

Chapel Hill Bible Church offers an alternative to conservative theology

by Tom Watkins
Staff Writer

Gerrard Hall, a 490-seat auditorium on the UNC campus, was as usual filled to capacity for the weekly Chapel Hill Bible Church service. Those arriving late, finding no empty seats, stood in the back of the hall and lined the balcony walls.

In the traditionally liberal-minded community of Chapel Hill, many might find it hard to believe that a church taking a conservative view of Christian doctrine could survive. Yet, the "Bible Church," as it is called by most, has not only survived but has grown into one of the largest churches in the community in its six short years of existence.

"We're unusual in the fact that nearly 90 per cent of our congregation is made up of college students," George Coxhead, a church deacon and former Chapel Hill alderman, said.

Indeed, there are probably more UNC students involved in the Bible Church than in any other organization, on or off campus, in Chapel Hill, with the possible exception of the Black Student Movement. An average Sunday when school is in session will find some 450 students in attendance at worship services, and pastor Jim Abrahamson estimates that there are in excess of 500 students who are involved in the church in one way or another.

"I feel part of the reason that we attract students is that we provide conservative Biblical theology and yet have an open-mindedness and respect for the academic community," he said.

A brochure provided by the Bible Church for visitors describes the church as "an independent, non-denominational fellowship that desires to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by encouraging individuals to trust their lives to Him and follow His Word. We accept the Bible as authoritative in all matters of faith and practice, and we believe that love for God and our neighbor are fundamental to the Christian faith...."

Abrahamson said that the church often experiences identity problems because of its status as independent and non-denominational.

"There are many stereotypes—some people say that because we're non-denominational we're anti-denominational. Because we take a strong conservative view of the Bible, some equate us with Southern fundamentalism, thinking that we're unconcerned about social aspects and generally backward. Some feel that we're robbing the other churches of students.

"Nothing could be farther from the truth. A lot of our philosophy comes from an

attempt to look afresh at the New Testament. It's a matter of starting with Biblical principles and being creative in bringing them to bear."

Abrahamson cited his use of an overhead projector during sermons as a good example, describing it as a "good communicative tool." Abrahamson's relationship to his congregation strongly resembles that of a teacher to his students, with many of those in attendance busily taking notes during the sermon.



The Rev. Jim Abrahamson uses an overhead projector to help make his point in a sermon given last fall to an audience of over 500 in Gerard Hall at UNC. The Chapel Hill Bible Church recently began having two services a week, at 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. each Sunday.

A graduate of Iowa State University and Dallas Theological Seminary, Abrahamson is one of the church's five elders and likes to be known as a teaching elder.

"I'd rather be known as just another brother in the fellowship," he said. "Being an elder is not a step up, but a step toward being more of a servant for the fellowship." The elders, who are elected by the congregation, are charged with the responsibility of the spiritual oversight of the church. Six deacons, also elected, tend to the physical matters of the church.

Although there are some people not associated with the University who are involved with the Bible Church, the vast majority of those active in the church are undergraduate and graduate students and UNC faculty and staff members.

"We have about 80 to 90 true members," Coxhead said. "We don't go out seeking members—that's one of the unique things about the Bible Church."

Yet the growth of the church has been astounding. According to Dr. Henry R.

Lesesne, church elder and UNC assistant professor of medicine, the church was started by a group of some 15 persons, most of them UNC faculty members, who saw the need for a more evangelical ministry in Chapel Hill.

"We had a group of about 20 who were commuting to Blackall Memorial Presbyterian Church in Durham every Sunday, and one day Paul Dunham (a former UNC assistant professor of physical education) asked Ed Henegar (Blackall's pastor) half-jokingly if he would come over

and do an early service in Chapel Hill. Ed decided to do it, so on a Sunday morning in October, 1970, we met together at Dunham's home."

On November 1 of that year the Chapel Hill Bible Church's first meeting in Gerrard Hall was attended by some 40 people who clustered together in the front of the hall.

"By the following spring, we were still spinning our wheels, unable to find any direction, and our budget was getting low," Lesesne said. "We still weren't getting much

students, and I saw a drastic change in students in the late '60s," Coxhead said. "There were religious students before, but 10 years ago a student would have been ostracized for carrying a Bible on campus. Now there are lots of kids with a real commitment."

"There's been a real turnaround in the last six years," Abrahamson concurred. "I was told that the year before I came it was difficult to find a dozen committed Christian students on the UNC campus. Now there are hundreds in the Bible Church and many more that I don't even know."

Abrahamson feels that "a number of factors are responsible for the change."

"The big thing is that it's hard to walk the line in Chapel Hill. Here a Christian has to take a stand and needs to trust Christ because he will be bombarded and tested every day."

"There are basically two groups of people: Christians who come to UNC and see a need for growth as Christians, and those who are converted to Christ here. I believe the real issue in evangelism is hope. The academic community says there is no hope. So people are listening and responding to Christ. Among Christians here there is a real hunger for the Bible, for what God expects. I would guess that a large number come because they feel they are growing in their understanding of the Bible."

Jeanes are as commonly worn to the Bible Church as suits, creating a casual atmosphere. A typical service might include expository Bible teaching by Abrahamson, singing, and opportunities for anyone present to share or pray aloud. There are Sunday School classes for all ages and levels, seminars, Sunday night meetings and occasional retreats. The church sponsors some eight missionaries, some of them former members of the congregation.

The Bible Church also has occasional joint worship services with the campus Black Christian Fellowship ministry. One such service in a larger campus auditorium last year attracted over 700 persons.

"The goal we have is attempting to offer a church that is authentically Christian and yet authentic to the society we live in," Peter R. Uhlenberg, church elder and assistant chairman of the UNC sociology department, explained. "We're highly committed to historical Christianity and a belief in the supernatural, and we seek to make this vital in the lives of individuals."

"A lot of things go under the name of Christianity. A lot of churches have eroded to a humanistic rather than a supernatural approach. I see the Bible Church as taking a strong stand—the whole idea of

commitment is stronger, there's more vitality. There is a certain freshness here, and it's really attractive to a lot of Christians."

Uhlenberg feels that the Bible Church helps bridge the gap often opened between Christianity and intellectualism. "In a sense we are respecting the intellectual world, but putting it under the rule of God."

Of the original group of 15, only Lesesne, his wife and two other persons remain active in the church, but it appears to have strayed very little from its original objectives.

"All of us still left feel that the life of the church is in the small groups," Lesesne said. Over 150 persons are involved in some 15 groups, which provide a context for "Bible study and discussion, prayer and fellowship," he added.

Primarily oriented toward students in the past, the Bible Church is expected to take on a new dimension in its ministry when it begins construction on a permanent church building next spring. The building, which will be located adjacent to campus on the corner of Mason Farm and Purefoy Roads, is scheduled for completion by the end of 1977.

"Our immediate goal is for facilities to expand our ministry to the community," Abrahamson said. "We would like the building to be multiple use, including an auditorium for 700 to 800 people, 15 classrooms and nursery facilities."

Abrahamson is well aware that having a church building could change the Bible Church's relationship to other churches in the community.

"Most of the other pastors feel that the Bible Church fills a void in conservative theology. Most have been gracious toward us, but I imagine some could feel threatened by our rapid growth. Other churches are built around families, and perhaps ours will become more that way."

He also envisions the possibility of a Bible school to perhaps be started by the church some five to 10 years in the future.

"It would provide an opportunity for students who are not going to seminary but would like pastoral training. We'd also like to get involved in a Christian elementary school—but then these aren't hard and fast goals."

In the meantime, the Bible Church will continue to be committed to providing a stabilizing force in a transient community.

"We want to provide an atmosphere to maximize Christian growth," Abrahamson said. "Our real purpose is not to evangelize Chapel Hill—although this will be taking place. We want to raise up a community of disciples for Jesus Christ, and to do this will be our outreach."

One report of B flu at UNC—more expected

by David Stacks
Staff Writer

Only one UNC student has been hospitalized with symptoms of a flu-like illness that has affected hundreds of students in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school system.

The illness among the public school students has been identified as the B-type flu, which includes the Hong Kong, Victoria and Asian flu strains.

The only other place in the country that has reported an outbreak of the B flu is

Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. Health officials at Vanderbilt have seen 60 to 70 students per day.

The B flu is not the same illness as a gastrointestinal ailment that is also common this time of year, Dr. J. MacCormack, director of the state health service, said Tuesday.

"The intestinal 'flu' is a viral infection and may last 24 to 48 hours, MacCormack said. Dr. James A. Taylor, director of the Student Health Service (SHS), said the

symptoms of the hospitalized student were similar to those of the ill Chapel Hill-Carrboro students, but the UNC case has not been confirmed as the B-type flu strain.

The UNC student was admitted to the SHS infirmary Saturday after complaining of muscle aches, fever, sore throat, and loss of appetite. The student was discharged Tuesday afternoon.

The illness was first discovered at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center Jan. 14, and by the middle of last

week had spread to all nine schools in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro system and three private schools.

The flu peaked in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro schools Jan. 18, when 225 students were absent from Guy B. Phillips Junior High School, which has a student body of 780. Absenteeism decreased as the week progressed. On Monday, 81 students were absent.

"It started almost overnight," Dr. Robert Senior, a Chapel Hill pediatrician, said.

Senior and the three other pediatricians he practices with normally see approximately 120 patients each day, but last Tuesday and Wednesday the doctors' waiting room was overflowing.

"The flu in Chapel Hill is a classical pattern for a flu outbreak," MacCormack said. "It started in the schools and later may spread to the parents."

Taylor said he expects a flu outbreak among UNC students and faculty any time.

"There are enough professors here with kids in school to transmit the flu to the campus. It could crop up any minute," Taylor said.

The B flu strain is different from the swine flu, although the two types have similar symptoms. Only two cases of the B flu have been reported at the North Carolina Memorial Hospital (NCMH), a hospital spokesperson said Tuesday. It is not known how many cases have gone unreported.

"Since there is nothing that can be done for it, people are not going to the hospital," Dick Broome, NCMH spokesperson, said Tuesday. The only way to treat the B flu is with aspirin and bedrest.

Joker snows WCHL radio

Students listening to WCHL between 1 and 2 a.m. Tuesday may have thought their prayers had been answered when the station incorrectly reported that Tuesday classes would be suspended until noon.

But, the announcement was not due to an act from above. A prankster, identifying himself as being with a "Dr. Anderson's office," called the station around midnight asking that the announcement be made, said WCHL General Manager George McCall.

McCall said the station received a second phone call about 1:40 a.m. informing the station that the announcement was incorrect. After receiving this information, the station tried to confirm the announcement by calling the University Police and Jack Gunnels, director of the UNC Personnel Department.

Neither the University Police nor Gunnels could offer any information on the subject, so the announcement was assumed to be false and was discontinued, McCall said.

He said that precautionary measures will be taken in the future to assure that all such announcements are official before being put on the air.

—Charlene Havnaer

Close vote by finance committee advises loan to Student Graphics

by Mike Wade
Staff Writer

The Finance Committee of the Campus Governing Council (CGC) voted 3 to 2 Monday to recommend a \$7,500 loan to Student Graphics, Inc.

Steve Gould, general manager of Graphics, said the loan is necessary to help the student-oriented company recover from unavoidable costs. The company suffered heavy financial losses from recurrent breakdowns of equipment, especially typesetting machines, and was closed for approximately 20 days during August and September 1976.

Marc Sandman, chairperson of the Media Board, said a fair amount of the money will be used to pay back salaries of employees who were not paid in the last month. Sandman said the employees have continued working because they believe in the organization.

Sandman told the committee that a study to determine the viability of Student Graphics will be completed near the first of March. The study will determine the need for Student Graphics on the campus and also recommend measures to help improve the company's financial status.

Sandman had said that any recommendation the committee made not to appropriate the funds would be premature before the study is completed.

Graphics had originally asked the committee for \$8,500, \$3,000 in a grant and a \$5,500 loan. The Finance Committee's recommendation for the \$7,500 loan still must be approved by the CGC.

Student Graphics provides offset printing to students at a lower price than other printing establishments. It also offers consultation and direct mail marketing orientation not available at

similar commercial establishments.

Gould said another attribute of the company is that it provides an atmosphere that students are comfortable in while providing them with job training. He added that since Student Graphics is a nonprofit, student-oriented company, student

Referendum for amendment called for in GPSF petition

by Charlene Havnaer
Staff Writer

The UNC Graduate and Professional Student Federation (GPSF) is circulating a petition for a campus referendum, to be held sometime after the election Feb. 9, on a proposed amendment to the Student Government Association Constitution. The amendment defines the status of graduate and professional students with regard to Student Government treasury laws.

The "Amendment to secure the Rights of the Graduate and Professional Student Federation" sets guidelines for the allocation of fees to GPSF.

If passed, the amendment would require the Campus Governing Council (CGC) to determine which student organizations benefit all members of the student body and which benefit only the undergraduate students.

Student fees paid by graduate and professional students would then be used to finance only those organizations benefiting the entire student body.

Graduate and professional student fees would not be used to help finance organizations restricted to undergraduate students.

According to GPSF President Dan Lindley, graduate and professional student fees would be used to pay a percentage of the budget of each

organization which benefits the entire student body. This percentage would be determined by the percentage of graduate and professional students making up the student body.

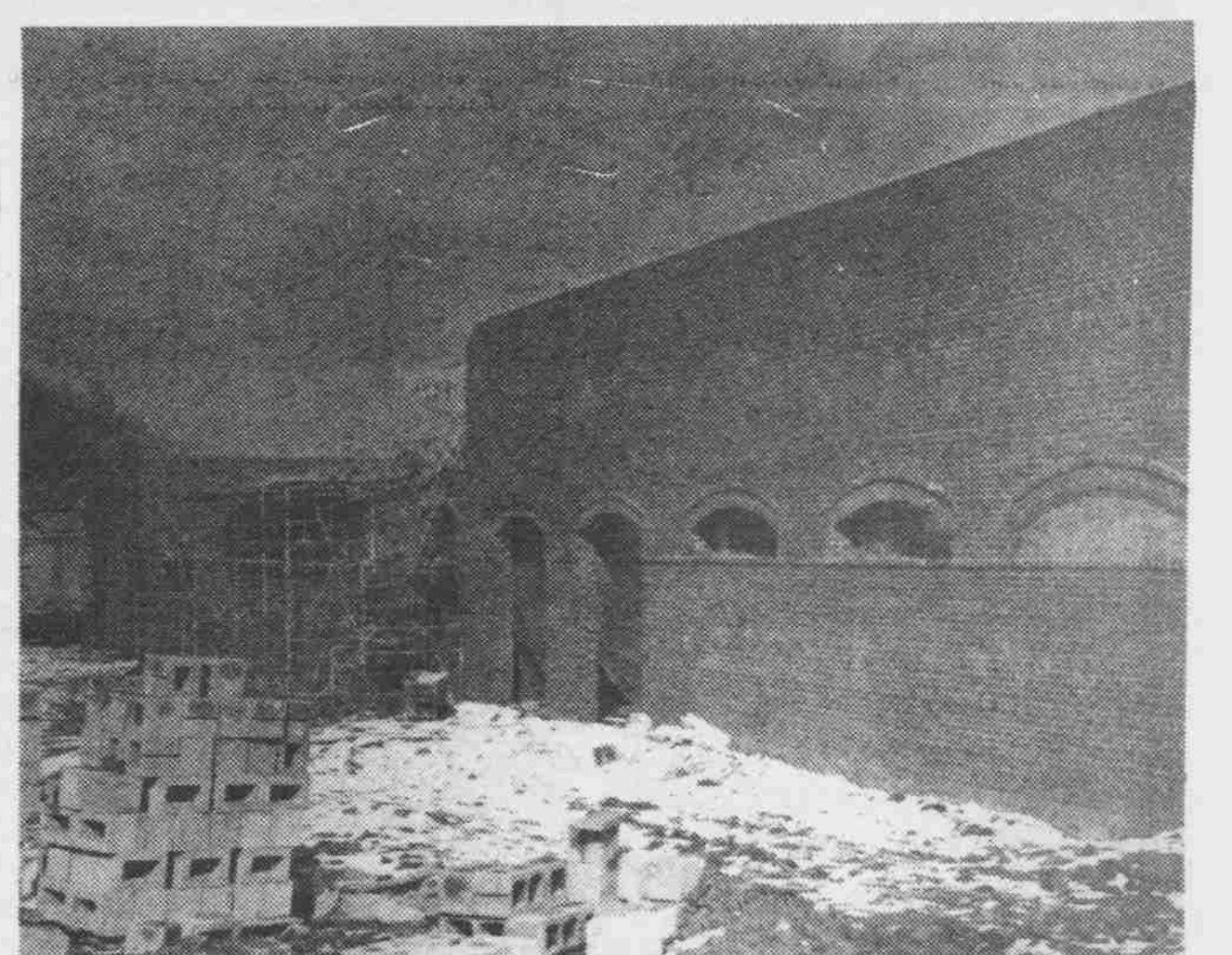
GPSF feels that graduate and professional students should not be required to pay student fees to organizations which restrict membership to undergraduate students, according to Lindley.

"Many organizations such as the Daily Tar Heel and the UNC Media Board benefit all students. But, many organizations such as the debating clubs don't allow graduate and professional students to participate as members, only as coaches, and we don't feel that our money should go for these," he said.

The amendment also states that any unspent funds from the Student Government's allocation to GPSF at the end of the fiscal year would be reverted to the GPSF surplus account.

A final stipulation of the amendment is that the GPSF treasurer be the final authority on questions raised by the Student Activities Fund Office regarding expenditure of the Student Government allocation to GPSF.

The Student Government Election Board requires that any petition calling for a campus referendum have the signatures of 10 per cent of the student body.



Construction continues on the Carr Mill Mall, the new shopping area in downtown Carrboro near the railroad station.

mall

Continued from page 1.

Ben Williams, who lives a few blocks over on Oak Avenue, recalls that four-room houses rented for \$4 a month. After electricity was installed, the rent rose to \$7 (utilities included).

Williams began work with the Durham Hosiery Mill in 1917. His first job was turning stockings for looping.

"The Durham Hosiery Mill was as good an employer as you'd ever ask for. Every Saturday afternoon they'd bring around a copy of the Saturday Evening Post for the employees," he said.

In 1940, Williams transferred to Durham Full Fashion Hosiery, where he spent 30 years as a supervisor in the knitting division.

Williams said he is glad the developer of Carr Mall is preserving the mill structure.

"It's a landmark. Older people here still have a sentimental feeling about that place."

Other residents, including Mack Watts, feel the town could have found a better use for the mill structure.

"Maybe it could have been converted into a rest home or recreation center," Watts said. "Malls, malls, malls. Money isn't everything. How about the congregation of the Baptist Church? They'll be surrounded by buildings of a commercial nature."

Watts regrets the loss of good

neighbors that characterized the Alberta Mill era.

"Back then people were more concerned with their responsibility to their neighbors. People would stop you on the street and ask 'How's the wife?' All that's gone now."

"I'm not trying to live in the past," Watts said. "It's just that you can't build a successful future without a solid past. I believe in change for the better, not just change for the sake of change."

Meanwhile, the renovation of the Alberta Mill into a shopping mall continues. Carrboro's remaining symbol of the past is being altered to accommodate the demands of the present.

The future of Carrboro remains uncertain. Some town officials advocate locating light industry along Highway 54 west of the town. A few others advocate a merger with Chapel Hill.

Somewhere in the middle are Carrboro's longtime residents, who take pride in Carrboro's past and hope it is indeed solid enough to sustain a successful future.

Tar Heel Classifieds
Cost Only \$1.50