and Mary K. Smith.

The Rev. Harley A. Chester, a native of Hickory, was designated as pastor of the Benson charge in 1938. Sunday School and church worship attendance increased markedly. Twenty members were received: George Bowden, Mrs. Evelyn Carson, Rives Gunn, Butler Jeffreys, Mrs. Butler Jeffreys, Mrs. Kenneth Johnson, Mrs. Ruby Hardin, Mrs. H. A. Chester, Rebecca Chester, H. O. Parks, William Parks, Mrs. Donald Parrish, Roscoe Barefoot, Mrs. Roscoe Barefoot, Mary Jane Utley, Arthur Stephenson, and Mrs. Arthur Stephenson.

The foregoing was published in *The Benson Review* on Tuesday, November 7, 1939.

At the request of the present pastor, the Council on Ministries, and the Administrative Board this summary was continued and brought up-to-date in time for the observance of the church's 75th anniversary.

On account of the urgency and lack of sufficient time, the following

portion of the summary is less concise and defined. However, let it be said that there is still a fine spirit of co-operation in the church, and we trust that together we shall continue in our efforts to be true instruments of God in the work of building His Kingdom. It is to this goal that we of the Benson United Methodist Church are dedicated.

December 1973

In the 34 years since the above information was assembled the following pastors have served the Benson church: H. A. Chester, C. B. Culbreth, Kern Ormond, D. A. Clarke, Ivey T. Poole, Carlton F. Hershey, W. E. Howard, W. M. Ellis, P. H. Layfield, H. A. Bizzell, and J. H. Crum.

Most of the pastors left written records of activities of the church and its various activities and also their comments on the progress and spiritual response evident during their ministry. The Rev. H. A. Chester noted that it was the first time in his ministry to serve a church with an average church school attendance exceeding that of the church membership and adding: "I attribute this to hard and faithful work of the Sunday School superintendent and his efficient workers." He also commended the members of the Missionary Society for doing fine work, satisfactory co-operation in various related church work, and tireless efforts in the cause of the Kingdom. The Youth Fellowship was very active and youth revivals were held as well as successful Vacation Bible Schools. The Youth Group has continued active and alert. He said his service here had been a happy and busy period. During his 4 years in Benson 90 members were received and 19 members were lost either by death or transfer to other churches. Mr. Chester's annual salary was \$1560.00.

The Rev. C. B. Culbreth, who followed Mr. Chester, left a note in the church records stating that "We have found a cordial and generous people in Benson, people who love their church and have shown their faith and loyalty to their Master." Mr. Culbreth passed away almost suddenly in the parsonage January 1, 1946.

The Rev. Kern Ormond, son of Bishop Ormond, having just returned from military service abroad, was called to the Benson church following Mr. Culbreth's death. He wrote in his records that he was gratified at the wonderful spirit of co-operation and brotherly love manifested and that the interest and activities in the church and Sunday School were very marked.

The Rev. D. A. Clarke counseled many youths. He was well pleased with the well-organized Youth Fellowship.

The Rev. Ivey T. Poole was our next pastor. He and his devoted wife were a blessing to the church.

The Rev. Carlton F. Hirschi, a young and enthusiastic minister originally from the state of New York, was an untiring worker. He had been stationed in North Carolina during his military service and strongly felt the call to preach notwithstanding that he had a slight speech impediment. He said that he counseled with many ministers all of whom advised him against entering the ministry on account of his speech defect. However, he was so strongly impressed with his "call" that he went ahead and prepared himself for his chosen work and one of his great blessings was that when he entered the pulpit and began preaching his bane of stammering disappeared. He was popular and well liked by all who knew him.

The Rev. W. E. Howard followed Mr. Hirschi as pastor here. Another good and dedicated man was he.

The Rev. Wally M. Ellis came to the Benson church following Mr. Howard. He and his wife were accomplished vocalists and added much to the worship services by their contribution in this area.

Next came the Rev. P. H. Layfield, who with his accomplished artist wife, brought many blessings to the community. Prior to entering the ministry Mr. Layfield had been a successful dentist for many years. Deeply feeling the call to the ministry Mr. Layfield said that for three years he resisted and lived in the depths of misery feeling that he would never be able to speak in public, much less be an effective "preacher." However, he decided that if the Lord wanted him to preach there was no other course to follow, so he gave up his successful dental practice and began his studies in the School of Religion. He spent 5 years as pastor in Benson and endeared himself to many hundreds of people in and out of the Methodist Church.

The Rev. Henry A. Bizzell was the next pastor here. He was a native of the community of Newton Grove and was an energetic worker.

The Rev. J. H. Crum is the present pastor. He is a native of Raleigh and is alert, likable, untiring and unceasing in his labors for the Master.

Through the years the church has maintained its physical properties, carried adequate insurance, met all its obligations in the financial field, and has shared in all mission causes presented, helped provide scholarships to students, sent financial help and clothing to the needy of

the world, and responded to many other calls with enthusiasm.

From the records of the church very little is learned of the great work of the church or of the noble men and women who composed its early membership.

The history of the church was been of no great outstanding events as the world regards history, but a steadily growing power for good in the community. It has not sought to write its history in glowing events, but in the lives of those who make up its membership and constituency.

The Benson United Methodist Church has served and is still serving a real need in the life of the community. It has brought solace and comfort to bereaved hearts, it has laid its hands on the hearts of boys and girls and guided their lives to maturity and sent them out into the great unknown realms of eternity unafraid.

REGISTER OF

Names.	To whom Married.	WHEN AND HOW RECEIVED.				By whom Received.
		Baptism.	Vows.	Certificate.	By order of Ch. Conf.	
Mary F. Ryals			Sept 16, 1898			D. B. Parker
Cassandra J. Johnson			"			" " "
Mrs Emma N. Jones			"			" " "
Lilla E. Benson			"			" " "
James W. Benson		Sept 16, 1898				" " "
Ferdy A. Holmes			Sept 16, 1898			" " "
W. S. Utley				Jan 29, 1899		W. A. Forbes
Ella M. Utley				"		" " "
Hammie E. Utley				"		" " "
E. F. Utley				"		" " "
U. J. Blackburn					Jan 29, 1899	" " "
Mrs Rosa Nighbors					"	" " "
Calvin L. Johnson					Jan 29, 1899	" " "
Lula Johnson	Royal		Jan 29, 1899			" " "
Bertha Johnson	Canady.		Nov. 25, 1898			" " "
Stella Benson			"			" " "

Reprinted above is a portion of the first page of the Register of Members of the Methodist Church in Benson in 1898.

This history of the Benson United Methodist Church was researched and written by Stella Creech of Benson.

The printing was done by the County Press, also of Benson.