

Chapter One

History, Mission and Goals



GBSC Mission Statement

God's Bible School and College seeks to glorify God and to serve His Church by providing higher education centered in Holy Scripture and shaped by Wesleyan conviction, thus preparing faithful servants to proclaim Jesus Christ and spread scriptural holiness throughout the world.

The Beginning

So great were the throngs that elbowed their way onto God's Bible School's new campus Wednesday evening, September 26, 1900, that "the capacity of the buildings was taxed to the limit, and there was already a great need for additional buildings." These excited people had come for the school's formal dedication, and this service, as well as the opening "recitations" the next day, was held in the ornate "double-parlor" of the old brick mansion on Young Street, Cincinnati, that still serves as the administrative center for God's Bible School and College.



Deeply steeped in the Methodist piety and conviction of its founder, the Rev. Martin Wells Knapp, and boasting a faculty of three, this new "drill school for Christian soldiers" enrolled an initial student body of 72 for a vigorous term of 40 weeks without vacations. The curriculum that confronted them included "grammar, orthography, penmanship, reading, and music," all taught from an evangelical Christian perspective. For as Knapp had made very clear in the June 21 edition of his magazine *The Revivalist*, "The Bible will be the main book studied" at the new "training school."

Knapp's Zealous Ministry

Later called *God's Revivalist*, a name it still bears, *The Revivalist* was the chief instrument that Knapp and his colleagues used to create God's Bible School. He had established the monthly periodical in Albion, Michigan, in 1888, and its circulation soon grew to about 20,000, giving its editor a powerful voice in America's fledgling "Holiness Movement." This was a zealous and expanding coalition of devout Christians from several Protestant denominations, though most of them were Methodists who, like Knapp, were deeply distressed by their church's infatuation with the values of Gilded Age America.

Increasing affluence, prestige, and enculturation, as this group insisted, had caused widespread drift from Methodism's historical commitment to "holiness of heart and life." This, they believed, was evidenced, first, by its waning emphasis on personal conversion and disciplined piety and, second, by its gradual withdrawal from sacrificial ministry to the poor and disenfranchised. In fervent camp meeting and revival sermons, as well as in such magazines as *The Revivalist*, the movement's leaders articulated their vision for spiritual renewal and reform. This demanded uncompromising recovery of Methodism's lost spiritual dynamic and, among other priorities, renewed focus on the "fourfold gospel" common to them all: (1) personal evangelical conversion; (2) the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives; (3) divine healing of the sick; and (4) the "personal and imminent return" of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom on the earth.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Knapp continually stressed these themes, not only in *The Revivalist*, but also in the books that he wrote and in his preaching ministry, first as pastor, then as evangelist. He was “a man small in stature, but large in love,” as his friend and colleague Joseph H. Smith, also a well-known Methodist evangelist, declared. “He was zeal incarnate. His whole being, physical and mental, was spent to feed the flame of love’s fires that burned in his heart for souls, for holiness, for God’s people, and for God Himself.”

Significance of a Name

In 1892 Knapp moved his family to Cincinnati, where he re-established his publishing business and began an inner-city holiness “rescue mission” to relieve both the physical and spiritual needs of “the lost, the last, and the least.” Even before he left Michigan, Knapp had written in his diary that “a training school for gospel workers is on my heart and in my head. It seems as if God put it there.” Now he worked feverishly to make that vision a reality, and in the July 21, 1900, issue of *The Revivalist*, mentioned earlier, he announced his plans for a “training school where the Bible will be the main book studied” and where “the Holy Ghost, its Author, will be acknowledged Superintendent and Interpreter.” That same summer he purchased two houses on a two-acre plot at the corner of Young and Channing Streets in Mt.

Auburn, the oldest suburb of Cincinnati, for the sum of \$20,000. It was here that he opened “God’s Bible School and Missionary Training Home” as the centerpiece of his thriving ministry of evangelism, education, publication, and social outreach.

Although the name Knapp chose for his school is well-known throughout the holiness movement in both the United States and abroad, it still raises questions among those unfamiliar with it. Simply explained, “God’s Bible School” was a term that underscored Knapp’s insistence that God Himself really owned the school where “His workers” would “spend at least two years with God’s Book; less only when duty demands.” To emphasize this fact even further, at his death the founder left the school to God, an improbable action that was to cause serious problems and even litigation. It is also true that the school’s name highlights its interdenominational and nonsectarian nature.

To this day, the words “Missionary Training Home” remain a part of the institution’s corporate name. As Knapp wished, it gives prominence to God’s Bible School and College’s originating vision to prepare and send students to “girdle the globe with salvation / with holiness unto the Lord,” as an early popular hymn insisted. William and Mabel Hirst, the first of thousands to leave the campus for the mission field, embarked for Africa early in the fall



This photo, taken circa 1905, shows students Henry Olsen, A. Elwood Blann, William Webster Holland, and Frank S. Robinson—W.W. Holland later became the GBSC Dean of Theology

of 1900; and only weeks later, Charles and Lettie Cowman left the school to begin the great work of the Oriental Missionary Society in Japan and eventually in Korea. This organization, now OMS International, is one of the largest interdenominational holiness mission organizations in the world.

The Administrative Trustees (1901-1911)

Martin Wells Knapp's administration of GBS was very brief, for he died on December 7, 1901, at the age of 48. On his deathbed, he committed operation of the school to three women: his wife, Minnie Ferle Knapp; his secretary and assistant, Bessie Queen; and his friend and colleague, Mary Storey, who was a Methodist businesswoman and evangelist. From 1901–1911, these administrative trustees directed academic and religious activities on the "Mount of Blessings," as GBS's tiny hilltop campus had come to be known. Mary Storey died in 1906, and she was replaced by Meredith Standley, who had married Bessie Queen three years earlier.



During this decade, a large brick building was erected to house the women's dormitory, the school kitchen, and the "engine room," where generators produced electricity for the campus. The school's social ministries were greatly enhanced by the purchase of an old mansion on Young Street for "Hope Cottage," a Christian "home of mercy" for "wayward girls" and their children. In 1906 "God's Orphanage" was opened in a 13-room house near Mulberry, Ohio.

Oswald Chambers, later known for his classic devotional book *My Utmost for His Highest*, joined the faculty briefly in 1907 and continued his connection with GBS for a number of years. Throughout southern Ohio, the school became well-known for its vigorous evangelism and "rescue work" in the miserable slums of Cincinnati's "Shanty Town," sprawled along the Ohio River.

The Standley Years (1911-1950)

Beginning in 1911, Meredith Standley and his wife, Bessie Queen Standley, were to shape the destiny of GBS for the next 39 years—he as president, and she as advisor, catalyst, and editor of *God's Revivalist*. The Standley years are remembered for their vigorous activity, exciting creativity, and institutional growth. GBS became not only a flourishing educational institution, but also a significant focal point for the entire holiness movement. In March 1930, GBS became a pioneer in Christian radio, broadcasting its "Sunrise Worship Hour" over WKRC in Cincinnati.

President Standley supervised the erection of two major buildings, which are still essential to campus life. These are the Revivalist Memorial Building, built to contain the new women's dormitory and the offices and printing equipment of *God's Revivalist*, and the Knapp Memorial Building, housing

the school's chapel and several classrooms, as well as the men's dormitory. The campus was extended to a full six acres by the purchase of various neighborhood properties.

"Soup, soap, and salvation" had defined GBS's social witness from the days of Knapp, and following his example, Standley expanded the school's well-known Thanksgiving Day dinners, at times feeding more than 20,000 hungry inner-city children and their parents during the dark days of America's Great Depression. During World War II, Eleanor Roosevelt became so impressed by the holiday meals served at GBS that, in 1942, she mentioned them in her daily newspaper column. This Thanksgiving Day tradition continued until the 1960s, and its spirit is still honored by a variety of inner-city ministries involving both faculty and students.

It was during the Standley years that the "Bible School" really became a college, in that it received authorization to offer degrees. Beginning in 1940, students wishing a short, concentrated preparation as "Christian workers" could also enroll in what was popularly known as the "Ten Weeks Course." Culminating the Standley administration was its rigorous "GIs of the Cross" crusade, opening at a massive citywide revival crusade at Cincinnati's famous Music Hall in November 1946. This began three years of highly successful jeep-and-trailer evangelism across much of the United States and even into foreign countries.



GIs of the Cross get their caravan ready for a mobile evangelism tour

"Saving the School" (1950-1975)

Unfortunately, the final years of the Standley administration were marred by excessive and irresponsible debt that put the school's future in serious peril. Early in 1950, trustees appointed by the Court of Common Pleas chose Lloyd Day, GBS's high-school principal, to succeed Standley; Day was to serve as GBS president until 1961. Almost immediately he launched a massive campaign to "save the school," and in cooperation with the Honorable Allen Roudebush, the court-appointed business manager, tens of thousands of dollars were raised through cash donations and debt cancellations in an attempt to erase GBS's staggering debt and to lead the school back to financial credibility.

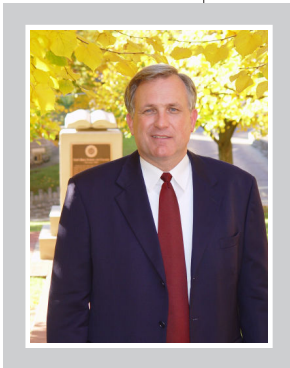
Debt elimination remained a prime concern for Elmer G. Marsh, who served as GBS's fourth president from 1961–1965. Marsh was in his eighties at the time of his election, and he already had given nearly fifty years as a much-loved and widely respected teacher at his alma mater. He brought stability and renewed confidence to the campus, dealing with creditors and encouraging the school's friends to rally to its defense.

Marsh's successor was Samuel Deets, GBS president from 1965 to 1975. His youthful vigor, academic insight, and "hands-on" approach made his tenure a

period of vigorous activity, focused on rebuilding and renewal. On June 8, 1969, a great “Jubilee Service” was held in the Chapel to celebrate the liquidation of GBS’s staggering indebtedness, which at one time had reached to over \$1 million. Soon thereafter, Deets launched a major effort to rejuvenate the long-neglected campus. School finances grew, new properties were added to the school’s holdings, and in March 1975, ground was broken for the new student-activities building.

The Miller Presidency (1975-1995)

GBSC’s sixth president was Bence C. Miller, who gave forceful leadership from 1975 to 1995. A highly successful pastor and businessman, he continued the campaign begun under his predecessor to renovate campus buildings and renew its infrastructure. In 1977, the student-activities building, housing the dining hall, gymnasium, and classrooms, was completed; and 13 years later, the R. G. Flexon Memorial Library, connected to the main campus by a skywalk, was opened for service. In 1982, the Court of Common Pleas freed the school from judicial supervision, leaving it to chart its own destiny. During President Miller’s tenure, the college received full accreditation by the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges (1986) and was certified as a degree-granting institution by the Ohio Board of Regents (1994).



The Current Period (1995-Present)

Current president of God’s Bible School and College, the seventh in that position, is Michael R. Avery, who was installed in the summer of 1995. In the decade since, he has given major impetus to continuing campus rebuilding, directing the complete renovation of the main chapel, the Administration Building, and the Women’s Residence Hall. Added to the campus have been the H. E. Schmul Ministerial Resource Center, designed especially for ministerial students and faculty, and the William D. Gale Missionary Resource Center, used by the Division of Intercultural Studies and World Missions (ISWM). President Avery has also initiated the school’s first official capital campaign – designated “Faith in the Future” – which brings promise of continued financial stability and campus enhancement.

President Avery’s leadership demonstrates profound respect for GBSC’s heritage and reassuring affirmation for its future. As part of his forward-looking vision, he led GBSC into a new venture – pursuing regional accreditation. This process is helping the college prepare to meet the challenges and opportunities of the present and future while maintaining its historical roots. In September of 2005, GBSC hosted a team of evaluators from the Higher Learning Commission, and in February of 2006, GBSC received initial-candidacy status from the HLC. The institution also seeks to continue its accreditation by the Association for Biblical Higher Education, highly valuing that body’s insistence on critical components of Bible-college character and culture.