COURAGE, CALAMITY, AND COMPASSION:
200 YEARS AT MULBERRY STREET UMC
A HISTORY STROLL ON THE EVE OF OUR 200TH ANNIVERSARY

Rev. Creede Hinshaw

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"O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell and the place in which you abide." Psalm 26:8

FRONT STEPS OF MULBERRY STREET SANCTUARY

Today you will taste a very small slice of our history. Think of this tour as the experience you get at a tapas restaurant – small plates of many dishes, leaving you wanting to return for more.

We stand outside the heartbeat of this church, the soul of this congregation. Inside these doors, or other doors less prominent, Methodist pastors for two centuries have preached, baptized, served the sacrament, and officiated at weddings and funerals. In this hallowed sanctuary for two centuries people have chased away the dark nights, walked the narrow path and known the risen Christ. From this sanctuary have emerged people renewed, restored, and redeemed.

Let's get a taste of worship here approximately one hundred fifty years ago. We will meet a couple of faithful Methodists described by the Rev. J. W. Burke, one of our associate pastors. Here is his description of a faithful married couple:

"Among the faithful members of Mulberry Street Church was old Brother and Sister Forsyth, both now dead, and in heaven, I have no doubt. The last shout I ever heard in (Mulberry Street Church) was from Sister Forsyth. I remember it well – how bright she looked – how happy she was. She had her same seat in the corner and was always there. It has been a long time since I heard that shout. Now I think what consternation would seize a congregation at Mulberry Street if anybody should shout as good old Sister Forsyth did on that day." (Rev. J. W. Burke *Autobiography: Chapters from the Life of a Preacher*, 1884, page 77)

In the early 19th century Methodists were often known as Shouting Methodists because in our worship services we did not hold back. We called out "Amen, Hallelujah, Glory, glory, glory!" We were expressive back then.

We shouted, and we sang with gusto. Rev. Burke fondly remembered Uncle Jimmy Williams:

"He was a plain man, not educated, but for fidelity to the church he had no superior. He was much opposed to introducing the organ into the church; he said he was afraid it would injure the singing. He believed in the old style of singing, such as old Brother Hardeman used to give us." (Rev. J. W. Burke *Autobiography: Chapters from the Life of a Preacher*, 1884, page 85)

Old Brother Jimmy wasn't the only Methodist who opposed the organ. One of our former pastors scolded us for having one. But we've almost always had an organ, though not without complaint. Consider these two excerpts from the minutes of our Board of Stewards:

Jan 7, 1902 – "Mr. Harter called attention to certain noises made by the organ which disturbed public worship." Dec 1906 – "By unanimous vote the organist was told to play the hymns in slower time, or in the time the congregation is accustomed to sing."

And then there is this matter of the proper role of the choir in our worship service. In 1906 Brother Ainsworth, our pastor, told the Board of Stewards: "High class music should be avoided." (I assume he would have opposed tonight's concert.) The music should always be secondary to the preaching." (How ironic that our choir is named for the pastor who made it clear the choir played second fiddle.)

We are proud that six men from Mulberry went on to become bishops. The one with the most compelling story is the only one of the six who never served as our pastor. Oscar Penn Fitzgerald walked up these steps in 1852, not as a pastor, but as a 23-year-old Virginian who was living in a downtown Macon hotel and working for a church member. Having recovered from a deadly typhoid fever, he came here during a revival to express his gratitude to God. At the conclusion of the service, he knelt at our chancel amid prayer and song, discovered that "Heaven came into my soul" and chose Jesus Christ as Lord. (*Sunset Views in Three Parts*, Oscar Penn Fitzgerald, 1900, pages 77-79)

He immediately joined our church, was assigned to a Methodist class meeting filled with serious Methodists, was soon granted a preacher's license and thereafter appointed to a small congregation. There were souls to save; we didn't waste time.

Next, Fitzgerald was sent to the gold rush fields of California where his first four funerals were two suicides and two murders. He wrote that gold dust and whiskey, fighting and shooting, made his life lively. That he later became a bishop is interesting. But what is important is Oscar Penn Fitzgerald walked into our church seeking God. He walked out a new man.

These church doors have not always been open to everybody. Until the 1960s white people only could enter this sanctuary.

In 1964 our ushers – uncertain what they should do should a black person try to enter Mulberry – voted to politely, but clearly turn away any who might try to enter. We would offer to help them find a church and explain to them that in the absence of a clear policy we could not allow them inside.

Soon the issue was taken up by our Executive Committee composed of 16 prominent community leaders. Led by William Fickling, Senior, a giant in this congregation, these men voted 13-3 to open our doors to all people. But their recommendation had to be ratified by our Administrative Board, which voted by secret ballot, the decision being too controversial for a

show of hands. By the slim margin of 32-26 we opened our doors to all and our church took a halting, courageous step that probably cost us both members and contributions.

COURTYARD

On this site once stood our first parsonage. It has long since been torn down, and we have owned parsonages all over this city.

Before us lies a labyrinth. This is not a maze. A maze is laid out to confuse. A labyrinth is an ancient Christian tool laid out to clarify. The twisting path leads to the center and then back out by a different way. I encourage you to walk it. It might represent the twisting path our own congregation has taken over two hundred years.

We stand in front of the Centennial Building, built in our one hundredth year, 1926. In the Roaring Twenties we were bursting at the seams and this building was a necessity. In our bond application we described ourselves: "We are one of the most prominent churches in Macon and considered one of the leading churches in Southern Methodism." Those statements were true.

In 1923 our Sunday School enrollment was 1,041 students. Our weekly Sunday School attendance was 707. We had 73 teachers. (Sixty years ago, our average Sunday School attendance was still 640.)

In 1926 we were brimming with confidence. Listen to these remarkable words. They are addressed to you and me and contained in our May 4, 1926, church bulletin: "One hundred years from now, if the world continues, the generation then living and worshiping at Mulberry Street Methodist Church will reverently tell the story of what we did." (That's what we are doing this weekend!) "Having set our hand to the plow, not one of us has ever dreamed of looking back."

Not long after 1926, though, we most certainly *did* look back. The Great Depression devastated us. In 1936, 72 Methodist Church buildings were sold for their debts. We almost joined that group. As Methodist Bishop Charles Galloway said, "We have built churches on faith and paid for them in repentance." (*Methodist Meeting Houses*, Paul Neff Gardner, pages 80-81).

1933 was one of the darkest years in our history. Our annual budget had shrunk to $13,000. We could barely pay the preacher and the power bill. We owed our bondholders $145,000…eleven times more than our budget. When we begged the C&S Bank for a 5-year moratorium on paying off the bonds, the bank accused us of failing to meet the standards of common honesty because many of our bondholders were widows and others totally dependent on this income.

The crushing debt, however, was only half the tragedy, because also in 1933 our senior pastor, Carl Gregory, committed suicide.

Reverend Gregory had been appointed here from San Antonio, Texas, in December 1932 and promptly took a 2-month leave of absence to recover from exhaustion. On Palm Sunday 1933 he returned to the pulpit and preached a triumphant sermon. We gave him a loving reception after church. That night he shot himself in Baconsfield Park, hovering near death for two days in the Macon hospital. He was 45 years old, leaving behind a widow and three sons. The newspaper, in its front-page coverage, said our pastor suffered from "melancholia."

We faced bankruptcy and this shocking death in the same year. The C&S Bank finally allowed us to pay our bondholders pennies on the dollar and we were legally rescued. We could have left it at that, but we were determined to fulfill our moral and ethical obligations and in the 1940s we established the Golden Rule Committee to repay every penny borrowed. By 1945, twenty years after construction, we succeeded.

In the center of the second floor is my favorite stained-glass window, dedicated to church member William Blount Burke, who set out in 1905 with his new wife to became a missionary in China for 50 years, including imprisonment by the Japanese during World War II.

Few people remember that his father, J. W. Burke, who I have already cited, was also a Methodist preacher who played a significant role in the life of this church.

J. W. Burke was our associate pastor in the late 1850s and early 1860s. He also was a printer by trade and owned and operated one of the largest printing concerns in the South. For decades he printed the Methodist newspaper the *Southern Advocate* and ran a prominent book concern at 146 Second Street. This Burke was the final white pastor appointed to our enslaved congregation, a story I will continue.

VACANT LOT – CORNER MULBERRY AND NEW STREETS

On this site once stood a two-story brick building where the South Georgia bishop and the Conference Administrative Offices stood. The building was demolished within the past two decades; the church had drawn plans to build a children's playground here. I have used this vacant lot to lay out the dimensions of our first church, which measured 40' x 60' and would have stood on the corner of Mulberry and First Streets.

On December 23, 1826, the State of Georgia deeded to our congregation "Lots one and two in Square sixty-five, each containing half an acre more or less." A clear brook rippled through a splendid grove of oaks here.

Our first church building was completed in the fall of 1828 and was probably called a Meeting House or Chapel. (*Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia*, 1879, John C. Butler, page 96)

We have no drawings of the first church, but these instructions from the 1824 Methodist *Book of Discipline* would have guided us:

Let our churches be built plain and simple, not more expensive than absolutely unavoidable; otherwise, the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent upon them and governed by them. And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not doctrine, too.

Enslaved persons undoubtedly did much of the construction, both of our first and second sanctuary. The interior might have had 10-12 rows of benches with a downstairs seating capacity of 175-225. These benches were described as "…the poorest kind of seats in which to take a nap during the sermon." (*Methodist Meeting Houses*, p 36) A gallery on three sides could have held another 150 or so persons. The chapel would have been lighted by tallow candles; the pulpit may have been a home-made box. The building may have been windowless. There would have been no heat. There were probably two doors, one for men, the other for women with an interior partition separating the two.

In this early chapel was held two significant meetings. The first was in 1831, when the Georgia Conference was organized here. Methodism had outgrown the South Carolina Conference and needed our own conference, which was organized here. This is why we are called the Mother Church of Georgia Methodism, not because we founded 12 congregations, which is an inspiring story in itself. (*A History of Methodism in Georgia 1736-1955*)

The second meeting took place in 1835 when Wesleyan College was chartered as the first female college in the world to grant degrees to women. Civic leaders in attendance that evening – some of them members of our church - insisted the Methodist Church govern Wesleyan because of our vitality, stability, and organizational genius. They were afraid if Wesleyan were run by anybody else it would quickly fail.

Do you know why our first chapel had a gallery on three sides? They were for the enslaved persons.

Our people were enslavers. Not all of them, of course, but quite a few of us. We owned lots of slaves. Some of our pastors were enslavers. The Dunlap family - from whose generosity came the endowment that today sustains this church – enslaved 19 persons on their plantation. Although we must guard against judging our ancestors too harshly, we must not hide the fact that racial issues have run through our entire history, a fact that impacted the wealth of our people and even the continuing viability of our church.

American Methodism initially expelled anybody who owned slaves. But because this stance inhibited the preaching of the gospel in the South, we rescinded our opposition, accepting and defending the enslaving of Africans, aiming to convert both master and enslaved person and hope for the best.

Our enslaved members worshiped in the gallery until around 1850, when they became too boisterous and our white members moved them out. (Holsey Temple CME history in our

Historical Room) We bought a corner lot for them in an area called the Northwest Commons. The enslaved persons purchased used lumber and built the church.

But moving our enslaved people to their own building created new headaches. We didn't allow them to meet by themselves because we were often terrified of potential slave uprisings. At the Quarterly Conference of June 15, 1859, "Brother Blakely Smith moved… that no meeting be held in…the Colored Charge…(unless) a white person is present…except once each month." A white Methodist pastor was appointed each year to be pastor of this congregation.

The enslaved church building must have been large. In 1861 we reported 497 "colored" members and an additional 274 "colored" probationary members, approximately one-fourth of all the enslaved persons in Macon. (Our white congregation had 589 members and 123 probationers) (*Journal of the Georgia Conference* 1861) In three decades our few humble members had grown to become a wealthy, powerful congregation.

CORNER OF MULBERRY AND NEW STREET

By 1860 the city of Macon had 2,829 enslaved people. These persons often lived in shacks behind the homes of their masters. ("Macon, GA, 1823-1860: A Study in Urban Slavery", Donnie D. Bellamy, Phylon, Vol 45, No. 4, 1984, pps 298-310)

The most famous African American who lived in Macon is not Otis Redding or Little Richard. It is Ellen Craft, an enslaved woman who lived in slave quarters behind that 3-story mansion. In a daring and dramatic escape in 1848, she disguised herself as a white man and her husband pretended to be her slave. They fled north by taking the train to Savannah where they boarded a ship and escaped to New England. The Crafts became international celebrities and leaders in the abolition movement. Their story was recently told in the Pulitzer Prize winning book *Master Slave Husband Wife*. (2023, Ilyon Woo, Simon and Schuster)

What is only briefly alluded to in the book is that a member of our church was Ellen Craft's enslaver. When church member Elizabeth Cleveland Smith died in 1879, the Macon paper reported that our church was full at her funeral and that Mrs. Smith was "strong with intellectual powers and was as well-known as any lady in the city." (*Find-a-Grave*, Elizabeth Cleveland Smith). Mrs. Smith gave the enslaved Ellen to her daughter as a wedding gift and the enslaved eleven-year-old Ellen Craft moved to this three-story mansion. Her new enslaver was her white half-sister.

Slave laws in Georgia were extremely harsh. It was illegal to teach slave to read; anyone found guilty would be fined or sent to jail. Slaves were forbidden to work in printing offices. They could not be out after dark or gather in public. (A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," Clement Eaton. Journal of Southern History, Volume 2, #3, 1936, pp 323-334)

BENEATH OAK TREE ON ASPHALT PARKING LOT (NEW STREET)

We worship where for thousands of years villages stood and campfires burned, where deer and bear were hunted, where Native American children were initiated into adulthood, songs were chanted and spirits and ancestors were revered. Gradually, by legal and extralegal means, Georgia dispossessed these people. Whereas our original deed promises that we Methodists can "have, hold, use, occupy and enjoy this land forever," we remember that we are simply the current stewards of this land.

We bought property when we could, eventually owning almost this entire city block. A downtown church can never own too much property, and our ancestors should be commended for their vision.

This oak tree is 200 years old. (My calculations using ChatGPT) It was a sapling when this church was young. It might be the oldest living thing in downtown Macon. Where we now stand the forest was once unbroken.

For me this tree represents the Kingdom of God spreading across the city and world from this corner. We have always been a missionary people.

Starting somewhere in the late 19th century we had a women's group called the Home Relief Society. In the 1890s these women made home visits to the poor, distributing food and cash. They bought sewing machines to give to poor women; they negotiated reduced fares for the poor on the city trolley car line. In March 1895, when they noted a number of children in Macon running wild who were too young to work in the factories they discussed opening a day school in our SS building. In 1893, these women pledged $2/month to support a Home for Girls who wished to reform an evil life. I assume this was a home for unwed mothers. We have always had a heart for the poor.

The Wesleyan Service Guild was organized in September 1940 with 50 women. In 1943, when most Americans reviled the Japanese, they sent $5 to a Japanese Relocation Center. In January 1944, when Jim Crow laws were extremely harsh, they gave a shower for the Negro Girls Reform School. In February 1947, sixteen years before the Civil Rights Act, they organized a program on interracial relations. In January 1951, when Native Americans were largely invisible, they gave $10 to provide vitamins for American Indians. In April 1957, they gave $25 for public health work in Cuba.

On another front, in July 1946 our pastor, Silas Johnson, asked the trustees to approve a church run kindergarten to hold 20-40 children and be operated by church member Mrs. R. L. Day. Tuition would be based on parent's ability to pay, thus its doors opened to the poor as well as to the prosperous. I am not sure whether we opened this ministry, but this action shows the mission heart we have always had for children.

Our Youth Center, which opened in 1953, was some 50 years ahead of its time. We had both a bowling alley and a potter's wheel in the church, and held dances every weekend. Cubbedge Snow reported that membership in 1964 was a staggering 3,298.

With the eventual demise of the Youth Center, which I believe was tied to integration, the downstairs space was ripe for a new ministry. Determined and visionary church women founded Macon Outreach at Mulberry, the premier church social service agency in Middle Georgia. Though quite successful, the ministry was controversial within our church. Some members resented that the Youth Center was no more. Others were afraid of homeless people and accused the poor of being freeloaders. The ministry, however, fed, clothed, and gave hope to thousands of people as it gave witness – and still gives witness – to the love of Jesus.

We have built a house for Habitat for Humanity, drilled wells in Central America, built a church in Costa Rica, and worked with Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic. Our youth have taken multiple mission trips to Appalachia and elsewhere. We have supported missionaries to Cuba and China and once had a connection with the Methodist Seminary in Moscow.

In 1946 we hosted the first free blood tests and chest x-rays in Bibb County, an extension of our embodiment of the love of Christ. Perhaps that outreach prefigured the Macon Volunteer Clinic, which leases our two-story building for $1 a year. This incredible clinic, founded by a Methodist physician, provides physical and mental health care to those in this community with inadequate health insurance.

Across the street sits our Community Garden, begun here under the ministry of Tommy Martin, thanks to the inspired leadership of Jack Head. A group of church volunteers works in this garden weekly. The food – locally sourced! – is given to Macon Outreach so the poor can eat fresh fruit and vegetables.

Adjacent to the Garden is our Community Clothes Closet, staffed by volunteers from across the city and engaged in acts of mercy by clothing the neediest persons in Middle Georgia.

FORMER CHERIO LIQUOR STORE
(Corner of New and Walnut Streets)

This building used to house a liquor store, these bricks and mortar now redeemed for Kingdom purposes. Methodism once expected and demanded followers to display distinctive habits and strive for personal holiness. In early Methodism we were "notoriously rigorous, taking a sharp counter-cultural stance on many occasions.", (*Early Methodist Life and Spirituality*, Lester Ruth, 2005, page 7) We were firmly opposed to drink, to dance, to amusement and to fine dress. If you didn't follow these rules, we expelled you.

Here are some examples, (taken from church records dating back to 1837) of how we expected members to live pious lives:

November 1847 – In the case of Brother Lanier there appeared a difficulty on the score of his selling ardent spirits. Brother Crumly and Brother Rylander were appointed to visit him and endeavor to dissuade him from this practice, as a scandal to the church.

February 1854 – The preacher reports that Dr. Osler is guilty of drinking and being a drunkard.

April 1854 - Dr. Osler brings character witnesses from the medical faculty who testify to his uprightness. He may have had alcohol smell on his hands after surgery, he said, and drank some brandy for his health. The Quarterly Conference severely censured him for his conduct. The doctor expressed his sorrow and shame and promised to do nothing of the kind again.

First Quarterly Conference of 1878 – Our pastor, Rev. McDonald, reports, "If I have been correctly informed, the theatre and the ballroom are liberally patronized by members of this church. This is a growing evil. I will use private admonitions and pulpit instruction to bring about a more healthy situation."

December 8, 1903 - The Board of Stewards was informed that various religious denominations were presenting a petition to City Council requesting additional regulations for the saloons of Macon. Recognizing the vital importance of a large number of supporters to attend, the Board promptly paused their meeting and proceeded to city hall...

February 1906 - It came to attention of Board that Bro O. C. Gibson had been making bets on elections and other things and that a statement that he had just made a large bet had recently come out in a Macon newspaper. A committee was appointed to visit Brother Gibson and request that he publicly deny the newspaper article or withdraw from the church.

Our 1921 South Georgia Annual Conference approved this statement about Public Bathing Places: "We believe that perhaps here as nowhere else is being destroyed the modesty of womanhood, which has meant so much to society. We unsparingly condemn the scanty one-piece bathing suits worn at modern bathing resorts."

We also stressed social holiness, sometimes courageously.

In the 1920s, when hundreds of hooded Ku Klux Klan members marched down Cherry Street, cheered on by a crowd of thousands, our pastor, Walter Anthony, preached a sermon condemning the KKK, saying, "America is cursed with the quackery of the hooded minions…" (*Macon Black and White*, Andrew Manis, 2004, page 94)

In another sermon later the same year, he said, again from the pulpit, "The men who choose mobs are not patriots. They are generally the scum and criminal element…" (*Ibid*, page 97) I love his boldness.

In 1937 our pastor, George Clary, convened a bi-racial group described as having completed the "most significant racial work in Macon." This group worked to build "positive good-will in a bi-racial society." (*Ibid*, page 131). That group founded the Booker T. Washington Center, which continues to serve Macon today.

Standing next to these redeemed bricks and mortar I ask, "How are we United Methodist Christians distinctive today? How are we identifiable as Christians who are set apart? What personal and social evils are we willing to oppose?

CORNER OF NEW AND WALNUT STREETS (175 NEW STREET)

On this corner stood the church building where our enslaved congregation worshiped between 1850-1869. Imagine it is January of 1866. Try to comprehend the change in society between master and enslaved person. Free for six months, the former slaves voted to remain Methodist, but to join the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Initially our congregation affirmed and blessed their decision.

The first black pastor of this congregation was Henry McNeal Turner, a free black man and a highly educated Methodist Civil War Chaplain who also was elected to the State Legislature and became Macon's first black postmaster. Our Main Post Office bears his name; you can see it as you drive down College Street. "Turner was one of the 19th century's most influential black leaders." (*Today in Georgia History*, May 8, 1915) Numerous books have been written about Turner's life and ministry.

The second black pastor of this congregation, Theophilus Steward, was equally gifted. His autobiography, which is available online, includes very specific details about how he and his congregation interacted with us during the tense years 1867-1869.

(Theophilus Gould Steward, *Fifty Years in Gospel Ministry 1864-1914*, 1922, Chapter 4; Also see the *Henry McNeal Turner Project* – online – especially Turner's letters and newspaper dispatches during this period.)

Although both congregations began by respecting each other, the relationship between the former enslaved church and their former enslavers up the street was probably destined to fail.

Eventually we, the white church, began to mistrust the African Methodist Episcopal congregation. Here they worshiped enthusiastically and held successful revivals. And that was fine with us. But here they also organized to gain full voting rights and become full citizens, an endeavor which made us – and most white Southerners - very uneasy.

When their second pastor, Theophilus Steward, asked our trustees to transfer the property to the AME Church, we stonewalled them.

In August 1868 we demanded that our former enslaved brothers and sisters surrender their church building to us. In October 1868 we served our former slaves with a summons to appear in Superior Court to answer an eviction notice.

On February 17, 1869, the Bibb County Sheriff came to this corner and demanded Rev. Steward hand over the keys to the church. The Reverend Steward refused to do so. This would have been a highly courageous act: a black pastor refusing to cooperate with a white law enforcement official. That night an unknown arsonist burned the church to the ground. The culprit was never found, although there were multiple accusations. The Macon newspaper scurrilously accused the African Americans of destroying their own church building.

Adding to the intrigue, when the AME church mistakenly allowed their insurance policy to lapse, we quickly bought our own policy for the land and building. Very soon thereafter the arsonist did his work.

The homeless congregation very quickly moved to Cotton Avenue and laid the cornerstone for a brick church in April 1869, with 2,000 people at the groundbreaking. That church is Steward Chapel AME Church, named for their brave pastor who stood his ground on this corner and refused to give us the church keys.

Except for a few scattered sentences in our quarterly conference records, our church has never told this story, nor is it recorded in our church archives. Of these early days of Reconstruction, we have chosen to highlight that we helped found Holsey Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church.

The Holsey Temple Methodists were also our former enslaved persons who apparently had second thoughts about belonging to the AME Church. They separated themselves from the AME congregation and drew nearer to their former enslavers. We embraced that splinter group rather than the much larger group who became Steward Chapel AME Church.

We used the fire insurance settlement of $1,425.24 to buy property on Washington Avenue for these former slaves who became Holsey Temple CME Church.

Parts of this history are murky and slightly contradictory; more study is needed. But this story is accurate in every major detail; it deserves a place in our historical room, humbling as is the account. This is our history.

We might ask ourselves this question, “Is it time to establish a meaningful relationship with Steward Chapel and Holsey Temple, the two Methodist congregations birthed out of our once enslaved people?”

CONCLUSION

At Mulberry Street United Methodist Church, we have had two centuries of sermons, conversions, quickened hearts, quarterly conferences. We have acquired property and prestige. We have installed coal furnaces, gas lights, and air conditioning. We have gone from quill pen to typewriter, from mimeograph to copier, from fax to computer and internet. We have watched our members march off to war, seen sons and daughters called into ministry, survived boom and bust, the 1918 influenza attack and the 2019 covid tragedy. We have seen most of the twelve congregations we founded die premature deaths. We have welcomed the inclusion of female leadership both lay and clergy. We have recognized that God's call to membership and ordination is dependent upon gifts and graces rather than sexual orientation. We have transitioned from the Methodist Episcopal Church to the Methodist Episcopal Church South to the Methodist Church to the United Methodist Church. We have withstood the recent departure of a dissatisfied, conservative faction of our denomination.

In January 1966, our pastor, Frank Robertson (1/16/66) asked our Board: "Are we in danger of being encrusted with meaningless, archaic, form and tradition?" He answered his own question, "Not now, I'm sure. But the danger is always present."

The danger is always present. And so, I ask: Who are we now and who does God want us to be and become? Our history indicates that –in terms of facilities – we took a huge leap of faith every 30-40 years. We outgrew our first church building in twenty years. We outgrew our second church building thirty years later. Forty more years we built a 3-story education building. Thirty years later we added a fellowship hall and chapel. Fifty years afterwards we completed a $7 million renovation. That was almost 30 years ago. It is time for the next leap of faith.

God told our ancestor Abram, "Go to the place where I will show you." (Gen 12:3) And Abram and Sarai went. What is Mulberry Street to become? Will we remain anchored on this corner for another two hundred years? What is God asking us to do next?

A charge to keep we have,
a God to glorify.
A never-dying soul to save
and fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age,
our calling to fulfill.
O, may it all our powers engage
to do our master's will.
-Charles Wesley

Appreciation: Mildred Taylor Stephens, who founded our Historical Room in 1958
Ann Henry, previous church historian
Carolyn Dominey, current church historian