

Historic N.C. church begins new ministry journey with solar-powered facilities

By Emily Holladay

In 1812, a dozen individuals gathered in Candler, N.C., west of Asheville and in sight of Mount Pisgah, to form Hominy Baptist Church. These 12 men and women hoped to create a community that would love God and minister to its neighbors.

Today, now over 200 years later, the church celebrates its long history of doing just that. In the semi-rural community, with nearly 25,000 residents and 10 miles from urban and eclectic Asheville, the church is full of warm and loving people who want to do ministry in new and creative ways, extending from the neighborhood to the environment, according to associate pastor Paul Raybon.

"One of the amazing things about Hominy Baptist Church is that our average attendance is between 150-175, but we run a full-time childcare ministry, a full-time adult daycare, an after-school program and our own meals-on-wheels program called Daily Bread," Raybon explained. "This is something that just stems out of who this church is. It's not a recent development. These things have been going on for years."

Since 1998, the church has solely identified with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, being one of the first churches in North Carolina to do so. In their years of partnership, the church has sent mission teams to Ukraine and raised funds to build wells in Africa, along with maintaining strong ties with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

"Hominy Baptist Church is one of CBF's strongest partner congregations in western North Carolina," said Larry Hovis, coordinator



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOMINY BAPTIST CHURCH

Hominy Baptist Church in Candler, N.C., celebrated its bicentennial anniversary last year (original church building depicted above) with a renewed commitment to community involvement and creative ministry.

of CBF of North Carolina. "That strength comes in two ways. First, Hominy Baptist has a strong CBF identity as expressed in their embrace of CBF values and the engagement of their leaders and members in CBF ministries. Second, they have a strong ministry in their community and beyond, evidenced by innovation in their missional approach to all they do."

Over the past few decades, the church has dreamed of additional ways to serve its community, and hoped to build a family life center to do just that. In 2001, the church built a ministries center to house the many community ministries already in place, including the childcare center and Daily Bread. However, they could not afford to build a family life center at that time.

More than 10 years later, as the church prepared to celebrate its 200th anniversary, they rekindled that dream, but it still seemed financially out of reach. So, instead of building a new facility, the church paid off the debt from the first building for the bicentennial celebration.

That was not enough for church members Jack and Carolyn Ferguson. They wanted to see the bicentennial celebration mark a new journey in the church's life and serve as an opportunity to reach further into the community. The Fergusons approached the ministry staff with their desire to help make this dream become a reality.

"In 2012, the Fergusons approached us and said, 'You know, we'd really like to see this family life center happen,'" recalled Raybon. "Because of the economy, we said, 'It's just not a really good time,' and they said, 'Oh no, you misunderstand us. We want to give you this building.' And so the Fergusons are fully funding the building."

After the conversation with the Fergusons, the church staff set out to design the 14,000-square-foot family life center, which will feature a full-size basketball court, an exercise equipment room, locker rooms, a small kitchen and several meeting and multi-purpose rooms.



FERGUSON FAMILY LIFE CENTER

Hominy Baptist Church, Candler, NC



Hominy Baptist members Jack and Carolyn Ferguson (pictured right) provided funding for a solar-powered family life center to house the church's childcare and adult daycare programs and other ministries.



The Ferguson Family Life Center, as it has been named, will now house the church's childcare and adult daycare programs, along with other community groups. The building is also being designed to serve as a Red Cross emergency shelter.

As the church continued plans to create this community structure, they created two building teams — one to instruct on structural issues,



The family life center has been a dream of Hominy Baptist for many years as they seek new and exciting ways to reach and impact the Candler community.

and the other to imagine ways the building can be used for new ministry in the community.

"We have a team that's looking at ways we can open it up to the community for sports teams, or a place for people to walk and exercise," Raybon said. "Our church is very focused on the community, so that's one of the things we'll always be looking at. It's not for us. It's for our community."

Because of its close proximity to Asheville, a progressive area, leadership put emphasis on making their new building environmentally friendly. As such, the building will be built using solar arrays covering approximately 11,000 square feet of the area. The solar arrays will cover the energy needs for the building along with 75 percent of the energy needs for the entire church campus.

For a congregation that seeks to reach its entire community, this is an enormous benefit, as it will free up funds to allow them to reach farther and wider than ever before.

"Usually when you do a solar project, it's many years before you see any financial advantage, but since the Fergusons are paying for it completely, we'll have the financial advantage from the very first day it's cut on. So that's a huge benefit," Raybon emphasized.

Construction on the new building began in August and is set to be complete within a year, opening its doors in Fall 2014. This is an exciting time as the church continues to grow into their 200-year history of loving God and ministering to the community in innovative ways.