

Clifton Christian Church

By Kathy Jordan

In 1909 a group Clifton area residents interested in building a Christian Church in Clifton was formed by the Rev. Clark bower.

Their dream became a reality with the dedication of the First Church of Christ of Clifton, 353 Second St., but more commonly know, as the Clifton Christian Church on Sunday January 9, 1921, starting at 10:30 a.m.

It was a beautiful building with two floors set atop a full basement. The stained glass windows were some of the most beautiful of any church in the valley.

The dedication turned out to be a valley wide event. The Rev. J.R. Blunt pastor of the Federated church at Palisade said the opening prayer.

The Rev. W.A. Mast of the Presbyterian Church in Grand Junction read the scripture lesson and William Weiser, president of the Grand Valley National Bank gave the main address of the day.

The Rev. George L. Snively, who was in charge of the dedication service, announced at the opening that the building had cost \$23,000 to construct, of which only \$7,000 had been paid. He said that he not only hoped that the balance of \$21,000 could be raised but there would be enough additional money raised to fully equip the church building and construct a parsonage.

The plan he outlined was that a pledge could be paid in a three year time period with no interested. His goal was to raise \$32,000.

Apparently he was a most convincing speaker.

According to a Daily Sentinel account the pledges started rolling in fast and furious and by dinner time \$34,000 had been raised from less than 100 men and women living within a radius of three miles of Clifton – and these were not wealthy people.

In the late 1980s the Clifton Christian church was no longer using the church built in 1920 and Joe Suarez, who had a bachelor degree in Christian education, rented the church and started his ministry work.

Suarez called it St. Paul's Pentecostal Church and was a traditional church

In 1990 Suarez's congregation purchased the church under the umbrella of Pentacostal Holiness Church. He said by then the once beautiful church was in bad repair.

Soon Suarez began reaching out to the homeless who were having issues with alcohol and drugs. Since his was no longer a traditional ministry he changed the name of the church to Set Free Ministries.

Suarez, a Vietnam Vet, wanted to reach out to what he called the “outcasts”. His program was working and soon the congregation of those looking for a non-tradition church went from 0 to 100.

Suarez said that one day a sheriff’s officer brought a young woman who to the church who had been found beaten in the desert and wanted to know of the church would help her. The sheriff’s office suspected that some bikers and attacked her and they didn’t know what to do with her. Suarez said the officer told him that he had heard that the church dealt with the people who were out of the normal realm of society. Suarez agreed to help her.

As the officer was leaving he warned Suarez that the bikers would probably come and try to take her from the church. Later one of the bikers did show up at the church and there was a confrontation.

Suarez told the biker “look your turf is outside these walls. This is a God house, this a church and you have no business in here and we are not going to let you take this girl.” The biker left.

Because of that event the bikers started coming to the church and such a positive relationship between the Set Free community and the Soldiers of Jesus group that they combines and became the Solders for Jesus Church.

Suarez said these guys would get on their bikes and go out and look for people who needed help. They found a lady out towards Delta who had a boys home and her license was going to be taken away because she couldn’t provide an educational program for them. So the Solders for Jesus converted her garage into a class room.

According to Suarez as word got out about the Soldiers group calls came from people needing help. began to get calls to help other people. They would go out and weatherize homes for the elderly, or family who couldn’t afford to do it themselves.

The Soldiers for Jesus ministry was going real well Suarez said until rumors began to spread that they were running drugs, that the Soldiers for Jesus was an outlaw biker gang using the church as a front for drug dealing and criminal activity.

The Pentecostal Holiness Church sold the church to the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1994. The Soldiers for Jesus church had to move to a new location and continued their ministry.

Suarez moved on too. He didn’t give up on his idea for the ministry work he was doing. He went on to get his masters degree in behavioral and social science and is now a probation officer.

The old Clifton Christian church is for sale again.