History & Theology – Church History

**Class 13 – History of Capitol Hill Baptist Church**

**Main Point:**

* Despite internal dissensions and contextual challenges of being an urban church, Capitol Hill Baptist Church has remained centered on the gospel and rooted in its community for nearly 150 years, thanks in large part to the preaching of the Word and the faithful lives of ordinary people who saw the local church as a cause worth giving their lives to preserve.

**Class Goals:**

* Highlight the role of women—like Celestia Ferris, Agnes Shankle, and Margaret Roy—in God’s work of preserving a witness for himself on Capitol Hill.
* Emphasize continuity over discontinuity by showing how much of what characterizes the church’s emphasis today—including expositional preaching and careful membership practices—also characterized the ministry of many of CHBC’s previous pastors.
* Help members to gain a vision for the local church as a cause worth giving their lives to preserve.

Today we conclude our thirteen-week study in church history by considering the history of this particular congregation. You can find a timeline on the back of your handout to help you follow along. I will often refer to Metropolitan Baptist Church—that was CHBC’s name until 1967.

# ‘Only’ A Prayer Meeting, 1867-1878

The story of Capitol Hill Baptist Church begins with a remarkable woman named Celestia Ferris.

## Celestia A. Ferris.

Celestia Anne Ferris was born in upstate New York in 1844. At age 7 she moved with her parents and seven siblings to Washington, DC in 1849. At age 14 she was baptized into membership at E Street Baptist Church on June 6, 1858 (her mother and older sister were already members).[[1]](#footnote-0) There she met and married a Civil War Veteran from New Jersey on April 23, 1867, and moved into a small-frame house on Capitol Hill at 214 A St NE. One evening in November 1867, they called together friends to pray for a church to be established on Capitol Hill.

## The Sunday School

In 1871, they started a Sunday School at the corner of Seventh and A Streets NE. The goal of Sunday School was not to provide child-care so that parents could attend church services in peace. Their goals were philanthropic and evangelistic. Capitol Hill was littered with “Alley Dwellings” where lower-class immigrants and African Americans resided in decrepit conditions. Volunteer Sunday School teachers literally went “in the byways and the hedges [to] compel the people to come so that the Lord’s house might be filled.”[[2]](#footnote-1) Echoing a widely used expression from the day, they referred to “The Sabbath School [as] the Nursery of the Church.”[[3]](#footnote-2)

## Metropolitan Baptist Association

In 1874 they formed the Metropolitan Baptist Association, for the purpose of raising funds and purchasing a lot on 6th and A Streets NE on which they could erect a building.[[4]](#footnote-3) The completion of the building in 1876 was due, in no small part, to the efforts of Celestia Ferris’s Sunday School students.

The story goes that Mrs. Ferris suggested to the Sunday School children that each child bring to the lot any bricks that they could find on the street or some vacant lot.[[5]](#footnote-4) Enthused by Mrs. Ferris’s instructions, two Sunday School girls visited a brickyard in the southeast section of the city and asked for a few bricks, which they received.[[6]](#footnote-5) Later returning to the same brickyard, the owner asked what they needed the bricks for. When they explained what they were doing, the brickyard owner sent a whole load of bricks by cart, free of charge. Encouraged by their success, the two girls proceeded to visit two other brick yards, telling them what the first man had done. How surprised the adults must have been when they woke up to find three brick loads of neatly stacked bricks at the corner of Sixth and A Street NE![[7]](#footnote-6) Praise God for how he works through little children!

A Church Formed

By 1878, with 31 members of various Baptist churches committed to the work, a growing Sunday School ministry, they were ready to covenant as a church. So on Sunday, February 27, 1878, at 7:30 PM, after reading the church covenant, the Metropolitan Baptist Church was formed.

Tragically, Celestia Ferris’s husband Abraham did not live to see that day. He died on July 28, 1877 at 44 years old and was buried in Arlington Cemetery. Celestia was left a widow at 33, with three young children. To provide for her family, she entered the workforce, eventually working as a washerwoman at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, which is how she was remembered over the years.

Celestia lived as she did because she believed local church was worth investing her life in even if she died and was forgotten. Capitol Hill Baptist Church exists today in no small part because ordinary people like Celestia Ferris gave themselves selflessly toward the work of evangelism and prayer. Brothers and sisters, do not despise the day of ‘small things.’ Praise to God for faithfulness of Saints who have gone before us. And honor the memory of Celestia Ferris by sharing the gospel with children and volunteering for Sunday school!

# Laying a Solid Foundation, 1878-1882

Between 1878 and 1882, the church grew from 31 to 98 members through the faithful pastoral ministry of Joseph W. Parker.

## Joseph W. Parker

At 73 years old, Parker was one of the most seasoned and experienced Baptist pastors in the country. He had faithfully pastored some of the most prestigious churches in New England before leading efforts to establish black churches and seminaries in the South during and after the Civil War. Moving with the Union Army, Parker would take charge of vacant and abandoned church buildings and convert them into schools for teaching the freedmen or church buildings for black congregations.[[8]](#footnote-7)

At the time that Metropolitan was formed in 1878, Parker was enjoying semi-retirement on a farm in Maryland while serving as an interim pastor at E Street Baptist Church in downtown DC.

What would induce Parker to take charge of a puny congregation with a “small chapel in an undesirable location” that “could pay but little salary”? Parker wrote in his memoirs that he accepted the call to Metropolitan because “it seemed to me a church should be formed as the Metropolitan had been.” Not “out of division and quarrel” but as a “legitimately formed.” Moreover, Parker feared that unless he helped the church, they would probably not make it. So he came.[[9]](#footnote-8)

## Ministry

Parker laid a solid foundation that others would build on in future decades. His sermons may have been somewhat longer than was considered typical, because Mr. Bower, the choir director, seated in the choir loft, would invariably fall asleep, and wake up just in time for the final hymn.[[10]](#footnote-9) Parker served as pastor for three and a half years, eventually resigning on October 15, 1882 due to his failing health.[[11]](#footnote-10)

# Divided by Debt, 1882-1890

After Parker, the church went through a dark period involving a church-split just six years into its existence. The story starts with a one-armed treasurer named Lester Edwin Forrest Spofford.

## L.E.F. Spofford

Spofford and his wife had attended the first prayer meeting at Celestia’s home in November 1867. He was a fiery Yankee who had enlisted with Union Troops at the age of 18. After losing his arm during a combat charge at Antietam, he returned to the fray only to suffer an additional injury to his remaining arm at the Battle of Port Waltham Junction in 1864. He still continued fighting. After the war, he moved to Washington for a government job, built a beautiful home at 508 East Capitol Street NE, and helped organize Metropolitan Baptist Church serving as the church treasurer.

## Church Split

Spofford, along with Parker’s successor, Rev. Wilbur Ingersoll, desperately wanted to grow the church and build a larger building on East Capitol Street. In 1883, they convinced the church to take on $7,400 in debt to buy a lot on East Capitol Street where they hoped to build a second, larger building. As collateral, they agreed to surrender the deed to their full-paid-off church building. Failure to meet the rather high interest payments would result in the forfeiture of their building.

When the loan payments proved too burdensome, most in the congregation wanted to sell the building. But Spofford and Ingersoll remained insistent. Church meetings began to get ugly. When Rev. Ingersoll called a church council of Baptist ministers to resolve the dispute—against the express will of the congregation—60 members, including Celestia Ferris—signed a letter demanding his immediate resignation.

On October 23, 1884, Rev. Ingersoll resigned, along Forrest Spofford and over fifty other members–nearly half of the congregation—and organized a new church, a block and a half away, at 4th and A Streets SE, which they called, “East Capitol Street Baptist Church.”

Though they felt that this was done “contrary to ‘Baptist usage,’ and good church fellowship,” members of Metropolitan “Resolved, that now and hereafter it shall be our object to endeavor to cultivate, by kind word and deed, Christian relations, and we earnestly hope that many of their number may eventually see fit to return to our membership.”[[12]](#footnote-11)

# Moral Reformers in a Progressive Age, 1890-1903

Against all odds, Metropolitan pulled through, and with the help of a young pastor named William H. Young, completed their second larger building in 1888, right next to the original one on the corner of 6th and A Street NE. He served as pastor for five years that were marked by fruit and growth. When he resigned, Metropolitan secured its fifth and most famous pastor of all-time: a native of Kentucky and avid teetotaler, whose once presidential aspirations had been eclipsed by a call to the pastorate: General Green Clay Smith.

## Green Clay Smith

Smith’s lively career before entering the pastorate in 1869 included serving as a military leader during the Mexican-American War, Union Brigadier General during the Civil War, a Congressman from Kentucky, Governor of Montana, and serving as an honorary pallbearer at Lincoln’s funeral. But at the end of his life, he wanted to return to Washington one last time, to pastor Metropolitan Baptist Church.

As pastor, Green Clay Smith was deeply political, embodying what historian George Marsden has called “innovative conservatism.” “The Word of God,” he declared in his inaugural sermon as pastor of Metropolitan, “is the foundation of all that is good in human laws.” “We put a penalty on our statute books for murder,” he explained, “but it was God who said: ‘thou shalt not commit murder.’” So it was “with the other earthly laws.”[[13]](#footnote-12)

As a force for good and the foundation of civilization, he believed Christianity could not, and should not be separated from politics but should be “carried into every calling among men and into the halls of legislation.” [[14]](#footnote-13) Anything less constituted direct disobedience to the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor.

Members of Metropolitan embodied Smith’s vision of Christian political engagement by participating in the District’s Anti-Saloon League, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and on occasion, even signing petitions requesting Congress to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages in the District.[[15]](#footnote-14)

# Becoming a Metropolitan Church, 1903-1944

At the same time, Metropolitan was becoming a Southern church. The church had been founded by northerners, but due to patterns of migration quickly became a predominantly southern church. When John Compton Ball arrived in 1903 to commence his 41-year pastorate, the church had 361 members. When he retired in 1944, that number had grown to nearly 3,000. Ball led the church to construct this current building, which was completed in January 1912, at a cost of $50,000. But weeks later, tragedy struck the country.

Early Monday morning, April 15, 1912, word reached Washington that The White Star Company’s prize-vessel—the Titanic—had struck an iceberg. 1,500 were dead—including dozens of Washingtonians.[[16]](#footnote-15) The following Sunday, John Compton Ball preached to a packed house, a sermon entitled, “The Real Titanic Disaster: or, the Spiritual S.O.S. in the Voyage of Life.”[[17]](#footnote-16) For John Compton Ball, the tragedy was a miniature for what the Bible taught about the plight of the world. All mankind was on a voyage—the voyage of life. Like the passengers of the Titanic, many were unprepared for God’s sudden and decisive judgment. Christ was our only hope—if only we would sound forth a spiritual S.O.S. No eye in the room remained dry, as Ball concluded the service by calling for the congregation to stand and sing, “Nearer My God to Thee.”[[18]](#footnote-17)

## World War I and Fundamentalism

Throughout World War I and the Spanish Flu of 1919, the church continued to grow numerically along with its surrounding neighborhood as the Federal Government expanded. In the 1920s, Metropolitan aligned itself theologically with the conservative movements within the Northern and Southern Baptist Conventions, with John Compton Ball serving as one of 156 signatories in 1919, calling for a conference on “Baptist Fundamentals.” [[19]](#footnote-18) In 1926, Metropolitan was the host-church for the annual pre-convention conference of the “Baptist Bible Union of North America.” Fiery messages were delivered from the pulpit of Metropolitan during that conference, including sermons by W.B. Riley, T.T. Shields, and J. Frank Norris.[[20]](#footnote-19)

John Compton Ball’s preaching may not have been deeply doctrinal, but it was consistently conservative. He preached unapologetically about Hell,[[21]](#footnote-20) insisted that everyone would not be saved, and emphasized faith in Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross.[[22]](#footnote-21) In fact, when a visiting Congressman from Louisiana visited in 1936, he fell in love with the simplicity of the services and careful practice of membership, “I believe I have never seen a church that was any more spiritually minded than this church is,” he wrote in a letter that was published in a local Louisiana Baptist paper.[[23]](#footnote-22) “All the songs are the old gospel songs,” he wrote. “Everything is very simple, very little style.” Moreover, “No modernism will be tolerated at all in this church.” The church was particularly careful in ensuring that “No person will be permitted to teach in the Sunday school until he or she has been pronounced absolutely orthodox in every way.”

“The church is very democratic,” Allen noted, and observed that “The membership is composed of salaried people mostly, no rich people.” But what surprised him most was Metropolitan’s membership practices. “No person is received in the church by experience as we do [in Louisiana]. Everyone desiring to join the church by experience indicates it in open church and is thereafter examined in detail by the pastor and board of deacons so that it may be ascertained for a certainty that he or she fully understands what the step means. After examination, and if the applicant is found to be satisfactory, at another service the person again comes down and joins and then the pastor gives to each person a fine New Testament and gives the party a short lecture.”

Allen described the services as “solemn” and “impressive” and emphasized that “no one ever leaves until the service is over.” Regarding Dr. Ball’s preaching, Allen wrote that “The sermons are always couched in language easy to understand, nearly always conversational tone. The minister rarely ever says anything that is not absolutely in line with the thought of his message.”[[24]](#footnote-23)

# Holding Forth the Word of Life, 1944-1961

However, by the time John Compton Ball retired in 1944, the church had become quite insular, idiosyncratic, and unduly attached to their pastor of 41-years, making it all but impossible for Ball’s successor—K. Owen White—to succeed.

As it turns out, Dr. White was actually *not* the candidate originally presented to the church by the Pulpit Committee. The Pulpit Committee had recommended the church call Dr. Ralph Walker, a Northern Baptist Convention pastor from Oregon. But Mrs. Agnes Shankle, a long-time Sunday School teacher, spoke up and “questioned the soundness of Dr. Walker’s preaching, stating there were considerable rumors that he was compromising in his dealing with controversial questions between Fundamentalists and Modernists.”[[25]](#footnote-24) Instead, the members of the church motioned and then unanimously agreed that the church call Dr. K. Owen White, a recent graduate of Southern Seminary, and a well-known conservative. In all of the history of Capitol Hill Baptist Church—this might have been the most decisive moment.

**[Application] - Praise God for women like Mrs. Shankle—who may not have had a Masters of Divinity, who knew her Bible, and could tell the difference between faith-undermining liberalism, and Bible-affirming conservatism! And church, let’s pray that if the elders of Capitol Hill Baptist Church ever bring a pastoral candidate to you who is compromising on any of the fundamentals of the faith, that we have a Mrs. Shankle in our midst who is willing to stand up and say, ‘Not in my house!’ That’s what it means to be a congregationally governed church. Sisters, study the Word of God. It’s your job too to protect the doctrine and life of this church.**

## *K. Owen White*

In any case, K. Owen White arrived in 1944 and found things not at all as they should be. The membership was a mess. The church boasted nearly 3,000 members but White suspected that probably no more than 500 showed up on Sundays.[[26]](#footnote-25) When he tested his theory out by placing attendance cards in the pews unannounced one Sunday in January 1948, he found that only 763 members had been present at the service.[[27]](#footnote-26) “Because of the long pastorate of Dr. Ball,” he later explained, “there were second and third generation people there who were tied to the church out of loyalty to him” simply because “it had become traditional to be a member of Metropolitan even though they had moved.”[[28]](#footnote-27)

What made things even worse, was that Dr. Ball refused to hand control over to White, remaining on the church staff as ‘pastor emeritus,’ keeping 75% of his salary, attending Deacons meetings, and insisting that Dr. White recognize him publicly during services. “My hair turned gray within the first six months,” White later recalled. “I have to say, in all frankness, that he didn’t make any great effort to make it easy for the new pastor.”[[29]](#footnote-28)

Nevertheless, White persevered and sought to reform the church through his pattern of expositional preaching. He first preached through Nehemiah, printing the upcoming sermon texts in the Bulletin and encouraging the congregation to read the chapters in advance.[[30]](#footnote-29) White also sought to reform the church’s membership, starting a five-week ‘New Members Class,’ and revising the membership roll by dropping 480 names who had stopped attending.[[31]](#footnote-30)

Through White, the church began to partner more closely with the Southern Baptist Convention. Like all historic white Baptist churches in DC, Metropolitan, from the beginning, was dually aligned with both Northern and Southern Baptist Conventions—contributing both money and delegates. After 1947, however, many conservative churches left the Northern Baptist Convention over its increasing ties to the liberal Federal Council of Churches. Under White, Metropolitan stopped contributing financially to the Northern Baptist Convention.

During his pastorate of five years, White baptized 848 new members, saw a total of 1,969 additions to the church, and more-than doubled the church budget.[[32]](#footnote-31)

## Walter J. Carpenter

Under Walter Carpenter, from 1950-1955, Metropolitan continued to grow in the wake of World War II, and served as the host-church for Billy Graham’s evangelistic crusade in Washington DC in 1952, of which Carpenter served as Crusade chairman. Members of Metropolitan sang in the choir and served as counselors at the month-long crusade held at the National Guard Armory down East Capitol Street, from January 13 to February 17, 1952.

Hundreds of young people were moving to Washington to work for the FBI and other government agencies and many of them were looking for a church home. One such person was Jane Walker. Jane was nineteen, reserved, and new to Washington, D.C. where she had come to work as a telephone operator for the FBI. The nation’s capital was a far cry from the rural town of Littleton, North Carolina where she had grown in a house without electricity. On her own in a strange city, without many friends, on the previous Sunday, she had “by chance” turned the dial of her radio to “1260” around 9 p.m. to hear a choir singing, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.” Alone in her room in the boarding house, she listened for an hour to the beautiful singing and biblical preaching, noting at the end of the broadcast, the name and address of the sponsoring church: Metropolitan Baptist Church at 6th and A Streets NE.

She had never been to a Baptist church before. But the next Sunday, she mustered up her courage, rode the Streetcar to East Capitol and 6th, where she joined the throngs making their way to church. She later described what she encountered as “a little bit of heaven.” Her faith grew under the preaching of Dr. J. Walter Carpenter, whom she came to regard as “a father figure,” and through a women’s Sunday School class taught by Pearl Carneal.[[33]](#footnote-32) On May 14, 1954, Jane Maxine Walker—later Maxine Zopf—was baptized into membership at Metropolitan Baptist Church.[[34]](#footnote-33)

## Carl F.H. Henry

In 1956, two theologians moved to Washington DC from California. Carl F.H. Henry moved here to establish *Christianity Today*. Walter A. Pegg moved here to pastor Capitol Hill Baptist Church. “Those of us who study the movings of God’s Spirit sense that something significant for evangelical Christianity may be in the making in the Washington area,” Carl Henry wrote to the members of Metropolitan on September 3, 1956, a day after becoming a member. “To the pulpit of Metropolitan, has come Dr. Walter A. Pegg,” Henry continued, “who could well lift the strategic witness of this church in the city in such a way as to multiply its impact upon the life and thought of the nation’s capital.”[[35]](#footnote-34)

## Walter A. Pegg

Henry was right. Pegg faithfully preached God’s Word, completing expositional series through Galatians, Matthew, 1 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Hebrews, and Philippians. “It is a most pleasing sight to see,” Pegg told his church in 1959, “virtually everyone with an open Bible in hand, and to observe notes being’ made in the margins.”[[36]](#footnote-35)

Pegg also insisted on careful membership practices and revised the membership roll by dropping 995 names on May 15, 1957—cutting one third of the church’s membership.[[37]](#footnote-36) “What does church membership mean?” Pegg asked the church in 1958, “What should it involve? A place where the name is inscribed? A place associated with pleasant memories? The Epistle to the Hebrews urges, ‘Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching’ (10:25).”[[38]](#footnote-37)

# Parking Lots and Peace Protests, 1961-1980

## Suburbanization

Despite Pegg’s faithful labors, there were factors at work outside of his control. The 1950s were a difficult time for cities and inner-city churches. Rising urban prices coupled with rising crime led members of Metropolitan to retreat to the suburbs in droves. In 1941, 83% of church families resided in the District of Columbia. By 1951 that number had dropped to 74%, and would continue to drop until leveling out, in 1970, at 39%.

The church tried to retain members by advertising its programs, talented choir, and rich services. But it was fighting a losing battle. Still, the church refused to give up.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the church bought up adjacent properties for pennies on the dollar. For example, 508 East Capitol Street was purchased for $32,000.00 in 1960.[[39]](#footnote-38) Their hope was to build an attractive downtown church equipped with a multi-story parking garage. The plan never came to fruition, but by God’s grace we still own most of the properties.

In an effort to keep members who lived in the suburbs from joining local churches, Metropolitan began advertising itself as “The Church DEAREST to you – Not the church NEAREST You!” [[40]](#footnote-39) In 1961, the church’s monthly newsletter printed a map of Metro Washington, showing the driving distance from each of DC’s suburbs: “No home in Greater Washington Is Too Far From Metropolitan Baptist Church” the heading reads. “It all depends on what you want.”[[41]](#footnote-40) The efforts did not work. Metropolitan continued to decline.

In 1966, Carl Henry summarized the church’s predicament in this way:

“I think Metropolitan is at the crossroads. One of its great assets—and also its liability at the present juncture of history—is that it is a downtown church located only about six blocks from the capital… There is only one real option for significant survival, as I see it, since its membership will more and more move to the suburbs or be confined to government workers in the immediate area: it must have a powerful pulpit and a special ministry to students in the Washington area (on an intellectual level and not merely social). if these two elements were combined, I think it could gain a reputation as a powerful center; Without them, I see no really significant future for the church.”[[42]](#footnote-41)

## John Stuckey

Metropolitan’s new pastor in 1967 saw the changing landscape of Washington as an opportunity: “Our church is in a small enclave where the population shift in recent years has been from white to black,” he wrote. “What an opportunity this church has to create a real fellowship of believers crossing racial and national lines!”[[43]](#footnote-42)

Stuckey’s hopes were partially realized in 1969 when the first African-American member joined the congregation: Mrs. Margaret Roy.

## Mrs. Margaret Roy

Margaret S. Roy was born on June 17, 1909 in Broad Run, VA. She came to DC at age 10 and worked as a teacher in Prince William County and later as a school principal. Mrs. Roy explained that she began attending CHBC because she had heard its hymns on the radio. Her reasons for attending were multifaceted. On the one hand, she wanted to disprove those who thought “it was a church that didn’t want Negroes.” She explained that “she wanted whites to know that there were blacks that weren’t all bad.” On the other hand, there were worship preferences. As Mrs. Roy recounted in 1996 “while some blacks like lots of clapping,” she preferred “quiet,” believing “it’s more important to listen and learn the gospel.” One month after she began attending, she explained, she received a letter from Rev. John Stuckey inviting her to join the church which she did.

Not everyone was pleased at this. John Stuckey recounted that four white families left the church when she joined. But despite experiencing some serious unpleasantness, Mrs. Roy resolved “that she would treat people right regardless of how they may treat her.” At a women’s Bible study, “one woman [rudely] turned her back on her,” but through her persistent efforts, “that woman later became a friend.” Another way she built friendships in a nearly exclusively white church was by making a point of visiting elderly women who were members of the church. They were often surprised to be visited by Mrs. Roy but she “didn’t think it mattered what color they were.”[[44]](#footnote-43)

# Darkest Before the Dawn, 1980-1993

Through the 1970s and 80s, the church continued to hold on through a ‘faithful remnant’ who stayed. Young people who moved to Washington to work on the Hill found cheap housing at the church’s “Boys Building” and “Girls Building” on East Capitol Street. Along with inexpensive housing they also found a faithful church, and not infrequently, a spouse.

Two young men who joined the church in the 1980s were Bob and Bill. Best friends, they organized a young professional’s group at church and discipled other young men. Not long after, Bob decided to leave his successful career in banking to become a missionary with the International Mission Board. In April 1980, less than a week after arriving in Nigeria, Bob was paralyzed from the shoulders down during a car accident that killed two other missionaries. Bob ended up back here on the block, in a motorized wheelchair. And Bill did everything he could to care for his friend: changing his clothes, helping him shower. That’s just the kind of guy Bill was.

When the church went through a difficult time in 1988, and the pastor left to plant a church in the suburbs, some of the older Deacons were considering closing down the church and distributing the assets to missions. Bill, who was one of the only younger guys on the Deacon board, fought for the church.[[45]](#footnote-44)

So in 1990, the church called Harry Kilbride from Brandywine, Delaware to become the next pastor, beginning his ministry on October 7, 1990.[[46]](#footnote-45) Bill, who was chairman of the Board of Deacons at that time did everything he could to welcome Kilbride and make him comfortable. Kilbride was a British disciple of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He was reformed in his theology, gave out books by J.I. Packer, and preached expository messages. The church slowly began to grow again.

But something was deeply wrong in Harry’s life. To make a long and very painful story short, Harry had begun counseling Bill’s wife who struggled with depression. At first she seemed to be getting better, but soon she began to get worse. But it wasn’t until after she attempted suicide in November 1992 that the truth came out. The pastor had been preying on her and taking advantage of her.

Disqualified from ministry, Kilbride left the church that was now in shambles. Already declining in numbers, spiritually deflated, and discouraged, Capitol Hill Baptist Church seemed destined for oblivion. What would happen next? How would God provide for this church?

# A New Era?

In June 1994, a student at George Washington University named Sandra Howard decided to write a term paper on CHBC, the church where her parents, Sherwood Sprunger and Dorothy Ball, were married. Her concluding paragraph reads as follows:

“In August, Dr. Mark E. Dever (originally from Kentucky but late from Cambridge, England) becomes the new pastor to Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church. When he comes, perhaps he will ride from National Airport with his family in the church van, one emblazoned with the words Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church–*Rooted in the word–Centered in the cross–Embracing the Nation’s Capitol*. Perhaps Dr. Dever will begin the second golden age.”

There’s no question that since Mark Dever’s arrival in 1994, Capitol Hill Baptist Church has experienced renewal and revitalization, growing numerically, planting churches, and seeing pastors trained and sent out around the world.

Mark faced early challenges over introducing elders, teaching Calvinism, and weaning the church off of depending on programs. But through hard times and good times, God has continued to grow his church. And if you want to hear stories about those early years, you don’t have to ask me! Just ask Mark or Matt Schmucker or the Reedys or Deepak Reju or many others who have been here since those early days.

# Conclusion

As we bring this 13-week class in church history to a close, and as Capitol Hill Baptist Church approaches its 150-year anniversary, the question needs to be asked, what did it take for this church to be faithful for the past 150 years? How can we remain faithful for another 150 years if the Lord tarries?

*Preaching:* The chief distinguishing mark of God’s faithfulness toward Capitol Hill Baptist Church has been the preachers who have heralded the gospel from its pulpit. From Joseph W. Parker to Green Clay Smith to K. Owen White to Mark Dever, the church has been blessed by remarkably faithful and gifted preachers—in no small part due to the carefulness of members like Miss Agnes Shankle! Pray for the men who stand behind this pulpit to be marked by faithfulness to God’s Word.

*Perseverance:* From Celestia A. Ferris to Margaret Roy, God has provided for his church by faithful saints who sacrificially lived ‘hidden lives’ of quiet faithfulness.

*Presence:* Unlike nearly every other evangelical church in the District of Columbia, Capitol Hill Baptist Church did not leave the neighborhood in which it was started. In that sense, CHBC is the church that stayed. It did not move on from the gospel when other churches went liberal, and it did not move on from its place when other churches fled for the suburbs.

*Prayer:* From the vantage point of heaven, the most significant factor in preserving the witness of Capitol Hill Baptist Church may be the prayers of the congregation. The church started as a prayer meeting and has maintained a prayer meeting since its inception. So much of the good that has come over the years is a result of God answering prayers prayed over a century ago.

So let’s pray and ask God to make us faithful for as long as he has us in this place and until he calls us home. Let’s pray.

1. *Membership List of E Street Baptist Church, Washington City* (1852-53), 16, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *Misc. Clippings and Notes*, February 29, 1908, MS-1279, Box 5, Folder 18. Newspaper Clippings. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. *Clerk's Annual Report (1879)*, December 31, 1879, MS-1575, Box 6, Folder 05. Reports 1874-1913. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. *Constitution of the Metropolitan Bapt. Assoc. and Other Reports (1874-1878),* June 12, 1874, MS-1600, Box 6, Folder 06. Minutes 1874-1878. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. MS-1344, Box 5, Folder 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. MS-1344, Box 5, Folder 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. MS-1344, Box 5, Folder 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Cathcart, 892; *Memoirs*, 120-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Joseph W. Parker, *Memoirs*, 307-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. “85 Years on Capitol Hill: A Dramatic Presentation of the History of the Metropolitan Baptist Church, Washington D.C.) by John D. Cochran. MS-1371, Box 5, Folder 27. 85th Anniversary. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. *Metropolitan Baptist Church Minutes (1877-1906)*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. *Metropolitan Baptist Church Minutes (1877-1906)*, 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. *The Washington Post*, 5 Jan 1891: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. *The Washington Post*, 05 Jan 1891: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. *Minutes of the Metropolitan Baptist Church* (1877-1906), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. *Evening Star*, 15 Apr 1912:25. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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18. “Church Records Broken at Service for Titanic’s Dead,” *The Washington Times*, 22 Apr 1912:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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20. *Evening Star*, 22 May 1926:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. The Washington Post (1923-1954); Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C]. 14 Jan 1935: 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. “The Glory of the Cross.” Sermon by Dr. John Compton Ball. Metropolitan Baptist Church. Sunday Evening, April 5, 1936. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. “Washington Religious Activities Impress Congressman Allen” *Baptist Message* [Shreveport, LA], March 25, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. “Washington Religious Activities Impress Congressman Allen” *Baptist Message* [Shreveport, LA], March 25, 1937. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. *Minutes of the Metropolitan Baptist Church (1934-1945),* 144. MS-1608, Box 6, Folder 09. Minutes 1934-45. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. *Church Bulletin*, February 4, 1945 in Metropolitan Bulletins 1945, MS-1803, Box 9A, 09. Metropolitan Bulletins 1945. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. *Church Bulletin*, Metropolitan Baptist Church, January 11, 1948 in 001806 Metropolitan Bulletins 1948, January 4, 1948, MS-1806, Box 9A, 12. Metropolitan Bulletins 1948. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Tonks, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Tonks, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. “Pastor’s Page” in *Metropolitan Church Bulletin*, October 1, 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. “Motion carried that 480 names of members on printed list who could not be found be dropped from the Church membership rolls and such names to be kept on file for future reference.” October 23, 1946. *Minutes of the Metropolitan Baptist Church (1945-1956)*, 18-19. MS-1610, Box 6, Folder 10. Minutes 1945-78. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. From $52,000 in 1944 to $123,000 in 1949. A. Blanchete, "History: Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church", February 1, 1993, MS-1287, Box 5, Folder 20. Concise History. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Interview with Doris Faber, Washington, D.C., August 16, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. See Mark Dever, Interview with Maxine Zopf, February 5, 2002 in Membership Folder. For date of Baptism, see *Increase Oct. 14, 1953 - May 1965*, MS-1625, Box 7, Folder 01. Increases - Decreases (1943-1962). CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. Cf. Maxine Zopf, *CHBC Radio History*, July 12, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Letter of Carl F.H. Henry to Metropolitan Baptist Church, September 3, 1956, MS-1150, Box 5, Folder 11. Walter A. Pegg. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. “From the Pastor’s Pen” in *Metropolitan Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 30 (July 8, 1959), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Clerk Report on Church Roll Sept. 1951 - Sep. 1971, October 1, 1951, MS-1633, Box 7, Folder 06. Membership. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. “From the Pastor’s Pen: What Constitutes Church Membership?” in *Metropolitan Messenger*, Vol. 2, No. 19 (March 3, 1958), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. “Another Step Forward” in *Metropolitan Messenger*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (January 6, 1960), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. *Metropolitan Messenger*, Vol. 2, No. 26 (June 10, 1959), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. *Metropolitan Messenger*, Vol. 6, No. 41. October 18, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Letter of Carl F.H. Henry to Rev. Bob Marsh, December 12, 1966, CHBC Archives, Series 1, Box 11, Folder “Carl F.H. Henry.” Bob Marsh had been recommended to Henry by Dr. Leo Eddleman, president of NOBTS. See CFHH to Clyde Taylor Recommending Bob Marsh for Pastor, August 15, 1966, MS-1863, Box 11, 02. Correspondence CFHH. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. Dr. John R. Stuckey, “This Difficult City” in *Capitol Hill Metropolitan Messenger* (Vol. 17, No. 5), February 10, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Notes of telephone interview with Mrs. Margaret Roy (Conducted by Bernard Myers), September 22, 1996, MS-1310, Box 5, Folder 21. Miscellaneous History. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Wes Ousley interview pt. 2 June 6, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. Letter of E.T. Kinney To The Members Of The Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church, September 18, 1990, MS-1247, Box 5, Folder 16. Harry Kilbride. CHBC Archives, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)