

HISTORIES
OF
GEORGIA CHURCHES

History of Beth-Salem Presbyterian Church

Columbus, GA

The present Beth-Salem United Presbyterian Church was organized in 1896 as the Second Presbyterian Church of Columbus. The First Presbyterian Church, downtown, was instrumental in establishing the church. Both congregations operated under the banner of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. This was the name given to the Southern branch of the Presbyterian Church that separated from the Northern group during the Civil War. The Northern group retained the name "Presbyterian Church in the United States of America" later becoming the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Predominantly Black congregations became a part of both organizations. Some sixty years later the First Presbyterian Church downtown was to be instrumental in establishing the Carver Heights Presbyterian Church in Columbus. The reunion process of both national bodies became an issue of great importance, and this union was consummated when the two churches met together in April, 1983 in Atlanta, Georgia.

Due to prolonged periods when it was impossible to obtain the services of qualified Presbyterian ministers who must be trained by the seminary, the church became inactive. During this period the church building located on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Sixth Street was used by the Board of Education as a supplemental classroom to the Fifth Avenue School.

Sometime between the dates the church was established and 1931, the name of the church was changed from Second Presbyterian to Beth-Salem Presbyterian. The exact date of this name change is unknown.

In 1929 a group in the First Presbyterian Church, downtown, re-established the Sunday School, and in 1931 the church and its property was deeded over to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The appropriate officers of the First Presbyterian Church, downtown, signed for the Southwest (Southern) Presbytery. The late Dr. G. W. Holley, the founder and then President of Albany State College, and the Rev. Augustus A. Clarke, founder and then Principal of the Gillespie High School and the Pastor of St. Paul Presbyterian Church, Cordele, Georgia, authenticated the necessary documents for the Knox-Hodge (Northern) Presbytery. The late Elders C. W. DuVaul and B. F. Lawton signed for the Beth-Salem Church.

During the period 1931 through 1934 the church was served by supply ministers, the chief among whom was the late Reverend S. O. Mitchell,

then Assistant Principal of the now Gillespie -Selden Presbyterian High School in Cordele. Reverend Mitchell did an outstanding job in getting the church moving again. He played the piano for the hymns, sang with gusto a melodious baritone the congregation always enjoyed, and preached an outstanding sermon each Sunday.

Reverend S. A. Laing became the first pastor of the church in 1935, under the banner of the Knox-Hodge (Northern) Presbytery. The church prospered under his leadership. Reverend Laing resigned the pastorate in 1939, and returned a second time as Pastor in 1949. He served the church until his retirement in 1963. The title "Pastor Emeritus" was bestowed upon him following his retirement.

During the period 1964 through 1977, the church again experienced difficulty in obtaining the services of a regular minister. The congregation stood fast and services were held every Sunday during these trying years. We were helped greatly during this period by our now retired former pastor, Presbyterian rules notwithstanding, and by seminary students from Johnson C. Smith Seminary of Atlanta.

Reverend Timm Cyrus, while still a seminary student, came to the church in 1978. New growth began again. It became apparent that facilities on Fourth Avenue were inadequate, and search was launched to find a new location. By the grace of God this facility became available and through the benevolent, mission-minded Program Agency of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Beth-Salem Church moved from its old location on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Sixth Street on the last Sunday in August 1980. Reverend Timm Cyrus, having graduated from the Seminary, was ordained and installed on this same date. Operating under the banner, "An Old Church with a New Ministry," the church grew in membership and community outreach. In June 1983, Reverend Cyrus resigned, after five years of dedicated service, and accepted the call to a New Church Development in Sacramento, California.

The church was again served by supply ministers until Reverend Otis Smith became Pastor in 1984 and served until 1985. During this time the church continued to serve the community.

In 1989 a call was extended to the Reverend Robert E. Powell who served faithfully until illness forced him to resign in August of 1991.

Although we once again find ourselves without the services of a pastor, we are grateful to the Reverend Bartley, the Reverend Abram Johnson, and Reverend Archie Simmons for rendering services to us.

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Through the years, the Beth-Salem Presbyterian Women's Organization played a very important role in helping to carry out missions of the church . Many projects were undertaken in order to help with financial obligations, building maintainence, and repairs. The organization continues its quest to help the church in any way possible and stands ready to offer its services whenever needed.