

FUMC 50th History 2004 - 2014

This chapter of Faith's history picks up from the excellent piece written by Mac McCullough, entitled "Forty Years of Faith (1964-2004)." In doing so, it is appropriate to begin with Mac's final words in that detailed compendium: "believe and act, for the best is yet to come." In the decade that followed his report, Faith Church has been through many changes and challenges, but in every case the congregation has pulled together and the church has arrived at its 50th anniversary stronger than ever. Mac's history divided the 40 years into distinct eras. Your humble scribe, lacking the imagination and creativity that motivated Mac, will instead proceed chronologically through the last ten years of Faith history.

2005

Faith's most recent decade began auspiciously. Charles Harrell was the Senior Pastor, Corey Sharpe had just joined as the Associate Pastor, and the District Superintendent was Mark Derby, who had formerly been the senior pastor at Faith. In 2005 Faith engaged in a congregation-wide study, "40 Days of Purpose," to help determine Faith's role in its community going forward. Gina Dawson, Director of Christian Education, spearheaded an important drive to rejuvenate adult and youth Sunday classes. 2005 saw the first "Family Retreat." And in other happy news, the church celebrated the very first wedding in the Chapel in the Woods (the name of the happy couple is unfortunately unknown to this scribe). The congregation was not adverse to experimenting with different approaches to worship. In 2005 there were three Sunday morning services offered, with a live nativity during Advent - wow! Some of the experiments resulted in additional learning; after a year-long experiment, the Shout! contemporary worship service offered on Sunday evening finally ended, as did a midweek prayer session.

For the music program, always a highlight at Faith, there was much to accomplish in 2005. Bob Holder, Faith's wonderful and talented organist, was struggling to produce lovely music each Sunday from the aging pipe organ. Pastor Emeritus Ken Jones had memorably described the organ as a "shot gun wedding of an organ to a bunch of pipes," and in 2005 the organ was at the end of its useful life. Floyd Werle, Faith's long time but in 2005 already retired organist, had years earlier called the organ a "beast" held together "with duct tape and bailing wire." The components of the organ had been purchased (used) from an Annapolis church, and had been in use at Faith since 1979. In 2005 the congregation determined to overhaul the organ, an effort that would take over a year to finalize.

Speaking of Ken Jones, his yearly Charge Conference report in 2005 explained plaintively that "I am suffering from insufficient opportunities to meet the needs of people whom God loves, and I appreciate any suggestions that might come from my friends at Faith Church."

2006

In 2006 the church received settlement funds from the County as part of the Montrose Road enlargement project, which had sliced off a chunk of the church's front lawn. The county built an additional entrance to the church with a wide turn-around, which has proved very convenient for overflow parking. These additional funds proved quite useful, as in 2006 the church replaced the furnace.

In 2006 Faith was alive with movement. The Card Ministry and Needlework Ministry were both launched in that year; both continue today. The new organ was dedicated and a brand new Fall festival, the Pumpkin Patch, was inaugurated to raise monies for charity. The church also sent a volunteer team to Mississippi to do repair work after Hurricane Katrina, which had struck New Orleans in the Fall of 2005.

2007

In 2007 big changes came to Faith, as Charles Harrell left for Trinity United Methodist Church. Faith was blessed to receive new lead pastor, Rev. Kathryn T. Woodrow. She joined the church on July 1, bringing along her husband Don and grandson Colin. In typical Methodist fashion, Faith celebrated with a huge pot-luck lunch, as well as eight home-based get-together coffees to allow Kathryn to meet many members on an informal basis. Kathryn immediately launched a congregation-wide conversation about leadership and vision for the church, which grew to involve many people and many hours of work. It took Don no time at all to become an integral part of Faith, pitching in on work days and providing hours and hours of volunteer services to the church, including shoveling snow on Sundays, organizing and participating in church-wide work days, and so on.

As an aside, and leaping ahead in the chronology, Faith has taken great pride in watching Colin grow to manhood (he was a member of the 2012 Confirmation class), and the congregation has been utterly delighted with "ultra-girl I wear pink and coordinating outfits" Sidney, who joined the family a few years later.

In other people news, Associate Pastor Corey Sharpe was ordained as an elder in the Methodist Church, the culmination of many years of work. Corey and his wife Julie also welcomed daughter Abigail, who joined big brother Jacob.

Gina Dawson reconstituted the Christian Education committee in 2007, which continues today. She persuaded Kathy Whitmire to lead the new committee, which Kathy ably did for many years.

During the summer of 2007, Faith began a new “Middle School Camp” for kids going into 6th to 8th grades. The full day service and play camp provided the attendees with the chance to perform community service projects in the morning, and plenty of play in the afternoon. The camp has been extremely popular and continues today.

2008

2008 saw additional staff changes at Faith. Longtime Church Administrator Mal Vasanth left, and Faith’s excellent staff (in particular, Jan Spencer, allegedly only a part-time employee) worked even harder to keep up with the needs of the busy church. Director of Music Jim Angel retired, and after a lengthy search, the church was blessed with the arrival of Michael Wu, who in fact began at Faith in January 2009. Not to give away any plot-spoilers, but Michael’s tenure at Faith resulted in an explosion of new musical initiatives and partnerships that have greatly enhanced Faith’s musical program.

As noted above, Kathryn had immediately upon joining Faith, begun an extensive project to discern the vision and mission of Faith Church. Members had been given homework assignments, for example, asking them to visualize the Faith Church of 3, 5, or 10 years in the future. Ultimately Church Council voted to accept the following new text as the vision statement for FUMC:

“Faith United Methodist Church is a thriving Christian home where we practice prayer, worship, hospitality, fellowship, study and service as we become more like Christ. We are committed to sharing the Good News, caring for one another and helping those in need in our neighborhood, nation and world.”

This process of discernment led to a newly invigorated church: the Charge Conference report for 2008 noted that “members are volunteering for new challenges, old members who tried mega churches have decided to return to a more family oriented approach, and new energy is emerging from our staff, mission and ministry efforts. New ministries continue to be supported and expanded based on good ideas that were the results of efforts by members.” Despite these successes, Church Council Chair Gordon Henley reminded everyone to “remember that God is **clearly** not done with any of us yet!”

The newly reconstituted Christian Education team spent time studying and discerning what materials to offer, and used a survey to define where to start. The team began offering many new adult education opportunities, including “movie nights,” and an annual Lenten study. The youth work trip was to Belize, and Faith also sent a group of adults to Russia to repair a dormitory. The Pumpkin Patch continued strong in its third year, raising money for local and international

charities. Jan Spencer began a new summer camp called KidServe, for kids going into 2nd – 5th grades. This half-day camp has proved extremely popular (just like the Middle School Camp) and is still going strong today.

The physical church received attention as well during 2008; using Montrose Parkway funds the Trustees replaced the floor and painted Fellowship Hall, and repaired, replaced, repainted and upgraded many portions of the building.

2009

In 2009, Senior Pastor Kathryn Woodrow presciently suggested that FUMC would need to enlarge its methods of outreach to an increasingly diverse environment, suggesting use of the (remember, this was really new stuff!) website to make sermons and other materials more available as she envisioned “mouse calls” becoming as important as “house calls.” Who could have foreseen how important the World Wide Web and electronic communication would have become by 2014? Nevertheless, Faith Church did indeed embrace these new methods of communication, which later (again, jumping ahead!) led to many iterations of improved websites, Facebook pages, and all manner of electronic communications.

Life continued in 2009; Associate Pastor Corey Sharpe had another baby girl and the community celebrated with a pot-luck. Long time Parish Nurse Marge Taylor retired (that should be “retired,” as she managed to be as busy in “retirement” as she had been while at work!) and Pastor Emeritus Ken Jones “agreed to make a few pastoral calls every week, so that I do not lose the knack of doing it.”

There was much activity in the musical program at Faith during 2009. The Trustees, with the approval of Church Council, purchased a 7-foot Steinway grand piano which Michael Wu had identified, using a combination of private pledges and the Montrose Parkway Funds. The piano was formally installed and dedicated in 2010, and numerous fundraising concerts with the new instrument were planned to replenish the church’s capital reserves. In staff news relevant to the music program, Mary Nieter stepped down as Children’s Choir Director, and Christopher Guerra was hired to lead the Faith Singers. Michael Wu began a Youth Choir and Jan Spencer volunteered to lead young children in another ensemble. Volunteer Lyn Mullinax re-started the Bell Ringer program, with over 25 youngsters, all of whom were excited to discover the “secret passage” up to ring the church bells enthusiastically before each service.

Work continued apace for the Christian Education team. Faith boasted seven children and youth Sunday School classes with approximately 60 participating, three Sunday morning adult classes with an average of 25 attendees, two movie nights, five small groups during the week, a Lenten Study, summer camps, and an experimental (although ultimately short-lived) new Family

Speaker Series focused on parents. The Youth work trip was to Reading PA, and the youth also participated in World Vision's 30 Hour Famine to raise awareness of world hunger.

2010

2010 saw another pastoral change at Faith. Rev. Corey Sharpe left after six years as an Associate Pastor, moving to Havre de Grace. The congregation was delighted to welcome Rev. Laura Peterson, her husband Mark, and cat Frances into the Faith family, throwing what appears to have been the first Faith vegetarian pot-luck (the vegetarian part was the first, certainly not the pot-luck!) In preparation for the Petersons moving into the Old Bridge manse, the church threw a July 4 "party" where volunteers painted the interior and cleaned and landscaped the exterior. More than 40 volunteers participated. (Work on the parsonages is a continuing theme; Matthew Henley later earned his Eagle Scout Badge after doing a great deal of work at the Smoketree parsonage.) Two weeks after arriving at Faith, Laura proved to be an excellent sport, leading the youth work trip to Savannah, Georgia. Laura brought with her a renewed focus on hospitality and evangelism, leading that team at Faith.

In other big news, the Reverend Kathryn Woodrow officially became the Reverend *Doctor* Woodrow, completing an extensive program of study to achieve her doctorate from Wesley Theological Seminary. The church celebrated her accomplishment with cake (naturally).

In September 2010 Faith Church celebrated the life and accomplishments of Floyd Werle, who had been Faith's organist for 35 years before retiring. Floyd had been recruited to be Faith's organist by Rev. Ken Jones, when Ken was appointed pastor of the newly formed Faith Church in 1967. Floyd was a remarkable individual, who wrote many original choir anthems, introits and prayer responses. Many at Faith had been delighted to listen to Floyd play the old "beast" of a pipe organ so enthusiastically with such wonderful results. Happily, Floyd had returned to Faith to play on the new organ just the prior year before his death. His memorial service featured many of his original hymns. The chorus of one pretty much says it all:

**God loves you and so do I
Under the light of a newborn sky
No reason to wonder why
God loves you and so do I.**

In other news from the musical program, long-time tenor soloist Robert Kimball retired, sent away with many well-wishes and a big pot-luck (of course!)

Budget constraints began to become apparent in 2010, reflecting the broader economic realities. The church, which had financially operated at a deficit each year since 2004, was spurred by an

anonymous donor to contribute an extra \$20 for 20 weeks – the “20-20 campaign.” As a result, the church ended the year without a deficit.

At this point in our narrative we come to a very significant event – one that would take years to unfold and would require the sustained participation and cooperation of many, many Faith friends and family. And here is that event, as recorded in the Charge Conference documents: “The Labyrinth/Memorial Garden Task Force, chaired by Gina Dawson, made a presentation to the Trustees regarding a proposal to upgrade the Memorial Garden and Courtyard area with a labyrinth. The Trustees were favorably impressed, and asked the Task Force to move forward and gather more information, particularly with regard to costs.” How like a tiny mustard seed are those words; terse and spare, and yet with inherent power to flower and bloom and transform.

2011

In 2011, Rev. Dr. Kathryn Woodrow began to work with the congregation and Church Council on the “Call to Action” initiative from the Council of Bishops. This denomination-wide effort called Faith to construct a plan of action going forward as it seeks to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. While Faith could draw upon other congregations’ work, we were (as always) unique. As Kathryn put it, Faith is “too big to be small and too small to be big.”

Faith continued its mission and outreach programs in 2011, sending youth to Logan County, WV as part of the Appalachia Service Project. Those who heard Pastor Laura preach about that perfect peanut butter sandwich she had spent all day looking forward to eating, only to discover it had been swiped and eaten by a lonely child, will never forget her message of how important it is to keep our priorities firmly in mind.

During 2011 the church was blessed to receive a sizeable bequest from Orva “Mickie” Heffley. This enabled the Trustees to begin to replenish capital reserves, while setting aside enough to replace the chiller unit on the air conditioning (which happened the following year). The Trustees were able to upgrade and enhance the lighting in the sanctuary, as well as aging heating units in hallways and classrooms (which had an immediate and positive effect on the budget).

The Memorial Garden planning continued, bringing in expanding concentric circles of participants. Faith’s first “Heavenly Harvest” supported local, national and international mission organizations, and the Mission Auction raised \$14,000.

2012

Faith continued to be blessed with new members joining the congregation – both adults and children. And speaking of children, Faith welcomed its own new staff child on November 15, 2012, when Tobias Linwood Peterson arrived. Food was involved in the celebrations, and “Toby” became a key addition to FUMC’s growing nursery.

The Memorial Garden project began to show some tangible progress in 2012, when the design was selected (after extensive consultation with the entire congregation). The massive tree dominating the courtyard was removed, and members of the congregation employed a great deal of personal “sweat equity” to remove the uneven bricks and spread mulch in preparation for the upcoming garden renovation.

Faith moved to a new worship schedule in 2012. Given the growing popularity of the Chapel in the Woods service at 8:45, when the Fall arrived that service moved indoors to become the “Holy Grounds” casual worship service. This arrangement has been very satisfactory and continues today.

2013

2013 was a banner year at Faith, with numerous welcome changes to the church and its properties. After a ground-breaking ceremony in July, the newly renovated Memorial Garden was dedicated in November 2013. The entire congregation had participated in the planning of the Garden, which began with an inspiration felt by a faithful few some four years before the dedication. The lovely space features a labyrinth and a fountain, and will be a peaceful venue for the entire community.

The time and talents of the congregation were apparent in projects less ambitious than the Garden, but no less important. Faith’s Chapel in the Woods was completely refurbished by Eagle Scout Sean Ramsperger, resulting in a more welcoming space in which to hold a worship service. In addition, the Trustees completed numerous projects to upgrade and maintain our property, including painting throughout the sanctuary and numerous upgrades to our two parsonages.

What could have been a major upheaval in our financial record keeping occurred when Milton Brown, bookkeeper for 17 years, moved on to a new and exciting job in Atlanta. Happily, Jan Spencer was able to step in to assume all of his duties and became Faith’s new full-time Financial Manager. In other staff news, Elizabeth Bono was hired as Office Manager to handle all of the secretarial and “odd jobs” so necessary with a church the size of Faith.

Our Christian Education team continued to be active throughout the year, offering Sunday school classes for children and adults, summer camps, family gatherings, and of course, movie nights.

Faith was again a strong supporter of numerous charitable causes. The Missions Auction raised over \$11,000 in 2013 and Faith continued to provide monthly meal deliveries to Sophia House and the Dorothy Day Women's shelters. The Missions committee, led by Carol Henley, organized an effort to assemble school kits for UMCOR, with participants at the annual Heavenly Harvest fund raiser doing some of the assembly and the 1st- 3rd grade Sunday School class doing the rest. Faith also supported the Community Based Shelter week in April. (In fact, Faith has supported the Community Based Shelter project since 1993, even before the shelter facility in Rockville was opened. As Mac McCullough's 40th Anniversary history records, in the early years Faith physically housed people in the church for a week long homeless shelter each year.)

The youth of Faith continued to be active. They raised money for famine relief by participating in the "30-Hour Famine," shopped for and wrapped Christmas gifts for less privileged kids, collected food during the "Souperbowl of Caring," organized worship during Youth Sunday, and went to Parma, Ohio on a mission trip.

2014

This narrative has now arrived at 2014, Faith's 50th anniversary. Faith is blessed to still have with us six charter members and a much larger core group of long-time members. The six charter members are as follows:

Leslie Avery

Judy Beisner

Hank Beisner

Marion Caldwell

Karen Johnston

Mary Melvin

Most importantly, Faith has welcomed a significant number of new members in the past few years, many of whom are families with young children. As a result, we have enlarged our Sunday nursery program to have two classrooms, one for newborns and not-yet-mobile babies, and a second for toddlers. This joyful expansion of the Faith Family has also produced a banner crop of youngsters who participate in the Children's Sermon at the front of the sanctuary each Sunday. As a parent who, many years ago, worried greatly and gave my children the "Mother's Eye" each time they considered acting up during the Children's Sermon, I will confess to being delighted and anticipatory during the Children's Moments of 2014: will the little one on the left actually launch that paper airplane he is clutching?? Will the one in the middle scoot away from the older sibling?? We all giggled at the shocked reactions of the children when, at Easter,

Pastor Laura smashed a hollowed out egg to bits, empty and containing no yolk. These wonderful moments help makeup the mosaic of the family that Faith Church is for each of us.

When we gathered for the 50th Anniversary dinner in May at Asbury, our Rev. Dr. Woodrow did a magnificent job of “MC-ing” the program to remind us of the highlights of 50 years of a cohesive, many layered and ever changing congregation. We saw video clips from the beginning of Faith, including several current members, many of whom were children at the time, and reminisced about what drew each of us to join Faith and to remain here to contribute our time, talents, witness and stewardship. Our hope and prayer is that Faith United Methodist Church remain as strong and as filled with talent over the next 50 years as it has enjoyed in its first, formative, 50 year history.