

BETHANY TEMPLE PART III

This is part three of “My Ministry at Bethany Temple Presbyterian Church” – 1953-1960.

EMPLOYING ASSISTANTS

Just as Rev. Cunningham felt the need for an assistant and employed me, I requested approval from the Session to do the same.

In September 1956, Bruce Alan Giles, a ministerial student at Temple University School of Theology and a member of the First Presbyterian Church, Darby, PA began as my assistant on a part-time schedule. Bruce was well-liked by everyone, youth and adults. He and I got along very well. His work in the Sunday School and with the young people gave me the freedom to prepare sermons and conduct other vital aspects of the ministry. When he graduated from Seminary he was ordained and became a pastor in New Jersey. He married one of the girls from the church – Sally Murray, Jan.24, 1959 - and I performed the ceremony at Bethany Temple. Later, he moved to California where he became the pastor of a large Presbyterian church.

In March 1958 we employed an additional assistant, Mr. Paul Clark Randolph, a ministerial student at the Reformed Episcopal Theological Seminary. Paul was his own man and did not win friends easily. He seemed a bit distant from Bruce and me and did not always want to be a team player.

Bruce graduated in June 1959, Paul left in June. Like Bruce, he too, married one of the girls of the church – Joan Walker, Dec. 28, 1959 - and I performed the ceremony.

In September 1959 we employed Samuel J. Seymour as a full-time assistant. We had attended Temple University School of Theology together and related very well to each other. His experience in ministry began when as a teen he became the tenor soloist and quartet member of the Young People's Church of the Air radio program, and the Youth on the March Television program with Evangelist Percy Crawford. He toured extensively in this preaching and musical ministry and served during several years in the summer ministry of the Pinebrook Bible Conference in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. When the two of us graduated from seminary, he was appointed by the Methodist Church to a parish in Rock Hall, MD. He contributed immensely to the ministry at Bethany Temple through his music, speaking at various services, and his compassionate manner with our parishioners in their needs. He was also a great help to the church after I resigned. He continued to serve for a while with the new minister before becoming the assistant at the First Presbyterian Church of Norristown, PA

MISSIONS AT BETHANY TEMPLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A very meaningful time of the year at Bethany was when we had our Missionary Conference. It was a wonderful experience in learning of the various ministries provided by the missionaries we supported throughout the world.

During my first year at Bethany Temple, Rev. Cunningham held “The School of Missions” on the four Wednesday evenings of May 1954. It was my introduction of some very wonderful servants of God who had been serving on the mission field for many years. The speakers that year were Reverend Francis Kinsler of Korea; Reverend Dean Dobson of India; Dr. John D. Hayes of China; and Dr. Samuel H. Moffett of China. Dr. Hayes, a fascinating person had been imprisoned by the Chinese Communists and had undergone “brain washing.” Dr. Moffett became a member of the faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary after leaving the field because of the Communists.

Several other speakers from missions in Philadelphia, Arizona and the Cameroun, West Africa told of their work in proclaiming the gospel of Christ around the world. For me, it was an eye-opener. Though I had heard and met missionaries before this in an impersonal way, this encounter stirred my heart. It helped me to see the mission of the church in a broader way, beyond that of the local church.

In 1955, and again in 1956, the School of Missions continued each Wednesday in the month of May, but when I became the minister, we moved it in 1957 to the month of October and devoted all services each Sunday and Wednesday to a missionary theme.

Rev. Richard B. Norton was there from Japan, Dr. A. Monroe Bertsch from Syria, Rev. Robert G. Mc Clure from Kentucky, Rev. Dudley Peck from Guatemala. Others were Dr. Kenneth Scott and Rev. Stanton R. Wilson from Korea, Robert Judy from Bolivia, Rev. L. Paul Moore, Jr. from the Cameroun, Africa, Dr. Archibald Campbell from Korea, Rev. Wallace Anderson from Guatemala, and Rev. George Rhoad, Jr., from Kenya. Local missions included the Eighth Street Wayside Mission and the First Italian Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

MEXICO MISSION TRIP – 1958

When our first daughter, Beth, was born, one of her nurses at the Presbyterian Hospital was Alice Bowman. Her father, Richard Bowman, a Christian layman, was the Regional Director of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, a missionary organization that was unknown to me. It didn't take him long to acquaint me with the work that was being done around the world in providing various language groups with the Bible in their own language. I became fascinated and impressed with their ministry.

As a result, in February 1958, the third to the fourteenth, I joined two other ministers in visiting The Wycliffe Bible Translators Mission in

Mexico. One of the ministers also took his wife with him. Isabel was unable to go with me because she was expecting our second child. My sister Ginny went with me.

Several members of the church contributed a total of \$250.00 to help defray my costs. Arriving in Mexico City from Philadelphia via a four-motor American Airlines plane for an introduction to the Wycliffe Ministry by Dr. Ben Elson, Director, we then flew south on a two-motor Mexican airline plane with wind whistling in the windows. Stopping at Vera Cruz and Tuxtla, and overnight in a motel in the beautiful town of Oaxaca, we ended up at the Wycliffe “Jungle Camp” near the Guatemalan border via a one-motor Missionary Aviation Fellowship plane.

“Jungle Camp” was the training area for missionaries going to remote areas. It was quite revealing to those of us ministering in big cities to realize the ways that the missionaries had to adapt to living without running water, bathrooms, or any of the modern conveniences we were accustomed to. A real eye-opener was an overnight stay in the Lacandon village of thatched-roofed huts and to sense the commitment and sacrifice of the missionaries. We arrived there by walking through dense jungle on foot for an hour or more.

At another location, we stayed at an isolated medical facility overnight and then walked a mile or so to a roughly-built wood structure for Sunday worship. Though there were no other buildings – not even thatched-roof structures were seen - more than three-hundred Mexican Indians gathered for a five-hour service of singing, preaching and praising the Lord. We sat at the front on a raised platform facing the congregation with men on one side and women on the other. Not understanding the words sung in dialect, I nevertheless knew the tune and sat in deep emotion listening to the song I knew as “Tell it to Jesus, Tell it to Jesus.” I shall never forget it and the sense of identity I had with other believers despite the language barrier.

The trip left an indelible impression upon me. When I returned to Bethany, I was more determined than ever to do what I could to support our missionaries. It seems that I talked and preached so much about missions from that time on, that when I announced my resignation to join the administration at Eastern College, some of my people thought I was headed to the mission field.

MISSIONARY CONFERENCE – 1958

During our annual Missionary Conference In October 1958, we conducted a telephone interview each Wednesday night with one of our

missionaries in a distant location. One was with Dr. Peter Baker in Brazil, one with Rev. H. Dudley Peck in Guatemala and another with Rev. Walter Soboleff in Alaska. In those days, it was an innovative idea because distant telephone communication was difficult. I arranged with the Telephone Company in advance, and they provided an operator who came to the church and helped make the contact. I had also written ahead to the missionaries requesting photographic slides and submitting questions that I would ask them on the phone. As we gathered together in the Sunday School auditorium, I sat at a table on the platform with a large projection screen behind me. When the pre-arranged time arrived and the amplification system was in good order, I picked up the telephone to place the call. The operator in the room connected me to the Philadelphia area operator who in turn connected with the operator in Brazil, Alaska or Arizona. We all listened intently as the operator at the other end said, "Dr. Baker, go ahead, please."

Simultaneously, a picture of Dr. Baker was projected onto the screen. As I moved through my questions and he answered them, other pictures were shown of the mission building, the people, and the missionary family. No one could ever forget the final moments when I asked the missionary to close the interview with a prayer for our congregation.

No one had ever met our missionary in Alaska, Rev. Walter Soboleff, even though the church had supported him for several years. But that one experience did more than we could have expected in closing up the distance between us and giving us a sense of family in the body of Christ.

One of our members, Miss Jean Baldwin designed a large 12' by 8' missionary map showing the location of each missionary the church supported. It was of further help in knowing just where they were serving.

Telephone interviews continued during our Missions Conference in 1959 with calls to Cuba, South Dakota, and Alaska. After leaving Bethany Temple, I often wondered why other churches have not picked up on this idea, particularly now that telephone calls around the world are so easy to make.

One of the daughters of the church, Lucille Greer was married to a missionary, George Rhoad, Jr., whose father was the founder of the Gospel Furtherance Society in Kenya Colony, Africa. We became very fond of this family of four.

Isabel and I had very memorable times in our home with some of these missionaries such as Dr. and Mrs. Peter Baker, Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Moffett, Rev. Robert McClure, and the Rhoads family with George, Lucille, David, and Ruth. They were a part of our church family.

DENOMINATIONS MERGE IN 1958

When I began at Bethany Temple it was a part of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Other nearby churches were part of the United Presbyterian Church, a separate denomination. In 1958, the two denominations merged and on January 13, 1959, the first meeting of the newly unified Philadelphia Presbytery was held at Bethany Temple. It was our honor to have the distinguished minister of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, the Rev. Dr. G. Harrison Ray, occupy the pulpit that day.

A year later when I was in Chicago, I went to that church on a Sunday morning. As I was greeted at the door by a gray-gloved usher, I mentioned that I was a minister from Philadelphia. He signaled to a white-gloved usher who then took me all the way to the front of the large sanctuary to a choice seat just four rows from the pulpit. Then, after the regular worshippers had arrived, and just before the service began, other visitors who had been held in the foyer were ushered to vacant places in the very crowded church. It was interesting to say the least, and a bit disconcerting to realize how self-centered the church can be at times.

CHRISTMAS AT BETHANY TEMPLE

In 1958 we initiated a Christmas Day worship service at 9 am. I thought that if there was any day in the calendar when Christians should be found in worship, it was the day when we celebrated Christ's birth. To the amazement of many, we had a very sizable congregation that day.

At the Christmas Day morning service in 1959, we were privileged to have our missionaries from Kenya, Rev and Mrs. George H. Rhoad, Jr., worship with us while they were home on furlough. We devoted a part of that service to the presentation of gifts to them and their two children, David and Ruth. They were surprised, and the rest of us thrilled to be giving just as Christ was given to us. It was a wonderful feeling to have them join with us as part of the church

TRIANGLE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION OF BETHANY TEMPLE

When Bethany Temple began in 1906, it was modeled after Bethany Presbyterian Church at 22nd Street and Bainbridge, also founded by John Wanamaker. In addition to worship services and the Sunday school

programs, Wanamaker wanted the church to meet the physical and social needs of the people as well as the spiritual. In addition to providing a medical clinic and other social services, a gymnasium was built for the young people. At Bethany Temple, The Triangle Athletic Association developed a very active schedule of sports with a basketball team that at one time played against the local public school teams. It also had a church tennis team. Though it was not as active in the 1950's, in my time, as it once had been, it was still in operation most every night of the week. Many neighborhood young people came to the church and to Christ through channel. In 1958 it was under the supervision of George Fuller, a seminary student, later ordained a minister, and Alice Merritt, teaching "girls the rudiments of basketball – amusing to the boys." So it was reported in "The Presbyterian Messenger."

HIGHLIGHTS AT BETHANY 1953-1960

In addition to special moments and events at Bethany indicated above, there were many others. One of them was the 50th Anniversary celebration in February 1956. Though I was not yet ordained and was still serving as the Assistant to the Minister, I was privileged to conduct those services along with Dr. Earl F. Ziegler at which three former ministers returned to the pulpit: Dr. Karl Frederick Wettstone who served from 1928-1937; Dr. Irvin Shortess Yeaworth, 1941 to 1950; and Rev. Robert Beach Cunningham, 1951 to 1955. A former long-time choir director, Henry Kerr Williams also returned to lead the choir. The week-long celebration culminated at a communion service led by the Interim Minister, Dr. Ziegler.

Another special event occurred on December 11, 1957, when a 45th Anniversary Dinner honored our well-loved and highly acclaimed organist Miss Carrie Livingston who began playing at Bethany when she was only a teen-ager in 1912. She succeeded an organist who died unexpectedly at that time. Originally from West Philadelphia, she later moved to Fairton, New Jersey and spent many hours traveling from her home to the church for services and choir rehearsals. It is amazing to think of the way she adjusted to so many ministers and choir directors and their demands.

REPORT OF MINISTRY FOR 1959

I have often been asked as to what a minister does besides preaching on Sunday. My report below, to the congregation for the year 1959, will give an answer.

During this past year, we have shared together in many wonderful experiences. We have gained new friends, and have lost others by death. Let me share with you some of the numerous phases of my ministry during the year 1959.

Sermons prepared and preached	— 107
Conducted 10 Week's Communicants' Class	— 10
Brief messages, devotional, lessons	— 21
Parish visitation: home, hospital, counselling, interviews, approx.	— 1000
Funerals conducted	— 38
Meetings attended in addition to Sunday services	— 260
Marriages performed	— 5

A minister also has numerous responsibilities in civic and community life and in the Denomination. Some capacities in which I serve are as follows:

Philadelphia Presbytery

- General Council Member
- Summer Evangelistic Committee
- Sessions Records Committee

Board Member, Philadelphia Area Sunday School Association;

Chaplain of the Phila. Junior Chamber of Commerce;

Member of Human Relations, Committee of the Phila. Junior Chamber of Commerce;

President of Geneva Cleric; Executive Committee Member of Alumni Association, Eastern Baptist College; Chairman of Reformation Day Service, West Phila. Ministers' Association.

Looking over the report and realizing that I was only thirty-two years old with a wife and two young children ages three, and one and a half, I know that the hand of the Lord was open me. He was providing good health, daily strength, self-discipline, determination, wisdom and so much more. I am grateful and thrilled to have been chosen as one of His servants in ministry.

A TIME AND A PLACE TO RELAX

Trying to find some way to relax and escape occasionally from our busy schedule at the church, Isabel and I purchased a two-story cottage at the nearby Methodist Camp grounds in Chester Heights, PA. It was owned by Mrs. Albert Norton, a dynamic Bible teacher at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Her husband – though a little bit eccentric – was a prolific hymn writer and a violinist. He would often attend our worship services and in the following week present me with a lengthy poem he had written about the message. One of the hymns he wrote was “If Jesus Had Not Come.”

At the cottage, where we got water from a common well-pump at the corner of the path leading through the camp, I spent one Labor Day weekend digging a hole for our outhouse just a step from the back door. The previous one was not deep enough.

Though some worship services were held in the Camp's wooden tabernacle during the summer, I was not able to participate because of our own church schedule. Our venture there ended when we left West Philadelphia for our new home at Glen Moore, PA where I had more than enough to do at our new property to keep me busy and provide exercise.

PRESBYTERIAN INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

In January 1960, I attended the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations held at McCormick Seminary in Chicago with Dr. Marshall Scott, Director. The purpose was to help the clergy understand the dramatic change that was occurring in churches as a result of the population rush to the suburbs. This three-week course opened my eyes to the problems that had been affecting Bethany Temple and what changes would have to be made in the coming days.

The Session and I were fully aware of the changes in our West Philadelphia neighborhood. Members were moving to the suburbs and the new neighbors were not coming to us. Any new members we gained were coming from other congregations. Many white people of the area were angry about their new neighbors who were black, not simply because of their skin color and what that seemed to portend, but primarily because it meant a decline in the value of their homes and property. Though our congregation sent missionaries to Africa, some did not want blacks to be a part of their church. Showing their disapproval, some members did not want me, as their minister, to encourage blacks to worship with us. My desire, however, was to minister to everyone in the neighborhood regardless of color or ethnic background. In fact, we had some other nationalities represented among us with a very strong sense of mutual brotherhood and family, but they weren't black. Color made the difference.

Nevertheless, the attendance at Sunday school and Church services, as well as the membership steadily declined. In 1953 membership was above thirteen-hundred and attendance five-hundred to six-hundred on Sunday morning. By 1960 membership was just above a thousand, with Sunday morning attendance about three-hundred fifty to four hundred. Sunday evening attendance was between one hundred and one hundred-fifty. Though, in themselves, the numbers were impressive and larger than most churches, they were interpreted in light of what they once had been.

Of greater concern to me than the numbers was the attitude of the congregation. They had lost their sense of primary mission in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and building a community of believers.

At the same time that this was going on in the church, I was pondering an invitation that had been given to me to join the administration at Eastern Baptist College in St. Davids, PA. Dr. George Claghorn, Dean, had called my secretary in November 1959 and asked for an appointment with me. For the life of me, I could not imagine why he would want to see me. When we met, he invited me to become the Director of Admissions, a newly created position in the administration, to begin on July 1 1960. Though I was highly flattered and impressed with the opportunity, and though I saw it as an exciting endeavor in extending my ministry in a Christian college, I did not accept. Isabel and I prayed about it as I thought of the effect my acceptance for a position more than seven months away. My reply to the Dean indicated that if he was still interested in me in the spring, I would reconsider. In February, after I had returned from the conference in Chicago, the Dean called me again and renewed the invitation. In light of the information I had gathered there, and believing that the congregation at Bethany would begin to minister to the whole neighborhood, I accepted. The plan was for me to leave on June first for a month's vacation, to which I was entitled, to begin on July one, and to announce my resignation on the first of April. The intervening two months between the announcement and my departure seemed to me to be a proper timing for everyone.