

Churches burned in 2006 mark 20 years of God's blessings

February 16, 2026

More than 100 people from Alabama and Mississippi gathered recently at Galilee Missionary Baptist Church in Panola to mark the 20th anniversary of what Pastor Bob Little calls “a blessing in the blaze.”

Four churches in Pickens County, Miss.—including Galilee—were burned the night of Feb. 7, 2006, a few days after five churches were torched in Bibb County, Ala.

Nine churches targeted

Three college-aged students confessed to burning the Bibb County churches, and then two of the three also targeted the Pickens County churches. All three were convicted and served time in federal prison.

Marvin W. Wiggins, Bibb County Circuit Judge, who presided over some of the trials and hearings related to the case, served as guest



Bibb County Circuit Judge Marvin W. Wiggins serves as guest speaker for the banquet. (Photo/ Jennifer Davis Rash)

speaker for the 20th anniversary event.

“It was a remarkable moment 20 years ago when the church burners went around the Black Belt,” he said. “Several were burned to the ground.”

Preaching from the book of Job, Wiggins said, "Sometimes God uses tragedy to transform our lives ... sometimes tragedy builds us up.

"God had us in place to be in a position to talk to pastors, to talk to the families and talk to the kids' parents about what should happen. All I could think about was what if it had been one of our (kids)?" Wiggins said.

Grace and forgiveness

In the end, the pastors and church leaders chose grace and forgiveness. The young men were granted concurrent prison sentences instead of the sentences being added up into a lifetime in prison. They were released while still in their 20s with an opportunity to rebuild their lives.

"God wanted to see what we were going to do," Wiggins noted. "Are y'all going to be like them? Or are y'all going to remember my goodness?"

And he wanted others to see his goodness too, Wiggins added. "A church once sitting out here in the middle of nowhere is now on the road where people can see it."

The new building has plenty of space with the opportunity to grow and is active with a variety of ministries taking place, including multiple roles being filled by youth and young adults.

Little, who has served as pastor of Galilee for more than 25 years, agreed the way God has moved and worked since the fire has been nothing short of a miracle. "I just praise him," Little said. "He has brought ministry out of a match, and we are grateful."

Others in Pickens County

The other three churches burned in Pickens County, Miss., were:

- Dancy First Baptist Church near Aliceville: The congregation got back into its building in July 2006, thanks to volunteer teams from Baptist churches around Mississippi that gutted and renovated the interior of the church.
- Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church near Boligee: A new building was constructed by volunteers. The new building has a library room open to the community that was initially furnished with 1,000 books collected by Pickens Baptist Association.
- Spring Valley Baptist Church near Emelle suffered smoke damage and was able to get back into its building at the end of summer 2006.

Bibb County churches

The five churches damaged in Bibb County, Ala., were:

- Rehobeth Baptist Church in Randolph was reduced to rubble but was rebuilt to continue being a strong ministry presence in the community.
- Ashby Baptist Church in Brierfield met in mobile chapels for several years after the fire, continuing to grow even before it moved into its new building.
- Pleasant Sabine Baptist Church in Centreville was rebuilt by Carpenters for Christ volunteers.
- Antioch Baptist Church in Centreville only suffered minor damage and made repairs fairly quickly.
- Old Union Baptist Church in Randolph also only suffered minor damage and was able to be functioning as normal in a short amount

of time.