



The Mill



THE STORY OF
The Mill

FROM A MISSION TO A MOVEMENT

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From a Mission to a
Movement

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The story and these pages was recorded
to celebrate 30 years of
God's faithfulness to The Mill.

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and burned the sack. The church member came to Floyd the next day and asked him if he had liked the gift. "Thank you. The chickens were delicious," he said. The man asked, "What about the money?" "What money?" asked Floyd. "The \$50 bill I put in the sack with the chickens," replied the man. Floyd hurried back to the ash heap and found a small piece of the burlap sack amongst the ashes. He unfolded it to find the \$50 bill inside, unburned and intact. It was clear evidence of God's provision.

As he walked through the mission project and all that it entailed, Floyd would need to personally know God's faithfulness to provide what he needed. All he had to do was look at his life.

Finally, his heart was important. When asked to describe her husband, Sara said very simply, "He loved people." She said his heart would break when there were disagreements among the church leadership.

His heart went out to young people and he often attended the church youth camps. His daughter said, "What attracted kids to him was that he trusted them to take responsibility and ownership of what they did."

Floyd's attention to his mother was further evidence of a heart that loved. He took care of her throughout her life, making sure that she wanted for nothing. His love for people allowed him to see the need for Christ in those around him.

Floyd's life speaks volumes of his commitment to the ministry, but it was his character and devotion to God that is most noteworthy. When he passed away on December 4, 1996, Reverend Floyd Loudermilk's obituary was noticeably short. He did not want too much made of his life, so he did not want the usual visitation and service after his passing. He sought no honor of his own, only that which was due his God. What mattered was what God was called him to do. God knew that about him and chose the right man for the job. ■

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.
- Acts 9:31

New Beginnings: The Mission

Beginning in the early 1980s, Forest Acres Baptist Church faithfully met every Sunday in the basement of a Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The congregation, led by Dr. Dan Cloer, originally consisted of 70 members. Over time, however, efforts to grow the congregation were not successful.

By the late 1980s, the church dwindled down to about 15 mostly elderly members. A January 1988 vote formally disbanded the church and appointed trustees over monies accumulated from faithful giving. The following month, these hardy souls joined the Loudermilk family in Pastor and Mrs. Loudermilk's living room for a potluck dinner and discussion about forming a mission.

A Southern Baptist Association report designated Anderson Mill Road as one of four Spartanburg County areas in need of a local church. Armed with that knowledge, the group's first order of business was to find a location for the mission that would be central to Anderson Mill Road.

By the end of February 1988, Pastor Loudermilk secured an empty storefront in the West Oak Square shopping center at the corner of Reidville and Anderson Mill Roads. For a \$500 per month rental fee, the "Spartanburg Mission" now had a meeting place.

Between 30 and 40 people attended the first Sunday service at the end of February, with the number swelling to over 100 within the next three months. The 25-by-50-foot space, originally empty, was now filled with chairs of different sizes and colors; some had been donated by West Side Baptist Church, and others had been brought by the individual members. There was barely room for a pulpit and a couple of chairs at the front.

The nursery, set up in a converted mop closet next to the worship space, presented its own difficulties. Not only could the congregation hear crying babies during worship, but, as charter member Harold Brock said, "The smell of the ammonia was pretty strong when the babies were getting changed."

Volunteers offered to do everything from the custodial to the secretarial. Sunday bulletins were written by hand and shared. According to Pastor Loudermilk, one of the mission's greatest needs was "personnel who work free!"¹ In the end, everyone did just that. People willingly served in a wide range of capacities from overseeing church finances to leading musical worship to investing in children.

With the congregation's number increasing, it was obvious that the small space could not hold much more. The mission rented two adjoining spaces and, with the owners' permission, removed the common walls to expand the sanctuary. They did this with the provision that those walls would be rebuilt upon the end of the lease. As Harold Brock said, "We didn't even know if they were load-bearing walls. We just knocked them down and hoped for the best!"

The mission's leadership looked to nearby businesses that were closed on Sundays to ask if their spaces could be used for Sunday School classes. It wasn't long before members began to meet in a restaurant (The Galley), a barber shop, a gym and a satellite office of the Spartanburg Herald-Journal for small group Bible studies. The senior adult class met in the sanctuary, and another class met at the Cloer's home across Reidville Road. They used movable panels to separate spaces in the sanctuary to accommodate additional classes. After the expansion, the congregation climbed to 150.

Pastor Loudermilk's last interim church, Five Forks in Simpsonville, was building a new sanctuary and offered its old pews to the mission. Harold and Gerry Brock personally

¹ Video, early Spartanburg Mission Service, courtesy of Wade Loudermilk

purchased them, as well as the pulpit, fiberglass baptismal pool and three large chairs for the mission. The mission used the pews that fit into the space and placed the rest in storage. A sign reading "Family of God" hung above the expanded sanctuary, which now housed two services, Sunday School classes and a well-attended Sunday night service.

With a growing congregation, the members could envision an actual church building in their near future. Anticipating this, a Service of Constitution took place to move the mission's status from "mission" to "church." West Side Baptist Church, which had so graciously allowed the mission to use its campus for baptisms and fellowship events, served as the sponsoring church. The congregation chose a name based on its location.

Within 10 months of the mission's first service, the number of members had grown to 250. It was time to build a facility for Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church.



Considering the amount of work, time and money it took to begin and sustain a fledgling church, what kept them going? Two motivating factors continue to be evident in the recounting of this history: God's provision and the congregation's love for each other.

"God's hand was on this" was a phrase often heard in conversation with the charter members. God not only supplied the necessary space and resources, but energized the people with the excitement of seeing growing numbers regularly attending each Sunday.

Bobby Loudermilk, the first outreach leader, recalls the extraordinary efforts of the visitation team and the way the news spread about the mission by word-of-mouth. This also had a financial benefit.

Sara Loudermilk recalled finding money in the church's mailbox, often from people who did not attend, but who had heard of the mission's existence. These donations supplemented the congregation's consistent giving and the seed money donated by Forest Acres Baptist Church.

By the end of July 1988, just six months its inception, the church had \$90,000 in its bank account, with 10 percent allocated for missions. This was truly amazing, considering the relatively small number of people in the congregation. It was simply further evidence of God's blessing and provision.

The congregation's love for each other was evident through members' encouragement of one another and the work they did to benefit the mission. It was apparent in the way they extended themselves to others.

Charter members Fred and Dianne Wofford said that their reason for attending and staying at the mission was the peace and presence of the Holy Spirit they felt there. There was a feeling of family and a unity in purpose.

Members affirmed their love at the closing of each service as they held hands across the aisle and sang "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God." When church ended, it was common for people to stay one or two extra hours, just to fellowship with each other.

God's provision and the congregation's love for each other would be important as they faced the challenge of building a church facility. They were off to a truly good start. ■

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

- Luke 8:15

Road Trip to Nashville

Building a facility for the church could have been a scary and overwhelming endeavor. There were many challenges. How would they build for their current needs while also anticipating future growth? The new facility would need to accommodate people in various stages of life – babies through senior adults.

And, of course, the congregation would need to pay for the facility, which could be staggering for a relatively small congregation. Their faith fueled their determination to accomplish this project. God had provided for them from day one.

The first step in the process was research, and The Southern Baptist Convention offices in Nashville would be a good place to start. Pastor Loudermilk and a group from the church traveled in the Brocks' RV.

When they arrived in Nashville, they met with representatives of the convention's Architectural Department. The group presented their history and where they felt God was leading in terms of building. The panel had a rather disheartening response. In their opinion, the project would cost about \$100 per square foot, requiring roughly \$5 million to complete. The panel further recommended that the group wait five years to build and urged them to "go back and grow."

The group headed home discouraged. At a rest stop on the way back, Pastor Loudermilk, convinced of both God's will in the matter and His provision, told the group, "Don't be discouraged. We will build this church."

With \$90,000 in the bank, the next step was to find a piece of land for the church. A seven-acre property on the corner of Anderson Mill Road and Sundyal Drive seemed the best choice. Unfortunately, it was not for sale. Fortunately, the current owner of the land was an acquaintance of a charter member of the mission.

Two members of the congregation knocked on the land owner's door and asked if she would be willing to sell the land. She refused. However, a week later, she accepted their offer. The land was theirs. The mission hired attorney Lloyd Howard was hired to handle the title search and other legal issues.

After purchasing the land, there were no funds left to build. Next on the agenda was to find some kind of financing. This was a difficult task. The church's giving history was not long enough to guarantee income with which to repay a loan, and the once robust bank account had been depleted by the land purchase. Also, as Harold Brock said, "To get money to build a church is the hardest thing in the world, because no one person is responsible."

Jim Cantrell, a banker with First Citizen's Bank and Trust, approached his bank for a loan. He submitted a proposal, and, as he recalls, the loan officers laughed at him.

When he returned to the church members and told them what had happened, approximately 50 people decided to pledge \$5,000 each, should the church default on the loan. Oddly enough, when given this information, the bank decided to take a chance, and loaned the church \$600,000 to build.

The Home Mission Board, acting as a sort of backup, also pledged to provide the money for the loan, in the event of default. The members' financial commitment might have seemed risky, but as Harold Brock said, "Things had been going so well, and they knew that God would provide." Fortunately that offering was in force for a relatively short time, and a later refinancing relieved the members of the potential burden.

In order to cut costs, the church hired a contractor instead of an architect to draw up the plans for the envisioned 20,000 square foot building. It would house a sanctuary, fellowship hall and educational space.

In the end, the total cost of the project, including the land, was approximately \$700,000. The cost was about \$24 per square foot, a significantly lower figure than the Southern Baptist Convention group in Nashville had estimated.

The groundbreaking took place on December 4, 1988, only 10 months after the famous Loudermilk living room meeting. Various subcontractors worked on the project at amazingly reasonable rates.

The project was not without its challenges, however, and cost-cutting was the rule of the day. Professionals installed the septic system, but it was the men of the church who dug and placed the lines.

Resourcefulness was a mandatory. An example was the lack of dirt for the grading. Rather than paying for dirt, they added a basement to the plans. The basement made up for the lack of dirt, while also providing extra space. That space would be sorely needed in the years to come.

The plans called for colored windows on either side of the sanctuary, with one large window over the baptismal area. The most reasonable estimate came from a Statesville, North Carolina company. Each side window would cost \$600, and the larger window would be \$1600.

Again, money was an issue. And again, the church membership stepped up. At a subsequent Sunday night service, Harold Brock shared the window estimates and told the church that there was very little money to spare. By the end of the service, all the windows had been bought by the members.

The windows are special, particularly to Brenda Blackwell, Pastor Loudermilk's daughter. She remembers touring the

shell of the building with her dad before the installation of the windows. As they strolled by the open window spaces, they saw the sun shining through them. Pastor Loudermilk said, "You know, honey, one of these days, God is going to do something huge in this place."

He could not have known how prophetic those words would be. ■

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Romans 15:5-6

Coming Home

When the church members walked into the new building on Sunday, February 4 1990, it was like walking into a dream. Gone were the days of setting up and taking down furniture and equipment each Sunday. Gone were the days of children playing in a storefront parking lot. Gone were the days of housing babies in a mop closet.

The storefront had been a spiritual home because of the people and the presence of God, but this felt like a real church home.

The sunlight streamed through the colored windows that had been purchased by individual church members. The walls had a fresh coat of light blue paint. The full complement of pews had been taken out of storage and reupholstered in blue as well. The hymnals and Bibles rested in the pew backs. The carpet, donated by Milliken and Company, was ready for foot traffic. The choir wore robes from Forest Acres Church. Frances Camp, who had sold the land to the mission, donated the baby grand piano.

There was room at the end of the sanctuary for actual choir space, a baptistry, a podium and chairs for the pastors. The new parking lot had been paved instead of graveled so women in high heels could walk in without difficulty.

For the first time, all of the adult, youth and children's Sunday School classes were under one roof, meeting in rooms to the rear of the sanctuary.

The basement, which had only been added when there was not enough dirt for the grading, held a kitchen, fellowship hall and closets for supplies. The two years in the storefront

church location had been worth it all to come to a place like this.

From the special day the church dedicated the new facility, the congregation continued to grow. As Dianne Wofford said, "It wasn't unusual to see people lined up across the front of the sanctuary at the invitation time. People were placed there [in the church] at the most appropriate times."

Her husband Fred Wofford added, "People came to this church out of nowhere for no logical reason. No one was at Anderson Mill by accident. Everyone had a purpose for being there."

Despite the beautiful building, there were continued rumblings about the structure itself and the undertaking of a tremendous debt in such a short time. Furthermore, in October 1990, Pastor Loudermilk decided to step down as senior pastor due to health issues and his desire for the church to move forward under the leadership of a younger man.

This decision drew some criticism among members. For the first time, the unified mission was not so unified. Yet the congregation, with much prayer and belief that these "growing pains" would resolve, pushed ahead and formed a search committee to find a new pastor.

The newly-elected search committee narrowed the field down to only résumés of candidates in their 30s and 40s.

A young pastor named Don Seagle, from Hopewell Baptist Church in Blacksburg, South Carolina, emerged as a front-runner. He accepted the call and began as senior pastor in December 1990.

By that time, the church had a membership of 257 and there were 15 adult Sunday School classes on campus. Rev. Seagle, a dynamic and vibrant preacher, focused most of his efforts on growing the congregation.

The church used missions funds to purchase a bus in order to transport people in the community who did not have sufficient transportation to get to the church. However, maintenance of the bus and the availability of drivers hampered the efforts, and the bus was sold.

Under Rev. Seagle's leadership, the church purchased new choir robes and published its first newsletter, "The Messenger." They installed a new brick sign and columns flanking each driveway.

In 1991, a basement renovation made room for the youth department. The next year, a minor construction project removed the back wall of the sanctuary to make room for overflowing crowds.

In February 1994, Rev. Seagle resigned, and the church experienced another difficult period of disunity, resulting in declining membership. The deacons and various pastors filled in on Sundays until an interim pastor could be found.

In April 1994, retired pastor Bob Freeland accepted the position as interim pastor. Rev. Freeland was not only a great believer in formal church traditions, but he was an avid supporter of missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, an annual effort used to financially support the International Mission Board's missionaries.

Today, church members still refer to Rev. Freeland as the pastor God provided to unify and heal the congregation. Harold Brock said, "He was there to take the church to the right pastor. He was just the kind of person that everyone liked."

Fred and Dianne Wofford said, "He had a heart for people. He was a blessing. He was there for God to heal the place."

Ray Caruso agreed and, with an affectionate grin added, "He made me wear a tie!"

In March 1995, Rev. Freeland's leadership as interim pastor ended as the church hired a new senior pastor. It had been

a rocky five years but, as with any other kind of family, restoration and healing followed the disagreements. The mission cited in 1988 as the fastest growing in the Southern Baptist Convention, had hit its stride once again. ■

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

- Matthew 25:40

Where Broken Hearts Are Mended

Finding a new senior pastor meant the church had to form yet another search committee, and they did so with great prayer.

The committee hoped to find a pastor with a seminary degree, experience leading a congregation similar in size to Anderson Mill and a heart for youth. After sorting through the résumés, the committee agreed on one candidate.

Rev. Keith Bradsher was a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and pastor of Hampton Heights Baptist Church in Eden, North Carolina. A dynamic preacher, he not only had a personable manner, but a powerful testimony. During his interview, he was very candid with the search committee regarding his past and the way God turned his life around, blessing him with a call to the ministry.

On February 26, 1995, Rev. Bradsher was called by the Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church congregation as their new senior pastor. April 9, 1995 not only marked his first service, but the beginning of a time of tremendous growth for the church.

As a result of both his preaching and his relational style, the numbers of those attending Sunday morning worship and Sunday School increased. The rise in attendance meant the development of new programs to meet new needs. Some of the new additions included a ladies' morning Bible study, a mother's morning out program, off-campus Bible clubs and in-home small groups, known as “Koinonia.”

Rev. Bradsher's heart for people is what people most fondly remember today. As Gabriel O'Sullivan recalls, a relational ministry was a natural fit for Rev. Bradsher, whose personal

testimony began with his own struggles. It was his desire to create an atmosphere within the church that supported emotional and spiritual healing.

The church adopted a new focus: "Where Broken Hearts Are Mended." The congregation welcomed and ministered to individuals coming from diverse backgrounds with all types of personal issues and struggles. This focus led the church to care for others, no matter who they were and where they'd been.

The first major order of business under the new pastor was to deal with the initial debt incurred by constructing the original church building. As Sunday morning attendance continued to rise, the church needed to consider expanding the current building or the possibility of building a new sanctuary. Before undertaking a new financial project, however, the most responsible course was to eliminate the church's outstanding debt.

On July 7, 1996, the church embarked upon a journey called "Together We Retire." The goal was to eliminate the church's existing debt by December 1997. The campaign kicked off with a pledge night held at Anderson Mill Elementary School. The pledges received that night completely covered the remaining debt, which was approximately \$100,000.

Meanwhile, Sunday morning worship attendance grew steadily. The deacons recommended adding a second service to handle the overflowing crowd. As a result, the church added an 8:30 a.m. service in October 1996.

By March 1997, the congregation had grown by nearly 60 percent with at least 80 percent of the sanctuary filled on Sunday mornings. In a church building designed to comfortably seat 400, numbers in excess of that were pushing the limit. Something clearly had to be done. ■

The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

- Psalm 33:11

Possess the Land

With the rise in membership and visitors, it was necessary to review the church's capacity to minister to a growing population. A second Sunday service and a short-lived Saturday service had not adequately addressed capacity issues.

Growth again created the need for some intentional thought. A long-range planning committee would oversee the next steps. According to Tom Sinclair, the committee was given the charge "to see what the future could hold and what direction the church should take." The committee invited representatives from the South Carolina Baptist Convention to join the discussion and bring research and area demographics to the table.

The committee presented their findings in a document entitled "Opening the Window to the Future." In it they addressed the current "state of the church" and growth in the surrounding area. Ultimately, they recommended that the church build again and possibly use the existing church for educational space.

On October 5, 1997, the congregation accepted the long-range planning committee's recommendation and formed a building team. At first, the team considered the possibility of enlarging the current church. The original owner of the church's land owned additional acreage adjoining the church property. The church approached her about selling it. There were a few challenges to that property. In the end, she decided not to sell. The committee began to look elsewhere.

They identified four possible parcels of land in the vicinity of the church property. All four properties were along Anderson Mill Road.

Offers to purchase property across from the present-day fire station and a plot of land in the Kirkwood area both fell through.

The next property was the committee's first choice. This option consisted of 21 acres, including a house and cow pasture. It was the closest option in proximity, as it was just across Sundyal Drive from the existing church. Representatives from the church approached the owner about buying, but he was adamant that this ideal piece of property was not for sale. The committee had no other choice but to keep looking.

The final parcel considered was the farthest one from the existing church. It was on the opposite side of the road from the dairy farm on Anderson Mill Road. The 21-acre property, offered at \$21,000 per acre, was large enough to accommodate a new sanctuary. The committee ordered a preliminary site plan and presented it to the church for approval.

There were a few issues that made the plan less than ideal. It was incredibly close to the dairy farm. It was a considerable distance from the original church. It was also located on a potentially dangerous curve and a possibly troublesome embankment. Before turning the decision over to the congregation for a vote, church leadership decided that at least 80 percent approval would move the plan forward. Church members voted, and only 75 percent of the congregation was in favor of the plan. The proposal was null and void. It appeared the congregation was stuck.

In the meantime, the church offered once more on the 21 acres across Sundyal Drive. Again, the family declined to sell the land to the church.

Surprisingly, not long after the unsuccessful offer, the land owner's family had a change of mind and heart. A member of the family approached the church with an offer to sell the property for \$700,000. Woodruff State Bank in Roebuck issued a loan for the entire amount at a rate of 7 percent.

On January 5, 1999, Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church officially purchased the piece of land that was always the most ideal location. God had been faithful once again.

A new chapter in the history of Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church had begun. It was time to possess the land and build again. ■

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Romans 15:5-6

A Time of Decision

The land purchase meant that the church carried significant financial debt again. The church launched another capital campaign titled "Possess the Land." The campaign had financial goals at three levels: a "Victory" goal of \$700,000, a "Challenge" goal of \$850,000 and a "Miracle" goal of \$1,500,000. The intent was to eliminate the debt by November 2000.

The church held a celebration banquet at USC Spartanburg on April 11, 1999, during which the congregation filled out pledge cards. By the following week, they received enough pledges to settle the entire amount of the debt. In fact, a total of \$925,000 in pledges had come in, giving the church additional seed money to begin the building process.

The building committee looked at the configuration of the land and decided that the facility would probably sit on 15-17 acres. Any remaining acreage, outside of the unusable wetlands, would be earmarked for recreational use.

The building committee set out to determine how to best use the new facility, particularly how to divide space between worship and education. They studied the worship and Sunday School attendance and the relationship between those numbers and financial giving.

In October 2000, the deacons approved the decision to build a temporary worship facility, educational space and family life center. The building team looked at the design of several other churches in the Upstate, including Brushy Creek Baptist Church in Taylors, Inman First Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of Simpsonville and Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Fountain Inn.

On December 6, 2000, the team presented the congregation with a tentative plan with two possible options. The first option was to build a 1,000-seat sanctuary with an optional future balcony and 13,000-square foot educational space. The cost would be \$3.3-3.5 million.

The second option was to build a 9,600-square foot dual-function worship center/fellowship hall, two educational buildings totaling 30,000 square feet and a 2,800-square foot enclosed assembly/greeting area. The cost for this plan would be \$2.8-3 million.

On January 3, 2001, the building team addressed the congregation and recommended moving forward with the second option. Discussion followed regarding the feasibility of adding a family life center and gym. Approximately 70 percent of those present voted in favor of the addition.

The team further recommended that the original church, too costly to maintain and not rentable, be sold as soon as possible. Since the church had retired the original debt in November 2000, the money from the church sale would be deposited and used to begin the building process.

The statement, presented to the church on the following Sunday, read: "The Building Team recommends that Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church proceed with the planning and design of a worship/fellowship center, family life center and educational facility to accommodate our current congregation and allow for forecasted growth. We further recommend that a committee be appointed by the Deacons to study and recommend future utilization of the current facility."

The congregation's answer was "Yes."

However, the road to building a new facility would not be the smoothest. As committee leadership and members came and went, they continued to discuss various plans and details without much resolution. They needed clarity to move forward and trusted that God would provide it.

Then something happened that no one expected. Rev. Keith Bradsher, citing personal reasons, resigned on December 12, 2001. At the start of an immense building project, Anderson Mill Baptist Church had just lost its leader. ■



1988—An inside view of the original sanctuary which was located inside of a strip mall. The words family of God became very meaningful to the congregation in its early days.



1988- Members of the original congregation gather to break ground on The Mill's first facility. This building still houses the church's administrative offices and many weekly ministries.



1989- Excitement was in the air as members and guest enjoyed the very first worship service in a brand new church building.



2008- After many years and many challenges members gathered to break ground for a new worship center and education space located on the property adjacent to the original church. Instead of 1 leader holding a shovel, the entire church participated by jointly pulling the plow.



Completed in 2009, a new 63,000 sq. ft. facility positioned The Mill for continued growth.



2016- In order for the entire church to be together in one service, members gathered at the Upward Star Center to provide the financial commitments needed to construct a new worship center.



2017- After months of anticipation, members gathered to once again break ground on a much needed facility. They also continued the practice of involving every person by pulling a plow together.



A depiction of the new worship center and ministry space under construction during the printing of this book. The Mill will gain use of this space in 2019.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

- Psalm 20:7

Faith Without Sight

In its short history, losing a pastor was certainly not the first hurdle Anderson Mill had faced; but it was possibly the most devastating. The emotional toll of having a vibrant pastor, who many called friend, leave was considerable.

On top of this, many church members left because of sheer disappointment or because they could not envision staying without Rev. Bradsher. Men like former interim Rev. Bob Freeland and Dr. Don Wilton from First Baptist Spartanburg came to preach messages of encouragement to the church. But what the church needed was someone with a heart for people who would be consistent and available. From 2002 until 2004, that person was Dr. Allen McWhite.

Dr. McWhite was a native of Greenville and graduate of The Citadel and Southwestern Theological Seminary. He had been called to pastor Southside Baptist Church in Spartanburg following an assignment in Ecuador as a missionary with the International Mission Board.

After leaving Southside, but prior to accepting the interim pastor position at Anderson Mill, Dr. McWhite became the Director of Global Engagement at North Greenville University. He served there and at Anderson Mill at the same time. He recalls that his responsibilities at the church were made easier because of the "great staff" and the strong leadership of an incredible deacon body.

His impression upon coming to the church was that "it had had the wind knocked out of it, but it had certainly not been knocked down."

At the same time, Dr. McWhite had some words of commendation for Pastor Bradsher. In his words, "[Keith] had brought the church to a point where the people

understood that the head of the church was not a pastor, but Christ; and that made a huge difference." Dr. McWhite also credited the congregation with knowing that "they were still the people of God through all of this."

Forgiveness and healing certainly were of paramount importance, but what should be done about plans for the new building? Was it possible to build without a permanent pastor on board? The decision would test the strength of the existing leadership.

During a presentation to the church, Dr. McWhite offered words of encouragement, saying, "from a pastor's perspective, if [a candidate] were called to the church to preach and a building project was already in process, he would see a church with a vision."²

In July 2002, the deacons recommended that the building project be split into phases, with the Christian Life Center (CLC) and youth area being built first. In the wake of all the changes experienced by the church, proceeding with this phase was thought to be motivating. The project would not only generate excitement, but would be a visible sign of forward movement.

On November 17, 2002, the building committee and the deacon body presented a proposal to the congregation. They offered details of the CLC's design and estimated cost. Both presenting bodies urged the congregation to take the next week to pray before the following week's vote. They agreed that an approval of 80 percent of those present would carry the building project forward.

The next Sunday, November 24, 2002, the congregation voted, and 93 percent of the voting members agreed to proceed with the project. A few months later, on January 26, 2003, the church held a groundbreaking ceremony.

² Minutes, presentation to Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church, November 17, 2002

Now it was time to deal with money. The church was debt-free, had \$522,000 in the bank and a received a \$1.5 million loan from Wachovia. It was time to embark upon another stewardship campaign.

Michael (Doc) Holliday served as chairman for the project alongside board of deacons finance officer Jim Simon. The campaign, "A Journey of Faith," kicked off with a dinner at Anderson Mill Elementary School on February 22, followed by a banquet time of financial commitment at First Baptist Spartanburg on May 2.

A tumultuous and potentially crippling experience had become a time of courageous progress, emboldened by faith and strong leadership.

Gabriel O'Sullivan said they were just waiting on God to see it through. "God's hand was on the church until its purpose was fully served, and we didn't think it was fully served yet," he said.

Now it was time to find a new leader for Anderson Mill. ■

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be requires, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

- Luke 12:48b

The Right Man

The question seemed to be, "who should the congregation choose?" At this time in Anderson Mill's history, there was a building project underway, and the congregation needed a man of vision to take the church into the future. Surely an older, seasoned pastor would be the obvious choice.

However, throughout this church's life, God's provision had often appeared in unexpected ways. How was the congregation to know that God's man was beginning seminary at the same time the search committee was forming to look for him? Clearly, God wasn't finished surprising the people of Anderson Mill.

This time, the pastoral search committee, led by Steve Vaughn, was not having an easy time. About a year into the search, tension began to build. Frustrations surfaced, and the committee felt significant pressure to find a pastor. God was clearly closing doors.

Then, after almost two years of reviewing applications, visiting churches, conducting interviews and meeting every week for two to three hours at a time, the committee changed. Some members rolled off, while others stayed on.

Committee member Amelia Harris said, "I don't know anything that has brought me closer to God's presence. But, to find someone to shepherd the congregation was overwhelming at times."

Fortunately, something significant was about to happen.

Committee member Marc Zachary had been involved with Centrifuge camps for years. He approached the camps' pastor and seminarian, Tony Merida, to ask if he might be

One member who has had a counseling relationship with Pastor D.J. echoes this and said, "There is no deception in him. He is honest, and I can trust him. If he doesn't know the answer, he always brings the issue back to Scripture."

During his time so far as pastor, D.J. has cast a vision for the church that has challenged members to step out of their comfort zones in two particular areas: discipleship and missions. He leads by example, not expecting his congregation to step out on faith without stepping out himself.

Church member Tom Sinclair summed it up nicely when he said, "For us to be attuned with God's will, we must walk closely in prayer, meditation and study. Even more so a pastor, for not only must he seek God's will for his life; he must likewise seek to know and understand God's will for the church he leads. The Mill is blessed with a pastor who recognizes this and balances his responsibilities. Most importantly, D.J. commits himself to godliness through study, meditation and prayer. His love for God is reflected in his family and his church and by living closely with God. He has been able to share God's direction for The Mill and lead accordingly."

After serving on a mission trip to Asia with Pastor D.J. and Laurel, member Julie Rogers said, "D.J. loves the Lord, has a heart to see the nations come to know Jesus, is madly in love with Laurel and adores his children."

As always, God provided. He brought the church a man for the job and a vision for the future. ■

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

- 2 Corinthians 9:8

The Time Is Now

By 2006, the church building was bursting at the seams. Members and visitors had to fight their way down the halls. It took colossal effort for each person to get out of a Sunday School class and make it to the sanctuary. Nevermind if you had to visit the restroom along the way. It was a daunting task.

To complicate the flow of traffic, the people trying to exit the sanctuary were met at the door by a wave of people, at least ten deep and many more wide, trying to get in. In the face of rising frustration, it was time to consider a new building.

Four lead teams became involved in the new project: an investigative team, a prayer team, a fundraising team and a building team. These four groups received support from a handful of other teams dedicated to specific tasks. It truly was a team effort.

The Investigative Team's responsibility was to assess the need for construction, look at the current building plans, estimate what the church could afford and offer a tentative timeline for the project's beginning. The team recommended the establishment of a building team to interview possible architectural firms.

The Building Team visited several sister churches in nearby cities, including Biltmore Baptist (Asheville), NewSpring (Anderson), Brookwood Church (Simpsonville) and Fairview Baptist (Greer). They then drew up a charter document, which combined the best of what they had seen on their visits and the needs identified by the congregation in town hall meetings. They shared the document with Freeman and Major Architects and Trehel Corporation, the construction firm. The charter document also served as a reference

point whenever architectural and building issues arose throughout the construction process.

A number of concerns came to the forefront when considering a project of such magnitude. The children's wing and its security were up for major discussion. Even the number of bathrooms and their placement was an issue.

Two of the more intriguing concerns centered around Sundyal Drive and the fate of the original building.

The team considered requesting the re-routing of Sundyal Drive around the back and to the side of the original building, in order to keep that piece of property and the new sanctuary/educational space as one, undivided unit. The city seemed to be amenable, but the cost of moving utilities and merging the land was not feasible.

How to handle the original church building was another issue. The general feeling of the congregation was that everyone and their ministries wanted to move into the new building. That, plus the inability to move Sundyal Drive, led to a discussion about the building's future.

The ensuing discussion included the possibility of selling it to a start-up church, giving it to the Baptist Association, or even demolishing it. However, leadership decided that the original church was still usable as part of Anderson Mill. After moving into the new building, the church donated the pews to a sister church in need and renovated the space to house the church's administrative offices and serve a variety of different ministries and programs.

The Prayer Team was another vital facet of the planning process. This group was responsible for leading prayer during the process and developing family devotionals to accompany the building and giving journey.

Finally, the group in charge of leading the financial part of the journey was called The Celebration Team. They developed a capital fundraising plan to manage

architectural and construction fees and to address the retirement of the CLC debt, which had not been previously paid off as anticipated. Due to the size of the project, the team led the church to partner with of INJOY Stewardship Solutions, a ministry-based capital fundraising company.

By December 2006, the CLC debt had been eliminated, and the church was ready to tackle the new \$8.5 million project. The stewardship campaign, "The Time Is Now," kicked off on May 6, 2007, when the entire church gathered at the Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium for a worship service and pledge day. Pledges received on that day exceeded all expectations.

With \$2 million in the bank, the church was on its way to a healthy start to the project. In order to finance the remaining \$6 million, leadership secured a loan at an interest rate of 2 percent using the London InterBank Offered Rate (LIBOR) instead of the standard 7 percent offered by local banks.

As "The Time Is Now" continued, even with church members giving 10 percent over and above their tithes, the church met its budget for the first time.

On Sunday, January 27, 2008, the church body gathered as usual for worship. In between the two church services, the congregation met outside to break ground together. Those in attendance lined up along eight 100-foot ropes. On the count of three, everyone pulled on the ropes in unison, dragging an old farm plow to literally break ground. There was no mistaking that the members of Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church were in this project together.

Their efforts paid off. Trehel Corporation finished the construction in February 2009, and the church doors opened on Sunday, March 8, 2009 for the first worship service in the new sanctuary.

As of this writing, that building has been the church's worship and educational space for almost nine years. It has been used well. Sundays often see the congregation

using every single classroom in the building. Wednesdays paint a similar picture. The children's wing houses the Early Learning Center (ELC) preschool and kindergarten program five days each week, using every single downstairs children's classroom. The church is, once again, bursting at the seams. ■

Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
- Hosea 10:12

Fulfilling a Vision

The small gathering in a pastor's living room cast a God-ordained vision: to plant a church in a developing part of Spartanburg County. But those committed church founders could not possibly have envisioned what this body of believers would become.

Their faithfulness would result in a congregation numbering more than 3,000, a full pastoral team equipped to handle a church that size, growing ministries intent on discipling and a missions program on a financial and world-changing journey to spread the Gospel. The church has grown up, built upon the legacy of those founding members. After its humble beginning and three building projects, what does it look like today?

Nine years ago, Pastor D.J. began using "Gather, Grow, Give, Go" to describe what every member of the church would be asked to do. A few years later, the leadership began communicating the vision of the church this way:

The Mill
A place of New Beginnings and Real Relationships.
We believe this becomes reality when we each
Gather, Grow, Give and Go.

Why "The Mill"? Let's be honest. "Anderson Mill Road Baptist Church" is a mouthful. Everyone had a quicker way to shorten this beloved church's name. "AMRBC," "Anderson Mill Church" or simply "Anderson Mill." The leadership decided to capture this by affectionately referring to the church as simply "The Mill."

It made sense for three reasons. First, it paid homage to the full name of the church. Second, it was short, easy to

communicate and memorable. Third, and finally, it fit well with Spartanburg's history.

Historically, Spartanburg was filled with mills in every community that made all kinds of fabric-related products. As The Mill, the church wants to make disciples just as Jesus instructed.

The journey of making disciples can be seen in many ways on a weekly basis. As a church body, members gather for corporate and small group fellowship. They desire to grow in their personal time with the Lord and through discipleship. They give of their time and their treasure. And The Mill encourages members to go into the world daily to share their faith and take the Gospel to the nations through missions.

The Mill is a place where children matter. The church started an official children's program in 1996, which eventually gave rise to the Early Learning Center (ELC). The ELC is a place for preschool and kindergarten education, boasting an enrollment of about 200 today. The number of children on the church campus has risen tremendously, with over 500 in Sunday School and about 350 attending on Wednesday nights. The children's choir meets on Sunday nights. Wednesday evenings offer dinner, preschool choir time, worship, game time and Bible study for various ages.

In response to an increasing number of families joining The Mill, the church created a new pastoral position in 2015. The Pastor to Young Families leads a Family Ministry Team made up of the children's, middle school and high school pastors and a student ministry associate. Working together, they create a discipling plan, which provides a resource for parents and guides children from birth through high school graduation.

The Mill is a place where students matter. The student ministry has been a vital part of The Mill's life since its beginnings. Over the years, students have been challenged with in-depth Bible studies, leadership projects and a

charge to share the Gospel with their friends. Today, middle and high school students dive deep into the Word in intimate discipleship groups led by adults. Wednesday nights are alive with worship and teaching. Students are learning ways in which to be invested in the life of a church body. Every year students give their lives to Christ and sense personal calls to ministry.

Missions has become a strong part of the student ministry. Students have painted and roofed houses in Tennessee, taught crafts to children in Bulgaria and have shared the Gospel door-to-door in Puerto Rico. Here at home, students have packed Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, held Christmas parties at Miracle Hill and helped with The Mill's Fall Festival and Trunk-or-Treat. In 2016 one of the student pastors left with his family to plant a church in North Carolina, further exemplifying the relationship between missions and young people at The Mill.

The Mill is a place where adults matter. Discipling and faith-building relationships are key in helping people walk Spirit-led lives. Small groups have grown from the eight classes meeting Sunday mornings at church to dozens operating throughout the week both on and off campus. As membership at The Mill climbs, organized small groups help people build real relationships and live life in step with God's Word. Steve and Sherry Vaughn, longtime small group leaders, liken it to Jesus' inner circle of disciples. They said small groups are "where you get to know people at a deeper level."

In 2007, The Mill started a new focus on creating opportunities for discipleship in an effort to bring more people into one-on-one mentoring relationships. Groups of two and three began meeting for coffee, sometimes early in the morning. Adding another dimension to their spiritual lives, discipleship helps people grow in their faith and their daily walks with the Lord.

The number of discipleship pairings has steadily increased as people have begun to reap the benefits of walking

"Praise and worship touched us," said Vickie Downey. She and her husband Joe came to The Mill searching for a church they could be used. "It wasn't about us anymore," she said. Hearing about The Mill, they decided to come one Sunday in February 2017. The church size made them a bit nervous, but the worship and the expository preaching excited the Downeys.

They visited a small group and felt instantly at home. They wanted to be in a church that believed in missions, so the missions conference sealed the deal for them. They attended the new members class, which they loved, and joined the church. Loving the sense of community at The Mill, Vickie said, "There have been times when we had to miss church because we were out of town or sick, and we just felt deflated!"

When the Loudermilks gathered folks in their living room, they had no way of knowing what the decades following would hold or how the church would evolve into a body so passionate about gathering, growing, giving and going. Though their vision was strong, they simply could not see how many lives their actions would touch. ■

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power.

- 2 Thessalonians 1:11

At a Crossroad

In an atmosphere of growth and change, no one has been exempt. In 2013, as he neared the 10-year mark as pastor, D.J. began to review his career at The Mill and God's will for him in the next 10 years. Content at The Mill, Pastor D.J. remembers mentally checking the following off the list: "Family? Good. Church? Good. Education? Finished." But then he asked, "God, do You want me to move?"

Soon thereafter, Pastor D.J. received an unsolicited call a large church in another state. Not knowing where it might lead, he went through a four-hour interview, only to be declined as a candidate.

In 2014 he was elected president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, which occupied much of his time and energy. Yet he still couldn't shake the feeling that God might be preparing him to go somewhere else.

In 2015 Pastor D.J.'s name made its way to a large church in Alabama near his and Laurel's families. Pastor D.J. investigated the position and the church, and it seemed to be a good fit. There were some areas in that church's life that needed work; generally, however, it seemed to be a bona fide possibility.

When he came to The Mill, Pastor D.J. was a young married man, a fresh seminary graduate and new father to a three-week-old baby. He said that he and Laurel had essentially "grown up as adults" over their first 10 years at The Mill. Now a seasoned pastor, he thought the Alabama position just made good sense.

Pastor D.J. and Laurel prayed intensely about the move. On his way to his final interview with the church, Pastor

D.J. received a phone call informing him of a very difficult situation back in Spartanburg. He proceeded to the interview, which went very well. Afterward, he informed the search committee of his need to return to South Carolina to tend to the situation. The church was very understanding and told him to take whatever time he needed to deal with the issue at hand.

While Pastor D.J. was taking care of things at home, God was busy changing his heart. Still somewhat torn about the decision, a mentor gave him this assurance: "Clarity will come." And so it did.

Firmly believing in the concept of being "called" by God to serve, Pastor D.J. could not envision himself standing in front of the Alabama congregation saying, "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am called to be your pastor."

He remembers saying to God, "You have called me five times in my life. You called me to be a Christian, to marry Laurel, to preach, to go to seminary and to be pastor of The Mill. Until you give me a sixth calling, I'll stay in the fifth one."

Pastor D.J. called the Alabama search committee and declined. In doing so, he received immediate "peace and a fresh vision."

Pastor D.J. felt that God wanted to impress upon him a few things for the next decade at The Mill. He believes God wants him to preach, pray, love people and keep his people focused on purpose. He knows he is to be his congregation's shepherd.

While pastoring this growing church could go to his head, Pastor D.J. keeps himself spiritually healthy by meeting regularly with an accountability partner and sending notes of encouragement to two different pastors every week. He considers himself a better preacher by virtue of time and experience.

Though he is often called to preach out of town, he says that his favorite place to preach is The Mill. Pastor D.J. expressed it this way: "When you can feed people God's Word over time, you are a weekly source of Truth." One of the benefits of pastoring in one place long-term has been seeing changes that take time to happen: marriages restored, relationships mended and a congregation growing in faith, unity and maturity. He feels this year has truly been his most exciting year of ministry yet.

But even an energetic and devoted young pastor can become fatigued. Rapid growth at The Mill meant Pastor D.J. was dashing back and forth across Sundyal Drive to preach four services live and a fifth by simulcast each week. In just one year, 350 new families visited The Mill for the first time and over 200 new members joined. Something had to happen. There was little doubt it was time for The Mill to build again. ■

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

- John 14:12

Greater

After worshiping across five services in two buildings each Sunday, it was a rare day when the entire congregation came together in one place to worship. On October 30, 2016, the body gathered at the Upward Star Center for Commitment Sunday to kick off the “Greater” capital campaign to build a new 2,000-seat, \$16.7 million facility. The service culminated in 521 families pledging \$5,675,000 over and above their tithes.

In June 2017, the congregation saw the long-awaited building plan and 99 percent voted to approve it.

On August 20, 2017, The Mill held a special groundbreaking service. After worship in the sanctuary with musical guest Taranda Greene, the crowd moved outside to witness 23 baptisms at the approximate location of the future baptismal font. The groundbreaking took place afterward with the congregation pulling disc plows with the same ropes from the 2008 groundbreaking.

With the proper signatures freshly inked on loan paperwork, site construction began on November 3, 2017. A church member donated his labor to remove two houses adjoining the church property.

By November 2017, a total of 629 families had committed \$6,368,723 to “Greater.” The journey was well on its way.

As for the future, Pastor D.J. said, “God has given us 30 acres. Let’s max it out. We need to develop small groups and birth new ones, take missions to a new level, increase technology and take worship farther.”

The current sanctuary will be converted into space for the

children's program, which is now bursting at the seams. Adult education will move into the new building. Future plans also include The Mill School for Ministry for those wishing to take seminary classes for credit.

Though the lobby, sanctuary and overflow areas have been at capacity on any given Sunday morning, "Greater" has very little to do with adding another building to the campus or creating an impression of size and prominence. It is about gathering, growing, giving and going.

Pastor D.J. uses the analogy of an airport versus a resort as a way to describe his vision for The Mill:

Resort hotels and airport terminals have a lot in common, because they handle large crowds. But there is one fundamental difference. People travel through airport terminals, but they travel to resorts. Resorts are destinations, while terminals are just a part of the journey. When churches function like airport terminals, they bring people in, take care of them, help get their plans in order, punch their tickets and then watch them depart on a mission. As a pastor, I am keenly aware of the trap we can fall into when our focus becomes more about our physical campus than our spiritual mission. The assignment of the church is to join God in reaching and releasing people to join His mission of making disciples of all nations.

It would be easy to slap "The End" on this history of The Mill, but the journey is far from over. As long as there are people to reach and places to go, The Mill will be at the forefront. While "gather, grow, give and go" is a great motto, it is the people and the pastors of The Mill who give life to those words. They invest their hearts in the message that drives them: Jesus is alive and is the hope and salvation for those who trust in Him.

Pastor D.J. has always referred to Mrs. Sara Loudermilk as the "first First Lady of The Mill." It is only fitting that her words end the current chapter of this incredible story. She recently said, "You have to say that God has been in it all the way. We're not through growing. We're still on a good journey." ■

Pastors of The Mill

Rev. Dr. D.J. Horton
2003- present

Rev. Dr. Allen McWhite
2001- 2003 (interim)

Rev. Keith Bradsher
1994- 2001

Rev. Robert Freeland
1993- 1994 (interim)

Rev. Don Seagle
1990- 1993

Rev. Floyd Loudermilk
1987- 1990

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Debbie Robinson

