

has not been heavily used to date. It is difficult to prove the value of online giving, as the church has to pay a fee up to 4% of the donation to process an online gift given by credit card.

Yet electrification continues to grow in church and culture. The latest Mountain Brook Baptist Church venture into e-communications was to webstream the Traditional Worship Service, beginning September 16, 2018—the launch of the 75th Anniversary observance. The livestream is linked to the church’s website, [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org), with a button in the top right corner which says “watch.”

Members now live in an atmosphere of electronic communications, and naturally the church has seized the opportunities to carry out ministry and to share the gospel in new ways. Dr. Dortch has said, “Computer-assisted communications are refreshing our ongoing work. Everything we do in technology endeavors to send out the gospel of Jesus. As technology develops, we develop. We know this is necessary for us to be faithful to our mission of proclaiming the gospel in word and deed.”

## MOVING THE MESSAGE ON-SCREEN

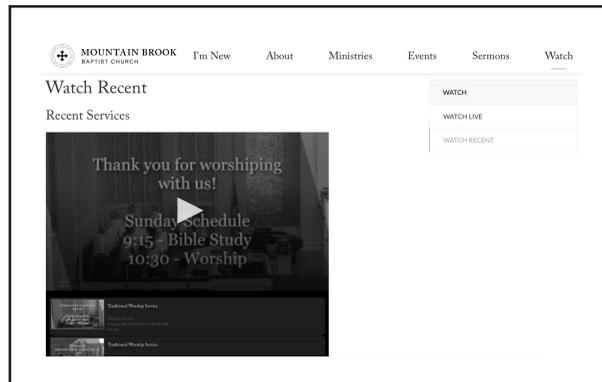
Go to [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org) and click “Watch.” Welcome to the worldwide congregation who can watch our church worship on a computer or other digital device. The first service to be livestreamed was September 16, 2018. This was our first major day of the year-long 75th Anniversary Celebration. Vision 2020 groups had the dream of launching new technologies, including video streaming. Video could be routed through the church website.

Kely Hatley was the minister assigned to work out the video stream of the Sunday Traditional Worship Service. He got lots of help from two newly arrived church ministers: Tim Sanderlin and Ben Winder. Each had already been trained as video administrators. A technical control room had already been built behind the balcony in the Sanctuary. Television equipment was mounted there and elsewhere in the balcony, so that a director or controller could remotely operate cameras, insert graphics, and otherwise run the technical equipment, without disturbing the congregation. Essential pieces of electronic equipment included two cameras and a switcher-streamer computer.

Once the system was working, a team of volunteers was needed to operate it. A new television web-streaming ministry team was organized. On February 3, 2019, Marty Lloyd spoke in the Traditional Worship Service, appealing for people to volunteer for training in television and web-streaming. As a result, many new volunteers were added to the team. We are still recruiting helpers, so if you are interested in learning more about the live streaming process, contact Ben Winder ([ben@mbbc.org](mailto:ben@mbbc.org)) or Tim Sanderlin ([tim@mbbc.org](mailto:tim@mbbc.org)). The work of this team not only helps make ministry possible, but it also makes our ministry and services international in scope.

To date, worship services since September 16 are archived on the “Watch” page and are accessed by clicking on the “Watch Recent” tab. People can review and catch up on services of interest.

The television web-streaming ministry team joins another long-standing technical team: the audio ministry team. Both teams enable ministry to be carried out which is an exciting and essential way to share our Christian message to the ends of the earth.



MARCH 31, 2019

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

## “E” MEANS ELECTRONIFICATION, “E” MEANS EVANGELISM

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In 1984, the Deacons and the finance committee decided that there was no need for a computer in the church. Jerry Edwards, one of the young members who helped count the Sunday morning offering, politely disagreed. He had just set up his own business, bought a computer, and learned the advantages of the newest technology. Why shouldn't his church have the latest equipment? Without anybody's permission, Jerry Edwards personally paid about \$3,000 to buy a computer for the church finance office. Staff celebrated the efficiency and improved analytics. After a year, the finance committee chairman came to Mr. Edwards with apologies and thanks for his gift.

By 1989, computers were given to some staff in the church office who cranked out the many letters and print publications being mailed or handed to members. Other staff kept on using typewriters.

The 50th church anniversary history book, *Outward Focus*, was handed to an outside printing company in a stack of pages created on a typewriter, with handwritten corrections. This was in 1994, and immediately afterward, the new “Information Age” dawned full force in society. How would the church adjust? In less than a year, email was sweeping the nation. By 2000, more than half of Americans had a personal computer. By 2001, more than half of Americans were using email.

At the same time, the Internet was becoming more usable by amateur communicators. The World Wide Web had been made public in the early 1990s and several websites were showing popularity by 1994. Even churches were getting websites. Websites led to search engines—like Yahoo Directory, Ask Jeeves, and Bing. Then came Google in 2002. Mountain Brook Baptist Church members were living electronically at home and work, but the church lagged a bit. By 1996, some church staff were bringing their own personal computers to the church office for work, using personal email addresses via dial-up connections. The church had to consider how quickly all ministers and office workers could go electronic.

When Alvin Pelton joined the staff as minister of education in 1996, he got outside consultants to advise about setting up an email system and a webpage. In 1998, the church registered its web domain. That was the birth of [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org). Alvin and team set up an enduring protocol for using first-names@mbbc.org for staff email addresses. Debbie Hix (who has served as the church's finance director since 1993) was designated to be administrator for the in-house computer server and technical sides of church Internet usage.

In 1999, the church website went live: [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org). It was a halting, humble attempt based on work of external designers. The church directory and other publications advised members about the web address in 1999. Staff and consultants kept tweaking it. Church member Susan Ray was contracted to be web coordinator in 2010 and 2011. The 1999 directory also announced email addresses for staff. Email addresses for some church members began to be listed in the directory in 2001, and many had email addresses included in the 2003 directory.

While the church learned to optimize new technology, a temporary device was installed: a phone tree. It was used for emergency announcements including deaths and funerals. Without the phone tree, the church secretaries had to punch in individual telephone calls to members needing emergency news. The phone tree was expensive, so it was discontinued as soon as the majority of members got email.

As the church office collected a sizable list of email addresses, some announcements began to go out via email rather than phone or hard copy. In 2003, the church office had to buy a larger computer server to handle the growing volume. To cyber-watchers, Mountain Brook Baptist Church began to look like a spammer. So in 2006, the church began to dispatch mass emails through an electronic marketing service called Constant Contact.

The arrival of Dr. J. Douglas Dortch Jr. as pastor in 2011 brought an acceleration of electronic communications channels. He spoke to the Deacons about making this an urgent priority. Personally, he was a speedy and effective user of email and text messaging. Alvin Pelton conducted a “communications audit” to get a better picture of the church's electronic status. It proved that the majority of members clearly preferred

electronic communication from the church and its outreach.

It was observed that church ministers and other staff were using their personal cell phones for a lot of communication. Staff members' personal cell phone numbers were actively, privately circulated among members. Apple's release of the iPhone in 2007 threw electronic communication into lead position for many members who learned to send text messages. Staff cell phone numbers began to be printed in the church directory. By 2008, more than half of American teens were text-messaging, so their church leaders had to text too. In 2012, the church began paying monthly bills for its ministers' unlimited cell usage.

A new external website consultant was brought in for a laborious, slow re-do of [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org). Wayne Splawn was the staff leader of the effort beginning in 2012. Soon blogs by the pastor and other staff could be found on the website—and next came podcasts. Several other major web reorganizations came in 2014 and in 2017. In 2017, Geoff Johnson, who was on staff with Leap Logic at the time, worked with his firm to help update our website and brand.

“Social media” offered other new channels of electronic communications. Facebook opened for public use in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. Instagram opened in 2010. Mountain Brook Baptist Church people were immediately on these electronic media—and their friends and some of their ministers also. Some had theological fears about the popularity of these sites and about whether the church could manage official presence. Nevertheless, in 2016, Mountain Brook Baptist Church-related pages were launched on Facebook. The pastor used Twitter. The church webpage, [www.mbbc.org](http://www.mbbc.org), showed links to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Social media sites attracted up to 500 followers each, significant in church communications.

In February 2016, the church office began to send out a weekly e-newsletter via email to all members who expressed willingness to get their news electronically. The church discontinued or deemphasized its hard-copy newsletter, “The Messenger.” As of 2019, a typical e-news bulletin or memorandum from Mountain Brook Baptist Church goes to about 1000 email addresses. Analytics indicate that the most-read emails are death and funeral announcements. Still, in 2019, some members do not have electronic connections and can't be reached by email or text message. Slightly more than 100 people get church news via hard-copy or by a telephone relay from class members.

In the past, for many years, the church printed its news on the back page of *The Alabama Baptist* (*TAB*) statewide newspaper. Interest in this medium dropped off, and the church stopped getting its special edition printed and sent to members. If a member wants to continue receiving *The Alabama Baptist* for its denominational news, the church provides it free of charge. In 2019, 61 people continue to get a church-paid subscription to *TAB*. Many of the paper's articles are available online at no charge.

As early as 2009, and certainly by 2011, it was common to drive up to the church building, and find several staff or members walking around outside trying to talk on their cell phones. It was impossible for most cellular providers to send a decent signal inside the church building—or even outside. (One clear spot for some servers was in the middle of the Sanctuary—very embarrassing for members who didn't bother to turn off their phones prior to a worship service.) In March 2009, limited Wi-Fi coverage was made available in some spots around the church office. After constant additions and tweaking of Wi-Fi routers, most of the building was covered during 2016. Still there are spots deep in the masonry and steel where no phone signal can penetrate.

Another wing of electronic advancement has been online giving. Some leaders felt that the church would benefit from facilitating members being able to give in this way. Some members already took the initiative to set up automatic funds transfers from their bank accounts to the church. Then in 2017, church publications announced procedures for making a donation online, even via text. If you visit the church website, you'll notice that the top banner offers an option to “give.” Surprisingly, online giving