

## 40 Years of Trinity

### CHAPTER ONE - 1965 - 1970

By Neena Haskins and Sarah Gilbert

With enthusiasm, joy and the certain knowledge that the Holy Spirit was leading them, Bill Gilbert and Bob Paden from First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, approached Asheville Presbytery in the fall of 1964 requesting its support in forming a “truly Presbyterian” church (Bill Gilbert’s words) in Hendersonville. With need established and location secured, again with Bill’s untiring efforts, the new church began its life as a strong liberal voice in the community. A first service was held in the Girl Scout cabin in Edwards Park February 21, 1965; (46 in attendance). Presbytery then bought us an old house (1403 Fifth Avenue) but it took us until May 30 to clean out the grime to begin services there.

Milestone Events Came Fast: Our first “interim,” Dr. E. C. Scott arrived, appointing Bill, Bob and Phil Sellers as a Steering Committee.

July 4<sup>th</sup> - Dinner on the grounds to meet the Eichelbergers; Hugh E. eventually became our first pastor.

Choosing a name (Westminster suggested - but deemed too long).

Chartered August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1965. (This date is our actual “birthday”).

There were 70 charter members.

And then the process of becoming a church family began. Hard work from cleaning and scrubbing, sorting books left by the Peter Murphy family to start our library, mowing, creating a church office in the old servants’ quarters over the garage (complete with “bathtub” filing system), to organizing us as Presbyterians - Elders, Deacons, Women of the Church, Sunday School, Choir - we were busy!

We Set Goals:

Developing a Mission Statement. This would be our charge and a solid guide for the future.

Strong benevolence giving. Our goal was 50% of our budget; we started with an initial 25% commitment.

Being an intergenerational church. Emma and Hal Clark were invited to become our “older generation” and contributed so much more.

Migrant Council involvement and energy to see needs in the community set a standard that continues to this day. We are a church that reaches out to our community and the world as a legacy to them.

Staffing. Lois Dorsey became Hugh’s support - the consummate secretary.

Connectional affiliations. When Arthur and Jeannette Ocker joined us, we learned what it really meant to be involved in the larger church. Art and Hugh worked together to be a strong (and somewhat different) voice both in Presbytery and beyond. (Art nominated Sarah Gilbert (she was elected as our first woman Elder, the second in Asheville Presbytery).

Strengthening. The Strengthening Committee, so aptly named, found in Dr. Bob Ohmann (retired Oil psychologist) the guidance and direction to create the small groups that led to developing the leadership, intimacy and caring that we see today in our Nurture Ministry and in an endowment from which we still benefit.

With great sorrow we learned that life is both precious and transient. We joined Bill and

Sarah in their grief at the death of their son Bill IV. Wally Stoneman, Church Treasurer and Deacon, father of four, vital and vivacious, became a victim of cancer and his death brought us close again as we shared our grief with Anne and their children.

And then we built: Careful planning, financial commitments and the generosity of Tom Hunter and Presbytery enabled us to carry out an ambitious building program, a foretaste of our current building. We felt truly named when, during the dedication service (December 6, 1969) of the new building, an electrical storm blew the transformer across the street and some said that they saw three (3!) Balls of fire.

1970, our 5<sup>th</sup> year: 214 members, 112 families; and our Head Start Center opened!

The vision that we started with - to be a caring and viable voice in the community carrying God's word to all through work and worship - is with us today in all its strength and purpose.

Thank you Gilberts, Sellers and Padens!

**40 Years of Trinity**  
**CHAPTER TWO - 1970 - 1975**  
**By Phil and Julia Sellers**

In our second five years, Trinity was a stable, growing church made up predominantly of young families. Meaningful worship, outreach, church school education and service to others were the focus of our weekly activities. Everyone was involved.

Leadership: As our first called pastor, Hugh Eichelberger provided strong leadership as a motivator, personal counselor and a particularly strong preacher. The church was sad to see Hugh and Priscilla and their family leave our community in 1973. The Rev. John Crawford, a religion teacher at Montreat-Anderson College, served as our interim. Later in 1973, Sandy McGeachy, whose family had a strong Presbyterian ministerial background, came from Houston, Texas to be our second called pastor. His wife Camille and their four children became an important part of the life of Trinity.

Planning: Worship services and church school attendance soon exceeded our capacity. An adequate nursery was one of our first pressing needs. In 1973, the church had reached the limits of its 1967 planning. A new planning committee did a thorough evaluation of Trinity's facility needs, as well as the future growth patterns and church needs of our community. After much prayerful deliberation, the church decided to take the pastor's and secretary's offices out of the all-purpose room and build a new church school wing to include their offices. As a result 300 people could be seated in the sanctuary (our present Fellowship Hall) at one time. The plan was to grow to about 500 members and then consider helping sponsor another new Presbyterian church in the community.

Education: Learning together continued to be emphasized. A large number of people participated in several different types of small groups – "Encounter," Bible study, personal growth and "koinonia" supper groups. Bob Ohmann, a retired psychologist, was heavily involved as an elder as well as a small group leader. The Covenant Life Curriculum was used in the church school. A communicants class of 23 youth joined the church in 1973, and the following year, 13 youth joined.

**Governance:** An extensive study of Trinity's governance structure was made. A sixteen member unicameral session was elected and took office in 1975, combining elders and deacons into one governing body. The church leaders had thought there was too much fragmentation of "authority" between the deacons who handled the finance and maintained the facilities, and the elders who tended the spiritual and teaching affairs of the members but who ultimately had the final authority for all decisions. The unicameral system lasted until 1984 when the deacon board was re-established. Its new mission was solely to provide pastoral care for Trinity's members.

**Community Involvement:** Many members participated in local community services, frequently in leadership roles. These included Head Start, Fish, Migrant Council, Mental Health Association, Sheltered Workshop, Western North Carolina Community Action, Black Mountain Children's Home, Council on Aging, Interracial Relations, Christian Needy Families and the Pardee Auxiliary.

**Change:** Money was carefully spent. We were pushed for dollars. The benevolence portion of our budget dropped below 20% in spite of total giving having increased. We maintained a membership of around 450 – some attrition but an equal number of new members. As we began 1975, the adopted theme for the years was "All Alive in '75." Yet by the end of that year some dissatisfaction among the congregation, the session and the pastor became evident, prompting the pastor to recommend a "Proposal for Mission Re-Design." He wrote "We need to discover the sense of unity, direction, morale, theological integrity and purpose for the next era."

**Conclusion:** Overall, from 1970 to 1975, the congregation could be described as a friendly, informal, family-like fellowship committed to our beliefs in the "Trinity" of God and in easing the needs of others.

**40 Years of Trinity**  
**CHAPTER THREE - 1975 - 1980**  
**By Gladys Bailey and Anne Stoneman**

In the third five years Trinity struggled with:

Who we are? Who we were? Who do we want to be? as a Christian, caring congregation. Members were not always in agreement with each other, nor with the pastor, or the Session. Session continued to serve the congregation, resulting in the unicameral system, combining Elders and Deacons, unanimously approved as our governing system.

The Youth Group was very active, even organizing and preparing (in February 1977) a church supper for the congregation.

In March 1977, we began interviewing seminary students to serve here as interns, especially to assist with Youth, Christian Education and worship. Marjorie Mason was our first intern (September, 1977 - July, 1978) and being paid \$600 per month. She was well liked by the congregation and performed well with many extra duties between pastor Sandy McGeachy leaving in March 1978 and Interim Phil Dunford's arrival in July 1978. Marjorie Thompson became our second interim in the fall of 1978. Our interns truly brought a new dimension to our spiritual growth. They developed diverse short term adult study and sharing groups, and excitement abounded as they demonstrated our new A-V teaching aids.

Facility needs such as painting, playground and gardens needed to be addressed, but membership dropped to 300 and pledges were down. While some wanted to raise money through bazaars, raffles, etc. others supported the Presbyterian Book of Order which emphasized individual giving. So fund raisers were out.

The trend was away from congregations owning a manse for the pastor to live in. We decided to sell our manse with the first option to buy to be given to the next pastor. The Rev. Al Kissling was called and came to Trinity in March 1979, and did eventually buy the manse.

With new pastors come new visions and dreams. Koinonia groups (small study groups) were offered and a Long Range Planning Committee was formed to begin planning facility expansion. Single summer services were held at 10:00 a.m. Communion was taken to shut-ins on the Saturday before Communion Sunday by the pastor and an elder.

The church began to grow again and space problems led adult classes to consider meeting in homes. Sponsoring a refugee family became a real interest for Trinity and eventually a unique and significant factor in our church life. In 1979 we accepted the Cheng family from Cambodia (placed here by Church World Service). They still live here and operate the South Wind Motel; their daughter is a successful CPA. In the next decade we sponsored a family each from Romania, Poland, a second Cambodian family, and in 1991, one from Russia.

The Building Committee proposed a two-story wing with offices, classrooms and a library – and also a plan to finance \$350,000 of the cost by selling bonds. Our third seminary intern, Cathy Mason, arrived in May 1980. The congregation was divided into Parish Groups with one Elder responsible for each. Trinity also became involved with Hospice.

In conclusion, we have come through some difficult, challenging times but with many happy memories of our seminary interns and our firm belief in Trinity. This church is a strong, cosmopolitan, well-educated, open-minded, community-active church, and as Gladys notes, southerners are diminishing in numbers.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: TRINITY'S MIDDLE YEARS**

**1980 - 1985**

**By Fred and Kathie Van Itallie**

**Busting at the Seams!**

With the calling of our third pastor, Rev. Al Kissling, we continued to attract new families and grew from 309 to nearly 350. The need for more classroom and office space had reached a critical point, so in early 1980 Trinity rented a mobile classroom (trailer) from the county school system. Fred recalls teaching an adult class on the Middle East conflict in that room. (How sad that peace remains so elusive.)

The mobile classroom was only a stopgap measure to provide some breathing space until a new classroom and office addition could be designed, approved, financed and built. Wow! All that space for classrooms, offices, a real library and a choir room. No longer did the choir have to meet on Sunday mornings in the closet downstairs.

Stretching the Staff: In 1980 we called our third seminary intern, Cathy Mason, and in 1982 we called our first Director of Christian Education (D.C.E.), Evelyn Worth. She provided support and professional management of our growing church school program. In 1983, she married Cary McMullen who is a frequent columnist on the religion page of the Times-News.

### Other Big Changes and Events:

- To handle the growing program of the congregation, the Session was expanded from twelve to fifteen, and the church re-established a Board of Deacons to focus on pastoral care.
- The Rainbow Express, a musical extravaganza featuring nearly everyone, was a magical intergenerational moment in the life of the church family.
- The first Trinity Family Retreat at Camp Arrowhead extended the bonds of

intergenerational fellowship.

- A pulpit and choir exchange with the Star of Bethel Church demonstrated the diverse expression of God's love.

#### Issues Within the Church:

- Money! The church continued to struggle with how to spend limited resources. The need to serve others through Outreach is always at odds with our need to maintain and support ourselves.
- Our Mission. During this period we re-examined and re-affirmed the Statement of Mission adopted at the church's founding.
- Limits on Growth? As our numbers grew, some began to question, "How big is too big?" While not yet a serious issue, continuing growth was a cause of concern for some who looked back at the early years and remembered how easy it was to know everyone.
- Children at the Lord's Table. As we developed a program to bring children into the Sacrament, we were all enriched as we re-examined its meaning and the meaning of church family.

Lessons for the Future: Life is constant change. For the church to be alive, it (we) must struggle to find direction, hope and grace through life's ever-changing journey. We seek to understand the nature of God, to receive his Grace and Power, and to go out and work miracles that bring wholeness to His Creation.