



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Choir Director Dan Baker leads the congregation in song.

'Little Brown Church by the Sea' grows into haven for area Baptists

By DONNA KIMURA
Sentinel staff writer

THE UNIFIED VOICE of the choir rises as the last of the congregation slips in through the doors for morning worship:

*Let us kneel before the Lord,
Our God, our maker.*

The faint essence of perfume floats in the air as women in floral print dresses, men in suits and teen-agers in T-shirts find their place in the 1,700-seat sanctuary.

It's 10 a.m. Sunday at Twin Lakes Baptist Church in Aptos, where God's word is spread to thousands from Aptos to Argentina.

A little 25-member church by

the sea has grown into one of the largest congregations in the area with 2,300 members, eight buildings on a scenic 15-acre campus and missionaries throughout the world.

This summer marks 20 years since the conservative Baptist church made its home in Aptos. It also signals a time of new beginnings for the church as members search for a pastor to succeed the man who shepherded the congregation for almost a half a century.

Let us kneel before the Lord, the choir sings to open the service.

Graced with the conveniences of technology, a giant screen hangs above the singers, telecasting the hymnal words so worshippers — from the first pew to all the

way to the last row in the balcony — can join in.

It's a meeting of the video age and old-time religion.

Nearby, a small electronic monitor is on the wall. It is there for the benefit of parents whose children are in the child-care center. A special number will appear on the monitor to silently alert a parent if he or she is needed in the center.

Our God, our maker, everyone sings.

An organ, piano, two guitars and drums accompany the voices.

"How we have been blessed this morning with the ministry of music," begins interim pastor Floyd Overstreet.

After rising for the spirituals,

the congregation is ready to listen to the week's message: "Living for Jesus."

"There are poor people, wealthy people, average-working people," says church leader Glen Ifland, describing the considerable membership. "It's across the board."

A member since he was 10, Ifland has been part of Twin Lakes for the past 47 years.

He has witnessed the metamorphosis from a small neighborhood church to a regional institution.

Located between Highway 1 and Soquel Drive, it draws members from Boulder Creek to Salinas and employs 100 people.

Please see TWIN LAKES — A5

Twin Lakes Baptist

Continued from Page A1

Ifland can tell a stranger that it was once fondly known as the "Little Brown Church by the Sea" on Seventh Avenue. Built in 1890 as a Baptist convention center, it later became known as Twin Lakes Baptist Church because of its location between two lagoons.

Swelling with a growing congregation, church leaders coped by constructing more buildings before eventually running out of room to expand.

In 1973, Twin Lakes left the lagoons for a hillside in Aptos next to Cabrillo College.

There, the church began a new chapter with a \$2 million complex made up of three buildings. The campus has since grown to feature six main buildings, including the sanctuary, a fellowship hall, a gymnasium, a preschool and offices, all designed by Ifland's firm, Ifland Engineers Inc., in Santa Cruz. There is even a well-manicured softball diamond on the site that would rival most parks.

Out of 1,200 churches nationwide that belong to the Conservative Baptist Association of America, Twin Lakes has the most members, according to association officials.

Many credit Roy Kraft, the pastor for 47 years, and other leaders with the growth of the church.

Kraft, who is pastor emeritus, preached two or three sermons each Sunday before retiring in 1990. He also broadcasted "Morning Chimes," a religious radio show on KSCO, for 35 years before the show was dropped in 1986.

Baptist churches experienced a growth in membership throughout the 1980s, according to Sidney Reiners, president of the Christian Forum Research Foundation in Grand Rapids, Minn.

"Baptists have attracted the more evangelical people who have become disenchanted with other mainline denominations," he says. Other denominations, Reiners says, have become more liberal, placing new emphasis on social issues rather than the traditional teaching of the Bible.

"The key to me is the senior pastor, confidence in him and in the staff," says the Rev. Paul Barton, who has been involved with the church as a member and pastor for nearly 43 years. "What really builds a church is the preaching and teaching of God's word."

Twin Lakes has always been faithful in the preaching of the word of God, says longtime member Tony Holbrook. The first day he moved to the area, a new neighbor introduced him to the church.

To join the church, a person must be a Christian and be baptized by immersion, says Barton, one of eight pastors on staff. Together, the pastors have roughly 150 years of ministry experience, say church officials.

Unlike other churches that have an annual fee, Twin Lakes relies on voluntary contributions.

"You can be a member and never give a cent," Ifland says.

For the past several years, the church has maintained a \$3 million budget.

In comparison, the national average membership of a Protestant church is 159 and the average church budget is \$82,000, says George Barna of the Barna Research Group in Glendale. The company is a marketing research firm specializing in Christian ministries.

Twin Lakes also owns and operates Camp Hammer and Saddle Mountain Ranch, camps adjacent Big Basin State Park. The ranch is a facility for underprivileged children in the county.

In addition, the church operates a preschool and an elementary school at the Aptos campus.

Church officials are looking to sell 18 acres next to the church site for roughly \$3 million to provide funds for future growth, says Leonard Dueck, business manager.

The land had once been planned for a retirement center, but officials are now hoping to use money from the sale to pay for a proposed school building and a combination administration and classroom structure. The church's Mid-County Christian School already serves 150 children in kindergarten to fifth grade.

"They're the benchmark of evangelical churches in Santa Cruz County," says Chip Ingram, senior pastor of Santa Cruz Bible Church.

Twin Lakes has made a commitment to longevity, he says.

"They got together and dreamed a dream almost 50 years ago."

Big, yet personal

For he is our God,

And we are the people of his pasture.

Choir members donned in gold and green robes lead the congregation.

Their voices fill the spacious sanctuary.

"The bigger, growing churches have to have ways of drawing people and maintaining the interest of members," Reiners says. "They have to have community outreach. They offer things that are not necessarily even spiritual to get people interested."

It's a philosophy that Twin

members to participate in basketball, softball, volleyball or golf.

"The programs are important, and we have a lot of them," says the Rev. Barton. "They are an outcome of Christ our Savior."

Some say the church has grown so big because it has managed to stay personal through its numerous activities.

Suzanne Zeber has been attending the church for about five years since moving from San Jose.

Zeber and her husband, Keith, visited several churches in the area before finding Twin Lakes.

They were used to being part of a small congregation, but found the larger church to fit their needs, she says.

"Twin Lakes has such a broad spectrum of small groups," Zeber says.

Those activities, she says, make the large church intimate to its members.

Among the groups that Zeber participates in are a women's Bible study group and a support group for mothers with young children.

A transition period

*Let us kneel before the Lord,
Our God, our maker.*

The congregation continues to sing.

"Super churches have to find



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Members of the Twin Lakes Baptist Church choir in action during July 4 Sunday morning worship service.



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Twin Lakes Baptist Church in Aptos in its current form.

yet to name a new pastor.

In a recent update to the congregation, the search committee reported having had initial interviews with three possible candidates. The same update also says the committee is continuing to receive names of candidates.

Members hope to find someone this summer after completing a na-

What Baptists believe

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They say only those who are old enough to make their own

...says the Rev. Paul Barton, who has been involved with the church as a member and pastor for nearly 43 years. "What really builds a church is the preaching and teaching of God's word."

Twin Lakes has always been faithful in the preaching of the word of God, says longtime member Tony Holbrook. The first day he moved to the area, a new neighbor introduced him to the church.

"It provided food for believers, food for the congregation," he says. "People flocked to the congregation."

A commitment

The church believes that the Bible "is the inspired, inerrant word of God," according to the Twin Lakes' doctrinal.

Although a member of the conservative Baptist association, Twin Lakes is independent, governed by its own local board of directors. Ifland, who has been on the board for 35 of the last 40 years, is chairman.

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It's a philosophy that Twin Lakes believes in and practices.

"You provide what meets people's needs," Ifland says.

"It's far more than a Sunday worship service," he says. "It provides many programs for all age groups."

There isn't an empty day on a monthly calendar of events that is printed for the congregation.

Most days are filled with three, four or five activities, ranging from basketball to baptisms.

Twin Lakes has ministries for just about every group — singles, seniors, children, women. There is even a sports ministry for mem-

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A transition period

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"Super churches have to find that they have a less rigid format for their worship services, the singing of short choruses, personal testimonies rather than a rigid lethargy and a sermon and you go home," Reiners says."

Overstreet's voice rings out clearly from the pulpit.

He pulls out a passage from Timothy, reading it to the congregation. He talks about the church's search for a new senior pastor.

"God knows who he is," he says. "We do not at this time, but we must begin praying."

Twin Lakes has been interviewing candidates for the post, but has

yet to name a new pastor.

In a recent update to the congregation, the search committee reported having had initial interviews with three possible candidates. The same update also says the committee is continuing to receive names of candidates.

Members hope to find someone this summer after completing a nationwide search.

Holbrook, chairman of the search committee, said the congregation approached the task slowly after having had a pastor for 47 years.

"It takes a transition period," he says.

Community involvement is one of the lessons that Ingram says he has learned from Twin Lakes.

"Don't serve only the church, but the community," he says.

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ture.*

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Baptists hold many of the same beliefs as other Protestants, but they part ways on the question of who should be baptized.

They say only those who are old enough to make their own declaration of faith should be baptized, and that excludes children.

Other key beliefs in Baptist doctrine:

- "The Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God." 2 Timothy 3:16

- "God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1.

- "Jesus Christ is God." John 10:30-33.

In the covenant of the Twin Lakes Baptist Church, members promise to separate themselves from worldliness; give cheerfully to support the ministry and relieve the needy; serve the church in some capacity; maintain family worship; and follow the Scriptures.

Source: Twin Lakes Baptist Church, World Book Encyclopedia