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#### Core Seminar

#### Membership Matters

**Session 4: History of CHBC**

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***Teaching Suggestions from Jamie:***

*This teaching guide has two pieces: an outline of the class, and a word-for-word manuscript. More so than the other classes, I would strongly suggest that you teach from the outline—having familiarized yourself with the manuscript first. This class can get quite dry if it feels at all scripted.*

*The challenge in teaching this class (especially if you’re working from the outline rather than the manuscript) is time management. It is very easy to spend too much time on the first 1500 years of church history and then skimp on post-reformation history that gives us Baptists and Capitol Hill Baptist Church—the two pieces of this class that will be least familiar to your listeners. If you’re teaching from the manuscript, my suggestion is to not insert any of your own comments until you get to the Baptists. If you’re teaching from the outline, pay close attention to the time markers to make sure you’ve correctly budgeted your time. Doing this will feel like the first section is rushed—but that’s OK. Time markers in bold are for the Sunday morning edition. The other time markers are intended for the weekend edition.*

*Note: the manuscript and outline are written in the present tense. I find this voice (traveling through history, so to speak) to be more engaging than putting everything in the past tense. So where you do find past tense, it is looking back in time from the point in history you’re currently discussing. If you find this awkward, feel free to shift everything to past tense. But give it a shot at least once! You might like it.*

What you *need* to cover:

* What are the differences between Roman Catholicism and historic Protestantism—and why they matter.
* The story of how CHBC came to be.

**Outline Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first and last name, religious upbringing.

***9:50*** */ 0:00*

**Background**

Ask the question:*Why is the history of all churches a helpful introduction to the history of this church?*

* Helps us understand that there’s nothing new at this church. What’s taught here is plain old orthodoxy.
* Helps flesh out our statement of faith
* Helps you understand our personality as a church
* Introduces the history of our own local church

Four parts: early church; protestant reformation; Baptists; CHBC

**The Early Church**

* God creates a people by his Word (creation, Abram, dry bones, Jesus: word made flesh).
  + Saved not merely as individuals but (again) to be the people of God: the church.
  + Church isn’t man’s idea; it’s God’s idea. Jesus founds (Matt 16), commissions (Matt 28), builds (Acts), rules the church.
* From the beginning, though, error begins to creep into the church.
  + Perverse immorality, Gnostic heresy, gross favoritism: Corinthians, Colossians, James
  + The history of the church from the death of the Apostles until 1500 is a long history of the spread of the church geographically, but also of the struggle of the church doctrinally.
  + No surprise: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching” (2 Ti 4:3)
* But some good comes through these struggles.
  + Church repeatedly returns to the Scriptures and agrees on what the Bible really teaches.
  + That’s where we get some of the great confessions of the faith (e.g. Nicene Creed).
* Not only does the early church hold fast to their faith through creeds and confessions, but also with their very lives. (organized persecution begins in Acts 7).
* And that brings us to Constantine.
  + Became emperor in 311 AD; next year he associates himself with Christianity.
  + Edict of Milan in 313AD granted toleration to the Christian faith across the empire.
    1. End to persecution.
    2. Opens the door to worldliness (lots of reasons now to call yourself a Christian).
  + Growth of monarchical bishops and emergence of the Pope. Now his word rules the church.
  + Over next centuries, various reforms are attempted but purity of the church deteriorates as Popes consolidate their power.
* AD 1054: East breaks with West. Doctrine of Holy Spirit; claimed authority of the Pope.
  + 15 Orthodox churches in all.
  + Our heritage comes not from the church in the East but in the West.
* In the West: things go from bad to worse
  + Church claims to forgive original sin through baptism, on-going sin through confession and penance.
  + Eventually: church claims to dispense God’s grace as she sees fit.
  + Other heresies creep in: doing one’s best as a prerequisite to receiving the grace of God, indulgencies to earn merit, purgatory for further purging of sins.

***10:01*** */ 0:11*

**The Reformation**

* Martin Luther’s testimony: born 1483; a monk in Wittenberg, Germany.
  + Long struggled with how as a sinner he could be accepted by God.
  + Catholic church taught one enters heaven through combination of faith, good works, penance, and purgatory
  + Luther reportedly heard one indulgence seller say: "when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs"
  + Luther disagreed; He proposes a debate, nailing 95 debating points to the church door (October 31, 1517). He wasn’t looking for a new denomination—just to see reform in the church’s teaching.
  + Next few years: Luther studies Romans, Psalms, Galatians, and other parts of scripture. Comes to see the gospel clearly.
  + Romans 1:17.
    - Luther’d always been taught that this referred to his *own* righteousness.
    - Now understood it to be an alien righteousness: the righteousness of Christ.
    - The Gospel teaches that sinners are justified, or declared righteous before God, not based on their own efforts, but as the free gift of God received by faith. Luther described this as the “sweet exchange:” Christ on the cross bore my sins, and died as a substitute in my place, removing God’s wrath and obtaining my pardon; while Christ’s righteousness was imputed to me by faith, bringing me into right relationship with God.
  + Luther knows peace with God—but also anger at the idea of the church selling indulgences.
* But the Church of Rome would have nothing to do with what they perceived as novel ideas.
  + Tried before the Diet of Worms (April 1521).
  + “Unless I am convinced by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments that I am in error—for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot withdraw, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one’s conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.”
  + But as Rome condemns Luther, it is in fact condemning the biblical Gospel that Luther had recovered.
* Reformers popping up all over Europe: Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, Bucer in Strasbourg, Cranmer in England.

**Any questions so far?**

***10:06*** */ 0:16*

**The Baptists**

* Among Protestants, there were three major groups:
  + Lutherans: biblical understanding of gospel, authority of Scripture—but similar to Roman Catholicism re: baptism and Lord’s supper.
  + Anabaptists: rejected infant baptism. But sometimes also rejected original sin, civil authority, embraced pacifism. *Not* our theological heritage.
  + Reformed churches:
    - Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Church of England.
    - Along with free grace emphasized God’s sovereignty in salvation and a Protestant view of baptism and the Lord ’s Supper.
    - This is where Baptists come from. Early 17th century, some in Church of England begin to question whether infant baptism is Biblical.
* On both sides of the Atlantic, Baptists are persecuted by the established church.
  + So Roger Williams, Rhode Island: religious freedom.
  + First Baptist church in America: Providence, Rhode Island, 1638.
* Late 17th and 18th century Baptists all share a Reformed, confessional understanding of the faith.
* Baptists distinguish themselves in:
  + Literature (John Bunyan).
  + Religious liberty in America .
  + Help pioneer world missions movement (Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice).
  + Rice later founds both GW University and the Baptist General Convention for Foreign Missions—the forerunner to the Southern Baptist Convention.
* Late 18th century: Baptist churches in America multiply at an astonishing rate.
* Late 19th century: Christianity encounters another formidable threat in theological liberalism.
  + At heart: questioning authority of Scriptureonce mature, rejects virgin birth, deity of Christ, miracles, and bodily resurrection.
  + By 1930, almost every Protestant denomination in America has been captured by theological liberalism (Conservative Baptists from Northern Baptists, OPC from PCUS, Missouri Synod from ELCA).
  + Fundamentalist response in 30s & 40s: preserve orthodoxy by withdrawing
  + Later neo-evangelical response: re-engage culture while also defending inerrancy and the necessity of supernatural grace for salvation.
    - Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry, John Stott, J. I. Packer (different denominational backgrounds).
    - CHBC comes from the neo-evangelical strain of Protestantism
* So: not East but West; not Roman but Protestant; within Protestantism: Reformed churches; within Reformed: Baptist. Committed to inerrancy of Scripture; not fundamentalist but neo-evangelicals.

**Questions?**

**10:12** / 0:22

**Capitol Hill Baptist Church**

* Late 1860s: Mrs. Celestia Ferris begins a prayer meeting at 200 block of A St NE
  + Neighborhood is expanding; children need to hear gospel1871: Capitol Hill Baptist Sunday School Association.
  + 1872: purchase lot where church now sits.
* 1878: with support of other Northern Baptist churches in DC, formally organize as the Metropolitan Baptist Church with 31 members.
  + 1888: new chapel built.
  + First 16 years: 6 different pastors.
  + By 1892: 244 members.
* 1903: Dr. John Ball becomes pastor, a position he will hold for 41 years.
  + Current main and west halls built in 1911.
  + Membership grows to 3,577.
* While American Protestantism struggles with theological liberalism, this church remains committed to the Bible as God’s inerrant Word,
  + Unfortunately, not the case for many churches in DC which, by the late 20th century, have stopped teaching what the Bible says about sin, our need for a savior, exclusivity of Jesus as the only way of Salvation, etc.
  + By God’s grace, tide has begun to turn and today there are many times the number of gospel-preaching churches in DC as there were even in the 1990s.
* 1950: Dr. Ball succeeded by Dr. K. Owen White, who is concerned about theological liberalism in the Northern Baptist Convention and leads us to shift our funding to the Southern Baptists. But leaves after 5 years.
  + Next 20 years: 5 different pastors; slow but steady decline compounded by suburban migration and urban riots.
* 1990: new pastor whose preaching was well-liked but who badly wounded the church through an adulterous affair. Leaves in 1992.
  + Membership at 500 but attendance barely above 100; no one lives in the neighborhood.
  + Many wondered if CHBC had any future at all
* 1994: Mark Dever becomes senior pastor.
  + Ministry marked by slow but steady change.
  + 1998: move to plurality of elders as our leadership, creating more stability.
  + As God has blessed preaching of his word, church has filled up again—and roughly half live within walking distance.
* Being full has its own challenges.
  + Have decided to stay in this neighborhood; not go to multiple services.
  + Our ambition: to help revitalize other DC area churches so people don’t need to come here.
    - Guilford, Grace, LaPlata, Restoration, Del Ray: send money, members, and normally pastor/elders.
    - If you don’t live on Capitol Hill: consider visiting these churches.
  + This is our personality as a church.
    - Won’t hear much talk about growing our own church (can’t really do that)—though transience of our city is always making room for new members.
    - But a lot of talk about training up and sending out members, pastors, missionaries.
    - I hope you’ll join us in that vision.

**Any questions?**

**Manuscript Format**

**Introduction**

* Let the pastoral assistant welcome people, describe the membership process, get the sign-up sheet around, and pass out books.
* Introduce yourself (name, where you live, family, job, etc.)
* Ask everyone to *briefly* introduce themselves: first and last name, religious upbringing.

***9:50*** */ 0:00*

**Background**

This morning, we’re looking at church history. Now, I’ve obviously got my reasons for thinking this is important enough to spend one of our six classes on, but just to get your juices warmed up, I’m curious what you think. **Why is the history of all churches a helpful introduction to the history of this church?**

Answers (fill in any that are missing after the class stops talking):

* Shows that there’s nothing innovative about our church. What you hear here is what Christianity’s been for two millennia.
* Helps flesh out our statement of faith (one thing to positively state what we believe; quite another to see where Christians have disagreed over the centuries).
* Helps you understand our personality as a church (what it means to be Baptist; why we focus on church revitalization, etc.).
* Introduces the history of our own local church.

Well, to do all this we’ll take the history of the church in four parts. The history of the early church; the Protestant Reformation; where Baptists come from; and the history of our own local church. You might think of this as “from John the Baptist to Capitol Hill Baptist.” So let’s get started.

### The Early Church

In Scripture, God has creates his people by his Word. He spoke creation into existence, called Abram out of Ur, spoke to his people from Mount Sinai, told Ezekiel to prophesy to dry bones in a vision so they could come to life. And ultimately we see Jesus, the Word made flesh, who died on the cross to save us from our sins. But when he saved us, he didn’t just save us as individuals—again, he saved us as a *people*. The church. The people of God created by the Word of God.

See, the church isn’t man’s idea. It’s God’s idea. Jesus founds the church in Matthew 16, commissions the church in Matthew 28, builds the church through the Spirit in the book of Acts. And Jesus rules the church through his word. Knowing this, the early church kept and preserved the apostles’ writings. Because they recognized them from the first as Scripture—God’s word. And that’s how the church started.

So when we think about Church History, it’s not just a story about religious people. We’re hearing a story of *God* working mightily to display his glory through his church.

But that history isn’t without difficulty. From the very beginning, error begins to creep into the church. The church in one city tolerates perverse sexual immorality among its members; another embraces Gnostic heresies, another shows gross favoritism to the wealthy and powerful. It’s all there in the letters to the Corinthians, Colossians, and in the book of James. And it doesn’t get any better as time goes on. The history of the church from the death of the Apostles until 1500 is a story of the spread of the church geographically, but also of the struggle of the church doctrinally. And that’s no surprise: the Apostle Paul warned that there would come a time when people would no longer put up with sound teaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

But some good comes through these struggles. As heretical teaching seeks to redefine the church and the gospel, the church comes together repeatedly to go back to the Scriptures and agree on what the Bible really teaches. That’s where we get some of the great confessions of faith like the Nicene Creed that we use on Sunday mornings. Not the creation of new doctrine, but useful summaries of what the Bible has always taught.

Not only does the early church hold fast to their faith through creeds and confessions, but also with their very lives. Organized persecution begins with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 and continues periodically—but often brutally. The early church martyrs illustrate what it means to be a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ: someone who is willing to affirm that Jesus is Lord, even unto death.

Doctrinal struggle and persecution: that’s a good summary of the first 300 years of the church. Which brings us to Constantine.

There is perhaps no more important figure in the early church than Constantine, who becomes Emperor of Rome in 311 AD. The next year, he associates himself with Christianity after, as he understands it, the Christian God helps him win a key battle; frankly it’s unclear if he actually converted. Only God knows. But the result is that Christianity, which had been persecuted, soon becomes officially tolerated through the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. And that means that two things happen. Number one, by God’s grace, is the end to organized persecution. But number two, with Christianity in favor, people have all sorts of reasons to call themselves Christians regardless of what they really believe. And this begins to change the church from a group willing to lay down their lives for Christ to a group that looks much more like the world around them. The church begins to resemble the structure of the Roman civil hierarchy, and we see the growth of monarchical Bishops and of course, the Pope, who claimed to be the representative of Christ on earth. It’s now his word that rules the church.

Over the next many centuries, various reform movements are attempted, but for the most part, the church’s doctrinal and moral purity deteriorates. Meanwhile, Popes work to consolidate their power, though not everyone is on board with that idea. In 1054, the church in the East breaks from the Western church, in part over the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and in part over the universal authority that the Pope claims.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is where we get the Orthodox family of churches, 15 in all. And that’s our first dividing point in Christian history. As you can see in page 15 of your booklet, our heritage as a church comes not from the Eastern Church, but from the church in the West, which is where we’ll focus now.

In the West, things go from bad to worse. The church continues to distort its authority, claiming to forgive original sin through baptism, and to forgive on-going sin through the practice of confession and penance. Eventually, these false doctrines develop to the point that the church claims to dispense God’s grace as she sees fit. Other heresies creep in like doing one’s best as a prerequisite to receiving the grace of God, indulgences to earn merit, and purgatory for further purging of sins.

And that brings us to our second section:

### *10:01 / 0:11*

### The Reformation We’ll start with Martin Luther. Born 1483, a monk in Wittenberg [“Vittinburg”], Germany. Luther had long struggled with the question of how as a sinner he could be accepted by a holy God. The Roman Catholic church taught Luther that one enters heaven through a combination of faith, good works, penance, and purgatory. It also taught that Christians like Luther could not be sure of their salvation -- indeed any such assurance constituted a presumptuous error. This left Luther seeking to do works better and confess sins more.

After taking up a position teaching the Bible at a relatively new university in Wittenberg, Luther voraciously studied the Scriptures. He compared Biblical teaching with the words of men authorized by the Catholic church to sell indulgences. After he reportedly heard one man say "when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs", his anger grew.

So he proposes a debate, nailing 95 debating points in Latin to the door of the Wittenberg church on October 31, 1517. He wasn’t looking for a new denomination—just to see reform in the church’s teaching, particularly on indulgences and penance.

Over the next few years, as Luther continues to study Romans, Psalms, and other Scriptures, he begins to find a much more solid and Biblical answer for his plaguing question of how a sinner could be accepted by God.

His breakthrough comes from Romans 1:17, which says “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” Luther had always been taught that this righteous was his own righteousness. Which threw him into despair because he knew he wasn’t righteous. But finally, he realizes that Paul in this verse wasn’t talking about his own righteousness, but an alien righteousness, a righteousness that was outside of himself–the righteousness of Christ.

The Gospel teaches that sinners are justified, or declared righteous before God, not based on their own efforts, but as the free gift of God received by faith. Luther described this as the “sweet exchange:” Christ on the cross bore my sins, and died as a substitute in my place, removing God’s wrath and obtaining my pardon; while Christ’s righteousness was imputed to me by faith thus bringing me into a right relationship with God.

Well, for the first time in his life, Luther understands the peace of soul that comes from knowing his sins are forgiven. And with that peace comes great anger at the Church for their attempts to sell this free grace through indulgences.

But the Church of Rome would have nothing to do with what they perceived as Luther’s novel ideas. He is tried before the Diet of Worms (“Vorms”) in April 1521, and told to withdraw his books and teaching. Luther replies:

“Unless I am convinced by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments that I am in error—for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot withdraw, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one’s conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God. Amen.”

But as Rome condemns Luther, it is in fact condemning the biblical Gospel that Luther had recovered. Rome would go on in the years that followed to condemn the gospel in even more detail at the Council of Trent.

Fortunately, Luther survives this ordeal—and God is soon raising up people with similar convictions all over Europe. Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, Bucer in Strasbourg, and Cranmer in England. Through them we get the Reformation of the Protestants. And once again we see a narrowing of our heritage: we come not from the Roman church but from the Protestants. Which now brings us to the Baptists.

**Any questions so far?**

### *10:06 / 0:16*

### The Baptists

Among Protestants at this time, there are three major groups.

The *Lutherans* affirm a biblical understanding of the Gospel, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers, but also keep some similarities with Roman Catholic doctrine, especially in their understanding of baptism and the Lord ’s Supper.

The *Anabaptists* reject infant baptism for believer’s baptism, but also question original sin, often reject civil authority and sometimes embrace pacifism. That’s *not* where Baptists come from.

And there are the *Reformed churches*. These include the Presbyterians, Congregationalists and the Church of England, who along with free grace emphasized God’s sovereignty in salvation and a Protestant view of baptism and the Lord ’s Supper. Early in the 17th century, some in the Church of England are questioning whether infant baptism is biblical and becoming Baptist. It’s out of this strand of the Reformed churches that we get the Baptists.

On both sides of the Atlantic, Baptists are persecuted by the established church and so Roger Williams asks to charter a new colony—Rhode Island—where freedom of religion would be granted. And it’s there that in 1638 he and 11 others found the first Baptist church in America. These late 17th and 18th century Baptists almost all share a Reformed, confessional understanding of the faith: A sovereign God saves us not through our good works or even our wise choice, but through His grace realized in Christ’s work on the cross.

Baptists like John Bunyan go on to distinguish themselves in literature, and in America contribute significantly to the cause of religious liberty. Baptists like Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice also pioneer the world missions movement. Rice, who would later found George Washington University, helps form the Baptist General Convention for Foreign Missions, which is the forerunner to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Towards the late 18th century, Baptist churches in America multiply at an astonishing rate—probably because the informality of their structure and style made church planting easy across the expanding frontier.

*Liberalism & New-Evangelicalism*

At the end of the 19th century, when this church was being founded, Christianity encounters another formidable threat: the rise of theological liberalism and modernism. After theological liberalism spreads around the world and matures, it rejects the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His miracles, and His bodily resurrection. At its heart, is the questioning of the accuracy and authority of Scripture.

By 1930, almost every Protestant denomination in America is captured or greatly influenced by theological liberalism. Eventually, denominations splinter as those holding onto orthodox beliefs are forced out or leave. Conservative Baptists out of the Northern Baptists; the OPC out of the Presbyterian Church (US); the Missouri Synod out of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

### In response to this, the Fundamentalists in the 1930s and ‘40s seek to preserve orthodox Christianity by withdrawing from an increasingly secular and irreligious culture. And in response to that, there’s another movement—the neo-evangelicals. They agree with the Fundamentalists doctrinally, but are frustrated by their cultural and intellectual marginalization, and so they seek to re-engage culture while also defending the inerrancy of Scripture and the necessity of supernatural grace for salvation. This movement is led by men like Billy Graham, Carl F.H. Henry, John Stott and J.I. Packer from a variety of denominational traditions. And it’s out of this last strain that we find our church. Not from the Eastern church but from the West; not from the Roman Catholic church but Protestant; within Protestantism from the Reformed churches; within the Reformed churches, the Baptists. Not theologically liberal modernists but a commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. But of those Christians not the Fundamentalists but the neo-evangelicals. That’s where this church comes from. But having come all the way to the mid-20th century, let me back up a hundred years to get the full history of *this* localchurch. First, though, any questions?

### 10:12 / 0:22

### Capitol Hill Baptist Church

In the late 1860s, Mrs. Celestia Ferris begins a prayer meeting in her home in the 200 block of A Street NE. The neighborhood is expanding, and many children need to hear the Gospel, so in 1871, the group incorporates as the Capitol Hill Baptist Sunday School Association, and starts holding Sunday school for the children of the community. Then, 1872, they purchase the lot where this building now sits.

On February 27, 1878 with the support of other Northern Baptist churches in DC, the group formally organizes as the Metropolitan Baptist Church (if time: have the class guess why “Metropolitan”. Answer: likely because of Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle—a Baptist Church at the center of another capital city). Each of their 31 signatures is on the original church covenant which we have hanging in the West Hall. In 1888 a new chapel is built to replace the old Sunday School building. Over 16 years the congregation has 6 different pastors, and yet still manages to grow to 244 members by 1892. But stability is right around the corner.

In 1903, Dr. John Ball becomes the church’s 7th pastor, a position he’ll hold for 41 years. Under Dr. Ball, the current main and west halls are built in 1911, and the membership roll grows to 3,577 people at its peak.

While American Protestantism struggles through the theological battles of the 1920s and 30s, this church, by the grace of God, remains committed to the Bible as God’s inerrant Word. Unfortunately the same can’t be said for many other churches in this city—in which by the late 20th century you would no longer hear Biblical teaching about the reality of sin, our need for a savior, or the exclusivity of Jesus as the only way of Salvation. By God’s grace, though, this tide has begun to turn the other way and today there are many times the number of Gospel-preaching, Bible-believing churches in DC than was the case in the 1990s.

But back to our own history.

In 1950, Dr. Ball is succeeded by Dr. K. Owen White[[2]](#footnote-2), who in response to theological liberalism in the Northern Baptist Convention (that’s the American Baptists today) leads us to redirect our funding to the Southern Baptist Convention. But he leaves a few years later, eventually serving as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Over the next 20 years, the church sees 5 different pastors and a season of slow but steady decline that’s compounded by suburban migration and the urban riots of the 1960s.

Then in 1990, another pastor comes whose preaching was well-received, but who badly wounded the church through marital infidelity. When he leaves in 1992, the membership roll stands at 500, but the attendance is barely above 100 and really no one lives in the neighborhood. The church’s reputation has taken a great hit in the community and many wonder if CHBC has any future at all.

But the Lord in His kindness has different plans. After much prayer, the church calls Mark Dever as the Senior Pastor. He begins his ministry in September 1994 and his ministry begins with slow and steady change. One of those changes is that in 1998 the church moves from being led by just the senior pastor to a plurality of elders, creating much more stability in leadership. As God chooses to bless the preaching of his word and as the neighborhood changes, our church gradually fills up again—and roughly half the membership today live within walking distance of the church building.

Of course, being full on a Sunday morning—which we’ve largely been since 2009—has its own challenges. As a church, we’ve decided we’re committed to this neighborhood rather than going to build a larger building elsewhere in the city. Historic regulations keep us from expanding the size of this building. And we’ve decided that we’re committed to worshipping in a single service on Sunday morning. We don’t know how to build the kind of community that we see here and that we believe the Bible envisions if we are split up on Sunday mornings and unable to meet again on Sunday evenings.

So our “plan for growth,” so to speak, is to help revitalize the witness of other churches in the DC area. Sometimes that’s been through church planting. But largely, that’s been as some of our members leave us to go to struggling Baptist churches where we send money, a pastor, and normally some of our elders. That’s been the story with Guilford Baptist in Sterling, Grace Baptist in Arlington, LaPlata Baptist Church, Restoration Church in NW DC, and most recently Del Ray Baptist in Alexandria. Incidentally, if you live beyond the Capitol Hill neighborhood, I’d strongly encourage you to check out one of these churches. You’ll find a map with church contact information on our church information card in the Main and West Halls. Beyond church planting locally, we’ve sent out numerous church planting missionaries overseas and have trained dozens of men for the pastoral ministry—all with the hope that the health God seems to have blessed us with would be a blessing far beyond our own local church. In many ways that’s our personality as a church. You won’t find a lot of talk about growing the size of our own church—we frankly don’t have the space—though the turnover is always making room for new members. But you’ll hear a lot of talk about training up and sending people out, as faithful church members, pastors, and missionaries. I hope you’ll be able to join us in that vision.

**Any questions?**

1. One common question on this topic is the nature of the doctrinal difference regarding the Holy Spirit. The West believed that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son while the East believed that the Holy Spirit proceeded only from the Father. This difference is often called the *filioque* controversy (*filioque* means *and the son*). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dr. Ball became Pastor Emeritus in 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)