



Photo courtesy of Open Bible Christian Center

The original Open Bible Church building was constructed in 1955 at the corner of 13th Street West and Avenue D.

Special speaker, meal to help Open Bible mark 55 years

Gazette Staff

Open Bible Christian Center will celebrate its 55th anniversary this weekend with a special speaker and meal.

Jeff Farmer, president of Open Bible Churches, will be the special speaker at today's 6:30 p.m. service and again on Sunday at the 11 a.m. service. The Sunday morning gathering will be followed by a potluck, and participants are asked to bring a dish to share.

Previous pastors and members have been invited to take part in the anniversary events, said the Rev. Ron Rager.

The history of Open Bible goes back to the early 1950s, when the Rev. Carl Hart, pastor of the Hardin Open Bible Church, had such a burden for the city of Billings that he began to hold meetings in the larger city. He was accompanied by daughter Bonnie Hart, who played the piano.

The Rev. Ray Smith, fresh out of Bible college, pioneered the church with his

wife, Helen. Smith, his wife, and three original members initially met in the basement of the Odd Fellow's Hall downtown.

In 1954, the congregation was chartered with Open Bible Standard Churches. A year later, members constructed a small two-room small building at the corner of 13th Street West and Avenue D.

The church moved to its present location, at the corner of 19th Street West and Howard Avenue, in 1971. Its name was changed in 2002 to Open Bible Christian Center.

These days, the church is known for its annual live Nativity, a tradition for the past 10 years. The congregation also reaches out to the community by opening its doors to outside activities, sponsoring a Celebrate Recovery group and running a bus ministry that brings youth in the city to church.

"We want always to open our arms to those in our community that they might see Jesus in us," Rager said.