

**CHAPTER SEVEN: 1995 – 2000**  
**“Through Years of Struggle, Fellowship, and Grace”**

**by Midge Mack with Marian Lowry**

The title and first line of Trinity’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary hymn by Mary Louise (Mel) Bringle is nowhere more relevant than in the years 1996-2000 at Trinity. All three—struggle, fellowship, and grace—were present. Out of that struggle, by the grace of our Creator God, came the vibrant congregation we are today.

It was Thanksgiving Sunday 1996 when we joyfully and thankfully processed from the old sanctuary to the new, beginning—though we hardly knew it—a new era. Our sanctuary dedication in February 1997 was likewise a joyful and momentous event, celebrated with a community-wide **Fine Arts Festival** followed by a visit from our then **General Assembly Moderator Marge Carpenter** and her message of “**Mission – Mission – MISSION!**” The struggle lay just ahead.

Minor frustrations became major, while conflict and dysfunction beset the staff, leading to the **resignations of the Boyds, Gene Witherspoon, Ed Forsyth** in the late spring, and eventually, in late summer, **Pastor Al Kissling**. The congregation was confused, unhappy and hurting, so that many members, most all of our young families, chose to leave Trinity, too.

With his church-wide expertise, our own **Rev. Mac Hart** rescued us temporarily in September while a committee sought an experienced, intentional interim pastor. **Gene Linton’s** creative gifts brought, in early 1998, challenging preaching and a measure of unity and healing to our divisions. We hosted the first **Faith Summit** meetings when representatives of all faiths began to seek solutions to Henderson County welfare problems. **Faith Link** was established and by 2000, the Trinity team was working with three families.

Session worked hard to revise and strengthen its own structure and operation, resulting in a system of ministries and subcommittees that has worked efficiently and effectively. Our exterior landscaping was expanding, maturing and thriving on special attention. A **columbarium wall**, with 68 niches to receive the cremains of deceased members, was built in the Memorial Garden and put to use in 1999.

Meantime, **Carole Ball** took over our youth program and kept it together for several years, with focus on retreats and mission trips. **Jim Vincent** became Parish Visitor. A Pastor Nominating Committee was soon at work and in September 1999, **Dr. Thomas Blair** of Doe Run, PA, became our **fourth installed pastor**.

We ended both 1998 and 1999 with a solid reduction in building debt and records in outreach and mission support. Growth and progress now took many directions. Pictures had been taken and a new **pictorial directory (Trinity 2000)** was published. We saw our petition to presbytery (1998) about **The Year of the Child as a national emphasis** become an overture adopted by General Assembly. This later grew into **The Decade of the Child** across the whole church. Our own **Faith Link** Program was growing, and we were visited by another **General**

**Assembly Moderator, Freda Gardner.** In May of 2000 we hosted the quarterly meeting of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina for the first time. When Jim Vincent retired as Parish Visitor, he was ably succeeded by **Linda Owens**, an ordained Presbyterian pastor and single parent of a delightful oriental daughter Jaime.

**Children's Learning Hour** took on new dimensions as computers and a new curriculum were added. **Wonderful Wednesday** continued with fun pot-lucks and good, varied programming. Trinity was a strong participant (both financially and with people) in **Bounty of Bethlehem** and many other local missions. Small fellowship groups thrived.

It seemed that Trinity was now more comfortable with its past, enjoying its present, anticipating a brighter future. And to reduce the at-times blinding brightness in the sanctuary (as well as create lasting beauty), our own artist Gene Carman undertook a major building project, the first of three **planned stained glass windows** that he would design and install.