

## Westwood Hills Church of God

Westwood Hills Church of God was organized in the summer of 1967 as the Westside Church of God and is an offspring of the Gainesville Church of God which was at that time located on the Hawthorne Road. Sunday School and the first few services were held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Abe Painter until the band room at Westside Middle School could be authorized for use for the weekly services. Construction on the original building was immediately started and much of the materials, labor, and equipment were donated by the charter members, their relatives and friends. Both skilled and manual labor was donated on Thanksgiving Day 1967 and the ladies of the church prepared Thanksgiving Dinner for those workers, many of whom were not members.

The building was completed occupied in the spring of 1968; the original building consisted of a four level, two-story building which served as an educational facility for Sunday School and was designed for a daycare, secondary classes and a fellowship hall. The fellowship hall served as the sanctuary and was furnished with padded pews and a rostrum.

Rev. J. W. and Rose Dawsey were the original pastor and wife and served as Senior Pastor until 1971. He was succeeded by Rev. Dan Callahan who served as pastor until 1975. During his tenure the Love n Care childcare center was established and quickly became a vital ministry within the church. Rev. Henry Ellis succeeded Pastor Callahan and under his leadership the church name was changed to the Westwood Hills Church of God and the Westwood Hills Academy was founded. Rev. Ellis served as the Senior Pastor until 1981 and was succeeded by Rev. Jack Reynolds; his tenure was approximately a year and half and he was then replaced by Rev. R. L. Peeples. He was the pastor of longest tenure and served for 16 years.

On November 11, 1991 the original building was the last victim of an arsonist which burned numerous churches in several cities in the southeastern part of the United States. The fire damage was so extensive that the remaining few walls had to be torn down, rendering the building a total loss. This occurred just after midnight only a few hours after the Sunday night service had ended. The church body did not skip a beat, a vacant mall store which stood at the present site of the Lowe's store on NW 13<sup>th</sup> Street was secured and adequately furnished and services held at this location the following Sunday. This was used for approximately one year when the Ridgeview Baptist Church permitted the Westwood Hills Church of God to conduct Sunday School and an early morning worship service to be held in their facilities. This continued until 1994 when the existing facility was completed on the outside and on the lower floor. The upper level was a vacant, unfinished shell until 1998. During the ongoing work to complete the second floor classrooms and offices Rev. Peeples and Rev. Elmer Holbrook of MacClenny, FL exchanged pulpits; however, Rev. Holbrook felt that he was being called to start a new church work in MacClenny and returned there after approximately nine months and was replaced by Bishop E. Bob Kuschel in early 1999.