



1923-1929

## “Laboring Together”

James L. Fowle

A few weeks after Dr. MacLeod’s resignation, the elders and deacons met together to discuss two pressing problems - the need for a new pastor, of course, and the need to bring about a better understanding between the officers and members of the church. Official records hint at some dissatisfaction among the congregation with their spiritual leaders. In a confidential letter written earlier in 1922, a member had questioned the officers’ non-attendance at Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. Their absence had been the source of criticism and, as the writer pointed out, “the officers were elected by the people to look after the affairs of the church and in a certain way to set an example before the people.” Rather than commit anything to writing, the officers decided to personally call on members. It is unclear how, when and if these particular conflicts were resolved.



*The Mother's Class met for Bible study and to share the special concerns of mothers. The class was active in the 1920's and 1930's.*

A committee was formed in February, 1923, to begin the search for a successor to Dr. MacLeod. Many names were suggested and considered. One early possible candidate, James Fowle, was dismissed because of his youth. As one elder noted, "we require a man of experience to run a city church." Nevertheless, it was young Mr. Fowle who received the unanimous recommendation of the committee on September 12, 1923. The congregation voted favorably on the following Sunday, and Mr. Fowle was ordained and installed as pastor on his 26th birthday, October 14, 1923.

James Luther Fowle was born in Washington, North Carolina, in 1897. He graduated from Davidson College and studied further at Johns Hopkins before attending Union Theological Seminary. Upon graduation, he entered Princeton Seminary and received a master's degree. Westminster College conferred an honorary doctorate upon him during his tenure at Central. Befitting his work as a Synod evangelist at the time of his call to Central, Mr. Fowle took for the text of his first sermon Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth..."

The clarion call of the gospel would be a hallmark of Dr. Fowle's tenure. Central sought to be a church with an open door, welcoming all in the name of Jesus. "A Brief Statement of Our Faith," published during those years, declared that "the Church is God's commissioned representative in the present world, and that its sole mission is the proclamation of redemption in the name of the risen Lord."

The church hosted or actively supported services conducted by a number of evangelists, including the famed Englishman G. Morgan Campbell (who visited Central both in 1926 and 1927), James Gray of the Moody Bible Institute, and Billy Sunday.

Of special note were services led by former pastor Layton Mauzé. Central had the "pleasure and spiritual profit" of a week of services with Dr. Mauzé, culminating in the formal dedication of the church building. Twenty years before, in 1908, Dr. Mauzé had refused to dedicate the new facility at Clara and Delmar because money was still owed for its construction. In March of 1928, he was invited to share the church's joy when that debt was finally paid.



*James L. Fowle. "Young Mr. Fowle" was only 26 years old when he was installed as pastor, the youngest man to fill Central's pulpit.*

**GOSPEL MEETINGS**  
— AT —  
**CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
DELMAR & CLARA AVE.  
**REV. EUGENE BELL, D. D.**  
Moderator Synod of Kentucky  
**3:30 P. M.                      7:30 P. M.**  
YOURSELF AND FRIENDS ARE INVITED

**HEAR DR. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**  
WORLD FAMOUS BIBLE SCHOLAR  
**Central Presbyterian Church**  
Delmar Boulevard and Clara Avenue  
**MAY 16th to 19th, INCLUSIVE**  
**AFTERNOONS 3:30 P. M.                      EVENINGS 7:30 P. M.**

<b>Monday</b> The Bigness of Paul's Shortest Letter	<b>Theme:</b> The Man of Nazareth
<b>Tuesday</b> The Letter And Its Method	<b>The Pharisee's Problem</b>
<b>Wednesday</b> Some Social Groups	<b>Who Is This Son of Man?</b>
<b>Thursday</b> The Inspirational Secrets	<b>The Last Unwilling</b>
	<b>The Many Dialects</b>

ALL WELCOME

**HEAR DR. JAMES M. GRAY**  
WORLD FAMOUS BIBLE SCHOLAR  
**CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
Delmar Boulevard and Clara Avenue  
**DECEMBER 2nd to 7th, INCLUSIVE**  
**Afternoons 3:00 P. M.                      Evenings 8:00 P. M.**  
**"PRIMARY TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"**

<b>Why I Believe the Bible Will Stand</b>	<b>The Resurrection of the Body</b>
<b>When Christ Made Himself Equal With God</b>	<b>What is the Bottom of the Holy Spirit?</b>
<b>The Fall of Human 'Reformation'</b>	<b>What is Meant by the Second Coming of Christ?</b>

ALL WELCOME

Gospel meeting announcements, circa 1927.

Early in his pastorate, Dr. Fowle emphasized the importance of all members participating in the work of the church. "Laboring together," he said, "the Church will make progress. We must realize that this is work of God. If we do our share, God's blessings will be on our Church. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us - not in ourselves." Although membership actually declined during these years, benevolence giving increased and church members were encouraged by the number of people attending evangelistic services. Both the pastor and Session acknowledged that the congregation was once again unified and stabilized.

A personal crisis also helped to bond congregation and pastor. Dr. Fowle came to Central a bachelor, and in 1925 he married the church's financial secretary, Katharine Ferguson. Soon afterward, Mrs. Fowle fell gravely ill. As recalled by one of the women of the church, while Mrs. Fowle "lay sick unto death, her life despaired of by the doctors, the ladies met in an all day prayer meeting. As the doctors watched her, they said, "There seems a force outside of our efforts working for her." Katharine Fowle was restored to health, and her husband shared his thoughts with the congregation:

*Words cannot express to you the gratitude of my heart for your prayers, sympathy, and helpfulness during those terrible days of anxiety and suffering through which we passed. No Pastor was ever so strengthened by his people. I love every one without a single exception and if this frank expression seems out of place here forgive the heart for speaking out of turn.*

Dr. Fowle served on a number of synod, presbytery, and ecumenical boards and in 1927, the clerk of the Session allowed that "we still live under the constant menace arising from the various invitations received by our popular pastor to enter other fields of service." The clerk, Irvine Mitchell, rejoiced the following year that "our pastor has been enabled to resist the attractions offered by other fields of labor in the ministry." In 1929, however, Dr. Fowle accepted a call to serve the First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee. He preached his final service at Central on March 31st. Thus it was "with gratitude to God for His goodness in bringing James Luther Fowle to us and for the blessings God has poured out upon us . . . through the ministry of Dr. Fowle" that the church "bid him Godspeed in his new pastorate."