

# THE LITTLE ROCK CHURCH



**By Barbara Dietrich**

Copyright © Barbara Dietrich 2013

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**To Diana Shelburne who persistently urged me to write the history of the Auburn Seventh-day Adventist Church.**

**She also encouraged me to keep going until, what turned out to be a book that was finished. Her dedication to the project meant many hours of work.**

**Also to Kathy Kovalski and Sean Morris who finished the project to completion and publication.**

**And of course, God who thru the Holy Spirit enlightened me to remember the events and conversations that made this story possible.**

*To the Past,  
To the Present,  
To the Future members of the*

*Auburn Seventh-Day Adventist Church*

*Who in the past worked,  
Who now are working,  
Who will in the future work,  
So that the miracles will continue to bring  
Glory to our Heavenly Father.*

*This book is dedicated.*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **DISCOURAGEMENTS TURNED TO JOY 1991 – 1993**

**THE SEED WAS PLANTED  
A MAN WHO LOVED GOD  
THE DISSAPPOINTMENT  
INTO THE DESERT  
GOD BRINGS US BACK  
THE DECISION  
THE PLAYERS  
THE CONTRACT  
THE CRISIS  
A TIME OF FAITH  
A TIME OF JOY**

### **THE REWARDS OF PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE 1994-1998**

**UP AND RUNNING  
THE STORM OF FRUSTRATION  
THE UPS AND DOWNS OF 1995  
FOR WHOM WILL THE BELL TOLL?  
ANOTHER SET BACK  
SENT OF GOD  
AN INCH TO SPARE  
THE PRESSURE IS ON  
THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FULL  
MOVING ON  
WAIT ON THE LORD**

**GOD OUR ARCHITECT AND BUILDER**  
**1999 - 2001**

**THE MASTER'S PLAN**  
**I THINK I CAN**  
**GOD, OUR BUILDER**  
**GOD MOVE THE HEART**  
**THE WITNESSING**  
**THE VIEW FROM THE TOP**  
**THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD**

## INTRODUCTION

In the little town of Auburn, Georgia, located just outside the metro-Atlanta area, stands a Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has been called the “Miracle Church.”

Webster’s Dictionary defines “miracle” as “an extraordinary event manifesting Divine intervention in human affairs.”

God’s Word has many stories of miracles that inspire us, but when you are a part of the story and experience the miracles personally, it inspires you even more. And for that reason, this story is being told.

There were spectacular miracles like the parting of the waters of the Red Sea but also the quiet miracles like the giving of manna six days a week for many years.

Auburn’s events were more like the quiet miracles where God intervened in so many occasions that the sum of them is what made Auburn become a “Miracle Church.” It was His plan to have a church in Auburn, Georgia and He never errors.

The first part of the story is one of a lot of discouragement as we struggled to start a work in Auburn. Maybe it was our testing time and the most important part of the experience, but I promise you, that if you read the whole story and as it unfolds, you will realize that nothing can stop a plan that God has ordained.

This is also the story of my spiritual journey with God as I experienced it and perceived it. There were many lessons on faith, trust and patience that I needed to learn. I have prayed that the Holy Spirit will help me to be factual and accurate. Hopefully our experience will inspire and encourage others to have a greater faith in how God leads in our lives.

All miracles are for the purpose of glorifying God and increasing faith in the greatest miracle of all. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 NIV.

Thank you, God; that we can see You through Your miracles until the day we can see You face to face.

# **DISCOURAGEMENTS TURNED TO JOY**

**1991 – 1993**

**THE SEED WAS PLANTED**

**A MAN WHO LOVED GOD**

**THE DISSAPPOINTMENT**

**INTO THE DESERT**

**GOD BRINGS US BACK**

**THE DECISION**

**THE PLAYERS**

**THE CONTRACT**

**THE CRISIS**

**A TIME OF FAITH**

**A TIME OF JOY**

## THE SEED WAS PLANTED

When did it all begin? Who can say when the Lord started to work out His plan for a church in Auburn, Georgia? I know when it began for me.

One of those rainy, soggy days in May of 1990, I was driving home from work when I was distracted by something at the side of the road. When I looked back, I saw the truck that had stopped in front of me to make a left turn into a driveway. I slammed on the brake pedal but nothing happened. I had no control over the car. I braced for the impact as I flew at 60 miles an hour into the rear of the truck. I survived. The State Trooper said the car I was driving probably saved my life. It had taken most of the impact. This proved true as I later read that the old Chevy station wagon, which I told my husband Don after we bought it that I didn't like it, had the record of being the safest car to be in if involved in an accident. I felt God had worked that out for me.

The accident had left me unable to return to work. The doctor said I would be much better in a couple of months, but when the months passed and I was not better, even with medication, I had to resign my job and was not able to attend church.

One day I received a phone call from a church friend who asked if I'd be interested in going with her to a home prayer meeting in which about six people were meeting together. It was the first ray of light that gave me some hope of fellowship and spiritual food.

As we were driving along, my friend started talking about how nice it would be if we had a church in our area since we all lived 25 to 30 miles away from the nearest Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We talked about our children and grandchildren who did not attend church anymore. They all lived in the Auburn area and would they come if we had a church in Auburn? I couldn't put the thought out of my head. So the next week when we met again, I asked the group what they thought of having a church in Auburn. They all agreed it would be a good thing. The seed had been planted. That was our beginning.

With new courage I started thinking, "Where do I start?" The first thought that popped into my head was, call Charlie Crane. Charlie was our daughter's father-in-law who along with his wife, Norma, had moved into a basement apartment prepared by their son, Steve. Charlie and Norma attended the Methodist Church in Auburn.

I called Charlie and asked if he would find out if a small group of Seventh-day Adventists could use the Methodist Church on Saturday mornings. He was excited about the idea. Steve, his son, and Karen, our daughter, were Seventh-day Adventists. "I'll check it out and get back to you as soon as I know anything."

It didn't take Charlie long to get back with me. "Barbara, the Trustees would be happy to have you use our Methodist Church on Saturday mornings."

"How much do they want in payment for using the church?" I asked.

"Seven dollars a week to help cover the utilities," Charlie replied.

I thought, "How amazing!" God was making it easy for us.

Charlie had arranged a meeting for the Methodist Pastor, Pastor Joan Biles, Don my husband and myself, to see the church.

I will never forget the first time we walked into the Church, the church was built with granite rock. It had stain glass windows and a bell tower. We had driven by the church for 17 years on our way to the Seventh-day Adventist Church that we had been attending. I always wondered what the inside of the Church looked like.

When we walked into the church, my heart was bursting with emotion. It was evident that the church needed much repair. Some of the plaster was peeling off the walls. The carpet was threadbare. There were old school lights with one globe hung from the ceiling—but still I felt the presence of God. The Pastor took us on a tour of the rest of the property.

“Our congregation has grown so much that we will have to move and build something bigger. The church is for sale,” she said. My thoughts raced as I thought, “Oh, how I’d love to see this as an Adventist Church.” But at the moment that seemed to be impossible.

“Would you like to start meeting here this Saturday,” Pastor Joan asked. I made some excuse and then we decided that we would begin June 1, 1991.

I didn’t have any commitments from people to come since I hadn’t told anyone yet about the church being available, but I felt confident that there would be others as excited as I was.

I called the pastor of the church were Don and I were members and told him about the church being available to us. He came to see me and said he was leaving to pastor another church. He didn’t offer much encouragement. In fact, he seemed to be preparing me for failure.

“It’s very difficult to start new churches,” he said and then proceeded to list all the reasons why. He did agree that he would take it to his Church Board for approval of their support for a Branch Sabbath School.

Meanwhile I got busy calling people I knew who had not attended church for sometime. I also called friends who I thought might respond. David Wolcott, an Elder said he would gladly come and help. He had helped raise up a church before he came to Georgia. That was encouraging, but the words of the Pastor echoed in my mind as one after another couldn’t or wouldn’t support the idea of a church in Auburn.

On June 1, 1991 about 25 people came for the first meeting in the Auburn Methodist Church. We were on our way but we knew nothing about what the future would bring. What God had planned for us would be a remarkable experience.

## A MAN WHO LOVED GOD

Charlie had not told me when I first called him that he was scheduled for cancer surgery. Three years before he had been diagnosed with throat cancer. After treatment they told him he was in remission so he moved to Auburn to be closer to his son. After I called him about renting the Methodist Church, he postponed the surgery until he knew that it was clear for the Seventh-day Adventists to use the church.

When we visited him at the hospital after his surgery, he wrote on a tablet, “Did you start to meet at the church?”

“Yes,” I replied.

He smiled a big smile and wrote to this wife, “Give me the check book.” He then wrote out a check to us as our first offering.

It was the last time I ever saw him. After coming home from the hospital, he passed away from complications from the surgery. Before his death, Pastor Joan, the Methodist Pastor, visited him. Because he could not speak, he wrote the following letter.

“I am so happy that you obtained approval for the Seventh-day Adventist group to meet at Auburn United Methodist Church. I do believe that God had in mind this possibility years and years ago.” He then proceeded to say how the Lord had led him to Auburn and the Auburn United Methodist Church. He continued, “To me, this sequence is so unbelievably beautiful. It proves to me that “nothing just happens,” God’s hand is in everything. You see, when He decided He wanted this Seventh-day Adventist group to use our church, He started ten or more years ago...Isn’t it a blessing and a thrill, when you suddenly realize that you are involved in more than you could ever realize. That God uses you and the church for His Glory... You know it may be that someday, if this little group of Seventh-day Adventists grows and the players in God’s plan continue to increase, that their need for a church will become the answer to their prayer for a little sanctuary in Auburn, and allowing us in our growth to move to a new site and continue to grow as they will grow in new and creative ways in God’s Glory to minister in the Auburn area. Only God could have arranged this...you know.”

Pastor Joan shared his words with me and I have always cherished them. It is a record of a man’s love and faith in God. We would not have this last testimony to inspire us if he hadn’t lost the ability to speak.

A memorial service was held in the Auburn Methodist Church. It was a sad experience for me for I had lost a dear friend. His words “and more players shall be added...” were prophetic.

Some day in heaven he will know how he was an important player. “Only God could have arranged it...” became my foundation for faith to believe God’s plan for the “Miracle Church.”

## THE DISAPOINTMENT

David Wolcott led out in the Sabbath School meetings. We had no piano player or a preaching service. After a few weeks we began to see a drop in attendance. I called an old friend, Pastor Curtis Morton, who was retired, and asked if he could come and preach to us. He agreed and when the word went out that he was coming, we had a good turn out, a potluck dinner and a good time together. It was evident that having just a Bible study was not enough to hold the interest of the group. The majority of those attending had not attended church for some time and they needed the atmosphere of a spiritual worship service. Pastor Curtis could not come to preach on a regular basis.

With no Pastor to preach and Sabbath School interest waning the attendance dropped until there was only Don and I, David and Ramona, his wife, and Shirley Bush, who were meeting on Sabbath morning. We would pray and plan what we could do to hold together and regain interest.

I called the Georgia Cumberland Conference hoping to talk with anyone who could help us. I left messages with the secretaries for someone to call me, but no one returned my calls. Our only hope was that when the new Pastor came, things would change. When we heard the new Pastor had arrived, I anxiously called him, leaving messages, but again, I got no response. David approached him personally and the Pastor promised to meet with us in Auburn on a Sabbath afternoon in January 1992. We had waited eight months and again a good group turned out. There still was a spark of faith in raising up a church in Auburn, but we needed someone to fan the flame. Our hopes were high.

When the new Pastor started his talk with us, he proceeded to quickly tell us that he had too much to do for the other church and wouldn't be able to help us in any way.

I was aware of an Evangelist Council in Atlanta that worked with the Atlanta pastors to plan evangelistic strategy. We had already prepared a letter with an appeal for the churches in the area to present to their congregations a call to come and help us get started, without changing their memberships. It would be considered a "loan" until we could become stronger. It was a plan endorsed by the General Conference as a means to plant new churches.

I asked the Pastor if he would represent us at the Council and pass out the letters.

"Yes, I'll do that for you," he said.

"How many should we print up? A thousand?"

"No, fifty will be enough because they will only throw them in the trash," he replied. There was no guessing what his attitude was. It left many of the group discouraged and some even angry.

I asked if he would be willing to meet with the Methodist Pastor with the hopes when he heard of the potential for growth in Auburn, he might be impressed and change his mind.

Pastor Joan, the Methodist Pastor, was very easy to like. She was a visionary and had all her ducks in a row. She knew of all the statistics from a demographic study that had been done and she was well informed.

Her statistics showed that the location of the church at a main intersection of town was strategically placed and was a well-known landmark in the historical section of town. Auburn had shown a 300% growth in the 1990 census. New subdivisions were popping up like weeds every where. Auburn, in Barrow County, had no Seventh-day Adventist presence, which made it a “dark county” and was an open mission field.

I was not present at the meeting between Pastor Joan and the Pastor, so I was anxious to hear from him and to hear of his impressions. After a few days, I called him and was told he hadn’t changed his mind about helping us. Then he said something that took me by surprise.

“You should raise about \$50,000 in the next six months and buy the church.” Apparently, he was impressed with the church itself.

“Buy the church,” I thought. We couldn’t even get attention or help to organize a company. Buy a church! Fifty thousand dollars in six months!

I got off the phone and at first felt angry. I figured it out comparing the size of our group to the members of his church and that it would be comparable to him asking his members to raise over a million dollars in six months.

It seemed so hopeless; my anger turned to despair.

“It’s all over,” I thought. There is no where we can turn. The tears came forth like a broken dam. If David, the psalmist had put his tears in a bottle, mine were in a bucket. The many months of frustrations had taken its toll. I thought, “It’s finished.”

I talked with the few others and we agreed to disband the group. I asked Pastor Curtis one more time to come and preach to us. He was sorry we were going to disband and suggested that we try the Conyers Church. Pastor Henson, his cousin, might help us. The Lord was leading but not in the direction I thought.

## INTO THE DESERT

The loving Lord always knows what is best for us. He knew I needed a rest. What I thought was hopeless, He was saying, “Wait and be patient. In My TIME and My WAY it will happen.”

A good friend, Marguerite Lilly, asked if I had read the biography of Ellen G. White. I hadn't, so she gave me Volume 1. Once I started reading I couldn't stop. That summer of 1992 I read all six volumes. It gave me a new perspective of the history of our denomination. I read of the difficult struggles and trials caused by personality conflicts, diverse opinions, the faith it took to raise the money to purchase properties, start churches, schools and medical institutions. It opened my eyes to the human element that is always in conflict with the spiritual.

I read in Volume 3, The Lonely Years, page 385-386, Ellen White's words, “A strong firm resistance was manifested by many against anything that should interfere with their own personal ideas, their own course of actions. This laid upon me the heaviest burdens I could possibly bear.” MS2—1888. Overwhelmed with discouragement—overtaken by sickness, she wrote, “I felt no desire to recover—I had no power even to pray and no desire to live. Rest only rest, was my desire, quiet and rest. As I lay for two weeks in nervous prostration, I had hope that no one would beseech the throne of Grace in my behalf. It was the impression that I would die; this was my thought, but it was not the will of my Heavenly Father. My work was not yet done.”

The message came that she was needed at the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis. She got out of her bed and went. Too sick to get out of her berth on the train, but she went, and anyone who knows Adventist history knows how important the 1888 General Conference was to the denomination. God sustained her, renewed her strength and used her in that crisis.

I have carried a copy of what she said about her experience with burnout and depression for many years in my purse. I changed many purses through the years but never changed my gratefulness that God “led” me to read her words. When I have feelings like I can't cope, I read her statements and have the courage to go on.

The sin of discouragement is giving up but the glory of God is to keep going in spite of it.

That summer of 1992 I had no idea that many years were still ahead of me where I would have to keep going and let God sustain me to His glory.

## GOD BRINGS US BACK

The summer passed and one Sabbath Don and I decided to visit the Conyers Church. I remembered Pastor Curtis's words, "Talk with my cousin Pastor Bill Henson. Maybe his church will help you."

I was surprised that after many months I still felt like talking about our experience in Auburn. Pastor Henson said he couldn't help us but said there was a couple who lived in Auburn and who were attending Conyers. The next Sabbath we met Kirk and Lone Howell. They came to see us when we got home. They were interested in using the Methodist Church for Friday night Bible Studies and asked if I would talk with the Methodist Pastor to see if the church would be available again. I told them I didn't think I could get the group that had come before to attend on a Friday night meeting since it was difficult to get them to come on Sabbath morning. Kirk assured me that didn't matter since he knew of people that he felt would come.

I consented to talk with Pastor Joan and she was glad to renew our arrangement that we had before, so we started meeting on Friday nights. David and I were the only ones from the original group. Kirk and Lone had been attending Sabbath afternoon meetings with an independent ministry group and they also came.

The Friday after Thanksgiving, David, Kirk and I were in the mobile home next to the church because of the cold and we felt that it would heat up faster than trying to heat the whole church for just a few people. Somehow there had been miscommunication and the rest of the group were in the church. The speaker made the decision to cancel the meeting since the church was so cold. Kirk saw them leaving and came to tell David and myself. It was providential because we turned our thoughts to what we were doing there and what we were trying to accomplish.

David made the comment, "You know this isn't going any where unless we have the support of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. We are dead in the water."

I said, "I had been thinking the same thing. Having a talk on random subjects on Friday night was not likely to lead to establishing a church and that was suppose to be our purpose."

After some thought, I said, "O.K. I'll call the conference on Monday and try again."

When God has it in His plan to move, things happen.

## THE DECISION

On Sunday I called Pastor Joan to ask her if she had a copy of a Christmas story I had heard her tell. She said that she would send me a copy. Then the conversation turned to the church.

“Have you found a buyer for the church?” I asked.

“No,” she replied. “The City is considering buying it and turning it into some kind of public building. We had hoped another church would buy it so it could stay a church.”

As we continued to talk, it was evident that she hoped we would purchase it. I explained to her that there were only ten of us as a group.

“You don’t buy a church before you have a congregation to come to it.”

Then I said something that still amazes me. Remembering the previous difficulty in getting people interested in starting a new church, I said, “I don’t think getting the finances would be a problem, it’s the people coming that concerns me.”

I told her of my brother who might be able to finance the purchase for us. It was just a thought that had never crossed my mind before. I was too focused on people instead of money.

The lights must have started flashing when Pastor Joan heard that because the next morning she called and asked if I would call my brother to see if he could help. She wanted to sell the church and she was a good salesperson.

I thought, “O.K. Nothing can be lost by talking with Walter and Frances Zornes.” They were not wealthy people but they had good business sense and had connections with several banks.

After a lengthy discussion, the Zornes said to me, “Go for it; try to buy the church and we’ll do what ever it takes.” With renewed courage, I then called the conference and the secretary put me right through to Elder Long. It was the first time in a year and a half that I was able to talk with someone at the conference.

When I told him we were a group trying to start a church in Auburn, he immediately made an appointment to come and talk with us as soon as possible. Now my courage was really soaring!

I then got the group together to discuss the purchase of the church. I did not tell them of the Zornes commitment because we had agreed to wait and see first what the group would do. They were surprised, of course, since we had never given it any consideration. I had come prepared with several quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy about the work to be done in raising up churches, especially in “dark counties” (as we used to say). Barrow County had no Seventh-day Adventist presence. Auburn was like the hub of a wheel. You had to go from 25 to 30 miles in any direction to find a SDA Church. It was a good location and an open mission field.

For two hours we went back and forth with our discussion. Strangely, they didn’t mention, “Where are we going to get the money?” Instead, their concerns were what standards the church would have. They stated that if we bought the church, they would be the core group. They also proceeded to list all of the things that the church would not allow. I knew they were very legalistic and I had

come prepared. I told them I respected their opinions and personal life styles, but I said, “This is going to be a healing church. Regardless of who comes through that door, how they dress or what they eat, it will not be our priority to correct them. We will work to bring them to the saving knowledge of Jesus and let the Holy Spirit do His work in their lives.”

Finally, they agreed to proceed to purchase the church and the meeting ended.

There was a lot to do. The Lord’s time had come. Doors would be opened.

I met with Pastor Joan and asked if we could present a letter of intent to purchase the church with a 90-day option to arrange the financing. It was agreed; the letter was accepted and with no earnest money involved. Our group had only \$400 in our account. Elder Long became ill and was not able to meet with us until late January 1993. When he came, we again had a good turnout. People were excited when they heard we were going to buy the church. They wanted to be a part of it.

When we told Elder Long about our plans to buy the church, he told us that we would have to be approved by the Conference to become a Company. The property would have to be inspected by the EPA to determine if any toxic materials were in the building that would have to be removed. If so, they would not approve the purchase, plus if they did approve the purchase, we would have to raise 50% of the purchase price.

All of this was news to me. I didn’t have a clue about the regulations concerning church properties. I had already gotten a commitment from a bank through my brother’s influence to loan us 75% of the purchase price at an interest rate of 1% above prime. Once again there was a need for patience. I wasn’t discouraged.

## THE PLAYERS

Starting in January 1993 we decided to have full services on Sabbath. We had asked Pastor Curtis to come and preach to us again. After the service when we were having our potluck dinner in the Annex (the mobile home next to the church), Pastor Curtis and I were standing in the kitchen when I said; “You know we really need someone who can represent us to the Conference.” We had no mother church. The pastor of the church where we had attended said to me that I was sheep stealing. Rumors were circulating that we were a disgruntled group and Barbara Dietrich was brainwashing people.

Pastor Curtis was quiet and then he said, “I’ll come and help you.”

I was taken totally by surprise since I was just making conversation and wasn’t even thinking of him helping us.

“Wonderful!” I said.

This seemed unbelievable since Pastor Curtis lived 60 miles away, which was on the other side of Atlanta, and he would have to drive through the worst of Atlanta’s traffic.

He said that he would have to talk with Evelyn, his wife, first. He told me later that it took him until Thursday to get the courage to talk with her. Instead of saying, “Are you crazy!” She said, “I’ll support you...”

We had our full time Pastor.

We decided to give him a small stipend to help with his travel expenses.

When the word got out that Pastor Curtis was preaching at Auburn, our attendance increased. Many knew him when he had pastored the church they had attended years before. We saw people coming back to church because they enjoyed him as a pastor.

Another important player was Hazel Roberts. She called to tell me she had made the decision to come to Auburn. She met with her pastor and told him, “I’m 76. I want to have a legacy that my family can look to after I’m gone. I want to be a part of helping raise up a church.” He told her that it would be the most exciting time of her spiritual life.

Hazel still had a real estate license and in January 1993 during cold and rain, she showed property hoping to raise money to help with the purchase of the church.

Hazel called her old time friends, Wes and Mary Blitchington about her decision. They visited one Sabbath and Mary was enthusiastic about the church. She said, “I’m going to call the Conference Monday morning and tell them if they don’t buy this church, they’re crazy!” Mary was very outspoken and Wes was a quiet man and had a gentle way of saying, “Now, Mary” if she was too exuberant. They were a caring, loving couple that brought us a lot of joy. Mary was a fantastic cook and cooked up enough food to feed an army for our potluck dinners that we had every Sabbath. They gave generously to help the church and also to help those in need. Both have passed away and now rest in the Lord.

## THE CONTRACT

The Methodists had an appraisal made of the property, which totaled \$124,000. This included all sanctuary furniture, oak pews, pulpit, chairs, communion table and piano. Two mobile homes were on the property. One was a 12x60, which was used by the city for a public library and a 14x70 commercial type unit, which was used for classes. The basement on ground level was used for a pre-school business.

In looking over the appraisal, I noticed that the lot was listed as being one acre. I new it couldn't be that large. To be sure I went to the courthouse and looked up the plat plan. I also found the surveyor and got a copy of the survey. I found out the church had at one time been an acre but had sold the half-acre. Apparently, the appraiser had looked at the old plat plan and priced the land as one acre. This meant we could deduct the cost of a half-acre from the appraisal. Even though the church was only a half-acre, it looked much larger since the City right-of-way was on the two street sides of the corner.

We waited for the wheels of Conference leaders to get moving so we would know where we stood. We couldn't go forward until they told us to. We were meeting on a regular basis with Pastor Curtis and anxiously wanted to start raising the money to purchase the church. That was going to be a big one in our experience.

The weeks passed and we heard nothing about the Conference sending an EPA Inspector. Elder Long did say the decision to allow us to become a Company would be decided on May 19<sup>th</sup> by the Conference Executive Committee.

Our option to purchase the church expired on April 1<sup>st</sup>. As the date approached and we still hadn't heard anything, I called the Conference and was transferred to Elder George Powell. He made an appointment to see the church a few days later.

Don and I met Elder Powell and Elder Jay Shanko at the church. They walked all over the property and even crawled underneath the church. Don and I sat in the Sanctuary waiting. I had told them the price based on the appraisal. When they returned, Elder Powell said, "Buy the property! Usually we have to give a report to a committee but we've agreed, get right on it, write up a purchase agreement and Fax it up to us in a couple of days."

Why is it that when you have plenty of time, no one is in a hurry?

Hazel got a sales contract form and she, David and myself wrote up the contract. It was Faxed to Conference and approved. We then planned to present it to the Methodists but did not have any earnest money. Hazel told us that she was closing on a sale. When it closed she turned her commission check over to us as our earnest money the same day we planned to present the contract. Showing houses in January paid off. So we then presented the contract and \$5,000 in earnest money to the Methodists who accepted it. The purchase price was \$105,000 and closing date was in July. We still did not have the balance of \$47,500 that the Conference had asked for. We were excited and confident that the Lord would provide a way. Then a shock rattled us and sent us into a tailspin.

## THE CRISIS

The phone rang.

“Mrs. Dietrich, this is George Powell at the Conference office. We have received some disturbing information about the Auburn group. We have been told that you have an independent ministry who are attending every Sabbath and they are planning to take over the church after you purchase it. I’ll tell you right now, if this is true, we will stop everything immediately.”

“Where did you hear this?” I asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said.

“We do have people involved in an independent ministry meeting with us,” I answered. “We have asked them about their ministry and we were told they were directed toward education and medical missionary training. We will check it out and call you back.”

I tried not to jump to conclusions. My first thoughts were that the source of the information came from the Pastor who said I was sheep stealing and he was just trying to discredit us. I was right about whom it was but wrong about his motive. I found out later that someone coming to his church told him about the independent group and it was serious enough to pass on to the Conference. Also, I had always felt that something was not quite right about the group. When I’d ask them about their work, they were too generalized and evasive. As I previously stated, they were very legalistic but their behavior was without fault. They were pleasant, loving people and I had developed a fondness for them.

The phone rang again. This time it was Pastor Ken O’Guin who pastored the Hiram and Woodstock churches. The Conference had called him asking if he knew anything about the group in question since some of his children were attending Auburn.

We had to get some answers fast. I called Pastor Curtis and he and David went to talk with the leader of the group to see what they could find out. The leader, whom I will call Thomas, answered their questions and Pastor Curtis and David gave the Conference the report that they felt the independent ministry was doing a missionary work in the area of education and medical work. They were satisfied that they would not be a threat to Auburn.

The Lord was working in a way that no one could ever have guessed.

At prayer meeting a week or so later, Pastor Curtis, Lone and myself were the only ones present. Lone asked Pastor Curtis how it went with the meeting with Thomas. Pastor Curtis told her that he was impressed with the office building they were occupying and that there was a lot of money from somewhere because the machines and equipment were expensive. He also stated that the decision was that their ministry was acceptable. The conversation continued. Lone told about how she and Kirk had attended their meeting at their office on Sabbath afternoons. Visits were made by members to the Howell home in which they had asked Lone to join their ministry and teach Physical Therapy. Lone had declined. Then she said something that turned the whole issue upside down.

She said, “Thomas had married one of the couples on a Friday evening.”

“Married them!” Pastor Curtis said. “Is he a licensed minister?”

Pastor Curtis and I both saw the red flag. Then Lone sat up straight in her chair and it was like a light bulb went off. She also realized something was not right. She then told us of secret meetings that she and Kirk were not allowed to attend until they became members. She also went on to say how the group did not have a church but the members attended all the different churches in the Atlanta area. Pastor Curtis got out his notebook and as Lone gave names of members and what Seventh-day Adventist Churches they were attending, he wrote the information down.

“Obviously, I did not ask the right questions.”

He said, “David and I are going back to see Thomas and see what answers we get this time. If he is a licensed minister, I want to know of what denomination.”

We had assumed that the members of their ministry were Seventh-day Adventists.

Pastor Curtis and David immediately went to their office and asked Thomas the question, “Are you a licensed minister?”

“Yes,” Thomas answered.

“What denomination?” asked Pastor Curtis.

“Davidian,” was the answer.

This was in April of 1993 when David Koresh and the Waco incident was national news. The media had mistakenly said Koresh was a Seventh-day Adventist. This was a hot potato we sure didn’t want to handle. What should we do? Our decision was to write a letter and ask Thomas and all the members of his ministry to leave the Auburn Church. The Conference would not approve us as a Company or allow us to purchase the church if they were present. It was a difficult thing to do. I really liked the people but we had no choice. The letter was prepared and Pastor Curtis and David delivered it to Thomas. Pastor Curtis was gracious even though they had deceived us. Thomas was gracious and said they would comply with our request.

The information was given to the Conference just a few days before the executive meeting was held. Our fate was in God’s hands.

On May 19<sup>th</sup> the Committee met and we were approved to be accepted as a Company in Auburn. I was told it was a close vote, almost split. The vote to approve us was carried by only two votes. We officially became a Company effective June 1, 1993, exactly two years to the day we met for the first time in the Methodist church. Pastor Curtis was appointed to be a stipend Pastor.

At the end of May during camp meeting, a special meeting of the Atlanta pastors was called. Pastor Curtis was asked to speak to them about our experience with the Davidians in Auburn. He gave the names of those Davidians who were attending the different SDA churches that Lone had given to Pastor Curtis. He told them that their strategy was to place two or more in several churches to recruit members. They were a new organization that had just established themselves in the Atlanta area, and that they had come from New York, Canada, the Islands of Trinidad, etc. There was a lot of money behind them that had come from somewhere. They had printed material that was being sent to many countries.

I always thought how God had gotten us through the crisis and at the same time used little Auburn Church to benefit the Adventist work in the Atlanta area.

## A TIME OF FAITH

The crisis with the church had passed, but Don and I were faced with a crisis of our own. Don told me that he had a severe headache, which he usually didn't have. He took something for it and we went to bed. I felt very uneasy about it because Don usually was never sick. The next morning I woke up and found him wandering around the house in confusion. He could not speak coherently. We got him to the hospital as quickly as possible. He had suffered a brain hemorrhage. The doctor said to be prepared for permanent brain damage. When he came home from the hospital, I told the group I would have to take care of Don. He was my first priority.

After several weeks of therapy, Don was much better so I felt that I could get back into the church business. Now the task before us was to raise the money necessary to purchase the church. The Conference requirement for financing properties was 50% in cash for the down payment. This meant raising \$52,500 before our closing date of July 30, 1993. Packets were prepared that included a letter, picture of the church and information pertaining to the area and future evangelistic plans. They were sent to friends and relatives who we prayed would be willing to help. Then the waiting time that only faith could fill. Only a few responded and it was evident that we could not meet the deadline of July 30, 1993. We asked for and received a 30-day extension on our contract. The closing date of August 31, 1993 had to be met because the Methodists were pressing to start their program of building their new church. As the August 31, 1993 deadline approached, we realized that we were several thousand short of our goal and it wasn't likely that it would come in from our appeal with the letters. Pastor Curtis approached a man known for his generosity to help with churches. David contacted McKee Industries because the owner knew him. We waited prayerfully for the results of their contacts. Neither one resulted in any financial assistance.

I knew we had to come up with some creative financing. I called Pastor Joan and asked if the Methodists would accept a \$10,000 note due in one year. She said yes. I then called Walter and Frances and told them of our predicament. They told me they would keep their commitment "to do what ever it takes." They would get a loan of \$25,000 against their property here in Georgia. They were on their way from Delaware when I called Elder Powell on Monday. I told him the closing date on the church was only a week away and we were only able to raise \$40,000.

"Would the Conference accept that and close the deal?"

"Do you have \$40,000 in cash?" he asked.

"No," I said, "but I feel we will have it all in a few days."

"I'll ask the committee and call you back on Tuesday."

The Zornes arrived on Wednesday and had an appointment with the bank on Thursday. The agreement was that they would pay for \$15,000 of the \$25,000 loan and the church would have a note of \$10,000 to pay in one year. Thursday at about 4:00 p.m. the \$25,000 was deposited in our account. We now had the \$40,000. It was only a few minutes later that Elder Powell called (not on a Tuesday as he said) and asked, "Do you have the \$40,000?"

“Oh, yes,” I replied very calmly and confidently. “It’s all in the bank. I can write a check right now if you want it because I’m the treasurer.”

“Then make a date for closing and we will be there.”

The Lord had provided another miracle.

Hazel and I, along with Elder Shanko, represented the church at the closing. Hazel and I signed the note to the Methodists for \$10,000. When we left and got in her car, Hazel turned and looked at me and said, “Do you realize you and I are responsible to pay \$10,000 in one year to the Methodists?”

I grinned and said, “I’m not worried. They’ll have to come after you not me. I don’t have anything they can take.”

She grinned back and said, “I’m not worried either.”

We both were so happy. The church was now ours; nothing could dampen our spirits. We had one year to raise the \$20,000 we owed the Methodists and the bank. We had no idea how we’d do it, but God already had it in His plan. It would be another miracle.

## A TIME OF JOY

Because of scheduled commitments, the Conference could not come until October 23, 1993 to officially organize us as a Company. It was a day of worship and celebration that I will never forget.

We were all excited and wanted the church to look its best. The group cleaned and painted, planted flowers and prepared special foods for the fellowship dinner. Evelyn Morton made fall decorations for the platform area and all the windows. Our dinner would have to be served in the annex. We knew there would not be enough seating room if we had several guests. I called the funeral homes in the area, which donated the use of canopies for shelter. The Lions Club allowed us to use their tables and chairs. Since the seating would have to be outside, we anxiously watched the weather report. It started raining on Friday and every weather forecaster said the rain would last through the weekend. I felt we would work it out somehow. It rained all night and Sabbath morning about 9:00 a.m. the rain stopped and the sun came out. It was a glorious day. God who controls all things seemed to show His pleasure at the work well done by favoring us with the beauty of a sunny bright day. Saturday night it started to rain again through Sunday.

God was favoring us also in another way, which as Charlie would say, "Only God could have arranged it."

The Monday before our special Sabbath, I got a call from Marguerite. She told me that she and her husband Dr. Ray Lilly were eating breakfast and talking about the little Auburn Church and the coming Sabbath when she said that she had an inspiration to call an old friend, Chick Fleming who at one time was president of the Professional Business Association (P.B.A.). The Lilly's had been charter members many years before. She told Mr. Fleming about Auburn and asked if he could represent Auburn to the Association and get us a little help. She knew that sometimes they would give grants for specific needs.

At first he didn't feel he could do anything for Auburn. He wasn't very hopeful, but Marguerite kept talking and finally, he said, "Send me all the information you have about the church. I'll do what I can."

Marguerite immediately called and told me of her conversation with Mr. Fleming. "Barbara, get everything you can get together and send overnight to Mr. Fleming."

I stopped everything I was doing and got a packet with pictures, demographics, letters we had prepared, maps and anything that I felt would be informative and took it right to the Post Office.

Then I got a call from Elder Long at the Conference office.

"We have gotten a call from the P.B.A. saying that at their next meeting, they are going to discuss Auburn for the possibility of a grant. Write us a letter and get it to me quickly. The meeting is next Monday. The Conference will be present and we need the letter."

I wrote the letter, not asking for money, but told of our plans for evangelism, the potential for the Lord's work and our plans for Auburn.

On Sabbath the Conference President Elder Geary, Elder Long with their wives and Elder Powell came to Auburn. We also had many guests. The church was almost full.

The service was well planned and enjoyable. We had a lot of talent in our small group. After Elder Geary preached the sermon, Elder Long presided over the signing of the 39 charter members. He also challenged the newly elected officers of the Company. Before the closing of the service Elder Geary came back to the pulpit and said, "I'm meeting with the P.B.A. on Monday morning and I'm going to tell them what I have seen here today." He definitely was impressed.

The dinner was fabulous. We had a 30 feet table packed with food (I'm not exaggerating). God's presence was felt and it was a perfect day.

I didn't think too much about the meeting with the P.B.A. on Monday. I was too consumed with our big day—my head was still in the clouds when Marguerite called.

"I've heard from Chick Fleming," she said. "He apologized and said he was sorry he couldn't get what he asked for."

I thought that's all right. I hadn't expected anything. Then she continued, "He said he asked for a \$25,000 grant but they voted a \$20,000 grant instead."

\$20,000! \$20,000! The number went around in my brain like marbles. Twenty thousand dollars would pay off our note to the Methodists and to the bank. I was speechless which isn't very often. The Conference, the P.B.A. and Marguerite did not know of the notes we had signed. But our Heavenly Father knows all. We had stepped out in faith and He took care of the rest.

What we could not get by appeals for donations, God ordained a grant so He could give us a lesson in how He cares for us.

In the spring, many months before, I had talked with Marguerite about the P.B.A. and not about a grant. I didn't even know about such things. I was trying to get some direction about our financing for the purchase of the church. She had hesitated to make any calls. She said that she and Ray were not involved much anymore. She was uncomfortable calling. It was never mentioned again so it was a surprise to her and to me that she got up from that breakfast table and called Chick. She said it was an inspiration from God. The timing was perfect with the Conference coming the Sabbath before the Monday meeting. Chick had received the packet and was impressed. Everything came together according to God's Plan. If Marguerite had called when we first talked about it, it never would have happened. We were involved with the crisis of the independent group. Remember there were some on the Conference Executive Committee that voted against the approval that we become a Company and purchase the church.

Marguerite said there was only one condition.

"We cannot tell anyone until the Conference takes care of the paper work and gives us the grant."

I wanted to shout it from the rooftops but promised I'd tell no one.

Time passed and I called the Conference and talked with Charles Young. He knew I was aware of the grant but said I should not tell anyone. He would call when the paper were ready.

It was December 31, 1993—New Year's Eve that he called and said, "Let the members know. You will get the check sometime soon."

I think he had some compassion for me and wanted to release me from the promise to keep the secret.

What a New Year's Eve that was! The year had started with a handful of people wanting to buy a church before they were organized as a Company; the crisis in the involvement with the independent group that almost caused us to be denied; Don's healing from the brain hemorrhage; the effort to raise the money and faith to step out when the donations didn't come in; the excitement of the purchase of the church and the organization of the Company; the unexpected grant of \$20,000 to pay off our two \$10,000 notes. Everything had been directed by God: the players, the timing, all were miracles.

With the list of the church members, I started dialing.

"Hi. This is Barbara. Happy New Year! Wait until you hear what the Lord has done for us!"

# **THE REWARDS OF PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE**

1994-1998

**UP AND RUNNING**

**THE STORM OF FRUSTRATION**

**THE UPS AND DOWNS OF 1995**

**FOR WHOM WILL THE BELL TOLL?**

**ANOTHER SET BACK**

**SENT OF GOD**

**AN INCH TO SPARE**

**THE PRESSURE IS ON**

**THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FULL**

**MOVING ON**

**WAIT ON THE LORD**

## UP AND RUNNING

We started 1994 with high spirits. Our goal for the Auburn Company was to start a work in the community. We were the new kid on the block and people would be watching us. Our weekly fellowship dinners became planning sessions. I remembered Elder Long telling us the year before that the Conference had special funds for “dark county” evangelism.

I was reading the Tidings when I saw a story about E. W. Dempsey who was coordinating the “dark county” evangelism. I gave him a call and talked with him about Auburn. He had planned to start work in another area but was impressed to come to Auburn instead. He talked it over with the pastor in the other area and he graciously agreed to the change in plans. E. W. came to visit us and we were told effective June 1, 1994 (another June 1<sup>st</sup>) that he would start a work in the Auburn, Barrow County area.

E. W. was a dedicated layman who had a burden to work in “dark counties.” Elder Long had told him about the Auburn Company and it’s potential for growth, so he was anxious to come. E. W. was funded by private donations that provided the money he needed to work his programs.

He began by mailing to all of Auburn and some of the surrounding areas a letter with a Bible Study and an invitation to continue the studies. About 200 people responded. Newspaper ads were placed in the two local papers each week for twelve weeks that gave a brief summary of our basic Bible doctrines. All inquiries were sent to a special P.O. Box in Calhoun under the name of Bible Research where E. W. would respond with letters, literature or phone calls. If an interest developed, he would personally visit or someone in our group would make the call.

Training classes were held for our group. Teams went out on Sabbath afternoons to pass out literature.

I received a call from the City of Auburn asking if we would consider participating in the City’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration. They asked if Pastor Curtis would have the opening prayer for the program, which would be held in front of City Hall. Of course, he was glad to oblige. The City was taking notice of the new kid on the block. We knew because of our location that the crowds of people would be passing right in front of the church. Why not use this opportunity to introduce ourselves to the community? We agreed.

“Let’s go for it!”

Our Head Elder was part of a gospel-singing group. He would bring the group with all the speakers and perform on the front lawn. I don’t remember how we did it, but we got a flat bed trailer parked on the lawn to be their stage. I called the funeral homes again and got canopies set up. One was for people to sit and listen to the music while they sipped the free cup of lemonade we were passing out. We also had a booth for E. W. who had a display for Stop Smoking and other health related subjects. Another booth had free samples of vegetarian cooking.

Blood pressure readings were done and literature passed out. We even had a dog show where the best-dressed dog won a prize. The church members came out full force. They wore Uncle Sam paper hats; red, white and blue vests; flags were everywhere. We ran out of cups for lemonade and had to go get more. We counted our stock of cups and knew we had passed out 800 cups. People signed

up for Stop Smoking and vegetarian classes. Pastor Curtis said he had never seen any church with even 500 members put so much effort into a day of witnessing. It was indeed a glorious day.

In August the City of Winder had a Summer's End Festival. We rented a space and set up computers to do Health Assessments. It was very successful. Over 250 people went through the program and more were waiting in line, but a downpour ended everything because the equipment was going to get wet. E. W. later told me after doing the same program in many locations in the Conference that the turnout we had that day in Winder was second only to another location in the number of assessments done.

Our Lord was turning on some lights for us in the community. It had been a lot of hard work but very satisfying. Young and old of all our members were pulling together.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." Phil. 2:2 NIV.

My joy was complete, but a storm was gathering and a difficult time was just ahead of us.

## THE STORM OF FRUSTRATION

With our evangelism going well, our thoughts turned to the renovations we were anxious to start.

When we purchased the property, we had the agreement with the Methodists that we would allow them to continue using the church for one year to finish their new church. We also agreed to leave the pre-school business in the basement to be used exclusively by them along with the Pastor's office in the Annex and the use of two storage rooms. The trailer in the back was the City Library. We were limited to the Sanctuary and part of the Annex. We asked for no rent since they had been so gracious to allow us to use the church for only seven dollars a week. We also took on all the cleaning and maintenance. We had hoped we could become friends with the Methodist people so we tried to be as accommodating as possible.

We knew it would be a challenge for two congregations to share the same facility. We were using the church on Sabbaths only. We had prayer meetings in my home until we purchased the church. They had the use on Tuesdays, Wednesday night, Thursday and all day Sunday. Pastor Joan and I agreed on the schedule. We had to clean on Friday and after our fellowship dinner in the Annex on Sabbath; we cleaned up everything from sweeping and mopping the floors so that the Annex would be clean for them on Sunday.

We thought with all things considered that we would find we would be treated with respect for our effort to be thoughtful and friendly.

As time passed, it became evident that this would not be the case. Pastor Joan tried to hold it together because she too was aware of the tensions that were developing. It seemed to us that even though we were the new owners of the church nothing had changed. The Methodists were free to do as they pleased as long as they used the church.

I wish I didn't have to be specific about some of the things that happened but it is a part of our story and will help our readers to understand our frustrations. It doesn't bring me any satisfaction in telling you about this time in our experience.

About six months after we purchased the church I asked Pastor Joan if I could meet with the trustees and discuss some of the rules that were necessary to keep order between the two congregations. I had prepared a letter hoping it would be passed out to all their members.

After the meeting in which I did all the talking, there was no response, no discussion, no friendly approach, only silence and coldness. Except for Pastor Joan and a few others, there was the feeling of resentment toward the Seventh-day Adventists.

As the end of the first year approached, I talked with Pastor Joan about the pre-school leaving since our renovation plans would have to begin in the basement. The Sanctuary could not be done until the basement could be used as a temporary meeting area. I had been told the school area of their new church was going to be finished first. It was in the summer so I felt they would have time to make their plans for the move.

The weeks passed and when I would inquire about a possible date that they would leave, I was always told soon. But soon turned out to be later as the first year passed and we were into four months of the second year. Finally, they said that they were coming for their remaining belongings in the basement.

The Head Elder and I were there and when about half a dozen showed up, we tried to be friendly and make conversation. They were silent and cold. They left and the Head Elder and I started to clean up. We found the evidence of rodent infestation. Now every church is supposed to have a church mouse, but it looked like there were more mice than the whole congregation. We swept the dirt into piles and I remember saying to the Head Elder, "There's enough dirt here to grow tomatoes." But the Methodists had vacated the basement and we could begin our renovations of the basement. That part of the tension was behind us.

During that time one incident that perplexed us was the removal of the chain link fence behind the church.

Don and I were on our way to the supermarket when we passed the church. I could never pass the church without looking at it and what I saw shocked me. The chain link fence around the back of the church was gone. It wasn't difficult to figure out who took it.

When we got to the store my adrenaline was pumping.

"How could they do that?" I thought. If I had a nickname, it would be "Turtle" since I move so slowly. But not that day. Never before or since did I push my cart up and down the aisles so fast with my thoughts racing with frustration.

As soon as I got home, I called Pastor Curtis. He had the same reaction that I had. We had turned the other cheek to the previous concerns, like removing furniture from the church without our permission. They took the piano to use it at some outdoor event and it rained. They brought it back wet and didn't even try to dry the water off of it. They did not respect our Sabbath. We found a lady giving piano lessons in the Sanctuary after our service. We were not told of special events that they had planned. Don and I came one Friday to clean and found they were having a fair on the front lawn. They had emptied the Annex of the furniture; people were using the kitchen and bathrooms. Our church members were coming to help clean and decorate for a special Sabbath we had planned. I had to call them and postpone it until later in the day. They parked their cars all over the front lawn every Sunday even if it was raining. They put up a volleyball net on the front lawn and trampled the azaleas that Pastor Curtis and Evelyn had planted. The list could go on but the point was our patience was growing thin. Would we again turn the other cheek? Yes, we did. We filled the holes they left so no one would step in one and turn an ankle. I drove by their property and saw the fence rolled up, not in use.

We also had previously had a meeting with the trustees to present the \$10,000 we owed them. We felt this would show good faith on our part. Again the body language showed their dislike of us: crossed arms, slumped in their chairs, but this time not silent. They complained that we were taking away their space and refused to stay off the front lawn to park so they wouldn't have to walk to the church front door.

It was getting out of hand when Pastor Joan stopped it and told them, "Would you like to go somewhere else and pay \$800 a month to rent a place to worship?"

I tried to be friendly after the meeting but the tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Pastor Curtis said, "I've always said, I've never met a Methodist that I didn't like, but not anymore."

Pastor Joan called me a few days later and apologized and said she had called each one in and talked with them about their behavior.

I appreciated Pastor Joan and her good spirit. She had a dream also: a new church and a church school. She was very talented and organized. She was a mother to her church family. We stayed friends through the years of transition and are still friends today.

Every church has its problems with its members and we were not an exception. I saw what the tension was doing to our own members. We were disagreeing on the way to handle the constant problems popping up. We were going into our second year of sharing this facility and we still were not able to have control of our property. Our attendance was dropping. The rush of excitement in buying the church was wearing off. Then Pastor Curtis received a call from the Conference. The decision was made to redistrict the Athens and Madison churches. Auburn would replace Madison and Pastor Warren Ruf would be Auburn's pastor. Pastor Warren's schedule was to meet with Auburn at 9:30 and Athens at 11:00. This was not acceptable for us because we felt it would affect our growth if visitors came at 11:00 and found we were having Sabbath School. Pastor Curtis agreed to continue to come and preach two Sabbaths a month at 11:00 even though he had been released as our stipend Pastor by the Conference. Pastor Warren would come once a month at 11:00, so we had to have a speaker only once a month to fill the last Sabbath. Again, Pastor Curtis came to our rescue. His heart was in Auburn. We again started to pay him a small stipend for his travel expenses.

So the year ended with a new pastor and the basement ready to start renovation. This we hoped would help the sagging spirits of the members.

## THE UPS AND DOWNS OF 1995

The basement needed a total renovation. The old stonewalls needed to be covered with sheet rock. Electrical wires and copper gas lines were hanging from the ceiling. To get to the restrooms, both men and women had to go through the furnace room which had two dinosaur furnaces, duct work that made the ceiling low and a drain that tried to handle water from a leaking vent pipe. The rest rooms were best described as the worst of gas station rest rooms. We had a lot of work ahead of us.

All renovation can be worse than new construction as anyone knows who has ever done it. There had to be a different approach to the rest rooms. The City Inspector came and gave me some idea of what we would be allowed to do. I suggested that we go through the stonewall from the main room into a redesigned space. It would mean putting up a wall to close off the furnace room, gutting the restrooms and starting from scratch. This was new territory for us: we would be going through a rock wall. We met on Sunday morning with Pastor Warren and about three men.

It was hard, dirty work. It was February and the windows had to be open to handle all the rock dust, and it was cold. The men took turns using the jackhammer and taking the removed rock outside. They started in the middle removing one rock at a time. They found out there were three rock walls, one behind the other, totaling almost two feet. As they proceeded to the top, they removed a rock and found a huge I-beam was resting on the very wall we were removing. Someone got some post jacks and we held our breath. The I-beam was holding up the whole back of the Sanctuary upstairs. There was still enough rock to hold it up, but we had a problem we didn't foresee.

Pastor Warren took on the problem by contacting a structural engineer who designed the arch we would need, had it made, then Pastor Warren returned with two experienced ironworkers. They worked all day the following Sunday until 10:00 that night to install it. It had been a tough job and a disaster prevented. We were never billed for anything. I never asked Pastor Warren how that was accomplished.

It took several months to do the entire project. When finished, we had new electrical, plumbing, new walls, drop ceiling, flooring, a new kitchen with appliances and, of course, the redesigned bathrooms. New tables, chairs and decorating finished the project.

The next job on the list was the Annex. E. W. was finishing up his work and leaving us to go to another area. There still was a list of several names to follow up on. We decided to contact Amazing Facts for a worker whom we would hire for one year. We agreed on a salary and housing. We felt the Annex would be perfect for the housing. Don painted the dark walls white, carpet was laid on the tile floors, and it was furnished and decorated.

During this time, the Annex was off limits to both congregations as we worked.

Remember June 1<sup>st</sup>? It was a date to remember the good things. Our first time we met in the church, the date we were approved as a company, the date E.W. started his work in Auburn and Barrow County. There was one more June 1<sup>st</sup> that Don and I would remember. We were returning to Auburn after trying to locate a Bible student that E.W. asked us to visit. It started to rain heavily and

I asked Don to slow down. The memory of my previous accident in the rain left me nervous about driving in the rain. You know how husbands don't like wives to tell them how to drive. If it would have made a difference I don't know, but within a minute or so a car in the other lane lost control and crossed into our lane heading for a head-on collision.

When the car hit us, Don had already turned right to avoid the collision but not enough. The car hit the front on the driver's side and then slid along the full length of the car. By then we were out of control and we left the road and went down into a deep gully. We didn't roll; the car came to a stop because of an embankment where we sat wedged in. We only had enough room to open the passenger side door to barely squeeze out. The other car with a mother and children in it bounced back onto the other side of the road. Both cars were totaled. It was a bad accident, but we have a good God who looks out for us and takes care of us. No one was seriously hurt, just bruises and bumps that healed. Again our Lord had spared us for His reasons and purposes. I wondered if Satan was trying to send a message that he could have things happen on June 1<sup>st</sup>. If that was the case, the only message I got was how God was taking care of us.

We were on our third year of sharing the church with the Methodists. On October 8, 1995 they held their last service in the Auburn Seventh-day Adventist Church. I decided to attend by myself. I wanted closure on a long, difficult time. I had made friends with a few of the leaders and I wanted to wish them the best as they left. It was a solemn ceremony. I felt some of their sadness as they left a church that had served as a place of worship for more than one generation. To end the service, Pastor Joan led the congregation in a rite of passage that stated, "We now leave this holy place that God has ordained as the Auburn United Methodist Church." I realized that they felt the church was for them with God's blessings until they left it. Then they filed out with their crosses and artifacts that they used in their services. That part of our experience was over.

Pastor Warren had a membership renewal service two Sabbaths later. A letter to all members dated October 30, 1995 reads as follows:

"To the Members of the Auburn Church:

This month marks the first anniversary of my assignment to the Auburn Church and the second anniversary of company organization. It is a natural time to reflect on the events of the last year and consider a few of the many lessons learned.

The greatest planning, energy and work has been invested in the basement renovation project. The transformation is unbelievable. In my fifteen years of ministry, it is the nicest eating environment of any small church fellowship hall I've seen. If you haven't seen the finished project, you owe it to yourself to check out this lovely place for community events and fellowship luncheons. In addition to cosmetic changes we have also upgraded the electrical and water systems. The total cost of this "bargain basement" was just above \$10,000. Nothing like this comes without hard work, sacrifice, and dedication. The basement will be a testimony to our dedication for years to come.

The Annex also has received a total interior face-lift. The walls have been painted a lighter color and a rug has been laid in the main room. We hope that this will soon be the residence of the Amazing Facts Bible worker who is scheduled to come later this fall. Most recently the church roof has been re-shingled. The structure is sound underneath and the new roof should serve for twenty years.

The final Methodist worship service in the church was held on October 8, 1995. This brought to a virtual end several years of growing tensions, complaints and difficulties. I am very grateful for your patience and grace during unpleasant situations. You tried to overlook a lot of things that added up to frustration and hurt. A few of you actually had to back off for a while until your feelings could handle the situation. The saga of the church bell continues at the moment, but we are hopeful that by November 15, this, too, will be resolved. We have learned some strategies for achieving consensus in solving a problem and resolving conflict. We have learned not to condemn the entire group because of the actions of a few. We have learned that it is natural for people to remain emotionally attached to a building even when it has been sold to another group.

Due to personal and congregational issues some of the first generation of members are no longer attending. For some advancing age or moving away has naturally limited their activity level. For a few, the obligations of being a charter member were too stressful; the adventure and excitement of being part of something new was no longer fun. During this second year there was enough hardship to make people wonder if having a church in Auburn was so important after all. In reflection I believe our church came through a mini-crisis, and those people who endured the difficult times showed character and determination. They showed patience, endurance, perseverance, and Georgia Bulldog tenacity. Like members of Gideon's army, they survived the "cut," and demonstrated the character needed to be the core group of this church. We have not only survived the second year, but we have also gained members who have replaced those who have left. God has sent others to fill in the gaps. The "replacement players" have become an important part of the church, and they will shape the future. There's nothing like belonging to a small church. It will challenge your faith, get you off your duff, and force you to get involved or leave.

To those who have been away, why not return and try this again. The proverbial kitchen isn't as hot now and you might find the surroundings more comfortable.

In closing, I want to express thanks to several important people of the church. Without Pastor Curtis and Evelyn, we would not have been able to maintain our 11:00 worship hour. I appreciate his preaching ministry. Am also grateful to Phillip who has served admirably as Head Elder. He has a lot on his plate, but he has demonstrated a definite spiritual leadership gift. Don and Barbara Dietrich have worked so hard for the church. Their supervision of the projects has insured quality work for the best price. The work they have performed is known only in heaven.

Those who volunteer to work for the church are consciously choosing to deny themselves for a greater good. The church is the bride of Christ. Those who work to make the bride more beautiful are richly rewarded by the Groom. Christ notices everything we do to sustain and enhance the church, either as a building or in the larger sense as the people of God.

With warmest personal regards,

Warren Ruf

The Pastor refers to the "saga of the church bell." That is a story in its self that must be told.

## FOR WHOM WILL THE BELL TOLL?

It was a bright sunny Sabbath morning when I walked up to the front door of the church. I was met by a church member who said, “Look up there, Barbara.” As I looked up, I wasn’t quite sure what he wanted me to see. Then he said, “The church bell is gone.” Persons unknown had gotten on the roof, removed the latticework from the back of the bell tower and removed the bell.

After church I called Pastor Warren. He came immediately and as I sat in my living room, he paced the floor back and forth trying to decide what action to take. Should it be reported to the police? Pastor Warren decided to investigate first. It didn’t take much imagination to talk with Pastor Joan first. Yes, two men in their congregation took it down. They had a sentimental attachment to it since it was the original bell in the First Methodist Church 100 years before. When the old wooden church burned down and they built the rock church (probably so that wouldn’t ever happen again), the old bell was installed in the bell tower. They had no use for it in their new church; it had no bell tower, and the bell was not in working order at the rock church. When Pastor Joan was asked what they planned to do with it, she said that they would probably build a stone monument of some kind and place it in the churchyard. She said they were planning to replace the 100-year-old bell with another one for us. They brought in a bell that was a farm bell that you could purchase at the Feed Supply Store for \$75. I know because I checked it out. Our church members, most of them were ready to rumble (not literally), but this time we would not turn the other cheek.

Pastor Sherlock Holmes (aka Pastor Warren) went on a hunt for the bell. His detective work resulted in finding out the bell was in a barn owned by one of the trustees. He asked that the bell be returned, it would be appraised and if the Methodists would purchase a bell of equal value, we would consider the trade.

After many phone calls, and the weeks passed, Pastor Sherlock turned up the heat and said he would come personally to pick it up.

“No,” he was told, “we’ll bring it back.” Finally one Sabbath morning we found it on the church doorstep.

The bell was engraved with the date of 1892 and the foundry’s name. It was in good shape with no cracks or defects that we could see. We selected an appraiser from a company that had a history of more than one generation in the business. We had a church business meeting planned so those interested could be present when he came.

We were all guessing what it was worth. When he came and examined the bell, he said, “What you have here is a bell that was made by a foundry which has been out of business for many years. It patented the “yoke” that holds the bell and it is very rare so that makes the bell more valuable. It has a clear “G” tone and when cleaned up and polished, it could be heard for two miles around the church on a cold, crisp morning. I’d say its worth is \$5,000 and I’ll buy it from you if you want to sell it.”

That was exciting! But we had to do some thinking about it. Our decision was to offer the bell to the Methodists for \$5,000. If they wanted to replace it with another bell, they would have to install it and repair the damage they had done removing it. Pastor Warren wrote a letter stating the facts, with a copy of the appraisal and gave them 30 days to respond. That’s why he said in his letter

that on November 15<sup>th</sup> the bell issue would be resolved. We never heard from them, so then the decision had to be made: should we sell the bell or keep it. The \$5,000 was tempting since we were planning a total renovation but the decision was made that the bell was part of the heritage of the old church and should remain with it. The bell was restored to its original beauty and installed back in the bell tower where it rings today.

It has brought a lot of pleasure as we hear it tolling on Sabbath mornings as a call to worship our Heavenly Father on His holy seventh-day Sabbath.

## ANOTHER SET BACK

We were getting our spirit back. The fellowship hall was finished, the Annex furnished and ready for our Amazing Facts worker. The bell was ringing, and our hearts were singing.

Dan Bora from Amazing Facts arrived and was anxious to get started. He was to work fulltime with the Bible students that were the results of E.W.'s work. We were paying him a salary and providing housing and utilities. The finances were provided by our members. I am the treasurer and it always amazed me how the offerings came in to cover our evangelism, renovation expenses and our tithe per capita was at the top of the list for all the churches in the Conference. At the end of the month there was always a healthy balance, which gave us stability.

God had sent us people who were dedicated and giving. New people were coming that wanted to be part of the building up of the church. We were enjoying the blue skies until someone rained on our parade.

Dan (his wife Elena came later) was living in the Annex only a short time, two or three weeks at the most, when there was a knock at the door. It was two men from the City. They talked with Dan and told him that he could not live in the Annex. We could not understand why. Pastor Warren put on a new hat, that of a diplomat and went to see the City officials. The plan was to ask the City to consider that Dan would only be using the trailer for one year. It would still be used as a classroom on Sabbaths plus it would place a financial burden on the church if we had to move him out. That seemed reasonable to us. But not to the City. In fact Pastor Warren was shown minutes to a council meeting that stated that a variance was given to the Methodists to place the Annex on the property with the condition that as soon they left the property, it had to be moved off the property: something the Methodists failed to tell us (on purpose?). Used mobile homes are hard to sell because of strict ordinances in the city and county. At the time we were negotiating the sale of the property, we were told we had an option of not buying the Annex but "If the Methodist had to sell the trailer, they would only get salvage prices." We felt we needed the Annex since we were so limited in space. Also, the other trailer was used by the City as a library. I felt we were hearing voices of Methodists past.

Pastor Warren contacted the Conference and after a lot of thoughtful prayer, Pastor Warren returned to the City and presented a letter stating we would move Dan out of the Annex, but we were asking for the same considerations they had given the Methodists and allow us to leave the trailers there until we could build an addition for our Sabbath School classes. They agreed and the issue was resolved for the time being. A member of the council told one of our members that they were sorry for the action but someone had made a complaint and they had no choice but to follow through.

We rented an apartment for Dan and then put it all behind us.

One last thing I feel that I should say about the Methodists is that there were many in their congregation who fought selling the church to Seventh-day Adventists. They believed we were a cult. Don experienced this first hand when he was confronted with an angry Methodist one day when we were at the church. She let loose with her frustrations by yelling at Don "You're nothing but a cult!"

He said, “No, we aren’t.”

She yelled back, “Yes, you are. I read it in a book.”

This was the underlying cause for all the tensions we felt. Again Satan tried to prevent us from having a church in Auburn. But if you choose to battle with God you will always end up the loser. Satan loves to dissect a church over any issue that serves his purpose. I’ve seen this happen in Adventist churches also.

The Methodists had many problems with their building project. Materials were stolen. They fired the builder and architect; members defected and there wasn’t the money to pay Pastor Joan her salary. The church was placed in the hands of their conference. Pastor Joan told me all of this when she moved away to accept another position. We can all learn something from this. When united we stand in the Lord, then Satan cannot divide us. There were times ahead of us when Satan tried to divide us but the miracles that came always pulled us together and helped us to remember why we were a part of the raising up of a church in Auburn, Georgia.

And so, in 1996, we had a big year ahead of us. The Sanctuary was to be renovated and a lot of evangelism work was planned. God had never failed us in the past and He would provide for us what was needed to continue our plans.

We planned evangelistic meetings in the fall so we needed to get started on our Sanctuary renovation as soon as possible. God had that all arranged. His plan for His church was more than we could ever imagine.

## SENT OF GOD

A church member hired an interior decorator to come and give us ideas of what to do with the Sanctuary. The decorator made her presentation with drawings at a church business meeting. She suggested gray walls and purple carpet. She loved the gray stone interior walls. She had drawn three options for us to consider. We kicked that around for a while.

Then another church member had a friend who was good at wood working, so he came and made his suggestions and we kicked that around for a while. It seemed we could not get a consensus.

Then God sent us His interior decorator, a man named Vasile Neldelco (nicknamed Lica). Lica came from the Romanian church one Sabbath, to see Dan Bora. He told someone "I can make your church beautiful." I was told about it and met with Lica a few nights later. He showed me pictures of his work. He was a gifted artist and had done repair work in cathedrals after the earthquakes in California. He had many years of experience in decorative ornamental plaster.

As he showed me the pictures of his work, "I thought the man does such beautiful work, we could never afford him." I felt embarrassed that he had given me some of his time.

So, I was honest with him and told him, "I don't think we can afford you because I know the kind of work you do is expensive."

He asked, "How much money do you have?"

"Eight thousand dollars, but we have to buy carpet also."

"Alright," he said, "I'll do it for six thousand."

I had been checking with plasterers and getting prices. I even found the man that had done the original plastering forty years before. The best price I got was \$4,000 and that was for repair work only.

I was convinced Lica was our man. Again the church had to see his presentation. We had a very good turnout. He showed a video of some of his work and then we all went upstairs to the Sanctuary. The people dispersed and started making suggestions.

"I think this—no, I think that---"

Again, we couldn't come to a consensus. Lica already had in his mind what he wanted to do, but he was patient until some started asking questions that bordered on rudeness and then one member questioned Lica's integrity.

Whoever said, "The more the merrier," was not applying that to a church business meeting of people trying to decide the decorating of a church.

I saw Lica say something in Romanian to Dan. I knew he was upset. He then walked out.

I called him when I got home and I remember exactly what he said, "Barbara, what is wrong with these people? Don't they know how many thousands of dollars the work I would do would really cost?"

He was upset, no doubt about it. He was offering us a gift and we were not accepting it with gratitude and were closing our eyes to the blessing that God had sent us. I apologized and made all the excuses I could think of for the behavior of some of our members. I also told him of the confidences I had in him and how I believed God had sent him to us. After a while, the conversation settled down and he agreed to meet with Pastor Warren who had not been at the meeting.

I then called Pastor Warren.

“We almost lost Lica,” I said and told him about what had happened and the subsequent phone call.

Pastor Warren called me a few days later and said, “The decision has been made. Let Lica do his work, and then he said, “and you will be the only one who will work with Lica.”

I didn’t ask how that decision was made; I hadn’t even been asked if I would do it. But, of course, Pastor Warren knew I wouldn’t even have to think about it; I would do it.

So, Lica and I met at the church and he told me of his plan: pillars, capitals, panels framed with molding, carved flowers above the windows and archway, etc. He told me he had seen it all in a dream.

I asked him if he wanted an advance for materials and his answer was, “Wait until I’m finished and if you don’t like it, you don’t have to pay me.”

The entire Sanctuary had to be emptied and the old carpet pulled up so Lica could put up his scaffolds. We had our Sabbath School and worship in the new fellowship hall. We worked on restoring the old solid oak furniture and pews. It was a lot of work.

Lica had told me that he had plans to go back to Romania for a month in the near future. We had our evangelistic meetings scheduled so there was some time pressure on us.

His work was awesome but we had not planned to do the ceiling. The electricians were finished with the new wiring and new chandeliers had been hung.

That’s another story that I’ll mention just briefly. When I started to get estimates for new wiring, they were estimated at \$5,000 or more (without fixtures since a church member found them at 50% off), but the Lord led me to a man who had been in the business for many years and had good references. When he came, he told me how he had done his church and witnessed how he believed in the Lord. He gave us a price of \$1,800 and did more than was asked to do. This seemed to be the case many times as I searched for subcontractors to do our work. The Lord saved us money and arranged the opportunity to witness.

Now back to the ceiling. It had cellulose squares that were as old as the church. Lica wanted to do the ceiling. We had not agreed on that previously. It was evident that it did not complement the walls. I had brought in sheet rock men who said the weight would be too much for the studs. We felt we would have to live with it.

Lica said, “I can fix the ceiling. I can do it.”

“O.K.” I said, “I’ll see what the others say.”

Lica took down the scaffolds and left. You know how long it takes to go through the process of making decisions. When we decided, “Yes, let him do it,” I called Lica. It was a Thursday night.

“Lica, we want you to do the ceiling.”

“Oh, Barbara, I’m leaving tomorrow to go to Romania. I’ll be gone a month.”

Because of our scheduled meetings, a month would be too late. It was now or never.

He said, “O.K. I cancel my ticket and come back.”

I know that was a sacrifice.

He had planned his trip months in advance. It had been years since he had been back to Romania. He worked sometimes all night. He finished the ceilings with panels and moldings and he did a fantastic job. He left up the scaffolds to be used by the painters he was sending. The paint had been purchased; he had picked out the colors he wanted and instructed me how he wanted it done. Then he flew off to Romania. Who would do the painting had never been discussed. It was another gift to the church when five men showed up to start the painting. I had all the cans marked as to where they should be used. They wanted to just spray the ceiling since the bordered panels were a lot of handwork. I told them what Lica had said and they said, “No, we will just spray it white.”

Who was I to argue with five men, so I let it go. I’ll tell you later what happened when Lica came back.

There is another story that has to be told. Again, God was leading in a remarkable way.

## AN INCH TO SPARE

We only had a month to finish all the renovation. We had finally made a choice on the carpet, after several months and several samples. The carpet would be coming from Dalton, Georgia, the carpet capital of the world, and the carpet layers would come with it. It looked like we were going to meet the deadline. That was until a set back and a very important decision was made.

Jim Faulk was one of our new members who had come to us because of reading his Bible through twice and was convinced the seventh day was the Sabbath. He left his Sunday keeping church and went looking for a church that worshiped on the seventh day. He drove past our church, saw our sign, called me since the church had no phone yet and I was taking all calls for the church. We talked for two hours and he and his wife, Beryl, were in church the next Sabbath. We were also seeing other people coming to church, sent of God because we had made no contact with them. We started to have requests for baptism. We had no baptistery, so we had to go to another church or use a swimming pool. Jim kept saying, "We need a baptistery. Our members should be baptized here in our church."

We agreed, but how could it be done? The Sanctuary was over a crawl space that had a dirt floor. Without going into the details of the construction of the church, we were scratching our heads as to how we could put in a baptistery. Some said it couldn't be done. But when there is a will, there is a way and Jim had the will. If we were going to do it, it had to be done right away before the carpet could be laid. Time was passing. Jim said he could do it: cut a hole in the floor, put in new footers and pillars for strength, drop the tank and cover it with a raised platform that could be lifted. It would also mean enlarging the platform area to accommodate the spaced needed to do all this.

The decision was made to do it. But first, I had to find a tank. Everywhere I called I was told it would take two to four weeks to get one shipped to us. That would not be enough time. Would we have to give it up? No, if you keep looking, God will direct you. After many days of calling, even out of state, I found a company right in Chattanooga who had one tank that was 8 feet. We had measured between the two pillars on the platform. It was just a few inches over 8 feet. If we wanted it, we could pick it up with every thing we needed the next day.

Jim got busy and never stopped except to eat and sleep as he got everything ready for the tank. Pastor Warren had taken his pickup to Chattanooga to get the tank. Then the time came to see if Jim's work would fit the tank. About four men came to carry the tank in. When they got to the double doors they found they had to remove the doors to get it in the foyer. Again they then had to try to turn it to pass through the arch into the Sanctuary. They tried this way and that as I stood and watched. In our haste to get a tank, we hadn't considered how to get it in the church. Finally, as I stood by the arch, they cleared it with an inch to spare. Any tank longer or wider would have meant cutting into rock wall. The tank fit into the floor perfectly and we praised God. Again, "only God could have arranged it."

Since then we have had probably fifty people go down in the water to be born again in their salvation through Christ.

One of the baptisms I will never forget is when Ken Bush was baptized. His wife Shirley and the children were still faithful but Ken had drifted away. Elderly and because of several strokes, he was confined to a wheel chair. He desired to be re-baptized. His son Allen lifted him out of the wheel chair and carried him down in the water and carried him back up. Ken came to church as often as he could, always attended by his son, until he passed away. What an example of the devotion of the son for his father and the father's faith to be baptized in his disabled condition. A beautiful ceremony and all because God wanted us to be a complete church able to baptize so He sent us Jim Faulk who persisted and said, "I can do it," and did—with God's direction and only an inch to spare.

## THE PRESSURE IS ON

When the carpet was laid, the pews and furniture brought back into the Sanctuary we'd be ready for the upcoming meetings. The time frame was tight but we could make it if everything went on schedule, which it didn't.

The day the carpet layers were to come with the carpet was a set back. Pastor Warren and I were at the church waiting but they didn't show up. I called later and found out their van had broken down. It was re-scheduled and the second time they made it, but when they backed the roll of carpet off the van onto the parking pavement, they found out that the carpet was defective. Pastor Warren went to the city and got help with a bobcat to load it back into the van and they returned it to the factory. The factory told me that they had corrected the order; the carpet was o.k. (I had to believe them; I had no choice.) Then another problem developed. The carpet layers gave up on me and wouldn't come back, so I had to find local carpet layers quickly, have the carpet shipped to them, and then pray a lot. It worked out that the carpet would be laid on the Thursday before the meetings were to begin on Saturday night. It also meant that Thursday evening we would have to hope the carpet layers were finished and all the furniture could be brought back in. We couldn't do it Friday evening because of the Sabbath.

At the beginning of the week I got a call from Danny Sweeney. He had a heating and air conditioning business.

"Barbara, I'm at a slow time and I want to keep my men busy. I would like to give the church two new furnaces and fittings if you would be willing to pay the men their labor."

What an opportunity! The old original dinosaurs were noisy and the fans clanged and whistled when they were on. We, of course, said yes. Another gift from God. Now there were men in the downstairs putting in new furnaces at the same time we were working upstairs, with only a few days to do it all.

It was Wednesday night. Lica had come back from Romania. He wasn't pleased that the men had not painted the ceiling panels. Don was painting the side rooms as Lica and I sat on the paint buckets. He was determined to paint those panels. It was late, Don was tired but when I told him what Lica wanted to do, Don consented to help. Again, it was a now or never situation. Don and Lica climbed up and painted the panels.

The next morning the carpet came. Warren and I were there early. When I told Pastor Warren about the ceiling, we could see places where the paint had not covered the white, so Warren got the 10 foot ladder and started painting the spots missed, trying to get done before the first piece of carpet came in. It was a long day. About twenty people showed up that evening to carry the pews upstairs and set everything in place. I had been at the church for twelve hours. When I got home, I felt exhausted but satisfied that a good work had been done. We were ready for the Lord to send the people. The people did come and some became members. The Sanctuary was beautiful and the Lord's presence filled His House. I could feel in my heart that the Lord was saying, "Well done."

It was well with my soul.

## THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FULL

As we worked to make God's House a place of worship for His glory, we also were working to fill it. When we were paying for all the renovations, we were also paying Dan's expenses and the costs of the evangelistic expenses all at the same time. This could be a heavy financial burden for a small company but like the widow's oil and meal, we never ran out of funds and we had no debts except our mortgage. It was another miracle from God that He put it in the hearts of the people to give so generously.

There are many stories of how God sent us people who came to us through no personal contact. The Holy Spirit was doing His work.

The Sweeny family came to us through unusual circumstances. They were shopping in a store and Jeanie, Danny's wife, saw a small piece of folded paper on the floor and picked it up. Now you know that's unusual. When she unfolded it, she saw it was a check made out to a Seventh-day Adventist Church for tithe. She gave it to the cashier and when they got in the car, Danny and Jeanie made the decision that the Lord was speaking to them to pay tithe. They drove by our church, called my number and asked if we would accept their tithe.

Jeanie Sweeney arrived the next day with a sizable tithe check and told me their story. Someone in Texas had given them a Great Controversy. It was packed away and when they moved to Georgia, Danny was unpacking a box and found the book, read it, and was convinced of its truth. For some time they had been keeping the Sabbath as a family in their home. Danny was also witnessing to friends and neighbors of his new found truth.

I gladly accepted the check and Jeanie and the children started attending church every Sabbath.

As I mentioned earlier, Danny was in the heating and air conditioning business. One Sabbath the air conditioning wasn't working, so I asked Danny if he would service it. While there, he looked over the whole system for the church. He felt we didn't have sufficient units to service our Sanctuary, so he donated and installed a complete three-ton heat pump system in the attic to supplement our heat and air. You know the rest of the story: how he donated two new furnaces to replace our old 40-year-old dinosaurs. God sent a family with a need for a family church and they gave us the generous gift of two new furnaces and a total heat pump system. That's evangelism and renovation as a package that only God could have put together.

Wayne and Helen Cagle came from another church to help us with our evangelism. Wayne gave Revelation Seminars that resulted in baptisms. After two years they moved on to help raise up a church in another area.

That was the way it was. Strangers sent of God who would come through our doors and stayed and become members. Some were dedicated Seventh-day Adventists workers and some were looking for God. In all we were starting to fill up the pews and we know the reason why: God wanted a church in Auburn.

## MOVING ON

In 1997 Pastor Warren Ruf accepted a call to another conference and Dan and Elena Bora also left to a new work in Oklahoma. With the major renovations done from the new roof, electrical, plumbing, walls, flooring, baptistery and cosmetic changes, it was pretty quiet with the building program. If Pastor Warren had not left, our next project was to start the plan for a new addition to the church so we would be able to pull off the trailers. The old City Library trailer was beyond repair so the library moved to another location and we gave the old trailer to the fire department to use for their training program.

In February 1998 our new Pastor Mike Pethel arrived. Our first business with the Pastor was to bring him up-to-date about the City wanting us to remove the Annex. The Church Board voted to start with the project so I was appointed to do the research as to our possibilities.

I knew the first step was to get approval for a new septic system from the County. The tanks were beside the church but the drain field was behind the church. We wanted to build out the back since we had very little land beside the church to build and still meet the set back requirements. I knew every thing depended on getting approval for a new drain field.

I called the county inspector to meet with me at the church. I had been told he was a difficult person to deal with, to put it kindly. When he arrived I met him at the downstairs back door. He stood there with some papers in his hand and said, "I found the original plat of the tank and drain field and you don't have enough land here to put in a new drain field. You should sell the church and go somewhere else."

He sounded so definite or should I say, blunt.

"Oh, no," I said, "we can't do that."

"Well you can't build over a drain field," he said.

As if I didn't already know that.

"Would you please come in and talk with me?" I asked.

"I have another appointment," he replied.

"Please, just give me a little of your time," I again asked.

He reluctantly came in and sat down at the table with me. I started telling him about our struggle to buy the church, the City involvement, etc. How we had worked so hard to renovate the building but we had to have classrooms. He was restless and kept saying, "I have another appointment."

Then I said, "Come upstairs. I want to show you something."

When we got upstairs, he sat down in a pew and was quiet. I really think he felt the presence of God as he looked around at our beautiful Sanctuary.

"You see why we can't leave the church. There has to be a way we can build an addition for our classrooms," I said.

Then his mood completely changed. He started making suggestions of how we might try to build on the side of the church. He went outside and looked around. We talked some more. He spent an hour and a half with me and left saying if I could find a contractor who could put in the septic system with a pumping station at the side of the church and pump the sewage to the front of the church and put the drain field there, he'd approve it.

"Bring the papers to me," he said as he smiling and jokingly left the church. Another miracle.

The new septic system was installed in June. Again there was enough money to pay cash. The oil and meal still had not run out. The front lawn had to be sacrificed. We had worked for over two years to landscape and have a beautiful lawn. People in the community would compliment us for the change in the landscaping and they now asked me, "What are you doing to your church?"

"We're building a new addition and making our front lawn look like a bombed war zone is the first step," I would reply.

There would be a lot more steps ahead of us. If the Lord had allowed me to see into the future what was ahead of us in building an addition, I might have been overwhelmed, but we took one step at a time or as they say, "one day at a time." The big one was still ahead of us.

## WAIT ON THE LORD

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Eccl. 3:1 KJV.

God is in control of the time that is given to all of His creation. We must believe as David said in Ps. 31:15 KJV “My times are in thy hands.” If we doubt God’s timing it can cause us to move ahead without His leading. It takes patience and perseverance to allow God to work out His plan for us and to His glory.

Don & I and my brother Walter Zornes were baptized on September 27, 1952, in Cleveland, Ohio, the same time that the Rock Church was being built in Auburn, Georgia.

The three of us were involved in the bookwork (Literature Evangelists). Don and Walter became Publishing Secretary Associates. The work took us in different directions but God’s plan for the Auburn Church would bring us together in one purpose.

The story of Walter and his wife Frances, and God’s timing to benefit the Auburn Church should be told.

Walter and Frances bought a property in Delaware that had a house on it and three mobile homes, plus 25 acres of land. Their plan was to develop a mobile home park.

Highland View Academy needed funds and the Zornes who have always had a burden for Christian education were impressed to give the Chesapeake Conference their property. Because of a problem with a tax liability, they were not able to transfer the property.

Don and I arrived in 1967 to help with the management and construction of more spots (rental lots). We were there for six years before we moved to Auburn, Georgia in 1973. We bought a house two blocks from what would someday be the Auburn Church.

In 1978 the Zornes sold the mobile home park as a lease purchase to a man who later developed serious financial problems. He thoughtfully signed the park back to the Zornes.

More time passed as they continued to enlarge the park. Then they decided to try and sell the business again. Four investors and the Zornes met with the attorney for the closing. The paperwork had not been completed so the apologetic attorney asked if they would return the next week. During that week one of the investors became ill with a serious health problem and decided to back out, so again the park was still in the Zornes’ hands. It was hard, demanding work. The development of the park had grown even more.

Then a large corporation offered a deal with the Zornes for the park and an adjoining 30 acres, again on a three-year lease purchase agreement.

“This is it,” they thought. “Surely this is the one.”

The corporation had plans to develop the 30 acres into lots and sell manufactured housing.

The corporation invested thousands of dollars in surveying and drawing plans for the expansion. The Zornes were now comfortable that they could retire. But it was not to be. Sixteen months later the corporation had financial problems and asked the Zornes if they could be released from the contract and they were willing to forfeit all money that they had paid to the Zornes. The Zornes agreed and again the property was given back to them.

The Zornes' accountant advised them that because of their advancing age, they should sell the park on a cash basis. That would be the only way they would be completely free of the property. To find a cash buyer would not be an easy thing. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. They continued to hope for a buyer.

Meanwhile Pastor Mike and the Conference had set the date of August 1, 1998 as the date when the Auburn Company would be organized as a church. At this same time, the Zornes were praying for a buyer and made a commitment to the Lord that if He would send them a cash buyer, they would pay off the mortgage of the Auburn Church.

It was in the spring that the Zornes called and told me that they had made contact with a buyer who was interested in buying the park and he wanted it to be a cash sale. This seemed to be an answer to prayer but they were cautious about getting too excited, not because of a lack of faith, but because of their previous experiences. Until the money was in their hand, they needed to be patient. And so they waited. There was a lot of legal work that required a team of lawyers both for the buyer and the seller.

After many years of hard work, they had a mobile home park highly rated. They had paved and lighted streets, sewer and water systems and over 100 lots. It was like a self-contained city.

As time passed, it seemed like it was taking forever. The buyer could back out at anytime. They wanted to be able to give the gift they had committed to the Lord but didn't want to be premature in telling anyone, so they waited and I waited also. Again, I was told not to tell anyone. As August 1<sup>st</sup> approached, it looked like the legal work would be done in time for the church to be organized and the mortgage burned at the same time. I then had to tell the Pastor and he in turn prepared the Conference President who was coming that there was a possibility of a payoff of the mortgage. I had strict orders not to tell anyone else. If it happened, it would be a surprise. Walter and Francis and I were burning up the phone lines as August 1<sup>st</sup> got closer. Then on Wednesday, they signed the papers and Thursday their gift was deposited in our account. On Friday before our special Sabbath celebration on August 1<sup>st</sup>, I got the cashier's check to pay off the church's mortgage.

On Sabbath morning Elder Larry Evans, the Conference President, Elder Roy Caughorn, the Pastor and I met and decided how to handle the presentation. Don and I would be called up after everything on the program was finished.

The church pews were full. Friends and members from other churches came. None knew of what a special day it would be for Auburn. The witnesses of what happened that Sabbath would make an impression on their memories that would be hard to forget.

After the sermon and then the signing of the Charter members, before the closing song, Don and I were asked to come to the platform. Walter and Francis had written a letter to the church and briefly summarized the history of their partnerships with God as owners of the mobile home park. When I got to the last paragraph and read, "Therefore, we are sending \$50,000 to pay off the mortgage." I held up the check and there was pandemonium as people jumped to their feet, some clapped, some cried, people were hugging and laughing. There was so much noise I couldn't finish the letter and identify who sent it. But that didn't matter. The Zornes were not people who sought recognition. We then burned the mortgage and became one of the few companies (if any) that purchased a church, renovated it, and paid off the mortgage at the time we were organized as a church.

It had taken 33 years of hard work and patience to wait for the Lord to work out His timetable. Only a cash sale could provide the \$50,000 we needed to pay off the mortgage and it came only two days before our High Sabbath.

Why God would honor us so makes me feel so humble. I know of many church companies who have to first meet in homes and storefronts and sometimes it takes them years before they can have a church of their own.

To think that God had a plan that started 33 years before with Walter and Francis and their business. How Don and I moved to Auburn and so many others that God timed their lives to be a part of His plan for a church in Auburn is awesome.

We were so blessed of God that we began to feel that Auburn was a miracle church, a miracle church indeed and God still had more miracles planned for us as we looked to the future to build the addition and finish our master plan for God's church planted in Auburn, Georgia.

# **GOD OUR ARCHITECT AND BUILDER**

**1999 - 2001**

**THE MASTER'S PLAN**

**I THINK I CAN**

**GOD, OUR BUILDER**

**GOD MOVE THE HEART**

**THE WITNESSING**

**THE VIEW FROM THE TOP**

**THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD**

## THE MASTER'S PLAN

We had a lot behind us for which to be grateful for. Ahead of us was the building of the addition and it would prove to be the most difficult project of our master plan. A Building Committee has one goal: to get quality work done at the best price. Decisions, decisions, and more decisions had to be made and still the best-laid plans many times turn into financial and emotional disasters.

I am a very cautious person by nature and I have to research everything before I can move to a decision. I talked with anyone who would give me time so I could pick their brains for good advice in how to proceed with our construction. It wasn't going to be easy. A major concern was the limited land we had. With the church sitting on a half acre, I was told it couldn't be done, but I had heard that before and I couldn't believe that God who had brought us so far would now leave us without a way to finish what we felt was His plan for Auburn.

One day I got a call from the City and I was told that they had decided to give us the use of the easement of 20 feet behind the church. This was good news because it gave us more room to build. Now with the setbacks established, we could proceed with a plan. The Pastor and the Building Committee had gone over several different plans for possibilities of what we could build to meet our needs. I had a concern about handicap codes and wanted to be sure our plan would meet those requirements.

One of my favorite texts is: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and He shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3:5,6 KJV. The Lord would direct our path in an unusual way.

We were holding evangelistic meetings and an old friend from another church whom I hadn't seen in many years came to some of the meetings. I knew he was a Building Inspector for Gwinnett County, which bordered on Barrow County. I called him and told him of my concern for the handicap codes, etc. and he suggested, "Call up the Chief Fire Marshall for Gwinnett County. His name is Rufus Tipton. Tell him you talked with me. He's a good guy and I'm sure he can answer your questions." The call was made and Don and I were to meet with him in a couple of days. I had several drawings that I had done over many weeks. I planned to show them to the fire marshal and see what he would say.

I was doing some housework with no thoughts of the church when suddenly into my mind I saw a plan that was different from anything I had previously drawn. It was so clear and detailed that it was like a blueprint in my mind. I was anxious to draw it up and did so that evening.

When we walked into the Fire Marshall's office and told him why we were there, I handed him the several plans I had drawn. Don and I sat there and waited as he went through the plans saying, "This one won't work," and then another, "This one won't work," and so on until he picked up one drawing and said, "Now this one will work." You guessed it. It was the plan I saw in my mind.

"Is it drawn to scale?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

He got out a ruler and measured the feet from the stairwell exit to the church back door.

“Yep,” he said, “it’ll work. It will meet codes.” Everything else drawn would not. He than wrote on the plan the measurements for width of the stairs, halls, door opening, handicap stalls, also noted handrails, firewalls for the stairwell, fire doors, etc. Then he asked who the Building Inspector for the City of Auburn was.

“Wayne Holcombe,” I answered.

“I know Wayne. I’ll give him a call,” he said.

“Wayne. Hi, Buddy. This is Rufus. Listen, I have Mr. and Mrs. Dietrich here in my office with a drawing for an addition they want to build onto their church. I have gone over everything with them and would you back me up on this plan? Thanks, Buddy.”

The City Inspector had agreed. God had directed our path, indeed!

I was convinced because of God’s direction that we had our plan but I knew that others would have to see it the same way. There was one more step before we could bring our plans before the church. We had to work out the finances.

## I THINK I CAN

The Pastor made an appointment with Darrel Starkey from the Conference to meet with the Pastor and myself. I showed him our proposed plan. We had picked a figure out of the air and were impressed we could build the addition for \$150,000. I had no idea of the current construction costs. It had been years since I had been involved in construction. The Conference agreed to give us a construction loan for \$150,000. Now we were ready to take our plans to the church.

The church business meeting was well attended. The plan and finances were presented. There was concern that one, we were building too big; two, we were too small a group to handle debt; and three; the \$150,000 would not be enough to do the construction. "It can't be done for that," was the thought.

Diana Shelburne told us of our needs for Sabbath School rooms. We had to look ahead because it wasn't likely that if we needed more space in the future that we'd build another addition. The Lord's plan showed that if we added 16 feet on the length of the plan we would double the number of classrooms to six. It would be a good investment in the future for our church needs.

The concerns where that we would have a large debt that we couldn't pay was realistic, but in faith we had bought the church, renovated it and we were debt free.

To think that we could build 5,200 square feet for \$150,000 seemed impossible to some, but that's what makes miracles for faith building. Without going into details, which I plan to tell you later, I will tell you now that the Lord did provide miracles and we built a 5,200 square foot addition and borrowed only \$115,000 from the Conference.

I finished the presentations with the familiar children's story of the little engine that was not given recognition because of it's size and determined to make it to the top by saying, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." We ended the meeting by approving the plan and to proceed.

"I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." I was confident we'd make it to the top.

You know what it means when you go to buy a new car and see the price. We call it sticker shock. I don't know what you would call an architect fee for they don't wear stickers but the shock is the same. To get the permit to build we had to supply blue prints. We had thought by designing the plan we could get a student to do the blue prints and it would be less expensive. The City said no. The blue prints had to be stamped by a licensed architect. I got busy following leads to find a way to save on the architect fees. I found a retired Seventh-day Adventist architect who wanted to help us but then I found out he had to be licensed in Georgia so that was a dead end. I called the Conference to see if they knew anyone who might help us. A few hours later I got a call from George Mercurius. We talked and he offered to help us. We met and he gave us a price several thousand less than two other estimates that we had gotten.

We now had the green light from the church and George Mercurius was getting the blue prints done. So the next step was to get approval from the Zoning Board. Our parking would be a challenge. I talked with members of the Zoning Board and got the

criteria for approval. I then called the City Inspector and he, the Pastor and I measured our lot to see how many parking spaces we could squeeze in. It looked pretty good since we had City parking on the two street sides of the church. When the Annex was pulled off and with the 20 feet easement in the back of the church, we would have parking all around the church.

I got a call from George Mercurius.

“Sister Dietrich, I have talked with the City Inspector and he says we have to have a site plan done. I’ll need \$3,000 more to cover the expense.”

“I don’t know why,” I answered. “I have a copy of the survey done for the Methodists. I’ll talk with the Inspector.”

A call to the Inspector cleared up a misunderstanding.

“I only need a drawing of the site showing the church, the addition and all the parking spots. It should show all measurements of the whole site. I don’t care who draws it,” he said.

So back to the church I went. With help we measured everything and I drew the site plan to scale. When I took it to the Inspector, he accepted it. When the blue prints were finished, I took them to the City and then the words I had waited so long to hear:

“You can have your building permit.”

It was July 15, 1999. It had been 16 months of meetings, phone calls, paper work and never knowing what was coming up next. With the Building Permit in hand, I got into the car where Don was waiting, sat down and with a deep sense of gratitude, I said,

“Thank you, Lord.”

## GOD, OUR BUILDER

I started to get estimates from builders. I had asked for cost/plus estimates. When the Building Committee went over the estimates, we realized if we supervised the construction ourselves, we could save thousands of dollars. I also felt very strongly that if we were in control of the sub contractors and made the decisions, it would allow the Lord to send us more miracles. We would restrict his interventions if we were locked into a contract with a builder. But there was one problem. Who would do the supervising? Pastor Mike was tied up with building his new home and acting as his own builder.

Jim Faulk was planning to start building his new home, but he was waiting for financing. He agreed to give us some of his time until then. Don and I were the only ones available during the day since we were retired and lived so close to the church. It seemed only logical that the majority of the supervision would fall on us. I would supervise the first floor fellowship hall and Jim would frame and dry in the second floor (Sanctuary level) and also do the electrical and plumbing mechanics. Then I would finish up. It sounded like a good plan. We stepped out in faith to meet the challenge and the unknown future.

There were more meetings and more decisions that had to be made before we broke ground the last of October. Pastor Mike had arranged for the company that did his footers on his house to do the same for the church. When I went to the church I could see that what they were doing would not meet the code the Inspector had told me would be necessary. The work was stopped until the next day when the Inspector could be there. He corrected their work so it would be acceptable. Then I began to get a gut feeling about the location of the restrooms. The slab was to be poured and the plumbing had to be stubbed in first. I had asked more than one person if the location of the restrooms on the far end of the room would be close enough to the septic tanks which were on the other side of the church which would make it about 75 feet away. I was told that there was enough fall to the tanks so it was no problem. But my cautious instincts were sending me a message. I had to check it out. I was the only one there when the tanks went in and I remembered that they seemed to be close to the surface. I called the company who had installed the system and was told that they were 12" from the surface. Next I called plumbers and was able to get one the next day. Two men arrived who checked it out and bottom line, there was not enough fall to flow to the tanks without installing a pump which is costly and troublesome.

Pastor Mike came and we decided we had to change the plan. I drew up a new plan and put the restrooms on the side where the tanks were. The Inspector came and approved the change and the plumbers stubbed in the drains. The new plan actually was better than the first. The slab and footers were poured and we were o.k. God had intervened, and it wasn't the first nor the last time He would.

## GOD MOVES THE HEARTS

In Ezra 1:5 NIV "...everyone whose heart God had moved - prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem."

I saw how God moves hearts when we were doing our construction. It is interesting how God sent us Seventh-day Adventists from other churches that were not our members. To mention a few who did a special work willingly out of a desire to glorify God in his house:

Lica, my good friend, had done our Sanctuary. When the new fellowship hall walls were up and the addition dried in, I called Lica.

"Hi, Lica, we have a job for you if you are interested." After I told him what the project was, he said, "I'll meet you at the church."

It was getting dark, and as I sat on a five-gallon paint can, Lica walked around, deep in thought. That artistic mind of his was working. Then he started to tell me of his plan—panels, pillars, capitals, and a large mural. Our new fellowship hall would be a replica of the Sanctuary. He would also do the outside of the addition in stucco. Again he would do it for us at a reduced price. When we got into the old church and started to make a new foyer, he came, did the walls and also finished the handicap ramp. He refused to be paid.

**He was a man whose heart had been moved by God.**

Jeff Roth. We wanted a state of the art PA system. I remembered a young man who visited our church that was an electrical engineer. I called him and he came and took on the job. He spent endless hours sometimes working until 1:00 a.m. pulling wires and doing everything that I don't understand a thing about, but the end result was closed circuit TV in every classroom, mother's room and fellowship hall. He also wired for computers, phones, and etc. He asked for no pay. We only had to pay for materials, which he carefully got for us at a good price. **He was a man whose heart had been moved by God.**

Bob Smith. Bob and his wife, Carol, visited our church one Sabbath. Bob called me after Sabbath.

"What plans do you have for your restrooms?"

I told him what we were considering.

"I would like to help," he said.

We agreed to meet at the church on Sunday morning. We had four restrooms, two upstairs and two downstairs.

"I'm ordering the counter sink tops," I told him.

"What about vanities?" he asked.

"I don't know. We thought maybe we wouldn't put them in," I answered.

"I'll build them for you and install them, that's what I'll do."

"How much would be your fee?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said.

Bob also laid ceramic tile in both foyers and the walkway in the fellowship hall to the kitchen, did outside grading, did our sidewalks and other concrete work. **He was a man whose heart had been moved by God.**

God moved many hearts to work in Auburn from the painting, decorating, landscaping, setting up a library and a Pastor's office, to work bees to haul off the trash and clean up.

Donations came freely. We made no calls for pledges or wrote letters for donations. There was a steady commitment of giving on a weekly and monthly basis. We were not a congregation of wealthy people as some may think because of the Zornes gift to pay off the mortgage. The Zornes turned their benevolence to another church in Delaware that needed renovation and the offerings came to us as **God moved the hearts of the people.**

## THE WITNESSING

While the construction was going on, there were many opportunities to witness.

He came to the door of the church. He was a nice looking young man.

“May I come in and see what you have done? I’m a member of the Methodist congregation.”

“Of course,” I replied. “I’m waiting for an electrician. Come on in and look around if you’d like.”

We talked a little about the construction and then the conversation turned to personal things. He was a schoolteacher. He and his wife had just moved to the area. They had joined the Methodist Church. I sensed he was a spiritual man. He started to ask me questions about our beliefs.

“Why do you go to church on Saturday?”

I, of course, mentioned the fourth commandment and why we were called Seventh-day Adventists, etc., but I did not give him a Bible study on Daniel and Revelation. Instead, I spoke of the meaning of the Sabbath in my life; the joy it brings and how from sunset to sunset it is holy time. He sat quietly, listening and then he said, “That is so profound.” Then he talked of diet and how he and his wife were very interested in health. I told him about the Adventist diet and our medical work. After an hour he left saying, “If you ever have any health meetings, please call me. I’m sure my wife and I would like to come.” The electrician never came. He wasn’t supposed to. God had arranged that hour for witnessing.

The Stone Cutter. We had a major decision to make. We had to go through a stonewall to make a passage way from the Sanctuary to the new addition. We removed a window from one of the side rooms and planned to open the area up as another foyer coming into the church from the back door of the church. We removed a window from the back wall, which helped, but it was only 32” wide and would not meet the handicapped code. There was a large stone that was the header over the window. It was also a load bearing wall so if we removed too much stone, it would affect the header and we would run into the same problem we had downstairs when we went through the rock wall. Remember the structural engineering and steel work we had to do?

The City Inspector came and looked at it.

“If you can make the opening 36” I’ll pass it.”

It would mean taking about 3” off of each side and it would not affect the header.

Now, to find someone to do the cutting. I started calling the stone quarries and got nowhere. I got the yellow pages and started calling through the list. After many calls a man told me of someone who did that kind of work. I called his pager number and within minutes, he called back. I told him what we needed done.

“I’ll meet you at the church after work,” he said.

He loved the church when he saw it and said, “I just had to come and see this church. I don’t usually do such a small job like this, but I just had to come to this church.” It was as if he was saying that a strong impression made him come. A few days later he called and said he’d do the job. Again he said, “I just had to come to your church.”

As his men cut through the rock, he and Don went downstairs and started to talk. He started to tell Don of the tragic life he had suffered. Then he broke down and wept.

“I don’t go to church and I know I should,” he said. Don invited him to come and worship with us. He said maybe he would. When I talked with him later on the phone, he again said, “You know, I just had to come to see this church.” We never saw him again but I’m sure he will remember how he just had to come to the little rock church and something happened when he was there.

There was Frank. I found Frank by going through the listing for glasswork. He gave me a price on mirrors for our restrooms. I found out his father had made and installed our stain glass windows many years before. He gave us reduced prices on covering the stain glass windows with safety glass and also other work. He said he and his wife thought about coming to our church. We still talk to each other on the phone occasionally.

There was John who came for his check and took his time to talk to me about the Adventist diet. He was very interested in health. He had given us a good price for the work he did. He said he had made only \$50 profit.

There was Brian who did our electrical work. One day he sat down and talked with me about his marital problems and said, “I need to change my life and start going to church.”

There was the photographer who came in one day while I was at the church. He was an aerial photographer that had taken a picture of the church. He started asking about the Sabbath and our beliefs.

There was Rich, the man who did our black top work. We talked about the Sabbath.

There was James who did our railings on the handicapped ramp. He said he and his wife knew they should be going to church and were looking for a church.

The list could go on but I think you can get the picture. It seemed that the Holy Spirit in some way touched many who came to work for us. It was a seed planting time that I believe will someday mature into a harvest of souls for God’s kingdom. I feel it was my privilege to be a small part of the witnessing. Someone said, and I believe it is classic, “that people don’t care what you know, until they know that you care.” Love comes first. When you witness, you first listen and then in your answers, they can hear the Holy Spirit speaking—not you.

## THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

In August of 2000 we were able to start using the new addition. The Sabbath School rooms had been furnished and decorated. The new fellowship hall was decorated and tables and chairs were purchased. The library was furnished with new bookcases and stocked with donated books. The mother's room was set up with closed circuit TV. We were pleased with what had been done.

Our finances were in good shape. We had made draws totaling \$70,000 on our construction loan. That left \$80,000 that was available to us. We decided to go all the way with additional projects so we would have a finished facility.

The parking areas were paved, sidewalks were poured and gutters installed and the handicap ramp finished. We landscaped, put in a sprinkler system and laid sod. A beautiful memorial garden was planted beside the Church. All the trim on the outside of the church was painted and then the stain glass windows were covered with safety glass panels.

On the inside of the church, interior walls were removed and a new foyer was made to accommodate our handicap ramp and exit to the outside ramp. The Sanctuary had a stairway that had to be removed. Pew cushions were purchased and ceramic tile laid in both foyers. The Pastor's office was furnished and equipped with office machines. Canopies were installed over our new doors. The kitchen was expanded with more cabinets, appliances and storage closets. A 60" TV and satellite system were purchased for use in the new fellowship hall. Everything was done that we could think of that needed to be done and then we were finished. Whew! Can we sit down now?

Some thought we had bought a white elephant that would end up in the bone yard. When we stepped out in faith into the unknown future of the hazards of construction, God had blessed us in so many ways. It had taken seven years from 1995 to 2001 to complete the total renovation and construction. I wondered if there was any significance in that the Biblical number seven means complete.

The total cost of the new addition and all the extras was \$195,200. Because of donated labor and good prices on materials, we were able to build the 5200 square feet addition for \$150,000. The miracle was that we only had to borrow \$115,000 from our construction loan.

Some people, who came to see what was going on in Auburn, caught the spirit and became members. It was an exciting time. Our charter membership had tripled.

In October 2001 the Conference came to join us in our celebration of what God had done for us. On our special Sabbath, Elder Michael Parks, the Conference Treasurer called for the offerings but first, he said, "What church is this?" and then answered his own question. "It's the miracle church."

After the service, Elder Larry Evans, the Conference President, had taken the tour of the classrooms and it so happened that I was behind him as he went down the stairs to the new fellowship hall. When he reached the bottom of the stairs and he looked into the room and he stopped short and said one word, "WOW!"

All the tables had tablecloths and were decorated with fresh flowers. The ladies, as always, had prepared an abundance of delicious foods. Our large mural of a waterfall and silk trees was a focal point. The ornamental plastered walls gave an elegant look. To Elder Evans' "WOW", I could add, "Amen, Brother."

So the little church who like the little engine that was thought to be insignificant but said, "I think I can," had made it to the top. And the view was awesome!

## THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

It had been a long haul to get to the top. To say that we had no frustrations, trials, and discouragements would be to say there is no Devil. Of the 50 years that Don and I have been Seventh-day Adventists, our experience with seeing the Providences of God working through human effort in the planting of the church in Auburn, Georgia were the most rewarding of our spiritual journey.

So now the noise of construction has ceased. The church stands as a witness to what God can do when there is faith and perseverance to do God's work.

It is not the most pretentious church and certainly not the largest. The miracles we saw were related to the purchase, renovation and building the House of Worship of our God, a church home for our community of believers. But there would not have been any miracles if there were not the people who answered the call of God.

In this age of zoning codes and costs, to think that an old church in disrepair on a half acre could become what it is today is why it is called "The Miracle Church."

This is not the end of the story; it is only the first chapter. The story must go on. Our Lord did not show us His interventions so that we could sit back and say, "See how God has favored us. We must be pretty good people, maybe even special." We must never forget the history of the Israelites who thought that way and the glory and splendor of the temple in Jerusalem ended in ruin. "For that which is alone of value in His sight, they would not offer. They did not bring Him the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit. He values his church not for its external advantages but for the sincere piety, which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of its members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ's representatives." E. G. White, Prophets and Kings, pg. 566.

God did not plant the Auburn church to be only a showpiece. There is a work to be done in the spirit of Christ. After a lot of excitement and recognition, there is a tendency to let down and rest on our laurels. That can be the most dangerous time for an attack from Satan. Nehemiah put guards on the walls of Jerusalem to protect the city from its enemies. "While Nehemiah implored the help of God, he did not fold his own hands, feeling that he had no more care or responsibility in bringing about his purpose to restore Jerusalem. This example of this holy man should be a lesson to all the people of God, that they are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligence and fidelity." E. G. White Christian Service, pg. 239.

I have seen many changes in the church and also many changes in my relationship with the Lord. I try to understand that changes are not always wrong, but also to stand firm to Biblical principals. The Bible speaks of the Law and the Gospel, of Justice and Mercy. My Lord has been patient with me thru the years as He has taught me thru experiences this very important concept. The Holy Spirit worked with me for 10 years before I fully understood "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8,9 KJV.

I know that the 10 years of service in being involved in the work of the Auburn Church does not guarantee my salvation, so I must put a guard on my wall to keep the enemy out of my life.

The Church is progressing into a very difficult time. How will we survive the terrible time before us? The scriptures give us many examples of faith and trust that we must learn.

“Nehemiah made God his trust: and here is our defense. A remembrance of what the Lord has done for us will prove a support in every danger.” E. G. White, Southern Watchman, April 19, 1904.

E. G. White admonished the church to “Lift up Christ” and “Press together.” This will be our strength that will bring the church and ourselves to victory.

New guards have been chosen and more will be added. The old guards have, because of age, health or just having to move away, must be replaced.

“Those who have been set as guardians of the work in our institutions are ever to make the will and the way of God prominent. The health of the general work depends upon the faithfulness of the men appointed to carry out the will of God in the churches.” Testimonies, Vol. 9, pg. 264.

“Courage, energy and perseverance they must possess. Though apparent impossibilities obstruct their way, by His grace they are to go forward. Instead of deploring difficulties, they are called upon to surmount them. They are to despair nothing and hope for everything.” Gospel Workers, pg. 39.

This is how the church structure was built, but more important is the “building” of its members. I have asked God to allow me before passing to my rest, to see the church filled to overflowing each Sabbath and to feel the presence of a united, dedicated people.

By God’s Grace, I will never forget the “Miracle Church” of Auburn. As our replacement players come, I pray our history will inspire them to continue the miracles as God ordains.

Ellen G. White said, “In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us and His teaching in our past history.”

May we all say “**Praise God**”, as we remember the Little Rock church in Auburn, Georgia that became the “**Miracle Church?**”