

# **Christ Congregation Our Church Building and Grounds The First 50 Years**

## **The Church**

### **The Beginning:**

The first organizational meeting for the church met on February 9, 1955. The first worship service of Calvary Baptist Church of Princeton was on March 6, 1955 led by the Rev. Dr. Harold Stoddard, Executive Secretary of the New Jersey Baptist Convention, with 117 in attendance. The offering was \$117.50. The certificate of incorporation was signed on March 15 by six founding families: Anna and Walter Bastedo, Helen and Harry Bowser, Nancy and Ralph Coker, Elsie and Nils Lindenblad, Mildred and H. Theodore Sorg, and Violet and Thurland Wilkinson. Worship services were held at the Chapel at Westminster Choir College. The May 1 Communion Service extended the “hand of fellowship” to 42 members. The purchase of the property at Houghton and Walnut was approved in May, as well as purchase of the parsonage at 29 Tee-Ar Place. Preliminary studies were done for a building in 1956, and the Building Committee formed in 1957.

Work began on the current building in 1958 with a groundbreaking on April 27. The goal was set to be in the building by the end of the year. The architect was Harold Wagoner of Philadelphia, PA. The current sanctuary was originally envisioned as the chapel for a larger church. There was a “Church Entering Ceremony” on December 28, 1958, with a procession from Westminster Choir College Chapel to the new church for the first service.

The original cost was estimated to be \$100,000, but it went up, with furnishings, to \$132,000. It was financed with three mortgages (First National Bank, \$50,000), American Baptist Home Mission Society (\$30,000) and American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (\$75,000) There was enough money from the mortgages to build it, but not to furnish it, so extra fund drives paid for initial chairs, tables, etc. We have some of the original folding chairs. Payments on those mortgages were made from contributions to a Building Fund that was outside the operating budget for the first 20 years. A number of times, mortgage payments and pastoral salary checks had to be delayed because of lack of funds.

Following dual affiliation with the United Church of Christ in 1966, the name of the church was changed to Christ Congregation in 1969. In 1971, the congregation began a special campaign for the Building Fund to pay “2 of 3 by 73,” and they paid off the first two mortgages. The cover of the 1972 Annual Report featured pictures of the campaign and the celebratory dinner. Tom McNally was then Chair of Deacons, and Beverly President of the Women’s Society. The Robertsons joined that year.

In 1978, the congregation voted to sell the parsonage to pay off the mortgage, and to sell the back lot. (See below.)

### **Additions and Changes Over Time**

The building has been loved, cared for, and struggled with. In 1962, the pastor Ken Dannenhauer noted that “the primary purpose of our being is not building payments. The building is a means, not an end, and we have come too far to let it dominate our life.” Similarly, in 1981, moderator Beth Maxwell noted the new kids in the church, the concerns for the building, and the need “to look through the windows and exercise some

responsible stewardship toward God's world and God's children. It's too bad our concern and efforts don't flow out through the glass as plentifully as our heated air does."

There have been perpetual and reoccurring problems with plumbing, heating, the chimney, and leaks in various spots, particularly in the fireplace room and the back door. Major repairs, changes, or additions have included:

- 1966 Tore up floor in Fireplace Room to repair floor and plumbing. Repaired windows in the library that were broken by vandals.
- 1967 First discussion about renting parking space or rooms to the high school.
- 1971 Temporary railing in the chancel taken out. Heating system problems.
- 1972 "Patience, we are trying to heat the building."
- 1976 First notice of church mice in the kitchen.
- 1977 Kitchen repainted, baptistery resealed, heating fixed again. Recommendation for wood stove in fireplace, and maybe one for sanctuary. (An early focus on energy conservation)
- 1979 Sanctuary repainted, new furnishings planned from memorial funds.
- 1980 Possibility of padded chairs noted.
- 1981 New boiler
- 1984 Parking lot finally graded and stoned per the agreement with Robert Hillier who bought the back lot.
- 1985 Roof patched, decision to do major repair the next year.
- 1986 Church repainted inside and out. New chairs, first copier purchased, walkway to parking lot put in, chimney damper finally fixed, new back door, concrete porch added outside kitchen. Decision to stop rental to groups who used sanctuary as gym or exercise room.
- 1987 New lighted church sign.
- 1989 Ceiling fans installed.
- 1990 Thermal panes behind organ installed.
- 1991 Kitchen renovation for \$8000 with new cabinets, stove, refrigerator. First PC bought, and new copier
- 1992 New tile floor in fireplace room, education wing. Ruffina Martinez begins as janitorial service.
- 1994 Second new door on back.
- 1995 Sanctuary and bathrooms repainted. Large organ repair.
  
- 1997 Roof resealed, Walnut Street repaved, Yews removed. Plans explored for expansion of building but put on hold when the Princeton Junior School moved.
- 1998 Education wing repainted by members after Princeton Junior School moves out. New floor in sanctuary, new valence lights. Successful Endow a Table and Chair Campaign for new classroom furniture
- 1999 New carpet in chancel area.
- 2000 New walkway from sidewalks to front door. Smoke detection, yard fencing and more installed by French School.
- 2001 New tile again?
- 2004 Thermal Windows everywhere except big window in sanctuary, from plan developed by architect Bill Wolfe.

## **Have You Wondered Where They Came From?**

### **Banners**

The original banners were designed by Jean Bezanon, but mistakenly got thrown out in the mid 80's with the left-overs from a rummage sale. They could not be found after intense searching. She helped design the replacements and led another group to remake them. They were replaced in 1985. Peter Walker, the organist, did the acrobatic work to install the current pulley system to hang them. Jean was known for her artistic flair. The art work in the narthex is done by her and there is a Memorial Fund in her name to be used for music and art.

The quilt hanging in the sanctuary is a more recent addition to the sanctuary. It was a gift from the Lakota Sioux Indians at Cheyenne River Reservation in Eagle Butte, SD. Charles and Carol McCollough lead seminars for two consecutive years at the Eagle Butte Learning Center, a Ministry of the Council for American Indian Ministry, the United Church of Christ. The purpose of the EBLC is to enhance the quality of life for Native American people and churches through an educational ministry that prepares men and women for pastoral and lay leadership and that promotes spiritual growth, healing and cross-cultural understanding. Christ Congregation has contributed generously for the support of this ministry. In appreciation, the American Indians gave the quilt as a gift to our church.

### **Baptismal Font**

Tom McNally and Marge Lewellen found the stone for the baptismal font in 1980. The stone cost \$8, but it took a long time and \$140 to get it carved. (See Tom McNally's remembrance.)

### **Communion Table**

It was designed by the church architect, to go with the building, and dedicated on Easter in 1960. Candles were first put on the Communion Table in 1987. The current candlesticks were designed, sculpted, and donated to the church by Charles McCollough in 1998.

### **Cross.**

The first cross was built by Vincent Staats. The current cross was built by Tom McNally, Beth Maxwell, and David Byers in 1980 when a number of things were done to refurbish the sanctuary.

### **Organ**

The first organ was an electric organ. A new piano came in 1974. In 1983, its age was beginning to show, according to the Annual Report. The next year, the church decided not to put any more into the current organ (7 of 27 stops were working), but they did not have any luck finding a new one. An organ was found in 1986, bought for \$24,000 from Faith United Church of Christ in Center Valley, Pennsylvania. Members of the church stored various parts of the organ until 1988, when the chancel was cut to install it four days after Jeff Mays arrived.

A year long installation tries the patience and talents of the congregation, with major help by Bob Staats Westover (carpentry), Mike Cox (wiring), John Peck, Linda Tsui, Beth Maxwell, and Marjorie Lewellen. She designed and made the screen. Stories abound about various members of the congregation in awkward positions under the chancel floor. It was ready for the 1988 Easter Service, played by new "short term organist" Joanne Hardgrove.

The final report on the organ installation by Reg Robertson in 1989 notes that it cost a total of \$32,000, all donations except for \$8,500 from capital reserves, and that it was estimated to be worth six times what was paid for it.

Problems with the organ began to be noted in the mid 90's, and 2001, a contract with Gerger and Sons was signed to tune and maintain the organ. As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, a new committee will begin a study process to see what to do with the current organ.

### **Pulpit**

An original "pulpit" covered with wood looking contact paper was replaced with a new pulpit designed and paid for by memorial funds in 1979. It was built by Allen Smith for \$800 and installed in 1980. For a time in the 1970's, the church worshiped in the round, with a small table in the middle, and no pulpit.

### **The Grounds and Plantings**

In the early years, the parsonage was in the lot behind the church where the current condo stands. Part of the grounds was used in 1973 by students from the high school in a project about growing vegetables. The plantings in the back were installed by the Junior School and then improved markedly by Marilyn Romanesko in 1998. The hedge from the chimney to the fence was planted in 1996. The weeping cherry tree was planted for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The magnificent holly tree has been here since the property was bought.

### **The Engraved Drawing of Christ Congregation**

The engraved drawing of Christ Congregation that is used on many of our Annual Reports, and other reproductions, was done by George Bradshaw of Trenton, a Baptist, and well known artist, in the 1960's.

### **Community Outreach and Building Use**

Christ Congregation has utilized the building in stewardship to the community and also to help supplement the budget through rentals. Many community organizations, schools, and groups have used the building over fifty years. One of our roles has been to help new schools be born, and, like the kids in the church, watch them move out as they got bigger. Groups using the church have included

- Girl Scouts, Street Theatre, and Koinonia 1971
- Nassau Cooperative Nursery, 1974-1980. Departure left "financial strain."
- Pro Musica, YWCA (exercise class), Princeton Recreation Association in 1981.
- Princeton Christian Fellowship
- AA Meetings begin on Friday nights in 1983
- Princeton Missionary Alliance, 1984, three nights per week.
- Princeton Junior School 1987-89, 1990-98.
- Princeton Folk Music Society, 1987 – present
- Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament (1987)
- High School Meditation Group
- Princeton Chinese Christian Fellowship (baptisms)
- Voices (singing group)
- Princeton Indian Church 1996 - present
- French School. 2000-2002.

- Princeton High School rents parking
- Plans for Child Care Center, 2004

### **The Parsonage**

The first parsonage was at 29 Tee-Ar Place. It was home for the Middletons and Dannenhauers. Early Annual Reports talked about all of the maintenance work that had to be done by congregational members on the parsonage.

Behind the church was an empty lot where the main sanctuary was to be built. The parsonage mortgage was finally paid off in 1976. After Rev. Dannenhauer left in 1978, the church decided to sell the parsonage so the last mortgage on the church could be paid off, and then the back lot could be sold to Robert Hillier, who sold it to Dixon, the developer of the current condos. The parsonage sold for \$79,000. This was all handled by members of the church, including Fred Bauer, so the church saved an estimated \$20,000 in broker fees. In 1980, the church bought a house cooperatively with the new co-pastors, Mark and Margot Pickett, and the church sold its share when they left.

After Jeff Mays came in 1987, the condo at Griggs Farm was bought in 1992 for \$105,000. It has been cited as a very good investment, with some occasional problems, like the flood caused by a washing machine in the 90's.