

### III. History of Education & Edification

With the larger meetinghouse built in 1975 and the addition of a busing program in 1976, much emphasis was placed on teaching the young. Augmenting the normal Sunday School and Wednesday night classes was a Sunday night Children's Bible Hour teaching stories of the Bible through activities and dramatic performances. Three professional teachers wrote and planned the curriculum with other adults participating as needed. This class continued for ten years, 1976-1986, with attendance of 50-60 children, ages 5-14. Meanwhile, a class for babies was incorporated into the Sunday School program, bringing more young adult parents into the membership of the church.

Innovating thinking and planning took over the original Vacation Bible School program, making it a huge undertaking that practically involved the whole adult membership. Called Biblerama to distinguish it from the normal VBS, the first year brought in 300-plus children, K-6<sup>th</sup> grade. Each night's story was dramatized on stage in costume, followed by break-out classes for each age group. Twelve ladies with shepherd's crooks guided their "flock" to class, returning them to the auditorium for the closing puppet show application. Biblerama grew to an attendance of 550-600 per night, including classes for teens and adults, from 1976-1993. In 2015 Biblerama was revived to continue to present in much the same format as the original.

Beginning in 1999 more emphasis was placed on teens who participated in county-wide Bible Bowls and the Youth Training Series. Teens also began attending the Evangelism University in Savannah TN, Horizons at Freed-Hardeman U, and the Challenge Youth Conference in Gatlinburg & Pidgeon Forge. Ethridge began hosting Youth Rallies in 1999, an effort that continued through 2009, bringing in youth from other congregations, some of which had to be housed in cabins near the Natchez Trace. When the number of attendees reached 800, tents were erected on the church lawn to supplement available classrooms.

Edification of adults continued with three classes on Sunday mornings and two classes on Wednesday evenings. Speakers for adults at Biblerama and the Youth Rally replaced the more traditional Gospel Meetings. Instead of the Sunday night worship, members gathered for two months in small group Bible study classes in various rooms at the building. These groups were later hosted in various members' homes with one class still meeting in the FLC.

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Source: Sara Dolly Leighton, *History of the Ethridge Church of Christ*, 22 May 2016, pp. 79-105. Copies available at ECOC office and Lawrence County Archives.