

TOWARD 2000

A CHRONOLOGY OF ONLY ONE CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COVINGTON, GEORGIA

The Reverend Doctor William B. Wade, ^{50'} church pastor since 198⁸, ^Q dared to suggest to the Session of the church that the time had come to stretch and reach out in faith to deal with increasingly inadequate facilities which were antiquated and in need of repair or replacement. Session agreed and, in good Presbyterian fashion, a committee was formed. Under Billy Wade's guidance, the committee:

Louly Fowler Hay, Chair

Jerry Bouchillon

Linda Boyd

John Howard

Steve Jordon

Sarah Chesnut

Pat Patrick

^{Billy}
Rev. Wade

Countless subsequent meetings over the next 5 years were preceded with earnest prayer for God's guidance and blessing. Most important of all, was His presence with us as we began our work with the most important and pivotal decision of all: "Do we stay where we are, or leave the historic courthouse square, and move where land is much less expensive and we would face fewer restrictions?" Our decision was quick, decisive, and unanimous, more than any others we had to make in the years ahead of us. We said we are a downtown church, where we have been since our founding, and we will remain where we have always been, for over a century. Session agreed.

That led immediately to a necessary and important question which was answered quickly. The property on the east side of the city block was owned by the church and had not been developed with any important structures.

Our next big question was to whom do we turn for help? We chose Atlanta architect Jack Haynes. Jack appealed to us for two main reasons: 1) He grew up in Covington when his father was pastor of First Baptist Church, so we thought he knew our community 2) Jack's practice was small and he ^{had} a history of designing many churches. Jack was very personable, reasonably affordable, anxious to please, and appeared to our committee to be a good listener.

We had many meetings, most filled with agreement, argument, disagreement, and rejections. It was a very trying time for all of us over many months. Of course, we always opened with prayer, but sometimes it seemed our prayers weren't heard or went unanswered.

Cell phones in our cars were new. I had one. So many times when I left home the next morning after our meeting the previous evening I called Louly at home to apologize for my lack of enthusiasm, indeed, my opposition to ideas from our architect, and sometimes my un-Christian way of expressing it. I was not alone. Just more outspoken.

Anticipating greater harmony, the Toward 2000 Committee scheduled a celebratory catered dinner at the wonderful new Covington Fire Department Community Room. It was big. It was elegantly decorated. It was important. It was very well attended. The food was excellent. Planned entertainment displayed talents of our church members previously unknown. All went well....until the anticipated moment of unveiling the architectural renderings. "It looks like a barn," was a frequently heard comment. Life-long much admired member Donald Stephenson was more emphatic in his disapproval.

I believe that God did hear our prayers. He led us to hear loudly and clearly the dissatisfaction with the plans our committee presented. So, we started over. We became more vigilant thereafter. Our architects's proceeding efforts improved, but were still more reflective of his tastes and ideas than ours. Things digressed. Our last big confrontation with our architect was over the brick. We met in the street in a winter drizzle to view his brick samples. None matched our old

sanctuary. He told us that brick wasn't made that way any longer and we could not have a match. Our old brick was made in a "bee-hive" oven and there was only one left still in business, somewhere in Ohio. When our committee told him to get the brick from them, no matter what, he finally got the message of how important it was for us to build a new sanctuary which complemented the old and honored all those generations before us.

Fortunately, our Contractor Pott's Construction, was anxious to please us, accommodate us, and conform to many author's changes.

A "Crowning Moment" was literally that, as Pott's Construction's tall crane hoisted the Cross and anchored it to the apex of the roof over our new sanctuary building. Our oldest member, Donald Stephenson, was there. A large color photo was on the front page of The Covington News along with a quote in large bold-face type from Donald Stephenson, born in the 18th century: "I was born in this town and have lived my whole life here. This is the first time there has ever been a cross on top of a church in Covington." *downtown?* *early 20th*

Donald Stephenson's succinct observation made it so apparent that all the years of meetings, arguments, disappointments, and unexpected surprises had all been worth it.

An equally great confirmation was the Sunday Worship Service which began in the old sanctuary and concluded with long-time member, Elmer Blankenship, ceremonially carrying the generations-old pulpit Bible from the old sanctuary to the new. Many tears mixed with those of sadness, joy, and celebration were shed by all present.

"Toward 2000" When our committee adopted that slogan, it seemed so distant, as did the whole concept of a new millennium.

But, we did it. With so much generosity, our bank loan was paid off in record time and a grand celebration was held to burn the note.

Many additions and improvements continue to make our church what it is today:

- Sympathetic conversion of the old sanctuary from a seldom used "chapel" to daily use as staff offices, meeting space, and choir practice area, made possible by the Hay Family.
 - Significant remodel of the Martin Fellowship Hall and a commercial kitchen.
 - Improvements to classrooms and space for the Early Learning Center
 - Improved handicapped access
 - Additional historical décor
 - Handsome signage in memory of the Lassiters
 - Stained glass crosses at the apex of every sanctuary window, made by former organist Cliff Frierson
 - The Cross hanging predominantly in front of the organ pipe façade.
- Given at request of Louise White from gifts donated in memory of her husband, ^{the} beloved Reverend Tom White, pastor for over 30 years.

(22)

Many other gifts are permanently recorded in an elegant leather binder, housed in a gorgeous cabinet in the Sanctuary Narthex. The cabinet is a gift from Chris and Barbara Martin, designed and built by Chris' father, a master furniture craftsman. It is not locked for all are encouraged to lift the glass top and enjoy the beautiful calligraphy of long-time church member Mary Bolinger which honors every singular gift to "Toward 2000."

Of course many gifts of a few coins were joyfully made by children in our Sunday School rooms, which went unrecorded, but had significance beyond a balance sheet. Private, yet unheralded gifts, beyond our church, were part of our celebration.

There are few plaques and inscriptions in our church. This is very intentional, on suggestion from our "Toward 2000" Committee Chair, Louly Hay. It was our committee's agreement to limit marked individual acknowledgements. Donors of individual classrooms on the lower level beneath the sanctuary are recognized on a plaque at the bottom of the stairwell at entry to those beautiful and valued

classrooms. A plaque behind the console acknowledges the gift of the pipe organ from the Patrick Family.