

Early Organization of 'The Kirk' in Detail History of Kirk of Kildare Presbyterian (USA) Church

Early Days

During March 1977, backyard Presbyterian neighbors in Greenwood Forest, Leon Gabriel and Fred Manley, began discussing the idea of a new Presbyterian Church in Cary. (At 18,000 residents, Cary was continuing its population explosion—being located between Raleigh and the developing Research Triangle Park.) The Manleys had moved to Cary from west Raleigh in late 1974—retaining their membership at St. Giles where Fred was an elder and Celeste Manley was active in church school. The Gabriels had moved to Cary in early 1975 from Mooresville, where Leon was an elder and Joye Gabriel was active in church school at Fieldstone.

The First Actions

During mid-July 1977, Rev. Dr. Bill McCorkle, interim pastor at West Raleigh (where the Gabriels had been visiting) and former associate pastor at Raleigh First, was visiting the Gabriels and challenged Leon to provide leadership in the establishment of a new church in the Cary-Apex area. After Leon indicated that he and Fred had been discussing such an idea, McCorkle arranged a meeting of Leon, Fred, Orange Executive Presbyter John Danhof, and himself at West Raleigh on July 26, 1977. Consensus was reached that a need for a new church did exist.

A second exploratory meeting was held at Hudson Memorial on September 1, 1977. Attending were Bill Stewart of Orange Presbytery, Dot Bass of Hudson Memorial and member of the Orange Presbytery Church Development Committee and the Presbyterian Urban Council of Raleigh, Hudson Memorial Associate Pastor Herb Underwood, Leon, and Fred. The consensus of the first meeting was confirmed; there was a need for an additional church in the Cary-Apex area. Further logistical questions were explored, and it was made clear that there would be a great deal of effort required by the church's first congregation to have the church succeed. (At this point, the burden of responsibility rested with Leon and Fred. This was a vital turning point in the birth of the Kirk.)

July 26, 1977 consensus was reached that there was need for a new church in Cary, NC where a population explosion, created by the developing Research Triangle Park, resulted in employees making residence here.

Initial Local Leadership

The first step Leon and Fred took was to place an announcement in The Cary News stating that a group would meet at the Gabriel's house on October 13, 1977, to discuss the idea of a new church. The discussion group consisted of only eight people; however, there was excitement about a new church. One of these persons was Janet Holcombe—to become a vibrant member of the group. A second meeting was planned for mid-November.

The November 15, 1977, meeting at Greenwood Forest Baptist Church showed growing support for a new church. Thirty people attended this meeting, six of whom represented either Orange Presbytery or the Presbyterian Urban Council of Raleigh. A steering committee was appointed, and specific tasks were assigned. The steering committee consisted of Leon Gabriel (meeting

location leader), Fred Manley (treasurer), Janet Holcombe (music leader), Rev. James McGinnis, Dick Griffin, and Dot Bass (Presbyterian Urban Council of Raleigh representative.)

On November 22, 1977, the steering committee met at the Gabriel's house to plan the next gathering of the fellowship. Present were Rev. James McGinnis, Janet Holcombe, Fred Manley, and Leon and Joye Gabriel (Celeste Manley was at home with the Manley's newly adopted son, Judd.) It was decided to hold the meeting on December 4 and to publicize it through The Cary News and a direct mailing to those attending the meeting on November 15.

The First Service

The first service was held at 2:30 p.m. on December 4, 1977, at the MacGregor Downs Youth Center with 23 people attending. It consisted of a business meeting led by Leon Gabriel and a devotional service led by Rev. James McGinnis. The first hymn sung was "We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing." The scripture read was John 3:1-17, and the sermon was entitled "God So Loved The World." Rev. Bill McCorkle gave the offering prayer and Ed Wilson passed his hat for the collection.

The Presbytery Task Force

A Task Force appointed by Orange Presbytery's Division of Education and Missions met on January 6, 1978, and resolved to proceed officially toward establishing the church. Serving on the Task Force were Rev. Neil Bain (Ernest Myatt), Dot Bass, Rev. Milton Carothers (UNC-Chapel Hill campus minister), Dot Temple (West Raleigh), and Rev. Doug Vaughn as chair (of St. Giles and pastor of the Manleys). Representatives of the new congregation were Leon Gabriel, Fred Manley, and Louise Crawford. Rev. Dr. Bob Fields (pastor of Hudson Memorial), chair of the Presbytery's Division of Education and Missions, allotted a budget of \$11,355 as requested by Task Force Chair Vaughn. (Only \$700 was actually used with the remainder coming from the new church's offerings).

After the initial service seven weeks earlier, the first formal worship service was held January 22, 1978, at Jordan Hall and a worship service has been held every Sunday since then with the exception of instances of severe weather.

The First Formal Worship Service

The second (first formal) worship service was held on the afternoon of January 22, 1978, at Jordan Hall. (The \$25 rental cost was paid from the offerings of the first meeting on December 4, 1977.) Rev. Herb Underwood led the service, and his wife, Frances Underwood was pianist. (From this point on, a worship service has been held every Sunday exception of instances of severe weather.)

The First Sunday Morning Worship Service

The third (first Sunday morning) worship service was held at Brown-Wynne Funeral Home on January 29, 1978. Rev. Steve Shoemaker, Presbyterian campus minister at NC State University, led the service. The organist was Don Morrow. (It is noted that the youth at the service announced that they would not attend another service at the funeral home.)

Services Start at Kildaire Farms Visitors Center

At the request of Janet Holcombe who lived in the Kildaire Farms Planned Unit Development, the fourth meeting was held on February 5, 1978, at the Development's Visitors Center. The service started at 10:30 a.m. in order for it to stop and the Center's furniture returned to its original placing at 12 noon when the Visitors Center opened. (This is why the Kirk's worship service began at 10:30 a.m. until 1998.)

Leon Gabriel had earlier arranged for the rental of a room in Farmington Woods Elementary School that was under construction; however, the completion date had been delayed until June 1978. Bill Henderson, vice president of Kildaire Farms Development Corporation and an acquaintance of Fred Manley, recognized the church's dilemma and came to its aid. The son of a Methodist minister and a lay minister himself, Henderson overlooked the Corporation's rules that allowed a church to use the Visitors Center only twice in one year. He agreed to allow the church to use the Center during the remainder of 1978.

The Weekly Routine

By February 5, 1978, a weekly routine had begun. Names and addresses of those in attendance were taken, and each received a weekly mailing. Fred Manley, as treasurer, opened a bank account and maintained the budget. Leon Gabriel located a minister each week. Janet Holcombe led the congregation in singing a cappella. The task of providing coffee and cake or cookies rotated weekly among the fellowship.

It was also on this fourth meeting that the first Church School classes were held. A Children's Class was led by Joye Gabriel and Janet Holcombe. An Adult Class was led by Fred Manley, Carl Osman, Bill Abernathy, and Bob Phillips.

Search for an Organizing Pastor

In Spring 1978, a committee was appointed by Orange Executive Presbyter John Danhof to search for an organizing pastor. The chair was Rev. Doug Vaughn, pastor of St. Giles (the Manley's church) and chair of the new church task force. Serving on the committee were Leon Gabriel, Fred Manley, Louise Crawford, Dottie DuBose (White Memorial's Christian Education Director), and Milton Carothers. The committee first met on May 18, 1978, and began to examine resumes. Of 67 that were considered, four met with approval. Interviews with each of the four were conducted—the final being Rev. Dr. Eugene Witherspoon, Jr., who accepted the call. On June 20, 1979, Rev. Witherspoon became employed by Orange Presbytery as the organizing pastor, and his first service for the church was held on June 24, 1979. His sermon was entitled "No Borrowed Creed" with the text being I John 1:1, 3.

Finalized on January 2, 1980, 5.7 acres was purchased from the Kildaire Farms Development Corporation with a total cost of \$222,086.

Search for a Permanent Worship Location

By late 1978, a regular attendance had been established, and it was felt that the organizing church could reasonably consider purchasing a permanent meeting place. The fellowship had met continuously at the Kildaire Farms Visitors Center since February 5, 1978. Each Sunday before church school and worship, those attending would rearrange the tables, couches, and

chairs for the services. Hymn books were distributed, and coffee and doughnuts were set out. Additionally, ice cream was available for everyone from the Center's ice cream room—compliments of Kildaire Farms Development Corporation. Following each service, the furniture was returned to its original arrangement by 12 noon in order for the building to resume as the Visitors Center. This activity was not carried out laboriously, but rather as a time of fellowship prior to and after worship. (As noted earlier, this necessitated that worship begin at 10:30 a.m.—a practice that continued until 1998.) However, a need for some permanence was felt.

Leon Gabriel and Fred Manley looked at many sites and gave consideration to two: (1) the southeastern corner of Kildaire Farm Road and now Cary Parkway and (2) a 12-acre site on US 64 between MacGregor Downs and Apex (currently the site of the Eva Perry Regional Library in Shepherd's Vineyard) on which they personally negotiated an option to purchase. However, logistical problems concerning utilities and road access discouraged the purchase.

In Spring 1979, when Leon Gabriel and Fred Manley were discussing the use of the Visitors Center with Bill Henderson of the Kildaire Farms Development Corporation, Henderson agreed that the Center had become too small for the development and that plans were underway to move the building to another site and enlarge it. It was at this point that Leon Gabriel and Fred Manley suggested that the church might be willing to purchase the building and property.

In conjunction with the Task Force and Orange Presbytery representatives, a purchase price was negotiated. (It is noted that two other church groups were considering the property—one of which had submitted a bid substantially larger than that made by the fellowship.)

A business meeting was held following the worship service on April 8, 1979, to present the option to purchase to the congregation. A motion was approved to sign the option. Later, a motion to delay signing the option was defeated 10-9.

In the following months, Fred Manley established a fund to which contributions could be made toward the down payment of the mortgage loan. The closing date was set for the last day of December 1979.

On December 28, 1979, and January 2, 1980, the 5.7 acres was purchased from the Kildaire Farms Development Corporation. The contract sales price was \$219,130. Purchaser's expenses of \$2,956 made a total cost of \$222,086. A down payment of \$49,086 (\$12,604 from the church's treasury, \$2,250 from individual church members, \$15,000 from the Presbyterian Urban Council of Raleigh, \$19,000 from Orange Presbytery, and \$232 interest earned) left a loan amount of \$173,000. This was financed by Wachovia Bank and Trust of Durham (the bank of Orange Presbytery then located on the campus of Duke University) with Orange Presbytery guaranteeing the loan. The term was 15 years at 13% interest guaranteed for five years that meant monthly payments of \$2,189 or \$26,266 per year.

The Church Name Selected

During early August 1979, over 20 suggested church names were presented to a committee for a decision by members. After voting several times to narrow the list, the final proposals were presented to the congregation along with an explanation of the significance of each. The final seven names were: Kirk of Kildaire, Presbyterian; Providence; Pine Forest; Kildaire Farms; Community; Faith; and Amity.

Kirk of Kildaire, Presbyterian—the chosen name—was the suggestion of Janet Holcombe. It was taken from the 1979-80 Book of Church Order (PCUS), Our Confessional Heritage (PCUS), and the Scot's Confession. Janet Holcombe read excerpts from Our Confessional Heritage and Chapter 16 of the Scot's Confession entitled "The Kirk," as follows: "As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world, shall be, one Kirk; that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace him by true faith in Christ Jesus who is the only Head of the Kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus. This Kirk is catholic; that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with God the Father, and with his Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit."

Early Gifts and Celebrations

During its first years, many generous gifts came to the church. The piano was acquired through a Piano Fund that was started at the suggestion of Cynthia Harris. (By then, Dorothy Greene had consented to become the first choir director, and Mike Harris was the first pianist.) Beginning with the first meeting at the Visitors Center, the church used hymnbooks lent by Hudson Memorial. A Tractor Fund was started that purchased the first John Deere. The seating problem was helped by Western Boulevard through the loan of 100 folding chairs. Bobby Ransdell provided a permanent solution with the gift of stacking chairs. The first communion sets were lent by Cary Presbyterian and St. Barnabas. The church was given a communion set by Fred and Virginia Straub of Bethany Presbyterian in Covington, Georgia, where Rev. Witherspoon was a former pastor. The first pulpit (the white one in the Fellowship Hall) was given by Orange Presbytery. Bulletins and newsletters were produced with a mimeograph machine by Western Boulevard. Dot and Claude Greene gave the memorial stand and book. Nancy and William Stephenson gave the electronic organ—with Nancy being the first organist.

The first Christmas service held on December 12, 1978, was attended by 98 people. It was conducted by the youth and planned by Carol Cheney and Cynthia Harris.

The first baptism occurred before the fellowship officially became a church. Rev. Herb Underwood, associate pastor of Hudson Memorial, baptized Holly Fries, daughter of Tim and Sissy Fries. (Cader Howard, Jr., son of Cader and Noel Howard, was the first person to be baptized after the church was officially organized.)

The Service of Organization

The Service of Organization was held on Reformation Sunday, October 28, 1979, at 7 p.m. It was at this service that the hard work of so many people during the past 2 ½ years manifested itself in the form of a new church. The service was held at Kildaire Farms Visitors Center with nearly all of the church's members attending. In addition, representatives of other churches in Orange Presbytery attended to express their joy in and support of the new congregation.

The service consisted of three parts: (1) the Worship Service, (2) the Organization Service, and (3) the Congregational Meeting.

The worship service began with the call to worship by Rev. Herb Underwood followed by the hymn of praise, "The Church's One Foundation." The invocation was led by Dot Bass, and after the Lord's Prayer, Bob Stoops (elder at St. Giles and member of Orange Presbytery's Task

Force on Church Development) gave the scripture lesson from Ephesians 2:19-22 and 5:25-27. After the Children's Choir, directed by Mike Harris, performed "I Wonder How It Felt," Rev. Bill McCorkle delivered the sermon, "The Church and Her Future."

The organization service was led by Rev. Herb Underwood, who first examined the 15 charter members to be received by profession and reaffirmation of faith. They were: Jocelyn Carter, Duane Dawes, Susan Day, Claire Dixon, Lisa Fries, Andy Greene, Laura Manley, Robin Montgomery, Tom Montgomery, Carl Osman, Carol Osman, Joe Osman, Louis Parker, Robert Phillips, and Julia Sanderford. The Sacrament of Baptism was administered to Andy Greene and to Joe Osman.

Rev. Underwood then presented 77 charter members who were received by transfer of church letter. They were: Bill and Joan Abernethy, Shirley Blackman, Lynn Blackman, Tom and Vivian Carter, Jennifer Carter, Gil and Brenda Carol Chenery, Bob and Mary Jane Cleveland, Frank and Louise Crawford, Terri Crawford, Jim and Barbara Crissman, John and Connie Crook, Bill and Fran Dawes, Kim Dawes, Bob and Sharon Day, Martha and Roy Dixon, Linda Dixon, Bert Drake, Frank and Joan DuBose, Larry and Roberta Foster, Roxanne Foster, Wade Foster, John and Sue Fricks, Tim and Sissy Fries, Leon and Joye Gabriel, Dee Ann Gabriel, Dick Griffin, Claude and Dorothy Greene, David Greene, Mike and Cynthia Harris, J and Bob Hatley, Scooter and Janet Holcombe, Cader and Noel Howard, Steve and Pat Lee, Fred and Celeste Manley, Betty Parker, Bobby and Jackie Ransdell, Jack and Barbara Sanderford, Wendy Segreti, Steve Shearer, Vivian Ullrich, Dale and Sallie Van Horn, Keith and Pat Vaughan, Keith and Cathy Williams, Jesse and Pam Williford, Ed Wilson, Anne Wilson, Peggy Witherspoon, Kay Witherspoon, and Dan Witherspoon.

Following the presentation of the 92 charter members and the propounding of the constitutional question, Rev. Underwood declared: I now pronounce and declare that you are constituted a church according to the Word of God and the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The service of organization was concluded with a prayer by Rev. David Wiseman (Cary Presbyterian), the charge to the congregation by Dot Temple, and the hymn, "Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above."

The congregational meeting, led by Rev. Witherspoon, consisted of (A) the Confirmation of the Election of Ruling Elders and (B) the Confirmation of the Selection of the Church Name.

Ruling elders who were ordained and installed were: Louise Crawford, Frank DuBose, Janet Holcombe, Carl Osman, and Keith Williams. Ruling elders installed were: Bill Abernethy, Leon Gabriel, Claude Greene, Fred Manley, and Ed Wilson. (The Kirk started with unicameral government; however, it later added a diaconate and then trustees. It has returned to unicameral government.)

After the installation prayer and the declaration of installation, the name of the church was confirmed as THE KIRK OF KILDAIRE, PRESBYTERIAN. Rev. Witherspoon closed with the benediction, and the doxology was sung by all.

NOTE: This early history was compiled by Fred Manley with the significant contribution of the Kirk's first historian, John Crook, who was inspired to become historian by his father-in-law, Ed Wilson. Those who assisted John in his early work were: Leon Gabriel, Fred Manley, Janet

Holcombe, and Rev. Eugene Witherspoon. Fred apologizes for any errors of commission and omission due to inaccurate or incomplete information and/or to his “fading” memory and requests that anyone not hesitate to contact him to correct this history.