

October 4, 2009

In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the
Commencement of Woodland Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas

Reflections

by John R. Slimp

Twenty years! A lot of things happen in twenty years. Let's go back and take a look.

Twenty years ago my hair wasn't gray.

Twenty years ago, Huebner Road didn't exist in front of our church, there was no interchange for Loop 1604 at Blanco, and Hwy 281 stretched through just open fields beyond Bitters Road.

Where is my son John sitting out there? John, stand up. Twenty years ago this fine young man was just a twinkle in Jill's and my eyes.

Twenty years ago two fine, strong churches had visions of outreach and ministry for the north side of San Antonio.

So, how did it start? Well, a few years more than twenty years ago First Baptist Church and Manor Baptist Church each called separate, hardy groups of volunteers, "seed families", to start a couple of missions. FBC's Ridgewood Mission was out here first, and in typical Baptist fashion had met in a variety of locations, including homes, a school cafeteria, and in an old abandoned glass factory, just a few minutes from here.

Manor's mission was born of a spiritual renewal emphasis a few years earlier, and by the time it was ready to begin the mission it had heard about Ridgewood. Through the tireless and inspired efforts of folks like Luke Williams of FBC the two missions decided to come together after a six or seven month courtship. Just to get to that point there were quite a few bumps along the way in both camps, both in the mother churches and in the missions, but God's kingdom work would not be denied, and we treasure our heritages from our mother churches

In keeping with our Baptist roots, the newly combined mission congregations took a vote one evening at Manor to name ourselves Woodland Baptist Mission. We bought and put up our sign at the glass factory, and settled into a routine of mopping floors, having meals and ice cream socials together, and endlessly, it seemed, unstacking, moving into place and then restacking chairs for every activity and worship service.

We were fortunate to have a number of mentors to help us work our way to getting up and running. In addition to Luke Williams, there was Jimmy Elrod, Bob Herring, and Don Anderson to name just a few. However, when we began to prepare for the first Sunday of activities, we weren't sure we could pull it off, as we didn't yet have a pastor, or any other full time staff for that matter. But, we just gathered a group together under

the name “the October Committee” and started planning. It was a celebration then, just as it is now, to do God’s work.

So, on October 1, 1989, Woodland Baptist Mission opened its doors at the glass factory with Sunday School classes for all ages. Then we had our first service with a full choir – of 17 members or so – a room full of borrowed hymnals and Bibles, a volunteer choir director and pianist, and a guest preacher. It was a great morning and when it was over – we, of course, had to move and restack the chairs again in preparation for Wednesday evening activities and choir practice. God’s kingdom work would not be denied.

We were full of hope and praise – we had no pastor yet, and Lee and Barbara Maresh were working for free as our choir director and pianist – but we were doing a new thing. Within a year and a half, we had constituted as an independent church, took over the land purchase note from Manor, and in another year had built this sanctuary and adjoining rooms. We grew - and unashamedly took on the mantle of that “funny little liberal Baptist church on the northside.” As we worked together, we also worked out our faith statement based on historic Baptist principles– what we still believe today:

- freedom of the individual
- freedom of the local church
- being the body of Christ, and His servants in missions and ministry
- reverence for biblical authority yet respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship
- proclamation of the Good News, and assembly as a free church in a free state

We liked to say that in joining Woodland we didn’t require you to check your brain at the door. We dreamed of, and were blessed to start and grow, a church where men and women are servants of the Lord on an equal basis as teachers, deacons and ministers.

In twenty years it’s been long enough now to see our kids grow up and marry, friends and families move away, and many return. Some who helped us to begin this work have gone to be with the Lord. We honor their memory, and we delight in new friends and families who join with us and help us to continually redefine who we are. We’ve been blessed with three wonderful pastors, three wonderful ministers of music, and so many other dear church leaders who have helped us to grow from infancy through our teen years, and now into adulthood.

Our missions ministries and efforts have grown, too - from our own initial neighborhood outreach that we called “pies for prospects - to a bridge ministry to the homeless downtown. We go to barrios in south Texas and across the border into Mexico. And now our mission teams annually travel to Guatemala and Moldova. God’s kingdom work will not be denied.

The words of the hymn say it well – we are called to be God’s servants, working in the world today, taking His own task upon us, His sacred words obey. Today in this fellowship called Woodland we celebrate twenty years of service to our Lord – and counting.

Thanks be to God.