

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Memphis, Tennessee

Printer-friendly story
Read more at commercialappeal.com

Rooted in faith: Church tears down to rebuild on seeds planted in Binghamton

By Linda A. Moore

Friday, April 1, 2011

As a teenager more than 70 years ago, Martha Rogers was baptized at First Baptist Church-Broad in what eventually became the basement but was back then the only floor.

Built in 1917, the baptismal pool was under the raised platform at the front of the church where the minister stood to preach. The platform was removed when the church baptized on Sunday afternoons, said Rogers, 93.

Decades later, Terrica Williams, now 35, would grow up in the church as well, spending her youth in the church building that was completed in 1948, constructed as a second floor above the original building.

On Thursday morning, both longtime members were at the church in Binghamton to see the building demolished to make way for a new sanctuary.

"It was an occasion that the Lord had blessed me to witness," Rogers said. "I didn't want to miss it, seeing the tearing down and the beginning of something new."

"It's bittersweet," said Williams, who became a minister last year and took an early lunch break to watch the demolition. "It's a structure you've known for so many years and you have so many cherished memories. The sweet part is the fact that we're growing and we know that a new structure is soon to come."

The church at 2835 Broad plans to build a nearly \$4 million, 40,000-square-foot worship facility that will include a new sanctuary and smaller chapel, said pastor Keith Norman.

Binghamton was once a thriving community but has suffered a downward spiral over the years, Norman said.

"We believe there's a strong resurgence taking place in Binghamton now," he said.

Norman came to First Baptist-Broad in 2000 when membership was about 300. It has since grown to more than 3,000.

The church founded in 1895 now feeds 500 to 1,000 needy people on Thanksgivings, gives away 250 to 300 baskets at Christmas and was a host site last year for the city's Youth Ambassadors Program, Norman said.

He will head to Washington next week with city officials to take part in a panel on how churches can help combat youth violence.

"Our presence in the community has been an improvement," Norman said.

Other churches are leaving the inner city, Norman said, but with roots more than a century deep in Binghamton, church leaders at First Baptist-Broad decided years ago to stay put.

"We decided to stay and flourish where God has planted us," he said.

-- Linda A. Moore: 529-2702



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online