

BETHEL FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH

The Bethel Free Will Baptist Church came into being when a group of Christians gathered together to organize a church, that was founded or establish upon the Solid Rock. This meeting took place on March 12, 1939, in the home on Mr. and Mrs. Glen Paisley of Midway, West Virginia. At fist the name of the church was the Bethel Baptist Church, which was later changed to the Bethel Free Will Baptist Church.

Rev. D.W. (David Winton) French was elected Pastor for twelve months. The Deacons elected were Charley Martin and Bert Aldridge. Trustees were: Rev. D.W. French, Glen Paisley, and Roy Deck. Church Clerk, was Mrs. Gladys Aldridge. Church Treasurer, was Mrs. Merle Whitely.

The fourteen original members were: Rev. D.W. French and his wife Ida Mae French, Gene and Merle Whitely, Bert and Gladys Aldridge, Charley and Dorothy Winder, Roy and Myrtle Deck, Charley Martin, Mrs. Bessie Cook, glen and Thelma Paisley.

The church lot was donated by the Beaver Coal Corporation, courtesy of M.W. Mac Taggert and L.H. Davis. Ground breaking for the foundation started June 18th, 1939 and construction on the church building began July 11, 1939. The building was completed on December 23, 1939, at a cost of approximately \$2500.00.

The money for the building of the church was raised by free will offerings, through a financial committee composed of: Robert Doan, Charley Martin, Glen Paisley, Thelma Paisley, Bert and Gladys Aldridge, Orville R. Phillips, A.E. Whitely, John Isom, Mr. and Mrs. Charley Winder, Mrs. Merle Whitely, Mrs. Bessie Cook, and Roy Deck.

Sunday School was organized in the 1st Sunday in September 1939, with 46 enrollers. Bert Aldrige was elected Sunday School Superintendent. Miss Stella Deck was elected secretary and treasurer. The teachers were: Bible Class - Mrs. Merle Whitely; Young People's Class - Roy Deck; Intermediate Class - Orville R. Phillips; Junior Class - Mrs. Gladys Aldridge; Card Class - Miss Kathleen Bare.

The Bethel Free Will Baptist Church was dedicated, free of debt, the second Sunday of August, 1940, with an all day service and dinner on the ground. There were approximately one thousand people attending. The Rev. Jeff Thomas (age 79) of Marmet, West Virginia preached the dedication service.

Rev. D.W. French, with the help of his dedicated Christian followers, brought the congregation of the Bethel Free Will Baptist Church from fourteen original members, to hundreds in the late 1940,s and 1950,s. Rev. French held many revivals all over the area of south central W.V. He was instrumental in the founding or organizing of several other churches (*Sophia Free Will Baptist, Arnett Chapel, Camp Creek Free Will Baptist, Bradley Free Will Baptist, Coal City Free Will Baptist, Lillybrook Free Will Baptist, Kilsyth Free Will Baptist, and Naoma Free Will Baptist Church*).

Rev. French also loved music and often invited the Stamps Baxter School of Music to hold classes to teach people how to sing shape notes, as well as to play the piano.

Rev. French was also instrumental in founding of the Beckley Conference of Free Will Baptist, as well as being a big supporter of the Free Will Baptist Children Home in Greenville, Tennessee; where in 1958 one of the homes there, know as the West Virginia Home, was dedicated to the memory of Rev. D.W. French.

The Church belongs to the Beckley Conference of Free Will Baptist, the West Virginia State Association of Free Will Baptist, and the National Association of Free Will Baptist.

Ministers who have pastored the Bethel Free Will Baptist Church are as follows:

Rev. D.W. French	-----	1939 to 1957
Rev. Wayne Sisk	-----	1957 to 1961
Rev. F.C. Calhoun	-----	1961 to 1973
Rev. L.S. Coahoun	-----	1973 to 2010
Rev. Terry Hatcher	-----	2010 to present (2015)

Attached you will find: a picture of D.W. French (1st pastor); Rev. Jeff Thomas - Mr. Whitney - Rev. D.W. French; Rev. French baptizing at Pemberton, W.V..

***NOTE:** This information was given to the Historical Committee of the West Virginia State Association of Free Will Baptist, sometime in, November 2015, by Gloria Jean French Darnell, granddaughter of Rev. D.W. French.*



Rev. D.W. French



Rev. Jeff Thomas - Mr. Whitney
& Rev. D.W. French



Rev. D.W. French Baptizing at Pemberton, West Virginia