

## FAMILY DEDICATIONS AT MOUNTAIN BROOK BAPTIST CHURCH

The first child-family dedication ceremony at Mountain Brook Baptist Church took place in June 1968. Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr. was the pastor and the instigator. Without prior discussion or announcement, Dr. Nelson told the congregation that child-parent dedication ceremonies would become part of the church program. He said that families with new babies needed to be spiritually nurtured by the church. He cited Scripture, Luke 2:21-40 about the infant Jesus. Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple for dedication, so why not us?

Some Baptist churches had reportedly begun the custom of baby dedications in the late 1940s, but the idea did not reach Birmingham until the 1960s. Dr. Nelson designed a ceremony for Mountain Brook Baptist Church. The ceremony was not just a dedication of a baby, but of the baby's parents, entire family, and the church.

In some years, dedications took place in groups on Mother's Day or Father's Day. Or, a dedication might be especially for one family. When Jennifer Cox became the first children's director in 1982, she steered the dedications into groups on Mother's Day or Father's Day. More recently, the dedications have been for a single family per occasion.

When Emma Laura Patrick took up the post in January 1990, she began keeping a card file of dedications—pink cards for girls and blue for boys. Families looked forward to dedicating their little ones and often brought out heirloom clothing or emblems.



Mountain Brook Baptist Church customarily has given a New Testament and a flower to each child presented. Since Sharon Howard became children's director in 2007, 90 dedications have been recorded.

This is the prayer that Emma Laura Patrick always offered to conclude a dedication service.

*Almighty God, our Everlasting Father, as Thy children we renew the vows of our commitments to Thee this day. Bless, we pray Thee, \_\_\_\_\_ and his/her parents as together they grow in their love for each other, for Thee, and for Thy church. To complement their love, give the parents the common sense, insight, and perceptiveness necessary to support him/her in all the ways that will enable him/her to grow into wholeness, to increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. We pray this our prayer in the name of Thy Son, Jesus, our Savior.*

*Pictured are the Haynes family (above) with their daughter, Naomi, who was dedicated on May 27, 2018, and the Kelley family (left) with their daughter, Lydia, who was dedicated on March 6, 2016.*



FEBRUARY 10, 2019

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL  
75th Anniversary Memories of Mountain Brook Baptist Church

## CHILDREN AT MOUNTAIN BROOK BAPTIST CHURCH

*“But Jesus said, ‘Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 19:14 KJV).*

The early members of Mountain Brook Baptist Church were parents of the Baby Boomers. That generation had children, lots of them. And those children, their children, their grandchildren, and now a few great-grandchildren have always been a primary focus of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Early minutes record that Deacon John Bayliss agreed to provide \$10 a month for nursery expenses. With the church bursting out of the Jackson Avenue house which Mountain Brook Baptist Church called home, some children’s programs were held across the street in Crestline School.

There is a photo of a girl’s Sunday School class meeting in a car. The first baby born to the congregation was Larry Greer who, while no longer a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, lives outside Mountain Brook Village and his twin grandsons were graduates of our Early Learning Center in 2018.

Some might argue that those “Greatest Generation” parents tended more to the “children should be seen, not heard” philosophy than perhaps some parents today. The September 1953 Deacon’s meeting minutes record that they authorized \$275, a princely sum at the time, to soundproof the nursery.

W.H. Borland reports in the January 1954 minutes “since Deacons contacted the Junior Boys concerning their behavior, the boys have conducted themselves magnificently in the past few weeks.” By 1954 the church hired Bill Caldwell, a Howard College student, as its first youth director at \$75 a month.

He was soon replaced in September by Bill Baggett.

With the quick turnover in that position, perhaps those boys didn’t continue to conduct themselves so magnificently.

Vacation Bible School was a big factor in growing Mountain Brook Baptist Church. The first Vacation Bible School was organized in the first summer of Mountain Brook Baptist Church—1945. It was held for children ages 4 through 12 on June 1-15. Mrs. Elouise Prater walked door to door through Crestline to enroll 85 children—surely maxing out the house and grounds of the little house-chapel on Jackson Avenue. VBS was revived after the first



*Whether it’s at Children’s Camp, Vacation Bible School, or over a fellowship lunch after church, there’s always something fun and spiritually enriching happening in our Children’s Ministry!*



Montevallo Road church unit was functioning. In 1953, 56 children attended, likely organized by Mrs. Herbert Acton who later for over 20 years ran the church’s kindergarten program. By 1975, Bible School enrollment was up to 270 under Hoyt Wilson’s leadership, followed by Emma Laura Patrick and Sharon Howard. Today, well over 500 attend the Mountain Brook Baptist Church’s VBS.

In the 1950s, the church sponsored Scout troops, reporting that in 1955 there were 46 boys meeting in the Fellowship Hall. The Christian Life Center has been a hub of youth activity since it was completed in 1975, not only for Mountain Brook Baptist Church families but as a facility used by much of the community, especially junior high students. There’s no way to count the number of youth basketball teams that have called the Christian Life Center their home court nor the number of birthdays celebrated in the gym. Deacon minutes record a 1971 father-son banquet with Mike Kolen, the Miami Dolphins’ Captain Crunch, as speaker. Only the Lord knows how many camps and retreats there have been at Shocco, Hargis, Lake Martin, or Panama City.

The \$275 spent to soundproof the nursery in 1954 was perhaps well intended, but at Mountain Brook Baptist Church there is no way today to soundproof all the children’s activities happening at the corner of Overbrook and Montevallo.

Note: the writer of this story was a Junior Boy in 1954 and disavows any knowledge of what prompted Mr. W.H. Borland’s report to the Deacons.

*Richard M. Adams*