

CHAPTER VI

JUSTICE, HALL, AND A MOVE

Without the leader on whom they had depended for so many years Kelham was like a ship without a rudder. R. C. Howard had been such a tower of strength that it was difficult to visualize Kelham operating without his strong leadership. After the initial shock had subsided, the staff and the officers of the church, knowing what must be done, immediately went into action. Jack Lyall had been called as music director in March of 1947, before Brother Howard passed away, and he came on the field in June of that year, before a pulpit committee was elected.¹ It was almost two months after Brother Howard's untimely death at the age of fifty-eight that a pulpit committee was appointed and the first step of rebuilding was accomplished. The committee were among the ever-faithful stalwarts of the church: R. C. Howard, Jr., C. C. Freeney, Homer Myers, George Tiefel, and E. M. Gibson.²

Prayerfully the committee began its work. They were certain God had already chosen a leader for His flock. Although there were others considered, the committee was unanimous that the pastor God had selected for them was pastor of First Church, Atoka, Anson Justice, a native Oklahoman.

¹Minutes of Kelham Baptist Church, March 21, 1947.

²Ibid., July 6, 1947.

Anson Justice

Anson Justice was born near Elmore City and graduated from Lindsay High School and the University of Oklahoma. His graduate work was done at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He was baptized, married, and ordained in First Church, Norman, under "Preacher" (Edgar F.) Hallock. Justice served as the first pastor of Trinity Church, Norman for seven years.³ He then served First Church, Atoka, for more than six years. His wife is the former Nadean Turner of Norman. They have three children, Ruth Ann, Laurence, and Paul.⁴

Feeling certain that they had located the pastor who had been chosen by God to lead the flock at Kelham, the committee recommended to the church that it tender a call to Anson Justice. Justice accepted the call, and on September 1, 1947, he came on the field as Kelham's spiritual leader.

On June 20, 1948, a seven-room house, to be used for a parsonage, was purchased at 917 Northeast Nineteenth Street for fifteen thousand dollars.⁵

Under Justice's leadership, Kelham continued its role as a *missionary* Baptist church. The church set a goal to establish at least one mission a year. In 1947 a radio program was started with Anson preaching each Tuesday morning at 7:45 A.M. over station KLPR.⁶

³Anson Justice was the mission pastor at Trinity, Norman, and saw the church through its constituting.

⁴"Program of Dedication Services," September 7, 1952.

⁵*The Baptist Messenger*, July 2, 1948.

⁶*Ibid.*, October 3, 1947.

The parsonage on Nineteenth Street

In 1948 Newalla Mission was founded⁷ and three former missions were constituted as churches. These were Plainview (formerly Lincoln Mission), Shields Boulevard located at 3704 Shields Boulevard,⁸ and Friendship, located on Southwest Fifteenth.

Southwest Friendship Church, 1951

⁷Mary Fike, "A History of Kelham Baptist Church" (Brewington Collection).

⁸Mary Fike noted that Shields Boulevard was started as mission in honor of the later R. C. Howard. In the minutes for the deacons meeting of June 9, 1947, Harold Lassiter, Brother Howard's assistant and acting leader after his death, introduced "Bro. Steele from our new Mission, Shields Blvd. Baptist Mission." Later Lassiter became pastor of Shields Boulevard.

Shields Boulevard Church, 1951

In 1949 there were eighty-nine more people baptized in Kelham than in any other church in the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.⁹

It was also in 1949 that Kelham member Albert McClellan, editor of *The Baptist Messenger*, left for Nashville, where he initially served as Publicity Director for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. When he left, this tribute to Kelham appeared in the last issue of *The Baptist Messenger* edited by him:¹⁰

And Kelham Avenue, with R. C. Howard and Anson Justice as my spiritual mentors, how can I ever be anything except an Oklahoman? Kelham gave me a broad view of what heaven is like, where fellowship is deep and kind, where people love each other, where God and all his interests come first, Kelham with all her children churches and grandchildren churches. Kelham with her abundant liberality. Kelham that gave my two sons their first consciousness of what a great church can be like. Kelham will always be a part of me. Glorious Kelham. It could happen only in Oklahoma.

In 1949 Howard Memorial, originally East Reno Mission and then Meadowview, constituted into a church, and in 1952 Crutch Mission, located at 6900 Northeast Twenty-third, received its charter as a church. The Chairman of the Missions Committee at the time was M. J. Jones.

In 1951 space was again at a premium. There were two alternatives. The church could expand the present facility, or they could move. There was much soul-searching and a great deal of discussion as to the proper course. A drastic shift in population was occurring. The location on Fourteenth and Kelham was not as desirable a location as it once was because a great number of the members had moved from the area to other parts of the city. The

⁹Ibid, February 4, 1949.

¹⁰*The Baptist Messenger*, July 28, 1949. The frontispiece of this issue has a typographical error in the date, indicating 1948.

transitional nature of the neighborhood "made some members doubt the wisdom of added building at the site."¹¹ A choice had to be made. Some thought a new location should be sought and that the church should be moved. Others felt that they already had so much invested in the old location that they could not afford to move. There was no easy answer.

After much prayer and a thorough discussion of the available options, it was finally decided to bring the matter to a vote of the members. When the vote came it was two hundred and fifty to sixteen to remain in the old location.¹² The die was cast.

From the perspective of time it might be easy to say the church made the wrong decision. Such a conclusion, however, would be simplistic, for it disregards the dynamics of the church and the community in troubled times. Moving the facilities any substantial distance would have meant abandoning the members of the church. Later a move was made twenty blocks north, but even that meant hardship for some members. Another factor to be considered in the equation was a rather substantial amount of money that had accumulated in the treasury. Many hours were consumed in suggestions concerning proper use of the funds. Voting to build eliminated possible contention and moved the work ahead.

When the church decided, no time was wasted. Plans were drawn for a new educational building, to be located on the corner of Northeast Thirteenth and Kelham. This was the location of the original white-frame building and its additions, and it was still being used as part of the church operation.

¹¹"A Stranger Looks Inside a City Church: 'Kelham Baptist Just Grows and Grows,'" *Oklahoma City Times*, April 4, 1954, Page E-1.

¹²*Ibid.*

Disassembling the original building

Lockhoma Mission was a rapidly growing mission and needed additional buildings. The original building was sawed into two sections, and moved to Lockhoma, where it continued in the Lord's work for many more years. Actual construction had begun on the new educational building before the old building was moved. The new building was built around the old as much as possible.

The new building was two-storied with two single-story wings. The foundations on the single storied sections were built so that an additional floor could be added on when required. When completed the new building contained 5,600 square feet.

The new educational building

As soon as the educational building was completed all church functions were moved into the new building, and re-

modeling of the old auditorium began. As originally constructed the old auditorium was built over a basement, with an entrance several steps above street level. Remodeling plans included lowering the auditorium floor to street level, adding thirteen feet to the front of the building, five feet to the rear, and seven feet along the north side. The new sanctuary was designed to add an additional three hundred seats, bringing total seating capacity to one thousand and fifty. The new sanctuary was described at the time as "conventional enough to be like a church and modern enough to be up-to-date."¹³

In later years Anson Justice recalled, "We decided to shoot the works and it seems to have been the right decision. We have members driving in from all over the county each Sunday. Our membership has risen to two thousand and four hundred."¹⁴

Remodeled auditorium

Designed by Architect Bryan Miller and constructed by Milner Construction Company, the new building was one of the most beautiful in the city. The exterior was pink

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

Clinton brick, trimmed with two bands of marblecrete cast stone, with a cornice of the same material. The front was built of Crab Orchard stone surrounding a massive arch, which enclosed elaborate rose window towers above glass doors that seemed to invite the worshiper to come into the house of God.¹⁵

The color scheme of the interior was light green and rose, with cinnamon carpet down the aisles and rose drapes across the baptistry. The building was completely air-conditioned. A completely new baptistry was installed as well as new walnut pulpit furniture. The new building was dedicated on September 7, 1952. Regular services were held in the morning, and the dedication was held in the afternoon.

The dedication opened with the Processional, which included the pastor and deacons, mission pastors, and pastors of churches organized by Kelham Avenue Baptist Church. Mrs. Ferman Phillips was the organist. Dr. M. E. Ramay addressed the assembled group on "The Hazards of Going On."

Some of the notables who attended were the Honorable Johnston Murray, Governor; Allen Street, Mayor; Dr. Hershel H. Hobbs, President of the Southern Baptist Convention; and Dr. T. B. Lackey, Executive-Secretary of The Baptist General Convention Oklahoma.¹⁶ During the

¹⁵"Program of Dedication Services," September 7, 1952.

¹⁶Personal letters of congratulation were received from such Southern Baptist legends as Dr. R. G. Lee (see Appendix D for the letter from Lee); Dr. E. D. Head, President of Southwestern Seminary; Dr. J. Howard Williams, Executive Secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Harold Lassiter, then serving as pastor of First Church, Flat River, Missouri; Joe Burton, Editor of *Home Life*; John Wesley Raley, President of Oklahoma Baptist University; and Dr. Harold Graves, President of Golden Gate Seminary (Justice Collection, Howard Memorial Library). In addition telegrams were received from J. D. Grey (First Church, New Orleans) and Porter Routh (Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention). These also are in the Justice Collection.

evening worship the baptistry was used for the first time. The song service was led by R. C. Howard, Jr.,¹⁷ who was also a member of the building committee. Ruth Ann Justice and Beverly Howard¹⁸ sang a duet.

The following year the missionary growth of Kelham continued as Lockhoma Mission was started with Max Caldwell as pastor. In January 1953 Jack Rose, of Harrah, came as the new Music Director.¹⁹

In January 1954 the educational building was completed and dedicated. During construction of the remodeled auditorium, part of the educational building was used as a temporary auditorium for the church.

In late 1954 Anson Justice resigned to assume the pastorate of Crestwood Church, Oklahoma City, where he remained until his retirement from the active ministry. *The Baptist Messenger* (January 12, 1978) indicated that Anson Justice retired January 1, 1978, after forty-six years as an Oklahoma pastor. He had been moderator in three associations, was a former president of the state convention, and was a member of the board of directors of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. During his ministry he preached 160 revivals, conducted twenty-eight Bible study series, taught forty years at Falls Creek and led six tours to the Holy Land. At the time of his retirement, his son Laurence was a pastor in Anniston, Alabama, and his son, Paul, since deceased, was a pastor in Oklahoma City.

¹⁷"Program of Dedication Services," September 7, 1952.

¹⁸Mrs. James Emerson.

¹⁹*The Baptist Messenger*, January 2, 1953. Jack Rose currently is retired and living in Tulsa.

David C. Hall

The church elected a pulpit committee and within a month, David C. Hall, pastor of Sequoyah Hills Church, Tulsa, was called. Hall was born in Oklahoma County and educated in Oklahoma City public schools. He was ordained at the age of sixteen and served as pastor for Nicoma Park Church from 1943–1944 and later at Crowder. He was pastor of Calvary Church, Shawnee, and later Emmanuel, Ardmore. In May 1951 he accepted the pastorate of Sequoyah Hills, when the church was only thirty months old. During his ministry at Sequoyah Hills there were six hundred additions to the membership, two hundred and thirty-nine of which were by baptism.²⁰

David Hall was a graduate of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth. He was accompanied to Oklahoma City by his wife, Marcine, and three children, David Jr., Judith, and Mary Sue.²¹ At that time, George Green of Tulsa was educational director, and Don Sears was Youth and Music Director.²²

Hall preached his first sermon at Kelham in January 1955. David Hall was an enthusiastic young preacher; strong on organization and promotion. He led the people to practice preaching, teaching, and soul-winning.²³

²⁰"Rev. Hall Returns, He'll Be at Kelham" (n.d., article seems to indicate 1954 or 1955), Westbrook Collection.

²¹Ibid.

²²*The Baptist Messenger*, Feb. 12, 1959.

²³Mary Fike, "History of Kelham," n.d., ca. 1964.

In the first year Hall was at Kelham, 1955, there were two hundred and forty-four additions, one hundred and twenty-seven by baptism. Total tithes and offerings were \$101,544.²⁴

In 1956 the specter of relocation again raised its head. The area in which Kelham was located was in flux. Population was shifting to the north and west. The church finally decided that to survive, relocation was a must. Events moved swiftly. During this time Jack Rose, minister of music, resigned to accept a similar position at First Church, Bartlesville.

There were lots available between Northeast Forty-eighth and Fiftieth, just west of Eastern, where Kelham had considered building a mission. This plot covered nearly a square block, but it was L-shaped. Although the location was seriously considered, it was not selected.

The building committee, composed of C. L. Fike, Glen Pipher, Charles Litton, R. C. Howard, Jr., E. W. Thomas, and Claude Barton, wrestled long with the problem of exactly where to relocate. Property on Broadway Extension was considered, as was a plat on North Lincoln. Another site considered was Northwest One hundred and eighth and Western.

First Church, Oklahoma City, had established Park Estates Mission at Northeast Thirty-sixth and Staton Drive some time before, and things were not going too well. First Church offered to sell the building and property to Kelham for approximately what was owed on it, and Kelham bought the site for fifty-nine thousand dollars.

Plans now had to be made to sell the church property on Kelham Avenue. Unknown to Kelham at the time, the members of Park Estates Mission protested that they were never told of the pending sale or consulted in any manner

²⁴*The Baptist Messenger*, February 19, 1956.

whatever. They complained that they had been shuffled onto Kelham Avenue Baptist without the members' knowledge. Park Estates rebelled. They were determined, but they were ordered to leave the building and site, which First Church had helped to finance. Members of Park Estates Mission tried to establish a new church and met for a time "in the army reserve armory, NE 37 and Eastern".²⁵ Dr. Elmer Ridgeway, who was retired at the time, preached for the group for a while. Park Estates Mission's attempt to establish a church was unsuccessful, and many finally affiliated with Kelham.

Northeast Thirty-sixth and Staton Drive

The property at Northeast Fourteenth and Kelham covered "a square block and [was] valued at more than one-half million dollars."²⁶ The property was sold to Avery Chapel, African Methodist Episcopal church. Robert H. Alexander was pastor of Avery Chapel, which had a membership of more than eleven hundred. The announced "purchase price was \$180,000."²⁷ At the time of the sale, Kelham had already begun construction of new facilities on a three and one-half acre plot on Northeast Thirty-sixth.

The last person baptized at the Kelham Avenue location

²⁵"Orphaned Church Finds Home in Armory," n.d (Westbrook Collection).

²⁶"Baptists Sell Church," n.d. (Westbrook Collection).

²⁷Ibid.

was Moses Goddard of Adult 3. On February 8, 1959, Kelham moved to Thirty-sixth Street, although the official dedication was not held until April 5. George Bruce Fike, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Fike, was the first candidate to be baptized at the new location. Several years later, the church officially adopted the tradename of "Kelham Baptist Church."²⁸ The church's corporate name remained The Kelham Avenue Baptist Church, which it still is today.

Construction progressed rapidly at the new location. On Sunday, April 5, 1959, the building was officially dedicated. Designed by Bryan Miller and constructed by J. W. Skaggs Construction Company, the edifice was modern in design, the exterior presenting an inviting pattern of pink brick and grey stone. The temporary sanctuary, which would later serve as Fellowship Hall, had a seating capacity of six hundred and fifty. The units of the structure were designed to care for approximately twelve hundred in Sunday school. The cost of the project, including pews, parking, annex remodeling, and architect, was about three hundred and fifty thousand dollars and resulted in thirty-five thousand square feet of space. The dedication service was held at 3:00 P.M., with presentation of the building by C. L. Fike, Chairman of the Building Committee, and acceptance of the building by M. A. Fitzgerald, Chairman of Deacons.

During this transitional period, the church continued to grow. In the previous four years about eleven hundred members were added and the church's income had increased about fifty-percent.²⁹ The first Sunday after relocation, there were one thousand and eighty in attendance. Two worship services were held, the first at 8:30 A.M., the second 11:00 A.M., with Sunday School sandwiched in between at 9:45 A.M.

²⁸Minutes of Kelham Baptist Church, March 6, 1966.

²⁹*Oklahoma City Times*, April 6, 1959.

In 1958 the Foreign Mission Board assumed support of our mission in Egypt, where Seddik Girgis served as pastor. Just prior to this, Brother and Mrs. Girgis were guests of Kelham for several weeks. Kelham helped them purchase a car to be shipped to Egypt.

That same year Don Sears resigned as Music Director to accept a similar position in Bonham, Texas. As he had many times in the past, R. C. Howard, Jr., filled the position until a replacement could be selected. R. C. was an excellent singer and was always willing to help in any manner possible. R. C. Howard, Jr., and Millie, his wife, had been married in 1930 and had four daughters, Barbara, Beverly, Katie, and Trudy. R. C., like his father, R. C., Sr., started in the insurance business and progressed finally to the specialized field of estate analysis and management. After retiring, the Howards moved to a ranch near Cushing, Millie's hometown.³⁰ R. C. died in 1980.

R. C. and Millie Howard in Hong Kong

Members of Kelham for many years, R. C. and Millie contributed greatly, both spiritually and financially, to the growth of Kelham. Their contributions led to the construction of Howard Memorial Chapel at Baptist Memorial Hospital and the Howard Cottage at the Boys' Ranch Town. R. C. was awarded an honorary doctor of laws

³⁰*OBU Bulletin: Bison Hilltopics*, Oklahoma Baptist University, Spring 1983.

degree by Oklahoma Baptist University in 1974.³¹

In August of 1958, after R. C. Howard, Jr.'s, interim period as Music Director when Don Sears left, Denny Boyd of Elk City was called as Music Director.

In January of 1960 Texas Mission in the southeastern part of Oklahoma County was begun with A. Lee Hibbard as pastor.³² This was a new era in missions for Southern Baptists. This was in the period of the new philosophy of "associational missions." Kelham's missions before this time had been missions that originated in the heart of the home church or were adopted because of needs in the mission.

At some point in time, however, the idea that the association could somehow exercise greater wisdom as to where new churches needed to be started originated. Consequently the association had bought property in what they deemed to be growing and expanding areas of the county. Texas Mission was one of these missions.³³ In this case the church voted to have the trustees accept title to the property for the mission on Southeast Twenty-ninth and begin plans and arrangements for construction of a permanent building. In June the church authorized the be-

³¹Ibid.

³²Minutes of Kelham Baptist Church, December 20, 1959.

³³One might well argue that few churches possess the wisdom and resources to properly plan mission sites in expanding communities. The history of Kelham's missions and mission failures might well be used as evidence of this, but an equally strong case might be made based on statistics for associational missions. Though we might be tempted to adopt a corporate approach to mission starts, buying key properties well ahead of their development, it seems to this writer that the process that has worked from the very beginning has almost twenty centuries of successful church starts behind it. Furthermore, this strategy has the implicit support of Matthew 16:16-18, which associational missions probably lacks. In no case should this be seen as a diatribe against cooperative missions. We believe in cooperative missions as taught in the New Testament. If anything, this is a defense of church missions in its purest New Testament sense—the sense in which missionary Baptist churches have always done the work of the Great Commission.

ginning of Shady Nook Mission, with Damon Corley as pastor.³⁴

In February of 1960 George Green submitted his resignation to become Educational Director of Baptist Temple, Oklahoma City. In March Jim Moore was called from Missouri as Educational Director.

In September 1960 David C. Hall resigned as pastor of Kelham to become pastor of North Phoenix Church, the largest Baptist church in the western United States. Hall returned to Oklahoma and pastored First Church, Chickasha, where he remained for three years.³⁵ Hall then served in Madison, New Jersey, where he remained almost a year. From there, he went to Washington, D. C., for a brief time. Later he was pastor of the Seminole Heights Church, Tampa, Florida. He currently pastors in Tulsa.

With the resignation of David Hall, Kelham was again without a leader, but there was never any doubt that the Master already had chosen exactly the right man to lead them. Little did the church know that under this man, God's man for God's time, they would again move. Only time would reveal that the church on the move was poised to move again.

³⁴Sherilyn Vogt, "History of Kelham Baptist Church," 1968. Minutes of Kelham Baptist Church for December 20, 1959, note that "the Missions Committee notify the Oklahoma County Baptist Association of our desire to begin a work" in the Shady Nook community and that "the Trustees be instructed to accept title to approximately four acres of land located a short distance South of N.E. 23rd street on Post Road."

³⁵"Baptist leader returns," *Oklahoma City Times*, April 14, 1977. The exact sequence of Dr. David C. Hall's ministry has not been fully researched by this writer.