

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LAKE FOREST HISTORY



Established in 1900, First Baptist Church of Lake Forest was founded by Reverend Harry Knight of Chicago, Illinois. Services were held from home to home in Lake Forest. Eventually, the membership rented Haley's Hall for worship, which stood on the corner of Bank Lane and Westminster Avenue. In May of 1903, the church secured a permanent location at 673 Oakwood Avenue, which remains as our present location. Included among the early Christian Pioneers who paved the way for the establishment of First Baptist Church of Lake Forest were: W.L. Best, Samuel Dent, Joe Drummond, and Hanna Reid.

In 1912, the church building and land was paid for and the membership increased to 61. Rev. H.C. Stokes was pastor. Because of needed building improvements, the church was mortgaged in 1912. The building was completely remodeled inside and a baptismal pool was installed. Throughout the years, many improvements were needed; however, through the continued efforts of our devoted members, we went from gas jets to central electric lighting; from stoker heating to oil and then to gas heat. Through these combined efforts our major shortcomings were completed by 1917.

Since 1900, First Baptist has had many pastors to include: Reverend Harry Knight, Reverend J.C. Smith, Reverend Rodgers, Reverend B.H. Hunter, Reverend Thompson, Reverend McEwen, and Reverend Payne. In 1921 Reverend C.C. Caldwell became pastor. Under his leadership, the church mortgage was liquidated and the building cornerstone was erected in 1922 displaying the names of Deacon Charles Davis, Luke Watson, Washington Jordan, and Reverend C.C. Caldwell as Pastor.

In 1937 Reverend Richardson was called as pastor. This was considered a time of rapid growth and progress. Many young people were baptized and became church members. Tithing was instituted and in July, 1941 a system was implemented where all finances from auxiliaries would be deposited into the main church treasury. This plan was so successful that it is still in effect today.

In 1946, Reverend R. S. Jones was installed as pastor. Pastor Jones served First Baptist Church of Lake Forest faithfully for 27 years. He was an inspiration to the membership and to the Lake Forest Community.

Reverend R. W. Balk came to pastor First Baptist Church of Lake Forest in 1973. His tenure ended in 1981.

From 1981 to 1992 Reverend Charles M. Starks was pastor. He continued in the tradition of the early years working toward improving and beautifying the church building as well as winning souls to Christ.

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Reverend Rodney B. McCalister became pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lake Forest in 1993. His pastoral leadership lasted until 2003. Under his leadership in 1986 a historical plaque was presented to the church by the Lake Forest Foundation from Historic Preservation in recognition of the historical significance of First Baptist in Lake Forest. As a result of this recognition, our church is a lifetime member of this society and became a part of the rich history of African American in Lake Forest and Lake County by being the oldest Baptist Church in Lake County.

Presently, First Baptist Church of Lake Forest is under the spiritual leadership of Pastor Todd E. Fletcher. Pastor Fletcher became pastor in 2005 and continues to build upon the rich spiritual history of our historical church.

PASTORS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LAKE FOREST

Pastor Harry Knight	1900 – 1912
Pastor H. C. Stokes	
Pastor J. C. Smith	
Pastor Thompson	
Pastor McEwen	
Pastor W. R. Payne	
Pastor Bitt Hunter	1917 – 1921
Pastor C. C. Caldwell	1921 –
Pastor R. L. Brown	
Pastor Richardson	1937 – 1946
Pastor R. S. Jones	1946 – 1973
Pastor R. W. Balk	1973 – 1981
Pastor Charlie M. Starks	1981 – 1992
Pastor Rodney B. McCalister	1993 - 2004
Pastor Todd E. Fletcher	2005 -Present