

BETHANY TEMPLE PART II

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

ENROUTE TO ORDINATION

In September 1955, as I entered my third and final year at the seminary, Rev. Cunningham submitted his resignation from Bethany Temple to take the position of Secretary of Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church with denominational offices in New York. His last Sunday at the church was on November 13, 1955. Though the Presbytery appointed Dr. Earl Ziegler as the Interim Minister beginning on November 20, I continued as the Assistant to the Minister fulfilling my usual responsibilities.

I was asked to preach on Thanksgiving Day, November 24 at a very well-attended service. The congregation began to observe my every move,

prayer and activity. It was the beginning of a new relationship with greater independence for me. Moreover, Dr. Ziegler asked me to participate more in the worship services, to preach on occasion, to conduct the Wednesday evening mid-week services, visit the sick and infirm, and be at the office as much as possible



Rev. Cunningham and Dr. Earl Ziegler

I taught communicant classes for fifteen weeks on Sundays, preached at the New Year's Eve service and again at the evening service on January 29, 1956. I spoke at twenty-eight Wednesday evening Prayer services from November 1955 to the time of my ordination in June 1956. At the same time I was still attending Seminary classes at Temple University School of Theology and taking final examinations.

While all this was happening I had decided to officially join the Presbyterian denomination and seek ordination. I had embraced Reformed Theology and was tremendously impressed with the polity and organization of Presbyterianism. In addition, I had the actual experience of working within the framework of the denomination.

To seek ordination it was necessary for me to join a local Presbyterian church but Rev. Cunningham thought it inadvisable to join Bethany Temple because I was employed there. One of my professors at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary was Dr. G. Hall Todd, minister at the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, consented to having me join there even though I would not be able to attend services because of my work at BT. I joined in the fall of 1954. Six months later, on March 8, 1955, I qualified and was received as a candidate for ministry in the Philadelphia Presbytery. The Candidates Committee would not approve my attendance at the

Reformed Episcopal Seminary and recommended that I attend a Presbyterian Seminary such as Princeton. I was reluctant, however, to disrupt my ministry at Bethany Temple, or move out of the area, or to have to commute to Princeton. Furthermore, Isabel would have to find new employment or stay alone in West Philadelphia while I was away. Too many problems had to be solved. I had heard that other candidates had attended the School of Theology at Temple University and that there were some professors there who were Presbyterians, such as Dr. Andrew W. Blackwood. After further discussion with the committee, they approved my transfer to Temple, and I took my senior year there and continued at Bethany.

So while everything else was happening with additional responsibilities at the church, and while I was finishing classes at the Seminary, I had to take the Denominational series of Examinations in Bible Knowledge, Biblical Exegesis, Presbyterian Church History and Polity, and also preach a trial sermon. Having passed all those, I was officially licensed on April 19, 1956 at a Presbytery meeting at the Chambers-Wylie Memorial Presbyterian Church on South Broad Street in Philadelphia. That meant that I was authorized to accept a call to a local church as minister.

Following the resignation of Rev. Cunningham, Bethany Temple had elected a committee from the congregation to search for a new minister. After several months, however, the committee had not made a selection and realized that I would soon be graduating from Seminary and would leave them for another call. When in March, the committee asked me to meet with them and consider staying on in this new position as Senior Minister, I was excited, honored, and surprised. It became a matter of prayer for all of us. Was I qualified for such a position in such a large church of nearly thirteen hundred members? Could I meet the demands of the pulpit with two new sermons each Sunday and a message at the mid-week service? Would I have ample time to conduct an vital visitation schedule within the congregation – with those ill in hospitals spread across the city – with shut-ins – with prospective members – with the bereaved and the conducting of funeral services – counseling with those of special need – overseeing the Sunday School and Youth programs – meeting with the Session, the Board of Deacons and the Trustees – attending Presbytery meetings and serving there on committees as expected. All of these things I had to weigh carefully, and so did the church.

I consulted with several professors at the Seminary as well as some other Presbyterian ministers I had come to know. Having asked for their honest opinions, I was encouraged by each of them. Several indicated that the Bethany church people had a good understanding of my abilities and

limitations, and that if they still wanted me, I shouldn't hesitate to accept. I did.

But now, the call from Bethany had to be approved by the Ministerial Relations Committee of the Presbytery, and that would not come quickly or easily. The chairman of the committee, Rev Alvin Dwayne Smith, pastor of the Overbrook Presbyterian Church was very much opposed to my call. He felt that I was too inexperienced to lead such a large church. Moreover, I had been a Presbyterian for fewer than three years, had not attended a Presbyterian Seminary, had been under care of the Presbytery committee for fewer than two years and could hardly be expected to know what I should about Presbyterianism.

At the same time, he knew that it was the church requesting my services, not the other way around, and a call from a church needs to be honored if at all possible. If the M R Committee rejected the church's request for approval, would the rest of the Presbytery go along with them? Surely, there would be some churches that would feel that the Presbytery had taken away their right. So, after further consideration, the MR Committee granted temporary and limited approval. I would be permitted to proceed with ordination, become a full-fledged Presbyterian minister, but be permitted to serve Bethany temple only as a Stated Supply minister for a period of six months. At the end of that time, the Bethany Temple congregation could proceed with a congregational meeting to decide my future relationship. If they decided not to call me, I would be available for a call to some other church.

Though the chairman may have thought this was a clever way to prevent a call, it turned out differently. In the meantime, I was then ordained on June 22, 1956, at the church, by the Presbytery, and permitted to serve as Stated Supply Minister for the designated time. .

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—**Ordination of William Allen Zulker.** The members and friends of Bethany Temple are cordially invited to attend the Service of Ordination to the Ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ of William Allen Zulker at Bethany Temple Presbyterian Church. Following the Ordination Service a reception will be held in the Social Hall for everyone.

Certificate of Ordination

At Philadelphia the 22nd

day of June A. D. 1956

The Presbytery of Philadelphia having examined for the ministry under the provisions of the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Mr. William A. Zulker a licentiate, and his examinations having been approved, then in due order, the Presbytery solemnly ordained and set apart by imposition of hands and prayer, the said Mr. William A. Zulker to the holy office of the Gospel ministry, and afterwards extended to him the right hand of fellowship to take part with them in this ministry.

John K. Linn
Stated Clerk of Presbytery.

The Ordination Service was conducted by the Moderator of the Presbytery, the Honorable Edward J. Griffiths. LL.D.

Judge Griffiths
Presbytery Moderator



Other ministers participating were Rev. William A. Guenther, Director of Christian Education of the Presbytery; Rev. Earl Tyson, Minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Kensington, Philadelphia; Rev. Dr. Andrew W. Blackwood, Author and Professor of Preaching at both Princeton Theological Seminary and Temple University School of Theology; Rev. Dr. George Handy Wailes, Dean and Professor of Old and New Testament Exegesis at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary; and Rev. Dr. G. Hall Todd, Minister of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church Philadelphia and Professor at the Reformed Episcopal Theological Seminary. Drs, Blackwood, Wailes and Todd had been my professors. A more impressive gathering could not be found. In addition to the Bethany Temple Church Choir under the direction of Mr. John H. Brown, Jr. and the organist Miss Carrie E. Livingston of Bridgeton, NJ, the soloist was Irvin Shortess Yeaworth, Jr., well known tenor and film producer.

I was particularly encouraged by letters received from people like Dr. Ross H. Stover, pastor of the famed Messiah Lutheran Church in Philadelphia; Dr. Frank H. Stroup, Director of Field work in the Presbytery; and Rev. John K. Lynn, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. There was also a special one from Mr. Max Levin, my Jewish friend and former employer, the owner of Eton Shop in Trenton NJ where I worked while in high school in 1943-45 and after returning from military service in 1947-48.

Many in the congregation felt that they were being manipulated by the Ministerial Committee and hoped to prove them wrong.

Immediately upon ordination, and with the approval of the Session, Isabel and I moved into the Manse next door to the church at 5339 Spruce Street.





As I began full-time ministry there, the congregation rallied behind me. Everything seemed to go along smoothly and effectively. Most everyone seemed hopeful that I would be able to stay on.

On January 20, 1957, after the stipulated six-month trial period, a congregational meeting was held at which the church voted to call me as its new pastor and to continue my service.

A month later, a service was held on February 20, 1957 at the church as I was officially installed by the Presbytery. I was twenty-nine years old. By that time, our first child, Elizabeth Ann, was born.

*The Session of
The Bethany Temple Presbyterian Church
of Philadelphia, Pa.
cordially invites you to
The Installation Service
of its seventh minister
The Reverend William Allen Zulker
by
The Presbytery of Philadelphia
Wednesday evening, February 20, 1957, at 8 o'clock
Reception in the Social Hall*

Another glorious and memorable service was led by Dr. Theodore C. Meeks, Moderator, with Rev. Harold M. Russell, Rev. Dr. Ellsworth Erskine Jackson, Rev. Dr. Earl F. Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Robert W. Bringhurst and Rev. C. Edwin Houk participating.

Call for a Pastor

The Church ofBethany Temple Presbyterian Church.....
.....being, on sufficient grounds, well satisfied of the ministerial qualifications
of you.....William Allen Zulker.....and having good hopes from our past
experience of your labors, that your ministrations in the gospel will be profitable to our spiritual
interest, do earnestly call and desire you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation;
promising you in the discharge of your duty all proper support, encouragement and obedience in
the Lord. And that you may be free from worldly care and avocations, we promise and oblige
ourselves to pay you the sum of.....\$5500.00.....yearly in regular.....semi-monthly
payments during the time of your being and continuing the regular pastor of this Church,
together with free use of the manse and...5...Sunday...vacation each year. And we agree to pay
or to continue to pay monthly or quarterly in advance to the Board of Pensions a sum equivalent
to that requisite per cent of said salary which may be fixed by the General Assembly of the Pres-
byterian Church in the United States of America for participation in the Service Pension Plan.
And we promise and oblige ourselves to review with you the adequacy of this compensation
annually, prior to the adoption of the church budget.

In Testimony Whereof we have respectively subscribed our names this...twentieth.....
day of.....January.....A. D.....57.....

Ruth E. Atkinson

Edward S. Boy

William A. Lentz Jr.

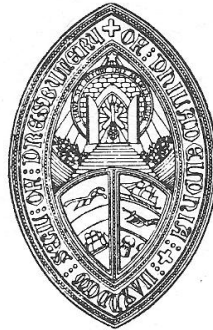
Charles H. Reisert

Keith J. Hardman

John Abrams

MY BEGINNING SALARY AT THE CHURCH WAS \$5500 A YEAR PLUS FREE USE OF THE MANSE.

I was amazed by the acceptance given me by so many of the clergy in the Presbytery. Before long I was elected to the Session Records Committee as well as the Candidates Committee and helped groom other young aspiring ministers through the process. Later on, I served on a two Commissions to assist two churches through some difficult issues. In 1977, I was elected First Vice-Moderator of the Philadelphia Presbytery, and in 1978, the highlight of my Presbytery service, as Moderator, and then Chairman of the General Council in 1979.



Service of Induction

of

The Reverend William Allen Zulker

as

MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERY OF PHILADELPHIA

of

THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

in the

EASTERN COLLEGE
ST. DAVIDS, PENNSYLVANIA

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 1978

ONE-THIRTY O'CLOCK

My installation as minister of the church did not change my daily routine in ministry; it simply gave me a new title.

Continuing on, I normally preached at both the Sunday morning and evening services as well as at the Wednesday evening service. I oversaw the Sunday school and youth programs, met with the Session each month, as well as with several committees, conducted funerals and weddings and maintained a very busy visitation program with members and visitors. I set a weekly goal of twenty personal visits toward an annual goal of one thousand visits. Because of the distance to several hospitals in the larger Philadelphia area, it meant a lot of travel time. In those days, we did not have air-conditioning in cars and “the minister” always wore a shirt, tie and coat. That was also true on Sundays in the church without air conditioning.

Not having any “barrel” of sermons previously preached, each sermon was new and the result of many hours of study. I usually reserved the morning hours for sermon preparation, but was frequently interrupted by other demands such as funerals and emergency hospital visits. Mrs. Claudia Steele, the long-time, full-time secretary at the church was tremendously helpful to me. She assumed many responsibilities and protected my time. Though I wrote out my sermons word for word, I typed my notes myself and preached from them. Mrs. Steele typed many letters for me, prepared the Sunday bulletins and other newsletters, but I hand-wrote numerous personal notes on special stationary-note paper that I had printed with a photo of the church.

The days were long with many evening meetings and more late-night study. Fortunately, my wife Isabel was very understanding and adjusted to the demands of my ministry.

During those years, I tried to get some exercise at the local YMCA gymnasium, but that didn't last long. It was too time consuming. At one period, I served as one of three chaplains for the Philadelphia Junior Chamber of Commerce, rotating attendance at the weekly meetings to give prayer or grace as requested. At another time, I served as president of Geneva Cleric, an informal gathering of Presbyterian clergy in the Philadelphia area.