

A Brief History of Apex United Methodist Church

A Methodist congregation has existed in Apex for about as long as the town itself has existed. 1870 is the traditional date for the founding of the congregation, though the exact date is unknown. The earliest church record—a property deed—dates from August 3, 1872. Over the years, the congregation has worshipped at three different locations within the Town of Apex and grown in membership, ministries, and missions.

The first sanctuary was built on Elm and East Moore Streets—on the land purchased in 1872—facing the railway tracks. Fire destroyed the building in 1879, forcing the congregation to meet in the town hall until a new church could be built. In 1883 the congregation sold the original property and purchased land on Saunders Street, across from the present day police station. The second sanctuary was a white wooden-framed building, measuring approximately 35 by 60 feet, which served the congregation for over three decades. A cemetery, nestled among the trees on a hill overlooking Saunders Street, where many early church members are buried, is all that remains from the second property. An antique pump organ in our current sanctuary provides a glimpse of the furnishings of the earlier sanctuary. The church women raised money to purchase it and other furnishings in the 1890s by selling ice cream and oysters.

In November 1917, the congregation purchased property from Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Cunningham, and the third and present sanctuary was built at the corner of Hughes Street and Chatham Street. The three large stained glass windows were installed during the original construction. The others have been added over the years - four lancet windows and the two round ones in the chancel area in 1958, six lancet windows in 1976-77, and two transom windows in the narthex in 1985. The sanctuary was remodeled and expanded in 1993 to accommodate the growing congregation.

Originally, the Apex Methodist Church was part of a circuit, whereby one minister would serve several smaller churches. From 1880 until 1942, the Apex congregation was part of the Cary circuit, consisting of four congregations in Cary, Apex, Holly Springs, and Macedonia. In the days when travel was slower, the minister could attend only one congregation each Sunday. Thus, he conducted morning and evening services in Apex once per month, often arriving the evening before. By 1942, the Cary congregation had grown large enough to support its own minister, but Apex continued as part of a three-point charge with the Holly Springs and Macedonia Methodist churches. Not until 1946 did the congregation in Apex obtain the appointment of a full-time minister. As of 2007, fifty-two pastors have faithfully led the Methodist church in Apex. Our current senior pastor is David Brownlee who was appointed by the conference in 2005.

Just as the town of Apex has grown since its modest beginnings in 1869 as a stop on the Chatham Railroad, so the congregation of the Apex Methodist has also shown steady growth. From 15 members in 1882, to 295 in 1976 (the town numbered 2980 residents), to 2007, when the congregation topped 2600 members.

Concurrent with the growth of the congregation has arisen the need for larger facilities. In the 1960s the congregation began purchasing adjacent properties, resulting in the church property encompassing the whole block. In 1946 a parsonage was built on the northwest corner of Chatham and Hughes Streets (diagonally across the street from the current sanctuary.) That house was sold and replaced by a new parsonage on Olive Street in 1993 which was subsequently converted to a church office in 2006.

In 1958, a fellowship hall and education building was added at the back of the church—the white brick building, today called the Music Building. A second fellowship hall—the red brick building which today houses classrooms and the church parlor and called the Education Building—was constructed in 1982. In December 1999, the congregation dedicated the Lovelace Christian Life Center, named after Henry Lovelace who served as pastor from 1987 until his retirement in June 1999.

The small white house behind the Education Building stands as a reminder of the earlier residential nature of the block. Originally, it was built as a garage for the house of Frank Mills. When the church acquired the property, the building was first converted into a three-room apartment and rented out for added income; later it was renovated for office space and currently serves as a prayer room for our entire congregation.

Since the 1990's, our congregation has expanded in many areas, including both traditional and contemporary worship services, mission programs around the world, and active adult, youth, and children ministries. Our congregation has grown both in number and in our devotion to the Lord's work in Apex. God continues to provide us with new opportunities and as we listen to His voice we are confident he will direct us to be instruments of his grace as we strive to invite, equip, and transform all who come in contact with our fellowship.

The recital of congregational growth, new buildings, and leadership does not tell the whole story of Apex United Methodist Church. Today just as yesterday it is the people who make the church. The names on our stained glass windows remind us of a few of the faithful believers who have gone before us, but there are many others whose names may no longer be familiar but whose devoted service to the Lord laid the foundations for the health and vitality of the church today. We pray that the “people called Methodists” in Apex, North Carolina will continue to be faithful disciples, blessed by God to be blessings to those in our community and the world around us.

Apex United Methodist Church
Property Acquisitions / Building Programs
1872-2004

The history of "The People Called Methodist" gathering at Apex United Methodist Church in Apex, NC spans the era from the late nineteenth century to the active congregation that exists today in 2007. Throughout this time, the membership of AUMC has prayerfully considered God's call to expand His ministry in the Town of Apex and around the world. At several times in our history, our response to Christ's Great Commission to share the message of salvation with the entire world has driven us to consider physical expansion of our facilities and property. This report summarizes the major property acquisitions and building programs the congregation has undertaken during the period from 1872 to 2004.

The traditional date of AUMC's founding is the year 1870 with the first property purchase recorded as "one acre on the Raleigh and Augusta Railroad" for the cost of \$862 in a deed dated August 3, 1872 and recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 34, Page 578). In 1883, the congregation relocated to a second site on the current Saunders Street (formerly Methodist Street) by purchasing for \$100 "one lot in the Town of Apex containing one acre adjoining the lands of W.S. Mann, Olive and Atkinson" and recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 74, Page 357). From 1883 to 1944, AUMC maintained ownership of this lot and established the current church graveyard during that time. In 1944 the Church deeded a portion of this lot to the Town of Apex, retaining rights to the graveyard.

In 1885, the Apex Land and Improvement Company surveyed a large section of land within the Town of Apex with the intent of developing a community to be called Fairview. Block 1 of that development is the basis for the current AUMC church location and is delineated by the intersections of East Chatham, South Hughes, Olive, and South Elm streets. AUMC's title to this property consists of five purchases with the majority being acquired since 1976.

AUMC is best known as a congregation established at the corner of Chatham and Hughes streets in Apex due to our move to that location in 1917. The original purchase was defined as "lots nos. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18, block no. 1 as shown on the map and survey of the lands of the Apex Land and Improvement Company". The land was purchased from Lizzie M. Cunningham and J.R. Cunningham for \$1000 as recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 324, Page 39). An interesting note is that this property was original deeded by the Apex Land and Improvement Company to the Apex Presbyterian Church in 1910 and subsequently sold to the Cunninghams in 1913 prior to our purchase in 1917.

For forty-three years, with the exception of the first parsonage property, AUMC did not expand beyond the limits of this original property purchase. In September 1960, the Church agreed to purchase for \$15,000 "all of lots nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 and the greater portion of lot no. 28" from Ada J. Mims, C.A. Baucom and wife Meredith M. Baucom as recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 1422, Page 607). In addition to the Baucom property, the Church acquired two buildings - the "White House" (current 106 South Hughes Street) and the Baucom residence (since removed). The Church maintained both properties as rental homes until the late 1970's.

In 1976, the estate of Jesse A. Norris via Triangle Associates approached AUMC about the purchase of the land defined as "Tracts A and B according to survey and plat of J.A. Norris Estate (Old Home Place) by Smith and Smith Surveyors, dated October 3, 1973, and being part of the land convey to Jesse Norris by deed dated November 4, 1880." The total area of this land was 1.598 acres and greatly expanded the physical property of the Church. The Norris home (since burned by the Town of Apex) and several cedar trees still standing along the property frontage with South Elm Street were included in this purchase completed by the Church on June 30, 1976 and recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 2423, Page 417) at a price of \$25,000.

AUMC continued to expand and acquired additional lots adjacent to the original property purchased in 1917. Commonly known as the "H.C. Benton Property", the land was deeded to the Church by Margaret Ferry and several members of the Benton Family and consists of "lots 9, 10, 11, and 12" of the original Block 1 of the Apex Land and Improvement Company. The deed is recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 4173, Pages 673 and 674) and dated December 20, 1987 with a price of \$50,000. This property also had a house (removed by the church in 1989) and several trees that remain on the property today including the large oak and pink dogwood along the property frontage on Chatham Street.

The final property acquisition that completed the Church's ownership of the entire original Block 1 was the purchase in 1996 for \$50,000 of "lots number 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 and 8" from Edward Tindal as the executor of the estate of Florie Outlaw Tindal. The Tindal property included a metal "quonset hut" that at one point had been used as a small engine shop along with an underground storage tank both of which were removed soon after the property was acquired. The deed for the Tindal purchase is recorded in the Wake County (NC) Book of Deeds (Book 7125, Pages 103 and 104) and dated August 1, 1996.

In parallel to the five property acquisitions completed by AUMC since 1917, the congregation has considered and approved corresponding expansions of our church buildings. Much of the character of the current church is reflected in the original worship space constructed in the late 1910's at the corner of Chatham and Hughes Streets. The original sanctuary and the current worship space for Holly Springs (NC) United Methodist Church appear to have followed a similar architectural plan. Rev. B.P. Robinson served both congregations (as well as First UMC and Macedonia UMC in Cary) from 1913-1917 and is noted for building new sanctuaries in Apex, Holly Springs, and Macedonia.

As the AUMC congregation grew, additional space for education (Sunday School), fellowship, and worship led to a building campaign launched in 1952. The building program brochure entitled And it came to pass ... documents a poetic history of AUMC and the need for expanded facilities. In light of the property limitations at the time (only original lots 13-18 were owned by the church), the expansion was described as a remodeling of the worship space in the sanctuary and the addition of 62,400 cubic feet of space most devoted to a large assembly and fellowship hall, kitchen, and classrooms. From 1952-1954, the congregation struggled with arranging the necessary financing for the expansion. With the assistance of a loan secured from the Duke Endowment for Rural Church Development, AUMC completed a much smaller expansion than originally planned resulting in the existing Fellowship Hall #1 (current 102 South Hughes Street) dedicated in 1956.

During the 1960s and 1970s, AUMC maintained its presence and ministries in the Town of Apex but did not consider facility expansion as one of the priorities for the congregation. During the mid 1970s the congregation in fact struggled to meet its conference apportionment payments and annual budget. In 1978 under the leadership of Rev. Howard McLamb, the congregation funded a Land Use Plan developed by Nicholson Associates Architects in Durham, NC. This Plan recommended three “schemes” for the expansion of the physical facilities at AUMC to best utilize the increased property available (both the Baucom and Norris tracts had been acquired at the time of the report). The congregation and Building Committee focused on Scheme Two highlighted by these recommendations:

- 1) Conversion of the existing sanctuary to a fellowship hall
- 2) Construction of a new sanctuary at the corner of Olive and Hughes streets
- 3) Connect the existing fellowship hall (current FH #1) to the new sanctuary to provide additional classroom space
- 4) Conversion of the “White House” for junior and senior high classes
- 5) Covered walkways (colonnades) between all buildings and extended to parking areas

From July 1979 to 1981, the Building Committee with Hershell Ball as chairperson worked through various options for both conversion of the existing facilities and expansion to support the increased worship and education needs. After a change of pastoral leadership from Rev. Ed Privette to Rev. Jack Benfield in 1981 and Rev Benfield's subsequent heart attack, progress appears to have slowed and the emphasis shifted from a combined worship and educational space expansion to focus on additional educational and fellowship space. In September 1982, the congregation broke ground on the approved expansion, Fellowship Hall #2 (current 104 South Hughes Street) resulting in an additional 4 classrooms, new kitchen, and large fellowship hall space for meals and other church activities.

Upon Rev. Henry Lovelace's appointment to AUMC in 1987, the church once again considered expansion. A Church Growth Study Committee, chaired by Jack Kerley, was formed and tasked “to meet the spiritual needs of our community as we grow in grace and strength.” The Committee surveyed the congregation to determine the proper ways to address the growth in the community and AUMC. The survey results clearly indicated “a mission to stay here on this corner and grow.” Classrooms in FH #1 and FH #2 provided adequate education space but the sanctuary (at that time seating approximately 150-175) could not comfortably accommodate the expanding congregation. In September 1989, a church conference wisely voted to fund the development of a new “master plan” which was completed the following year by Bohm Architecture. Among the recommendations provided was an enlargement of the sanctuary to seat up to 300-350. The building committee, led by Paul Madritch, was able to maintain the spirit of the 1917 sanctuary while providing a much larger worship space. The church began and completed this remodeling in 1992 and dedicated the expanded sanctuary in May 1993.

As AUMC and the Town of Apex continued to grow during the 1990's, the church once again revisited the issue of facilities expansion. Guided by the 1991 Master Plan, the Long Range / Short Range Committee of 1995 voted to organize a new building committee under the leadership of Lance Youngquist. This 1996 Committee completed surveys of the congregation and staff and studied population projections from the Town of Apex to determine the primary

facility needs for a 5-10 year horizon. After numerous meetings and dedicated times of prayer, the top five program and facilities priorities identified were:

- 1) Classrooms (projected growth to 22 needed)
- 2) Multi-purpose space (seating for up to 700)
- 3) Dedicated music room(s)
- 4) Improved/expanded office space
- 5) Commercial grade kitchen (equipped to serve 600 meals)

The Committee realized that only a large restructuring of the current facilities could accommodate all of these priorities and recommended to the Administrative Board that the church consider a property expansion (purchase of Tindal Property) to allow for the building of a combined "Christian Life Center" and the remodeling of the existing FH #1 (music) and FH #2 (offices). In June 1996, the church voted to proceed with this plan and moved forward to complete the Lovelace Christian Life Center in December 1999.

God continued to bless the AUMC church family and once again in 2001 the congregation considered ways to address the continued growth. The Administrative Council commissioned the Long-Term Planning Committee, under the direction of Rev. Bob. Bergland and Larry Jordan, "to plan, with God's guidance, the future of Apex United Methodist Church." The Committee's report listed 20 recommendations for the church to consider including establishment of a new building committee and stewardship campaign. Growth in multiple areas led the 2001 Building Committee, under the leadership of Lanny Bynum, to develop a multiphase expansion of the church buildings. In parallel to this Committee's work, a capital program promoted as the "God's Far Purpose" campaign initiated a "Five in Five" goal to raise \$5 million within 5 years. The congregation began to combine the building program with the God's Far Purpose capital campaign and moved forward to vote on approval of the first phase of a building program. Approval of Phase 1 would have authorized construction of a new sanctuary at the corner of Olive and Hughes streets to accommodate a worship space of up to 800 people. In July 2004, a church conference voted not to move forward with this plan resulting in a continuing period of reviewing the appropriate priorities and directions.

Throughout the history of AUMC, many individuals have devoted innumerable hours planning and implementing a vision for our congregation. Each of these saints should be praised for their efforts as they struggled to hear and respond to God's call to His people in Apex. After a review of the property acquisitions and building programs our church has completed over this era, these lessons learned should guide our future efforts:

- 1) Organize a "Long Range" planning committee to continue to research growth trends and congregational needs out to a 5 to 10 year horizon
- 2) Contract with outside expertise to advise the church and help "think outside the box"
- 3) Identify all sources for financing as early as possible in each project
- 4) Continuously reaffirm directions with the congregation and church leadership
- 5) Maintain an emphasis on prayer as central to all teams engaged in any major project
- 6) Keep open to new visions that God may place upon the hearts of the congregation

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