

DR. NELSON'S FIRST SERMON

As if a tornado had struck the pretty little Chapel, Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr. preached his first sermon as pastor on May 28, 1961. It had taken the pulpit committee more than 14 months to convince him to move from First Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina. It took a big campaign and lots of promises to dislodge him from one of the most prestigious and wealthy churches in the south. All the top business leaders and Baptist officials of Birmingham area had thrown a dinner for him. The whole city promised to support him—if he came to Mountain Brook Baptist Church. He had met privately with every Deacon in Mountain Brook Baptist Church and pinned them down—would they increase their giving? Would they aggressively enlist new members?

His greatest demand was to church leaders. In spring of 1961, before he would consider coming as pastor, they assembled to hear his “conception of the church.” He asked more of them than they had ever devoted to church.

Gen. Leon L. Mathews, a vice-president of the First National Bank, chaired the pulpit committee. Letters were exchanged. Yes, there would immediately be a drive to build a new Sanctuary. Yes, Dr. Nelson would have his own secretary. He could hire a full-time minister of education and other staff of his liking. Yes, the church would launch an intensive program of visiting and enlisting prospective members. And definitely the church would dramatically increase its giving funds in support of Baptist missions—actually they had already doubled such giving and promised to do even better.

The only problem was salary. Dotson Nelson took a drastic cut in pay to come to Mountain Brook Baptist Church. His wife Grace was packing but also asking, “How are we going to put new shoes on four children? We can't live on that salary.” Believing that God had prepared him to preach and to lead in Mountain Brook, Dr. Nelson came.

On May 28, the Chapel was packed for two services. When the time came for people to indicate their desire to join the church, the Nelson family of six led the way. And there were 22 other people standing in a crowd at the front of the Chapel.

Today several of our members can say “I was there.” Excitement and hope were erupting. Leadership was exactly what the church needed to grow. These are some of the challenges that Dr. Nelson gave his congregation on opening day of his pastorate. The title was “My Church.” The church is people—with a message, a mission, and a method. The people must move into the community to find people who do not know the Master.

Such a breath-taking sermon ought to have been a carefully crafted sermon preserved on paper. Apparently, it was not. Samford University's library has nearly 20 archival boxes full of Dr. Nelson's sermons and notes. The file for May 28, 1961, contains only a notecard and a rough piece of brown scrap paper entitled “draft.” “My Church” was a spill-over from the heart of Dr. Nelson to the hearts of no more than 400 eager people. It launched a glorious twenty years that brought 2,747 people into the membership.

Richard M. Adams, Lee N. Allen, Catherine Allen, Mary Scott



MAY 26, 2019

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

STARTING MEADOW BROOK BAPTIST CHURCH

Mountain Brook Baptist Church has had a strong commitment to helping start new churches. In 1983, Mountain Brook Baptist Church purchased about 14 acres of land in the new Meadow Brook development, about a mile west of 280. Brookwood Baptist Church shared the cost of approximately \$210,000.

I was surprised when Drs. Nelson and Moebes appeared at my office in the summer of 1984. I was manager of the spacious new national headquarters built by Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was located on a mountaintop overlooking the Meadow Brook development. Highway 280 was a lonely outpost in those days. WMU had just moved in. My husband, Lee N. Allen, was in the laborious process of hanging nearly 500 pieces of artwork (after his day of work at Samford), while I was arranging an open museum of mission artifacts.

Jim Moebes told me about a small congregation that had been meeting behind a gas station further out Highway 280. They had lost their lease and could not grow without a better meeting space. He asked me if this church could meet and grow in the WMU Building. Mountain Brook Baptist Church would send some of its people to form a nucleus. Dr. Nelson would be the pastor until the new church got on its feet. Mrs. Grace Nelson had been ordained for ministry by Mountain Brook Baptist Church in 1982, and she would be the associate pastor.

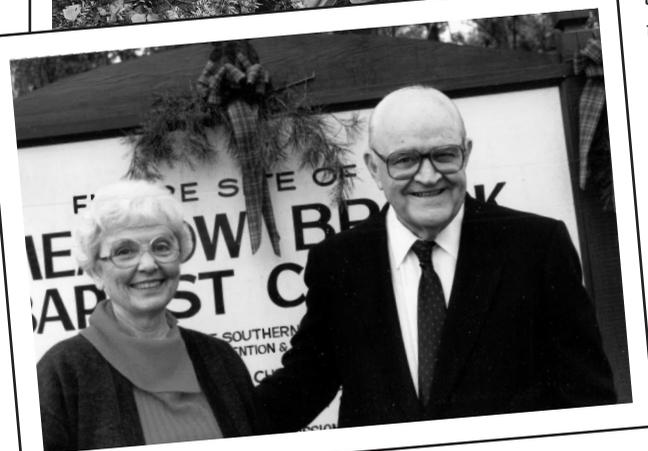
It was a great plan—but the WMU Building was definitely not child-friendly, though there were plenty of assembly rooms. As keeper of the keys and security codes, I or another responsible WMU staff member would have to be present. The Allens would have to join the new church. Like any call to do mission work, the Meadow Brook project would call my family to rearrange our lives. But, there was no way to say no to Drs. Moebes and Nelson and Mrs. Nelson—not to mention a divine plan for local missions.

The Nelsons took over on the first Sunday in August 1984. From then on, for more than four years, Lee and I were at the WMU Building seven days a week, along with our daughter Leslie. Lee was glad to serve as a Bible teacher of adults at the Meadow Brook mission. He had only one request—he didn't want to stop functioning as clerk of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Friends like Mrs. Irma Cruse kept things covered at Mountain Brook, while Lee became the historian and clerk of Meadow Brook.

At the first Meadow Brook service, Dr. Nelson

Top: The youth of Meadow Brook Baptist Church were given opportunity to break ground. The girl in the photo is Leslie Allen, who was among those "loaned" from Mountain Brook to start the new church. The man to the left is Dr. Bryant Strain, representing Brookwood Baptist Church and next is Dr. Dotson Nelson of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, the two churches involved in providing land for Meadow Brook.

Bottom: Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr., pictured with his wife, Grace Nelson, at the groundbreaking for Meadow Brook Baptist Church. Mrs. Nelson was newly ordained for ministry by Mountain Brook, and she served Meadow Brook as associate pastor in charge of visitation and new members. Dr. Nelson was the part-time preaching pastor.



looked around to see who would play the piano or sing. Nobody volunteered, so he said, "Grace, we need you." Until that moment, I had no idea that Grace Philpot Nelson had been trained at Julliard in voice and piano! What a heavenly experience to hear her music—but only until some musical volunteers joined Meadow Brook.

A large group of Mountain Brook leaders cast their lot with the new mission. Church membership was moved to Meadow Brook for these, among a total of 30 Mountain Brook Baptist Church people: Michelle and Rodney Rushing; Connie and William Stigler, Kem Stigler, and other children; Lloyd Rains; Anne Roys Owens and Bentley and Kitty Owens; Keith and Stella Bryant; Polly and Walter Reed; Elvie and S.D. Weaver; Jewel and Don Wheeler; Lynn Wheeler; Debbie and David Gallaspy; Vernon and Faye Knight.

Every committee and every class in the new church had Mountain Brook "missionaries" as the backbone. Meadow Brook Baptist Church was formally constituted as a church on February 10, 1985. Robert U. Ferguson, formerly a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, was called to be the regular pastor at Meadow Brook. He was married to Debbie, daughter of Jack and Ruth McKewen of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. They had two handsome young sons. Debbie later said that her greatest fear was that her sons would drown in the deep fountain in the lobby of the WMU Building.

On December 6, 1987, Meadow Brook Baptist Church dedicated its own fine starter building on the property which Mountain Brook Baptist Church had deeded to the new church in early 1986, aided by Brookwood Baptist Church. On December 20, 1987, Lee, Leslie, and I came back home as regular members of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. The Nelsons and some of the other "missionaries" from Mountain Brook also returned home, once the new church was flourishing on its own.

Currently Meadow Brook Baptist Church has an active membership of approximately 675. Meadow Brook Baptist Church is also a partner with our mission efforts in Builders for Christ.

Catherine Allen



Meadow Brook Receives Deed

Mountain Brook and Brookwood Baptist churches recently presented Meadow Brook Baptist Church with the deed to land for its new building. Pictured at the presentation service are (left to right) Mike Bayliss, Meadow Brook stewardship chairman and general chairman of the trustees; Davis Weaver, Meadow Brook deacon chairman and chairman of the building committee; Julian Brown, Mountain Brook deacon chairman; Milton Bagby, Mountain Brook chairman of trustees; James Moebes, Mountain Brook pastor; Art Rice, Brookwood deacon chairman; Bryant Strain, Brookwood pastor; and Robert Ferguson, Meadow Brook pastor.

Mountain Brook, Brookwood Give Deed to Meadow Brook

BIRMINGHAM — Mountain Brook and Brookwood Baptist churches recently presented the deed to an 11.2-acre tract of land to Meadow Brook Baptist Church.

Meadow Brook Baptist Church, started as a mission of Mountain Brook and Brookwood, celebrated its first anniversary as a church February 9. The church currently meets in the Woman's Missionary Union building on Highway 280 near Birmingham, but has plans to begin construction of its own building soon.

THE DEED was presented in a joint service at Mountain Brook Baptist Church March 2. Accepting the deed on behalf of Meadow Brook were Davis Weaver, chairman of deacons and chairman of the building committee, and Mike

Bayliss, general chairman of the trustees and stewardship chairman.

Art Rice, Brookwood deacon chairman; Milton Bagby, Mountain Brook chairman of trustees; and Julian Brown, Mountain Brook deacon chairman, challenged Meadow Brook members to "share the vision" by establishing a mission fund so that as the church grows there will be funds for a future mission.

IN 1968 Mountain Brook Baptist Church gave 10 acres of land and 100 members to start Brookwood Baptist Church.

Robert Ferguson is pastor at Meadow Brook, James Moebes is pastor at Mountain Brook, and Bryant Strain is pastor at Brookwood.

In 1986, Mountain Brook and Brookwood Baptist Churches presented Meadow Brook Baptist Church with the deed to land for its new building. Pictured at the presentation service were (left to right): Mike Bayliss, Davis Weaver, Julian Brown, Milton Bagby, Dr. James D. Moebes, Art Rice, Bryant Strain, and Robert Ferguson. The presentation service took place in the Sanctuary at Mountain Brook Baptist Church.