

# **CELEBRATING OUR 30<sup>th</sup> CHURCH ANNIVERSARY**

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**Founding pastor of Berkland Baptist Church**

Having turned the calendar on a turbulent year, in the beginning of 2021 we were able to hold a special service to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church in Boston. Although due to Covid-19 restrictions we could not gather together in person as we had originally planned, we were still able to celebrate with our fourteen churches worldwide. On Sunday, January 3, over 500 people congregated online through Zoom. For nearly five hours we recounted and remembered the 30-year history of the Boston church through the sermon, video slideshow, special music, and many personal testimonies. It was such a joy to see the faces of all of our church members and missionaries around the world, a memorable gathering of the family of God. Everyone was encouraged by the spirit of unity.

It was on January 6, 1991, when we held the inaugural worship service of our church at the First Baptist Church in Cambridge, MA. I recall we had 33 people total, with the Director of Missions (DOM) of the Greater Boston Baptist Association in attendance, as well as some college students and a number of special guests. There was a sense of excitement in the air, with great expectation of what God could accomplish through our ministry. Slowly but surely God began adding to the newly formed congregation. It was truly the faithful work of God. Our first church that we started in 1981 in Berkeley, CA had grown from my family of five to over 500 active church members, most of them students from UC Berkeley. After 10 years, however, God gave us a vision through my wife to move to Boston. While she was walking alone on the Harvard campus during Thanksgiving time in 1990, she heard a "Macedonian Call," a voice telling her to come instead of sending a pastor-disciple couple as we had originally envisioned. We obeyed immediately because we knew it was God's voice since humanly-speaking it was difficult to leave a thriving ministry to start a pioneering work all over again.

So like our first church in Berkeley, the Boston church plant was from the very start focused on college ministry, with weekly campus Bible studies, outreach events, discipleship training, fellowship, and community service. That first Fall, we were able to baptize our first five new believers. One was my very own daughter. Another was a college graduate who stayed with our ministry and became the senior pastor of the church some twenty years later at my retirement. From humble beginnings God has grown our ministry and it is now one of the leading churches in our Greater Baptist Association. Since the founding our church plant in Boston it quickly became a sending body. Our church has raised co-laborers among our disciples and sent them off in small teams as missionaries to establish branch churches in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Alaska, Korea, Central Asia, and the Caucasus region.

In retrospect, we can see clearly what God had in mind when He moved us from Berkeley to Boston. It was for the sake of the many changed and transformed lives through our church ministry. Many have stayed on as church leaders and campus staff. Many got married through our church and have children who are part of our children's department. Some have been called to gospel ministry as pastors and long-term missionaries. One young family was commissioned as missionaries to Korea at our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we recently had a tearful farewell for them.

Over the years we have tried to obey God's biblical command, as in Acts 1:8, when our Risen Lord challenged His disciples saying, "...you shall be my witnesses from Jerusalem... to the ends of the earth."

The church is the body of Christ and it must bear witness to Jesus. The priority of church is to worship God and to be his witnesses (martyrs), not to be excellent and competent in “doing” ministry since it is the Spirit of God that works through us. The Book of Acts records the work of the Holy Spirit through the power of prayer. In looking back 30 years, we advance forward in anticipation of what God will do as we continue to carry out the Great Commission until Christ Returns. Meanwhile, we commit ourselves evermore to the baton of faith to our children and sheep so that they too can serve God in their generation.