

Mary's Grove United Methodist Church members Bertie Howell and Luis Orlandi stand beside the sign that greets travelers along Mary's Grove Church Rd. The church located north of Kings Mountain is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

Mary's Grove Methodist celebrating its centennial

By TODD HAGANS
Special to The Herald

Bertie Howell remembers a time when church goers walked a mile or more, barefoot through all kinds of weather to reach the house of God. Upon reaching the church, they put on their shoes and went inside to worship and fellowship among Christian friends.

"We didn't have cars back when I was young to come to church, we walked," said Howell, the oldest living member of Mary's Grove United Methodist Church. "When it was a meeting place for young people years ago, this is where you came. There are people who are 91 years old and this is where they met their husbands."

A lot has changed since Howell joined the Mary's Grove congregation in 1930. The road leading to the church is paved and the surrounding community seems to grow more and more every day. But after all of these years - 100 to be exact, the small church continues to serve as an extended family to the Mary's Grove community.

"I believe anyone who comes here on Sundays, they feel so welcomed they keep coming back," said church historian Luis Orlandi. "It's a small church and it's beautiful."

Rev. Ron Lytle said he first noticed the church's commitment to creating a family atmosphere when he was appointed as pastor within the past year. It's a commitment that he believes "is strongly rooted in tradition."

"There's a bond here. When I first came here I could feel it," said Lytle. "They are a very accepting congregation. People come to church the first time on what you hear. People come back based upon their experience."

Youth director Renee Bingham

realizes it's her duty to make the church enjoyable for the youngsters since they will keep the family tradition alive for years to come.

"I believe in the youth and I believe there is a call in my life to work with them," said Bingham. "I would like to see them carry on the faith, the love, the tradition."

The church pulls students from four area high schools - Cherryville, Burns, Kings Mountain and Lincolnton. While some may consider the youth group relatively small at around 16 members, Bingham believes that getting young people in church is a direct way to reach adults. Just recently, the family night program attracted 49 people of which 29 were non-members who came from the community.

But Bingham's role is about more than just getting youth in the church - she strives to influence the youngsters' lives as children of God and inspire them to "make a difference in the world and in this community."

"Each week I try to give them the faith of God," said Bingham. "I am thrilled with their hunger to pray, their knowledge of the Bible and their willingness to learn."

In an effort to reach new members - both young and old, the church regularly sends out a newsletter to the 127 homes located within a half-mile radius of the church. They sponsor various church functions, services and programs, always extending an invitation to the community.

"We are trying to make our church accessible," said Bingham.

Church leader E.A. Bingham, Jr. carries on a tradition established by his father. Just like his father, Bingham is a devoted church leader, serving as chair of

the administrative council and a member of the board of trustees, finance committee and pastor parish relations committee.

"If it didn't have meaning to it, you wouldn't do it," said Bingham, who as a youngster helped build the existing church building.

Beth Jones serves as music director, pianist and president of the United Methodist Women. She has no long, complicated explanation as to why she gives to her church - it just seems like the right thing to do.

"I have to because I have to," said Jones. "I enjoy what I do." Orlandi worked to preserve the church's rich tradition in a history compiled over the past 10 years titled, "The Mary's Grove Connection."

"I love history, I love the church and I want to keep this history alive," said Orlandi.

In observance of its 100th anniversary, the church recently took a step back in time, holding an outdoor service with several members dressing in apparel from the 1800s. The service included Lytle playing the role as a circuit riding preacher and lay leader James Jones taking on the role of striker.

Throughout the year, the congregation has honored the church's three founders - H.S. Sellers, Peter Eaker and Andrew H. Black.

YOU'RE INVITED

The congregation of Mary's Grove United Methodist Church extends an invitation to the community to join them for Sunday services each week at 9:15 a.m. The church is located at 1223 Mary's Grove Church Rd. near Cherryville. For more information about church services and programs, call (704) 435-5544.

CHURCH BRIEFS

Ministerial Association

The annual Kings Mountain Community Thanksgiving service will be held Wednesday, November 21 at the Family Worship Center, 1818 Shelby Road. The prelude will begin at 6:30 and the call to worship will be at 7 p.m.

Speakers are Rev. J.R. Robbins of Faith Baptist Church and Rev. John Houze of People's Baptist Church.

The service is sponsored by the Kings Mountain Ministerial Association.

Victory Baptist

Victory Baptist and Dixon Presbyterian churches will have a joint Thanksgiving service Wednesday at 7 p.m. at Victory Baptist Church near Grover.

Rev. Allan Sinclair, pastor of Dixon, will deliver the sermon. Rev. Dennis Wells, pastor of Victory, will be the worship leader.

Refreshments will be served following the service. The public is invited.

Grace Methodist

Grace United Methodist Church, Kings Mountain, will present the one-man performance of Pastor Dale Swofford as "Joseph of Nazareth"

Saturday, December 1 at 7 p.m.

The play is a one-hour long play that tells the Christmas story from Joseph's perspective. It is both funny and inspiring.

Admission is free. For more information call the church office at 739-6000.

Midview Baptist

Midview Baptist Church will host a Boston Butt sale December 1 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Call 739-1960 for orders or more information.

All proceeds go to the building fund.

Midview Baptist will have revival November 25-28. Services are at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Sunday and 7 p.m. on Monday through Wednesday.

Rev. Tim Spencer, formerly from Kings Mountain, will be the speaker. Rev. Bob Hope, pastor, invites the public.

St. Matthew's

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, North Piedmont and

Ridge Streets, Kings Mountain, will have a brief time of prayer each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. during the time of national crisis. Dr. John D. Mauney Jr., interim pastor, will offer prayers for the hurting and suffering

and the government leaders and service personnel. The public is invited.

Gospel Singings

"A Night to Remember" is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 1 at 7 p.m. at Ashbrook High school, 2222 South New Hope Road, p. Featured performers are the Greenes, Michael Combs, Brenda Turner & Cross Walk, and the Songsters. Advance tickets are \$12 and available at area book and music stores. For more information call 864-9185.

(Deadline for church news is 12 noon Monday. Items received after the deadline will be held until the following week. Call your church news into 739-7496, fax 739-0611 or e-mail Kmnews@aol.com.)

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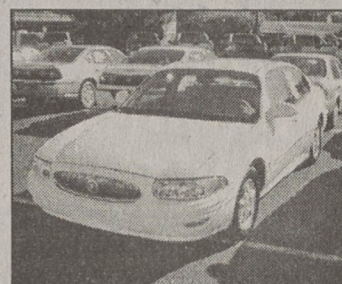
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