

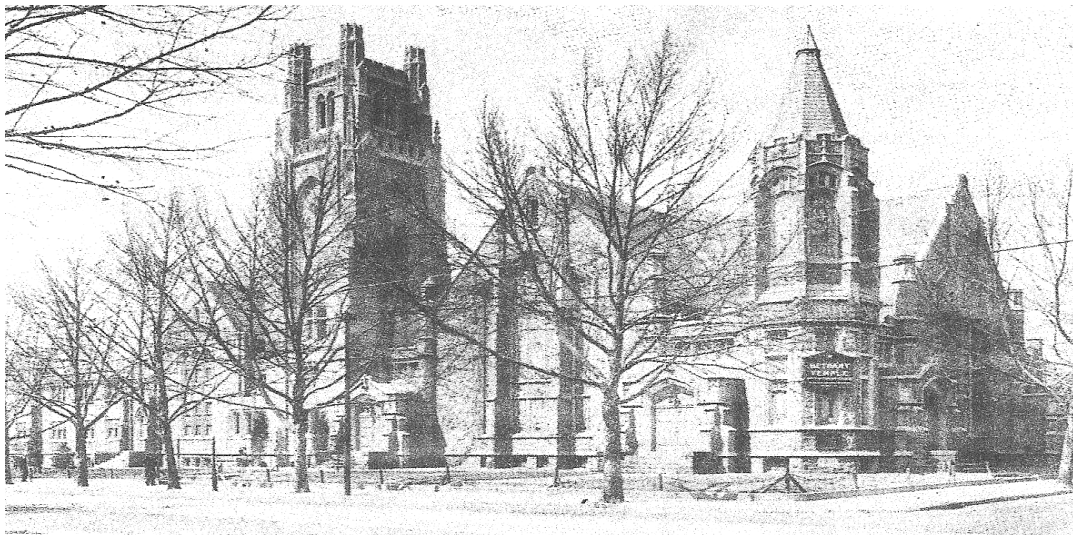
BETHANY TEMPLE – PART I (in four parts)

BETHANY TEMPLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Fifty-Third and Spruce Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

1953-1960

Recollections of Rev. William Allen Zulker,
B.A., S.T.B., M.A., D. Min.



BETHANY TEMPLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FIFTY-THIRD AND SPRUCE STREETS PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

My ministry at Bethany Temple Presbyterian Church began in 1953 after I graduated from college and entered Theological Seminary.

Initially, I served as the Assistant to the Minister, the Rev. Robert Beach Cunningham. Later I became the Senior Minister serving until July 1960.

It began in an interesting way. During my senior year at Eastern Baptist College in St. Davids, PA, Rev. Cunningham was one of the chapel speakers. I missed chapel that day but heard from those who attended that

they had heard a great message. That was very complimentary for we had heard a lot of warmed-over Sunday messages that often failed to speak to our needs or concerns. When I told Isabel, my wife, we decided to hear this preacher at his church – Bethany Temple. On several occasions we had attended the Tenth Presbyterian Church in center city Philadelphia where Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse was the minister and we acknowledged him as a Biblical preacher; but we had serious doubts about the theological correctness of other Presbyterian churches. It must be remembered that my earlier years in an independent Bible church - Church of the Open Bible, Trenton, NJ - and some years in a Conservative Baptist Church - Central Baptist Church, Trenton, NJ - had convinced me that Presbyterians were all liberal and didn't believe or preach the Bible in its true message.

So when we heard Rev. Cunningham present the Gospel in clear evangelical terms, we were impressed. Moreover, his message was stimulating, and the music of the church so uplifting. Surprisingly, Rev. Cunningham came to our third-floor apartment on the Tuesday evening following our first Sunday visit. He sat and talked with us and invited us back. Though his membership was over 1300, he surprised us in taking the time to visit college students who could hardly be expected to contribute to the life of his congregation. We kept going back, even to midweek services. We were impressed with all that we saw and heard.

At that time I was not aware that Bethany Temple was one of four churches founded by John Wanamaker, the famed retail clothing-merchant who was a devout, evangelical Christian. More of his story and how he impacted my life will be told later in this paper.



Sometime during my junior and senior years at Eastern, a classmate – John Horton, a member at the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia – asked me why I was not a Presbyterian. I told him it was because I was a Baptist. He said that was not a good reason. He then put before me two books – one, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination by Lorraine Boettner. There before me was an introduction to “Reformed Theology” that I had not previously studied. The emphasis, to my understanding, was upon the Sovereignty of God and His redemptive work through Christ. I saw this in contrast to man’s attempt to “good works” and salvation depending upon man’s choice. Divine adoption and divine election appeared so vital and without question. John also encouraged me to read Systematic Theology by Hodge and some works of John Calvin. Also included were other writings of Charles Hodge and A.A. Hodge. Slowly, but steadily, I was becoming Presbyterian.

Just as I was about to graduate from Eastern, I told my Philosophy professor, Dr. George S. Claghorn, about our visits to Bethany Temple and that often Rev. Cunningham expressed to us how busy he was. It seemed that he might be open to having a student assistant – meaning me - as I went on to Seminary. Dr. Claghorn told me that his parents had been members there and he knew the church. Furthermore, he encouraged me to talk with Rev. Cunningham about my interest and availability.

I went to the church office, made an appointment, met with Rev. Cunningham and came away feeling positive. He talked with me about my experiences and leadership of Frankfurt, Germany Youth For Christ while in the Army, and Trenton Youth For Christ in Trenton, NJ, and invited me to preach for him on Sunday evening June 28, 1953 at Bethany Temple. I preached on the subject, “The Word of God is Powerful,” and used Hebrews, Chapter Four, verse 12 as my text. During the following week he told me that he was presenting my name before the Session of the church as candidate for the position of Assistant to the Minister, but that no decision would be made until after summer and the beginning of September.

In June I graduated from Eastern, and because of my change of theology I did not want to go on to Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. I had heard about the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in West Philadelphia, that was very conservative and taught reformed theology. If I were accepted there, I could remain in the area and still be available for employment at Bethany Temple. Also, Isabel could continue her employment at the Philadelphia Life Insurance Company in center city. Unfortunately, however, an unforeseen problem arose. Our landlady, Mrs. Phenna at 918 N.

64th Street, informed us that she was going to sell her house and that the third floor apartment would no longer be available. This was disappointing to us for we had lived there two and a half years.

But then we found a second-floor apartment with a private entrance just a block from RE Seminary. I could walk to classes, Isabel could catch a bus in and out of the city easier than before, and if the job opened at Bethany Temple I would be only a mile or so away. As we moved to 116 South 43rd Street, I was accepted by the Seminary and I was scheduled to begin classes in September.

While waiting for a decision from Bethany Temple, I spent the summer selling health insurance in the Philadelphia area.

The day finally arrived in September when Rev. Cunningham appeared at our apartment and told me that the Session had approved me for the position.



BETHANY TEMPLE
PRESBYTERIAN Church
Fifty-third + SPRUCE STS.

No job description was given or any word about the length time I was expected to work each week. My salary was to be “fifteen sixty”, but I didn’t know then for what period, and I really didn’t care. I knew I had a job! It

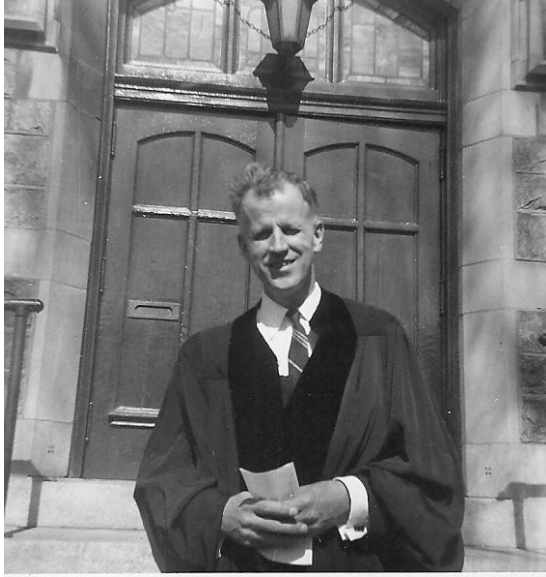
was ministry! And it was in a place that appeared to be the greatest. Later, I found that it was \$1560 for the year. That meant \$30.00 a week. I was excited.

My life changed. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I would be involved in the Christian ministry – something I had longed for and prepared for over several years. I was twenty-six years old, married, employed in a church, and a seminary student immersed in theological studies. What more could I want at that time in my life!

Rev. Cunningham was a high-strung individual with unwavering self-confidence. He was well-educated, well-read, highly organized, a hard worker, and a very good preacher. He was a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary and had been a teacher at the prestigious Horace Mann private school in Riverdale, NY, ranked by Forbes as the best private school in America. What a teacher I would have. He was strongly motivated, evangelical, Biblical and Christ-centered in his ministry. He also had a strong determination that Bethany Temple was going to grow under his ministry, particularly his preaching.

I found him to be a good teacher in helping me establish a solid foundation in self-discipline in my studies, daily schedule and ministry. Because of his demands upon me, it was not long before I concluded that he might not want to admit that I was only a part-time employee and that I had a wife and seminary studies that deserved some of my time. Whenever he gave me an assignment, he expected it to be done without any outside interruption or excuse. I was just as intent that he would find no fault in my work, my response, or my commitment. I kept up my studies, made hospital and home visits, supervised and gave oversight to teachers in the Sunday School and those leading the youth. I participated with him in the pulpit in all worship services, and accompanied him to various meetings including those of the Philadelphia Presbytery. We worked well together though he seemed to always keep me at a distance. At the time of my employment he asked my middle name, and then said we would use it from then on. So, I became William ALLEN Zulker. Apparently, that was the style used by most ministers at the time. The first time the Sunday bulletin was printed, that was the way it appeared. He always referred to me as Mr. Zulker, and I of course called him Rev. Cunningham. I don't ever remember him calling me Bill. Those were the days when all clergy were seen in a different light than today. Dress was always formal, and proper etiquette was paramount.

Rev. Robert Beach Cunningham



At times it was difficult for my wife, Isabel, because Rev. Cunningham would call for me irrespective of meal times or family events. But through it all, I was being prepared for a future ministry and a broader ministry right there at Bethany Temple. At the time, I was unaware that the Lord was establishing a spot for me as the next minister of the church. I doubt that even the congregation could have imagined that such might happen. And with the attitude that Rev. Cunningham had about himself, he probably thought that I would never be capable of such. He did, however give me opportunity to preach. During the summer of 1954, my first summer there, he scheduled me for two Sundays, morning and evening, August 1 and 22, joining with such distinguished preachers as Dr. C. Hans Evans of Coatesville, PA and the Rev. Robert L. Briggs from Fort Worth, Texas. In 1955, I preached on one Sunday, August 7, morning and evening, while he was on vacation.

SUMMER VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

One of my responsibilities as the Assistant to the Minister was in planning the Summer Vacation Bible School. In 1954 the school was held for two-weeks from June 28 to July 9 from 9 am to 11:45 am. Our theme was “Sailing with Christ.” We had a very excellent staff of volunteer teachers and helpers, some of whom were public school teachers with years of experience. The Sunday School auditorium was decorated in a nautical way with a good-size sailboat and a light-house on the stage. Coming in from the outside, the children walked up a gangplank.



In the following year, the theme was “Adventuring with Christ, and one of our collegians – Keith Hardman – later ordained a Presbyterian minister - constructed a Conestoga wagon for us.