



# Weaving Lives Together Through Time



1914 \* 2022



## **1914**

Feb 22, First gathering of First Congregational church at Manor Hall, Rev. Brainerd Thrall (at age 64) preaching

March 14, Rev Thrall forms first Boy Scouts troop in Asheville (and all of WNC)

June 7, Official start of church; 31 charter members, none were native of WNC.

Sept., Trustees purchase lot at corner of Merrimon and Spears; some members don't like the site and 5 charter members withdraw, including the first moderator and clerk.

## **1917**

Sept. 19, Cornerstone of church building is laid.

## **1918**

March 31, (Easter)—First worship service held in new building.

## **1932**

Oct. Rev. Thrall resigns at age 82

Church suffers financial hardship and decrease in membership.

## **1933-39**

Rev. John Chapman's tenure as pastor, marked by active participation in the life of the city, strong social, educational and spiritual growth of the church. But despite marked growth of the congregation, his pastorate was always in the shadow of Thrall. At one point some members asked that a portrait of Thrall be hung over the pulpit! Chapman "could not consent to having his picture become the focus for worship. 'There were strained feeling from that time on.'"

## **1940-45**

Rev. William P. Jackson's tenure as pastor. Known fondly as "Papa Jackson." "He continued the tradition of successful work with young people and was active in the community."

## **1945-47**

Rev. Aubrey Todd's tenure. Todd's strong positions on social issues seem to cause a decline in membership and financial support. In a letter from the Deacons and Trustees to the pastor, they say (in part): "We are gravely concerned lest we go out of our way to inject controversial issues, outside the field of religion, into our church program...that give our church a reputation for adventures in social and political crusading that can accomplish nothing except to promote friction and bitterness" (p.28 of the church's History).

## **1947-51**

Rev. Earl D. Weed's tenure (He resigned because he felt he had not made sufficient progress toward bringing the congregation to financial self-sufficiency; still getting funding from the denomination.)

## **1951-64**

Rev. Frank E. Ratzell's pastorate, during which the United Church of Christ was born (a merger of the Christian Congregationalists and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches). First Congregational grew tremendously during the first 12 years of Ratzell's ministry, from 82 to 226 members). They took steps to move and build a new larger building. In the midst of that he had a series of heart attacks and died in 1964, at age 53. "'Through his preaching and informal group discussion, he enabled those who were struggling with problems of belief in the modern scientific world to build a reconstructed faith with enthusiasm to express it in daily life....' Other "hallmarks"

of Rev. Ratzell's ministry: proponent of racial justice, did a lot of work with Asheville Area Council on Human Relations; FCUCC was first "white church" to welcome a black member; various programs started, e.g., Couples Club, children's programs, music program flourished, numerous building improvements.

#### **1964-65**

Rev. Ernest W. Barnes serves as Interim Minister.

#### **1965-69**

Rev. Wilson L. Busick's pastorate, marked by an issue that nearly divided the church: whether to sell the building or not. "Some members wanted church to relocate to suburbs, while others thought sale price of building wouldn't be enough to build a new church. "Busick felt that he was unfairly compared to Rev. Ratzell and that the Executive Board thwarted his growth plans summarily."

#### **1969-71**

Rev. Paul Limbert's pastorate. Became "an esteemed church member" during Ratzell's tenure, becoming the Moderator in 1968. Accepted call to be the Interim some months after Busick's departure. Developed a vigorous long range planning project: church needed to grow and refine and redefine its identity; and denomination needed to become better known through PR campaign. In 1969 membership was 166; 38% were over 60 years old; 22% were under 30, mostly students. Limbert was very active in international politics and social justice efforts.

#### **1971-82**

Rev. David Crook's pastorate. He was active in local civic organizations and the Southern Conference of the UCC. Many improvements to the church building and parsonage. Boards of Deacons and Deaconesses merge; first woman Moderator, Mary Lou Wing, is elected, pulpit exchange with Berry Temple United Methodist Church.

#### **1982-83**

Rev. Ralph Kuettner serves as Interim Minister.

#### **1983-88**

Rev. Roland FF Roehner's pastorate. Name changed to First Congregational United Church of Christ. United Church Board for Homeland Ministries is consulted and recommends the church relocate. Architect presents plans for enlarging current building at 1987 Annual meeting, but no action is taken.

#### **1988-89**

C. Edward Weber serves as Interim Minister.

#### **1989-1994**

Rev. Dwayne C. Carter's pastorate. Adult Ed program was expanded, church's physical space was improved/refurbished. "Special Funds paid for \$70,000 elevator installation. Members gave \$17,000." Executive Board authorizes \$5000 loan to Habitat for Humanity toward purchase of building for their store. Later the debt was cancelled. Music program grew significantly. New Century Hymnal is purchased; FCUCC was seen as a "dying church."

#### **1995-96**

Rev. Dorothy (Dorri) Nell Sherrill serves as Interim Pastor. First woman to do so. "Rev. Sherrill involved the church in important community and social justice efforts. She grew the church in both numbers and spirituality", including: revived children's ministry, interfaith initiatives/services, co-founding Holy Ground, Inc. In May-June '95 members discussed church's future; staff from the Southern Conference UCC helped lead discussions.

## **1996**

January - Mike Downs of the UCC Board for Homeland Ministries meets with church to discuss "church's future, especially what kind of financial situation would be required for new church start.

March-May - Rev. Aubra Love serves as Interim Minister, the first African American to serve as pastor of a predominantly white church in Asheville.

Pentecost Sunday – Joe Hoffman's first Sunday as pastor.

John Adams retired as Director of Music; Mary Patton Higgins was hired as the new director.

Two new committees: Vision Task Force and Ministry & Mission Task Force.

## **1997**

Executive Board began a Land Task Force to find new land for the church.

EB approved start of a budgeted line item for Building Fund (as a result of donation specifically designated for Building Funds.)

## **1998**

Church increased its participation in the community with a block party, and in social justice issues, including adopting an anti-capital punishment stance, supporting Habitat for Humanity.

35 people from our church walked in the Gay Pride March.

## **1999**

Anita Freeman hired as Music Director.

Went to 2 Sunday morning worship services.

Paid for all Mission spending from the Operating Fund, not from Special Funds. (Previously, some Mission funds were kept in Special Funds because certain projects were of great interest and importance to the long-time members, and Trustees had continued to have say over the Special Funds. With the new Christian Action Committee (CAC) moving us in new directions, the funding for the new CAC ministries came from the Operating Budget and were voted on by the congregation.)

Capital Funds Committee began to determine how we can pay for new property / building.

Disagreements emerged about financing and location for a new church – (only places we could begin to find for new church were out ways – and we had said we wanted to be in the city – downtown) -- how soon we needed to make the move in order to sustain our growth and energy.

We realized that we must learn to disagree in ways that are loving and respectful.

## **2000**

Started hosting "Room in the Inn", a rotating, week-long housing program for homeless women in conjunction with Homeward Bound--two times a year.

Began exploring the option to adopt Open and Affirming (ONA), the United Church of Christ's (UCC) designation for congregations, campus ministries, and other bodies in the UCC which make a public covenant of welcome into their full life and ministry to persons of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

We purchased Piney Mountain Land and celebrated a ground-breaking ceremony.

## **2001**

Started Building Committee.

Cindy Maddox was hired as part-time Associate Pastor.

Joe Hoffman, Senior Pastor, began a one-month sabbatical on first day of Cindy Maddox's tenure. (The first sabbatical for a pastor of FCUCC.)

Asked WNC Association of UCC to remove the barrier for gay/lesbian ordination.

A lot of time was spent on the ONA process, holding congregational meetings, answering questions, hearing concerns.

## **2002**

Voted at annual meeting (January 02) to approve the Vision Statement and become Open and Affirming congregation. The action was filed with national UCC.

Created Capital Campaign Committee.

Spent good bit of time discussing sexual violence – created a steering committee to respond to an incident in the community.

## **2003**

Through the support and advocacy of our congregation, Cindy Maddox, Associate Pastor, became the first openly gay or lesbian person to be ordained by the Western North Carolina Association of the Southern Conference of the UCC.

Made commitment to build new church home on Piney Mtn – and made a commitment to leave our home on Merrimon Ave.

Celebrated with worship service at Diana Wortham Theater that the Capital Campaign "Grounded in Grace/Giving in Joy" for building exceeded 1 million dollars.

Declared that our benevolence giving increase by 1% a year until it was 20% of total budget.

## **2004**

Joe Hoffman, Senior Pastor, informs Executive Board that he is dating Noel Nickle, a member of the congregation.

3 leaders resign (Moderator, Chair of Trustees, Chair of Capital Campaign Committee)

People of Faith for Just Relationships was organized to promote marriage equality.

## **2005**

Jo Larsen, Church Secretary, for 25 years retires.

Judy Slater is hired as Church Secretary.

Made an offer in late Summer to purchase 1<sup>st</sup> Christian Church on Oak Street downtown. Within a two-week period, contract for \$1.5 million was signed. In Nov, moved into the building and first worship service on Thanksgiving Sunday.

Cindy Maddox resigns to accept call as pastor of a congregation in Connecticut.

Staff Transition Committee is formed to discern staffing needs.

Amanda Hendler-Voss is hired as interim Christian Educator during discernment period.

## **2006**

On June 4 the Oak Street Church building was dedicated.

Purchased new organ for sanctuary from designated funds.

Anita Freeman resigned as music director after a hard congregational conversation.

## **2007**

Hired Gary Mitchell as Minister of Music.

Bought baby grand piano for sanctuary with designated funds.

Staff Parish Relations Committee was established.

## **2008**

Began serving Sunday Morning breakfast to the homeless in Pritchard Park.

Closed on the sale of the Piney Mountain property and retired the debt from the purchase of the Oak Street building.

Rev. Shannon Spencer was hired as church's first full time associate.

Approved Accessibility Project to be finished by Easter 2009.

Began Vision Task Force.

A controversy developed over the process of hiring Associate Pastor. Changes in staffing and church identity led to the departure of a number of long-time members.

## **2009**

Completed accessibility project (sidewalk ramp on south side of building and lift in south stairwell).

Received and affirmed Vision and Mission Statement from the Vision Team.

New website developed by the Communication Committee.

Worship Committee developed an inclusive/expansive language covenant.

Gary Mitchell became a Commissioned Minister of Music and Arts through the WNCA.

1<sup>st</sup> New Year's Day open house for the homeless.

The Personnel Committee reviewed current job descriptions for ministerial staff and with feedback from Joe, produced a one page job description.

## **2010**

Homeward Bound's "Just Home in the Mountains" used the sanctuary for the play "Always Expect Miracles." Required moving pews out of the sanctuary for several months, which generated controversial discussion about the configuration of worship space.

The Personnel Committee worked with Culture Quest consultants to clarify the roles and boundaries of the staff members of the church.

Began "Grace on Thursdays," an evening worship service, with 15-35 in attendance. Harper Leich was hired as a temporary worker in the office.

First Annual Church Retreat was held in Blowing Rock.

A group of parishioners and Shannon Spencer, Associate Pastor, went on a trip to Managua, Nicaragua.

The stewardship campaign sponsored dinners in individuals' homes to discuss stewardship. About 100 people participated. .

The church budget operated with no debt.

## **2011**

Completion and dedication of the Memorial Garden.

Solar Panels were installed in April – FCUCC was the first faith community in the WNC to do so.

The church began providing office space for the Campaign for Southern Equality. (The CSE "We Do" campaign was held.)

A Task Force on Governance began meeting to review our large committee structure that was resulting in a dysfunctional Executive Board.

Grace on Thursdays ended in late summer due to only 6-8 participants.  
Began "Children's Church."

Harper Leich was hired as part-time Administrative Assistant.

## **2012**

The Governance and Ministry Task Force (GMTF) began a nine-month journey to help us focus on

both current ministry priorities and the building of the future ministry organization.

The congregation voted to accept the recommendation of the GMTF for a new model of governance and structure for a trial period beginning in June.

Shannon Spencer, Associate Pastor, resigned to co-pastor the Haywood Street Congregation.

In October, Yolanda Adams was contracted as half-time Ministry Coordinator for six months.

Gary Mitchell led the Oak Street Singers on an exchange trip to our sister church in Germany.

### **2013**

The Ministry Coordinator position, held by Yolanda Adams, increased to a three-quarters time staff position with benefits.

Recognition of the need for a new heating system, the congregation authorized a study to determine the options. Geothermal HVAC was chosen as the best option.

Capital Campaign was authorized by the congregation with endorsement to proceed with geothermal HVAC.

New bylaws were written and approved.

The trial, seven-member Executive Board structure was formally approved as the new structure, effective January 2014.

Two standing committees were established: Finance and Personnel.

We completed United Church of Christ requirements to become a Just Peace congregation.

We began a partnership with Community High School.

Participation in Moral Monday activities that included acts of civil disobedience to address social justice issues at the state level led to several members being arrested. Senior Pastor Joe Hoffman was one of those arrested.

We started a pastoral intern program, with Cindy Bovee-Kemper as the first intern.

JP and Taleese Morrill begin to lead the youth program.

### **2014**

New form of governance was implemented under Governing Board consisting of 7 members.

Year-long Celebration of 100th year anniversary - celebrations included June 7 Dinner and June 8 Worship Service.

Church members continue participation and civil disobedience arrests at Moral Monday March gatherings in Raleigh.

Building Project Committee to formulate plans for Friendship Hall renovation due to new HVAC geothermal system.

Campaign Committee "Weaving Lives Together" formed; Campaign launched in March, concluded

in June raising commitments totaling \$1.2 million for renovations.

First Artist in Residence, Molly Must, engaged to work with congregation creating special art for FCUCC.

National UCC, with Senior Pastor Joe Hoffman, and church members Cathy McGaughey and Diane National UCC, with Senior Pastor Joe Hoffman, and church members Cathy McGaughey and Diane Ainsley among the plaintiffs, filed federal lawsuit against the State of North Carolina and its Amendment prohibiting gay marriage.

FCUCC begins partnership with Emma School Project.

Ice Bucket Event to raise funds for ALS research.

Marriage Equality upheld by Supreme Court striking down NC's marriage amendment. In its wake, numerous weddings were performed in our church, including many "walk--ins" referred here by the Register of Deeds.

Visitors from our German sister church were guests for the fourth exchange between congregations.

## **2015**

Renovation completed of the Friendship Hall and kitchen.

Improved handicap accessibility to/from the Friendship Hall & Education Building completed.

Geothermal wells and HVAC system completed; new sound system in the sanctuary and Friendship Hall installed.

Joe Hoffman, Senior Pastor, began a six-week sabbatical in June. Dorri Sherrill served as the short-term interim.

The Board was notified by the WNCA of Joe Hoffman's required Fitness Review and he was placed on extended leave of absence in August.

Interim role continued to be filled by Dorri Sherrill into September.

Margot Pickett, Intentional Interim Minister, became the interim pastor in late September.

The WNCA Commission on Ministry suspended Joe Hoffman's credentials for six months in October.

Joe Hoffman tendered his resignation as Senior Pastor on November 11.

Margot Pickett began an intentional interim period in December.

The Personnel Committee revised job descriptions for the Administrative Assistant, the Ministry Coordinator, the Minister of Music and Arts, the Facilities Manager, and the Assistant Minister.

## **2016**

Talese Morrill hired as part-time Youth Coordinator.

Personnel committee reviews and revises the Personnel Guidelines regarding the Staff Parish Relations Ministry.

Governing Board passes an Alcohol Policy.

Nine members make a pilgrimage to the Island of Iona, Scotland, to explore the wisdom of Celtic Christianity, through our Stir the Soul Café Ministries.

All-church retreat in August, weekend camping in September, Blessing of the Animals in October, Thanksgiving Dinner in November and annual Christmas party in December.

Nadine Hamby was hired as Administrative Coordinator, following Harper Leich.

Community ministries continued with Room in the Inn, Earth Team, Pritchard Park and Laundry Love.

Gary Mitchell resigned as organist/choirmaster.

## **2017**

A group of people attended the January Women's March on Washington.

Kevin Bryant joined the church staff as Organist/Choir director on January 3rd.

Anthony Sumner was hired as ¾ time Building & Grounds keeper.

Intentional Interim pastor Margo Pickett ministry concluded on May 14<sup>th</sup> and Intentional Interim pastor Lance Perry began his service on May 30<sup>th</sup>.

Stir the Soul ministries pilgrimage to Ghost Ranch, NM – to explore wisdom of Indigenous & Celtic theology.

During the summer, Taleese and JP Morrill resigned as Youth Coordinators.

Church profile completed in June and the Search Committee began its work.

Covenant Agreement signed by new Pastor in mid-November.

August – there was a Church Retreat at Camp Logan.

September was the Church Camping at RV Pride with Joanne Roudebush coordinating.

November was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Thanksgiving Dinner.

December 8<sup>th</sup> was the Annual Christmas Party at the Church.

Betty Dillashaw assumed the directorship of the Handbell Choir as a volunteer.

Children's Chime Choir ministry began under her direction.

## **2018**

Sr. pastor, Rev. Dr. Kimberly Buchannan began her pastorate time on February 1<sup>st</sup> and her installation was August 12<sup>th</sup>. The interim Pastor Lance Perry completed his work at the end of January..

Last of our church retreats at Lake Logan.

A handicapped ramp to the Art Gallery and Offices was installed.

Gay Men's Group started meeting in May. This monthly group serves an outreach to gay men within our church and in our community.

In July, the church leads a team to visit the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial For Peace And Justice in Montgomery, AL.

The Racial Justice Team is formed.

Rev. Andrew Hoots was hired as Youth Ministry Coordinator in July.

Worship Team is formed.

Yolanda Adams resigned as Ministry Coordinator in November.

Kevin Bryant, Organist/Choir Director, gave resignation notice in December and left Jan 6, 2019.

A Health Advisory Team formed, and a local group began working with the National UCC W.I.S. E. Program

The Safe Conduct Policy was revised and approved.

The initial repointing of the stonework was begun in December.

## **2019**

In the Spring, Joanna Best was hired as Music Director and Marika Straw was hired as organist. Joanna left within a few months and Marika started filling both positions.

Stir the Soul ministries pilgrimage to NYC to explore sacred spaces in urban areas.

The removal and replacement of the mortar (pointing) in the outside stonework was completed. The stained-glass windows were refurbished including removing coverings, painting the wood and adding new coverings.

Prison Ministry was begun with volunteers leading the Women's Choir. In April, the Choir came to FC-UCC to offer a concert.

In May, Casey Clark was hired as full time Administrative Coordinator.

Held a Ministry Fair in September to educate and engage more people. The H.A.T. received a NC Council of Churches "In Health and Wholeness" Grant. This made it possible to purchase an automated External Defibrillator

and train 10 people.

In November, Denzel McKnight was hired part-time to clean the church.

## **2020**

Mid-March Covid 19 Pandemic spread causing the church, and most places, to close.

First, we held worship services via Zoom. Soon after we were recording services ahead of time and posting them on YouTube on Sunday mornings and this continued for the rest of the year.

June – The work of the Racial Just Team intensifies after the nationwide riots surrounding the death of George Floyd.

In June the work of the Racial Justice Team intensifies after the nationwide riots surrounding the death of George Floyd. It began when the Oak Street gallery offered a display “Say Their Names”. This led to collaboration with YMI (Young Men’s Institute) and featuring Black Artists in the Gallery, opening with receptions.

The Sanctuary plaster was repaired and painting was done.

Board approved the church buildings be used for Code Purple during the winter months for shelter for the homeless. Code Purple ran the program.

Late in the year, we began preparing to move worship back into the sanctuary and still offer services on-line, by updating the sound system. Video equipment and monitors in the sanctuary were added.

## **2021**

The book “Me and White Supremacy” was offered by the Racial Justice Team as a church wide book study with three zoom discussion groups.

There was a contentious Zoom Church wide conversation regarding the new sanctuary monitors resulting in the Board chair resigning and leaving the church. Other people also left. Since the AV system, equipment upgrades and addition of the sanctuary monitors was a board decision and not a congregational decision, the board revised its plans for future expenditures over \$10,000, whether from the building fund or the operating budget, would need to be approved by the congregation.

In March, the church began pre-recording Sunday worship services in the sanctuary and within a month, services were live on YouTube. Amanda McCauley was hired as the Audio/Visual Technician.

Easter in April, the church held an outdoor sunrise service in the parking lot. This was the first in-person service held since March 2020 due to Covid-19.

In house worship resumed at the beginning of May with limited numbers, social distancing, and masking protocol in place.

Marika Straw resigned in June and Wayne Smith served as interim organist.

Chuck Taft began as Music Director on September 5th.

New Advent Paraments, made by artist Alycia Johnson, were first used.

Three amazing exhibits in the art gallery featured Black artists:  
Heather Talbot, Kai Lendzeon, and Jenny Pickens.

## **2022**

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Buchanan resigned in Feb. and March 13th was her last Sunday.

Rev. Alice Martin-Atkins served as interim pastor through May.

New Easter Paraments, made by Alycia Johnson, were first used.

Kathleen Stigmon started as our Administrative Coordinator on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Eric Fricke became our organist/pianist on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

Photographer, Farhad Kanuga, at the request of the Benevolence Team displayed photographs in the Oak Street Gallery highlighting scenes and activities of Asheville community organizations as they go about collecting, preparing and distributing food throughout the Asheville area. The church had presentations from 4 local food distribution organizations and congregants donated goods and funds to these organizations each week during Lent.

With a lead gift providing more than half the cost and a short fundraising appeal, the church purchased a new 3-octave set of Malmark Handbells in May to enhance the handbell ministry.

Rev. Gene Derryberry became our intentional interim pastor in June

Transition Team and Search Teams were announced in July.

In the late summer, Anthony Sumner's contract was not renewed and Doug Williams was hired as head of Grounds and Maintenance.

Room 107 was renovated and water damage repaired to create a new Bell Room.

After 2-year Covid hiatus, resumed participating in Asheville Pride.