

Sorrento Baptist Church



1950-2010



where love abounds

60
years

Let us love one another for love is from God . . . The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. We love, because He first loved us.

1 John 4:7-8, 19



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History of Sorrento Baptist Church

Sorrento, Louisiana

1950-2010

Imagine Sorrento without a Baptist church. Just a few short years ago, this thought was a reality, and still would be today if it weren't for those who cared about the people of Sorrento. One of those people was Mr. John Hannah, who brought people from the Sorrento area to New River Baptist Church. Through this ministry, the need for a mission in Sorrento was realized.

In January 1948, Rev. and Mrs. Q. P. Davis, students at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, held services every Sunday afternoon in Sorrento in front of the old theater. According to Rev. Davis, the loud noise made it difficult to conduct services. The mission's department of the seminary allowed Rev. and Mrs. Davis to conduct a survey in hopes of starting a mission in Sorrento. Under the Home Mission Board, with Rev. Davis as pastor, a mission was established in Sorrento.

In September 1948, after Rev. Davis moved to Chalmette, Rev. Albert Hodge, also a seminary student, came as pastor. Other seminary students came with him to help. On Sunday, November 7, 1948, as the group of students traveled to Sorrento to conduct services, a tragedy occurred on Airline Highway. A car wreck claimed the lives of Rev. Al Hodge and a student.

In these early days, since no building was available, the mission held services in an old bus, first in front of the old Pasqua Theater and later in front of Mrs. Bessie Lambert's store. Later Mrs. Bessie helped the mission get permission to use the old Dehaase Eby Company Store next to the railroad tracks on Main Street.

New River Baptist Church began sponsoring the new mission in 1949. The mission was organized as a church on September 17, 1950 under the leadership of Bro. Earl Proctor and his wife, Lucille.

Sorrento Baptist Church bought their first lot on January 17, 1951 from Denver Hurst, Sr. This lot measured 80' by 250' and cost \$750.00. There was a small house on this property. This house was home to the first two

pastors, Bro. Proctor and Bro. Williamson, and also the fourth pastor, Bro. Moser.

The first church building was begun in June 1951 under the leadership of Brother Proctor. The church voted to hire Mr. J. B. Alexander as Head Carpenter for \$2.00 an hour, and Mr. Bill Richardson as Helper at \$1.50 per hour. Truvy Wells and others were hired to build the heavy framework.

Bro. Guy Williamson was a student at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and he and his wife, Judy, were coming out each week to help Bro. Proctor in organizing the church into a functioning body. After Bro. Proctor resigned on April 30, 1952, the church called Bro. Williamson as Pastor on June 4, 1952. Before this young minister could accept the call as pastor, he had to be ordained. The church requested that his home church, Capital View Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, ordain him. Bro. Williamson served as pastor until July 20, 1953.

Brother James Hawkins was called as pastor on August 1, 1953, with his wife Frances. He remained pastor through July 1956. The first church building was completed under the leadership of Bro. Hawkins. In May of 1953, the deacons made a suggestion that they finish the outside of the church before finishing the inside. During this time, the church was paying a \$50.00 per month note on the initial loan to start the building. Whatever monies could be raised over and above the note and other expenses were to be put into the building fund. This money would be available to spend on material. During this period, when progress on the building was so slow, the church voted to hire Bro. Hawkins to work on the church building. The church paid him \$1.00 per hour and furnished him a helper.

Bro. G.M. Moser was called as pastor in August 1956, along with his wife, Dorothy. He served as pastor until August 1959. During his pastorate on February 26, 1957 the church refinanced the church property borrowing \$5000 to remodel the little house behind the church, making it into a modest pastorium.

Bro. Fred Bookter was called as pastor in September 1959 with his wife, Willa Mae. At this time, the church was involved in building an educational building. The church was being assisted financially in this endeavor by the state WMU.

Sorrento Baptist Church acquired its second tract of real estate August 18, 1962, located on Brittany Road at a cost of \$1,995.54. This lot and frame house was bought from Milton Lee for a pastorium. Dr. Bookter was the first pastor to live in it.

On May 8, 1963, the church voted to buy their third piece of real estate from David O. Pezant paying \$3,200. This odd-shaped lot adjoined the church property on the north side back of the church, adding a very strategic piece of real estate to the church. The lot added 50 feet to the 80 foot street frontage on Highway 22, giving the church a 130-foot frontage.

As in most Baptist churches, especially small ones struggling to grow, there was always something to be fixed or something to purchase. The church voted on January 20, 1965 to refinish the flooring in the auditorium and the two rooms at the entrance of the church at a cost of \$850. Under the leadership and encouragement of Dr. Bookter, the church voted to liquidate the church debt by November 1, 1965, and then refinish the ceiling and walls as money became available. This plan was adopted at the January 20th business meeting.

Tragedy struck on Sunday morning, March 7, 1965. Due to a faulty heater, the church burned to the ground. Almost everyone in the church—men, women, and children—pitched in and started cleaning up the rubble from the burned church. Christian fellowship and unity abounded everywhere as everyone worked shoulder to shoulder. The clean-up operation took months. When tragedy strikes, hearts respond. Mr. J. A. Savario let the church use his old store building for services, and Mrs. Bessie Lambert allowed the church to use the barber shop for Sunday School classrooms. St. Ann Catholic Church took a special offering for our building fund. In March 1978, St. Ann's Church burned, and we did the same for them.

On March 10, 1965, the church immediately gave Dr. Bookter the authority to appoint a new building committee. The committee went to work getting plans and making decisions on all the things that go with starting a new building. By recommendation of the building committee, the church voted to build a new church building "debt free." This commitment could not be carried out. Groundbreaking ceremonies for a new building were held on May 9, 1965. Before the new building was started, Dr. Bookter resigned as pastor on August 11, 1965.

Bro. Carl Stewart was called as pastor in October 1965, but resigned in January 1966 because he chose not to move on the church field. By December 8, 1965, since work had not yet begun on the new building, all the former plans were abandoned. The committee visited other churches for building ideas and new plans were made.

Bro. Ed Bledsoe was called as pastor in March 1966, with his wife Sharon. Under his leadership, the construction of the present auditorium was begun and completed. Dedication of the church building was held on August 21, 1966. During his pastorate, the first educational building, including the recreation hall, kitchen, and classrooms was built.

The church acquired its fourth piece of real estate from Leonce J. Schexnayder on May 25, 1970 at a cost of \$1,065. This lot adjoined the property on Brittany Road where the present pastorium was begun.

Bro. Bledsoe resigned as pastor in November 1971. These times were very discouraging for the church. Another pastor had resigned; the church split—half the congregation staying and the other half went with the pastor to form a new church. Much time was spent reorganizing the church.

Bro. Fred Moore was called as pastor, with his wife Betty. He was the first pastor to live in the present pastorium. He served as pastor for a little over three years, from November 1971 to March 1975.

Bro. Eugene Gullet, our present pastor, was called on September 14, 1975, along with his wife Betty. During his pastorate, three additional adjoining pieces of real estate were purchased. On February 11, 1983, the church purchased 1.14 acres from William "Bill" Everette for \$2,000. Then on February 22, 1983, the church purchased two acres from Grady Melanon for \$16,915. An additional .7 acre lot was purchased on January 8, 1988 from Betsy York for \$7,000. This lot gave the church an additional 50-foot frontage on Highway 22. At the present time, the church owns approximately 5 ½ to 6 acres of real estate.

During his leadership many improvements have been made to our church including the following:

- a new educational building was built

- new lighting installed in auditorium and educational building
- cushions were added to the pews
- new carpet was installed in the auditorium and new tile in the foyer
- parking lot was paved with concrete
- nursery remodeled
- lawn equipment including tractors, lawnmowers and bush-hogs were purchased
- sound system was updated twice, and new pianos purchased
- church lighted sign was purchased
- all outside doors were replaced including the glass doors on the front entrance
- two flower beds were landscaped
- new paneling and flooring was installed in the church educational building
- air conditioning systems and furnaces were replaced
- sewer system was installed
- new roof was put on the entire church
- kitchen was updated
- connected the city water system

Maintenance and improvements were also made to the parsonage including: *(some of these items were taken care of both physically and financially by the pastor and his wife)*

- carpeting was replaced on 2 different occasions
- new flooring was laid in the dining area and kitchen
- new kitchen appliances were purchased
- two bathrooms were remodeled
- fluorescent lights installed in main part of the house
- roof replaced twice
- house foundation was leveled
- sewer system installed
- several trees cut down and others trimmed
- pump house re-built
- connect to city water system

The church borrowed money for the new educational building but all other improvements were funded by free will offerings. Sorrento Baptist Church has been **debt free** for over 20 years for which we give God the glory.

In 1986, the church began having joint services twice a year with Bro. Richard Rayborn and his congregation alternating one service at Sorrento with the other at The Christian Assembly. Since 1996 we have enjoyed a Thanksgiving joint service with St. Anne and St. Anthony Catholic Churches, alternating yearly between Sorrento and St. Anne. Each year we look forward to worshipping with both of these congregations.

Over the years the people of Sorrento Baptist have been involved in many ministries, such as:

- FAITH ministry (Sunday school outreach program)
- Children's church
- Bible drill
- Puppets
- Jail ministry, including state prison revivals
- Nursing home ministries
- Senior citizens luncheon
- Food baskets
- Food pantry

Currently, the church supports the following ministries:

- Fairhaven Children's Home
- Puerto Rican deaf ministry
- Mission Dignity
- American Family Association
- Family Research Council
- Louisiana Family Forum
- Alliance Defense Fund
- Louisiana Moral and Civic Foundation

Sorrento Baptist Church has been faithful in supporting the ministries of the Cooperative Program, International Missions, North American Missions, and State Missions.

Community Opportunities of East Ascension (COEA) has done an excellent job of cleaning the church for approximately 30 years for a minimal fee. Also, many members and others have given their time and energy to the upkeep and service of the church, such as:

- grass cutting
- sign messages
- painting
- pressure washing
- flower beds
- repair and maintenance of equipment
- work days at the church
- many other services have been rendered which are too numerous to name

In 2004 the ladies of Sorrento Baptist Church published a cookbook entitled "Savoring Grace". The cookbook contains a collection of recipes from members of the church.

We praise God and thank each of them for their hard work.

During the 60 years of the life of our church, many people have come and gone through these doors. Some have moved on to other areas and continue to actively serve the Lord. Numerous others have gone on to be with the Lord. We cherish their memories and the many ways they touched our lives through their sweet spirits and service here.

Much spiritual growth has taken place over the years at Sorrento Baptist Church. Many people have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior through the ministry of this church. It is our prayer that in the years to come, many more will be added to the Kingdom of God.