

First Baptist and its pastor are community fixtures

September 30, 2019



Pastor Blake Inscore looks back at the history of Crescent City's First Baptist Church and is struck by the story of its founding, as the church celebrates its 70 anniversary this Sunday.

"After moving here in 1949, a (California Highway Patrol) officer, Jack Anderson, and his wife were looking to see if any other people were interested in starting a Baptist church in Crescent City. So, he took out an ad in the (Del Norte Triplicate) for them to call him," Inscore said.

Unfortunately, as the story goes, Anderson subsequently was severely injured on the job. But others stepped in and took on his mission.

"The first group that met had 24 people, ages 8 to 90 years old, in a rented hall on 2nd Street," Inscore said.

The new members were there for but a few months, when the congregation purchased a small triangle of land for \$2,000 at the corner of Pacific and G streets.

The congregation's original hall, along with all of 2nd Street, was washed away in the tsunami of 2011. But the structure built at the corner of Pacific and G remains today, having been added to a couple of times. Inscore said the church now owns that entire block.

He and his wife, Lenea, arrived in Crescent City in 2008. Inscore has become Crescent City First Baptist Church's longest-tenured pastor.

"In fact," he said, "at three of my last four churches, I've been the longest-tenured pastor. The past 21 years, I've spent in (just) the last two places."

Inscore said the desire to establish a First Baptist Church in Crescent City was part of a movement following the Great Depression and then World War II, a real "Grapes of Wrath" migration out of the South, through the Bible Belt and into the West.

He said no founding members are in today's congregation here in Crescent City ... but only because Blanche Buckley joined just two years later, in 1949.

Buckley said her mother's family moved to Crescent City in 1947 and later heard about the effort to begin a First Baptist Church. "My mother chose to be a Baptist because her father was one, and his great-grandparents and so on, as far back we could find," she said.

She married her husband, Russell, at the church in 1951.

Buckley recalls seeing a picture in the church's scrapbook of one of its first pastors, Floyd Thompson. "He was 26 or so, sitting there on a concrete block. Well, he got in there to work with the crew building the church. Just like Pastor Blake does now," Buckley said.

"He's been very important to us, Pastor Blake. I appreciate his preaching, his reading, his dedication and a whole bunch of other words I can't come up with right now."

Inscore, who also serves as Crescent City's mayor, said he really didn't want to rock the boat when he arrived here. Yet that first summer, he couldn't help but notice the city's big turnout for the Fourth of July festivities. "The parade stages all around our property. I thought to myself, 'Man, I wish I could get all these people to church.'"

But the church building was locked up tight. Inscore was left wondering why it wasn't open for those assembled for the parade, if for no other reason than to use its restrooms. The answer he was given? "They'll get it dirty."

"I put that in my memory bank," Inscore said.

That spurred him to work on a vision for the church's role in better serving its community. Come the next Fourth of July, the building was open and members of the congregation were putting out coffee, donuts, hot chocolate and water bottles.

“I think I was able to touch more people on that one day than the rest of the year combined,” said Inscore. “The ability to see hundreds, if not thousands, milling about, runners going by and getting them to come inside. One of proudest things I have had the opportunity to serve our community.”

Inscore also recalls flippantly commenting that in order to further embrace the community, the church needed a new slogan: “If You Gotta Go, Go Here.”

“Then, without me knowing about it, they made banners and stuck them outside. ‘If You Gotta Go, Go Here’ became part of our church family and opened more doors.”

Inscore said that while his congregation has remained steady at about 60 active members attending church on Sundays, it hasn’t been afraid to take on big ideas. For example, he said, at Christmastime they traditionally adopt 20 families with children who are in Head Start, a Del Norte County Health Department program that helps lower-income families.

And, said Inscore, First Baptist partners with Four Square Church, its neighbor across the street, to encourage Christians through a 12-step recovery program. “Sometimes, we get more people here on Tuesday nights than on Sunday. But if people are getting ministered to who are struggling, I’m fine with that. It’s fantastic,” he said.

To celebrate the church’s 70th anniversary, Inscore said that after Sunday’s 10 a.m. worship service the congregation has planned a simple celebration – a tri-tip barbecue.

The Crescent City church already was honored during the state’s Baptist convention, and a local leader from Eureka will be here to present a plaque. Inscore also has invited participation by community leaders from both the City Council and the county’s Board of Supervisors.

Meantime, Buckley insisted that recognition be paid to Inscore’s wife, Lenea. “A good pastor, a blessed pastor, always has a good woman behind him, a godly woman. Lenea supports the pastor and always has throughout his ministry here, and supports the church,” Buckley said.

“A godly wife is probably a third, half, 100% of the ministry. She’s been a blessing to us.”