

THE WSBC

CENTENNIAL TIMES

SUMMER EDITION July/August 2011

Issue Number six

6th EDITION

CENTENNIAL
COUNTDOWN
16 months

MORTGAGE
PAYOFF
COUNTDOWN
\$594,165
TO GO

*"Celebrating God's faithfulness in the past,
His strength for today,
His promise for tomorrow"*

**SUMMER
BONUS!
EXPANDED
JULY/AUG.
EDITION**

Celebrating One Hundred Years 1912-2012

IN THIS ISSUE:

A LIFETIME MINISTRY BEGINS

*"I am just a
spectator
watching what God
is doing."*

-Billy Graham-

BILLY GRAHAM
MONTREAT, NORTH CAROLINA 28757

October 13, 2009

Greetings for 100th Anniversary of Western Springs Baptist Church

Congratulations as you celebrate the church's 100th Anniversary.

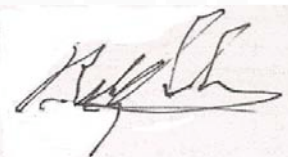
Western Springs Baptist Church helped form my ministry. It was the first church of which I was a pastor. When I first took Ruth there, I felt that she might be discouraged that it was in a basement, but she enthusiastically entered into the life of the church.

As I write this, one vivid memory that just came to me is a nest of non-poisonous snakes in back of the church. Why that stands out in my mind, I don't know--unless it is because later, when we moved to Montreat, Ruth many times had to take care of killing snakes of the poisonous variety around our home, but would never allow a non-poisonous black snake to be killed!

A more important memory, though, is the very warm welcome Ruth and I received when we began our married life in the pastorate of Western Springs Baptist Church. I will always be grateful.

I am also appreciative that down through all these years since that time, members of the congregation have prayerfully supported me and my ministry.

May God continue to bless and use the ministry of the church in Western Springs for many years to come.



Preparation for the Centennial Year



SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Throughout the summer months the Centennial Committee will be meeting with subcommittee chairs and staff to refine and flesh out plans for the centennial year. Budgets are being finalized and communication has been established as key to facilitating a smooth running of this ‘all church’ endeavor. Former pastors have been invited to ‘save the date’ encouraging their participation in our Celebration Weekend. Former pastor, Lloyd Fesmire’s daughter, Dotsie is interviewing her mother, Helen in preparation for the historical coverage of the twenty-plus year pastorate of Lloyd Fesmire. The **Videography/Photography Committee** is aggressively pursuing the creation of a video representing the past, present and future of our church. The **Archival Committee** continues to catalogue, and accumulate closeted treasures of historical significance. The **Fine Arts Committee** is dreaming of banners and Fine Arts Fairs. The **Mission, Fellowship and Discipleship Committees** are individually planning major endeavors in their unique emphases. So thankful for all who are participating!

WANTED: WSBC TREASURES FROM THE PAST

As you clean those closets and rid the attic of cobwebs, don’t forget the WSBC archives. WSBC memorabilia is of value to us!

CENTENNIAL TIMES AVAILABLE ONLINE

Know someone who would enjoy receiving the *Centennial Times*? Are you in touch with past members and attenders who would consider a return visit to WSBC during the Centennial year? Send names and contact info to church office ASAP. Also spread the word, *Centennial Times* is now available on the church website listed on the bottom of this page. Click on left hand column marked ‘events’. You will find ready access to all past issues of Centennial Times.

HELP RECORD WSBC HISTORY: ‘SONGS IN THE NIGHT’ ATTENDERS PLEASE NOTE!

If you attended a recording session of the Songs in the Night radio ministry of our church during the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s we would welcome your written memories of the experience. Whether child, teen or adult, your personal memories and perspectives would add much to our written historical record. Please snail mail or email ASAP to SondraBrunsting@yahoo.com.

A FEW FACES ON THE CENTENNIAL TEAM

- (Left to Right Top Row)**
 Jim Simmons- Video/Photog Comm
 Janet Helin- Centennial Comm
 Ruth Whittaker- Banquet Comm
 Barb Swift- Centennial Comm
 Sandy Wilsey- Centennial Comm
- (Left to Right Bottom Row)**
 Cliff Thomas- Open House Comm
 Louise Graff- Fine Arts Comm
 Eileen Thomas- Open House Comm
 Pete Orth- Open House Comm
 Ruth Fazio- Work Trek Comm

*Lord,
 You have been
 our
 dwelling place
 throughout
 all generations.*

Psalm 90:1

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF THE HISTORY OF THE WSBC “Songs in the Night” blossoms at the WSBC as a young pastor becomes restless.

As told first hand in the auto-biography of Billy Graham: “Just As I Am”.

Billy continues recounting his earliest days of ministry to our church. (Part 1 ~see June issue Cent. Times)

One day, as I was driving down the street, a man driving in the opposite direction pulled up next to me.

“You’re Billy Graham?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m Torrey Johnson,” he said by way of introduction.

“Oh, yes,” I responded enthusiastically. “I’ve heard you lots of times on the radio.”

“I’d like to talk to you,” he said.

“Certainly, any time,” I agreed.

He called on the phone a little later. “I’ve got too many things on my plate, with a large, growing church and my main radio program on Sunday afternoon... I have another radio program called ‘Songs in the Night’, and I’d like to give that to you. I’ve prayed about it and thought about it, and I think you’re the one who should have it.”

I said I would think about it and pray about it too, and I would have a talk with the deacons at my church.

“OK,” he said. “Call me when you’ve made a decision.”

So I took it to the deacons at the church. It would cost \$150 a week for the radio time on WCFL in Chicago, a station heard in the Midwest and into the South and East. A big decision! Little did I realize that it was one of the turning points of my life.

Ruth did not like the idea at first. Ministry at the Village Church already was demanding more than enough of my time and strength. She figured I would be in the Army chaplaincy before long, and right after the war we would be on the mission field.

Initially, the church board rejected the idea due to lack of money, but when the need for financing and staffing were provided, God’s answer seemed clear to go ahead. Bob Van Kampen agreed to provide the start-up funding. The quartet from the Wheaton College women’s glee club who had sung with me from time to time agreed to come on Sunday nights and sing for the live forty-five-minute program.

The first thing I wanted to do was to get a marquee name on the program. It was unlikely that listeners would have heard

of our church, or of me. But what about George Beverly Shea, the handsome bass baritone who at that time was a staff announcer at the Moody Bible Institute’s station, WMBI?

In my bold fashion, I headed to Moody and went to the radio station office located on the top floor of the main building. There, I asked for Mr. Shea. I could see him through the glass door of his office, but a secretary said he was busy in a meeting. Well, I did not want to waste a trip to Chicago, and I believed ... in the importance of his being on our program... So I waited until I saw his door open for a moment, and then I brushed past his secretary.

“Mr. Shea,” I said, “I’m sorry to intrude but I just have a quick proposal for you.” (cont)

PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 1943-1944	
Western Springs Baptist Church	
Pastor's Salary -----	\$ 45.00
Song Leader -----	6.00
Heating -----	5.50
Pastor's Telephone -----	1.50
Lighting -----	1.50
Water -----	.75
Janitor.-----	3.75
Miscellaneous -----	11.00
(Maintenance, Insurance, Special Speakers, Etc.)	
Total Budget \$75.00 per week	
Considered by the Board of Trustees September 14, 1943	

(Continued from page 3)

“Yes?”

“My name is Billy Graham, and I’m the pastor of the Village Church of Western Springs.”

“I’ve heard of you,” he offered.

“Torrey Johnson has asked us to take over his Sunday night radio show,” I said, too frightened to be flattered by Shea’s recognition of my name, “and I’m convinced that the program would be most successful if you’d agree to appear on it.”

“Well, I don’t know...”

I plunged on, outlining how I saw his singing fitting into the forty-five-minute program. I think he agreed to give it a try only because he could see that that was the only way he was going to get rid of me.

We did not have a typewriter, let alone a secretary, so Ruth helped me write the scripts. The program consisted of vignettes about three minutes long, in which the preacher would say a few things, and then there was a song. I preached for the radio program for the first time in early December, and several weeks later, following our Sunday evening service, we started broadcasting live from our basement church in Western Springs. We signed on with the program’s same theme song, “Songs in the Night,” inspired by Job 35:10, with lyrics by George Graves and music by Wendell P. Loveless.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH OF WESTERN SPRINGS

I had suggested the change of name from the Western Springs Baptist Church because there were mainly Lutherans and Congregationalists (but very few Baptists) in the surrounding area.

(NOTE: Our historical records indicate that “in 1944, the name “The Village Church of Western Springs was adopted to comply with a request of radio station WLS for the program to be interdenominational.”

As you well know, today we are known by both names.)

Our church, which sat only 125 at the most, was filled for the first broadcast. Very few people except our own congregation knew that Bev Shea would be there. But one visitor was an emotionally troubled woman who had been following (Shea) around around obsessively for some months. He was embarrassed by all her attention. At the end of the program, Bev whispered to me and asked if I could sneak him out.

I knew of an exit through the furnace room in back (small room behind our current Youth kitchen) We had to balance our way across a single plank in the dark to make our way through. Bev fell off, but he made his escape.

I built my radio talks around the events of the day. Keeping up with current events through newspapers and radio news programs, I began each message with a reference to something people would have been hearing and talking about that very day. Then, I moved into a biblical message, showing that God and the scriptures are relevant to every problem.

That first broadcast really put our church on the map. People started piling into our little building on Sunday nights to watch the show, and we got letters from listeners all over the Midwest. The Chicago Tribune sent a reporter out to write a story about our radio ministry. My filling station attendant in Hinsdale gave me \$1 to support the program. A poor woman sent us 10 ¢. A carload of people listening as they rode took up a collection for us on the spot. When I went over the books with the chairman of the radio committee at the end of the first two months our average income from listeners had been \$105.07 per week. The Lord kept the budget in the black with other contributions. (Con’t)

“... Billy had taken a pastorate at the Western Springs Baptist Church. I was not altogether in favor of this. I believed Billy’s call was to evangelism and not to the pastorate. He was receiving invitations to preach throughout the Midwest, which was a strain on his home church duties, and rarely was it financially possible for me to go with him... To keep me company, I used to sleep with Bill’s tweed jacket when he was away. I kept my mind occupied with Bible study and reading. When Billy hosted, ‘Songs in the Night’...I’d pass him notes of suggestions, quotations from the biographies, histories and novels I’d been reading. And all during WW II, I continued to write.”
Ruth Graham



Popular soloist and Western Springs resident, George Beverly Shea becomes a regular soloist on Songs in the Night

To add to the excitement, station WMBI signed us up to broadcast our regular Sunday morning service from the church during March and April of 1944. One of our listeners wrote in to request 50 copies of my latest sermon--mixed metaphors and all. I was swamped by all the incoming mail, which I had to handle personally. We had asked for volunteers. Only one showed up, a young woman from Knoxville, Tennessee, whose husband had a defense job nearby.

The year end flurry of activity kept us from going south at Christmas, our first time away from families at the holiday season. It made us terribly homesick to hear our landlords downstairs playing Christmas carols on their old Victrola while they bustled around trimming the house and wrapping packages. My cousin, Steve Hunter, who was stationed at nearby Great Lakes Naval training station, came on Christmas Eve to spend the weekend with us; Ruth made us both hang up our stockings. And the Lanes invited us to Wheaton for Christmas dinner at their house.

A RESTLESSNESS SETS IN

By the middle of April, with an increasing number of people not only attending the church, but coming to faith in Christ, Ruth and I began to feel that we might be there for several years. But two factors were working to redirect our lives.

First, there was discontent among a few of the deacons about my going away for evangelistic meetings so frequently. Of course, they had agreed to those meetings when I accepted their call, and the church letterhead listed me as "pastor/evangelist". At the same time, they probably were justified, because I was accepting a number of invitations to speak in several surrounding states.

Second, from my standpoint, preaching throughout the Midwest made

me restless with the pastorate. It seemed to me, perhaps because of the war, that the whole world was ripe for the Gospel. I wanted to be moving, traveling, preaching, anywhere and everywhere. Ruth soon began to realize, as she later told me, that her life was going to be one of good-byes. Already, it seemed I was gone as much as I was home.

That pattern was made even worse when I got another call from Torrey Johnson. He was heading a committee to start what was to be called Chicago-land Youth for Christ. The plan was to reach the flood of servicemen and young people who hit Michigan Avenue in Chicago on Saturday nights. The first meeting was to be held in Orchestra Hall, which sat about 3,000 and was internationally noted for its concerts. He asked me to preach an evangelistic message that first night.

That first Saturday night--May 27, 1944--proclaiming the Gospel live before a large crowd (the auditorium was nearly full). I was tense, very tense, but I found I had great liberty in speaking. When 40 came forward to receive Christ, it was one of the most humbling and spiritually encouraging moments of my life up to that time.

Other Saturday night Youth for Christ (YFC) rallies were springing up in Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Detroit, and I was asked to go to each. When I filled in for Torrey Johnson on short notice in Detroit I took my first plane ride.

Nevertheless, my constant absences understandably caused some concern in my Western Springs congregation. Things came to a head when I got back from a week of preaching services in Columbus, Ohio in March, 1944.

Good Presbyterian that she was, Ruth could not tolerate those Baptists "running their preacher," she wrote home.

(con't)

*We followed Ruth and Billy's marriage with concern and interest. Concern because Billy's dedication was of such intensity that I, as his mother, wondered if he could maintain the pace he was carrying. By this time he was pastor of the Village Church of Western Springs, and he became the speaker on a radio program, 'Songs in the Night'. We couldn't get the program on our house radio, so Mr Graham and I sat in the car and tuned the radio dial until the station came in loud and clear. Then we sat back marveling and we'd say to each other,
"Imagine, that's our Billy Frank."
-Morrow Graham,
Billy's mother*

(as quoted in Billy Graham, God's Ambassador- by Tehabi Books and the BGEA)



Bill & Ruth are said to have walked to church

“You can’t have alot of respect for a pastor who is just a button for everyone to push.”

Still, I was probably out of line. I got upset when someone remarked that the church would have to cut my pay if I went off much more. What pay? Thinking of my very modest salary of \$40 a week I told them that I was their pastor, not their employee and that if they deducted 1 cent, they could start looking for another man. They were not used to that kind of straight talk and maybe it was good for them. But to this day, I am not sure it was right for me to say it.

A THORN OF CONTENTION

Harder to take than that, though, was the superior attitude some of them had toward the new believers and people from other denominations who were coming our way. It was a judgmental attitude based on different lifestyles and associations. Take, for example, the concert pianist and orchestra conductor who was married to a former chorus girl--not the right type for our congregation, some thought. By contrast, Ruth and I found such people refreshing; we enjoyed their enthusiasm and earnestness in their new-found Christian life. They helped us to believe more than ever in the power of the Gospel to produce the more abundant life the Bible described.

One Sunday night, I bluntly (and perhaps brashly) told the people from the pulpit that some of them needed to confess the sin of troublemaking, I told them I would get the job done in Western Springs that God had brought me there for, regardless of their attitudes and opposition. Nobody talked back. But there remained an underlying tension that contributed to my restlessness about staying.

There were plenty of opportunities to leave for greener pastures. There was a big church in Fort Wayne, Indiana, that wanted me to come as pastor. And one in Chicago

with an office staff, great music, a large salary and a home for the pastor. As I recall, even Wheaton College got into the act, with a request for me to become one of their field representatives. None of the opportunities, however, seemed compelling enough for me to forsake our suburban basement flock, nor did I sense that God was calling me to do so. But a couple of things happened to shorten the pastorate.

I was accepted into the Army’s chaplaincy program. I would have passed my previous physical in Chicago and joined up earlier, but for the humiliating fact that I was three pounds underweight. I had requested a couple more months to fatten up. The army granted the extension.

The second thing was completely beyond my control. Ruth had just gotten home from a visit to Montreat in September of 1944, and I had worked hard to get the apartment in order adding gladiolus in the dining room, carnations in the living room and rosebuds in the bedroom. That was enough domestic activity to make any man sick! And I was. In bed. It seemed like a toothache, but one worse than I had ever experienced. Dr. Richard Matthies made a tentative diagnosis that sounded ridiculous to a twenty-six-year-old man and his wife.

Mumps?

Mumps it was. Ruth applied hot packs, but they did nothing to alleviate the pain. She thought I looked funny, but I felt frantic. That very night, attorney James Bennett was to speak at our church.

(con’t)



“The fame that came with this radio program (“Songs in the Night”) led to more invitations to speak, with the result that the Western Springs congregation languished under a pastor who was so frequently absent on Sunday mornings.

Robert Van Kampen, a local businessman and the Western Springs deacon who had invited Billy to be their pastor, defended Graham with these prophetic words, “There is only one thing that I can say, and that is that God has laid upon Billy a special gift of evangelism and someday he could be another Billy Sunday or D.L. Moody.”’

From Billy Graham, His Life and Influence by David Aikman

A funeral was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon. The night of the funeral, I was to begin two weeks of meetings at a church in Roseland, on Chicago's South Side. But mumps would keep me in bed for at least two weeks, it was estimated.

That did it! I had put on the three pounds the Army wanted, but now, because of the mumps, I could not go to Harvard, where the chaplaincy school was located...The fever raged and the two weeks stretched into two months as mumps turned into orchitis. People prayed on my behalf and Dr. Matthies exerted his skills to keep me alive.

A radio listener who had heard of my plight sent Ruth and me a check for \$100 to finance a recovery vacation in Florida. We gratefully accepted and left as soon as I was able, which was in December. I had lost a lot more than the three pounds gained for the army (indeed a lot more than was healthy for my already slight frame), and my eyes were dark and hollow. The doctors warned us that because of the orchitis, we probably would not be able to have children. I needed desperately to regain my strength, and Florida seemed like heaven to me.

We rented rooms in a small, inexpensive hotel...about a mile from the beach. Soon we discovered that Torrey Johnson and his family were renting on the same street...I looked him up and thanked him for his confidence in me and for all the opportunities he had sent my way. He invited me fishing...

I was looking forward to a relaxing day in the sun, but once we were on the ocean, he launched into an idea that

had been boiling inside him for weeks. The early success of Chicago-land Youth for Christ had awakened in him a dream he could hardly contain. (*Wartime weekend leave alternatives for service men and women desiring entertainment in the cities...*)



They organized Saturday night youth rallies in several cities, quite independent of each other, that drew large crowds. Snappy Gospel music, interesting testimonies, and (most of all) short, youth-oriented sermons combined to attract thousands of lonely, insecure and frightened teenagers and young adults. While still in Western Springs, I had spoken at several such youth rallies. From Torrey's point of view, the big one had been in Chicago, where I was the first speaker in Orchestra Hall.

As we sat bobbing in the boat, Torrey began selling me on his blueprint for evangelism and my part in it. He wanted to help organize youth rallies throughout the US, Canada and eventually the world. He planned to call the movement Youth for Christ, International... I almost

immediately agreed with him that this plan was of God ...

I was learning to trust God for every step of my life. I generally prayed about everything but it seemed unnecessary to pray about this opportunity! My strength was returning, and I was ready to travel, ready to preach, ready to evangelize. I wouldn't be much of an organizer or paperwork man...but I could not hide my enthusiasm. It was all I talked about with Ruth for the next several weeks. Finally, we decided that I should take the job.

But what would I do with my year-old pastorate? And what of my pending chaplaincy? Having seen my ministry expanding, the board of deacons at Western Springs graciously (and a few of them joyfully) accepted my resignation. The Army's chief of chaplains granted me a discharge, since the end of the war seemed in sight, agreeing with my logic that I could make a far greater contribution to the spiritual well-being of service people by organizing and preaching at youth rallies than I could serving as a chaplain.

And so it was, in January of 1945, that I walked into the first ever office of YFC in Chicago, on Wells Street in the Loop. I felt excited and exhilarated: this was where I belonged, and I could not wait to get started.

...and we all know the rest of the story...



Text taken from Just as I am, the autobiography of Billy Graham

*Quotes and pictures on page 1,4,5,6 & 8 taken from Billy Graham, God's Ambassador- by Tehabi Books and the BGEA
Quote on page 4 & Picture on p7 from Footprints of a Pilgrim, the Life and Loves of Ruth Bell Graham by Ruth Bell Graham*

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

The 21 month pastorate of Billy Graham might be considered by some to be the jewel in our centennial history as a church. Many feel great joy and honor in being the only church this great man of God ever pastored.

The truth, however, is that those months in the history of our church were bittersweet, producing both spiritual growth and conflict, expansion and instability, ushering shepherd and flock into new **but separate** ministry realms. Through it all, God's purposes for both pastor and people were being fulfilled, though it would seem that many in that 1943 WSBC congregation had great difficulty seeing God at work, save through the eyes of faith.

There's a lesson here for those who can look past the glitz of our historic relationship to an internationally renowned evangelist. I, for one, am grateful for Billy's open, transparent retelling of that period in our history. It provides us with a significant gift of better understanding what God was doing in that season of tension and instability. While our WSBC forefathers and fore-mothers may well have asked anxious questions and expressed concerns about the choices their young pastor was making, we now see more clearly,

and more easily glimpse God at work! Today, 66 years later, the faith of our WSBC forefathers **'has become sight!'**

In the midst of challenge, change and even conflict, do we consistently demonstrate the kind of faith and love that *'believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails'?* Just maybe an historical perspective will affirm God's providential leading in the midst of the very things we struggle against. Perhaps clearer perspective will not be granted this side of heaven. Nevertheless, we can **know** that our God is at work through all things, accomplishing His ultimate purposes, not only in our individual lives, but in our church and throughout our world!

Thanks be to God!

Sondra (& John) Brunsting

SHARE YOUR VIEWS:

What insights have you gained through the study of the history of this church? Perhaps you would like to share your thoughts with readers of the *Centennial Times*.

Submit your ponderings in writing to the editor at any point throughout this Centennial year. We will be publishing the *Centennial Times* through December of 2012.

“I read Ephesians again and again, where it mentions that the Lord gave some to be evangelists and some to be pastors. God just did not want me to be a pastor. It was time to take up what the Lord called me to do---evangelism.”

Billy Graham

**Watch for the Next issue
September!**

- A closeup look at 'Songs in the Night'
- One of our own becomes the first foreign missionary
- Lloyd Fesmire begins a 20 year pastorate