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Glad Tidings

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A CONGREGATION WITH VISION

Eagle Scout Alex Dante created a wonderful display cabinet for the historic records and treasures of our congregation; many of these reflect the evolving vision of our congregation. Here is a retrospect. Certainly the first vision of the Presbyterians in the area of Haddonfield was to have a congregation of their own. Elizabeth Haddon Estaugh and several freehold Quaker neighbors envisioned a Quaker community for “New Haddonfield” in 1721, the same year in which the Presbyterians in Philadelphia, just across the river, established their first synod with four presbyteries. Haddonfield was a Quaker community for its first 96 years, with the Baptists in 1817, followed by the Methodists and the Episcopalians, all establishing congregations. From the beginning of the Reformed Faith, Presbyterians had always stressed hard work, great generosity, and a useful life. Their vision was: “Work as hard as you can, make as much as you can, and give away as much as you can.” The local Presbyterians’ vision of a congregation of their own began to take shape in 1858 when 5 residents of the town asked the Presbytery of West Jersey to send them occasional preachers. The presbytery complied, preachers coming to Haddonfield on the first and third Sundays of every month. Then, following the War Between the States, in September, 1871, 36 local Presbyterians petitioned the presbytery to organize a congregation. November 21, 1871—which we commemorate on Founders Day—was the date of the formal organization. Within three years the membership had grown to 43 and the cornerstone was laid for a church building on the lot where the present Lighthouse (Westminster House/Manse) stands. An inspired vision of the congregation was to build their house of worship near the railroad station, and the first church was finally completed in 1882. Meanwhile, the congregation became very interested in domestic and foreign missions. By 1894 FPC Haddonfield had helped found a mission church (Logan Memorial) in nearby Audubon, and this was the first of 8 daughter churches founded from Haddonfield. The congregation was also in the 1890s supporting the Rev. Wilbur M. Campbell in the foreign field of ministry, in Hainan, China. By 1900 the congregation had grown so large that a new, larger church building was needed. Our present building was the gift of Mr and Mrs Henry Dyer Moore in 1905, completed in 1908 with a capacity of 475. (The congregation raised the money to build the next-door manse by various schemes, musical programs, a “little folks festival”, a cook book, and an “open air party.”) By 1911 the congregation had grown to more than 1000 and, following the Great Wars, renovations and extensions of the church followed. The sanctuary was extended in 1948, and a Christian Education building constructed in 1958. FPC by then had 2800 members and supported many overseas missions, including members of our congregation and friends working in Japan. In 1949 funds were raised for an airplane to enable Rev. Sam Lee to minister to his flock over 5000 square miles in northern Alaska. At home, the church was gifted in 1954 a camp in Medford Lakes which was used for church functions as well as a summer camp bringing kids from Camden. During the turbulent 1960s-80s the congregation’s vision turned to Camden City where FPC was a strong supporter of the Camden Metropolitan Ministry, its mission of bringing hope, empowerment, education, peace and justice in the city, and its missionary, the Rev. Sam Appel.

Also, in the 1970s the congregation supported a “marketplace ministry” at the Echelon Mall and a “boardwalk ministry” conducted in the shadow of the glitz of the casinos in Atlantic City. Under Dr. Robert L. Veon church members began their own mission trips with the first one being a team traveling to Arizona to work for week with the Parker Valley UPC. We also welcomed to staff the Rev. Harvey Sindima, from Malawi, who was doing graduate work and teaching at Princeton. Rev. Sindima was an African missionary doing ministry among us! But more was to come. Even as the sanctuary side balconies were created in 1964, Dr. Joan Gault helped found, from our church, Interfaith Caregivers whose offices are now in Wezner House. Caring Hearts Ministry, the idea of Joe Routon, was established to work with children of those with AIDS. A Women’s Prison Ministry is yet another of our visions realized. We continue our attempts to show the compassion of Jesus Christ as well as to strive for justice and peace.—

David Stedman