



Cliff Temple Baptist Church

1898-2023
A 125 Year Story

Introduction

The following pages do not contain the history of Cliff Temple Baptist Church. Historians scour all available primary sources, first-hand accounts, and artifacts to discern a position on a period of history. I read the available Cliff Temple newsletters and articles from newspapers clipped and saved in the church's archives. Gathered from these printed resources, the story of a church's search for God's will in Oak Cliff emerged. Reading the pastors' columns in those newsletters gave me a sense of the tenor of the church, but reading the Sunday School and activity announcements, notices, and notes revealed the sense of community Cliff Temple has nourished for 125 years.

The following pages do not contain the history of Cliff Temple Baptist Church. No history would be truly complete without discussing individuals and their contributions. You will read the names of pastors and some of the ministers who served for a generation or more, but I focused on what seemed to be ongoing programs and projects within the context of the culture of the time, so the 1996 celebration of Pearl Price's 75 years as Sunday School teacher went unwritten. Names such as Shanks, Berry, Smith, Evetts, and others appeared for decades, and these multi-generational families are as much of the history of the church as Mead Hall, but with the exception of Gus Berry's service as church organist, they don't appear in the following pages. I would not have been able to do their legacies justice in these pages. But sit in the Temple. You can feel the history of these saints within the walls. Walk up to the third floor, and run your hand along that beautiful bannister, and you'll think of them. I do. I am grateful and humbled to have been given the opportunity to learn so much about the church I love. Any errors or omissions are the fault of my limited research, and I'll leave it to future writers to clear up my mistakes.

The following pages do not contain the history of Cliff Temple Baptist Church. The history of the church was written in the Boethian Class members' prayer requests, the WMU's call for coats and shoes for children in need. The history of the church was written in every profession of faith, every baptism, every parent dedication, every morsel of food in the pantry of Mission Oak Cliff. The history of the church was written in great choral moments and silent prayers, the fellowship of church camp, and hugs in the Child Development Center. Cliff Temple is, has been, and will continue to be more than the facts of its existence, more than the pastors, the buildings, and the number in attendance on a Sunday morning. The history of Cliff Temple is found in how it has, for 125 years, sought to fulfill Matthew 28:18-19 and Matthew 22:37-39. The history of Cliff Temple is unfinished.

Joyce Wascom
October 2023

Cliff Temple Baptist Church

1898-1917

The twenty-six members simply could not stay. They loved their church, but they could not agree with leaving the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), and their church, First Baptist Church of Oak Cliff, was leaving because of recent Convention decisions. The twenty-six would charter a new church, one whose descendants would continue to serve in Oak Cliff 125 years later.

So much was changing in 1898. The Trinity River separated their town from the rapidly growing Dallas. William McKinley was President, the US had just declared war on Spain, and the looser-fitting clothes for women replaced the Victorian trussed-up style, allowing them to ride bicycles and giving a bit of freedom to travel a little farther from home. Electricity had not reached this part of Texas yet, but good rabbit hunting could be found at a spot at the future corner of Tenth and Beckley.

The twenty-six were tenacious. They called their church Oak Cliff Baptist Church and worshiped in a store on the same block as their former church at Lancaster and Jefferson, and they sought revival.



Oak Cliff Baptist Church

Visiting preachers, along with a summer resident minister named Walter Hillsman, filled the pulpit until the group called Rev. Joseph English, who served as pastor until 1900. During this time they built a

tabernacle-style church house and thrived, at least until Reverend English resigned. E. J. Thompson and W. H. Travis served short pastorates, but the deacons asked Reverend English to return in 1904.

The official annexation with Dallas occurred after a contentious debate in 1903, and Oak Cliff was now officially part of that growing city. The fledgling Oak Cliff Baptist had problems of its own. Described as “spiritually starved” by Reverend English upon his return, the church was in desperate need of revival. As discouraging as the situation seemed, one spontaneous prayer meeting led to that revival. Their numbers increased, and they soon outgrew their space. Fortunately, the lot on the southwest corner of Tenth and Beckley was available, so the land was purchased in 1908. The church changed its name to Memorial Baptist Church, and a new building was built. The congregation continued to grow.

Their troubles, however, persisted. Reverend English left for full-time evangelistic work, and the debt of the new building was more than the church could handle. The church needed leadership to help them move forward. They called Walter C. Lattimore, and he helped negotiate what would prove to be a pivotal move. Around this time, First Baptist Church of Oak Cliff had their own issues. Many of their members wished to return to the BGCT, while others wished to remain with the Baptist Missionary Association. No agreement could be reached, and the church was destined to split again. They dissolved the church, sold their property, and those who wished to be part of the BGCT merged with Memorial in 1912, bringing with them the exact amount of funds to pay off Memorial’s debt. The congregation, now numbering around 800, decided on a new name for the combined churches, Central Baptist Church.

The Dallas and Oak Cliff Bridge (the Houston Street Viaduct) opened in February of 1912, easing travel between Oak Cliff and Dallas, and those who had cars most likely drove a Ford Model T across that bridge. The Dallas newspapers’ headlines in April screamed of the sinking of the *Titanic*, Woodrow Wilson defeated William Howard Taft in November, and the National Biscuit Company introduced a new cookie called the Oreo.

The newly-named Central Baptist Church called William Allen Hewitt as their new pastor, and he was tasked with transforming the two churches into one body, one large body that would not fit into the current space. Dr. Hewitt proved masterful in coalescing both groups,

and the church worked together to build a new facility (at the site of the current playground and rose garden at 10th and Beckley), demolishing the four-year-old Memorial Church building. He established a visitation program that proved successful in enlarging the congregation.



Central Baptist Church Revival, 1915

Dr. Hewitt left his pastorate to return to Mississippi at the end of 1917, opening the door for a thirty-four-year-old pastor with a huge presence, a thundering voice, and a vision that became Cliff Temple Baptist Church.

1918-1929

1918 began as the "Great War" continued its devastation of Europe. In February, Wallace Bassett drove his family from Amarillo to Oak Cliff to begin his pastorate at Central Baptist Church, where he would remain until his retirement in 1966. So much would change by 1920. The population of Oak Cliff was increasing, and many families even had electricity and telephones in their homes. A woman's right to vote was on the horizon, and they would finally be able to vote in the 1920 presidential election. Oak Cliff had two Baptist churches, Central Baptist and a Central Baptist mission church. Central Baptist had membership of 1,200 and a three-year-old building. That would soon change.



Central Baptist, later called the Bassett Building

1923 brought a World Series championship to the New York Yankees and Babe Ruth, the first traffic light system in Dallas, and a new name for Central Baptist Church. Under Dr. Bassett's leadership, the church changed its name to Cliff Temple Baptist Church. Music Minister J. B. Christian began his thirty-one-year tenure as music minister in 1923. Described as "wholesome and helpful," he built six choirs and encouraged the congregation in singing great hymns.

Sunset High School opened in 1925, becoming Oak Cliff's second high school after Oak Cliff High School, which would be named after its beloved principal William Hardin Adamson in 1935. Cliff Temple was also growing, necessitating building growth. Several buildings were erected then remodeled to accommodate a growing congregation. Hewitt Hall was built in 1921, and Christian Hall, Central Hall, and the Junior Building were all built in 1925. None of these buildings exist today.

In September 1926, J. Earl Mead arrived as Minister of Education, a role he was to keep until 1962. Dr. Bassett referred to his "rapid-fire

energy.” Mr. Mead developed innovative education programs that were emulated by Baptist churches all over the country. One of his ideas was to hold a “Fall Rally” to kick off the fall schedule, a practice taken up by churches everywhere, a tradition still in practice at Cliff Temple. The impact of the three Cliff Temple ministers who served together for over thirty years continues to reverberate in the church and the Baptist denomination today.

Charles Lindbergh was a national hero in 1928, following his transatlantic flight, and Methodist Hospital opened in Oak Cliff. Skirts were shorter, the stock market was booming, and a mouse called Mickey made his first appearance in a small film called *Steamboat Willie*. Cliff Temple was now a congregation of around 4,000. The first “Wednesday Church Night” program began on Wednesday, October 11, 1928, beginning with “lunch” at 6:30 for the cost of twenty cents, followed by a prayer meeting, department meetings, and an educational program.

Members of the congregation were concerned, however, about their country. The upcoming presidential election brought up the issue of repealing Prohibition. Dallas County had been designated as “dry” since 1917, two years before the national ban on alcohol, but the prospect of repealing the ban concerned the pastor and some members. Presidential candidate Al Smith opposed Prohibition, but Herbert Hoover was in favor of keeping the ban, “as long as the people willed it.” The October 25, 1928, Cliff Temple newsletter included an article entitled, “How could a Wet President Damage Prohibition?” The article assured congregants: “Elect a dry President of the United States and the doom of the liquor traffic in America and abroad will be, by that fact, more finally sealed.” Hoover won the election, but Prohibition was repealed in 1933.

The Oak Cliff Ice Company delivered ice to homes, and milk was delivered daily. Ice could also be purchased at Southland Ice, the country’s first convenience store, later named 7-Eleven. Kidd Springs, “where Dallas plays,” offered swimming, boating, and picnicking for the admission price of ten cents, and the Cliff Queen movie theater showed “talkies.” 1929 brought a beginners’ choir class in “sight singing” so “you won’t be embarrassed if you have not had previous training.” The BYPU (Baptist Young People’s Union), which met Sunday evenings, was serious about an attendance push. “We’re coming to get you,” they informed the boys who had been missing,

In late October of 1929, the church voted on another expansion program for the purchase of land and new buildings, including a planned “spacious and commodious auditorium of simple elegance.”



The \$150,000 needed was the largest goal Cliff Temple had ever undertaken, \$50,000 to be raised by March 2, 1930. The church voted a resounding yes. One week later, the stock market crashed.

1929 Plans for Expansion

1930-1939

The 1930s brought devastating economic and social hardships that continued throughout the decade. By 1930, 1,350 banks failed. Unemployment skyrocketed from 3.2% in 1929 to 8.7% in 1930, doubling again to over 16% in 1931. Despite the economic pressures, the Empire State Building was completed in 1931, along with a tower at the University of Texas and Oak Cliff’s Texas Theatre. Those who could afford the ten-cent admission could see *Frankenstein* or *Dracula* that year. Affordable entertainment was scarce in Oak Cliff, but Lake Cliff Park offered free, outdoor silent movies.

Cliff Temple still owed \$20,000 of its original building debt by the 1931 spring Thank Offering. The yearly offering began in 1918, and by 1931, the tradition was firmly established. The congregation was told that raising “anything short of [\$20,000] will be a failure.” Times were hard, and they would get worse.

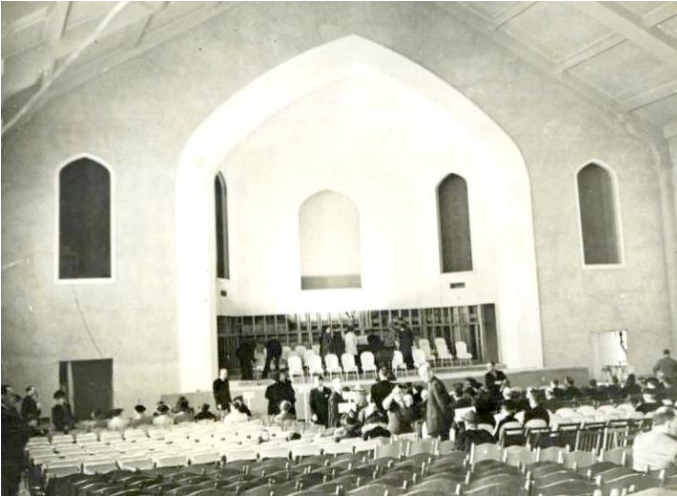
By 1933, the unemployment rate had risen to 24.9%, and many Americans were forced to live in the streets or in their cars. The most severe drought in history, the Dust Bowl, further impacted the American economy and left a half million people homeless. The Cliff Temple Women's Missionary Auxiliary sought to help, reporting that they distributed over \$2,000 to missions, including benevolent work in Dallas County. Some relief came with President Roosevelt's New Deal. In 1935 a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was established at White Rock Lake Park, and over the next seven years, men found work making improvements to the park.

Despite the hard times, Cliff Temple continued to grow. *The Dallas Morning News* described the church as "big business." The second largest Baptist church in the world (behind First Baptist Dallas), the church reported membership of over 5,000 and attendance in Sunday school averaging 2,900, 75% under the age of thirty. "Every Sunday morning at 10 o'clock fifty pianos strike up in different rooms of the church at the same moment," heralding the beginning of Sunday school.

The Golden Gate Bridge was completed, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt Disney's first feature film, was released in 1937. The Twenty-first Amendment repealed Prohibition, but Dr. Bassett's fight against liquor continued. He specifically blamed re-legalization of whiskey for juvenile delinquency. That year he told the annual Baptist General Convention, "These young people get in their automobiles and go zig-zagging up the highway at sixty miles per hour looking for a place to spoon. When they leave road houses, they are exceedingly lightheaded and amorous." Additionally, he asserted that increasing popularity of the card game Bridge "has only added fuel to the slumbering fires lying dormant in the hearts of inexperienced youth."

Throughout the decade, the dream of completing the new auditorium, a "temple of worship" was in constant peril. The plan for a new addition to go along with the auditorium had to be scrapped, but the church had been able to remodel some of the existing buildings; however, the economy was hopelessly bleak, and fundraising was slow for the "modified collegiate gothic" style building with space for 2,500 seats with "both heating and cooling." Ground-breaking for the new auditorium was finally held on the afternoon of March 6, 1938. The Temple construction began with the funds on hand and the faith that God would provide. The outside facade was erected, but the money ran out, and the building stood unfinished for almost a year, leaving

The Dallas Morning News to describe Cliff Temple as standing under the “dark towers of a great unfinished auditorium.”



Unfinished Auditorium, 1939

On October 17, 1939, the congregation held a special Thank Offering service inside the construction site with a makeshift pulpit and seating. Three washtubs were placed at the front, and the

congregation filed past with their offerings at the end of the service. The collection totaled \$22,000, along with a diamond ring. Building resumed, and the Temple was completed by the end of the year, for a final cost of \$261,517.91. The first service in the new sanctuary was held on January 7, 1940. The tradition of a fall Thank Offering had begun, and Cliff Temple continues to celebrate Thank Offerings in both spring and fall.

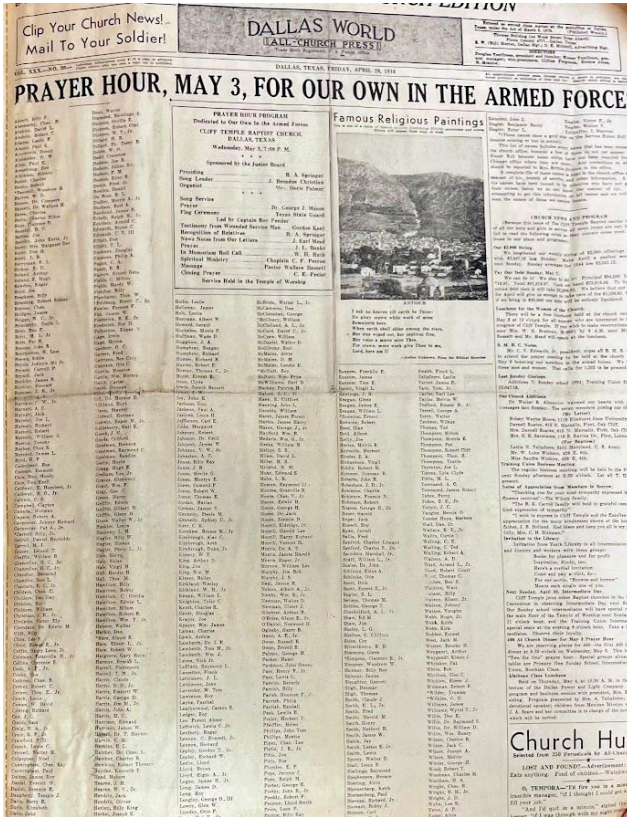
1941-1949

The year 1940 began in a period of uncertainty and fear. Europe had been at war since Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, and though the US remained at peace, all Americans knew that war was inevitable. In 1940, though, the war seemed far away. The US had an isolationist stance, but that fall President Roosevelt declared a national emergency and initiated a peacetime draft.

White Rock Lake completely froze that January, nylon stockings made their first appearance, and a new hero, Captain America, first appeared in comic books. Americans listened to swing and jazz, and Tommy Dorsey and Frank Sinatra’s “I’ll Never Smile Again” ruled the radio waves for most of the year. In Oak Cliff, Sivils Drive-In, noted for

their famous “pretty” carhops and 24-hour service, opened at the triangle where West Davis meets Fort Worth Avenue. The war came to us on December 7, 1941.

Victory Gardens, War Bonds, rationing, and mobilization of products and workers changed the country and its culture almost overnight.

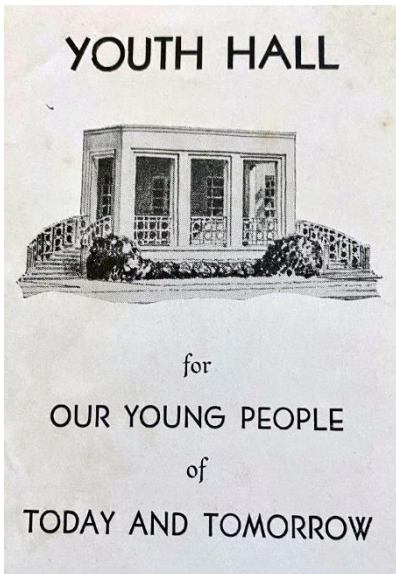


Men went to war, and women went to work. Members of Cliff Temple packed 1,000 care kits to be sent to suffering Russians, and they prayed for and corresponded with church members on the “Service Honor Roll.” The Cliff Temple newsletter included advertisements to encourage the purchase of War Bonds and reminded members that sacrifices were necessary for the war effort.

601 Members Serving in WWII, 1942

Americans were encouraged to “Keep Faith.” Cliff Temple dedicated 1944 to “soul saving.” Dr. Bassett sought 1,000 of the church’s 6,000 members to pledge to win one soul to Christ that year, and the Texas governor officially endorsed a plan for one million Texans to read the New Testament from April to July. The war still weighed on members' hearts, however, and May 3, 1944, was set aside for a “Two for One” prayer service, with two members present to pray for every one of the 601 members who were serving overseas. Nine of those servicemen had already been listed as missing or killed by the day of the prayer meeting. Others would follow before the war ended in August of 1945.

Post-war 1946 was a time of change, building, and growth for our country and for Cliff Temple. Cokes cost five cents, *It's a Wonderful Life* was a box office failure, and the streetcar was a major method of transportation in Oak Cliff. That summer the Southern Baptist Convention began a campaign to raise \$3,500,000 for war-torn Europe and the "hunger that hangs over the homes of more than a third of the people of the earth." Cliff Temple did their part in the campaign, also shipping 3,000 pounds of clothing to Europe.



Youth Hall was built in the fall of 1946, a building known today as Mead Hall. When the name was changed, Mr. Mead said humbly, "In twenty more years there will be those who never knew me, and the name will mean nothing at all to them." The name Mead, however, remains an integral part of Cliff Temple's DNA. The new building, which included a "fireproof nursery" was necessary. The post-war baby boom had begun, and Youth Hall housed the eight children's departments with twenty-three separate classes and an enrollment of 790 children.

Youth Hall, 1946

A day nursery called Tot Haven opened in 1947. The nursery provided child care five days a week and some evenings for a cost of \$1.00 per hour while their mothers "shop or attend clubs or meetings." Tot Haven became known as the Child Development Center, a licensed day care for working parents. The CDC continues to provide care for children between the ages of six weeks and pre-kindergarten.

The Women's Missionary Union wanted to help families in need, so they collected canned goods and clothing in the summer months of 1948 to distribute to the needy throughout the remainder of the year. They stored the food in an empty closet in the church and called it The Storeroom. The needs eventually outweighed these efforts, and they found that the WMU had to collect donations of food several times a year.



Cliff Temple Ladies, 1940s

Virginia Goslin, who had been baptized and married at Cliff Temple, was hired that year as Youth Director and Audiovisual Director, later serving as Church Visitor, and eventually as Director of Personal Ministries. She was instrumental in continuing the work of the WMU and establishing an ongoing food pantry at the church. As the years passed, The Storeroom evolved to become the full-service community ministry known as Mission Oak Cliff. Mrs. Goslin's tenure would last over thirty years, and her legacy of social ministry in Oak Cliff lives on today.

Oak Cliff had its own radio station. KLIF, founded in 1947, became one of the top radio stations in the country, and in 1948, WBAP became the first television station in Texas to go on the air. Oak Cliff boasted more than thirty Baptist churches, but Cliff Temple eclipsed them all, averaging over 2,000 in Sunday school each week. Mr. Mead explained to the *Dallas Journal* that Cliff Temple teachers "are trained to master the art of teaching and training, so that we can do a better job of Christian teaching and training than most any church we observe anywhere."

The church was a busy place. It was open every day of the week, providing activities for everyone, including sports ranging from softball to baseball and basketball to ping pong. Ceramics, crafts, dramatics, and Boy Scout Troop 17, along with music, committee and prayer meetings, Bible study, and worship filled the church's schedule. Members were thrilled by the extravagant gift in 1949 of a brand new Philco television, which was placed in the Bassett building reception hall. Classes and members were invited to "come by and enjoy this new piece of equipment" after prayer service or schedule a "television party."

The decade filled with the loss and devastation of World War II ended in prosperity for Cliff Temple. The church membership grew each week, and on occasion fifty or more people joined in a single week. The Cradle Roll continued to add babies each month. Groups and classes could reserve Cliff Temple's Lodge at Mount Lebanon, which was dedicated July 30, 1949. Westmount Chapel, a mission established early in the decade by members, was ready to become its own church, so in 1949 the church voted to give the property Cliff Temple purchased to start the fledgling church to them as they incorporated, the first of many mission churches birthed by Cliff Temple.

1950-1959

The 1950s brought rock and roll music, fear of Communists, and the threat of nuclear war. England had a new queen, Americans fought in the Korean War, and the business world began to utilize two new inventions: a computer that was as big as a room, and the Xerox machine. By 1953 Oak Cliff was still seen as a separate city and was designated as the fifth largest city in Texas, and Cliff Temple was the largest church in the city, with 7,080 members, twenty-three employees, and 300 Sunday school teachers. Three services were held each week, along with Sunday School, Training Union, and music and mission activities for all ages. Not all buildings had air conditioning, and a building campaign that year would provide it in two of them. A new gymnasium provided space for activities ranging from basketball to roller skating.



Roller Skating at Cliff Temple, 1950s

Our country was changing. The Supreme Court ended segregation in schools, Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, and a record called “Heartbreak Hotel” was released by a young singer named Elvis Presley, whose moves shocked the country when he appeared on the Milton Berle television show. Music would never be the same.

Cliff Temple sought to meet the increasing and varied needs of its congregation. The Robin Class was organized in the spring of 1956. Created especially for children with intellectual disabilities, the class, described as “non-denominational,” included children whose parents were not members, since it was the only one of its kind in Dallas. Beginning with twelve children and eight workers, the goal of the class was for the children to feel “happy, loved, and wanted in God’s house” and to “love Jesus as a friend.”

A tornado carved a sixteen-mile path through Oak Cliff and West Dallas in 1957, killing ten, injuring 200, and damaging hundreds of buildings, leaving 500 people homeless. That same year saw the beginning of the space race with the launch of Russia’s *Sputnik*. Cliff Temple began professional counseling services. Members could participate in group or individual counseling sessions, and a clinical

psychologist worked with parents and children to “bring and discuss problems.”

The decade ended with the introduction of Alaska and Hawaii as the country’s two newest states, America’s first eight astronauts, and a new doll by Mattel called Barbie. Cliff Temple’s three-year-old Lake Ridge mission church officially became its own congregation on June 6, 1959. Both churches greatly anticipated what the new decade would bring. They were not prepared for the cultural shifts that lay ahead.

1960-1969

In 1960 half of the US population was under the age of eighteen, most of them teenagers. In Oak Cliff, teens hung out at Sivils Drive-In or Polar Bear, played miniature golf at Wee Saint Andrews, and listened to KLIF. The world was a fearful place. Students were trained to duck and cover in case of an atomic attack, and when the U2 spy plane was shot down over Soviet airspace, that fear increased.

In 1962 the bouffant hairdo required teasing and Aqua Net. Americans still paid a poll tax, and the film *To Kill a Mockingbird*, based on the best-selling novel of 1960, was released. John Glenn Jr. became the first American to orbit Earth, and Cliff Temple began the Astronaut Reading Club, rewarding children for the number of books they read. Mr. Mead retired as Education Minister that year.

The Cliff Temple newsletter that day reminded members that blood donated to the “Cliff Temple Blood Bank” would only go to members and thanked members for a successful youth choir paper drive. The date of the newsletter was November 22, 1963, and by the time the newsletter reached mailboxes, Oak Cliff and the entire country mourned the death of President John F. Kennedy, assassinated in Dallas.

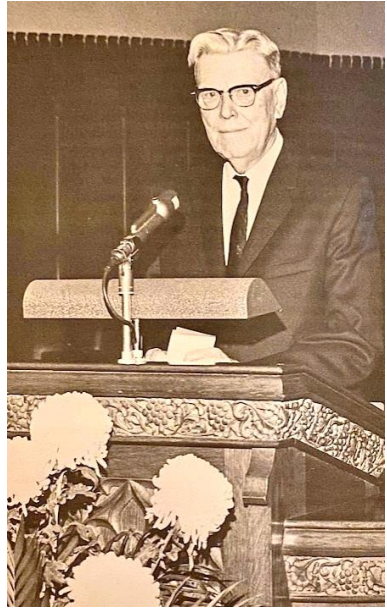
By 1966, the Beatles had already changed music forever, Americans had walked in space, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts had sparked violence in the south as Black Americans fought for equality. The number of US troops in Vietnam numbered 184,000 by the beginning of the year.

In February, Dr. Bassett retired as pastor of Cliff Temple. At his death two years later, he was remembered as a presence marked by “a voice whose size and range were put to the fullest use, as music, as whisper, as thunder.” Dr. Bassett was described as “one of the few notable Baptist personalities who could be labeled a Christian before it was noticed that he was a Baptist.” Dr. Darold H. Morgan began his pastorate at Cliff Temple in April of 1966.

Oak Cliff experienced a shift in its racial and ethnic diversity in the latter part of the decade, and a large number of middle-class families moved to the suburbs. Businesses on Jefferson, along with stores in Wynnewood, closed or moved to other areas in Dallas, and housing prices began to drop.

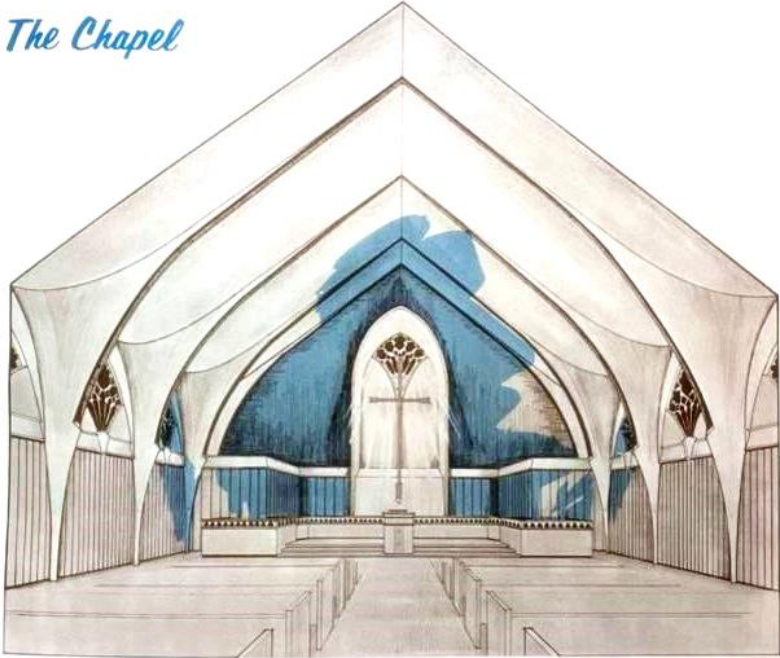
1968 was a year of upheavals, tragedies, and triumphs that forever changed our country. *Apollo 8* captured an image of earth that propelled the environmental movement. The assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. had Americans reeling, and protests rocked college campuses throughout the land. The vivid reporting and stark images of the fighting in Vietnam convinced much of the country that our involvement in the war should end. At Cliff Temple, a new Spanish-speaking Sunday school department was formed in September. Called EBENEZER, the group ministered to people from all over the metroplex.

After several years of study and long-range planning, the church embarked on a “10-15-year program of replacement and additions to the church” in 1968. Phase one included construction of a new building which included a new chapel, music suite, library, administrative area, reception room, educational space, and a conference room.



Dr. Bassett's Last Sermon, 1966

The Chapel



Plans for Bassett Chapel, 1968

The construction took almost two years, and Bassett Chapel, along with the new Library-Music and Administration-Education Buildings were dedicated on November 2, 1969. They remain in use today.

1970-1979

The new decade initially felt like the last one. The counterculture movement, arguably the most influential time period in modern American history, continued. Riots and demonstrations on college campuses in protest of the Vietnam War became violent. On May 4, 1970, four students were killed and nine more injured when the Ohio National Guard responded to a campus protest at Kent State. "Mama Told Me Not to Come" was the hit of the summer, and American teens grew their hair and rebelled against the values of their parents. At Cliff Temple, however, the young people held paper drives and worked for members as a fundraiser, which allowed the youth choir to travel to Alaska for that summer.

The youth department was thriving, including Bible study and fellowship through college-aged students and a student-led puppet ministry. After hearing an ensemble sing during a youth conference in Glorieta, several Cliff Temple teenagers were inspired to create their own. The group that emerged named themselves “New Humanity.” They sang contemporary music with piano, guitar, and drums, a first for Cliff Temple, and became an institution at the church that lasted for more than twenty-five years. New Humanity was one of the many changes that were ahead for the church.



Cliff Temple Youth Choir, 1976

Dr. Morgan resigned to join the Annuity Board, and the church called Dr. Doug Watterson as pastor in the spring of 1971. New education, youth, and music ministers came and went throughout the decade.

1971 brought forced busing to Dallas schools. A contentious subject, Dr. Watterson addressed integration and busing from the pulpit, in meetings, and in *The Dallas Morning News*. “The church,” he proclaimed, “needs to boldly say that racial contempt, rejections, and hatred is sin!” He called for the church to “find its voice” on the issue of racial justice, and he told the church that he was “prepared to ride school buses as an agent of peace and order.”

A break-in occurred at the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate office building in June of 1972, the year Americans were introduced to a new game called Pong, digital watches, and a musical

group called Abba. Cliff Temple lived out the tag line on its newsletter, the *Kaleidoscope*, “Ministering To The Changing Needs of the Metroplex.” The “fish” program, beginning in 1972 and continuing throughout the decade, paired volunteers with community members in need. Over 100 members made themselves available in a variety of ways, by driving people to appointments and shopping, cooking and delivering meals, and even helping with housework for some elderly people. That Christmas, Cliff Temple provided seventy families with food, toys, or money. By 1975, the church participated in seventeen ministries, all under the direction of Virginia Goslin. The church sponsored Vietnamese families and provided a Vietnamese translation of the service. By 1977, the church held Vietnamese, Korean, and Spanish speaking services.

America celebrated her Bicentennial in 1976, and Cliff Temple celebrated throughout the year. The Temple underwent a bit of a facelift that year by adding the steps across the front of the platform, along with areas for the organ and piano. A new computer company called Apple got its start, and Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci won three gold medals at the Montreal Olympics with seven perfect scores. Dr. Watterson resigned in May of 1978, and Dr. Dan Griffin accepted the call, becoming the church’s new pastor at the end of the year.

The Temple Choir presented “The Sounds and Tastes of Christmas” on December 11-12, 1978. The dinner was cooked at the church and hauled to the Dallas Garden Center at Fair Park. The choir served the guests, then sang the concert. The event, known as the Christmas Dinners, would continue for years, moving to the new Fellowship Hall in 1984. Tickets became so in demand that people lined up at



midnight to reserve their place. Christmas Dinners would continue into the next century.

Program from First Christmas Dinners, 1978

When some members became aware that shut-ins who normally received Meals on Wheels would receive no visit because of the holiday, those members gathered at the church on Christmas day to

cook turkey dinners and deliver them. This tradition has continued; the church will cook and deliver over 300 meals this Christmas.

Michael Jackson and Donna Summer ruled the radio waves in 1979. The Three Mile Island nuclear accident, Margaret Thatcher, and the American Embassy hostages in Iran dominated the news, but Cliff Temple brought good news to television screens in 1979. On March 23, after a feasibility study and “overwhelming approval” from the church, Cliff Temple embarked on a television ministry. Dr. Griffin had created a television ministry before coming to Cliff Temple, and the programs were available for the church to use before creating original programming. The first program aired on channel 39, KXTX, on Sunday, April 28, at 7:30 a.m. In June the church began a program called “Breakthrough” on WFAA, 570 AM radio. The *Kaleidoscope* tag line became “Where Worlds Meet to Worship Christ.” Cliff Temple had entered the modern age of communication technology.

1980-1989

The life-changing Post-it note was introduced in 1980, along with Rubik’s cube and the US hockey “Miracle on Ice.” Texans remember that year as the hottest summer on record with a forty-two-day string and a total of sixty-nine 100-degree days. That same year, Cliff Temple refused to accept the Southern Baptist Convention’s rigid views on women’s roles in the church and ordained their first five women to serve as deacons in November. The women who made history in the church and in the Convention are Virginia Canada, Mildred Harrison, Pearl Price, Grace Christianson, and Virginia Goslin.

Cliff Temple embarked on a three-phase “Together We Build” program in 1981, which included Temple restoration, demolition of existing structures, a new educational building, and modernization of Mead Hall. The following three years would see the church campus transform into an unsettled mess of tearing down and building up, but construction was completed on the Temple, atrium, and new fellowship hall, and the church celebrated with a dedication in January of 1984. The Temple’s woodwork and ceiling were part of this transformation, along with a playground and garden on the corner of 10th and Beckley.



Dedication, 1984

The church continued its focus on local ministries and missions throughout the decade. Cliff Temple had provided food for those in need since 1948, but in the summer of 1982, when the church's director of weekday ministries realized that children on the free lunch program at school often went hungry in the summer, the AGAPE (Aid Given All People Evangelistically) kitchen began serving free lunch to neighborhood children during their break from school. The program served 670 people in the two weeks in July and continued for the rest of the decade, providing meals for families "in crisis" throughout the year. Each summer, however, children were the priority. Beckley Hills became a mission church of Cliff Temple, adding to the church's missions, including DeSoto Hispanic Baptist Mission and Cliff Temple Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean congregations. The American Indian Baptist Mission was added in 1987, along with another Hispanic mission in south Dallas.

The 1980s Ethiopia famine was one of the worst humanitarian events of the 20th century, galvanizing the world's attention to end widespread starvation and save lives. Cliff Temple responded. Dr. Griffin preached on the need for members to help as they could. The Royal Ambassadors and WMU sponsored a "typical third world meal" to raise awareness and funds, and the music ministry sponsored a concert to raise money. The church sent over \$3,900 to World Hunger Relief.

Under the direction of Charles E. “Bud” Lovell, Cliff Temple’s music program continued to grow. The Sunset Serenaders, PraiSong, and New Humanity sang in church, on television, and as a ministry to our community and beyond. Preschool and children’s choirs, adult and children’s handbells, a men’s chorus, and an orchestra all brought



Temple Choir and Orchestra, 1980s

music to the church. The Temple Choir sang every week. They also prepared and presented classical oratorios, traditional and modern anthems, and gospel music and hymns. They traveled to London and Paris in 1985 and toured England and Scotland in 1987.

1989 saw the inauguration of President George H.W. Bush, *The Little Mermaid*, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In March, Dr. Griffin resigned to pastor a church in North Carolina. He described Cliff Temple as “America’s church” and left a legacy of supporting women as church leaders.

The decade saw schisms widen in the Southern Baptist Convention related to roles of women, inerrancy, soul competency, and the priesthood of the believer. Cliff Temple, described by Dr. Griffin, as an “alternative” to the Southern Baptist stereotypical church, would be called on to determine its relationship with the convention. Dean Dickens was called to pastor Cliff Temple in December, 1989. Dr. Dickens would lead the church as it navigated that relationship.

1990-1999

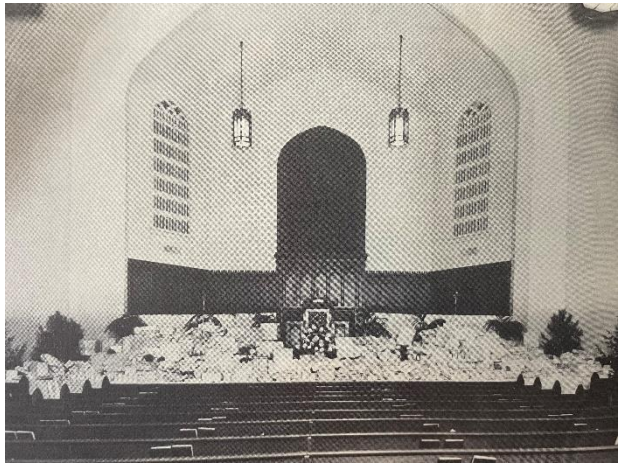
The 1990s brought Beanie Babies, Furbies, the Macarena, and *Friends*. Oak Cliff witnessed redevelopment of the area around North Bishop Avenue and Davis Street, beginning an increase in property values. The decade was one of decisions and changes for Cliff Temple. The church’s relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention remained strained. The 1990 convention continued to argue over the role of women and remained divided on “inerrancy” of the Bible. Cliff Temple convened a Denominational Relations Committee of fifteen

members to “study how to more effectively relate to our Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist General Convention of Texas.” The church decided to retain a nominal relationship with SBC but began its relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded neighboring Kuwait and had fully occupied the country within two days. Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm followed, beginning with the US deploying troops in August and coming to a close with the Liberation of Kuwait in Operation Desert Shield. Cliff Temple worked with the V.A. to set up an office for Operation Desert Shield assistance and offered support for families who came to Dallas to visit war-wounded soldiers.

The conflict ended the following February. That June, the church honored the servicemen returned from Operation Desert Storm, along with veterans and reservists, with a celebration and block party called Hotdogs and Heroes. The church continued celebrating heroes the following year, celebrating Dallas police officers, fire fighters, and paramedics.

Cliff Temple’s history of giving during Christmas began in the 1920s with “White Christmas,” as members brought toys for children in need, wrapped in white paper and placed on the altar. That tradition continued until the 1950s when that tradition was replaced with



White Christmas, 1950s

“Pack a Basket.” Members of each class were assigned items to bring, including food, which were packed up into baskets and distributed to families served by the Care Center. Distribution of toys became “Christ in Christmas” in 1991. The event continues each year and has evolved into a time organized by Mission Oak Cliff for parents to choose gifts for their children while the children have fun with the Cliff Temple youth.



Christ in Christmas, 2012

Cliff Temple became part of the Baptist General Convention of Texas’s “Key Church” strategy for missions. The strategy supported establishing missions to minister to groups in the neighborhood, including apartment ministries. The church embarked on “Mission: Oak Cliff” in February of 1992 as “a comprehensive missions strategy” to “fulfill the mission our Lord has given to the people of Cliff Temple Baptist Church to reach all the people groups of Oak Cliff.” The Care Center, which had evolved from the WMU’s food pantry, served 272 families with food, counseling, and other services and 192 families with clothes in one month that year. By the end of the decade, Cliff Temple supported twenty-six mission groups, including apartments and groups in Pleasant Grove and DeSoto.

Two decades after contemporary “Jesus music” became popular, contemporary Christian music had entered church services throughout the country. Some Cliff Temple members who had come of age during the proliferation of the new, popular music style preferred a casual worship service featuring praise choruses and a contemporary sound, while others preferred a formal, traditional style that featured choral anthems and the great hymns in the Baptist hymnal. Dr. Dickens and Bud Lovell appointed a worship committee to study the style of worship to be practiced in the church. The result was a blending of the two, a service that combined the elements of both styles of worship.

April 19, 1995, marked the horrific bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 and injuring 680 people. Amazon sold its first book in July, and the Macarena dominated the

airwaves and the dance floors. To combat a shifting of values in children, Cliff Temple embarked on a church-wide study of “Right from Wrong.” School children and youth met by grade level, and adults met to study topics such as the idea of truth and the role of truth in relationships.

The pipe organ in the Temple, installed in 1948, badly needed substantial repairs. The decision was made to replace the organ, leaving the existing pipes, and adding a Trompette en Chamade in the balcony. After a lengthy fundraising effort, the organ was dedicated in April of 1997 during a service to honor organist Gus Berry’s retirement after almost 47 years. The Berry-Roberts organ was named to honor Mr. Berry and in memory of Edna Roberts, a long-time supporter of the church's music programs.

Dr. Dickens resigned in 1996, and Bruce McIver served as interim for most of 1997. Dr. Glen Schmucker accepted the call of Cliff Temple, and began his pastorate at the end of June, 1998.

The first website was launched in 1991, that number growing to two million by 1998, the year Google debuted. The decade saw the percentage of households owning computers increasing from 15 to 51 percent. When Cliff Temple announced its own “Web page” in 1998, www.cliff temple.org, Dr. Schmucker noted that “people by the thousands sign on to the World-Wide-Web every day.”

The Dallas Stars won the Stanley Cup in 1999, and it seemed everyone was waiting for a new Harry Potter book. Cliff Temple saw the need and addressed mental health. Support groups were formed for divorce recovery, illness, grief recovery, and family illness. Because carrying a purse comforted some of their patients, the church collected old purses to send to the Terrell Mental Hospital.

As the year ended, Cliff Temple’s Strategic Planning Committee crafted, and the church approved, a new mission statement as the new millennium approached. “We at Cliff Temple Baptist Church are committed to representing Jesus Christ in authentic ways that help diverse people develop and nurture meaningful relationships with God and each other.”

2000-2010

Despite world-wide fears of the “Y-2K” bug, the anticipated computer issue expected to cause extensive havoc to systems infrastructures as the year changed from 1999 to 2000, the new millennium began without major issues until 2001. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, shook the world, and the effects continue to reverberate. America went to war, the global economy went into a tailspin, and a sense of security was shattered, resulting in a loss of trust and fear of “others.”

Cliff Temple committed to “The New Cliff Temple: A Twenty-First Century Rebirth,” with a framework of “spiritual reformation,” with an emphasis on small group Bible study, “physical relocation,” adapting the facilities to include a new welcome center on Tenth Street and attention to “modern child care and youth education space.” The concept of “Mission reclamation” involved developing an “inner city Missions and Social Services Program.” Cliff Temple participated in myriad ministry opportunities: a prayer walk in the neighborhood, driving the bus for Bishop Avenue Ministries, working with Meals on Wheels, or volunteering at the Care Center.

In 2002 the church adopted the new mission statement: Sharing Christ through Caring Relationships. Based on Acts 2, this mission statement, along with a clarification of core values, led to a new design for the organizational structure of the church, including eliminating most committees, initiating ministry teams, and installing a leadership team.

The church voted in June 2002 to partner in the work of The Well, a new congregation ministering people with severe mental illnesses. Beginning on the streets and meeting in parking lots, The Well Community, numbering around 100 by 2005, continues to meet weekly at Cliff Temple. The youth department, seeking a name that identified them, chose “The Cliff” for a name in 2004. They chose an image of a person climbing a mountain cliff to symbolize striving to get closer to God.

2006 brought *The Office*, Twitter (called “twtr”), and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. That year Cliff Temple entered into a partnership with Buckner Baptist Benevolences. Plans were made for a new Community Center in partnership with Buckner. Mission: Oak Cliff ceased to be an incorporated agency and operated as the Goslin Care Ministry under Buckner Children and Family Services until 2010, when it returned as a ministry of Cliff Temple. Bud Lovell retired at the

end of 2006 as Minister of Music after thirty-five years of directing “one of the most distinguished music ministries in the United States as well as performing all pastoral duties between the four pastors with whom he served.”

The church filled the building every day. The Child Development Center, with its roots in the 1940s Tot Haven, continued its care for children of working parents. The church hosted two charter schools and an afternoon program for school children every weekday. The Well met at the church on Saturdays, and Union Cathedral met in Bassett Chapel on Sundays. Dr. Schmucker resigned in April of 2008, and the church chose to engage in an intentional interim period, a time of reflection, healing, and preparation for the new pastor. Dr. Nolan Duck, Interim Specialist, began his interim pastorate in July to lead the church in the process, and by June of 2010, Cliff Temple was united and prepared as it called Dr. Brent McDougal as pastor.

2011-2023

The Oxford Dictionary named “selfie” the word of the year, and Candy Crush was the most popular game played in 2013, the same year Cliff Temple developed a new mission statement: Building Everyday People into Everyday Missionaries for Jesus Christ. According to *Everyday*, the church’s monthly publication, “Everyday missionaries are those who love God with their whole hearts, are being transformed together by the love of Jesus, and who are sent by the Spirit to love others in places where they live, work, and play.” A new church logo representing the foundation of our church within the diverse community was introduced, and a prayer ministry began in earnest. Members gathered each week to pray for members, the community, and specific needs.

2013 also saw the inaugural Swing for the Cliff, a golf tournament to raise funds for youth summer mission projects. Over the past ten years, the tournament has allowed students to travel to minister in places such as Washington DC, Memphis, Colorado, and San Francisco, and in the summer 2014, they served as Everyday Missionaries in Guatemala, doing construction work at a clinic and working with two schools for a vacation bible school type of experience.

The church continued to live its mission statement in 2015. Volunteers worked with KidzKlub, a twice-monthly neighborhood

missions effort to minister to fifth through twelfth grade children who live around North Lancaster Street, and Cliff Temple ladies made “lovies,” a little doll to help preemies at Methodist hospital NICU bond with their moms. Volunteers read with students at Bowie Elementary, and Mission Oak Cliff, offered its first citizenship class, helping with English, American history, geography, and civics needed for the citizenship exam.



Goslin Building

Mission Oak Cliff moved from Fellowship Hall, where they had been located since the Goslin building burned in 2005, to Mead Hall in 2016. The fellowship hall received an update to include audio

and video, lighting, decor, a platform, and a coffee bar. The restrooms, hallways, and entry points for the children’s ministry areas were refreshed, and video screens were added in the Temple.

In 2016, the youth began monthly visits to Promise House, a temporary housing and rehabilitation facility for teens in broken situations. That ministry continued until the facility transitioned to adult care at the beginning of 2023. The students now go out into the community to pray for people they encounter. Coram Deo, a modern worship service, which began in 2015 on Sunday evenings, was moved to Sunday mornings in 2016. This second service continued until after 2020.

2018 marked the beginning of Neighborhood Network, which began as a way to create forms of Christian community alongside friends and neighbors who might not come to church.

The church entered the “Great Expectations,” a multi-million dollar building renovation campaign in 2017, and echoing Cliff Temple of



1938, wash tubs were placed at the front of the Temple in November of 2018, and the congregation placed pledge cards in the tubs to commit to the great expectations. Construction began in 2020.

Dr. McDougal resigned in November of 2020, and the renovations of the

“Great Expectations” Pledges in Wash Tubs, 2018

children’s area, courtyard, Temple terrace and foyer and the new 10th Street entry and lobby were completed in 2022.



10th Street Entry, 2022

Before 2020, the terms “social distancing,” “mask mandates,” and “lockdowns” were unknown to most people, but the COVID-19 pandemic changed every aspect of life that year. A Dallas County Judge issued a “Stay-At-Home” order, prohibiting public gatherings

and allowing only “essential” services to remain open. Cliff Temple closed its doors immediately, live streaming both services, with only worship leaders present, from the church or individual homes. Sunday school classes, like many businesses, conducted classes on Zoom. The church remained remote until August, but worshipers, and all Dallas County citizens were required to wear masks in public until 2021.

Gannon Sims began his pastorate on July 1, 2022. After the season of distance brought about by the pandemic, it was time for all areas of the church to draw closer together. Rev. Sims believed that Spiritual renewal and intentional collaboration between staff, committees, deacons, Mission Oak Cliff, the Child Development Center, and the Spanish Language Ministries were keys to unlocking our calling as everyday missionaries and the greatest days in our future.



Easter Worship Service in the Temple, 2023

“The greatest day of this church still is in the future.”
- Dr. Wallace Bassett, final sermon 1966

*Then Jesus came to them and said,
“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

Matthew 28:18-19

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the first and greatest commandment.
And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.*

Matthew 22:37-39