



History Update

October 25, 2015

***Learning from the past to vision for the future.
“Forward through the ages!”***

Bensalem United Methodist Church: 1810-2015

“Forward through the ages...”

Hebrews 6:3

Reprinted from the Historical Record of Permanent Data.

Updated and annotated by Joyce (Vansant) Dworsky

*May this church be a light
far brighter than a star
revealing the path that leads to where You are.
Spirit of God, renew in us today
what You gave long ago
to this church, dear Lord, we pray.*

(Anniversary hymn written by member Gary MacClay —1994)

Annotated Reprint

Our nation was only thirty-four years old and James Madison was the President of the United States. George Washington had been dead only eleven years. Napoleon Bonaparte was the Emperor of France, and the Battle of Waterloo had yet to be fought!

[Yet,] ...in a rural section of Pennsylvania, known as Bensalem, there took place an event of great importance. A group of people gathered to dedicate a church – a new church. It was the year 1810.

(Excerpt from “A History – 180th Anniversary”, written in 1990)

It is not definitely known when the first Bensalem Church congregation was organized, but prior to the year 1810, meetings were held at private houses in winter, and camp meetings in summer. Pleasant groves in the township afforded ample space for these out-of-door gatherings. There is a record of one held in Jacob Hellings’ woods in 1804.

The first person from Bensalem of whom we have any record to embrace the Methodist religion was Mrs. Martha Vansant, who at a camp meeting held at Newtown in 1805, experienced the blessing of a renewed heart. Shortly after, cottage prayer meetings were held at farmhouses in the vicinity and awakened an interest that finally culminated in the building of a meeting house; the necessary capital being raised by the efforts of James and Ann Ridge, Garrett and Asbury Scott, and Pearson Hambelton.

The plot of ground upon which the church was erected was given by Joseph Rodman. The timber and frame was the gift of General Augustin Willett (a prominent Revolutionary figure), cut from his woods. The building was completed and dedicated in 1810, and became part of the Philadelphia Conference. The meeting house was a frame structure with small windows, with a gallery running around three sides, and the seats were straight with high backs.

*Thou, whose unmeasured temple stands,
Built over earth and sea,
Accept the walls that human hands
Have raised, O God, to Thee.*

(From: An Anthology of Prayer Poems compiled and arranged by O.V and Helen Armstrong. This verse appeared in the 1949 Bensalem Church Yearbook under Pastor Burns Brodhead.)

Bensalem Methodist Church had begun its journey....

“Forward, through the ages...”

The Methodist Church was young at this time, and pastors had large circuits. [They travelled on horseback from church to church, and were given the name, ‘Circuit Riders’. Philadelphia was still a half-day away by horseback. Bensalem became part of what was known as the Attleboro Circuit, which included Newtown, Bensalem, and Attleboro (now Langhorne).

(Excerpt from “A History – 180th Anniversary”, written in 1990)

Reverends James Fisher and Rev. Richard Smith officiated during this time.

In 1811, the Bensalem congregation was visited by Francis Asbury, who would later become the first Bishop of the Methodist Church in America. Asbury recorded the visit in these words, “I preached...at Bensalem Chapel to a small congregation, dined with Father Rodman, and continued forward to Bristol where I preached in the evening...the work of God has broken forth gloriously in Bucks County.”

(Excerpt from “A History – 180th Anniversary”, written in 1990)

In 1832, the spirit of the Lord took possession of the congregation, and a revival resulted, which led to the addition of many souls to the membership. Those taking an active part in church work from this revival were Joseph Dyer, Elizabeth and James Street, and Joseph Colbert. The interest aroused by the worship in Old Bensalem led to the holding of meetings in the schoolhouse in Hulmeville, on Trenton Road. The building is still standing; finally, a church was established there in 1840; some of the trustees of Bensalem Church also acting as trustees of the Hulmeville branch.

In 1853, under the spiritual guidance of **Rev. J.Y. Ashton**, a great revival took place, which added a number of young people to the church, and the congregation was so increased that the **building had to be enlarged** to accommodate the membership. The present church was therefore erected; among those aiding in this enterprise, both spiritually and financially, were Thomas Hambleton, Charles Vansant, Martha Lot, Charles LaRue, and George Sipler. In 1874, under **Rev. P.R. Cook**, nearly 100 were received into fellowship with God. The worshippers came from many miles around, and in 1884, **Rev. L. M. Hobbs**, then pastor of Bensalem and the Hulmeville Branch, started meetings in Cornwells, which led to the building of a church there. Many people in the area were heeding the call to come and worship:

***Come to Worship
And
Let Jesus
fill...
your HEART with joy
your BODY with strength
your MIND with understanding
your SPIRIT with peace
your SOUL with purpose
in the fellowship of His people.***

(The previous poem was written by pastor Russell Stahley
in the January 1997 BUMC Salute and used often during his pastorate)

Bensalem Methodist Church’s influence was moving into the surrounding communities...
“Forward, through the ages...”

In 1897, the churches at Cornwells and Bensalem were placed under the same pastor, and matters stood that way until 1902 when Bensalem went back to the combination with Hulmeville. This arrangement was kept until 1916, when the Conference was asked to appoint a minister to Bensalem as a **separate charge**.

At the celebration of the **100th anniversary (in 1910)**, Frank Reynolds, a lover of the church, **had a bell tower addition built and presented it to the church with., “... a clear toned bell to call worshippers together.”**; this was given as a memorial to his father, John H. Reynolds. *(It still rings true and clear today—in 2015!)*

The pastorate of Franklin **Duncombe** (1917-1920) was one of advancement and uplift in higher fields of spiritual life. His youthful enthusiasm manifested itself in the material advancements made. Prior to his pastorate, Bensalem had oil lamps and an inefficient stove *(which has been returned, preserved, and is present in the Chapel today)*; it had no wagon sheds; the exterior was falling apart—the interior was worse. Rev. Duncombe, gathering a group of willing workers to aid him, set about to remedy the situation. It meant hard manual labor, but he did not shirk. It was not long before Bensalem had electric lights, wagon sheds, a heater in a tiny cellar, the exterior painted, and the interior made like new. It was more pleasant to worship God in a home-like church. Also during this time, the purchase of a \$500 Liberty Bond formed the nucleus toward a fund for future repairs or extension of buildings.

Bensalem Methodist Church was planning for its physical needs, too.
“Forward through the ages....”

In 1920, another earnest young pastor and willing friend came; under **Rev. Charles E. Boraston's** pastorate of three years, Bensalem reigned in every heart. He was eager that the church should grow and glow, and so he put his whole soul into a pastorate of **love and friendliness** that is still manifesting itself in the hearts of Bensalemites. It has truthfully been said, "I am a part of all that I have met." During his [Boraston's] stay, the building fund grew in generous proportions. Rev. Boraston still remains at Bensalem in loving memory.

(Throughout most of the 1900's, worshippers were warmly greeted at the door in the Chapel and the "new" sanctuary by the warm, friendly, and caring handshake of Charles Inglin.)

Coming to church is like walking into a big hug!

(Comment made by Doris Sloan in a 1996 Adult V.B.S. class)

Bensalem Methodist Church continues to share its warmth and friendliness...

"Forward, through the ages."

In 1923, **Rev. Leon T. Moore** came to Bensalem. Prior to this time, although the young folks were sincere and energetic, there were not many of them, but now with new life, the Epworth League (*now the United Methodist Youth Fellowship*) grew to capacities that were almost unbelievable in a small locality. It not only grew in numbers, but in spirit and power as well. This progress made manifest the need of a place to hold social functions. So it was decided to erect a suitable, separate building (Wesley Hall) to care for social activities. An adjoining lot was obtained, and after the usual preliminaries, a beautiful stucco building was erected with space and facilities to care for the phases of social life. Mr. Edwin Ayer, then president of the Aid Society, was an enthusiastic backer of this improvement. The total cost was \$7,414.24. Since Bensalem did not have facilities to care for a minister's wife (*a parsonage*), another favorite ministry closed in 1926.

Rev. Walter A. Johnston came into the hearts of all, and took especially good care of the older folks; several services were held for them that uplifted and inspired all. Our oldest member, Mary Gillingham, aged 95, was present at one of these meetings. In 1926, it was decided to have the church renovated. As things go in Bensalem, it was no sooner said than done, and was completed by the middle of 1927. It was finished on the exterior, to match the hall (now called Wesley), with stucco; new carpets were added; pews rearranged and refinished; the walls refinished, and such changes made as to make it look like a new edifice. The total cost of renovating was \$6,123.48. As was the case with his predecessor, Rev. Johnson heeded Cupid's call, and a ministry of spiritual uplift ended in 1928.

The pastorate of **Rev. W. H. A. Williams** was a period of continued growth in membership and spirit. His kind, youthful way, accompanied by fine Christian principles, readily found a warm reception in the hearts of the membership. Next, **Dr. Abraham M. Vivian**, a retired supernumerary, was with us from March until September, 1931.

On the first Sunday in October 1931, **Rev. Howard W. Adams** began his ministry with us, and was our pastor for four-and-one-half years. His geniality and hearty friendliness made him much beloved in the community. During his term, a choir was organized, consisting of many of the Epworth League members. It was conducted by Mr. Nathan Adams, our pastor's father. Repairs and improvements were kept up during his ministry. Although Rev. Adams was married in November 1934, he was allowed to stay, by the Conference, until March 1936. A letter from the Trustees of the Church to the District Superintendent and the Conference Cabinet, made the terms that Bensalem was to remain a student charge with its salary to be for the aid of unmarried students.

In March 1936, **Rev. Frances W. Charlton** came to us. He was indeed a pastor to his flock. No illness or trouble of any kind among his people escaped his kindly ministration and spiritual help. In financial matters also, he proved to be a capable administrator. Our church paper, *The Beacon* (*now The Salute*), was inspired and launched by his efforts. Desirous that his church members should keep attuned to spiritual values, he presented each with the quarterly issues of "The Upper Room" during his pastorate.

Rev. Richard Dudley Bell began service with us in March 1939. His charm of personality, combined with his musical ability, made his stay of one year a happy memory as well as a great incentive toward the reestablishment of the church choir, which still enhances our morning services. The installation of an oil burner, to take the place of our old heating equipment, was accomplished during his stay. Rev. Bell also desired to get married so he moved to a pastorate with a parsonage.

Rev. Woodrow W. Kern began his ministry in March 1940, and it terminated abruptly in September 1941, due to war conditions causing a shortage of pastors, thereby necessitating a great deal of transferring and appointments. Almost immediately upon his assumption of pastoral duties, a new pulpit Bible adorned the reading stand. Soon after, each pew in the church boasted a new hymnal. During his ministry, a division of the Epworth League resulted in the organization of a Youth Group and a Young Adult Fellowship. In September of his first year, Rev. Kern instituted a Bensalem Sunday School Fellowship Day which had the possibility of being a Bensalem tradition. This was in the form of a picnic on the Church grounds, to which all friends and families were invited. Rev. Kern's stay was brief; but fruitful. He is quoted as saying:

If the Young Adult Group and the Family Fellowship Day continue at Bensalem, I shall feel that my brief ministry there was a success."

[From the Church grounds, to Clementon Lake Park, to Washington's Crossing, to Carson Simpson Farms, to Core Creek Park, to Bensalem's Township Park, to Neshaminy State Park, our church has continued to have a fellowship day together. What other places are yet to be visited in the future?]

Bensalem Methodist Church still provides a place for much fellowship.

"Forward, through the ages...."

Update (Added in the year 2000)

The Rev. George W. Eppehimer, Jr. was the next pastor to serve Bensalem in 1941. During his pastorate, the first Junior Church program was organized. He was quoted as saying:

***God is calling us to His service today.
Strengthen Bensalem, and you strengthen the kingdom;
enlist in the service of the church
and you give yourself to the service of the kingdom.***

[In July 2000, he returned, once again to preach. This spirit-filled pastor was still serving and "strengthening the kingdom" in Bensalem, even in the new millennium!]

In 1943, Bensalem Church continued to serve the Lord under the shepherding care of Rev. **John Wesley Gilbert**. Then in 1944, **Rev. Bickley Burns Brodhead** began what was to become the longest pastorate at Bensalem up to that time. The Pastor, himself, was often found laboring, as many renovations were made to the Church and the Social Hall (now Wesley) including: three Sunday school rooms, a large stage, restrooms and an updated kitchen. Also during his pastorate, the Wesley Players, a Christian drama group was begun, under the direction of Harry Carter.

When Bensalem Methodist Church celebrated its 137th anniversary on September 28, 1947, the following appeared in a 1947 article about that anniversary:

The church [Bensalem] has a new and effective bus service, an interracial church school, a visual education program, dynamic world peace work, youth fellowship, and young adult group. Membership has gained 60 per cent in three years.

(Excerpt from an original news article found in the historical church records of Doris Vansant, dated 1947.)

In his 1949 message to his "Beloved Bensalemites", Rev. Brodhead set forth the following task:

The task is to Advance for Christ.

*May there be an advance for the Christ in each of our lives,
in each of our homes,
in each of our church organizations,
and thus in the total life of our church.
Let us make it truly an Advance in Faith.*

Rev. Brodhead was also an enthusiastic trumpet player. (*Fifty-six years later, he still carried his trumpet to Bensalem and joyfully played along with the hymns as he returned in the year 2000, to bring a message challenging us to look to the future!*)

The addition of a parsonage under the pastorate of **Rev. L. Thomas Moore** in 1950, made possible the idea of longer pastorates. The first pastor to live in this new parsonage was **Rev. Wayne A. Dockhorn**, bringing the first pastoral family to Bensalem Church. There was a very active Young Adult Group and Aid Society at this time. The church had grown to 200 members and purchased its first electronic organ to aid in the singing of the Lord's praises.

Rev. Roger C. Stimson, Jr. became Bensalem Church's first full-time pastor in 1954. The Bates property was acquired in 1957 for Church School use. The ground was purchased, but the building (*which later became our Mission Thrift Shop*) was a gift from the Bates family in memory of their son.

**Bensalem Methodist was once again growing, both physically and spiritually,)...
"Forward, through the ages..."**

In 1957, Pastor **John A. Shannon**, and his family came to Bensalem. As the ministries and activities of Old Bensalem grew and expanded, so did its need for updated facilities. A study committee met, and after much consideration and prayer, this group of people, along with Pastor Shannon, took a giant step of faith and recommended that a new sanctuary and education wing be built. This was to accommodate the growth within the little country church and within the expanding community of Bensalem, as well. In this committee are names that we still recognize today: Horner, Jackson (now Mills), Kurtiz, Lorenzo, Rutherford, and Vansant. The journey of faith continued, and in **1962**, the Bensalem congregation began worshipping in a new sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, and Sunday School classrooms. A Methodist Men's group was chartered during Rev. Shannon's pastorate. The congregation grew to 316 members. Many people still remember this as a wonderful time filled with humor (*especially that of the Pastor*), fellowship, and faith. With the building of a new sanctuary, Old Bensalem Church became known as **Bensalem Chapel**.

*No longer is the little church alone
Beside her stand new buildings...
Standing now, along that same old road
is a new church, a big church,
a church that I helped build,
ministering to the needs of all
in a town grown very large.
Nearby, as a memory of by- gone days,
is the little chapel, still there, by the side of the road.
..And it matters not what structure we come to worship in.
It's the love we have within us
for both God and man,
that gives meaning to our chapels
as they still stand*

*waiting to house us, as we come to worship God,
close, by the side of the road.
(Excerpts from a poem by Verna Carter — August 1985)*

**Bensalem Methodist Church had changed to serve an ever-growing community.
“Forward, through the ages....”**

The year 1964 began the pastorate of **Rev. Merrill E. Graves**, a very devout man of faith. A new organ was installed in the sanctuary and dedicated in 1967, a delight for our talented organist, Connie Kurtiz. With his wife, Eloyce, and daughters, Marilyn, Judy, and Sharon, lending their talents for music and Christian instruction, a Vacation Bible School flourished during those hot, Bensalem summers. It was during this time that the Methodist Church, itself, began to change at the national level. Preparations were being made to join with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. **In 1968, the Methodist Church became known as the *United Methodist Church*.**

Also, in 1968, a new pastor, **Rev. J. Val Hastings, Sr.** and his family came to Bensalem and began the longest pastorate to date (1968-1983)! This was the first pastor's family (Val. Jr., Maria, and Carol) to truly “grow up” in Bensalem. Many new programs were begun as Bensalem U.M. Church sought to reach out to a changing community. The Christian Day School was founded and directed by Audrey Hastings. The Hastings founded our Mission Thrift Shop, first headed by Doris Vansant. CONTACT, a telephone ministry, was begun through Pastor Hastings. The Bensalem Ministerium continued (*a gathering of religious leaders of all faiths in Bensalem*) and flourished under his guidance. A Special Needs Class was added, to minister to mentally and physically challenged adults. Our church facilities were opened to the needs of other religious groups as well: Neshaminy Valley Baptist Church, Temple Shalom Reform Synagogue's religious school, and the Korean United Methodist Church. Pastor Hastings started a racetrack chaplain ministry in the early 1970's to meet the needs of the newly built Philadelphia Racetrack (*located right here in Bensalem, now including the Parx Casino.*)

There were many changes made within the church as well. Children's Time, Joys and Concerns, and the Open Altar were added to the worship service. The Junior Choir (organized and directed in the 1950's by Dorothy VanSant, and then by Connie Kurtiz) split into two groups in 1974, under the direction of Joyce Dworsky. Salem Singers (changed to S.P.L.C.E. [Singers and Players In Christian Ensembles] in 1980) became the contemporary choir for older youth. It joined the Junior Choir and the long established Senior Choir, directed by organist, Connie Kurtiz. In 1977, the Junior Choir (for elementary age children) became known as Happiness Singers, under the direction of Sandy Choyce. Christian drama was revived by George Dworsky in 1974, and the group became known as A.C.T. (Acting Christian Theater.) The Adult Fellowship was renewed during this pastorate under year-long leaderships of couples such as Bill and Joan Grow, Gerry and Pat Silcox, Jim and Genevieve Mills, Jim and Pat Cielinski, Ken and Jocelyn Vansant, and Pete and Sue Weed. Many church couples opened their homes to the fellowship's yearly “progressive dinners.” Also during this time, men from our church (Jim Cielinski, Roy Diebeler, Bill Dilks, George Dworsky, Tom Huntley, Russ Manning, Al Obenland, Gerry Silcox, and Ken Vansant) were an active force every Friday night in the Lower Bucks Christian Bowling League!

**Bensalem United Methodist Church's ministries were moving...
“Forward, through the ages....”**

During Rev. Hastings, Sr.'s pastorate, there were many physical changes to the buildings. Trustee leadership by Dave Harnish, Bill Eckman, Tom Kurtiz, Jim Mitchell and many others, enabled Bensalem UMC to maintain and enhance its ever-growing physical plant. In 1973-74 the Chapel, under the leadership of Bill and Joan Grow, Alfred and Barbara DeChiaro, Tom and Connie Kurtiz, and many others, was renovated with an attempt to restore it historically. Members, old and young, worked on the project. Acoustic tile and a stage were added to Fellowship Hall in memory of Harry Carter, in 1975. New stained glass windows with storm covers were added in the front and back of the "new" sanctuary in 1979, in memory of loved ones. The year 1983, celebrated the burning of the mortgage for the sanctuary! Also that year (April 13th), the research efforts of George and John Dworsky, placed the Chapel on the Bucks County Conservancy Register. This was done to help preserve its heritage, its land, and the physical structure for the future. (The plaque on the Chapel was officially installed and dedicated on Heritage Sunday, April 29, 1984).

**Bensalem United Methodist Church — preserving its heritage...
"Forward, through the ages..."**

In 1984, under the pastorate of Rev. Blake E. Nicholson, Jr., a "Step in Faith" program was initiated. Rev. Nicholson, a man of vision, skilled in the area of administration, sought to add updated parsonage facilities and a new education building to prepare for future needs. Irma Petri, George Allen, and other faithful members, worked long and hard on the planning which brought our facilities to their present-day configuration. Also during this time, a phone prayer chain (directed by Viola Dilks) was established and a second service was added to better care for the spiritual needs of the congregation. A Cherub Choir was begun under the direction of Robin Allen, followed by Myrtle Rickards, Holly Rogerson, Connie Kurtiz, and Stella Daily. Lori Caporale then continued this music ministry through many joyous years, followed by Alyssa and Laura Hadfield, and Karen Girard.

When Rev. Russell U. Stahley, arrived in 1989, he established two church services year-round. In a world that can often seem impersonal, 1993 marked a renewal of home Bible studies, helping the congregation get to know Christ (and each other) in a more personal way. In a sense, BUMC's ministry had come full circle, from the *farmhouses* of the past, to the *townhouses* of today. The Chapel (Old Bensalem) became "**heir-conditioned**" (*central air added*) through a 1993 memorial for Majorie Stinger, by her husband, Bill. Christmas was special in 1994 with the addition of a beautiful new Advent wreath spreading the light of Christ. It was given in memory of Violet Inglin, who, along with her sister Hazel Turton, taught, sang, and led many programs over the years. Brass candelabras were added in the sanctuary and Chapel in memory of Violet's husband, Charles Inglin, lending even more beauty and meaning to our Christmas, wedding, or Tenebrae candlelight services. Also during this time, the "Margaret Whyte Scholarship" was established in her memory by her husband, Dave, for student church members majoring in Education or Ministry. (*It can still be applied for each year.*)

In 1995, Bensalem U.M. Church celebrated its 185th year by adding colored stained glass to the windows on the driveway side of the sanctuary, in memory of former member, Dr. Henry A. VanSant. A healing service was added to the church's monthly ministry, Sunday School members were introduced to "Heifer Project", a mission outreach (*still supported by our church today*), and many of BUMC's youth, under the direction of Sandy Choyce, Lil, Ivins and David Hebble carried the Gospel to England as part of a youth group exchange!

May of 1996 brought a family retreat weekend at Camp Innabah, which proved, for a time, to be an annual event. The "Garden of Eatin'" was begun, allowing members,

worshipping at the two summer services in the “Heir-conditioned” Chapel, to fellowship together between services. July saw the completion of a Biblical garden on the northeast side of the Chapel by Dorothy Zeidler and Kathleen Stahley. It included a Jesus tree and 12 shrubs, representing the 12 disciples. The Hadfield family hosted one of the first Wednesday night “summer suppers”, opening their home (and their pool) to the Bensalem family. In August, cries of, “The British are coming!” could be heard (*but this time in peace*) as the youth from Big Barn Lane Methodist Church in England came to Bensalem and completed the youth exchange. As 1996 drew to a close, a lovely new piano graced the sanctuary in memory of long-time treasurer and choir member, Lynda Ogorek.

Bensalem United Methodist Church made it to “the web” in February of 1997, thanks to the efforts of Ginette Isenberg! She designed a website on the internet for BUMC. In May, the stage in Fellowship Hall was updated with a hardwood floor, lighting, and professional curtains, thanks to John Wilkins in memory of his wife, Margaret. In July, another garden was completed by Dorothy Zeidler and Kathleen Stahley, this time on the south side of the Chapel, facing the parsonage. This “Creation Garden”, is a memorial tribute to Ruth Edris, Kathleen’s mother. As 1997 began to draw to a close, more changes occurred at BUMC. November saw the transformation of the old “Social Hall” (Upper Wesley) into a gym/multipurpose room. Under the trusteeship of Eric Castelli, a generous gift from Lil Ivins enabled Harry Davis, and many members (working long and hard) to rewire, paint, etc., making that transformation a reality. Happiness Singers, UMYF (both under the direction of Sandy Choyce), and the Prime Timers, a group organized by Betty Feehan, were some of the first people to enjoy Upper Wesley’s renewal. It was dedicated in loving memory of Lou Ivins., and became known as “Ivin’s Hall”. It is hoped that many people, over the years, will come to know Jesus better through the programs, fun and fellowship this area makes possible.

*In the sadness of your deepest sorrow
He will give you joy.
In the need of an ear to hear you,
He will listen.
In your times of happiness,
He will join you.
When you’re lost,
He will find you.
In your ignorance,
He will give you wisdom.
In your loss,
He will give you strength.
In your disabilities,
He gives you hope.
When you believe,
He gives you life.
And when you have done all you can,
He will take you to Himself.*

(Poem written by Lynnae Ivins, Lou’s youngest daughter, as it appeared in the October 1996 Salute)

On Sunday, December 21, a bell choir (The Pealing Bells of Praise) under the direction of organist, Scott Walsh, joined our other choirs (bringing our total to 5). This new ministry of music was made possible by Carolina Obenland, for the bells were presented in memory of her beloved husband, Alfred.

An important Church event occurred in 1998. Our Bensalem Christian Day School, under the direction of Joyce Thorn, reached its 30th anniversary (1968-1998). The actual anniversary celebration day was held on April 24, 1999. Another milestone was reached in February 1999, when the Mission Thrift Shop, with Carolina Obenland as its president, also reached its 30th birthday. Several months later, the front of the sanctuary interior was enhanced. Beautiful gold leaf and a “seashell of angel wings” wood carving were added to the large cross at the altar in the sanctuary. Sandy and Eric Castelli, along with Kathy and Dave Oettinger, and designer, Ruth Bannon, completed the enhancement shortly before Easter.

September 1999 brought with it the welcoming of another new pastor to Bensalem United Methodist Church: **Rev. H. Fred Wooters**. He, too, brought and established traditions (those wonderful “babe-in-arms” Baptism introductions, for example), ideas, (cottage “get-to-know each other” meetings), hopes, and dreams, that placed their special mark upon Bensalem United Methodist Church as it moved into the **new millennium – the year 2000!**

Update (Added 2010)

Under Rev. Wooters’ pastorate, he encouraged us to develop a “vision for the future”, as we began the new millennium:

Without a clear sense of direction, we are bound to get lost.....

If we do not have a clear sense of where God is leading, we will wander aimlessly.....

*A clear vision will call forth the gifts and talents of all our members
producing growth and challenge for the whole church.*

(Taken in part, “From the Pastor” (Pastor Fred), January 2000 Salute)

In July 2000, another work team returned to Red Bird Mission. Locally, members worked with the Lower Bucks Homeless Shelter. A Rehab Group was established through Interfaith Housing Development Corporation with Connie Kurtiz as its liaison. A crew of faithful members worked on refurbishing houses as a local mission project. Missions chairperson, Bill Sleppy, enumerated the many ways in which our congregation supported various mission projects in the local community, the nation, and the world. Vacation Bible School was moved to the evenings, led by Cindy Clark and a fine staff of people. In September, a new Day School Director, Lisa Woods, accepted this important position at Bensalem, continuing the excellent leadership of those who went before her: Audrey Hastings (founder), Joyce Thorn (served two different terms), Judy Schulze, and Debbie Gontkof, who faithfully served as an interim director, during the search for a new candidate. Also in September, a Carillon Chime Master system (affectionately called “Bert’s Bells”) was installed in memory of Bert Dilks, father of Pat Cielinski. Its beautiful music of hymns floats on the breezes of Bensalem, bringing peace and a musical witness from our faithful church on Hulmeville Road.

October 15th, 2000, brought another new project to the congregation’s attention. Proposals were made by the Board of Trustees to update the kitchen in Fellowship Hall to a commercial kitchen, and to renovate the downstairs bathrooms. Plans for this extensive project were researched by Robin Allen, Steve Goetter, Dave Harnish, Tom and Connie Kurtiz, Diana Martinez and Doris Paine, and would eventually involve **many** other church members before the project was finished. The ALPHA program, often described as “Christianity 101”, was first introduced to the church in August 2001. Led by Stephanie Oldham and Greg Boynton, it both renewed and strengthened the spirituality of many members and friends. *(Little did we know that our faith and spirit would soon be tested with the horrifying disaster of September 11, 2001, causing the destruction of the twin towers in*

New York City, which would shake our Nation to its very core.)

In February of 2002, the 10:45 service began experimenting with the use of more contemporary music, as a way to reach out and grow in the new millennium. Sadly, health problems caused Pastor Fred to retire in early June of 2002.

**Bensalem United Methodist Church seeking its vision for the future....
“Forward through the ages...”**

That same June (2002), Bensalem UMC welcomed its first-ever woman pastor, **Rev. Debra Stanton!** Pastor Debbie came just in time to celebrate our first “Christmas in July” outdoor worship service, under the direction of Lay Leader, Steve Gruenbaum. The spirit of giving that day, made possible extra support for our local mission projects. The Day School’s “Annual Mini Summer- Camp” (begun in the 1990’s) immediately introduced “Pastor Deb” to some of its teachers, children, and our youth volunteers.

During her pastorate, many changes and more new ideas took form. She introduced our “Caring Connection”, “Joyful Hearts”: Saturday morning discussions and breakfasts for women, Holy Humor Sunday (*the Sunday after Easter*), and “Beginning Yoga” to encourage a healthy lifestyle (through prayer, breathing exercises, guided meditations and music). A new Young Adult group was started, for 18 to 30-something-year-olds, co-led by Kevin Cielinski and Stephanie Needle. “The Prayer List” of prayer joys and requests was added to the church bulletins and the Salute, to keep those in need of prayer and healing, close at hand. In February of 2003, Sandy Choyce began to organize a summer mission trip to Ecuador to visit children of “Compassion International”. The youth and members of our church have sponsored children through that organization for many years. Anne and Vince Drybala planned the first of many summer “Creation Vacations” to carry on the tradition of attending “Creation” a Christian music/worship/camping experience begun many years before. V.B.S. (Vacation Bible School) returned to a morning-to-noon time slot that summer, led by Cindy Clark. Bethany Drybala became our church’s first youth V.I.P. (Vocational Intern Program) as she assisted Pastor Deb with many vital church ministries, including preaching several sermons! Also in 2003, the Chapel underwent a much needed electrical renovation using funds in memory of William Grow.

Like Pastor Wooters, Pastor Debbie also encouraged us to look to the future and find the vision for our church. She contacted Rev. J. Val Hastings, Jr. (who had grown up in our church as the son of our former pastor) to guide us in starting our Long Range Planning process. Much later, with great thought and prayer, this committee developed our church’s Mission Statement:

**To Experience and Share
Christ’s Love,
by the Power of the Holy Spirit.**

Upon exiting the sanctuary, above the exterior doors, was hung a wood carving, in memory of Bill Slepp that reminds us as we leave, that we are entering the “Mission Field” of our world.

Meanwhile, following the completion of the Fellowship Hall kitchen and bathrooms project, in August 2004, plans were approved for the renovation of Fellowship Hall itself! Along with the changes to our physical plant, a major change was taking place in our worship style. On Sunday, September 1st, our 10:45am worship became a “Celebration (Come As You Are) Service”, aimed at providing a Contemporary Worship alternative to the traditional service. Steve Gruenbaum became Assistant Pastor: Director of Lay Ministries, and guided us in discovering our spiritual gifts and using them to “Build up the Body of Christ” through our ministries of service within the church.

**“...I believe that all Christians are called to be in some kind of ministry; but that doesn’t mean that we all should be pastors!
Surely not! I’m talking about a different way of looking at ministry—a way of ministering to others in addition to,
or even part of, whatever job you might have.”**

(Excerpt from “A Note from the Pastor” (Pastor Debbie) in October 2004’s Salute.)

In April, 2005, our Fellowship Hall Renovations were completed, under the capable direction of Mike Kail and the countless work hours of over 30 people! Those recognized for extensive hours of hands-on work included names such as Kail, Boynton, Cielinski, Guy, Kurtiz, Martinez, Oettinger, and Vansant. Bensalem UMC remained involved in mission projects, with Jeanette Schnarr as Missions Chairperson. Also during Pastor Deb’s ministry, Aid for Friends, (introduced to our congregation by Connie Kurtiz many years before), became a monthly activity, at the church, coordinated by Carol Kulik. Dawn Cridland (daughter of Linda Evans, a long-time Youth Leader and Sunday School teacher), took on the challenge of Vacation Bible School, involving many of the Evans and Cridland family members, who (along with a faithful staff of church helpers), carried out an awesome V.B.S. ministry.

Sadly, during this period, our long-time secretary, Judy Marshall, felt the need to resign and many women of the church (Dawn Beishel, Ginny Craig, Lois Creamer, Carol Kulik, Carol Lowry, Judy McNally, and Barb Ruditis), stepped in to fill that huge void. BUMC’s first “Ministry Fair” was held, making members aware of the many opportunities for ministry within BUMC, including new positions such as our Techno-Team, led by Dan Taylor, and our Contemporary Praise Teams, coordinated by Greg Boynton, who along with Liz Gruenbaum, and Stephanie Oldham became our Contemporary Worship Leaders. A Monday night Chapel Prayer Group developed under the guidance of Liz Gruenbaum and Debbie Duarte. Stephanie Walker coordinated a new “Mom’s Group”, which is still thriving!

In October of 2006, an artistic brass “Memorial Tree” was dedicated in the Chapel in loving memory of Charles Lorenzo, Sr., whose wife, Sarah, is currently our church’s longest-living member. It has already “born fruit”, and has sprouted leaves of love and memories. Speaking of trees, remember BUMC’s beloved Sycamore tree which has stood near the old Chapel for over 200 years? In 2006, it was declared diseased and in need of removal. This is the same tree that Francis Asbury preached under! (see page 3) How sad to lose such a piece of history! A great debate ensued. Its plight even made it into the Bucks County Courier Times Newspaper. (Jokingly, it was thought that Connie Kurtiz would tie herself to the tree to protect it from demolition.) Don Guy took a picture of it for posterity. Finally, it was cut down, but **not completely**. To the amazement of many, that old tree has once again sent forth new leaves and growth! *(It continues to live, even as we celebrate our 205th anniversary.)* Some members believe that it represents a symbol of renewal for our church through that ancient tree. **Think about it!** In the early summer of 2007, Pastor Debbie (newly- married) left BUMC to accept a new position in her ministry.

Bensalem United Methodist Church, learning to change and minister in the 21st century...

“Forward through the ages...”

In July of 2007, we welcomed **Pastor Mary Catherine Miller**, our second woman pastor, to our congregation. She found herself ministering to both a traditional and a blended/contemporary worship style of church services. She immediately took on the daunting task of getting to know everyone in our congregation. She had many church

challenges facing her, but by maintaining her relationship with God, and with the help of many faithful members, she joyfully led us onward:

...a text from Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 came to my mind. It begins, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."

...I encourage each of us not to forget to stay connected with the One in whom we live and move and have our being, and to take some time to become familiar with the passage above, letting its reassuring message calm any anxieties we may have as our days become even busier.

(Taken from Pastor Mary's greeting in the September 2007 Salute)

Her pastoral care, visits to those in the hospital, shut-ins, and her leadership of our continuing Wood River Village ministry, are indeed a blessing to our church families! During the second year of her pastorate, it was discovered that our main sanctuary needed a new roof and other major repairs totaling \$60,000! Through a Capital Campaign of pledges and upfront donations (led by George Allen), our congregation met the challenge! Work was begun swiftly, and successfully completed, but for a while Pastor Mary probably felt as if she was living in a demolition zone! In August, new carpeting was installed in the sanctuary, in loving memory of Viola Dilks, mother of Pat Cielinski. It was voted that the front choir pews in the sanctuary be reconfigured to allow for more room for contemporary service activities. During this same year, the Chapel also received new carpeting, a memorial to a hard-working church member, Carolina Obenland. The Pastor's study and the general church office switched rooms, while undergoing updates and reorganization.

Our youth and other members of our church completed another successful Red Bird Mission Trip, under the leadership of Robin Allen. An "Out to Lunch" seniors group took form. Thanks to Wendy Torchio, BUMC continued to be present on the web at www.bensalem-umc.org. Many of our church communications, including our prayer chain, were now relayed by e-mail. Our long-time, hard-working Boy Scout troop, Troop 130, still flourishes. Stephen Sollars did a wonderful job as he took on the task of our music ministry, due to the death of our prior Musical Director, Scott Walsh. We celebrated our 200th anniversary year, enjoying many special activities and programs, headed by our Anniversary Committee!

At the 2010 Annual Conference, thanks to the historical work of Connie Kurtiz, the following resolution was made concerning our dear "Bensalem Chapel":

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church designates the Bensalem United Methodist Church as a Historic Site within United Methodism during this their 200th Anniversary year."

(Person responsible for presenting resolution: Joseph F. Dipaolo)

Wow! What a memorable 200th Anniversary Gift!

(Pastor Bob Amundsen worked diligently with Conference to secure our promised plaque recognizing that we are a Historic Site within United Methodism. It is to be placed on the Chapel on our 205th Anniversary Sunday.)

Update (Added 2015)

In February of 2011, our church was shocked and saddened to learn of Pastor Mary's reappointment to nearby Newtown United Methodist. But, in true Bensalem form, our trustees, under the direction of Jim Cielinski, began working hard to prepare for a new pastor. The parsonage was refurbished and in July 2011 we welcomed **Rev. Bob Amundsen** and his wife, Karen, as they immediately began their ministry in Bensalem. During this time of transition, church ministries continued smoothly. Our Youth participated in the 30 Hour Famine (introduced to us by Lori Caporale several years before), our yearly Church Picnic

was held, along with summer suppers and VBS. Many children attended Methodist-sponsored church camps as well. Kathy Mc Dermott, our faithful treasurer, continued to work hard to keep us on track financially. In the fall, our Red Bird Mission Trip, led by Robin Allen, was once again a blessing to the people in Appalachia..

However, in the fall of 2012, we said another sad farewell to our talented and spirit-filled music director, Stephen Sollars. In late September, we were blessed to find a new music director, Kate Strubinger, who has truly worked hard to provide the ministry of music at Bensalem UM Church. Lil Ivins accepted the post of Sunday School leader. The year 2012 became a very active one in the life of our church! Pastor Bob and Billl Wingert introduced us to Family Promise of Bucks County, an outreach program to homeless families, and we became a Covenant Church for that program. The Pastor also introduced “Trunk or Treat”, a safe Halloween alternative for children, open to the community. He began a CD Ministry, making His sermons available to those in need of hearing God’s word. (*This ministry is now available on line at our church’s website and Facebook page.*) A community Zumba class was added as well.

During this time, a large number of our youth went on to college at the same time, so Lori Caporale continued to serve as our College Care Coordinator. Our Youth Group (led by Dave Newill) conducted their first “Pink Flamingo Flocking” (a hilarious fundraiser).

Finally, in 2012, one of our longtime goals was realized as Lou Aiello, along with Scott Cooper, Kate Strubinger, our music director, Larry Girard, and several others, introduced the Celebration Worship Service (at 10:45) to “**Mercy Street**”, our live praise band! Our first 9 PM Contemporary Christmas Eve Service was added, led by our “Mercy Street” band. Techno Team, continued providing wonderful graphic programs, led by Dan Taylor, and our Praise Teams continued to sing, led by Greg Boynton. Carol Kulik continued to handle our online prayer chain, which became an even more integral part of our church. Debbie Cooper took charge of The Salute and, it too, went online! Wendy Torchio continued our online presence at our church website, and soon our church went on Facebook as well!

Bensalem United Methodist Church, expanding its technical presence in the world!

In an ever-changing world, this church is still an active part of the Bensalem Community and beyond! Our church sponsors two missionaries, prepares over 300 meals each month for Aid for Friends (led by Carol Kulik and Ginny Craig), and has a loving and nurturing Christian Day School (directed by Lisa Woods), operating for over forty years for the community. Our children’s choirs: Cherubs (led by Wendy Lagoudakis) and our Happiness Singers (led by Lynnae Watson and Leslie Jordan), are blossoming. Bensalem UM Church now sponsors meals for AHTN (Advocates for the Homeless and Those in Need), introduced to us by Candy James and Debbie Gontkof, and still proudly sponsors Boy Scout Troop 130 which has truly been a blessing to our church.

Its UMW (United Methodist Women), now led Linda Evans, through its “Handcrafted with Love” mission (*guided by Joanne Miller*), has added afghans, hand-tied fleece blankets, and “neck huggies” for patients at the Fox Chase Cancer Center in addition to its many other recipients. UMW has an ongoing collection of personal care items for the Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter in Levittown, along with other special monthly mission projects. Robin Allen again sponsored a yearly mission work trip for ASP (Appalachia Service Project) in West Virginia, Leslie Jordan and Lil Ivins, made sure that Vacation Bible School is an important outreach for the community each summer. Red Cross Blood Drives, a

continuing Wood River Village service, and a host of other service and community outreach projects are ongoing.

An exciting project, just beginning, through the leadership of Frank Schilling and his crew, (*cared for and watched over by Betsy Pitcher*) is the refurbishing of the old Mission Thrift Shop for a future Youth Community Center! The church has recently added to its regular Sunday services, a Monday Night Service, open to all, at 6 pm in the historic Chapel. It sponsors community Tuesday night Yoga and Thursday night Zumba, as well as a host of other activities and programs. It is initiating a Stephens Ministry, thanks to Donna Thomas and Kathy Weber. Throughout the years, and to this date, the church at Bensalem has acted as a seed bed, opening its facilities to a diverse mixture of ethnic religious groups, allowing them to grow their own congregations.

In the May Salute of 2012, Pastor Bob reminded us that John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, said, “**The world is my parish**”, and asked us as a church to, “Embrace this Wesleyan vision of serving the community that we are a part of.”

**“It is why, as your pastor, I encourage you to look at our community as a focus,
to reach beyond our wall to see those that are hurting,
to provide a helping hand, and show others
the love of Christ that we know.”**

(Excerpt from Pastor Bob, September 2015 Salute)

Bensalem United Methodist Church may be 205 years old, but its historic roots are continuing to grow toward the future!

Bensalem United Methodist Church, learning from the past to vision for the future.

“Forward through the ages...”

Historic Ending from 2000, updated for 2015

As we move beyond this historic 205th anniversary, *how will we respond as a congregation? What kind of people will we be?*

“Here are *two* ways to respond to life. Beware; be careful of the “cellar voices”—those people who call you downward to doubt, despair, depression, death.

CELLAR VOICES urge you to give up, give in, turn back -

To exchange your integrity and self-esteem for safety.

Don’t be tempted; don’t be misled.

Watch out for those negative folks.

BALCONY PEOPLE are those wonderful ones who lift us up,

Who encourage and remind us of our “wings”.

These are the hopeful friends,

the family that inspires; invites our best.

JESUS is the chief balcony person. He came into the cellars of life;

he entered the dungeons

and the pits of human misery,

But He was lifted up by the Lord God....”

(Excerpt from a collection of sermon summaries of Rev. J. Val. Hastings, Sr., printed May 1984)

On our 205th anniversary, as BUMC continues to serve our Lord, who knows what the future holds and what people will be here to shape it?

God does! And it will be revealed in *His* time!

*..This is the place
Of parting and meeting,
Of farewells and greeting.
The beginning of remembering
the old ways in new days....
...There is a promised land
beyond the doors you leave.
There is a promised people,
waiting to receive
and offer back again
an unnamed vision,
as yet a dream unborn.*

(Excerpts from a poem read to us by the exchange youth from England—Sunday, August 4, 1996)

We are: a unique blend of the Past, the Present, and the Future!

Let us realize the faith of the past, the power of the present, and the need for the future. It should be with a deep sense of pride on this anniversary of serving our Lord through His church, that we should have a lot to talk about. Even more so, we should look at our glorious heritage and express our thanks and gratitude to God for His patience with us and his blessings so generously bestowed on us.

(Excerpt from an anniversary message written by Charles Inglin [father of Connie Kurtiz] in the 1970's)

Finally, in the words of Pastor Mary Miller,
There is no doubt that when the Holy Spirit is at work, awesome things happen. May we be moved to recognize and embrace the Spirit's power flowing into our lives so that in all we do and say...

*God is glorified.
Thanks be to God!*

(Excerpt from Pastor Mary's letter in the May 2010 Salute.)

**We are, Bensalem United Methodist Church,
moving, with God's help...
“Forward through the Ages!”**

Note: Unfortunately, there is not room to mention all of the wonderful activities, ministries, and faithful members with which BUMC has been blessed through the years! As lengthy as this booklet may seem, this historical record is but a snapshot in time, and leaves much of our church's glorious story untold!