

A Brief History of Peace Presbyterian Church

Chapter One

The Journey Begins: 1984-1994

On June 17, 1984 the newly organized congregation which was to become Peace Presbyterian Church in Winterville, NC gathered for worship. The Reverend Bill Goodnight, leading worship, and 78 folks (adults and children) signed the document establishing this new church development in the Albemarle Presbytery. Those organizing members were: (* indicates presumed children)

On June 24, 1984 the newly formed congregation would meet to elect 12 people to serve on the first Session, establish a Pastor Nominating Committee and consider a proposal to purchase 4.6 acres of land at the corner of Hwy 11 and NC SR1708 at a cost of \$115,000. On August 26, 1984 the PNC would present the name of the Reverend Bill Goodnight to become the first installed pastor of Peace Presbyterian Church. Reverend Goodnight continued in this role until August of 1992. In his letter of resignation, he described the congregation at Peace as having "a remarkable spirit of unity and vitality." He would leave Peace to accept a call as Pastor of the Lillington Presbyterian Church after leading the congregation with stability, wisdom and love in those first eight formidable years.

The Peace family would worship together in various community buildings, but mostly at the Ramada Inn, until they were able to purchase land upon which they would construct their own church building. In 1987 the church would break ground for the construction of their permanent home located at the corner of Fire Tower Road and Highway 11, across from Pitt Community College, with some financial support from New Hope Presbytery. A worship service dedicating the new building would be led by Reverend Bill Goodnight on June 12, 1988. The mission statement of the first worshipping community was:

"To proclaim the truth and compassion of Jesus, to rejoice and celebrate the new life given us by our Lord, to enlarge our circle of faith by sharing Christ's good news and to provide support and nurturing encouragement to one another and to serve God and others."

They wanted their new worship space to emphasize worship, celebrating and meeting together in God's spirit, flexibility for fellowship, and planning for the next 10 years. Their hope was to grow to 350 members. They embraced the idea that they wanted to transmit a sense of warmth, friendliness and family, and inclusiveness to all who would walk through the church's doors. Mission was also at the heart of the newly formed

congregation. They were committed to supporting college students financially as needed. They also were intentional in reaching out to potential new members through the visitation and evangelism committee, eventually dividing the congregation into nurture groups.

1985 - 1988 were crucial years for the new faith community. They were able to move into their new home over the summer of 1988. Membership grew to over 100 members. The first youth group was organized in 1988 under the leadership of Karen Marsh and Sylvia Goodnight. The focus shifted from building to growth and nurturing of members. Christmas was celebrated with a cantata, support was offered to the community night shelter, a Moravian Love Feast was held on Christmas Eve. The first choir director, Rachel Sturz, was hired in 1985 and job descriptions were written for the Pastor, Director of Music, Pianist, Nursery worker and Secretary. Building and Grounds was busy with landscaping, parking lot lights, etc and community groups began using the space. By the end of 1990, membership had grown to 132 and total annual financial support to \$119,000. It was a time of steady growth and creating administrative structures which would facilitate ministry. The outreach budget was \$6400 in 1990, with regular support for the community night shelter, campus ministry and nurture groups.

In August of 1992, when Reverend Goodnight sent his resignation letter, the church was growing, outreach was extending and it was apparent that there was a need to extend the church's facility. A Needs Assessment Committee was established to consider the feasibility of additional classroom and fellowship hall space. The Reverend Bill Hoyle was hired as the Interim Minister from October 1992 – June 1993, after whom the Reverend Mark Thomas was selected as the next installed pastor, beginning his ministry in June 1993. Reverend Thomas would leave Peace for a call in Illinois in 1994, followed by Larry Gibbons who served as Interim Pastor until September 1995 when the Reverend Paul Lang would accept the call as Peace's third installed pastor.

The first decade of Peace Presbyterian Church's life was one of creativity and organization, listening to God's call to ministry, stepping out in faith, paying attention to the direction God's Spirit was blowing, adaptability, care and concern for members and the community, and hospitality. In the later years of that first decade, after some years of stability, change and transition would once again become the norm for the newly organized congregation.

Chapter Two

Embracing Hospitality: 1995 – 2004

If the first decade of Peace Presbyterian Church's journey was characterized as a time of new beginnings – establishing administrative protocols, moving into a new home after years of gathering in community facilities, hiring of new staff, establishing creative worship styles, electing and training new leadership – the second decade of Peace's journey could be described as embracing hospitality.

The decade began with the call of the Reverend Paul Lang in September of 1996. By this time the new family of faith was settling in to their first home on Fire Tower Drive. Membership had grown from an original 72 adult members in 1985 to 162 members. And the focus shifted to an emphasis on hospitality. However, a commitment to hospitality was one of the core values of this family of faith from its beginning. Nurture groups – the entire congregation was divided into small groups to encourage relationship building - had been formed and were continuing to be sustained. Third Sunday gatherings after worship were initiated and continue to the present day. The young family of faith explored ways to reach out to visitors and assimilate them into the life of the church through the Outreach Committee and Visitation Committee. Thirty percent of the operating budget was committed to outreach ministries and benevolences. A focus on Youth Ministry was increasingly embraced and the selection of curriculum became a regular focus of discussion.

With the creativity and growth, however, there were a few growing pains. The Peace family was expanding and the new building needed expansion and additional seating. Should the church invest in pews or chairs? Permanency or adaptability? The decision was to remain adaptable, while at the same time tearing down walls for expansion. The leadership of the Session expanded from 12 members to 15 members. A focus on Stewardship became a core value as the young church family attempted to keep up with the needs through financial giving. Retiring the debt incurred with the construction of the building was explored. Committees were restructured. Even in the midst of change and growing pains, Peace continued to grow at a rate of about 6% per year. Stephen Ministry was established. The concept of creating a "Coffee House" to encourage fellowship was explored and set in motion. Peaceful Seniors began meeting on a regular basis for fellowship.

In May 1996 a new choir director was hired. Eventually Paul Dease would accept this position and provide the leadership stability needed for creativity and growth. An organ was donated. A bell choir was established. A second worship service was explored and implemented. New hymnals and choir robes were purchased.

And Children's Church was introduced. The Community Choral Society began gathering at Peace.

By the end of the century, Peace Presbyterian Church, approximately 15 years old, was steadily growing and adding ministries. Worship attendance had reached 159. A mission trip to Haiti was planned and involvement in Habitat for Humanity became a regular mission opportunity. A call was extended to the first Associate Pastor in March 2000, to Michelle James, who was to provide leadership in the areas of Women of the Church, Youth Ministry, Small Group Ministry and pastoral care until 2003. Rev. Lang would note in one of his Pastor's Reports that the church was beginning to experience tension as they moved from being a Pastor Driven Church to a Program Driven Church. While pastoral leadership was cited as a strength of the church during a Session and Presbytery Visitation in May 2000, there was a concern that the church maintain an open approach to newcomers and mission opportunities. Presbytery and Peace's relationship was strengthened when Ann Barnhill became Moderator of New Hope Presbytery in 2000. Also, there was a growing concern that the city of Greenville was rezoning property adjacent to the church and expanding Fire Tower Drive to 5 lanes.

A significant development in the life of Peace Presbyterian Church occurred in April 1999 when the Korean Fellowship began worshipping at Peace, initiating a decades long partnership in ministry. By 2000 the Greenville Korean Fellowship began worshipping concurrently with Peace, in Peace's Fellowship Hall. Joint fellowship and mission opportunities were explored. Reverend Gun Ho Lee would begin his ministry as organizing pastor with the Korean Fellowship in 2003, a ministry which continues today. In April 2021 the Korean Fellowship would become a newly chartered PCUSA congregation – Greenville Korean Presbyterian Church.

Chapter Three

Facing Our Giants

When the Peace Presbyterian Church was chartered on June 17, 1984, those 78 adults and children who signed the original organizing documents, stepped out in faith to begin a journey that would have delightful surprises and blessings, but many challenges as God journeyed with them. They would trust God to guide them and provide the resources they would need to become a community of faith dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. They would share that good news of God's love and grace not only through their words, but also through their choices and actions.

In the first half of their life together those blessings would include, but not be limited to:

- the loving and supportive relationships they would nurture; embracing Stephen Ministry and Nurture Groups, prayer ministry, Peaceful Seniors;

- a new place to call home by constructing their first church building on Fire Tower Road;

- the ability to devote 1/3 of their resources to outreach ministries in the community and beyond – outreach which included the homeless shelter, campus ministry, the Ulster Project, a mission trip to Haiti;

- sharing their faith with their children and youth; Kids Praise which began as a children's choir;

- a creative worship experience through music and God's word which would lift them up and encourage them to become disciples of Jesus Christ in the world; adding a second Vespers worship service and a bell choir;

- devoted leadership, including the organizing pastor Reverend Bill Goodnight who would provide stability, remaining at Peace for the first 8 years, and the Reverend Paul Lang, who would provide pastoral leadership from 1995-2012; and Paul Dease, director of music who would remain at Peace for nearly 10 years. Peace was also blessed with committed leadership, including elders and members, who devoted their time and talents to growing the young family of faith;

- outreach and welcoming of visitors through the Visitation/Evangelism ministry and partnering with what is now the Greenville Korean Presbyterian Church and the Latino Fellowship;

With the blessings, came challenges. Many of the blessings actually were experienced through those challenges. Those challenges included, but are certainly not limited to:

providing space for a growing congregation; by 2005 it became apparent that Peace was rapidly outgrowing their space and the city was rezoning the property around Peace on Fire Tower Road and the young congregation began to grapple with the possibility of moving their location;

being able to adequately resource the potential of a growing staff; Peace would call Michelle James as their first associate pastor in 2000 but she will leave to accept another call in 2003 and the Session would decide to not continue the position due to funding;

moving from a “pastor driven church” to a “ministry driven church” as the congregation grew to a worship attendance of about 150; encouraging members and leadership to discover their own talents for ministry,

encouraging stewardship of resources which were continually being stretched;

how to stay connected to one another as the growth continued;

there was a large turnover in membership due to the shut-down of Proctor and Gamble and Dupont production facilities and members being re-located;

how to partner with the Korean Fellowship in shared space and also share ministry together.

These were a few of the “giants” Peace faced in the first two decades of life together with each other and God. But with each challenge came a renewed sense of God’s presence and call. And so, the journey would continue with surprises, new roads to travel, bumps in the road, new relationships to encounter and always the gift of the Holy Spirit calling them into the future of God’s design.

Chapter 4

“Sacred Spaces”

Peace Presbyterian Church was officially organized on June 1984. In the summer of 1988, the young congregation was able to construct their first house of worship on Fire Tower Road in Greenville NC. For the next 15 years Peace Presbyterian Church would experience steady growth so that by 2000 membership would exceed 200 members and a worship attendance of nearly 175. The Session would struggle to accommodate for space by adding a second worship service and expanding the sanctuary space to add additional seating. Throughout those decades of growth, it became apparent that the City of Greenville was expanding around Peace Presbyterian Church. Many businesses would purchase land and the DOT would move ahead with expanding Fire Tower Road to 5 lanes to accommodate increasing traffic. Rezoning of Fire Tower Road would occur in 2001. By 2005 the Session of Peace Presbyterian Church would begin to explore the possibility of relocating. Did the faith community want to be located in the midst of a commercial district or a neighborhood? A piece of property on Old Tar Road would eventually be identified and purchased.

Ground would be broken on June 11, 2006 for the construction of the current sanctuary, office and classroom facility. Richard Johnson, member of Peace, would be the architect for the new building. In 2005 the Session would appoint a Building Committee which would guide this new building effort and that committee included Rick Croskery, Ann Barnhill, Richard Johnson, Charles White, Jon Day, Joanne Lang, Vicky Eck, and Reverend Paul Lang. They began their weekly meetings by hosting listening workshops with members of the congregation. From the beginning, the building of a new church was considered a “team effort”, with all the members of the faith family having a voice. Some of the core values which the congregation wanted the building to reflect were:

1. A tension between contemporary and traditional style. The contemporary style would reflect a willingness to be adaptable to changing usages. The traditional would reflect being grounded in the Christian faith and the stability/anchorage that would bring.

2. Richard Johnson explains:

The exterior and interior appearance of the building was influenced by several ideas and elements knitted together by a desire to express the values, nature, and needs of the congregation which could be grouped into two categories:

We wanted to acknowledge and celebrate the informal nature of a congregation focused on ministry to the community and each other, especially blessed with talented musicians, not rigidly organized or hierarchical, and welcoming to new people and ideas. This category of need might suggest an architecture that is unstructured, asymmetrical/non axial, and not iconic in form or style.

We also realized that there was a desire and need for the Church to be a place offering stability and relative permanence in a rapidly changing world. This category of need might suggest an architecture that is more formal, axial, symmetrical, and of an iconic style that looks like an easily identifiable Church.

The resulting design attempts to address both of these categories of need. For example:

The exterior of the building with its brick walls, cast stone trim, height to width ratio, arch topped clerestory windows, large gothic arch on the rear chancel wall, etc... seeks to be familiar and permanent, but takes the informal approach of simplifying and limiting the use of exterior features and ornament.

The building is mainly symmetrical and axial. The trees along the road and parking lot edges are planted in a formal way (evenly spaced straight line or circular arc), but the building is rotated from perpendicular to the road to focus on the Peace Oak.

The interior of the sanctuary has the traditional gothic height, clerestory windows, center main axis of the nave, minor axis of the transept, and curving structural arches, but the seating plan is semi-circular participant focused, the arches are made from laminated timber, the windows are planes of glass with no mullions, etc...

The Baptismal Font is placed on the main axis but is modern in design and is placed at the entrance to the sanctuary so that it can be encountered upon entry and exit.

Some reasoning behind some of the other features:

There is a designated space for a choir, but it is off axis and the choir is a part of the congregation, generally signing with the congregation.

The seating changed from stacking chairs in the previous sanctuary to curving pews in part to offer families a chance to sit as more of a group than in individual chairs (think of a child nestled against a parent). The curved shape of the seating also places everyone within 50' or less from the pulpit – a distance that lets the observer easily discern facial features.

There are 7 clerestory windows on each side of the Nave. 7 and 14 have religious significance.

The presence and orientation of windows allows a connection to nature with views of the sky and an ever-changing movement of sunbeams.

By a combination of the aspect ratio (tall and relatively narrow is optimal) of the space and the use of sound reflective materials, the acoustics of the space was designed to balance between the more reverberant needs of music and the less reverberant needs of speech. The desired sound reflectance of the tall brick wall at the rear of the chancel comes from that material's mass. The sound reflectance of the white walls on the sides of the sanctuary was enhanced by adding an extra layer of "plaster" finish coat to the sheetrock.

3. The curved pews reflect a circular community and not a linear design.
4. The design of the sanctuary is in the form of a cross. The stained glass window in the front came from the old sanctuary and is placed so that when the sun shines through the window, a cross is refracted in the baptismal font.
5. The ceiling of the sanctuary reflects the design of the hull of a fishing boat, reminding us of our commitment to discipleship.

The design of this building was intended to reflect the core values of this congregation while providing a sacred space to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Those core values include but are not limited to: diversity, hospitality, commitment to discipleship, openness to the surrounding context/environment, a combination of traditional and contemporary styles for worship, an embracement of the arts, community, and adaptability.