

A History of the
**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH**



United Church of Christ

✦ — *River Edge* ✦ *New Jersey* — ✦

1846 «» 1990



THE FIRST LADIES AUXILIARY

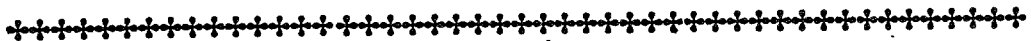
Miss Margaret Herring, Miss Elizabeth Herring,
Mrs. Wills, Mrs. Timpson, Mrs. Lovell,
Miss Mary Blair, Mrs. Lydia Voorhis,
Mrs. M.Z. Vanderbeek.

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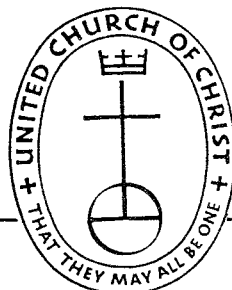
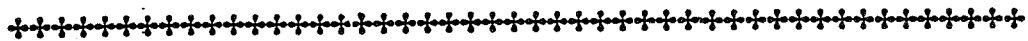


This is the story of our church which was founded in 1846. When we consider that this was just 70 years after the Declaration of Independence in 1776, we realize that our roots go far back in history and that what people did nearly a hundred and fifty years ago had an impact on the lives of those who are part of our church today.

A sincere effort has been made to tell the story as it really happened. Old church records, annual reports, newspaper articles and memories of various people have all contributed to the chronicle. It is altogether possible that important things have been omitted. If so, it is because no records of them have been found.

At the end of this booklet you will discover some blank pages. These have been inserted so that you may continue the story as it plays itself out in the future, should you wish to do so.

Dorothy Herrick





IN THE BEGINNING

To tell about our church we must also tell about our town, for the two were almost interchangeable for a great many years.

Our story begins in 1846 when River Edge, then known as "New Barbadoes", was a little farming community. Most of the homes stood between the Hackensack River and a narrow dirt road, known over the years, through Dutch and English settlement, as Steenrapie Road, Stony Road, Stone Arabia Road, Old Kings Highway, Riverside Road and later, Kinderkamack Road. The road formed a fragile connection, via stagecoach, with Hackensack and thence to Jersey City.

The river formed the major link with the outside world, and up the river came two-masted schooners carrying coal and other needed supplies and returning loaded with farm produce. The schooners were able to sail up as far as Camden Street in Hackensack. From there the ships were poled up to the Old Bridge, making frequent stops where each farmer had a dock. This also provided a way for an occasional traveler to go back and forth from Jersey and New York Cities, for it was not until the Civil War years that the railroad arrived. It is hinted, too, that runaway slaves were sometimes spirited from the City to a stop for the Underground Railway. This is probably true, for a tunnel ran from the river to a house which stood on the southeast corner of what is now Tenney Avenue and Kinderkamack Road, where the Chemical Bank now stands.

This was the environment, then, in which a tiny handful of Christian women began to feel a concern for the religious life of the people, and especially for the Christian Education of the children. Religious classes were held somewhat sporadically in homes, but the need for a specific building, dedicated to religious purposes, was evident. In 1846, Mr. John Demarest, a descendant of the original settler of Demarest's Landing (River Edge) in 1693, was persuaded to donate a piece of land for which the deed read, *"on the turn of the road leading from the Old Bridge to New Milford, on the west side of the Hackensack River, in the township of New Barbadoes, in the County of Bergen, this piece of land to belong to a certain number of individuals who have signed a Subscription list for the purpose of building a Sabbath School House and holding other religious meetings or a day school if required. Provided the subscribers build a Sabbath School on said lot of ground 25 feet long and 18 feet wide, and keep a fence around said lot."*

With these somewhat ponderous words the stage was set for the organization of the Sabbath School Association, and a white clapboard building was erected in conformance with the specifications laid down by Mr. Demarest. Regular sessions of the school were held each Sunday and an attempt was made to supplement the Sabbath School by preaching services.

From time to time the Rev. Abraham Duryea of North Hackensack or the Rev. George Cotten of the Old North Church in Dumont, arrived by horse and buggy to conduct a service.

Frequently "Squire" Webb, came to read his own sermons. In later years Mr. Blair, a



SABBATH SCHOOL
BUILT IN 1846

member of the later church, recalled having collected the offering in a cigar box attached to a broomstick.

Many changes marked the following years. There were times of great spiritual outpourings when the little building was taxed to its utmost, and "the fervent prayer and earnest word brought forth abundant fruit to the glory of God," and times when the spiritual life of the people seemed chilled and drooping and the doors of the chapel were closed. The tragedy of the Civil War undoubtedly left its mark on the lives of the community.

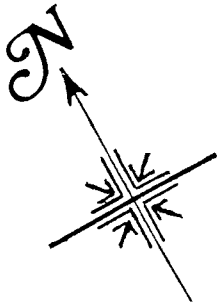
This, then, with more or less variation was the history of the chapel until, in 1890, after one of the periods of religious drought, Mr. Van Voorhees, with the help of some of the ladies, cleaned up the chapel and reopened the Sabbath School, with eight students. This little action under God's blessing seemed to open a new era.

NEARING A NEW CENTURY



As time went by the desire for a larger meeting house where regular religious services could be held, developed and, on January 6, 1896, the River Edge Chapel Association was incorporated under the laws of the state of New Jersey. It was organized for the purpose of "the erection of a meeting house and the maintenance of religious services, that God's Kingdom may be promoted on earth, that the Trinity shall be glorified and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be upheld."

Five trustees were elected: Messrs. John C. Webb, Thomas Sheppard, Frederick H. Crum, Albert Z. Bogert, and Ernest Kasterhuber. They immediately made plans to start a building fund and to explore the problems attendant upon erecting a house of worship, such as land acquisition, type of architecture and possible denomination. The response of the townspeople to the appeal for funds was prompt and generous.



SABBATH SCHOOL -
CHAPEL - 1846



RIVER EDGE RD.

KINDERKAMACK RD.

CONTINENTAL AVE.

N.J. & N.Y. RAILROAD

NEW MILFORD

HACKENSACK RIVER



HOMESTEAD OF
WILLIAM WILLIAMS

THE FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH - 1897

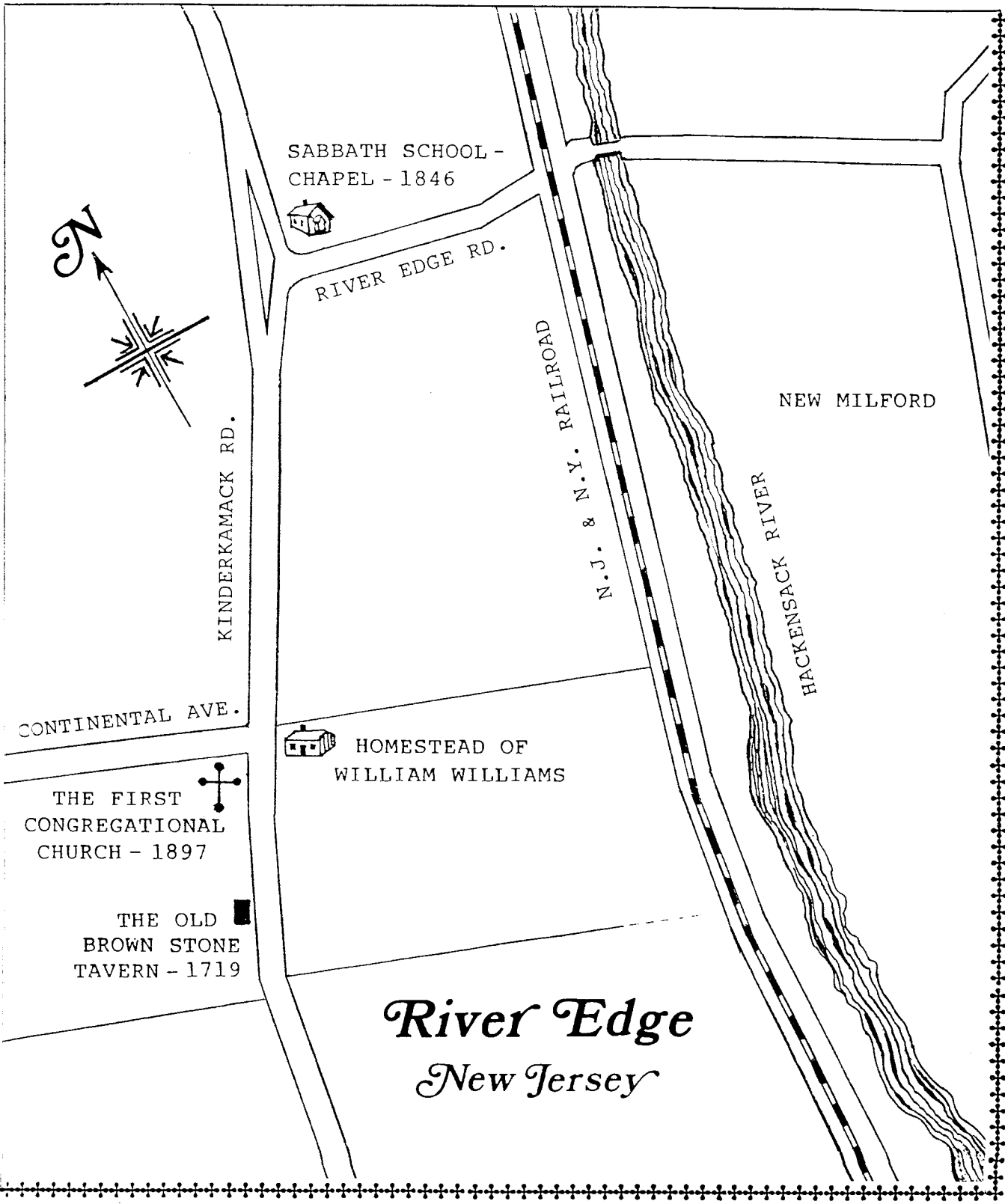


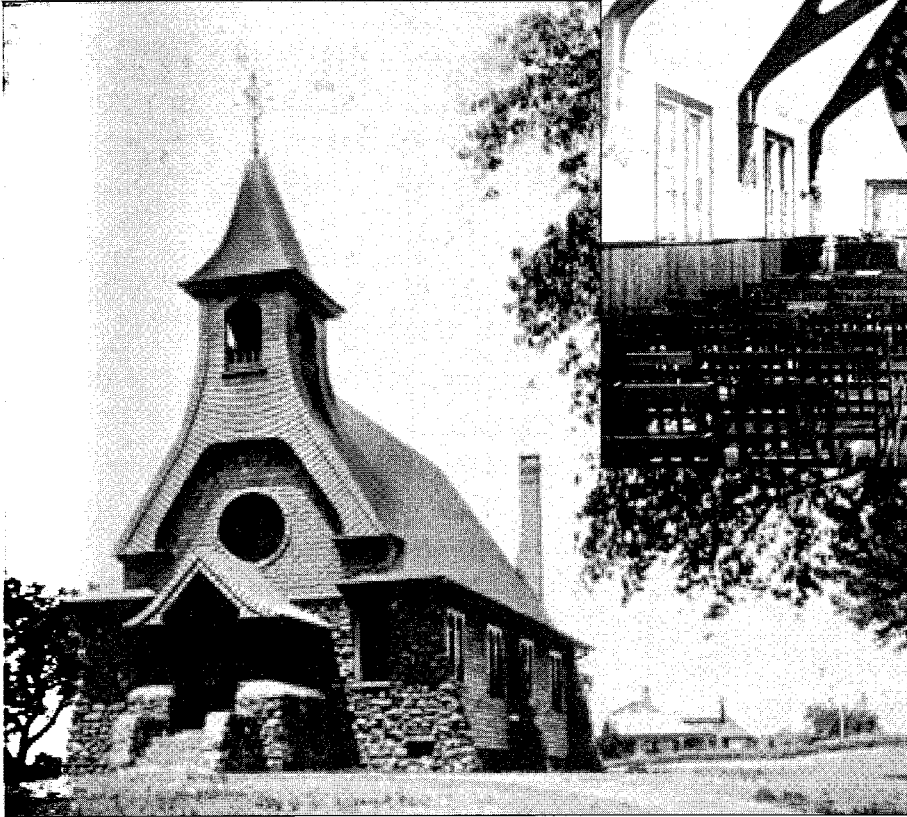
THE OLD
BROWN STONE
TAVERN - 1719



River Edge

New Jersey





THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BUILT 1897



INTERIOR OF CHURCH
ABOUT 1898

JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF,
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
1897



THE ORIGINAL PARSONAGE
BUILT 1908

THE PARISH HOUSE
BUILT 1921



At the cornerstone laying, which did not take place until June 1901, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Dutch Reformed and Episcopal clergymen were present.

By June 1899 sufficient interest had been shown to warrant calling a public meeting to consider the possibility of organizing a church. A committee was authorized to make plans and the Rev. C. Thurston Chase of Brooklyn was asked to help by calling in the homes of the community to determine the extent of the public's interest.

A CHURCH IS BORN



On August 26, 1899, the First Congregational Church of River Edge was officially organized with twenty-nine charter members: Alexander Baker, Matilda Baker, Elizabeth Billings, Mary Jane Blair, William Blair, Sadie M. Brokel, Mary J. Elkins, George H. Elkins, Joan Goldsworth, Joanne Goldsworth, John Goldsworth, Lizzie Haring, Ida Mary Haldrum, Cornelia F. Lovell, James D. Holdrum, Mary E. Phillips, Sara A. Phillips, Samuel Phillips, Catherine M. Randall, Florence Randall, Mary A. Simpson, William B. Simpson, Mary Z. Vanderbeek, John V. Vanderbeek, Annie K. Vanderbeek, Lydia D. Voorhis, Adeline Wills, Joseph Wills, and Minnie Worth.

At this meeting Mrs. Williams presented the Chapel Association with \$1000.00 which paid off the last of the mortgage on the property. Arrangements were made to rent the church building from the Chapel Association for \$10.00 a month.

On September 14, 1899, an ecclesiastical council representing the Congregational Churches of New Jersey officially recognized the church.

A NEW CENTURY



On January 1900 a call was given to the Rev. Henry W. Bainton to become the first minister. The year 1900 was destined to become a year of important beginnings. Sixteen more members were added to the church rolls, bringing the membership up to 45: Annie Butterfield, Mrs. A. Butterfield, Mabel Baker, Mrs. Elizabeth Herring, Margaret Herring, Anna Herring, Mary Herring, Edward Lovell, Mrs. Emma D. Pratt, Benjamin G. Pratt, William Pratt, Henry B. Pratt, Jr., Mrs. Elias Strom, Elias Strom, Mrs. Steneke and Andrew Vanderbeek.

Supplementing the Junior Christian Endeavor Society, which had been organized in 1898 by Mrs. J. F. Sheppard, a young People's Christian Endeavor Society came into being on February 9, 1900, with 21 charter members. This society played an important part in the life of the church for many years.

A Ladies' Auxiliary, formed on March 23, 1900 with 14 members, pledged to:

1. work for the benefit of the church.
2. raise funds toward furnishing the new house of worship.
3. carry on such missionary work as might present itself.
4. promote sociability and hospitality in the church.

In the following days many of the physical needs of the church were met by these two groups. The Christian Endeavor Societies presented the church with a communion table, a communion service, and baptismal font. The Ladies Auxiliary sponsored a wide variety of events, including church suppers in the basement, (with sheets hung up to hide the unattractive walls), strawberry festivals, sales of all kinds and musicals. Through their untiring efforts oak pews were purchased to replace the wooden chairs, carpeting provided, electric lights installed and the walls decorated and painted. The ladies kept the church dusted and orderly.

A bell was given by Mrs. Williams, the property was graded, and cement sidewalks were poured - the gift of the Sunday School and Mr. A. Z. Bogert.

In May of 1900 the Rev. Henry Bainton was installed as Pastor by an ecclesiastical council. Mr. Bainton was a man of wide interests and great enthusiasm. Years later, at the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the church, a long time member, Mrs. Henry Voorhis remembered him as a very joyful man who loved and was loved by the people.

On January of 1901, the year Queen Victoria of England died, the Chapel Association unanimously voted to transfer the property under its name to the Trustees of the Church, for the sum of one dollar. All the loose ends seem to have been brought together. A choir was organized to sing for Sunday morning services and special events. The church formally adopted the "Council Manual for a Congregational Church." Pews had replaced the chairs. A note from "The Echo," a quarterly magazine which published its first issue during this year, has the following information concerning them:

"While the new pews are not to be rented, the Trustees would like to see all the congregation subscribers to the church, and those who are will be allowed to draw for seats. The pastor desires all to have a regular sitting so that he can note any absences."

In this year, also Mr. Bainton urged that an old time revival be held and the Rev. W. H. Rankin of Colorado was invited to conduct the services. According to the records, this was a time in which "Christ has been exalted and sinners brought to His cross, professors of religion were made more earnest and the community awakened."

The Ladies' Auxiliary, in its annual report, reflects the loving atmosphere which prevailed, "We wish once more to emphasize the object of our association: to work for the church, not alone in procuring needed furnishings, but to promote a sociable, neighborly and warm congenial feeling among the members of the congregation. With that accomplished, all work is light." An old proverb says: "Where love is, there is no labor, and if there is labor, that labor is loved."

Mr. Johannemann, an artist from Carlstadt, finished work begun in the previous spring on a beautiful picture of the Bible in the alcove behind the pulpit.

There was some concern that no cornerstone had been as yet been laid and a committee was charged with the duty of selecting a suitable one. A beautiful piece of Vermont granite was chosen, 13 1/2 X 23 1/2 X 10, which would cost twelve to fifteen dollars. The inscription carved thereon was "**JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE, 1897.**" It was decided to have the laying of the cornerstone and the dedication of the Church take place on the same weekend. June 15th was the Saturday chosen for the cornerstone at 4:30 o'clock. A bounteous supper followed, prepared by the ladies, after which there were more talks by visiting clergy. Next morning at 11 o'clock the regular service of worship was held, with one of the visitors preaching. At 3:30 in the afternoon a Dedication Service formally consecrated the building to the worship of God.

In the evening the Children's Day Program gave the spotlight to members of the Sunday School, after which, one suspects, everyone staggered home and went to bed happy and fulfilled.

During this time there was a steady flow of new members but, unfortunately, Mr. Bainton's health was deteriorating, and at a special meeting called for December 12, 1901, he offered his resignation. A sorrowful congregation decided not to accept the resignation and granted him a leave of absence for one year, from January 1, 1902.

The Rev. Henry Lewis from Pilgrim Church in New York City was selected as a supply (temporary) minister for one year, from January 1, 1902 to January 1903, with a salary of \$600 and a month's vacation.

For two years Mr. Van Der Beek had been taking care of the furnace and ringing the bell for services without compensation but in December 1902 the Trustees decided to pay him \$75.00 a year and they presented him with a Morris chair as a slight gesture of appreciation for his services.

Two parties of "Fresh Air Children" from N.Y. City enjoyed "a most delightful outing at River Edge" through the efforts of the Missionary Committee of the Ladies Auxiliary.

The Junior Christian Endeavor sent many boxes of flowers from their gardens to the College Settlement on Livingston Street in New York City.

Mr. Bainton continued writing occasional articles for the "River Edge Echo", from Saratoga, Wyoming, where he was living. On January 1903, Mr. Bainton returned to River Edge but soon found he had to resign because of his health. An Ecclesiastical Council was called by this church to approve Mr. Bainton's *"withdrawing from this field of labor that he may enter in the work of enlarging Christ's Kingdom in the formation of churches and Sunday Schools in the Far West, where the sound of the Gospel is, comparatively speaking, seldom heard."* The clerk declared: *"As a church and congregation we deeply regret the necessity which thus leads to the severance of the bonds that unite us to Brother Bainton as our first Pastor, with whom every*

improvement and every stage of our growth as a church is so closely and intimately related, and no matter what the distance or how varied the circumstances that separate him from us as a congregation, still we will look upon him, think of him and pray for him as our Pastor-at-large, feeling that it is God's hand that is leading and directing him to a larger and more important field of action and usefulness. We therefore ask your approval of our action."

The Rev. Henry Lewis was asked to remain, and to this he agreed.

At the Annual Meeting in 1903 the Board of Trustees recommended that a Building Fund be started, the object being the addition of an annex for the use of the Sunday School, which was growing rapidly, and for lectures and meetings, to be known as the Lecture Room Fund. This was readily approved and was started with \$25.00 from the Trustees funds. The fund grew slowly for the next few years, augmented by a generous gift of \$500. from Mrs. Williams. The Trustees were asked to prepare a plan for the new addition.

In 1904, on the church's fifth anniversary, a service of praise and celebration was held on Wednesday evening, September 14th. A well-planned program included six guest ministers: The Rev. Mr. Chase, who had been most helpful in organizing the church, was the principle speaker. After the service "all were invited downstairs to the basement of the church, where the ladies in their usual good taste served light refreshments, which were surrounded by beautiful decorations and plenty of good cheer, thus closing an altogether delightful occasion."

In Dec. of 1906 the Rev. Mr. Lewis declared it would be impossible for him to serve after the end of the year due to ill health. Those present expressed appreciation of his work during his five years of ministry and deep regret at his leaving. In February 1907, Mr. Lewis turned over the editorship of the "Echo" to Mrs. Simpson, who had been assisting him in this work during his illness, and she agreed to be responsible for it's publishing until a new minister was found.

HOME FOR THE CLERGY



Once again the church was faced with a search for a Pastor. In conjunction with this, the need for a parsonage was discussed and a Committee was appointed to ascertain if the Lecture Room Fund, which by now amounted to over eighteen hundred dollars, could legally be diverted to a Parsonage Fund. After the pros and cons of the matter were thoroughly explored by the congregation, it was voted to lend the Lecture Room Fund to the Trustees for five years without interest, provided it was used for building a parsonage and also provided that sufficient cash could be amassed to complete a building costing not less than \$3750 or more than \$4500. The Parsonage Building Society agreed to provide 1/3 the necessary money, taking a first mortgage with no interest, but payable in equal quarterly installments over five years. A canvas of the community reported pledges of \$750.00. A call was issued to the Rev. C. N. Thomas of the Presbyterian Church in Colenga, California and was duly accepted. He was able to start his ministry at once, ending a difficult period for the church.

The Parsonage Committee had been diligently at work, and in July of 1908 presented plans prepared by Architect A. J. Stever, and recommended that they be adopted. Mr. John U. Winters of Oradell had submitted a bid of \$4573 for the work, and, after a recess was taken to permit the examining of the plans by those present, it was unanimously decided to approve the plans and the bid .

At the same meeting a full-size drawing of a Memorial tablet in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Williams was presented by the J & R Lamb Company; the cost to be \$60.00. It was decided to purchase the tablet "when the money was at hand." It was certainly fitting that a visible expression of gratitude for the generosity and caring of these two good friends of the church be placed where future generations could see it and acknowledge their debt. Without all the help given so graciously by the Williams, the building might have been delayed for many years. It was characteristic of them that in her will Mrs. Williams left a \$1000. bequest to the church.

In 1908 the Parsonage was completed and Mr. Thomas and his family moved into it. A note for \$100 still owed on the parsonage was eventually taken care of by the Ladies Auxiliary, leaving the parsonage debt free.

An interesting little item surfaced in the record of this year when the Rev. Mr. Herrick of Cuba, brother of William Wright Herrick, a member of the church, was invited to be guest preacher during the Pastor's vacation in August.

The following years were somewhat uneventful. Children's Day exercises continued to be held in June of each year. Lighting in the church was improved. New members continued to be added. The Duplex Envelope System was adopted.

In July 1910 it was reported by the clerk that he had received Mr. Thomas' resignation. A feeling of sincere regret was manifested by all present, although it was voted to accept the resignation.

A pulpit committee was appointed to search for a new Pastor, who would be offered a salary of \$900 a year and the use of the Parsonage. The question of extending a call to the Rev. W. Streeter of Oakham was discussed at some length. A standing vote was taken which resulted unfavorably.

The Chairman of the Church Committee gave a report on the Rev. J. G. Hamner, stating that *"Mr. Hamner was engaged in the preparation of books for the blind, which took up part of his time. However, although he had not preached to the church as a candidate, he said that, if a call were extended to him, he would give it his serious consideration. He did want it clearly understood by the entire church that, if he came, it would be with the understanding that he would devote more or less of his time to his present position."* After much discussion it was voted to extend a call to Mr. Hamner, offering him a salary of \$1,000.00, the use of the parsonage and a month's vacation.

The Trustees announced it would be necessary to have the parsonage renovated at a probable cost of \$100.00. No action was taken at the meeting, but several members volunteered to call

on some of their neighbors in the village who were not regular subscribers to the church and invite them to be come such, since the church needed additional resources.

The Rev. Mr. Hamner subsequently accepted the call.

The chairman of the Church Committee told of plans to have Dismissal Services for the Rev. Mr. Thomas on February 1, 1911, at 4:15, and a reception for the Hamners on that evening, followed by a social hour. This met with everyone's approval.

The Ecclesiastical Council, which presided over the dismissal ceremonies, commended Dr. Thomas' labors and spoke of his further labors "*in a new Christian enterprise in a distant state,*" which turned out to be Florida.

In the following weeks Mr. Hamner made several suggestions which were accepted - among them that the quarterly meeting be made a social as well as a business affair. He also asked that regular members sit in the front pews so that he could more readily see who was in attendance. He felt, too, "*that for a stranger to come to the church and see all the front pews empty and all the audience sitting in the back gave them a very bad impression.*"

At the July Quarterly Meeting a committee was appointed to appraise the Trustees of the desire of the church to go ahead with plans for a new Sunday School building.

It was also moved that a petition be prepared and sent to Mr. Andrew Carnegie requesting the gift of a pipe organ.

On April 8, 1912, at the regular Quarterly Meeting the following item appears in the Minutes: "*The subject of plans for the Sunday School was taken up and discussed pretty thoroughly. It was moved by Mr. Daniels, seconded by Mr. Pfof, that the rough plans, showing how the organ could be placed in the present building, be submitted to the church members at the next Quarterly Meeting.*"

TROUBLE IN PARADISE



There is no record of anything of significance happening in the church at this time. There were, however, intimations that all was not well between people and Pastor. However, in September 1913 a meeting was held in the home of Caspar J. Voorhis, where "considerable discussion took place as to what further action should be taken in regard to having Mr. Hamner tender his resignation as Pastor of our church."

Once again a committee was appointed to confer with Dr. Carroll, Minister-at-large of the North Jersey Conference, requesting him to act in an advisory capacity, with the idea of adjusting differences between Pastor and members.

On November 7, 1913, a special meeting was called to consider the question of the termination or continuation of Mr. Hamner. Present were Dr. Carroll, Dr. Charles Hasselgrove and Rev. Henry J. Condit who comprised an Advisory Committee. Their report was as follows:

FINDINGS OF COUNSELORS



- "(1) *We deeply appreciate the confidence implied in our being chosen for this delicate and important task. We have given it our most careful and prayerful consideration.*
- (2) *We recognize the peculiar gifts of the genial and energetic Pastor and are mindful of the success which attended the first months of his pastorate. We find no moral fault or delinquency in him. We also wish to commend the desire of the officers, whom we met, to speak only in the kindest way of their Pastor. We were impressed that they said what they did only because it seemed necessary to them for the welfare of the church.*
- (3) *We realize it is sometimes necessary for a Pastor to withdraw from a particular field when there is no particular fault in himself. Unlike a business or political position, a minister's efficiency terminates when he fails to have the support of his people.*
- (4) *It is evident that in this case many of the oldest members, and particularly the financial and spiritual officers have come to the conclusion that a change of pastorates is desirable. They feel that the time has come in the growth of the church when it should have the full time of the minister.*
- (5) *It is our unanimous opinion that no degree of popularity with people outside the church can off-set the failure of financial and moral cooperation on the part of the membership. Indeed, such popularity might work to the disadvantage of the Kingdom as represented by the organized church.*
- (6) *In view of these facts we reluctantly recommend that the Pastor terminate his connection with the church at the expiration of his third year of service. We wish him well wherever he may labor."*

Thirty six members voted for termination - nine against.

Dr. Carrol, when asked for the best plan of procedure in seeking a new minister, suggested that an appointed group of members arrange to hear likely candidates preach in neighboring churches; he agreeing to see that the committee got in touch with such candidates.

He proposed that, when this committee had unanimously agreed upon an available Pastor, they should report to the full membership of the church. Should the latter deem it advisable to have the candidate preach in their own pulpit, well and good, otherwise they could abide by the

decision of their committee. He also advised that, if possible, they select a Pastor of the Congregational denomination, pointing out that, inasmuch as this is a Congregational Church, it would be nothing more than right and proper that we should have a Pastor well versed in the ritual of the Congregational Church.

The Deacons reported that they had secured the services of the Rev. F. A. Johnson to temporarily fill the pulpit at a stipend of \$15.00 per Sunday. Once more the Parsonage required \$150.00 to put it in good repair.

Mr. Demarest announced a pipe organ for sale by a church in Englewood. A committee of three was commissioned to get a price and to discover what it would cost to have it moved and installed.

At a Quarterly Meeting held on April 13, 1914, The Pulpit Committee "highly recommended the Rev. Frederick B. Pullen as a Candidate for Pastor of this church." The report was discussed at "considerable length," and it was then moved that the Clerk send a call to the Rev. Mr. Pullen. This was accepted. A vote of thanks was extended to the Rev. F. A. Johnson, "for the good work he had done for us during the time we were without a Pastor."

During the five year pastorate of Mr Pullen the church continued to provide a full ministry to the community. Mid week prayer meetings were held every week. Beginning in 1914 an Old Home Sunday was observed each year with many families coming back to River Edge for a visit. On these occasions there would be a rally of church members in the afternoon, with a roll call by household. The entire community was invited. The program lasted from 9:30 in the morning until 8 or 8:30 at night.

One of the delightful memories of Mr. Pullen's pastorate is his "Green Bag Sermons." The younger children of the Church School met on Sunday mornings briefly with the adult fellowship, sitting in the front pews. Mr. Pullen would bring out his green bag which he placed on the lectern while many pairs of wide open eyes waited expectantly for the moment when he would produce from its depths some object which pointed up the moral of his Sunday story. At the conclusion of this mini-sermon, the children left through the door at the side of the platform to the minister's study, which was used as a classroom on Sunday. Church school for the older children was held in the church prior to the morning services. "Classrooms" consisted of two pews, in which children faced each other; those in the front pews kneeling on the hard oak seats. Each group was separated by one pew. Concentration was a bit difficult, since great curiosity always developed concerning what might be going on in the other classes. How much we owe to those teachers who taught under such conditions!

Eighth grade commencement exercises were held in the church, since the school had no auditorium.

Dr. E. Lyman Hood followed the Rev. Frederick Pullen as pastor in 1919. He was a very erudite man, who spent much time in study. Due to his wife's ill health and subsequent death, his daughter, Helen, presided over the Parsonage for much of the time. Dr. Hood was the picture of an Old Testament prophet and the possessor of a luxuriant black beard, shot through

with gray. In his study he liked to wear rose or purple velvet skull caps which, in the minds of the children, added to his image as a Biblical character. A former church member, who was a child at that time, recalls that "he made his pastoral calls on foot and always wore his black robe, which billowed around him as he walked."

Family picnics were held and eagerly looked forward to during these years. Open farm trucks took people to Old Point Comfort on the shore of the Hudson River, or to Leach's Glen. Later on cars were used for transportation to Green Pond.

Soon after his arrival in River Edge Dr. Hood was informed by Mr. Henry Voorhis, superintendent of the Sunday School, that the limit of the capacity of the Sunday School had been reached, and that it would be necessary either to refuse to take any more children or to start making plans for additional space. The Trustees seriously considered the situation and agreed it would be unthinkable to refuse Christian Education to any children who desired it. The community, too, lacked space for club meetings, youth activities, dances and so forth, and the possibility that such a facility might be built met with warm interest outside the church. Accordingly, a Parish House plan was drawn up. It consisted of a large room and basement.

So it was that just twenty years after the laying of the corner stone of the Sanctuary, the membership participated in the laying of the cornerstone for the Parish House, long planned for and desired. Into the cornerstone were deposited the Holy Bible, a church hymnal, the roster of the church and church school, "The Interboro News", the "New York Times", "The Congregationalist", "The American Missionary Magazine", "The Missionary Herald", a list of members of the Men's Club of River Edge, a list of the Municipal Officers of the Borough of River side, as well as Membership lists of the River Edge Choral Society and the Home and School Association.

The new building proved to be a blessing to many organizations: the public school used it as a gymnasium, the community used it for dances, basketball games, entertainment and, of course the church used it for Sunday School classes and related activities. Dinners and meetings were held there. Later on Boy and Girl Scout Troops met there, as did the Woman's Club, the Square Club and the Eastern Star. The Sunday School continued to break attendance records, proving that the Parish House had been built just in time.

In 1923 a beautiful stained glass Shepherd Window was presented by Mrs. William Reehl as a memorial to her husband. It was installed on the south wall of the church where it is still enjoyed in the present parlor. Throughout these years and those that followed there were innumerable people whose work, devotion and loyalty were sources of strength and inspiration. We hesitantly mention a few of them, knowing that many others should be included with them who did not appear in early records: Mr. & Mrs. Henry Voorhis, the Tennys, the Roe family, the Blairs, Caspar Voorhis, the Norrises, the Randalls, the Pattersons, the Vanderbeeks.

Many, of course, were highly visible, but there were also those wonderful, steadfast people who quietly and unobtrusively carried on the work of the church for years and years, asking not for recognition but for the joy of service.



REV. HENRY BAINTON
1900-1903



REV. HENRY LEWIS
1903-1907

REV. CHARLES THOMAS
1907-1910

REV. GARLAND HAMNER
1910-1913

REV. FREDERICK
PULLEN
1914-1919



REV. LYMAN HOOD
1919-1924



REV. CLAUDE PERCY LEACH
1924-1939



REV. ROSS CANNON
1940-1943



REV. ERNEST YARROW
1943-1953



REV. SUMNER H. GILL
1954-1981



REV. LEWIS WINTER
ASSOCIATE PASTOR
1961-1965



REV. ROBERT CEDAR
1982-1990

On June 8, 1924, Dr. Hood asked the members of the church to tarry for a short while after the Children's Day Service. He then surprised them by reading his resignation as Pastor, to take effect on the first of September. Although a committee waited on Dr. Hood in the parsonage, they returned with the news that his mind was made up. He thereupon outlined his plans for work in the Hawaiian Islands.

There was nothing to be done but to wish him godspeed and extend him good wishes for future happiness.

However saddened a church fellowship may be by the retirement of its leader, the life of the church must go on. On June 21st the Christian Endeavor Society presented an entertainment in the Parish House called "The Beantown Choir." It boasted a cast of fifteen and a printed program containing advertisements of many local businesses. Miss T. M. Sullivan, a teacher in the grammar school, was the coach.

After the church service on June 22, 1924, a committee was nominated to act as a Pastoral Supply Committee, to procure a new minister for the church. It consisted of the following people: Mr. A. Hasbrouck, Jr., Mr. H. R. Kingman, Mrs. Franklyn T. Baker, Mr. L. Z. Whitbeck, Mr. William Bogert, Mrs. W. R. Westervelt.

On the evening of November 16, the Clerk, at the request of the Pastoral Supply Committee, called a meeting of the church. Mr. Kingman, Chairman of the committee, reported that they recommended the name of the Rev. C. P. Leach as their choice. Following general discussion, it was the consensus of opinion that, inasmuch as a small number were in attendance, it were better that the committee continue its deliberations and report at a later congregational meeting, after due and timely notice had been given. Accordingly on December 7, 1924, Mr. Kingman presented for the consideration of the members the names of the Rev. Claude P. Leach and Mr. James A. Pratt, together with their qualifications. The result of the balloting showed a majority in favor of Mr. Leach and a motion by Mrs. Franklyn Baker, the vote to call Mr. Leach was declared unanimous. On December 12, Mr. Leach graciously accepted the church's call.

A RICH MINISTRY



Almost thirty years later the Rev. Ernest Yarrow, then pastor of the church, had this to say in an analysis of the church's first fifty years":

"In 1924 the Rev. Claude Percy Leach was called to the pastorate of the church. Although no one realized it at the time, this was to be the beginning of the longest and in many ways the richest ministry of the first fifty years of the existence of the church. Mr. Leach's ministry will always be remembered for its depth and breadth. His searching mind was always uncovering the wider and wider implications of the Christian faith for all phases of life and all areas of the world. His sensitive spirit was always probing the inner and deeper meanings of life's day by day events."

A printed "Order of Service" prepared for Mr. Leach's installation on June 24th, 1925, shows that the Rev. Henry Lewis, one of our former pastors, gave the prayer of installation. Other participating clergymen were Rev. J. C. Becker, Rev. C. H. Wilson, Re. J. T. Stockweg and Dr. C. W. Carroll of the Middle Atlantic Conference, who gave the "Charge to the People." So impressed by Dr. Carroll's remarks was a member of the Congregation, that he pencilled on his program the highlights of the address. These words are as valid today as they were then and bear repeating: *"Love your minister and believe in him. Don't load him down with petty details. Leave him alone in the mornings and on Saturdays so he can write his sermons. Don't talk behind his back. Eliminate all pettiness which comes from prejudice and ignorance and which shuts out the coming of Jesus Christ."*

Many problems faced the new Pastor. The church belfry had been struck by lightning and was subsequently repaired by Mr. Britten. A description of the church property as it was when Mr. Leach arrived is given in a letter from him some years later: *"The church had a leaky roof and the interior was badly in need of renovation. The lighting was inadequate, the carpet had seen many years of hard wear. A small reed organ was played vigorously and efficiently by Brother Austin Leake. A large bookcase stood in the front of the church, and on the wall near the entrance was a solitary nail on which Mr. O. V. Jones used to hang his hat."*

The Parish House consisted of two rooms. The large one was used as a gymnasium by the public school. The basement was unfinished but it was usable."

On a more optimistic note, the parsonage had been completely redecorated by members of the church. All fall they had been painting and papering all the rooms in the house. The golden oak woodwork was changed to white enamel, the bathroom was updated and everything was fresh and clean. Incidentally, the entire cost for the face lift was three hundred dollars!

Mr. & Mrs. Leach and their two boys, Dwight and Jim, quickly became instruments for change and improvement, and the parsonage was a lively and hospitable place. Mrs. Leach was actively involved in the Ladies' Auxiliary and was instrumental in its re-organization as the Woman's Association. Three circles were created, each being responsible for some phase of church work.

In 1926 the church celebrated its 25th anniversary with an elaborate dinner and a program of speakers, instrumental music and choral singing. The committee in charge of arrangements was composed of the Hon. A. Z. Bogert, Mrs. Henry Voorhis, Myers H. Blair, J. V. Vanderbeek, Mrs. Mahlon DeBaun and the Rev. C. P. Leach. A copy of a printed program still remains and tells us that the menu consisted of:

Cantaloupe
Broiled Spring Chicken
New Potatoes New String Beans
Olives Radishes
Club Rolls
Lettuce and Tomato Salad
Neapolitan Ice Cream Lady Fingers
Coffee

Speakers included the Hon. A. Z. Bogert, Mayor of River Edge, Henry Voorhis, S. S. Superintendent, Rev. Charles Schmidling, Pastor of the Grace Lutheran Church, Rev. A. J. Walters, Pastor of the Cherry Hill (North Hackensack) Reformed Church, Rev. C. R. Krehle of Hackensack, and the Rev. William A. Rice. The Rev. C. P. Leach also spoke.

Music was provided by the church orchestra, choral singing and solos by Helen E. Jones and Augustus Hasbrouck.

In 1929 the Parish House was enlarged to include a parlor, a kitchen, a Fellowship Hall, three offices and twelve classrooms, providing for the first time separate rooms for classes.

A pipe organ was finally installed in the Sanctuary, adding immeasurably to the beauty of the worship services.

The growth of volunteer choirs, under the direction of Mr. Albrecht, was a source of fellowship and inspiration.

A newly organized Men's Brotherhood provided stimulating programs and entertainment for many years. The public at large was cordially welcomed on these occasions and the entire community was enriched by them.

During this time there was some rather widespread agitation to enlarge the Sanctuary, but Mr. Leach, (always known as "C.P."), felt the time for that had not yet come.

Throughout these years and the years that followed certain names keep popping up again and again. Perhaps they should be mentioned. **Mr. A. Z. Bogert**, a member of the Board of Trustees from the organization of the church until 1924, when he was made an honorary member. **Mr. Austin Leake, Sr.** on the Board of Trustees from 1918 to 1929, Clerk of the Church from 1920 to 1924 and from 1932 to 1934, Treasurer from 1927 to 1931, Organist for many years prior to the installation of the pipe organ. **Mr. Howard Norris**, Clerk of the church from 1900 to 1915, on the Board of Trustees from 1924 to 1934 and active in many other areas of the church as well. There were countless other people to whom we, of the later church, owe much.

The Sunday School reported an enrollment of two hundred twenty-one active members. A cradle roll was begun with twenty-four little ones under the age of four.

There was increased activity in benevolence giving to widespread causes -- Near East Relief is mentioned as well as funds sent to Albuquerque for "the Water System." By the end of 1927 benevolence giving had reached \$1000.00.

In April 1932, it was learned that the Reverend Henry Lewis, our pastor from 1902 until 1907, had been killed when the automobile he was driving was struck by an electric train of the Staten Island Rapid Transit Company. For the three years previous to his death he had been pastor of the Oakwood Heights church on Staten Island.

In 1939, largely due to the construction of the George Washington Bridge, which facilitated the movement of people in and out of New York City, a building boom came to River Edge and the rest of Bergen County. Mr. Leach wisely decided that the energies of a younger man were needed to meet the new opportunities, and he and Mrs. Leach retired to Penny Farms, Florida. The church bestowed upon him the honorary title of Minister Emeritus. It was with deep regret that the church bade them good-bye, after a farewell reception and presentation of gifts on Dec. 3, 1939.

The need for new chairs for Fellowship Hall was the motivation for the start of a drama group known as the Footlight Players, which flourished for many years, providing both religious and secular plays, much appreciated by the church and larger Community.

The church school continued to grow and to develop a better program of Christian education based on a departmental system.

The Rev. Theodore Tucker became interim minister while a permanent replacement for "C.P." was found. After less than a year Mr. Tucker moved to his chosen field in Angola, West Africa where he served for many years as a missionary. In 1960 he returned to River Edge briefly to preach at a morning service.

In 1940 the Rev. Ross Cannon and his wife, Mary, were called to meet the challenge of a growing church and a burgeoning Community. They brought to the church a vigorous but balanced ministry. Mary Cannon, the daughter of a well known New England missionary family brought a deeper dimension to the women's work by the example of her own devotion and dedication. Under Ross Cannon's leadership the church accepted its responsibility to minister to the whole life of the community. Mr. Cannon's gift for drawing young people and his sympathetic help in areas of personal need placed his ministry deep in the respect and affection of the people.

Many newcomers joined the church in those years and these new members gave added vitality to the church. A Mr. and Mrs. Club came into being as well as a Young Adult group, full of energy and innovative ideas.

Newspaper clippings tell of an amusing incident related to the production of a play, "The Balmy Mr. Brown," which was given two evenings in Fellowship Hall. We quote from "The Record": *"The Balmy Mr. Brown gives his Town a Maniac Scare. Phone calls, some 200 of them, poured into River Edge Police Headquarters last night, the callers frantic about news of an escaped lunatic. Reports of the maniac on the loose, they said, had come to them from a blaring loud-speaker truck cruising the town. Police solved the mystery when they tracked down the truck and learned that it was sponsored by the Young Adult Club of the Congregational Church, to advertise its forthcoming play, "The Balmy Mr. Brown." Councilman Milton E. Winant is directing the production. Police asked him to explain his Orson Welles stunt. "Just advertising, that's all," Winant said. Police laughed it off and gave patient explanations over the phone."*

During this time a bequest of \$10,000.00 from Miss Mary K. Zabriskie, a lifetime devotee of

the church, paid off the remaining indebtedness resulting from the Parish House enlargement.

The Parish House was a boon to church and town. Basketball games were held there. Scout troops called it their home. Dinners and dances took place. It became a shelter during World War II. Voting machines were brought in at election time, and many other events occurred there.

After three years the Cannons received an urgent call from Evanston, Illinois, to nurture a newly formed church, and the fellowship sadly relinquished their loved young parsonage family.

THE WAR YEARS



The Rev. Ernest Yarrow accepted a call to the church in 1943, bringing with him his wife, Betty, and three little girls: Nancy, Susan and Linda. A son, Peter, was born during his pastorate. Mr. Yarrow was born in Turkey of missionary parents and brought with him a great zest for life, a mind totally devoid of bigotry or racial prejudice, a lusty sense of humor, enormous energy and a deep dedication to the church.

The rapid expansion of River Edge which had started about 1940 was arrested by the onset of World War II, but at war's end in 1945, sub-divisions and new developments brought renewed growth to the community. The baby boom, one result of the war years, was beginning to show at the nursery school level, and it took no great wisdom to know that in the near future it would show itself throughout the public school system. Already all facilities were overcrowded. Church attendance increased to the point where it became necessary to hold three services each Sunday morning, with fifteen minute intermissions.

The church school started Christmas vespers for small children and two services became necessary. It also became necessary to create double sessions for the pre-school and primary departments in order to accommodate the children who came pouring into these younger grades.

A Director of Religious education was obtained in the person of Miss Bertha Juell, whose warm personality and excellent training helped to give direction and needed professional help to the church school teachers and superintendents.

The Senior Pilgrim Fellowship was flourishing and sent large groups to the summer conferences at Blair Academy in northern New Jersey, giving our young people a really fine religious experience. Several times our delegation was the largest of all the church groups.

In 1945 the Rev. Manuel Fowler was invited to become Associate Minister to help alleviate some of the load that Mr. Yarrow was carrying.

In these years much had to be done to draw together all the new people who were coming into the church. The Women's Association needed some re-organization, since one of the circles had grown to fifty members.

Retreats for Church School Teachers were held each September at Green Pond, and for Church Boards and their families at Bear Mountain. These were planned to engage as many people as possible in projects for the coming year. Eventually the one day retreats became weekends, and were held at Deering, New Hampshire, Pauling, New York and, once or twice, at Lake Minnewaska, New York.

THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY



In 1946 the church celebrated a century of growth with a reception and social in the Parish House. Old pictures were on display, showing people and activities of the first hundred years.

A highlight of the festivities was a ceremony honoring Mrs. Henry Voorhis, Mrs. A. E. Martin, Mrs. J. D. Howell, William Pratt, Miss Jennie Vanderbeek, Mrs. Mary Simpson and B. G. Pratt; all charter members of the church. Old and new members of the church were welcomed by a group of hostesses dressed in the style of the gay nineties.

The plight of families displaced by the war in Europe became a serious concern, and eventually four such families were brought to this country by the church. They were the Egerows, from Estonia, who settled in South Hackensack, the Isputievs, who came from Russia and Germany, Dr. Barchenko and his family, who took up residence in Long Island and the Van Dingstees from Holland.

In 1947 more than a hundred and twenty members came to pay tribute to James McEwan, who had been Sexton for twenty -five years. He was tendered a dinner in Fellowship Hall, and given a purse in appreciation of his services. He was accompanied by Mrs. McEwan, who received a corsage.

In 1948 the church held a memorial service for seven young men affiliated with the church who were killed in World War II. They were Albert Carleton Lange, Jr., Charles G. Pfof, John Hibbard Wilmot, John August Bertheas, Jr., E. Lyle Hills, Charles R. Kennedy and Keith Whiteman Wythes. Lyle Hills and Keith Wythes were listed as missing in action. At this service a communion set, given in memory of these young men, was dedicated. It was a sad and sacred occasion.

BURSTING AT THE SEAMS AGAIN



A committee was formed to explore the possibility of building a new church school wing. Careful study of population trends and a forecast of future growth were made. The committee was authorized to conduct campaigns to enlarge our facilities and in 1949 a new church school wing was started at a cost of \$95,000. Twelve new classrooms were added and a beautiful childrens chapel was provided. Unbelievably, even with two sessions and two classes of each grade at each session, many of the classrooms were over crowded.

In 1950 a service of dedication for this building was held in the Roosevelt School Gymnasium with many dignitaries in attendance. Words of greeting were brought by Mayor James Farrell, the Bergen County Council of Churches, the New Jersey Council of Churches, the Middle Atlantic Council of Churches, the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches.

The Rev. Bruce Weaver of the Grace Lutheran church and the Rev. Harold Green of the Cherry Hill Reformed Church took part in the service and the Rev. Allan Lorimer of the First C. C. Church of Montclair, New Jersey preached the dedicatory sermon.

At the conclusion of the service, a procession, led by the children, was formed which marched to the new building, where brief cornerstone ceremonies were held. Into the cornerstone went the following items:

Bible

Church By-Laws

100th Anniversary Bulletin

Missionary Herold-1948

Church Organizations 1947

Information about the church

Annual Reports-1948-1949

Newspaper clipping from:

"The Record"

"Times Review"

"R.E. Advertizer"

"R. E. Bulletin-Feb. 1950"

Sermons

Congregators

Campaign Brochures

Photographs of:

the church

church School

Staff 1947, 1948, 1949

Children's Day Program 1949

Christmas Programs 1949

Dedication Program

for the Church School

NEW ADVENTURES



During these same years, the church was privileged to participate in adventures not directly connected with our church, but which were part of the denomination's long range plans. The first enterprise was the result of a population explosion in Paramus. The Congregational Board felt that a Congregational Church was needed in that town and asked our church to act as

sponsor. Thus it happened that the Rev. Daniel O'Connor became temporary Associate Minister, since Manuel Fowler had left for another assignment. Much of Mr. O'Connor's time was spent calling in the Paramus area, to discover whether there was sufficient interest to start a church. Members of our own church who lived in Paramus were offered the option of joining a new church there and giving it their support. Several families elected to do so. A meeting of interested people was finally called and forty five people responded. It was thought that was a sufficient number to start a church.

In September they explored the possibility of buying a house which might lend itself to becoming a temporary manse and church school. It was learned that an old homestead had been put up for sale. A visit to this house on Spring Valley Road convinced the committee it would serve their purpose very well. Accordingly they brought their findings to the attention of the Board of Home Missions in New York and received its immediate support. A down payment was made and Dan O'Connor moved into the house on November first.

On November fifteenth an organizational meeting was held in the Spring Valley Road Firehouse with twenty-six people attending. Mr. Ira Black of the Board of Home Missions and Dr. Joseph Stein of the Middle Atlantic Conference spoke to the group about plans and possible difficulties in starting a new church. A Steering Committee was formed with instructions to go ahead on this project. On December fourteenth the title to 205 Spring Valley Road formally passed to the Middle Atlantic Conference. That evening a group of enthusiastic men tore down a wall between two of the rooms and the following day the room was cleaned, Christmas decorations put up and furniture set in place. It was a tired but happy group that went home at 3 a.m. that morning. At ten o'clock the first church service was held with forty-six people in attendance.

Ninety chairs, seven tables, pulpit furniture and other articles were donated by the Finesville Christian Church. The River Edge church loaned some articles that were needed, and people from River Edge and Paramus gave equipment for the Child Care and Kindergarten rooms. The Paramus Congregational Church was off to a good start!

The other "adventure" involved a young theological student from South Dakota who was finishing up his work at Yale Divinity School, from which he graduated in June, 1953. Lloyd Van Vactor and his wife, Maisie, had been appointed as missionaries to the Philippines by the American Board of Commissioners. He was ordained at Saugatuck Church in Connecticut on the day of his graduation. His wife, Maisie, graduated, as did Lloyd, from Yankton College, and she studied at the Yankton State Hospital. She attended the University of Hawaii and became a nurse. During the winter they did preparatory work in the rural churches of Medicine Lake, Montana. In May they left for San Francisco and sailed from there for their post in Mindanao.

They wrote back to our church that they were spending five hours a day with a tutor and two hours studying by themselves, to gain an understanding of the language. Mindanao, to which they were assigned was also the island where Dr. Frank Laubach began his great work on illiteracy. His "each one-teach one" philosophy became known all over the world.

Our church and the church in Westport, Connecticut, became joint sponsors of the Van Vactors, and had a very close relationship for many years .

In the River Edge Church the church school had been thoroughly enjoying its new Church School building. The children's Chapel was a delight to pupils and teachers alike. There was a steady increase in enrollment and already some classes were too large for their rooms. Starting two sessions of the school helped to solve this problem.

The public school was feeling the pinch of the fast growing school population, and they arranged to rent rooms for six Kindergarten classes.

At the Confirmation Service for the Pastor's Class held on Sunday evening, June 7, 1953, the Order of Service noted that "the flowers for this Communion Service are given to let our boys in Korea know that they are in our minds and hearts" and that "the offering this evening is being designated, by vote of the Pastor's Class, for Korean Relief."

During his pastorate Ernie Yarrow had started a church weekly newsletter which he called "The Congregator." This was much appreciated by the membership since it contained lots of news about the church and its activities, church school and youth programs, information about up coming meetings and so forth. It helped the left hand of the fellowship know what its right hand was doing, and it continues to fulfill that function to this day.

The church was fortunate in having Rev. Philip Widenhouse and his wife, Emma, as new members and he was generous in using his expertise in the service of the church. John Arapura of Calcutta, India, was secured as a summer student worker with our youth.

Under the sponsorship of the Board of Christian Education, a series of lectures under the title of "School of Living" was held for several years. The series was offered to the community as well, and brought to River Edge outstanding speakers from the Seminaries and Universities of New York City.

Benevolence giving constantly increased. The children and youth groups sent quantities of clothing to Europe and Korea. A relationship was developed with the East Harlem Protestant Parish, which became a source of pleasure for both groups.

At Christmastime in 1953 the Church School sent to the children of East Harlem two hundred and twenty books, one hundred dolls and stuffed animals, one hundred games and puzzles, fifty toy cars and trucks, as well as many other toys. This was an exciting and joyous experience for our children, as was the "Shoe Project" entered into with great gusto by the Pre-school and Primary Departments. Word had reached the school that many children in Puerto Rico were suffering from serious foot infections, since so many had no shoes. Shoes were collected, repaired and polished and several cartons sent off to Rider Hospital in Puerto Rico.

The Chancel Choir grew in numbers and abilities under the guidance of Maureen Jamieson, who led the choir for many years. Its members participated in community affairs such as the annual concert with choirs of other churches, and caroling throughout the town at Christmastime.

Four other choirs added to the worship experience of the church - Senior High, Youth, Junior and Carol choirs. These sang for departmental worship services, and occasionally in the Sanctuary.

During this time of burgeoning population in River Edge a Jewish Community came into being. They, too, looked forward to having a building to house their activities, and it was this church's pleasure to offer them our facilities during 1952 until their own were ready.

WE SEEK GOD'S WILL FOR OUR CHURCH



These continuing changes in the life of the community caused the church to do some serious soul searching as to how it could best meet the many challenges of the coming years.

Ernie Yarrow in his annual report in 1952 warned against complacency. "Two hundred new members in this year is a very encouraging figure," he wrote, "and while we need to be sure that these new members are integrated into the church we must not neglect our older members. This is a delicate balance and requires the active interest of us all." And again he wrote, *"This is a friendly, democratic church, but that does not just happen. The current program of getting acquainted with one new person each Sunday is a must in our situation. The plans for neighborhood gatherings in the homes will help in this field considerably."*

He was saddened by the resignation of Bertha Juell, who planned to leave at the end of the year, but pleased by the liquidation of our Loan Mortgage ahead of schedule, saying *"it should make us feel we are headed in the right direction."* He looked forward eagerly to the building of the new Sanctuary.

Our Minister Emeritus, C.P. Leach, and his wife, Harriet, celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, and their acknowledgment of the church's participation in the celebration was so endearing that it seemed fitting to incorporate it in this history:

"The Flood came and beat upon us! And what a delightful beating! We were totally unprepared for such a flood of affection, greetings, good wishes and Many Happy Returns."

We thought the tide was high at Christmas time, but it continued to rise, reaching flood stage on New Years, when golden wedding congratulations swelled the inundation.

Fifty Golden Years! During the last twenty-eight of these years we have been

members of the First Congregational Church of River Edge, and it is a comfort to feel that relationship will continue until the sun sets. Our problem now is to convey to every single member of our church our deep and sincere appreciation of your messages and very substantial check which accompanied them. Our conviction grows upon us daily that ours is a great church, interpreting our Lord's concept of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of men in its immediate community and throughout the world. All we are able to say at this time is "God bless and keep you, everyone.""

**Mr. & Mrs. C.P. Leach
Penney Farms, Florida**

The Board of Trustees for several months had under consideration the acquiring of a new parsonage. Working closely with them had been members of the Building Committee and Architect Gustav Pfost, who, as a life-long member of the church had been deeply involved in many of its activities. New buildings, vacant lots and all available homes were considered as to their suitability.

A special report from the minister to the Board had forcibly brought home the fact that the three session schedule of church and church school was untenable. Believing that the most practical solution would be an early completion of the over-all building plans, the Board and Building Committee began exploring the possibility of obtaining adequate financing for a new Sanctuary at an early date. This was finally negotiated with the Providence Institution for Savings in Jersey City and Architect Pfost was asked to finalize plans for both a Sanctuary and a parsonage. A lot for the parsonage was acquired at the corner of Bogert Road and Midland Avenue at a cost of \$4500.00 The parsonage itself was built for approximately \$27,000.

Construction was begun in July. The men of the church formed work crews and did much of the work such as ditch digging and painting, both interior and exterior.

The church was not so preoccupied with expansion plans that other important matters were unattended to. The position of Director of Christian Education vacant by Miss Juell was temporarily, but efficiently, filled by Mrs. Alexander Chandler, wife of the minister of the Fairmount (Hackensack) Congregational Church. She, in turn, relinquished the post when Mrs. Grace Broswell agreed to accept it on a part time basis.

Many community groups found meeting places in our church: the Women's Club, two Brownie troops, three Girl Scout troops, one Boy Scout troop, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Blood Bank.

The old church was bursting at the seams. Five Easter services had to be held. Benevolence giving increased dramatically.

Four Foster Children from various parts of the world were sponsored.

The old parsonage was torn down to make room for a parking lot. The church looked forward

to seeing the Yarrow family in the new parsonage. That was not to be, for on July 29, 1953, Ernie Yarrow startled and saddened the congregation by announcing his resignation - starting to announce it, that is, he could not go on after the first few words. Read for him, his statement began: *"Because of the devotion, wisdom and prayers of those who love it, this church now stands on the threshold of true greatness. We are a strong church, obligated to think and act in terms of strength."* He asked the Congregation to accept his resignation effective November 1 so that he might answer a call to a parish in Seattle, Washington. "The Record," in reporting this event, commented:

"The Rev. Ernest Yarrow, pastor of the First Congregational Church in River Edge since 1943, is the kind of Minister most of us are apt to wish our minister were a little more like. One would like Ernie Yarrow to know that a community, larger than he knows, bids him godspeed. He too, thinking and acting in terms of strength, stands on the threshold."

The church had no choice but to go along with its minister's wishes. A Search Committee was selected to begin the difficult task of finding a replacement for a much loved pastor.

Meanwhile the work of the building committee continued. Plans for the new Sanctuary were approved by the fellowship. The old Sanctuary had to be taken down. Although it was at first hoped that it could be used as a chapel, there was not sufficient land to accommodate it and the new church. It was missed not only by the church members but by countless people who had travelled by way of Kinderkamack road over a 50 year period and treasured it as a bit of Americana.

The rose window and the pews were given eventually to the Paramus Church and the Shepherd window was moved to the Parlor adjoining the new Sanctuary, where it still is enjoyed.

The Roosevelt School Trustees agreed to rent the school auditorium so that Sunday services could be held until the new Sanctuary should be built and this proved a happy solution.

The Search Committee worked assiduously, reading resumes, visiting churches to listen to ministers, sometimes traveling to other states in search of the right man.

Interestingly, the church kept on growing through this period of volatility. The membership now numbered 1000 and the church school had over 600 members. The Women's Fellowship hit a new high of 250 members.

Time wore relentlessly on and the Yarrows' departure date neared. The Congregation held a farewell reception for them, which was attended by more than 300 persons. The Women's Association gave Mr. Yarrow a pulpit robe and Mrs. Yarrow a 5 piece silver tea service. The Senior Guild presented them with a purse as did the other members and friends of the Yarrows. Mrs. George Manfredi, President of the Women's Association had compiled a scrap book containing clippings of events and names of persons who have played an important part in the Yarrows' ten years in the church, and guests were asked to sign it. Refreshments followed. The reception lasted for about two hours - and one speculates that it must have been a most difficult experience for the Yarrows and the Congregation.

Sunday, November 1st, was an incredible day, for on that afternoon four very significant events took place; (1) An Ecclesiastical Council joined with the church in severing the pastoral relationship, (2) This was followed by a service of De- Consecration for the old church, (3) A ceremony was held to open the old cornerstone laid in 1901. Ernest W. Mantz, a 41 year member of the church, assisted Mr. Yarrow in removing the contents. Some of the original charter members of the church were able to attend the services. They were Mrs. James Christie, President of the first Ladies's Auxiliary, Mrs. J. Hallawell, Mrs. Henry B. Pratt, Jr., Mrs. Mary A. Simpson, Miss Jennie Vanderbeek, Mrs. J. V. Vanderbeek, and Mrs. Henry Voorhis.

After this the 500 members poured out onto the grounds for the ground breaking ceremony for the new Sanctuary. Mr. Yarrow, visiting clergy, old and young members of the congregation were invited to dig a spadeful of dirt and a great many did so.

Over a thousand people attended the two morning services in Roosevelt School to hear Mr. Yarrow's farewell sermon. In addition to his pastoral duties, Ernie was a former member of the Board of Education, Chaplain of the Fire Department for five years, and a vice-president of the Educational Society. Thus ended a vigorous, productive and meaningful pastorate.

THE FUTURE BECKONS



Dr. Philip Widenhouse, already a member of the church was asked to be interim minister and he graciously accepted the call. *"I trust that I may help to bridge the gap between the era of service of our former minister and the period yet to come to which we look forward with anticipation and high hope,"* he said. Mr. Widenhouse was a member of the Board of Education of the town and well acquainted with the life of the church. He was only able to give part time service to the church because he was executive secretary of the American Missionary Association which had offices in New York City. He promised, nevertheless, that he would be available for all ministerial functions. This arrangement worked out very happily.

The Pastoral Committee read endless resumes and dossiers from ministerial candidates all over the country. Many people were interviewed by letter, many (29) interviewed in person. In all, 48 candidates were considered. Eventually the list narrowed down to a young man from the Plymouth Congregational Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, the Rev. Sumner Gill. The committee travelled to Worcester to hear him preach and were delighted with what they heard.

An invitation was sent to Mr. Gill, asking him to come to River Edge for an in-depth discussion with the committee. The committee became even more enthusiastic about Mr. Gill. His personality, spiritual depth, and his concept of the Christian Ministry indicated that he was the man the church was looking for. But he seemed strangely reluctant to make the change. Mr. & Mrs. Gill and their young sons, Lowell and John were very happy in their church, many friendships had been formed and the work was going well. They knew a break up of the relationship would be painful for them and the Worcester Church. (In this they were

absolutely right. During their first year in the River Edge Church over a hundred people from Worcester travelled down to visit them).

Eventually the Committee's sincerity and their conviction that this partnership was "right" prevailed and the Gills agreed to let their name be presented to the congregation.

Accordingly on December 27, 1953, Sumner Gill preached at the 9:45 and 11:15 services at the Roosevelt School. His topic was *"I Have Learned in Whatever State I Am, Therein to be Content,"* and, indeed, it set the climate for his long and productive ministry.

A reception was held in Fellowship Hall at 3:30 that afternoon, attended by over 500 members, who had a chance to meet the Gills personally. At the Congregational Meeting which followed the reception and tea, the members voted him in with unanimous approval, thoroughly convinced that he was the best man to follow their beloved Ernie Yarrow.

A standing ovation was given to the Pulpit Committee for their long but successful search for a new minister. The pulpit committee consisted of Curt Prenzel, Chairman, Beverly Barker, Nellie Bogert, Mrs. Dorothy Herrick, Mrs. Meta Manfredi, Mrs. Ruth Morison, Nicholas Manicardi, Rudolph Meyer, William Morgan, Robert Norum and Clinton Spencer.

The Gills returned to Worcester where Mr. Gill had served for seven years, to make arrangements for their moving. While he was gone, work on the new parsonage was completed. An Open House was held, so that members might "tour" the new building.

Mr. Widenhouse continued as Interim Minister until March 1, 1954, where the Gills took up residence in their new home. Mr. Gill preached his first sermon on March 7, 1954.

Cottage Meetings were organized all over town so that the parsonage family could meet smaller groups of people on an informal basis. This was helpful not only for the Gills but for the large congregation who thereby became more closely integrated. As is customary, Mrs. Brownell, the acting Director of Religious Education, resigned so that the new minister might select a Director of his own choosing. Thus it was that Helen Jane Sears came from Worcester to work in that capacity.

A farewell reception and tea was given to Rev. and Mrs. Widenhouse, who were moving to Manhasset after nine years residence in River Edge. Mr. Widenhouse was presented with a desk clock and Mrs. Widenhouse with costume jewelry.

Much appreciation was expressed by church officials for Dr. Widenhouse's counsel and help during the interim period. They declared that his ministry had helped to preserve the strength of the church.

An article in "The Record" of this time notes that *"the church ranked seventh in total membership in the Middle Atlantic Conference, which has 71 members. The church school ranks second with over 650 members. The church also ranks seventh in total benevolence. The annual report revealed that the local church had received more new members than any other church in the conference. Only 22 other churches in the nation received more members."*

On Easter Sunday Sumner Gill preached to record attendances at duplicate services at 9:45 and 11:45 at the Roosevelt School.

A fund was started to purchase furnishings for the new Sanctuary, a pulpit, lectern, altar cross, communion table, pews, choir rail, etc. These were soon obtained.

On Sunday, June 20, 1954, an Installation Service was held for Mr. Gill. Many dignitaries were present and the sermon was preached by Sumner Gill's father, the Rev. Harley H. Gill, Supt. of Congregational Christian Churches, Northern California.

Progress continued to be made on the many odd jobs which had to be completed before the church dedication. Volunteers moved the kitchen equipment to the new kitchen, painted the fire escapes, mowed the lawn in front of the new Sanctuary, moved chairs from the Roosevelt School. The Mary Jane Blair and William H. Reehl memorial windows were placed in the new building and a third stained glass window was purchased for the front of the church, with a gift given a few years before by Mary K. Zabriskie.

All arrangements for the laying of the cornerstone were completed and scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 19th, at 4 o'clock. Through the cooperation of the Police Chief of River Edge, Continental Avenue was closed to traffic from 3:30 to 5 o'clock so that the ceremony could take place outdoors with plenty of room for all.

Participating in the program were Mayor James Farrell, the Rev. Harold Green, Jr., of the Cherry Hill Reformed Church; the Rev. Vincent McClellan of the Grace Lutheran Church and Rabbi D. A. Jessuram Cordoza of the Jewish Community Assn. Invitations were also extended to the Contractors: Visheen Construction Company of Ridgewood, Electrison, Inc. of Fairlawn and Frank Ackerman of Hackensack.

All was then ready for the dedication of the new Sanctuary, which took place on Sunday, October 31, 1954 at two services, held at four and eight o'clock. Over six hundred persons attended the ceremony and heard the Rev. Joseph Stein, superintendent out of the Middle Atlantic Conference, deliver the sermon, "Build Me A Sanctuary." Also on hand was Pastor Emeritus, E. P. Leach, who came from Florida to attend the dedication and to deliver the prayer of dedication.

We were off to a fresh start with a new minister, a new parsonage and a new church. A joyful congregation settled back with a sigh of relief to prepare for their first Christmas in their new church home.

Three Easter services were held in 1955 at 8:15, 9:15 and 11 o'clock to which over a thousand people came.

In February of 1955 David Gill was born and a third little boy came to live in the parsonage.

The new pastor was enormously busy gathering together all the loose ends and designing new ways for the church to expand its mission as a servant of Christ.

A Board of Christian Service was created to oversee our Benevolence programs which had grown extensively, and to keep our church aware of our Christian World Mission. They established the practice of retaining 10% of the Benevolence pledges for disbursements to certain mission and social action projects which they thought deserving. It became their responsibility to sponsor the One Great Hour as well as the yearly clothing drive for Church World Service.

The church continued to grow and according to the "Bergen Record" 1240 people came to worship on Easter Sunday, 1956.

"The Record" continues: *"The tremendously rapid growth, according to the Pastor, the Rev. Sumner Gill, is best illustrated by the fact that baptisms outnumber weddings and funerals combined by five to one. More than half the congregation is in the 30's or early teens. We have a congregation of elementary school kids and young married couples," he added. "Nobody is ready to die and nobody is ready to get married."*

DISASTER STRIKES



This euphoric state was of short duration for just a month later a raging fire destroyed the old Parish House. The insurance did not cover the cost of replacement. The damage was estimated at \$51,000. Once again the congregation tightened its belt. The new pastor was confronted with one more building fund drive. Unbelievably, by the end of that year the burned out portion was completely rebuilt and debt free! This time it included a new Pilgrim Hall and the church offices.

During this time a new staff position was created - that of Church Visitor. Mrs. Dorothy Perry assumed the responsibility of that office and her work brought greater health to the congregation, choirs, church school and Women's Fellowship.

A new Council, the Lay Visitation Council, was called together by the Deacons and became a permanent part of the church life.

This year, 1957, will be remembered as the year which brought the culmination of all our building fund efforts. The Mortgage Liquidation canvas was outstanding and because of the wholehearted response, the church was debt free two years later. Great credit goes to the Pastor who was keenly aware of the attrition beginning to set in and who understood that the longer the mortgages went on, the more difficult they would be to eliminate.

At the end of the church school year in June, Helen Jane Sears, the Director of Religious Education, announced that she had accepted a call to her home church in Braintree, Mass. and was therefore resigning from her position. August arrived with no director in sight and the opening of a huge church school of over 775 children looming ever nearer. The committee charged by the congregation to find a new director, thereupon asked Mrs. Marie Brown, who

taught in the Junior High Dept. and Mrs. Dorothy Herrick, Primary and pre-school Superintendent, to assume the responsibility of the work on an interim basis, until such time as a permanent replacement could be found. The work was roughly divided in half, with Marie Brown as Youth Director and Dorothy Herrick as Church School Director. Eventually the Committee asked these two people to become permanent directors, and the problem was solved.

The death of the Rev. C.P. Leach, our Pastor Emeritus, occurred in 1957.

Early in 1958 an important meeting of the official family was called to present a study of some of the sociological trends in force in Bergen County. Most people who moved into River Edge were non-Protestant and the rate of turnover was very high. During this year 124 adult members moved from River Edge.

In this year the Achievement Test--"Orders of the Bronze, Silver and Gold Cross," written by Sumner Gill and published by the church were instituted in the Church School. It was intended to supplement the church school's inadequate one hour a week. In the first year of use, 350 children voluntarily enrolled in the program.

The benevolence giving of the church continued to grow each year, in spite of the many demands upon the congregation.

In 1960 the long awaited Sanctuary Mortgage Burning was held. Special invitations were mailed to all the Congregation and many guests to attend the Mortgage burning and Rededication Service on May 22nd. Two services were held with a social hour in between.

The Board of Deacons had for some time considered the possibility of an assistant pastor to relieve Mr. Gill of some of his administration duties. It had been deferred pending the completion of the building fund drives. But when he was making over 600 calls a year, editing the Congregator, teaching the pastor's class for confirmands, holding Bible Classes, doing one to one counseling, serving on the Community Youth Council and on several denominational committees, attending all the Board Meetings, etc., it became clear that something must be done.

HELP FOR AN OVERWORKED MINISTER



So it was that the Rev. Lewis Winter was called as associate minister. The Board of Trustees purchased a new home for Lew and Grace Winter and their family, and undertook a major program of renovations. The approval of the congregation was demonstrated by increased pledges. New adult Bible classes and a college age discussion group were formed under the leadership of Mr. Winter.

A Senior Guild, Mr. & Mrs. Club and Men's Service League were very active and served to bring members together in closer fellowship.

In 1963 the church was delighted to offer the Gills a trip to England to attend a seminar at Mansfield College, Oxford University. This proved to be a thrilling and enriching experience for them and they returned refreshed physically and spiritually.

Marie Brown, the Youth Director, who had so successfully launched a Senior High Youth Group was forced to resign, since her husband's work took him to Canada. Three hundred young people and adults attended a supper and a "This is Your Life" program for Marie, to express all the love and gratitude that was felt for her. It was fortuitous that Virginia Geiges had served as Marie's secretary and worked closely with the youth group. She was asked to take the job as director and the transition was made with ease.

Fifty junior and senior highs attended summer camps. A new middle high department was started for ninth graders. The Junior Pilgrim Fellowship for 7th and 8th graders continued to be a lively, active group of forty. The senior highs had some ninety young people at the Sunday morning discussion groups led by six adult advisors: Roy Samuels, Keith Greenwood, Sally Zick, Marie and Don Herrick, Deen Mars.

Dances were held each week with about 300 attending. So many teenagers began to appear that eventually the dances had to be discontinued for lack of space and sufficient chaperones.

Virginia Geiges instituted Wednesday morning Lenten services at 7:30 and 100 to 125 young people attended, some bringing friends from other churches.

Dorothy Herrick, the Church School Director, called together Christian Education people from surrounding churches, and a plan was developed for an inter-church training school for teachers which met for five evenings in September. Some TWO HUNDRED teachers enrolled. They came from Paramus, Little Ferry, Oradell and Haworth. The school continued for 5 years.

The Every Member Canvas this year resulted in a surplus, thanks to the efforts of the 220 canvassers and the generosity of the members. This spurred the Board of Trustees to considering the purchase of more parking space. The old bell from the original church had never been installed in the new church, but was left in the yard back of the church. It was moved to the garage to protect it from the weather and from "small boys with large stones." The dream was to install it in a belltower.

1964 was a banner year. The SPF discussion groups continued to maintain high attendance. Sixty young people attended summer camps. The three Easter services were attended by 1306 people. On May 22, a Sanctuary Mortgage burning ceremony was held.

But perhaps the most joyful event of all was the tenth anniversary celebration held for the Gills. A service of praise and thanksgiving was held with all Boards, Church School, Youth Groups, Bible Study Classes, Women's Fellowship, etc., offering thanks and appreciation to

Sumner and Lois for ten years of dedicated service to the church.

After the service in the Sanctuary a reception was hosted by the Women's Fellowship. A charm bracelet was presented to Lois and a wrist watch to Sumner, together with a purse from the congregation.

THE CHURCH LOSES OLD FRIENDS



On January of 1965 word came that our former Pastor Ernie Yarrow had died. A memorial service was held in our church on January 10th, and a memorial gift was sent to the Yarrow family.

In February the church was saddened by the death of Gustav Pfof, architect of our church and many other buildings in River Edge. He had been deeply involved in many areas of the church life, as well as the church school. Through the efforts of Mr. Stanley Bessler, the Memorial Committee, the Men's Service League and many members of the congregation, a memorial niche, which had been planned by Mr. Pfof, was dedicated to him. It is a repository for lists of church memorials.

During the year the Rev. Lewis Winter accepted a call to a pastorate in Chamberlaine, South Dakota. His resignation was accepted with much regret for he had made many friends while in River Edge. He and his family were honored at a Vesper Service and reception.

Attrition had started to set in, due to many factors. Many families were called to other fields of work and there was continued moving. Families moving into the town were largely non-Protestant, many women were working outside the home, so that fewer felt able to give time to the organized work of the church. Mrs. Dorothy Perry, the church visitor, did a heroic job of keeping up with these changes and her 1966 report states that she made 748 calls in that year.

The church instituted a plan to "outfit a child for Christmas." Members drew names of children in the East Harlem Protestant Parish, and completely outfitted them for Christmas. There was a great outpouring of generosity as 120 families shared in the plan.

In spite of some problems good progress was made in several areas. Bible classes, both morning and evening, continued to thrive. Giving to our Christian World Mission advanced more than \$4,000.00 over the previous year. The program "Outfit a Child for Christmas" was extremely successful for the second consecutive year.

The youth program remained strong and healthy. Great number of Senior Highs attended the Sunday morning study groups. The Senior Highs, the church school and the Women's Fellowship all sponsored children year after year through such agencies as "Foster Parents" and "Save the Children."

About 120 adults and children participated in a multiple choir program.

The "Second Mile" project was inaugurated which provided a way for people to give to Missionary work of particular interest to them.

In June of 1969 Dorothy Herrick and Virginia Geiges, church school and youth directors, respectively resigned and were replaced by Grace Irvine.

In his annual report to the Congregation Mr. Gill wrote, *"It is not easy to serve as a pastor at this time because of the 'religious recession' which has spread all over the country. We have lost seven dedicated people through death and 13 very active families have moved away. It could be very discouraging but for the fact that we still have a large number of dedicated families, who are doing everything in their power to maintain our strength and programs. I am very grateful for every sign of loyalty."*

It was a happy thing to have the old church bell installed in a beautiful new steeple, and also to have the Sanctuary air conditioned.

In 1970 the church faced a possible financial disaster because so many large contributors had moved away. The Stewardship Council took its work very seriously and came up with splendid results. The threatened financial disaster was transformed into a most successful outcome, with actual increases in pledges under these adverse conditions.

The Pastor warned: *"As long as our church can maintain healthy work in this department, our program will be assured, but we would experience a foretaste of Dooms Day if we falter in our stewardship efforts."*

Dorothy Perry, the church visitor, moved to Florida during this year, and her cheerful personality and tireless work were sorely missed.

Maureen Jamieson should be mentioned for her outstanding work over the years in supervising all the musical programs and events in the church. Her willingness to help and her professionalism have made our choirs admired throughout the area.

Walter Pfof, treasurer for many years, also merits heartfelt thanks for his excellence of performance and his incredible, unselfish giving of his time and abilities over a long period of time.

In 1971, a special committee had been appointed to study the "Consultation on Church Union." The proposed plan would have created a new church out of nine separate denominations. Serious consideration of the ideas proposed had been going on in our church and in 1972 the committee was ready to submit its recommendation to the Congregation. The committee strongly urged the fellowship to vote "no" on this proposition for several reasons, among them being 1) that the local church, as such, would cease to exist and 2) the local church would no longer hold title to its property nor control its local policies. Accordingly, a "response form" was completed and forwarded to the C.O.C.U. office in Trenton, giving the principal reasons

for rejecting the plan.

Grace Irvine resigned after two and a half years as D.R.E, to return to her home in Canada. The Board of Christian Education recommended to the Congregation the calling of Lois Gill to the post of Director of Religious Education.

The year 1972 also saw the beginning of a special service known as the "Hanging of the Greens" which has since become a tradition. Among other things the service features the trimming of the Chrismon Tree. "Chrismons" are gold and white symbols of Christ. These are designed anew each year and are crafted by families of the church. These are brought to the tree to be hung there on, after which a switch is thrown and the tree blazes with hundreds of tiny lights.

The church participated in a nationwide evangelistic program called "Key 73" which was an effort made through television, radio, newspapers and local parishes to call people back to the teachings and spirit of Christ. It was a year devoted to public and private worship, Bible Study and spiritual renewal. Many meetings were held in the church, when members of the congregation witnessed to their faith and the deep meaning it had in their lives. The meetings were under the leadership of Kenneth Thropp, Howard Blest, Richard Haleblan, Elwood Perry, Nick Manicardi and Keith Greenwood.

The Board of Deacons formed a committee to arrange for a Service and a reception for Lois and Sumner Gill, to commemorate the completion of 20 years of Service to this church. The committee, drawn from all church groups, developed a delightful service in the Sanctuary on April 27, 1974. Presentations of flowers by children, tapes of S.P.F. songs, a Memory Book, containing contributions from many members of the church and a purse, were made during the service.

A reception followed in Fellowship Hall, where a receiving line formed to allow everyone to express their love and appreciation to the Gills.

This year a club for retired men was begun. "Key '74" meetings were held on Sunday evenings. Church attendance showed a 3% increase in each of the preceding two years.

Due to the enthusiastic work of the Stewardship Council on the Christian Enlistment program a great victory was experienced and the giving to the church advanced 9% over the previous year. Oril Campbell, financial secretary for many years, was of inestimable help in keeping records, preparing cards for callers and keeping track of pledges.

The church became the depot for this part of Bergen County for the collection of clothing for Church World Service. Hundreds of tons of clothing have passed through this depot, most of it from our own church.

The Board of Christian Education appointed a committee to purchase good religious art for the church school rooms and halls. Three reproductions were purchased in 1975 with more to follow in succeeding years.

"Key '73", now called "Search 75," continued the Sunday evening program of prayer, hymn singing and testimony.

The annual church Fair continued to be a large and joyful occasion which included scores of people with varied talents.

The Christmas season provided warm fellowship with many delightful and festive events including the "Hanging of the Greens" service, the Ham and Sweets Dinner, the Christmas Eve Service, the special Christmas Music, the Caroling throughout the town, and the Special reception for S.P.F. alumni.

The Parsonage was given a face lift and new appliances were installed.

THE WOODRUFF FUND



Miss Marguerite Woodruff, a member of the church, passed away during this year and left her estate to the church. These funds were to be used for special purposes and were to have no bearing on the annual budget. Miss Woodruff had appointed Sumner Gill as the Executor of her will, a position he graciously filled, refusing any payment for his work. A dedicated musician and an active participant in the music program of the church school, she stipulated that some of the money from her estate be used for electronic equipment in connection with the organ, and for the Deacon's Fund.

Since the bequest was of a substantial amount, approximately. \$150,000, it was thought that a steering committee should be appointed to prepare rules and regulations for the administration of the Fund. In considering the regulations, a study of the origin and activities of the Deacon's Fund was prepared. It was summarized as follows:

"About 1938-39 our then Pastor, Mr. Leach, established a Deacon's Fund. It was primarily for the purchase of flowers for the Altar and other small expenses of the Deacons. The Fund was something less than \$100.00 (from the recollection and a few records of Nellie Bogert, church treasurer at that time)."

Shortly after 1945 at the end of World War II Ernest Yarrow, Pastor from 1943 to 1953, became aware of needs of families in our parish adversely affected by the war, and those of displaced persons. At his urging special collections were made at Communion services to help meet those needs and a Deacon's Fund was set-up in the regular church budget. The Fund had been utilized ever since that time but amounted to less than \$2000.00 until the Woodruff Fund came into being. (From the recollections of Rev. Sumner Gill, Doris Pryke, Clinton Spencer and Marden Nystrom).

The steering committee then formally organized with the election of Marden Nystrom as Chairman and Keith Greenwood as secretary. It was agreed that a preliminary set of regulations would be developed by September and sent to the Deacons and Trustees for review.

Meanwhile the Trustees had set up a Bell Committee which was investigating carillon equipment.

During the summer, the Congregation was devastated to learn of the serious illness of Sumner Gill, who spent time in two separate hospitals. Many prayers were offered in his behalf and the fellowship drew more closely together. Eventually there was a happy outcome, for an answer to the medical problem was found.

In 1978 Maureen Jameson, who had served the church as organist and Choir Director for three decades, resigned. She was sorely missed for her beautiful music, directing talent and generous spirit.

The church music committee was fortunate in securing the services of Jim Wynne as choir director. He was able to come in time to rehearse the Easter music. He soon established good relationships with the Church Staff, the choir and the congregation. Jim was able to consult with the Carillon committee and to offer helpful suggestions.

A Carillon was installed on December 14, 1979, which played the Westminster Chimes. The hour was struck each day except Sunday, from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. The church office subsequently received several phone calls and a letter from the Mayor, William E. Doyle, complimenting the church on the installation and its pleasing sound.

It became necessary for the church to have a special Building Repair Fund campaign because a number of very expensive renovations had to be made. Some 50 people made calls on the families of the church--others were approached by letter. The results were very gratifying. More than \$28,000.00 came into this fund. Even though it was necessary to raise this money, the Christian Enlistment program in November was unbelievably successful. Approximately 150 families increased their support of the church even though most of them had pledged to the Buildings Repair Fund.

Steps were taken to conserve heat and electricity. A new high efficiency oil burner was installed. New shingles were placed on the main church roof, the porch and office roof and the parsonage roof was replaced. The Bible and Torch stained glass window was repaired and protective glass put over it.

This year marked the 25th year (1979) of the Gill's ministry and on April 22nd the church held a reception in celebration of this event. There was a service in the Sanctuary, which was filled with friends, and a reception in Fellowship Hall. The occasion enabled the Gill's to have a family reunion, for all three boys had married and moved away. Many gifts were presented to the Gill's and a tree was planted in the churchyard as an expression of appreciation of their service. Said Mr. Gill: "These material gifts represent a great generosity on your part, but the most meaningful part of that celebration was, and is, the expression of Christian friendship which means more to us than anything else."

TRAGEDY LOOMS



Unknown to the Congregation, Sumner had been having serious trouble with his heart for several years. He tried to resign in late 1980 but the congregation was reluctant to accept his resignation. Had they known how ill he was they would certainly have relieved him of his responsibilities. He continued to work, although friends could see that something was wrong. During his vacation in August on Cape Cod his heart pains became very bad and on August 23rd, at the urging of his son, Dr. Lowell Gill, he and Lois went to South Carolina. Lowell had arranged for a well-known heart specialist to do some tests. Sumner had hoped to come home after this, but his heart was so bad he was hospitalized on September 1st. An operation was performed but two weeks later Sumner was dead.

The congregation was devastated.

Sumner was brought back to River Edge where a Memorial Service was held on September 24th in the church. His two older sons, Lowell and John, shared their thoughts about their father and Ronald Patterson, a close friend, gave a tribute to Sumner, and a message to his family and congregation. Much of the service had been planned by Sumner who had also requested that Dr. Joseph Stein, his very dear friend, lead the service of worship. Dr. Stein read Sumner's message to the congregation which had originally been presented on Easter Sunday, March 1978. The "Bergen Record" in its obituary columns briefly reviewed some of the highlights of Sumner's life: *"He graduated in 1938 from Stanford University and later attended Harvard Divinity School. While there he finished second in pole vaulting in the National Championships in Madison Square Garden in 1939. Mr. Gill graduated from Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts with a Master of Divinity in 1942. He was valedictorian of the class and baccalaureate speaker at graduation. During World War II he served as an army chaplain with the rank of Captain in the Pacific area. In 1961 he received the George Washington Honor Medal from the Freedom Foundation of Valley Forge for a sermon he preached on "Dynamic Democracy." The sermon was reprinted in the Congressional Record. A telegram signed by the Rev. David J. Casazza, Pastor of St. Peter's Church and by Mr. Walter Clark, President of the Parish, said "The entire community of St. Peter the Apostles Church, River Edge, is deeply saddened by the news that our friends, Rev. Sumner Gill, has died. As a Christian Community, we share your loss. Our prayers are with his family and each and every member of your church."*

This beloved Pastor was laid to rest in Masswood Cemetery, Cotuit, Massachusetts and on January 1, 1982, Lois Gill moved to Cape Cod.

The church was still going through a period of mourning and grieved with her. However, it gathered itself together and faced the problem of finding a new minister and a new Director of Religious Education.

The congregation was more than happy to have the Rev. Richard Perry become the interim minister. He was an old and much loved friend of the church and he and the congregation quickly settled into a comfortable working relationship.

And then an additional blow came in the death of Oril Campbell who had been financial secretary for many years and a great source of help during the Every Member Canvasses.

NEW DIRECTIONS



Evelyn and Bob Fialko replaced Lois Gill as Youth Directors and the Search Committee had found a new minister in the person of Robert Cedar, who had been Pastor of a church in Wisconsin.

The Couple's Club refurbished the parsonage and in June 1982 Bob and Priscilla Cedar moved in.

The Board of Christian Service, confronted by the growing numbers of hungry people in Bergen County, set up a food basket in the Narthex and people were encouraged to bring food each Sunday as they came to church. The Center For Food Action, housed in the Westside Presbyterian Church in Englewood became the agency through which our church worked, and continues to work to this day.

This was a year of receptions for the Women's Fellowship. They were responsible for a reception to welcome the new minister and his wife, one to thank the Rev. Dick Perry for his help, one for the Parsonage Open House and one for the installation of Bob Cedar.

Many areas of the church were decorated during 1983. The Sanctuary and Parlor were repainted. A new dorsal curtain was installed. New carpeting was laid in the Sanctuary and in the Parlor and beautiful new furniture graced the Parlor.

A much enjoyed treat was a handbell choir from St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Silver Springs, Maryland. After the concert, fourteen people were housed in the homes of our parish overnight.

The Woodruff Committee began a policy of presenting \$500.00 gift certificates to River Edge and Oradell at Christmas time and this was extended to New Milford, since real need was uncovered in these communities.

Pastor Cedar labeled 1984 "a year of change." He wrote in his annual report: "The change has come about through attrition, retirement and resignations. The attrition can be seen most clearly in the choir, as we continue to lose long time, faithful members as they retire and move to warmer climates. In the office and program staff there has been a sixty percent change as

Doris Pryke, Church Secretary; Evelyn Fialko, Director of Religious Education; and Marie Herrick, Christian Education Secretary have all departed."

An expanded tape program was instituted. In addition to tapes of the services made for shut-ins, tapes became available for special occasions such as Confirmation, Baptisms, and Memorial Services.

New speakers were placed in position in the Sanctuary, Parlor and Fellowship Hall, so that those in these parts of the building might hear the services from the Sanctuary.

For the benefit of people with an inability to climb stairs, a new chair lift offered a "ride" up and down.

In December Mary Perkins was hired as Director of Religious Education, on a trial basis, to replace Evelyn Fialko.

"The writings of Sumner Gill," a compilation of prayers, essays, sermons and meditations were published as a memorial to our former Pastor.

Plans for the re-building of the organ were at last finalized. A contract was signed in 1984 with the Peragallo Organ Company, which submitted a bid of fifty-four thousand, five hundred and eighty dollars. Financing was provided by twenty-five thousand dollars from the Woodruff Fund, eighteen thousand from the Organ Fund and twelve thousand from the Memorial Fund. It was anticipated that the work would be completed in July nineteen eighty five.

During 1984 the Senior Citizens Residence of River Edge was completed and the church voted to furnish one room in the home.

At the annual meeting held on January 27, 1985, Marden Nystrom presented the revised Constitution and By-Laws for approval. It was unanimously agreed to adopt the new Constitution and By-Laws and to have them registered with the proper State authorities.

Pastor Cedar's Annual Report perhaps comments on the year just past as well as possible. Here are excerpts from his report: *"This has been a painful year in the life of this church and in my ministry. Perhaps to say that we came through it relatively intact and are looking forward to this new year with optimism (at least I am) is putting the best face on things. There was turbulence right from the start over the ministry of Mary Perkins which ended in her resignation in July. Before we had worked this through there came the controversy over the church questionnaire, which showed some people to be highly critical of many aspects of the church and its programs and its minister. After the immediate shock and dismay I have come to realize that, painful though it has been, the questionnaire brought to the surface a discontent felt by some parishioners almost from the beginning of my ministry here. Each Board of the church has devoted time at its meetings to these aspects for which they are responsible. Some changes have been made in response to the issues raised. Where changes can be made, every effort will be taken if it is deemed proper." He continues: "We must realize that we are still a*

strong church." "We are yet one of the largest churches in the Central Atlantic Conference and the largest Congregational Church in Bergen County. We have a large active Sunday School program, and a youth program at a time when most churches have none at all." "For a number of years we have been the church that has given the most to the One Great Hour of Sharing among all the 187 churches of the Central Atlantic Conference. We dropped off this year to #2, but that should make us try harder in 1986."

On November 24th the newly completed organ was dedicated, followed by a recital.

The flat roofs of the church buildings had posed a major problem for several years because of leaking. Plans were drawn up for a gabled roof to be installed over the existing one, and a contract signed with Meehan and Meehan for this work and with Complete Roof Systems for applying Gates Hypalon roofing material. The Board of Trustees decided to have a fund drive over a two year period to raise the \$40,000 needed for this work. The money was forth coming in a short time.

A partial listing of the benevolence giving for 1986 shows a continuing interest in world wide ministries: The Columbian Volcano victims, African famine relief, Mexican earthquake relief, Dansalan College in the Philippines, Bangladesh relief, tornado relief in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

While the Church School was without a Director for some months, members of the Board of Christian Education manned the Church School office on Sunday mornings, and coordinated and implemented youth activities. The Church School superintendents, teachers and advisors gave extra hours to correlate programs and activities in the Church School. Then Bob and Evelyn Fialko volunteered as Senior Pilgrim Fellowship directors and the youth work was able to continue. They generously served without pay. In January 1986 Michelle Heinzinger, a member of the church was hired to fill the post of D.R.E.

Declining attendance at both morning services prompted the Board of Deacons to suggest holding a single service. This was agreed to by the congregation.

After serving the church as Director of Music for seven years, Jim Wynne found it necessary to resign to serve a church nearer his home. Jim had been a fine director and was regarded with deep affection by the choir and people. It was hard to see him go. In May Roxanne Gabriel came to take his place but found it necessary to relinquish her job in September.

Dr. Steven Hwang became the new organist and choir director. Under his leadership a bell choir was started. The bells were a memorial gift presented by Mr. William Kaupp in memory of his wife, Juyne. Another greatly appreciated memorial gift was the pew candleholders given by the family and friends of Marie Anderson.

The church continued to support "Toys for Tots," sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. Over a hundred and twenty-five toys were brought to the "Hanging of the Greens" service.

The Church School Director began a service which she called "Mother's Morning Out" and

which proved popular. On Wednesday mornings from 9:30 to 11:00 o'clock, Mothers were able to leave their children in the Child Care room, presided over by two mothers each week. The other Mothers were then free for an hour and a half to do whatever they wished.

A Pictorial Directory of the church membership was started and completed in February 1988. In the interest of alleviating traffic congestion at the corner of Continental Avenue and Kinderkamack Road, the town of River Edge indicated, that it would need to acquire a triangular parcel of the Church property comprising about one hundred square feet.

Another problem arose at this time. Due to new construction at the Municipal lot, drainage problems occurred on the south side of the church property. Rather than negotiate these problems themselves, the Trustees decided to seek legal help. Thomas Barrett of the local law firm of Barrett and Kraus graciously offered his services without fee.

These difficulties were subsequently settled by the church's granting to the town the needed land provided that the town would correct the drainage problems created in our parking lot. Ernie Myhren drew up plans and specifications for the work. The Board negotiated with the Bergen County engineers to have the property on Kinderkamack Road regraded, rather than have the railroad tie wall specified by the County.

Eventually traffic lights were installed on this corner.

In 1987 John Hoogstrate, the last of the Custodians, retired. This left the church with one part time custodian who, along with John Chatellier, then church treasurer, tried to perform the numerous small repairs which keep a church running smoothly. Finally, the Board of Trustees decided to hire an outside cleaning service.

A new stove was installed in the parsonage kitchen and repairs were made to the heating system. Trees and shrubs were pruned and thinned out and members of the Board painted the living room and study.

Thus, through generous gifts of time and work of several members, many things needing to be done were taken care of.

At the January 1989 Annual Meeting, Treasurer John Chatellier reported that income was not sufficient to cover expenses and that a deficit of \$7000.00 existed. By a most fortuitous circumstance, an inheritance was received from the estate of William and Hattie Burke, long time residents of River Edge, in the amount of \$84,000.00. The Burkes were not members of the church but, years before, had some meaningful relationship with Sumner Gill. There were no restrictions on the use of the funds, which were invested in C.D.'s in local banks.

At the end of 1989, Bob Cedar announced his resignation to take effect at the end of July 1990. They planned to retire to Freedom, New Hampshire. A new Search Committee was appointed to begin the quest for a new minister. Serving on this panel were Robert Albrecht, Nadine Berg, Lois Caughlan, Claire Dewhurst, James Dunleavy, Byron Ledgerwood, Franklyn Meeks, Jeannine Peters, Caroline Sutton, George Thomas and Ruth Tschudin.

On June 24th a farewell reception was held for the Cedars after the morning service. A guitar was presented to Bob and a purse from the Congregation, together with gifts from various organizations of the church.

The church was on the verge of a new era.

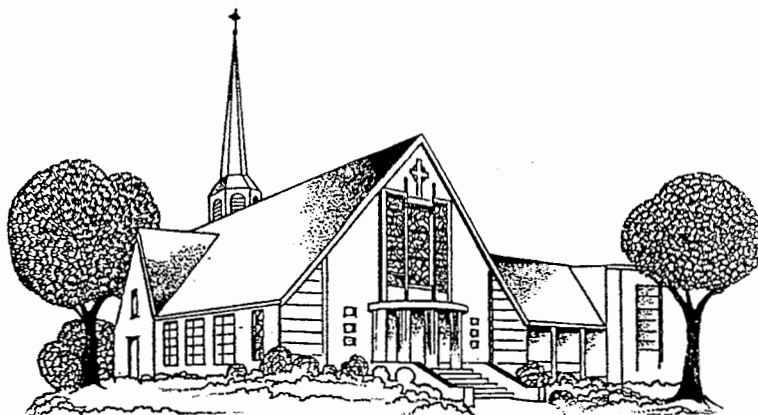
It seems inappropriate to conclude these tales of the first hundred and forty years of the church's existence, without listing the names of so many who have made today's church possible. It is, however, with considerable trepidation that we do this for, of course, there will be great numbers of people whose strength and work always have enriched this church, whose names do not appear here. Many appear on other pages of this history, many live in your memories and hearts.

We beg your indulgence for what is, at best, a very incomplete listing: Mr. & Mrs. Henry Voorhis, Herbert Kingman, Mr. & Mrs. Howard Norris, Walter and Chloe Randall, Cora and Franklin Baker, Gladys and Rudy Meyer, Andy Brunner, Sexton for many years, Don and Marie Herrick, Glenn Thompson, Nick Manicardi, Mildred and Howard Blest, Art Cassidy, Jerry and Stanley Bessler, Bill and Helga Hill, Nellie Bogert, Cathy and Gus Pfost, Walter Pfost.

How can one express the feeling which have been stirred during the study of this Church! There is gratitude for the many fine men who have been our Ministers. There is deep appreciation for the courage, dedication and foresightedness of those who have struggled with the many problems of the past.

There is certainly a strong sense of a Guiding Hand in all of this which leaves one with a feeling of awe and wonder. How blessed we have been!

It is evident that, when the people are devoted the church is strong; when they became complacent or apathetic, there is stagnation. It is clear that it is up, to us, as well as up to God. Only with the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of the Congregation can the church accomplish its high mission.



**"We must live upon the past, in
the present, but for the future."
--Abraham Lincoln**



Rev. Dr. John H. Danner

1991 -

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Dorothy Herrick has done our congregation a great service by compiling this history of our life together. These pages reflect many decades of service offered in the name of Christ. It is a proud heritage, one that provides us with a firm foundation.

But while it is important that we never fail to honor the past, and learn from it, we must, as Lincoln put it, "live...in the present...for the future." Indeed, the things we do and say here and now will provide a past for generations yet to come. We would do well to provide them with a footing as stable as the one left for us.

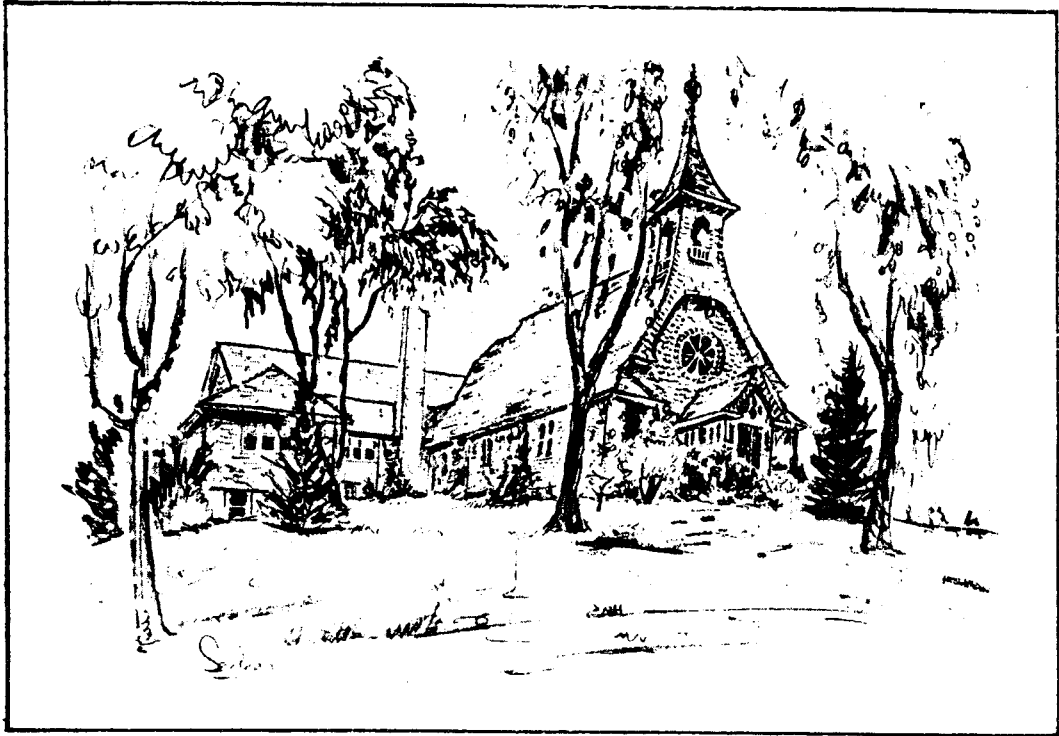
As I write these words, our present moment includes a growing dedication to helping meet the needs of our sisters and brothers who are homeless, hungry, sick or unemployed. We are involved in physically sheltering homeless persons: that need is not going to disappear in the near future. I envision us expanding our involvement in this vital ministry. Plans are underway for providing clothing for children in need. We continue our involvement with food pantries. We are, educationally and in other ways, addressing the issue of AIDS. We are expanding our interfaith involvements.

As a worshipping community we are utilizing the performing arts in new and exciting ways. Our choirs continue to provide an important part of every service. Drama, puppetry -- maybe even dance -- will grace our worship in the years ahead. Our sensitivity to the value and importance of holy communion seems to grow with each passing day.

Our physical plant is being updated little by little. From furnaces to wallpaper, attempts are being made to modernize our building. It is our most valuable physical asset and houses numerous community organizations as well as our own programs.

What does the future hold? God alone knows. But if the past and the present are indicators, the future would appear to offer the chance to be Christ's people actively seeking after personal growth combined with service to our community.

John H. Danner



JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF,
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE

1897