

## A Heritage of Christian Education Since 1975



In 2015 Christian Heritage Academy observes its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as not only a school, but as a vital ministry extension of the University Boulevard Church of the Nazarene (UBNC) in Jacksonville, Florida. Christian Heritage opened its doors to 24 students for the 1975-76 school year. Ever since then it has been “Providing a Christian Heritage” in an attempt to teach students that God through Jesus is a sure foundation they can build their lives on so they can say with the psalmist David, “Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine... What a wonderful inheritance!” (Psalm 16:5-6, New Living Translation)

Vision for the school began several years before it opened. The UBNC Senior Pastor then, Rev. R.E. Zollinhofer (“Pastor Z”), had allowed another church to rent some of the Nazarene church’s facilities for its school. It was this exposure to Christian education that gave Rev. Z the idea of UBNC opening its own school.

He “saw the need” for a school and so he approached Ruth Cox and Connie Glenn, UBNC members and local educators, about starting one. They envisioned offering “quality education in a Christian atmosphere, so that students are exposed to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and are encouraged to develop their individual abilities and be academically prepared to successfully handle future educational challenges.” That was and still is the Christian Heritage Mission.

The original visionaries and supporters of this endeavor felt “a Christian foundation was lacking in the public sector.” They believed a Christian day school, as opposed to a boarding school, could serve not only church families but also the community. However, they wanted a very open and non-sectarian school. There would be no denominational limits, but there would be a code students and parents had to agree to and understand before enrolling a child.

Much planning, prayer and preparation went into being ready for that first school year. In 1973-74 a survey was done among the UBNC congregation to see if it would support a school as part of its ministry. Ruth said, “We did a lot of data crunching before we began. There was a need and interest, but would church families, especially those without school-aged children, support the school?”

Ruth, Connie, and UBNC teenagers also canvassed the neighborhood around UBNC to announce a Christian school would be opening soon. “Out of those efforts we gained about one-third of our school students that first year,” said Ruth.

The school started by offering classes only to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders. The curriculum and format were traditional. Ruth and Connie taught the subjects. Ruth, the only full-time faculty member, served as Head Master, performing the administrative functions as well. Connie taught social studies two days a week. Classes met in the old church sanctuary (demolished in 1987 to make way for the current sanctuary) and some adjoining Sunday School rooms.

In 1975 and subsequent early years, challenges were abundant. How could a new school with limited funds get up and running and then stay solvent? Cost conservation included finding furniture at auctions, gathering library books from garage sales and purchasing items from businesses that were closing. It was even a challenge to get the students to school, so a van, bus and carpools served the purpose at various times. Lunchtime was also a hurdle to a young school that couldn’t afford a cook. By improvising, the students were fed prepackaged sandwiches, pizza, McDonald’s hamburgers on Fridays, and, of course, the old standby – a sack lunch.

And did Ruth ever get discouraged? She said, “The challenges served me well as a good foundation for an administrator because since then I’ve never let ‘no’ or ‘can’t’ be a part of my vocabulary. I have always pushed outside the box.”

Although it started on a shoestring budget and struggled to stay solvent, the school provided a quality education and did not water down its standards. Word of mouth advertising began spreading the school's name and quality. Rev. Z. said, "We were the only church school on the Southside that required certified teachers on our faculty. We had a good reputation."

Parents and community people began asking when other grades would be added, so a waiting list was started. Ruth went to the School Board and told them the school could expand to first through eighth grades because the overwhelming demand would translate into students and, thus, financial support.

Meanwhile, Rev. Z was introduced to the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) program. It focused on individualized study units known as PACES. Students, seated in individual carrels, learned by working through the units at their own speed. This program required a minimum of certified teachers since trained teachers' assistants could also work with the students.

Ruth and Rev. Z took training in this "learning centers and multi-age group" curriculum. The second school year, grades 1-8 were offered.

"While I was Head Master at the school, it never embraced the ACE program 100%," said Ruth. "I felt reading and math needed group instruction, so we combined that with the individualized unit. But the ACE structure made it possible for us to expand grade offerings and remain financially in the black."

Connie remembers this curriculum transition and all the volunteers who worked hard during this "major overhaul" because it required "working day and night" to prepare individual study carrels for the students and "finding the right people to assist as teacher aides." Even with all the work, Connie recalls, "It was fun. Ask any of the students who attended then, and they will tell you they had a good time while they learned. It was a good school."

Ruth agrees saying, "We all had so much fun together even though we worked hard. But it is laughing and crying together that really bonds a relationship. There was little strife because all who came to work and volunteer at the school had a common vision and focus."

The school continued to grow, and in its third year added kindergarten as well as ninth and tenth grades. With the expansion into higher grades came the addition of intramural sports teams, cheerleaders, and homecoming events. Students chose a crusader as their mascot and logo with gold and black as school colors. (Christian Heritage teams are still known as "The Crusaders" while the logo now features a shield and cross.)

Annual all-school plays were also presented with elaborate backdrops and costumes to compliment the music and drama. One followed the Noah's Ark theme, another was patriotic, others featured the nativity, but all uplifted Christ and His Kingdom. Helene Evans, Connie's assistant, lead the music program as well as multiple other assignments.

"We tried to build a well-rounded program," said Ruth. "We never wanted the students to feel like because they went to a church school that they were slighted in any fashion. Rather than be equal to the public school, we wanted to be better. I believe that was a good model and structure, and it is being followed today at Christian Heritage."

Over its 40-year history, Christian Heritage has had nine administrators. Each has brought certain strengths to the position and left a unique mark upon the school.

After Ruth Cox's tenure from 1975-1980, Jonathan (Jon) Sparks was the Administrator from 1980-1983. He recommended the school move to the Alpha Omega curriculum. Individualized curriculum with some small group interaction was still the format, but the new program challenged students more academically and intellectually.

From 1983-1986 Dave Jackson was the administrator. The school was in a precarious position at the time, and there was some discussion about closing it. Dave asked Rev. Z, "May I have a shot at trying to revive the school?" So during his tenure, the high school grades were dropped, the individualized curriculum was eliminated and a traditional classroom teaching environment was instituted. In addition, Christian Heritage became a "participating member" in the Florida Association of Christian Colleges and Schools.

Dave's business expertise resulted in a strong preschool program, established in 1984, and a more streamlined school structure. He admits the Lord sent just the right people to assist him, and one was

Martha Legg who eventually became the next administrator. Dave said that because God provided just the help that was needed, “I had nothing to do but go sit on the floor and play with the preschool kids.”

From 1986-1990 Martha Legg served as the school’s administrator. Among key improvements she remembers developing the preschool program, revising parent handbooks, initiating the Florida Performance Measurement System for the teachers, overseeing a major asbestos clean-up in some school room areas, and establishing a 12-month pay schedule option for faculty.

Besides these accomplishments, Martha felt, “establishing a team with a vision of what Christ had called each of us to do was a great victory. There was a unique spirit of unity and devotion to one another and to our established goals. I loved coming to work, and I think the rest of the staff did too.” One of those team members who came onboard in 1989 as a secretary and eventually moved into an Assistant Administrator was Lynn Barwell. She served with five administrators before leaving the school in July 2002.

One additional remembrance from Martha is that, “Praying with students and seeing their lives change is a special memory I have of my days at Christian Heritage. It was a real honor to have a small part in their becoming God’s children.”

From 1990-1991 Mike Curry was the administrator. He and his family had just returned to the United States from missionary service in Africa. “It was a personal challenge to experience the reverse culture shock of coming back to my home country,” said Mike.

Although there were a lot of adjustments, Mike said he “loved UBNC, the school and the people.” The administrator job was difficult for him, but the “sweet spirited and loving” staff and faculty reached out to him and his family. In addition, Mike remembers, “We experienced a real movement of the Holy Spirit that year and several students accepted Christ for the first time.”

From 1991 to August 2000, Jill Hoskins was the school’s administrator. The student body outgrew facilities during this time so the sixth grade was dropped and the school became “a premier Christian primary school” for kindergarten through fifth grade.

To meet the educational needs of the diverse student body, in 1993 the school began offering NILD Educational Therapy®. A product of the National Institute of Learning Development (NILD), this program is designed “to address students’ specific areas of difficulty and to improve their overall ability to think, reason and process information.” (See <http://discoveryprogram-inc.com> or <http://nild.net>) Christian Heritage sponsored and trained a teacher, Martha Newman, to be the director of the “Discovery Program”, and she helped train additional therapists. For 17 years the therapy was done at the school, but now referrals are made to Mrs. Newman. She and other therapists with Academic Therapy Solutions, Inc., work with clients from around the city in their homes and also from the computer since therapy is now available online.

Jill also saw a real need to upgrade “the aesthetic value of the school,” so each summer she had an improvement project. The school purchased new bulletin boards, student desks and chairs, replaced carpeting, painted regularly, upgraded computers, and added more multi-media technology. In addition, commercial-sized cooking and refrigeration equipment was purchased for the kitchen, the roundhouse became an indoor dining room for students, classrooms were built in part of the church fellowship hall, and two portable classrooms were added to the campus.

Major accomplishments in these years were full accreditation of the school by FACCS in 1995 and reaccreditation in 2000. Jill said, “The reaccreditation was God’s stamp of approval on this school.”

John Satterly was the administrator from 2000-2001. Prior to taking this lead position, John was a Christian Heritage faculty member, teaching fourth grade. He says, “Being the administrator was a wonderful catalyst for personal growth and gave me a unique opportunity to experience the grace of God. I will always appreciate the opportunity I was given, and I am very grateful for the love I was shown.”

During his tenure, Christian Heritage celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. John had the privilege of interviewing Pastor Z for a video that was produced for the observance, and he was MC for a special program October 5, 2000 that drew a crowd of 500 people. Ruth Cox and Connie Glenn were there as well as many school alumni, current students with their families, and UBNC members. Later during the

Silver Anniversary year, John served as “head chef” at an all-school cookout to close out the school year and the observance.

John says, “I look back at my time at Christian Heritage with mixed emotions. The obvious highlights were the students and parents. I also have some very fond memories of staff and board members.”

From 2001-2003, Kara (Bowman) Trees was the school administrator. Her selection as leader of the school was especially significant because she started and completed her middle school years as a student at Christian Heritage in 1978-79. Kara remembers and cherishes those early days at the school because of “the interactive and relational approach of the faculty.” She believes “It helped build my character and confidence to be the person and leader God was calling me to be. The school was a refuge that trained and prepared its students for their place in God’s Kingdom and world.”

As an alumnus, Kara is most proud of the heritage of the school which “has lasted all this time and overcome cultural barriers while following the same mission and purpose.” As a former administrator, she is proud that, “UBNC has invested financially and spiritually in the school over the years.”

During her tenure, the accrediting agency changed from FACCS to ACSI, a Task Force Committee was formed to begin planning the construction of a new building to house the school and also church family life activities, a 5-year improvement plan was instituted to look at adding a middle school, the front office space was remodeled, and math curriculum was updated.

January 1, 2004, Jim Stephens became the Administrator and is still currently in that position. Many key changes for the school have occurred in the last decade. In January 2005 ground was broken for the construction of the UBNC Family Life and Learning Center, (FLC) and it was dedicated in 2006. Located in the northwest corner of the church property, this 34,000 sq. ft. facility offered much needed space for the church and school, including 16 classrooms, school offices, a lunchroom/dining area, a commercial kitchen, a gymnasium with locker rooms, and a pick-up area for students in the gym lobby. The preschool also gained space because the school vacated key areas in the educational building and that allowed for expansion of the childcare area. (See Preschool History)

In the September 3, 2006 dedication service, the pastor at the time, Dr. Mike Jackson, led those present in a responsive prayer of consecration and dedication which said, in part, “God, we thank you for the miraculous ways you provided for us and through us in order to build this Family Life and Learning Center...we dedicate this building to your glory and to the service of the people who live in our neighborhood. Through our various ministries in this building, may children learn, laugh, play, love and grow in this place.”

Rev. Larry Morgan, UBNC’s current Lead Pastor said of the FLC, “Much of what was purposed in its conception and construction have been and are being fulfilled each week. People of nearly every age, interest and ethnicity have used our Family Life and Learning Center. God is using it to build up and expand the Body of Christ as well as extend care and concern to our neighborhood. We have a long way to go toward exhausting its multi-use possibilities. We would love to see how far that is.”

Since Jim Stephens began leading the school, his business background has proven to be a major asset. In 2004 cash assets were low, so budgets were tightened and personnel changes were made to reduce costs. The 2008 recession reduced enrollment numbers, and further measures were taken to lower operational costs. Jim’s steady hand and business acumen have made it possible for Christian Heritage to weather some blustery financial storms.

Even through tight times, the school expanded to include middle school grades 6-8, added resource teachers for much needed elective classes, and began a sports program for middle schoolers that includes girls’ volleyball, boys’ and girls’ basketball, cross country and boys’ flag football. In addition, renovations were made to the preschool facilities, and programs were added, including VPK for 4-year-olds as well as classes for infants and one-year olds.

The newer facilities, middle school, and expanded programs have kept Christian Heritage competitive in the Jacksonville area private school and preschool markets. A man of few words, Jim is justly proud of the solid growth in school student and preschool children enrollment numbers. When he

does speak, it is to compliment the certified school faculty and its hard-working staff that includes Lori Dean, the Business Manager. Jim is especially proud that the school is fully accredited by ACSI and is diligently working toward a successful 2016 re-accreditation visit and review. He also gives frequent kudos to the Childcare Director Heather Mercer for her wise leadership of the preschool.

For several years a number of Christian Heritage students have benefited from the Step Up for Students Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program. It “provides legislatively authorized K-12 scholarships and related support to give economically disadvantaged families the freedom to choose the best learning options for their children.” (see [www.stepupforstudents.org](http://www.stepupforstudents.org)) Christian Heritage is one of over 1,400 private schools participating in the program, and according to Jim Stephens, “a majority of the school’s current students receive scholarships through Step Up.”

Assisting those families who struggle to provide a private school education for their children is one of Jim’s passions. He promotes this scholarship but also gives discretionary discounts to deserving families. When the school’s Scholarship Fund can assist, Jim seeks support from that source as well.

As Jim and the school faculty go through the self-study preparing for the ACSI reaccreditation visit in April 2016, a number of goals for the future of the school will be established. Setting goals and envisioning the future have always been key strengths for Christian Heritage’s leadership. It is probably the reason why this ministry has spanned 40 years and impacted so many lives. When asked about what has contributed to the school’s longevity, some past leaders said:

**Ruth Cox** – “It has survived because the school, church and staff are providing a Christian heritage. The school maintains a good purpose and focus. The quality is there and the value system.”

**Connie Glenn** – “We have been through some lean times, but a quality staff, supportive church and many other strong people were there to hold CHA together.”

**Jonathan Sparks** – “It is because the church decided to support the school as a true Christian entity and not as a response to any problem in the public schools.”

**Dave Jackson** – “Through the sacrifice of many teachers and staff, the school survived. People worked so hard and gave so much of themselves during some difficult times.”

**Martha Legg** – “The school has survived because of anointed leadership, teachers, and board members who are determined to do God’s will in linking the home and school to the church’s ministry.”

**Mike Curry** – “CHA has lasted all these years because God is glorified there!”

**Jill Hoskins** – “When I look back at the paperwork that was done to start this school, I am awed and amazed at what God did through Ruth, Connie and Rev. Z. I see how God has had His hand upon Christian Heritage from the beginning to the present.”

**Kara Trees** – “The consistent Christ-centered leadership and collaboration of the church and school have been key in this ministry’s survival and growth.”

**Jim Stephen** – “Christian Heritage has been successful because it has consistently focused on its mission and has always been viewed as a ministry of UBNC by both church and school leaders.

At the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary observance in 2000, many expressed dreams that Christian Heritage would have new facilities with modern classrooms, increased access to technology, more visibility and accessibility, middle school grades, athletic programs, community service projects, and continued accreditation. In the fifteen years between that celebration and the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the school has made all those dreams realities. In addition, for 40 years Christian Heritage has been “Providing a Christian

Heritage” for students and their families. In the classrooms, in the gym at sporting events, in the dining room around the lunch table, and in all school programs, the clear proclamation is made that God through Jesus provides “a wonderful inheritance.” Praise Him for the school and for this Christian heritage!

History written by Leora Legacy/Summer 2014

### **Addendum**

Rev. Zollinhofer was the visionary pastor of University Boulevard Church of the Nazarene (UBNC) when Christian Heritage was founded in 1975. He died in 2007 at the age of 88. School administrators served under his direction and other UBNC pastors. The list includes:

**1975-1980** – Ruth Cox, Head Master/Connie Glenn (co-founder)/ Rev. R.E. Zollinhofer, Pastor

**1980 -1983** – Jonathan Sparks, Administrator/Rev. R.E. Zollinhofer, Pastor

**1983-1986** – Dave Jackson, Administrator (founded Preschool in 1984)/Rev. R.E. Zollinhofer, Pastor

**1986-1990** – Martha Legg, Administrator/Rev. R.E. Zollinhofer, Pastor through 1988/Rev. Gerald Baker, Pastor 1989-91

**1990-1991** – Mike Curry, Administrator/Rev. Gerald Baker and Dr. Orville Jenkins, Jr., Pastor (starting Sept. 1991)

**1991-2000** – Jill Hoskins, Administrator/Dr. Orville Jenkins, Jr., Pastor

**2000-2001** – John Satterly, Administrator/Dr. Mike Jackson, Pastor

**2001-2003** – Kara Trees, Administrator/Dr. Mike Jackson, Pastor

**2004-current** – Jim Stephens, Administrator/Dr. Mike Jackson, Pastor through 2008/Rev. Larry Morgan, Pastor 2009-present

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