

REMEMBERING THE PAST

In the summer of 1939 the Rev. A. R. Buffaloe was called to the First Presbyterian Church of Kingsport, Tennessee as Chapel Pastor for two outposts this church had already established. Land had also been purchased for a third outpost in the Oakgrove community of Kingsport. This plot of land was originally part of the Litz Farm and was located near the intersection of Litz Road and Bridwell Street. In July, Rev. Buffaloe began clearing the land himself and soon thereafter construction began on a white frame building consisting of an auditorium and four classrooms. Meanwhile, Rev. William McCorkle, senior pastor of First Presbyterian, and Rev. Buffaloe began intensive visitation in the surrounding community. A series of evangelistic meetings was planned to begin on Sunday, September 3, 1939 in the newly completed building referred to simply as The Chapel. As a result of these meetings, Sunday School and regular church programs were begun. The Kingsport Times News reported in a November 3, 1939 article that the congregation chose to name the chapel Bethel, meaning House of God. Two other names had been considered: Immanuel and Sharon. They also selected the watch words: ***Worshipping, Exalting and Serving Christ***. By spring of the next year, attendance at Bethel Chapel had grown such that four more classrooms were needed. Rev. Buffaloe and the men of the congregation constructed an addition using materials salvaged from old houses that Tennessee Eastman had wanted demolished. A small, one room stand-alone building was also constructed to serve as the pastor's study.

As a result of a petition by First Presbyterian in the spring of 1942, a six-man commission was appointed by Holston Presbytery to consider organizing Bethel Chapel into Bethel Presbyterian Church. This commission, chaired by Rev. McCorkle, met on Sunday, March 22, 1942 in Rev. Buffaloe's study before the regularly scheduled worship service and voted to approve organization. The minutes of their meeting stated that the commission then "proceeded to the auditorium where a capacity crowd awaited them". After the sermon, Rev. Buffaloe read the names of the ninety-six charter members. A charge was given and a prayer of consecration was offered. Rev. Buffaloe was officially called as Bethel's first pastor and J. D. Winger became the first Sunday School superintendent. The first congregational meeting of Bethel Church was called the next Sunday for the purpose of electing officers. Bernie Britton and Bradley Ward were elected as the first elders and Haskell Craddock, Ellis Lee and J.D. Winger were elected as the first deacons. Due to scheduling conflicts, the first official session meeting did not take place until three months later. At that meeting, Bradley Ward was elected Clerk of the Session. At the second meeting of the Session four Trustees were elected and the Session approved the purchase of an adjoining lot as attendance was increasing at a rapid and steady rate.

Prior to organization, the women of Bethel were considered part of the Women's Auxiliary of First Presbyterian. However, in October, 1942, Mrs. J. W. Landrum was elected first president of Bethel's Auxiliary. At that time, all the women of the church were divided into two Circles which met at the same hour on the second Wednesday of the month. Following Bible study, the Circles adjourned

to the general Auxiliary meeting. Growth continued into 1943. Additional elders and deacons were elected and Treasurer Ralph Casteel reported that Bethel was nearly debt-free and that he anticipated that Bethel could sever financial ties with First Presbyterian in September. Discussion was begun on enlarging the current building once again and a decision to hold revival services in the spring and the fall of each year was well received.

However, in August of 1943, Rev. Buffaloe asked the Session to concur with his request to accept a call to the First Vanguard Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. With regret the Session and later, the congregational accepted. Not wanting to leave his fledging flock without a shepherd, Rev. Buffaloe phoned a close friend and asked him to consider the work at Bethel. Rev. Marvin Compher was serving as pastor to four small churches in the Covington, Virginia area and was on vacation when he received his friend's call from Kingsport. Feeling he should at least investigate this opportunity, he quickly arranged to take the train from Richmond to Bristol. As Rev. Compher related in his book *"The Road I Would Take Again"* the train was filled with soldiers that summer of 1943. Wanting to show respect and gratitude, he refused to take someone's seat and stood all the way. His visit proved to be very enjoyable and he found the opportunities to reach out into the outlying areas exciting. When he left to return to Virginia, he indicated he felt led to accept any call Bethel might make. He received that call two weeks later and was back in Kingsport six weeks after that. Bethel was without a pastor for only three weeks.

Rev. Compher quickly set goals for the growing congregation: more Sunday school teachers, leadership for the youth, support for a music program and more space. The most pressing needs, in his opinion, were more Sunday School rooms and a fellowship hall. The present auditorium was soon enlarged by removing two classrooms. This provided a seating capacity for two hundred and space for a choir loft. A little over a month after Rev. Compher's installation as pastor, the congregation voted to accept the officers' plans for further enlargement of the church building. Funding was obtained by a bank loan. However, with the United States at war, new construction required a permit from the War Production Board and building materials were extremely difficult to find. Rev. Compher rode the bus to Knoxville and brought Bethel's application before the Board. Permission was granted without hesitation because Bethel was in an area home to many of the defense workers at Holston Defense. Bradley Ward, Clerk of the Session, and Joe Patterson, Chairman of Building Committee, found a solution to the scarcity of building materials. Elder Ward had family in Aho, North Carolina (a small community in Watauga County near Boone) who had access to privately owned sawmills. The two men would visit these mills and purchase more lumber than was needed. Subsequently, the excess lumber would be traded for kegs of nails or loads of cinder block and brick. This process was repeated time after time whenever Bethel was involved in a building program. Rev. Compher went before the Board a second time to obtain permission to purchase a furnace for the entire church building. Heating prior to this time was by small stoves in each room. An addition consisting of Sunday School rooms, a fellowship hall and a kitchen was dedicated on September 24, 1944.

Meanwhile, Rev. Compher had begun a survey of a growing area seven miles from Bethel near the Sullivan/Washington county line on Johnson City Highway. He found the need for a church to be

great as gas rationing limited travel to distant churches. The Session gave the Pastor permission to pursue the possibility of starting an outpost in this area. As Elder Ward lived in this area, he proposed that his yard, consisting of numerous mature shade trees, be used as an open-air venue. The plan was then to have a forty-five minute Sunday School program followed by a thirty minute preaching service on Sunday afternoons. Potential teachers were to be enlisted from the community to supplement ones from Bethel and chairs were to be brought from Bethel. On July 2, 1944 the first service was held with seventy-five in attendance. Throughout the summer, attendance varied between seventy and ninety and Elder Ward agreed to donate a lot he owned adjacent to his home as a building site. Rev. Compher again sought a building permit from the War Production Board. On November 19, 1944, the first service was held in the newly constructed basement of the outpost chapel which its congregation had named Bethany.

While going back and forth between Bethel and Bethany, Rev. Compher realized that there was not a Presbyterian Church near the midway point that was the rapidly growing community of Colonial Heights. With Sessional approval and the enthusiastic support of Bethel members, he began the same procedure he had followed at Bethany with one exception. He did not have to appear before the War Production Board because the Second World War had ended. On June 10, 1945, the first service was held among shade trees on Hemlock Road and the first service was conducted in the basement of Colonial Heights Chapel on December 16, 1945. Ministerial students were hired to assist with both Bethany and Colonial Heights until successful petitions to Holston Presbytery resulted in organization of both churches, Bethany on May 12, 1946 and Colonial Heights on February 23, 1947. These churches were then able to call their own full-time ministers.

A survey of the Vernon Heights area indicated a pressing need for a Sunday School and church between Bethel and Sullivan High School. Rev. Compher and the Bethel congregation welcomed another opportunity to build an outpost. However, no lovely lawn with shade trees was found. However, a local business owner had unrented property which he made available to Bethel at no cost. The first services were conducted in June, 1947. Land was donated, a building was constructed and services were conducted there beginning in November. This chapel was named Central as it was centrally located to four communities in the area, The members and officers of Central were included on Bethel's rolls until 1956 when Central became an organized church.

The desire to grow in numbers and to establish new churches was balanced by the need for spiritual growth. Home visitation, evangelistic programs, support for Rev. Compher's weekly radio program on WKPT, financial support of Bible instruction in the public schools and holding twice-a-year revival services were but a few of the efforts toward that goal. One of the more well attended revival services was conducted by the Rev. Earnest Wilson of Micaville, North Carolina and was extended from five days to ten days in the spring of 1945. Years later, Rev. Wilson and his family visited Bethel numerous times while his daughter, Jane, was serving Bethel as the wife of Pastor Martin Stokes.

The modest homes of the majority of the congregation limited the hospitality the church was able to extend to the invited speakers. Also, Rev. Compher's family had outgrown the small rental house

on Virginia Avenue Bethel was using as a manse. Just before Bethel's fourth anniversary, the congregation voted to build its own manse. A \$10,000 loan was obtained from the Executive Committee of Home Missions of Holston Presbytery and construction began in late 1947 on an eight-room brick home on Clover Street. The Compher family took occupancy in April of the next year, doing much of the finishing work themselves.

Rev. Compher's attention was drawn to the developing community of Bridwell Heights, located about five miles east of Bethel on the Bristol Highway. A survey indicated need and considerable interest. No lawn with shade trees was found but a Presbyterian family offered their home for midweek prayer and Bible study. A plot of land was donated by the A. N. Bridwell heirs and a basement was soon constructed. One hundred fifty-one people attended the first service in July of 1952. As with Central, Bridwell Heights Chapel was considered a part of Bethel until its organization in 1958.

Meanwhile, Bethel continued to grow. The Women of the Church now had five circles. Sunday School attendance was nearing three hundred and there was a critical need for parking. Planning for a new sanctuary, including financing and land acquisition, began in 1951 and by the end of the year, the congregation voted to proceed. The existing building would be converted to an educational wing. A ground breaking ceremony was held on September 10, 1952. Construction began the next week, employing Little Construction Company to supplement volunteer labor. Furniture, an electronic organ and new hymnals were purchased and in place for the first service in the new sanctuary on June 7, 1953. Bethel's first two ministers, Rev. McCorkle and Rev. Buffaloe, participated in a dedication service two weeks later. The first wedding ceremony was performed in the new sanctuary on October 10, uniting Mary Elizabeth Sine and the Rev. William Cameron in marriage. Rev. Cameron was then serving as assistant minister at Bethel responsible for the Central and Bridwell Heights Chapels.

After ten years at Bethel, Rev. Compher felt led to accept a call to the Overlook Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia and did so in November of 1953. For the first time Bethel officers had to make preparations for pulpit supply and to search for a new senior minister. The Rev. Lewis Shields, a retired minister, conducted many of the morning worship services and Rev. Cameron held the evening services. Church officers took over Wednesday night prayer services. These officers faced even greater challenges the next fall when Rev. Cameron asked the Session to concur with his request to be relieved of his duties so that he might accept a call to the Broadmoor Presbyterian Church in Portsmouth, Virginia which they did. However, in October of 1954, the Rev. James Tubbs of Florence, South Carolina accepted Bethel's call and began his work on November 1. This time Bethel was without a pastor for just over a month. Pastor's wives and children would become valuable additions to the church family. However, Rev. Tubbs also brought his mother with him. Mother Ruth was quickly embraced by the people of Bethel. She was considered an excellent Bible study teacher and a mighty prayer warrior.

In the beginning, Rev. Tubbs' ministry included Bethel Church, Central Chapel and Bridwell Heights Chapel. He held services at 10 a.m. on alternating Sundays at the Chapels and every Sunday an

hour later at Bethel. In answer to much prayer, the Rev. Bert Styles of Roan Mountain, Tennessee accepted Bethel's call to be assistant minister in charge of the chapels in early February of 1955. Rev. Tubbs was then able to concentrate his efforts on youth ministry, the music program, a men's program, foreign missions and evangelism.

Elder Lee Carrico became a Commissioned Lay Pastor in 1955 and began his service at Providence and Leesburg Churches while employed fulltime at Eastman. Later, Lee took on two more small churches and continued his ministry for over fifty years. Miss Ruth Parks, a youth advisor, left Bethel in 1955 to begin her service as a teacher to missionary children in Japan.

Growth continued and by 1956, Sunday School enrollment was at 366. Plans for a new educational wing began in earnest and the congregation voted to proceed with the Session's recommendation in September, 1957. Construction of the new and demolition of the old educational units proceeded, at times simultaneously. The only accident is said to be a broken arm suffered by Rev. Tubbs. An open house for the new, two story unit, complete with kitchen and fellowship hall, was held on September 28, 1958. Knotty pine paneling from the original Chapel auditorium was refurbished and used in the pastor's study and the secretary's office. The original pulpit from Bethel Chapel was moved to the fellowship hall where it remains today and the pulpit Bible, given to Bethel Chapel by Mr. and Mrs. J. Fred Johnson, is on display in the parlor. When asked at the Fiftieth Anniversary celebration how these young Bethel men, with little expertise (with the exception of electrician D.T. McCoy), even less money and with limited outside help, could built at least two additions to the original Chapel, basements for four outposts, a soaring brick sanctuary, an eight-room manse and a two-story educational unit, the response was: **Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Psalms 127:1.**

In 1959, when offers to purchase plots of land between the church and what was then called the Upper Circle were made, Bethel seized the opportunities. One parcel even included a small motel called the Circle Court. The church did not rent rooms but did continue to lease space for a beauty shop and a TV repair business until finances were such that in 1971, the church could manage without the rental income and the Court was torn down.

In the sixties, young people who had grown up at Bethel started their own Christian service. Skip and Dottie Slaughter were commissioned as Missionary Candidates by Holston Presbytery in July, 1960. They later served in the Congo. Jack Haga joined the Slaughters at Union Seminary that summer to begin his ministerial studies. Miss Beatrice Carr, Bethel historian for over twenty-five years, would include their visits to the Bethel pulpit in her yearly reports, starting with "our own Rev..." When Sue McCoy became Director of Christian Education at Lake Forest Presbyterian Church in Knoxville in 1961, Miss Bee's opening phrase was "our little girl". Years later, Nora Tubbs Tesdale, daughter of Rev. Tubbs and an ordained minister, received an "our very own little girl" when she visited Bethel's pulpit. A substitute historian later reported that Dr. Ed Isley had begun his full-time Christian service with the Billy Graham organization. This historian had probably not taught these young people in Sunday School as had Miss Bee and could not therefore share her joy. Two other "little girls" became ministers' wives: Martha Jo McCoy married Dr. Ted Barnett who

served as U. S. Director of African Inland Missions and Bobbye Jo Freeman married Father Joe Ballard, an episcopal priest. Dr. Phil Hoskins, Senior Minister of Higher Ground Baptist Church in Kingsport, attended Bethel as a youth.

There was also a new opportunity for Rev. Tubbs as he accepted a call to Wilmington Presbytery in North Carolina as Executive Secretary effective September 1, 1960. Bethel quickly elected a Pastoral Search Committee and began to look for an interim minister. Dr. Lewis Shields, a retired minister, agreed to fill the pulpit on Sunday mornings and Mr. William Goforth, a senior at Columbia Seminary, agreed to hold the evening services. Church officers took turns leading midweek Prayer Services. The need for a church secretary could no longer be ignored and Miss Libby Strong, now Mrs. Harold Roller, became Bethel's first paid secretary, working weekday mornings for \$20 a week. Thankfully, the Search Committee was able to report in April, 1961 that the Rev. Richard Keeton had accepted Bethel's call and would begin his ministry in June. Bethel was without a pastor for nine months.

The population of the country was becoming much more mobile and Bethel members began to transfer to other locations. Also, deaths of older members were sadly becoming more frequent. However, Bethel's enrollment continued to grow and more emphasis was placed on benevolence giving. By consolidating outstanding loans in 1963, the way was seen clear to finance a major improvement program. Air conditioning was installed in the sanctuary and church offices, the church tower was completed, the parking lot was paved and memorial funds were supplemented to suspend a six foot wide, twelve foot long walnut cross on the sanctuary wall behind the choir loft in memory of Tony Brown, a Bethel member who lost his life serving this country in the Viet Nam War. Bethel participated in the development of yet another church in 1965. As part of the Kingsport Church Extension, First Presbyterian, Waverly Road and Bethel supported Preston Hills Presbyterian until it became organized and self-sufficient. Ties to Grandfather Home for Children in Banner Elk, North Carolina were strengthened when Rev. Keeton was elected Chairman of the Board and Elder Bob Hart was elected to that Board. When Bethel was organized, Holston Presbytery included Avery County, North Carolina, the county in which both Grandfather Home for Children and Lees McRae College were located. Both these institutions had been supported by the Presbyterian Church since their founding. In the late sixties Bethel began to participate in city softball leagues. This proved to be a source of Christian outreach and witness for decades. Bethel could not help but feel proud of its teams because they won the fast pitch softball championship three years in a row with Steve Thornberg as pitcher.

In May, 1968 Rev. Keeton asked the congregation to concur with his request to accept a call to the First Presbyterian Church of Jefferson City, Tennessee effective June 30. The officers again took the necessary actions to continue the work of Bethel without interruption. A Search Committee, chaired by Bob Hart, was elected. Rev. Bert Styles agreed to act as Moderator of the Session, Dr. Ralph Brown and Rev. Edwin White agreed to alternate Sundays in the pulpit and Rev. White agreed to care for the sick. In December the Search Committee decided that a call should be extended to Mr. Myron Moore, a senior at Columbia Seminary. The congregation concurred and Mr. Moore

accepted pending approval by Holston Presbytery and his ordination. This time, Bethel was without a pastor for a year.

The Moore family arrived in June, 1969 and soon became part of the congregation. Holston Presbytery's examination and approval of Mr. Moore took place on July 19 and his ordination and installation services were conducted two weeks later. Rev. Moore's time at Bethel was noted for his vibrant youth ministry, not only at Bethel but throughout Kingsport. He conducted a Morning Devotional radio ministry and was in much demand as a revival speaker in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. In October, 1971, Rev. Moore requested that the Pastoral relationship between himself and Bethel be dissolved. Although the vote was split, the congregation did concur with his request. The Session later passed a motion that it would not oppose an independent ministry by Rev. Moore in the Kingsport area.

Bethel's pastorate was again vacant but the ministry was ongoing. The Session, Board of Deacons and Women of the Church had by now begun organizing committees which enabled the church to function more effectively and efficiently. Interim ministers during this period included: Dr. H.H. Van Cleve, Dr. William McCorkle, Dr. I. M. Ellis and Dr. Charles Gibboney. Two congregational meetings in the fall of 1972 were of special interest. On October 29, Precia Keel was elected Bethel's first female elder and on November 5, Libby Roller and Dottie Slaughter were elected to the Board of Deacons. In January of 1973 the Session voted to have as Bethel's purpose: **Bring people to Christ, build up people in Christ and send people out in Christ.** They also accepted the motto: **A Friendly Church Offering the Gospel to All.** Bethel was able to purchase another plot of land, including a house, adjacent to the back of the church. New members were added to the church roll during this period. However, losses due to transfers, deaths and inactivity resulted in a significant decrease in active membership.

After a year of effort, the Search Committee reported that Rev. Charles Sydnor, Jr., previously a home missionary in Kentucky, had accepted Bethel's call and would arrive in December, 1973. Around this time, Mrs. Tincie Wheat began her service as nursery helper. Concerned about Bethel's decline, the Session resolved to "seek to promote new strength, outreach and growth". Rev. Sydnor's ministry at Bethel supported these efforts. Bethel helped support various missionary families such as the Rules in Zaire and the Bundrants in Korea. Participation in campaigns to raise funds for the Benevolence Medical Foundations was on going. Bethel also established a relationship with the Bethel A. M.E. Zion Church on Maple Street. Ministers exchanged pulpits and choirs exchanged choir lofts. Active membership did rise and become fairly stable into the eighties.

Rev. Sydnor, with his keen interest in education, was elected to the Board of Directors of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina. In 1976 the Manse on Clover Street was sold and the pastor was then to be given a housing allowance. On April 3, 1977, Bruce Lyttle was hired as choir director, joining Harold Line who had been organist since 1959. Another major improvement project, begun in 1978, resulted in air conditioning for the educational building, a rapid warm-up system, carpet and acoustic tile for the sanctuary, the combination of two Sunday School rooms into a parlor and furnishings for it, an improved sound system, a new organ and a new church sign

for the “point”. In the summer of 1980, a lot adjacent to the church on Miller Street became available for purchase. Elder Bob Freeman, chairman of the Lot Financing Committee, offered a win/win idea for lowering church debt, insuring adequate parking and funds for the Miller Street lot all at the same time. He owned the land and building housing the Warpath Lanes Bowling Alley and Bethel owned a lot across from the church and adjacent to Bob’s property. Bob’s proposal was that he purchase that lot and include in the deed that this lot was to be used only for parking and that Bethel would be permitted to continue to park there at no cost. This restriction was to be in effect as long as Bethel remained a Presbyterian Church. The Session and congregation gratefully accepted this proposal. Two memorial funds were established which later added to the beauty and usefulness of the church property. The Ray Winebarger Recreation Area was built and pew cushions were purchased in memory of Agnes Wininger. Addition attention was given to enhancing the church grounds. Led by Mildred Faris and Rolando Gonzalez, Bethel won two Beautification Awards from the city of Kingsport.

Bethel’s first introduction to the possible union of the southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) and the northern Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA) was at a fall 1982 meeting of Holston Presbytery. This union was approved early the next year. Also in 1983, the Simpson property, visible from the kitchens windows, became available for purchase. Utilizing the financial expertise of Barbara Kelly and Charles Fortner, the Session approved a rather unique method of financing the purchase. Interest bearing notes were successfully offered to church members. Sadly, after providing Bible instruction to public school students for more than forty years, the Kingsport Board of Education voted to discontinue this instruction. Bethel’s financial support of this program for the 1984-1985 school year was returned and the Session voted to give these monies to Miss Kathryn Lockett, one of the retiring teachers and a former Bethel member.

After eleven years of service Rev. Sydnor asked Bethel to accept his resignation/retirement effective December 31, 1984. Bethel gratefully welcomed Rev. Robert O. Freeman as a one-year interim minister beginning February, 1985 and the work continued. Regretfully, Central Presbyterian Church was forced to close its doors the next month due to low attendance and insufficient financial support. During this time Bethel’s Sunday evening services were suspended. Bethel began receiving the Two-Cent a Meal offering for hunger in October, 1985 and continues to do so, only now it is Five-Cent a Meal. Following Rev. Freeman’s departure, Bethel’s Worship Committee filled the pulpit on a Sunday by Sunday basis and Secretary Jane Brown kept the church office (and the officers) running in an efficient manner. Rev. David Wadsworth, pastor of Colonial Heights and son-in-law of Bill and Buzz Peters, acted as Moderator of the Session in order that official matters could be conducted. One very important matter was to issue a call to Dr. Martin Stokes, Jr. who was serving at the Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Dr. Stokes and his family arrived June 8, 1986 to begin his ministry at Bethel and from the very beginning Bethel was blessed with the musical talents of this family. Dr. Stokes installation service on June 22 included family members, also. His father, Luther, an elder at Lynn Garden Presbyterian Church here in Kingsport, gave the opening prayer and his father-in-law, Rev. Earnest Wilson, charged the congregation.

By the mid to late eighties Bethel could no longer ignore the changing society and the challenges this presented to the church. Many women had entered the workforce outside the home. As a result, the Women of the Church began to have two monthly meetings, one during the daytime and one in the evening. Wednesday night "prayer meetings" included a supper beforehand which was prepared by a paid cook at a modest cost. Sunday night services were resumed and efforts were made to have a variety of programs such as movies, hotdog suppers, guest speakers or special musical presentations. Efforts were made to reach the children during morning services. Children's sermons were offered and then they were excused to the newly organized Children's and Junior Churches. The Session authorized the purchase of Bethel's first computer, answering machine and microwave oven. Dr. Stokes and the church officers attended a retreat in the spring of 1988 in order to develop goals for Bethel. Utilizing the results of a congregational survey entitled "Looking to the Future", they focused on four areas: youth, education, outreach and special ministries. These ministries were to include Senior Citizens, Singles and Music. The first and foremost goal was to hire a Director of Christian Education. A salary for a DCE was included in the 1989 budget and a search committee was appointed. Meanwhile, a large, stained glass window of Christ was installed at the back of the sanctuary, financed by memorial donations.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States celebrated its two hundredth anniversary on May 21, the date in 1789 when the first General Assembly met in Philadelphia. Bethel celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on September 3, 1989 with over three hundred in attendance. January 28, 1990 was declared "Harold Line Day" to commemorate his thirty years of service to Bethel as organist. August 26, 1990 was declared "Audria Mae Day" to commemorate her more than seventy-two years as Sunday School teacher, public school teacher and wife and helpmeet to the Rev. George Bowman who had chosen to spend his last years at Bethel. Rev. Bowman often served as pulpit supply and it was not apparent that he was blind as his "scripture readings" were from memory. The minutes of a Session meeting in 1990 described Bethel as a "happy and contented" church.

Finally, the DCE search committee reported success. Miss Julia Wiley was hired as Director of Christian Education, effective July 1, 1990. Her efforts were not confined to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School but included such diverse activities as planning Family Retreats, accompanying the youth to Mission conferences or mission trips, conducting youth choirs and conducting Continuing Education Courses for church officers

In 1991 church secretary and disbursing Treasurer Jane Brown resigned after twelve years of dedicated service. Months later, Bethel had the good fortune to hire Mrs. Doris McNew as secretary. In early 1992, Miss Wiley informed the Session of her desire to seek acceptance by Holston Presbytery as an "Inquirer of Ordination". The Session encouraged her in this pursuit. Julia did leave Bethel in July, 1995 to attend Columbia Seminary and in 1999 she was removed from Bethel's membership roll as she had accepted her first call to a Presbyterian Church in Canton, Georgia. In 2010, she obtained a Certificate of Eligibility from the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh, Scotland and remained to pastor a church there. Meanwhile, Bethel hosted a well-attended Ecclesiastical Family Reunion on May 3, 1992 which included the mother church, First Presbyterian, Bethany and Colonial Heights. Bridwell Heights did not participate as that church had not

supported the reunion of the PCUS and the UPCUSA churches back in 1983. Regretfully, Bethel accepted the retirements of organist Harold Line and church historian Miss Beatrice Carr. The Ray Winebarger Playground was dedicated in the fall of 1993. A cookbook, entitled "Bethel's Favorite Recipes", was published and sold to help fund the new playground.

In May of 1994 Bethel agreed to sponsor the Nsapo family and later the Tatchis family from Africa through the Bridge Refugee Sponsorship Services. Skip and Dottie Slaughter were very instrumental in this endeavor. During the mid-1990's, the number of deaths of charter and senior members appeared to escalate. In one year alone, Dr. Stokes held nine funerals for cherished long time members. March 10, 1996 was declared "Tincie Wheat Day" in recognition of her thirty years of outstanding service as Bethel's nursery attendant. A new paid staff position was initiated that year. Since the church's beginning in 1939, Bethel members had volunteered to take on the duties of either receiving or disbursing treasurer but not both. Mrs. Vicki Patton, then a member of Bethel, was hired to do both tasks. Bethel also began lending financial support to the King family, Wycliff missionaries in Papua, New Guinea. This relationship continued until the Kings' retirement in 2014.

In July of 1996, Dr. Stokes asked that his pastoral relationship with Bethel be dissolved so that he might accept a call to the New Monmouth Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Virginia effective August 31. Bethel concurred with his request and later elected a Pastoral Search Committee. Fortunately, the denomination had recognized an increasing need for interim ministers. Courses began to be offered at seminaries and lists of possible candidates were made available. Mostly, the candidates were retired ministers but some were career interims. Rev. Richard Mobayed from Kentucky accepted a one-year contract as interim and was in the pulpit by December. Dr. Frank Preston, having retired from a church in Florida, returned home to the Bristol area and accepted a six-month interim. Dr. Richard Ray, also from Bristol, was interim for only two months in the summer of 1998. He appeared to enjoy his time at Bethel, describing the church "as a light on a hill" but he felt called to accept a teaching position at Pittsburgh Seminary.

Responses to Holston Presbytery Development Questionnaire of 1998 revealed that Bethel's congregation was made up of 40% retirees, 25% families with children under age 18 and 35% employed without children. Membership had dropped about 25% from the years of greatest growth (1945-1965) and very few one-family homes had been built in the surrounding community in the last thirty years. Despite these discouraging facts and with the support of dedicated interim ministers and the church staff (Bruce Lyttle, Doris McNew, Vicki Patton, Tincie Wheat and sextons Ann and John Showman) the officers and congregation of Bethel carried on. New endeavors included setting long term goals, selecting a committee tasked with the installation of stained glass memorial windows in the sanctuary and deciding to participate in Wellmont's Parish Nurse Program.

Bethel's next interim was a retired Methodist minister who had at one time been senior pastor at the First Broad Street United Methodist Church in Kingsport. Dr. Toombs Kay's ministry at Bethel began in October 1998 and continued until May of 1999. He was most appreciative of Bethel for allowing him to do the "sweet things of ministry, preaching, teaching and visiting with the people".

Dr. Kay's sweet things resulted in Sunday morning attendance increasing by over 50%. Dr. Ted Hagan, pastor at Preston Hills, acted as Moderator of the Session during the months of Dr. Kay's ministry at Bethel. Rev. Robert Lowry began his interim ministry in May 1999. Rev. Lowry is remembered for his keen interest in church music and liturgy and his introduction of litanies and choral responses to the worship services. However, Rev. Lowry's time at Bethel ended in August as did that of the Pastoral Search Committee. After three years Bethel was no longer without a pastor.

Four years after retiring as an Air Force Chaplain with the rank of Major, Pastor Bement was serving the Providence Presbyterian Church in Southaven, Mississippi when he received and accepted Bethel's call, effective September 14, 1999. His first task was to conduct an Officers Retreat and a Parish-wide Planning Meeting to "determine where we've been and where we want to go". Under Pastor Gary's leadership, Bethel became a church in transition.

In the new century, Bethel's staff increased in numbers and in function. Donna Sade agreed to be Church Administrator and later introduced Bethel to the world of cyberspace. Liz Yount was hired as the Pastor's Assistant and Patty Lyttle took on the responsibilities of Child Care Coordinator, assisting child care provider Sherie Storie. Vannah Haga, wife of Charter Member Tom Haga, accepted the position of Parish Nurse. Theresa and Danny Bellamy were hired as additions to the music staff in order to bring a more contemporary, spiritual flair to the church music. Theresa was to be Director of Youth Music and the Inspirational Choir and Danny was to be a consultant and trainer for the sound system. A unicameral system of church government had been under consideration for some time. In March of 2000 the Board of Deacons recommended that there should no longer be a diaconate and that its responsibilities should be added to those of the Session. The Session concurred in June and voted to implement this unicameral system beginning in January, 2001.

Also, in 2001, the stained glass windows committee, chaired by Bill Sade, saw its months of effort come to fruition. Emmanuel Studios of Nashville completed the designs which were to conform to the large front window centered on Jesus himself through the theme, *Come Unto Me*. Later, Emmanuel installed ten large windows in the sanctuary and narthex, two smaller windows in the narthex and two windows in the prayer room (which had been converted from what was the church library). The funds for this project came entirely from individual donations. The names of those devoted Bethel servants whose lives these stained glass windows memorialized are listed toward the end of this booklet.

In 2002, a house on Miller Street, adjacent to the church grounds, became available for purchase. Following its tradition of optimism and planning for the future, Bethel purchased this property financed, in part, by five-year commitments from church members. In August, the house was rented by the Gamble family who later became the church sextons. Two scholarship funds were established also that year from memorials and estate donations, The Tim Jackson Memorial Music Fund and The Bethel Education Scholarship Fund. The funding for the later came primarily from the estates of Audria Mae Bowman and Beatrice Carr. Also, in 2002, changes in church staff

occurred. Liz Yount's title and duties were revised to that of Christian Educator. Donna Patrick joined Bethel as Treasurer following the resignation of Vicki Patton. The church's outside appearance was modified slightly in 2003 by the construction of a handicap ramp from the parking lot to the church entrance.

Concern over denominational issues impacted the work of Pastor Gary and the Session throughout 2003 and 2004. The 216th General Assembly's position on abortion, same sex marriage and political anti-war sentiments appeared contrary to Biblical teachings and some projects funded by the World Council of Churches were questionable. Steps taken by Bethel included letters of protest to Presbyterian governing bodies, letters to the local newspaper and a decrease in the yearly amounts given to Holston Presbytery. A further step was to stipulate that these donations go only to designated missions. Sadly, Bethel lost many valuable long-time members and officers who, in good conscience, could no longer remain members of a PCUSA church.

However, under Pastor Gary's leadership the work continued with an emphasis on revival and renewal. Liz Yount conducted seminars on the Purpose Driven Ministry which the Session later voted to adopt at Bethel. Church committees were reorganized into six ministries: Administration, Discipleship, Fellowship, Missions, Service and Worship. A series of Sunday School classes was initiated to provide a strong foundation for spiritual education. Bethel joined Preston Hills and Reedy Creek Presbyterian Churches to continue vacation Bible schools.

Turnovers in church staff started occurring in 2006. After nearly fourteen years of faithful service, church secretary Doris McNew retired. Christy McMakin was soon hired to fill this vacancy. The Inspiration Choir saw many changes in leadership. Theresa Bellamy was followed by Greg Bement who was followed by Katy Sherrand Anderson. Katy resigned following her marriage and Eva Haynes Pearson assumed leadership. When Eva married Russ Pearson, Youth Director at First Presbyterian, she left Bethel to join her husband. Our then pianist, Jill Harris, led the choir until she began her college career at the University of Kentucky. Sadly, the Inspirational Choir faded away. The one bright spot was the hiring of a talented, "temporary pianist", Margaret Lester, who was to remain with Bethel until 2014.

The church record of 2008 revealed that of the 261 active members, 73.1% were over the age of 55 and only 3.1% were under the age of 25. Vannah Haga, Parish Nurse, was vigilant in looking out for the health and wellbeing of the aging congregation. However, age did not diminish Bethel's enthusiasm for the work of the Lord. The following is a partial list of the outreach and missions endeavors to which Bethel was lending financial support and/or active participation:

Hope House	Hope Haven	Interfaith Hospitality Network
Shepherd Center	Joy Gift	Kingsport Community Center (KCMC)
Gideon's	Sunset Gap	ETSU Campus Ministry
Grandfather Home	Five-Cents-A-Meal	Prison Fellowship Ministry
Hay House	Salvation Army	Help and Hope Food Pantry

Knitting Ministry

Girl Scouts

Neighborhood Share Distribution Ctr.

King Family Missionaries

Schmidt Family Missionaries

Pastor Gary had his own unique missions. In addition to conducting Bible studies at the Kiwanis Towers Retirement Apartments, he utilized his experience as an Air Force chaplain to volunteer as chaplain to Wellmont Hospital, the Presbytery Camp and a National Guard regiment.

Bethel celebrated its 70th Anniversary on September 13, 2009. The highlights were musical presentations by Theresa Bellamy and the Stokes family. As part of the preparation for this event, a kitchen renovation was completed utilizing memorial funds for James Byrd and Joanne Vance. Just in time, a media improvement for the sanctuary was also completed which included a pull down screen, a choir monitor and updated software.

On December 27, 2009 Pastor Gary submitted his resignation to the Session, effective February 20, 2010. The Congregation voted to accept his resignation on January 17, 2010. Later, the session voted to pursue Pastor Emeritus status for Pastor Bement. This subsequently required his retirement and was approved by Presbytery in March. Liz Yount, Christian Educator, submitted her resignation January 1, 2010. A reception honoring the Bement and Yount families was held on February 14.

By this time the denomination had set up processes to enable a church to find both interim pastors and installed pastors. The Nominating Committee was to nominate members to serve on the Pastor Search Committee (subject to election by the congregation) as well as assume the duties of the Interim Pastor Search Committee. As lengthy and in-depth paperwork and step by step procedures were required for the process of selecting an installed pastor, Holston Presbytery's Pastoral Ministry Committee assigned Rev. Fred Niles to Bethel as both a Committee on Ministry Liaison and Moderator of the Session. A Congregation Mission Survey was required in order to address the myriad questions that had to be answered on the Church Information Form. The intent was to spell out in detail who Bethel was and what Bethel was looking for in a minister.

Meanwhile, the work of the church went forward. The Worship Committee kept the pulpit filled on a Sunday by Sunday basis. The Rev. Tim Merritt and Dr. Ted Hagan, Jr. served Bethel often in this capacity. The Property and Grounds Committee recommended to the Session that Blue Ridge Properties be hired to manage the rental house on Miller Street for a fee of 10% of the rent. The Session concurred with this and also with a recommendation that Vannah Haga be recognized for ten years' dedicated service to Bethel as Parish Nurse. New heat pumps were installed, financed primarily by donations from the Ruth Walker Estate.

At the May, 2010 Session Meeting, the Interim Pastor Search Committee recommended that a call be issued to the Rev. Kaye Florence as a Temporary Supply Pastor. This wording was extremely important for future consideration because, where as an interim pastor was not eligible to be called as an installed pastor, a Temporary Supply Pastor could be called as a permanent pastor with a two-thirds vote of Presbytery. The Session voted unanimously to issue a one-year call effective July 1, 2010. Rev. Florence had been serving as a Chaplain Resident at the VA Hospital in Johnson City

when she accepted Bethel's call. The transition appeared to flow seamlessly. After months of fervent prayer for discernment of God's will and diligent examination of over seventy-five applications, the Pastor Search Committee informed the Session in February that Rev. Kaye Florence was its choice for permanent pastor effective April 1, 2011. The Presbytery Committee on Ministry had already given its approval and a vote by Presbytery was scheduled for March 5. It came as no surprise that the Session, Congregation and Presbytery approved. The work could now proceed in earnest.

2012 was to be a very active year for the Staff, Session and congregation of Bethel. Bethel agreed to host the December, 2012 meeting of Holston Presbytery. Plans were made to have the property and grounds in tip-top condition for this event and included but was not limited to replacing floor tiles and carpet, painting, extensive cleaning and repair, etc. In February Apple of My Eye Preschool approached Bethel about using the Education Wing facilities two days a week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. It was agreed that this could be an opportunity for outreach but there were concerns such as tax-status, liability and safety that had to be addressed before any decision could be reached. However, these issues were resolved and congregational approval was granted in April. In March Rev. Florence began an eight-week Confirmation Class for three of our young people. Bruce Lyttle's thirty-five years of faithful service as choir director and worship leader were recognized at a service on April 22, 2012. Construction of an outdoor pavilion had been considered years ago and memorial funds were available but no action had been taken. In May Linda McIver was appointed by the Session to chair a committee to update these plans and in September, the congregation voted to begin construction on the 30' by 50' multipurpose shelter. Also, a decision was made to purchase one hundred of the newly developed Presbyterian Hymnals, *Glory to God*. Citing the rapidly declining health of her husband, Tom, Vannah Haga resigned as parish nurse in the fall of 2012. Sherie Storie, childcare provider, also resigned that fall just prior to her marriage.

Easter services in 2013 were of special interest. Bethel invited Reddy Creek and Preston Hills Presbyterian Churches to a Sunrise Service in the new outdoor pavilion with breakfast to follow. Also, that Sunday, the choir of St. Matthew United Methodist Church joined Bethel's choir to present an Easter cantata. Bethel's choir had joined St. Matthew's choir for a presentation at their Maundy Thursday service. Other special services included a July 7 Service for Justice, a workshop on the new hymnal conducted by Meg Flannigan from the committee on the hymnal's development and an evening Taize 'service. Changes in staff also occurred in 2013. Chelsea Lyttle was hired as childcare provider on Sunday mornings. Leslie Jones became sexton following the resignation of Chris Courtney due to health concerns. Searches were on going for a parish nurse and a permanent pianist.

In the summer of 2013 the session concurred with Rev. Kaye's request to use her entire 2014 continuing education time and travel allowances for a travel/study trip to the Holy Land. The Christmas Cantata for 2013 was another combined effort by the choirs of Bethel and St. Matthews. However, Vermont United Methodist choir also lent its support and well-received presentations were made at the three churches. While Rev. Florence was in the Holy Land the latter part of January and the first of February, 2014, the Rev. Sheerolyn Weed was pulpit supply. Rev. Weed had chosen

to worship at Bethel when she was not serving as an interim or pulpit supply at other churches in the area. Bethel received a Presbytery Hunger Grant of \$1329 which would be used to stock Bethel's Emergency Food Pantry. Easter 2014 services were similar to those of 2013. Bethel, Reedy Creek and Preston Hills Churches celebrated together at a Sunrise Service hosted by Reedy Creek and the three choirs gave multiple performances of another Easter Cantata. In July, 2014 the search for a permanent pianist was finally successful. Mrs. Debbie Robertson was hired to replace the temporary pianist of eight years, Margaret Lester. The search remained on-going for a parish nurse.

After 75 years of service, the work begun at Bethel Chapel is still not complete. In 2013, Bethel's Report to Presbytery revealed that 79% of the congregation was over the age of 65. Thus, the mission may be said to have changed somewhat to reflect what the church does day in and day out and that is to show the love of Christ to each other, to the surrounding community, to the city, to the Appalachian region and to the world. Rev. Florence's Words from the pulpit direct the congregation in these endeavors.

The Congregational Care Committee organized efforts to see that needs of members and their families are addressed whenever possible. In addition to Rev. Kaye and the Elders, visitation teams go out to those in hospitals, nursing homes or who are homebound. Meals are provided to families in times of bereavement if they so choose. Sadly, Pastor Kaye has had to call upon her experience and training as a Hospice and Hospital Chaplain twenty-eight times since she has been at Bethel when much-loved members have passed on. Christmas baskets, containing homemade soup and bread, are delivered to shut-ins. A "Heart-To-Heart" program is in operation whereby members with special needs are adopted by other members. A card ministry, to recognize birthdays, illnesses, anniversaries and deaths, is on-going. Transportation for Bethel events and services may be provided. There is even a rescue fund for acute financial needs. Monthly pot-luck Sunday lunches allow the congregation ample time for fellowship.

The dedicated and capable Property and Grounds Committee works diligently to keep the aging buildings with their mysterious plumbing systems in safe and effective operation so that Bethel may reach out to the community. In addition to the Apple of My Eye Preschool, the Quilt Guild, three Girl Scout Troops, a chapter of TOPS, Hope House (for training sessions) and an East Tennessee Veterans group use the church for their meetings. Bethel has received at least two Trefoil Awards from the Girl Scout Council as recognition of Bethel's willingness to provide a safe and welcoming place for the girls to meet.

When Bethel was organized as a church in 1942, one of the stated goals was to have half of the yearly budget go toward benevolences, both home missions and foreign missions. This goal may not have ever been achieved completely but Pastor Kaye describes Bethel today as having "a spirit of generosity". Bethel's Food Pantry Ministry is a very visible effort that extends the love of Christ to those in need in the surrounding community. In 2013, Bethel donated in excess of \$1200 to this mission. We continue to support other area ministries such as Hope House, Hope Haven, the Hay House, Kingsport Community Ministry Center and the Shepherd Center. Three organizations in Appalachia receive our financial support: Sunset Gap Community Center, the Presbytery's Camp

and Grandfather Home. In addition to monetary donations, Bethel sponsors angels from Grandfather's Angel's Tree each Christmas. For some of these abused children who have never before received a Christmas gift, Bethel is able to make a powerful witness. Gideon speakers make annual visits to Bethel and we support two denominational offerings, the Joy Gift and the One Great Hour of Sharing. The women of the church also contribute to offerings sponsored by the Presbyterian Women. For decades Bethel has supported individual foreign missionary families. In 2014, both the Kings and the Schmidts concluded their ministries overseas. The Session recently concurred with the Missions Committee's recommendation that the monies we would have normally sent to the King's for the remainder of 2014 should go to help with the education of a family member and that the donations that would have gone to the Schmidt's (who were with the African Inland Mission) should go to another AIM facility, the Alma Barnett Center for Children in Kenya.

And Bethel is looking to the future. A three-year commitment is being made toward the support of missionaries Fred Foy Strang and his wife Cecily so that they may return to minister to the Masai people of Eastern Africa. A youth room is in the process of being redecorated and furnished. A recent Pavilion Party has given the Disciple Committee ideas for next year's Vacation Bible School. The ecumenical choir is beginning plans for the next Christmas cantata. How to finance a new roof for the Educational Building has been mentioned. And so the work continues.

Where there is no vision, the people perish.....Proverbs 29:18

CHARTER MEMBERS

<i>Mrs. F.C. Adams</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. H.D. Craddock</i>	<i>Trula Maness</i>
<i>Betty Ann Adams</i>	<i>Virginia Davis</i>	<i>Raymond Mosely</i>
<i>Mrs. Henry Agnew</i>	<i>Peggy Dickson</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. V.R. McCoury</i>
<i>Mrs. B.P. Bishop</i>	<i>Billy Dickson</i>	<i>Anna Mae McCoury</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. D.L. Blalock</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Garnett Edwards</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. C. McCroskey</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. William F. Blair</i>	<i>Mrs. Frankie Faris</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Willis Newman</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. R.L. Blevins</i>	<i>Mrs. Cuba Fuller</i>	<i>Mrs. Conley Niel</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. R.G. Boardwine</i>	<i>Mrs. Neil Fuller</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Joe Patterson</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. E.E. Branton</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Dallas Fuller</i>	<i>Patricia Patterson</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Bernie Britton</i>	<i>Elizabeth Lois Grubb</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. W.E. Pyle</i>
<i>Mrs. Jessie Brown</i>	<i>Kenneth Grubb</i>	<i>Mrs. Lucile Shaw</i>
<i>Mrs. Robert Bridwell</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Tom Haga</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. J.M. Shoaf</i>
<i>Beatrice Brooks</i>	<i>Billy John Haney</i>	<i>Bobby Shoaf</i>
<i>Mrs. A.R. Buffaloe</i>	<i>Mrs. Richard Hawk</i>	<i>Mrs. Paul Slaughter</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. R.E. Casteel</i>	<i>Lois Hawk</i>	<i>Skip Slaughter</i>
<i>Eugene Casteel</i>	<i>Richard Hawk, Jr.</i>	<i>Lillie Tolliver</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Edgar A. Carter</i>	<i>Lowry Hawk</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Alonzo Tolliver</i>
<i>Marie Calhoun</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Orgie Hunt</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Bradley Ward</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. J.F. Catron</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Rex Keller</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. J.D. Wininger</i>
<i>Cora Childress</i>	<i>Mrs. J.W. Landrum</i>	<i>Mrs. Lillie Wyatt</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. S.E. Clayton</i>	<i>Mr. & Mrs. Ellis Lee</i>	<i>Helen Wyatt</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. George A. Cowan</i>	<i>Samuel L. Leeper</i>	<i>Betty Wyatt</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. E.M. Cox</i>	<i>Mrs. G.I. Maness</i>	

Surrounded by His Presence A Stained Glass Ministry

Description	In Memory Of
<i>Come Unto Me</i>	<i>Several Cherished Members</i>
<i>The Dove</i> <i>The Bible</i>	<i>Rev. Dr. Russell Buffaloe</i> <i>Rev. Dr. Marvin Compher</i> <i>Rev. Dr. William McCorkle</i>
<i>Nativity</i>	<i>Mr. T.W. Cox</i>
<i>Jesus in the Temple at Age 12</i>	<i>Mr. Victor Kelly</i>
<i>Baptism</i>	<i>Mr. Blake Faris</i>
<i>Sermon on the Mount</i>	<i>Mr. Joe Patterson</i> <i>Mrs. Mae Patterson</i>
<i>Blessings of the Children</i>	<i>Mr. Luther Stokes</i>
<i>Gethsemane</i>	<i>Mr. Alonzo Tolliver</i> <i>Mrs. June Tolliver</i>
<i>Good Shepherd</i>	<i>Mr. Albert E. Compton</i>
<i>Jesus Knocking</i>	<i>Mr. Walter D. Shankel</i>
<i>Ascension</i>	<i>Mrs. Zelda B. Freeman</i>
<i>At the Tomb</i>	<i>Mr. Robert F. Freeman</i>
<i>Lily of the Valley</i>	<i>Mr. Clarence H. Berryman</i> <i>Mr. Victor Kelly</i>
<i>Jesus Praying</i>	<i>Mrs. Ruth Isley</i> <i>Mr. Dan Kistner</i>

