

10/15/2004
Emailed to Edna Lloyd

Whitaker United Methodist Church

124 Arkansas Avenue Whitaker, Pennsylvania 15120

75th ANNIVERSARY

FEBRUARY 7, 1999

George W. Bashore, *Resident Bishop Western PA Conference*
Dr. J. Lavon Kincaid, Sr. *District Superintendent Pittsburgh-East District*
J. Robert Douglass *Pastor*

WHITAKER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In some minds, a church is a building constructed of brick and mortar. In reality, a church is its people; people dedicated to the Great Commission given by Christ to "Go into all the world." The people come in all sizes and colors; they can be young or old, rich or poor, male or female.

The people of Whitaker United Methodist Church have lived Christianity since the church was founded. They are a community of survivors. They have suffered personal losses and tragedies, have lived through the Great Depression and have watched their neighborhoods change as mills closed. They have offered their warmth, support and caring, not only to their fellow church members, but to their neighbors in the community.

The James Whitaker Family

The names "Whitaker" and "Methodist" have been interwoven into the area's history prior to America's struggle for independence.

In 1767, James and Catherine Whitaker and their children; James, Aaron and Catherine; migrated from Baltimore, Maryland and farmed some 800 acres of hilltop ground. The farm's territory included the entire borough of Whitaker, sections of Mifflin Township, portions of Munhall Gardens, an area of Munhall including the Ravine Street neighborhood and up the hill to Homestead Cemetery.

Besides farming, the Whitaker men have responded to freedom's call. James and his son, Aaron, served with the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Aaron's son, James, fought in the War of 1812.

The Whitaker family loved and served God. In 1830, the first organized Methodist service in the area was held at James and Nancy Whitaker's home. Aaron and his wife, Martha, and Catherine and her husband, Joseph West, each donated an acre of land on the farm's western edge for the erection of a church and burial plot. The church was named Whitaker Methodist Episcopal. Over the years, the church has been known as "Neck" Church, Franklin Methodist Episcopal Church and is, currently, the Anne Ashley Memorial United Methodist Church. Today, the burial plot is the Homestead Cemetery.

The Whitakers: James and Catherine, Aaron and Martha, and James and Nancy are buried in the family cemetery on Dora Street in Whitaker.

In The Beginning

The history of the present day Whitaker Church began in 1894.

John Munhall built a small chapel near the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Ravine Street in Munhall to serve as a Presbyterian mission. When the mission failed, William McMasters, a superintendent at the Munhall Coal Mines and a member of the Fourth Avenue Methodist Church, approached Mr. Munhall for permission to organize a Methodist Sunday School in the building. The Sunday School prospered and in 1895 a request was made to the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for a pastor to organize a church.

Benjamin B. Wolf was appointed as the first pastor of the Munhall Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1897, additional rooms were added to the chapel to accommodate the expanding church school.

The church was proud of its outstanding men's organization, the Excelsior Class, taught by Joseph Arthur. At an anniversary banquet on December 30, 1911, the class was composed of 42 men. Its officers were Samuel Howell, President; Walter Coley, Vice President; William Cox, Secretary; and Thomas Hardington, Treasurer. These men, along with the following individuals and their families, formed the foundation of the future Whitaker Church; Edgar Emery, William McMasters, Fred Baggott, John Eden, Arthur Davies, Fred Zimmerman, Walter C. Fawcett, William J. Poad, Samuel Hull, George Orris, Francis Orris, Lewellyn Lloyd, Dr. & Mrs. J. F. McNeely, Samuel Hughes, Harry Goff, Edgar Cowen, Violet Link and Jennie Haynes.

A Vision - A New Church In Whitaker?

The hymn, "Be Thou My Vision, O' Lord of My Heart" describes the early members' dream of building a church on the hilltop.

The Munhall Church served the community until 1920. During this period, the majority of members were Whitaker residents and the church officers voted to investigate the possibility of building a new church in Whitaker. Rev. E.L. Meadows initiated negotiations with the Church Union. During Rev. L.O. Dowd's pastorate, the Church Union purchased the Munhall Church facility for \$15,000. and established the John Munhall Neighborhood House and Community Center. The \$15,000. purchase price, combined with a \$10,000. grant from the Board of Home Missions and Church Extensions, was designated for the new church building.

The New Church

The dream became reality in 1922 with the purchase of four (4) lots on Arkansas Avenue in Whitaker. Construction began and Mrs. Jane Emery, the congregation's oldest member, laid the building's cornerstone on September 17, 1922.

During construction, evening worship services were held in the old Whitaker School building at the corner of Chalfont and Whitaker Streets, currently the War Memorial site. PIX

A New Year's Eve 1923 Watch Night Service was the first service held in the uncompleted building. The bell in the belfry, a gift from the Homestead Patriotic Societies, was rung and signaled a new year and era in the borough's spiritual life. Rev. William J. Turner was appointed pastor that same year.

The Whitaker Methodist Episcopal Church's dedication was held on Sunday, February 3, 1924. Rev. Sanford Corcoran, Superintendent of the Washington District, presided and Rev. Turner assisted. The sanctuary was not finished the pews had not arrived, and chairs were used for seating.

The church with its contents was valued at \$61,000. - a balance of \$34,000 was owed. The mortgage was a burden for the small church. Combined with an increased membership and God's faithfulness, their financial obligations were met until the Great Depression.

Names & Pastors

Bald? The church has been identified by several names throughout its history. A 1939 union of the Methodist Episcopal Church North, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, caused the church's name to be changed to the Whitaker Methodist Church. In 1953, it became known as the Whitaker Community Methodist Church. Then, in 1969, a merger of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches occurred and the church was given its current name; the Whitaker United Methodist Church.

Twenty-five pastors have occupied the pulpit of the Whitaker Church. Although each pastor possessed his/her own unique gifts and graces, all were dedicated to the common goal of serving Jesus Christ and His people.

The Great Depression

Bald "Black Friday", October 29, 1929. Wall Street crashed, stock markets plunged, and the country's economy tumbled. The church was in desperate financial straits. Mortgage payments, both principal and interest, ceased and the church struggled for survival. Arrangements were made by the Church Union with the mortgage holder to suspend principal payments. The Church Union agreed to assume the interest payments.

Revs. Eagleson, Longenecker, Huff, and Haine served the church during, and immediately following, the difficult Depression years. Money was scarce but utility payments and building maintenance were priority items, which often left insufficient money for a pastor's salary.

From 1929 to 1934, Rev. Eagleson organized the men of the church and community into a "coal mining" detail. These men toiled long and hard in an abandoned mine near Kennywood Park for coal to heat the church and community homes. Coal was also "traded" with the local merchants for meat and vegetables. Using the merchants' donations, the ladies prepared soup for needy families and also sold it in order to get money to help support the church.

Rev. Eagleson recognized the young people's inability to obtain employment or secure money for education. In cooperation with the University of Pittsburgh, he obtained the services of numerous professors and established the "Depression College". Initially, the "school" met at the church. However, as attendance increased, the group moved to the Carnegie Library in Munhall where classes were held.

Rev. Eagleson, dressed in old clothes and carrying a walking stick (a tree limb), was a familiar sight to all Whitaker residents.

Turning The Corner

In 1937, the congregation resumed interest payments. By 1939, financial conditions improved and payments were resumed on the mortgage principal.

During Rev. James R. Gray's tenure, an intense effort was made to pay off the mortgage balance. The congregation was encouraged because of the Church Union's offer to waive all interest it had paid for the church. A successful pledge drive was conducted and a June 30, 1944 Mortgage Burning Service celebrated the final payment.

The Brown Brick Building with the Oak Doors

From 1936 to 1939, Rev. Lynn H. Huff, assumed the pastorate with a new challenge - obtaining suitable housing for the pastor's family. Because the Sunday School attendance had decreased, the Board of Trustees remodeled three (3) Sunday School rooms and made them in to living quarters. The new apartment consisted of a first floor kitchen, dining and living rooms, and three (3) bedrooms and a bath on the second floor. All skilled craft work was performed by church members. Subsequent pastors resided in the apartment until a parsonage was purchased in 1956.

Rev. James Hartland's years saw wall-to-wall carpeting installed on the sanctuary floor. Also, a house was purchased at 130 Hamilton Avenue for the pastor and his family. Consecration services were held for the new parsonage on November 11, 1956. Following the final mortgage payment, District Superintendent, Dr. Sproule Boyd, assisted by Rev. J.V. Mullins dedicated the home on October 27, 1963. With the purchase of the home, the rooms which had been converted into a living area at the church, were returned for Sunday School use.

In 1959, while Rev. Ronald Smith was pastor, extensive alterations to the sanctuary's chancel area occurred. The high wooden railing across the choir loft was removed and the communion rail was opened, creating a divided chancel. A new altar, choir pews and screens, pulpit, lectern and cathedral lighting were installed. All sanctuary appointments were donated as memorial gifts by members. An electronic organ was presented as a gift from a former pastor and his wife, Dr. & Mrs. Lynn Huff. All original chancel furniture was donated to a Baptist church in Center Union, Pennsylvania. Also, in 1959, major renovations were made to the church's kitchen.

Bishop Peter D. Weaver served the church from 1971 to 1977. During this time, the sanctuary was painted, new pews were purchased through memorial gifts. Also, a wooden frame highlighted with carved symbols of the four (4) Gospels and a descending dove (surrounded the red velvet dossal curtain); were a gift given in memory of Mrs. Clara Hicks. The chapel area was remodeled with wood paneling, new lighting, new altar and other appointments, in memory of David Caspar. Additionally, a small Sunday School room in the chapel area was converted into a church library in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Edward Maze, Sr.

In 1986, while J. Michael Milliken was pastor, two (2) lots adjoining the church property were purchased to be used as a parking lot. (Statistics have indicated that churches with adequate parking facilities for their membership continue to experience growth.) The \$65,000 parking lot was financed with generous contributions from the membership and a \$10,000 grant and loan from the Conference. The Conference loan was repaid by 1988.

In 1990, a \$13,000. renovation of the Fellowship Hall was completed. New flooring and lighting were installed, and the walls were paneled and papered.

In 1997-1998, our current pastor, J. Robert Douglass, guided us through the most recent renovation. A concrete ramp for handicapped access was constructed and oak doors were installed at all of the entrances. The construction cost was \$31,000, which was partially funded through memorial gifts and various fund-raisers. During the summer of 1998, a former organist, Alan Flaitz, donated a three (3) console electronic organ.

For many years, all repairs and remodeling have been accomplished through the inclusion of a Building Fund designation in each member's offering envelopes. Projects have included kitchen remodeling, lighting and flooring in the gymnasium, an entire roof, plastic flooring in the social room, storm windows to cover the sanctuary's stained glass windows, building connection to the new sanitary sewage system in this portion of the borough, and a first floor ladies lounge.

I Am The Church, You Are The Church

The church is people, and Whitaker has been blessed with many dedicated lay persons. These men and women serve as choir members, Sunday & Bible School teachers, and church board members. These individuals and their witness enable the Lord's work to be performed.

The United Methodist Women, formerly the Ladies Aid Society and the Women's Society of Christian Service, have contributed their time, talents and monies for missionary work and the church.

The United Methodist men have volunteered their time and talents. They have given hours of their time to help with the carpentry, plumbing and electrical work. Their time and talents has enabled the church's money to be channeled into outreach ministries.

The United Methodist Youth Fellowship, formerly the Epworth League, has financially supported orphaned children and the MYF Fund. The current group meets weekly for study and fellowship. They also perform outreach ministries, such as nursing home visits and Christmas caroling. Various fund-raising projects have provided the financial support needed so that our youth could attend our conference-sponsored summer camps.

Ministries & Outreach

In addition to the ministries done by the women, men and youth groups, our church has demonstrated its witness in many other ways as well.

During Rev. Cuthbert Haine's pastorate, the Men's Brotherhood, currently the United Methodist Men, purchased and installed a public address system for the church. Recordings and chimes were broadcast throughout the community. In 1948, radio station WHOD (Homestead) began live broadcasts of the morning worship services to shut-ins.

Accomplishments - spiritual and financial are plentiful. Weekly Bible study, School of Missions, and Festivals of Faith have enhanced our spiritual life. A faithful prayer chain ministry, an ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve service shared with St. Rita's Roman Catholic Church of Munhall, Vacation Bible School, and Advent & Lenten Bible Studies are current ministries.

The church has provided strong financial ministry to both the Western Pennsylvania Conference and to the community. Christian stewardship has been channeled to Meals-on-Wheels for area shut-ins and to St. Peter's Child Development Center. The church has provided facilities for an Allegheny County sponsored Well-Baby Clinic, scouting programs, and currently hosts the M.U.S.A. sponsored Wesley Pre-School. A "Love Fund," a confidential cash ministry administered by the pastor, is available to provide individual and family emergency needs.

Answering God's Call

Seven (7) members answered God's call to full-time ministry or church-related vocations: James J. "Rusty" Morris and Michael L. Kundrat, current members of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, United Methodist Church; Donald Zimmerman, Presbyterian minister; Lois Zimmerman, United Methodist Deaconess; Judy Rehberg, Wycliffe Bible Translators; Betty Soles, Director of Christian Education and Linda Hicks, Director of Religious Education.

"A Charge To Keep"

The public, when passing by, observes a large, brown brick, steepled-church on Arkansas Avenue; a building which has played a vital role in the Steel Valley. Individuals, who have been touched by its people and ministry, are aware that love, warmth and the Holy Spirit resides within the church walls.

God has richly blessed Whitaker Church and its people. "The man to whom much is given, of him, much is required; the man to whom more is given, of him, much more is required." (Luke 12:48B) For this reason, we owe Him our continued prayers, presence, gifts and service.

God has been "Our Help in Ages Past" and is "Our Hope for Years to Come!" We have "A Charge to Keep" and "A God to Glorify!"

Ruth L. Henderson Historian
February 1999

461-9637

PASTORS MUNHALL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND WHITAKER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 1894-1999

MUNHALL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

1895-1896	Benjamin B. Wolf
1896-1897	I. C. Pershing
1897-1899	Benjamin B. Wolf
1899-1900	E. S. Nicholson
1900-1903	George H. Flinn
1903-1904	Charles T. Murdock
1904-1908	Joseph H. Laverty
1908-1909	J. J. Davis
1909-1911	David J. Sleppy
1911-1913	John M. Betts
1913-1915	R. R. Griffiths
1915-1917	W. S. Cummings
1917	W. S. Baker
1917-1918	Z. M. Silbaugh
1918-1920	E. L. Meadows
1920-1923	L. O. Dowds

+ Appointed to complete W. S. Cummings pastorate.

Review for special symbols

WHITAKER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1923-1926 William J. Turner*
 1926-1928 Webster D. Melchor*
 1928-1929 E. V. Shotwell*
 1929-1934 Hodge M. Eagleson*
 1934-1936 Martin S. Longnecker*
 1936-1939 Lynn H. Huff*
 1939-1941 Cuthbert E. Haine+
 1941-1942 James L. Carraway*
 1942-1947 James R. Gray+
 1947-1952 Charles F. Tame*
 1952-1954 James D. Robb+
 1954-1957 James R. Hartland-:B
 1957-1962 Ronald W. SmithE
 1962-1964 J. Valjean Mullinse)
 1964-1966 James F. Allen+
 1966-1971 Jack D. Fields+
 1971-1977 Peter D. Weaverlt
 1977-1978 William F. Hess+
 1978-1981 Glenn B. Kohlheppl
 1981-1983 William E. Hufford, Jr.t
 1983-1984 Ward Elliott*
 1984-1992 J. Michael Milliken*
 1992-1994 Walter E. Patton, Jr.+
 1994- J. Robert Douglasst,
 1995-

○ Active Member	Western Pennsylvania Conference, UMC Bishop	Eastern Pennsylvania &
○ Peninsula-Delaware Conference, UMC		
+ Retired Member	Western Pennsylvania Conference, UMC	
Retired Member	Western Ohio Conference, UMC	
ILD Member	United Church of Christ - Port Huron, Michigan	* Deceased
Location Unknown		