

GWYNEDD SQUARE'S HISTORY – The Highlights

The Gwynedd Square Presbyterian Church is the result of a dream of many area residents for whom the Presbyterian way has deep significance. The Philadelphia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the USA was concerned that the denomination be represented in a wide area which, prior to World War II, was largely Pennsylvania Dutch in character, and where no Presbyterian witness had been established.

In 1958, the Philadelphia Presbytery purchased a nine and one-half acre tract on which there was a well-built stone house to be used as a manse. In December of that year, the Rev. Donald F. Shaw, who had been called by the Presbytery to be the organizing pastor, met with six couples in an informal meeting. As a result of this meeting, arrangements were made to rent an old school auditorium on West Point Pike from the Upper Gwynedd School District.

The following year, 1959, this group of dedicated people got the building ready for the first worship service held on February 15. The service of organization was held on June 14, 1959, with 117 charter members. At the close of the year, membership had grown to 135.

On January 24, 1960 Mr. Shaw was installed as the first duly called pastor. On August 7, ground was broken for a chapel on the property located on Sumneytown Pike. Severe winter weather caused a delay in the completion of the building. However, by September 24, 1961, the dedication and consecration of the chapel portion of the first unit took place.

On February 22, 1965 Mr. Shaw notified the session of a call from the Tenafly Presbyterian Church. Later that year the Rev. Paul Corcoran was called to Gwynedd Square. The Presbytery of Philadelphia installed him as the pastor and spiritual guide on Sunday, September 12, 1965.

When the church was designed, the architect provided for a series of additions that could be constructed at the appropriate times. Increased attendance and crowded church school classes compelled the congregation to act on an expansion plan in 1967. Ground breaking took place on November 5, 1967 and the building was in full use by 1969.

Some key events and activities of the church are listed in the following chronology.

1968-1981 – the Easter Seal Society used the church space for a headquarters.

1968 – The church sponsored Peter and Krassy Raichev from Bulgaria and assisted them in finding an apartment and employment.

1971 – The Board of Deacons served as a clearinghouse for communication with the Montgomery County Housing Coalition. They helped newly formed North Penn Fish/Interfaith Emergency service by finding emergency housing for families in temporary need.

1972 and 1973 - The church helped people in Wilkes-Barre whose homes had been inundated by the Susquehanna River.

1973 – Church property was used as collateral to provide bail for people who were accused of non-violent crimes and were awaiting trial.

1975 – Two Vietnamese men were sponsored for admission to the United States and helped with resettlement.

1978 – The church sponsored its first two Cambodian refugees for admission to the United States. During this year, commitment to the refugee program was reaffirmed with time, talents and money.

1981 – The Youth Group "adopted" foster grandparents at the Gwynedd Square Nursing Home. They also raised money to sponsor two foster children in the Philippines. Twelve Koinonia groups were started as study and fellowship groups, meeting in members' homes. The refugee resettlement program expanded to include relatives and friends of previously sponsored people. The church has sponsored 50 Cambodians and co-sponsored 16.

1983 – The 1983 Headstart Program used church facilities for activities.

1983 – A Women's Association was organized. The members committed to contribute through service, gifts, and prayer to the work of the Association, to support the mission of the PC(USA), to grow in Christian faith and understanding and to act in Christian concern in the company of God's people everywhere.

1985 – There was a pulpit exchange during the summer months between the Rev. Paul Corcoran and the Rev. Derek Richmond from West Wickam, Kent, England. Also during 1985, a special offering was taken to provide aid to families left homeless as a result of the confrontation between Philadelphia Police and the MOVE Organization. The women of the church supplied sandwiches to Philadelphia Committee on the Homeless to be distributed among those in need. Church members embarked on a major fund raising campaign in support of a mission within the Presbytery of Philadelphia called "Partners in Mission: a Call to Faithfulness". The giving goal was \$18,000.

1986 – On February 16, 1986, the Rev. Paul Corcoran announced his retirement, effective July 31, 1986. In December, the Rev. Thomas Wray began serving as Interim Pastor.

1988 – In March the Rev. James R. Barber began serving as our Pastor.

1989 – The B.L.U.E. (Building and Land Use Evaluation) Committee completed its report. It was determined that our congregation desired to grow in numbers and expand our facility.

1991 – The Feasibility Task force completed its report along with Diserod and Wolff Architects to identify areas of expansion and present preliminary plans. In March a second Sunday worship service was instituted.

1991 – Our session voted to recommend the calling of an Associate Pastor to increase our staff. This would allow us to grow both in numbers and spiritually, since at that time it was felt that the building expansion was out of reach financially. The Rev. Jamie L Kenyon was called in January 1992 and served through November of 1995.

1994 – In December 1994, the church adopted the following as its mission statement:
"Out of commitment to Jesus Christ, we will *seek the* Lord with all our *being*, *follow* Christ's example for life and service, *lead* others to understand God's love and forgiveness and *renew* our spirits by the power and grace of God."
The official mission statement also includes the Chi-Rho monogram, encircled by "seek, follow, lead and renew," connected by arrows.

1995 – The church Growth & Building Expansion committee was formed by session to reinvestigate the possibilities of expansion.

1996 – The Rev. Manisha S. Shendge was called as our Interim Associate Pastor. In July our session voted to begin a building campaign. In November the congregation overwhelmingly voted to "proceed with the intent to build a new sanctuary with fellowship hall and to make necessary renovations in the existing facilities including classroom space and offices."

1998 – The Rev. Lesley J. Blair came as Associate Pastor of Membership, Evangelism and Christian Education. Construction began. The congregation supported three Sudanese refugees.

1999 – The Rev. James Barber retired. The Rev. Lesley Blair officiated at a service of transition on September 12, 1999. The Rev. Steven R. Garstad was called as Interim Pastor. The building was dedicated on October 24, 1999. Volunteers worked on the new fellowship hall.

2000 – The Mission 2000 Study Committee was formed. The mission statement for the committee was “to discern God’s call to mission for our church and to fulfill God’s will through the active involvement of the congregation.” The pipes were installed for the new organ. The Rev. Lesley J. Blair left her call to Gwynedd Square to be married and reside in Texas.

2001 - Kimberly Koczan Flory was welcomed to help with our youth program. On March 25, a worship service and Organ Dedication was held. The organ has 2500 pipes and was designed to support congregational singing and accompany choirs. At our annual outdoor service and picnic on June 10, Rebecca (Becca) Vetterani, who came to Gwynedd Square as our Minister to Families of Children and Youth, was introduced to the congregation.

2002 – Little Lambs Daycare began offering daycare in June. The Rev. Steven R. Garstad completed his call as Interim Pastor on October 27. The Pastor Nominating Committee called the Rev. David M. Poland from his church in Salem, NJ. He began preaching at Gwynedd Square on November 17.

2003 – The Rev. David Poland was installed on February 9. Kimberly Koczan Flory completed her time at Gwynedd Square on February 23. Becca Vetterani left in June and Melissa Brown was welcomed in August as Director of Children & Youth Ministries.

2006 – Melissa Brown left in July and Al T. Henderson was welcomed in December as Director of Ministry to Children and Youth.

2008 – Al T. Henderson left at the end of August.

2009 – On January 18, 2009 the Rev. Rebecca Kahnt was called as Associate Pastor.

2010 – The Rev. David Poland resigned in September

2011 – The Rev. Marie Cone came to GSPC as our Interim Pastor.