

# ***A Great Cloud of Witnesses***

**St. Paul United Methodist Church  
New Ellenton, SC**

**1953 - 2021**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. - Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)*

The information for this historical account of St. Paul United Methodist Church is a combination of three previous histories as well as new information obtained by the editor.

The present editor acknowledges the work of Donald and Mary Funderburk, who edited [This Is Our Heritage](#), the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary history of St. Paul, dated August 31, 1978, and Laura Mitchell, Betty Eubanks Rowland, Gladys Thames Britt, and Marie Stamey Renwick, who edited the [Historical Directory](#), dated February 28, 1993, for our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The current account is a continuation of [Christ, Our Cornerstone](#), the history of the first 50 years of St. Paul United Methodist Church, compiled by Randy Stowe in 2003.

This book is dedicated to the memory of all former  
members and ministers  
of Springs Methodist / St. Paul United Methodist  
who are with us now only in spirit.

Book edited by Randy Stowe

It is important that we keep our history accurate. If you discover errors in this manuscript, please let the church office know so that the information can be corrected.

Numerous individuals have contributed to the spiritual life and work at St. Paul United Methodist Church but are not specifically named in this historical account. Members of the choirs, Sunday school teachers, church workers of every type, those who contributed of their financial resources, as well as worshipers who attended regularly and who were faithful Christian witnesses in our community, we acknowledge them all. And God knows who they are.

## HISTORY OF ST. PAUL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

World War II had been over for five years, but the Cold War was just getting started. On November 29, 1950, an article in the Aiken Standard and Review newspaper proclaimed: "The United States Atomic Energy Commission today announced that its new production plants to be designed, built and operated by E. I. du Pont Nemours Company of Wilmington, Delaware, will be located in Aiken and Barnwell counties, South Carolina, near the Savannah River." This dramatic announcement heralded an influx of new residents into the area to build the Savannah River Plant, which soon became known as the "bomb plant." This tranquil, rural section of South Carolina was transformed overnight into a bustling center of construction activity.

The residents of the sleepy railroad town of Ellenton and several other small communities were forced to move and make way for the sprawling nuclear facility, leaving homes, farms, and churches behind. The Methodists in Ellenton had just completed a new brick church when the government announced their plans. The new building had to be sold to the government and demolished. The proceeds from the sale were divided between Bethel Methodist, a new church to be built in Jackson, and the existing Springs Methodist Church, a small rural church several miles outside the plant boundary in the Talatha community. Mr. David Sims requested the funds on behalf of 14 former members of the Ellenton church who were transferring to Springs.

At the time Springs was on a charge with Vaocluse and Capers Chapel Methodist churches, and M. W. Harvey was the minister.

In November of 1952, the Rev. Melvin E. Tingle was appointed by Bishop Costen J. Harrell of the South Carolina Conference to serve Springs Methodist Church. Rev. Tingle was sent to minister to the members at Springs Church, and at the same time, he was commissioned to establish a new church, closer to the emerging town of New Ellenton. A new church was needed due to the large number of Methodists who had moved into the area from all over the country.

According to the minutes of the November 3, 1952, meeting of the members of Springs church and the Bishop, the District Superintendent, and Rev. Tingle, Bishop Harrell "prayed that plans might be made wisely and well, so that the Church could minister to those who had come here. The long history of Springs and the tender sentiments associated with it were recalled, and he asked that as the congregation planned to move out nearer where it might better minister to the multitudes that they might turn men and women to the Lord and Savior of us all. He asked God to prosper the work, to bless Brother and Mrs. Tingle, and to bless and redeem our hearts."

The building fund already amounted to \$8,445.85. There was much discussion about the location of the new church. At least two parcels of land had been identified, one available for purchase and one offered to be donated for a church and parsonage. A major factor in choosing the site was "that the new church must be where it could be seen and entice and attract people to go there." A site on a small hill facing Highway 19 just south of the new town was eventually selected.

Miss Charlotte Stevenson, a Methodist social worker, was assisting with the initial efforts of forming the new churches in New Ellenton and Jackson. Bishop Harrell suggested that she "could gather little cells of Methodists in the trailers, under indigenous leadership, and get them ready to come to the church." Many of the new residents lived in several large trailer parks in

the community. Construction workers were housed in all sorts of makeshift accommodations, including tents.

According to quarterly conference records, dated February 15, 1953, the property for the new church had been secured, the well drilled, a road cut through the lot, and the building plans, approved by the Bishop and the General Board of Missions, had been selected, the builder hired, and the church was ready to be laid off. By April 26, 1953, the quarterly conference report indicated that the building was progressing rapidly.

The members of Springs church held their final homecoming at the old church on the last Sunday in August. The first services were held in the new building on September 1, and the new center of worship was dedicated on September 29, 1953. Quarterly conference records, dated September 29, show that church membership was around 100. The two-story brick church had been constructed at a cost of over \$40,000.00, and the construction was finished with the exception of a heating furnace which was to be installed at a cost of \$3,475.00. Only \$6,000.00 had to be borrowed from the Bank of Greenwood for construction, due to the church receiving a grant from the General Board of Missions in the amount of \$10,000.00.

Members of the Building Committee and of the Official Board of the Church during that surge of growth and activity (1953-54) were: William A. Cline, Mrs. William A. Cline, Thoy Eubanks, James Evans, Floyd Furr, Glenn Garrett, J. Randolph Johnson, Mrs. J. R. Johnson, John McKinney, Robert Mennenga, Mrs. Sheldon Mitchell, Carole Owens, David Sims, Mrs. Frank Smith, Mrs. Ralph Steele, Mrs. Rebecca Thames, Davis Toole, Sr., Richard Wall, Ramie Yonce, and Mrs. Ramie Yonce.

Rev. and Mrs. Tingle lived in a mobile home for a short time, but in September a small house was purchased on Old Whiskey Road, directly behind the church, to be used as a parsonage. The cost of the new parsonage was \$7,000.00, but the person from whom the house was purchased donated \$500.00, making the actual cost only \$6,500.00. On this debt the church borrowed \$6,000.00 from Mrs. Lily Yonce, a member of the church. The Fellowship Class, a Sunday school class composed mainly of young couples, assumed the responsibility of providing furnishings for the new parsonage.

The church continued to make progress, and by quarterly conference on August 15, 1954, the membership was 136. In November of 1954, Rev. James Alewine, his wife Betty, and two small children became the parsonage family at the young church.

This new church continued to be called Springs Methodist, New Ellenton Charge, until sometime in 1955, when a congregational vote mandated that the name become "St. Paul Methodist." The Quarterly Conference Report of March 13, 1955, is the first time that the new name appears in the official church records. Vacation Bible school certificates that summer, however, still listed the name of the church as Springs Methodist.

The original building had six Sunday school classrooms behind the sanctuary and a spacious fellowship hall downstairs. Within two years the members dug out the unfinished space under the sanctuary and added six more classrooms, which were first used in early 1956.

In 1957 Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Blackmon donated a lot adjacent to the church for a new parsonage. Those who served on the Parsonage Building Committee were: Charles Thames, Lavearn Akins, W. D. Blackmon, and Glen Garrett. The home was built by D. W. Robinson, a local builder and member of St. Paul. He agreed to build the new parsonage at a cost of \$10,000.00 plus the old parsonage, which was valued then at \$6,000.00. The new house was larger than the previous parsonage and provided sufficient space for a young pastor with a growing family. After several renovations and expansions over the years, it continues to be the home of St. Paul pastors.

Rev. Alewine ministered to the members of St. Paul for six years during a time of rapid growth, and by the time he left, the membership of the church was over 250. During this period there were many children and youth in the church. In addition to Sunday school, most of the children and youth participated in one of several choirs. Vacation Bible School was the highlight of the summer for children. There was an annual fellowship time around Halloween, and in December the children participated in pageants depicting the birth of Jesus. There was always a visit from St. Nicholas, too. Covered dish dinners were popular fellowship times for the young families. The smaller children often ate their meals on the stairs leading from the upstairs into the fellowship hall while the teens gathered outside on the front steps or in a classroom.

In 1960 Rev. Woodrow Ward was assigned to St. Paul. With him came his wife, Ruth, who was a skilled teacher of children. She is remembered as a person who taught the Sunday school teachers some excellent methods of communicating the gospel message to children. She believed strongly in the importance of children in the church family and felt that the very best in materials and techniques should be made available to them. It was probably at her urging that the educational annex was built onto the original building. Members who were children at St. Paul during this period fondly remember the recreational board games that Rev. Ward organized during Vacation Bible School.

At this point several active families pulled away from St. Paul and joined some others who lived on the south side of Aiken to begin forming a new church in that community. On February 5, 1961, these Methodists began meeting in a room adjacent to Herchel's Shell station between New Ellenton and Aiken. The new church broke ground on June 10, 1962, and the first services in the new sanctuary of Trinity Methodist Church were held on December 16, 1962. St. Paul lost some faithful members to this new church, but we are proud of our part in forming another successful Methodist congregation. Among the active families St. Paul lost were the Clines and the Carrolls.

At St. Paul a church conference on November 19, 1961, approved plans for a new educational building. Members of that building committee were: Mrs. Pauline Alexander, Wallace Brock, O. G. Garrett, Mrs. Harry Smith, George Stowe, Charles Thames, and O. S. Mitchell. Members of the congregation did most of the construction, with George Stowe providing much of the supervision. On almost any evening and on Saturdays you would find volunteers working. We tried to use the pay-as-you-go method of paying for the building, but toward the end of the project, a loan had to be obtained to complete the work. The addition was completed and dedicated on May 29, 1966.

There was an active Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) during these years, with both junior and senior high groups. The youth participated in Sunday evening programs and attended monthly meetings and an annual retreat with other church youth groups throughout the Sub District. Matt and Doris Boatwright took over the MYF from Carole Thames around 1960, and they

worked tirelessly with the program for the next 20 years. The traditional Halloween party was held after the children returned from trick or treating to benefit UNICEF, a program to assist needy children around the world. During the late 1960's attendance at the South Carolina Methodist Camp in the mountains near Cleveland was a popular summer experience for our young people.

Sunday evening services were well attended, and the fellowship hall was full every Wednesday evening for prayer meetings. The publication of the Good News (TEV) translation of the New Testament in 1966 sparked new interest in Bible study among our members. Confirmation classes each year were full of young people preparing to join the church. When the minister took a vacation, we had several laymen, such as Wallace Brock, Sheldon Mitchell, and Lavearn Akins, who were willing and able to fill the pulpit. Prior to his transferring to the new Trinity church, William Cline also often filled in as a lay speaker. After 1968 a new emphasis was placed on lay speaking, replacing all other terms for that service of ministry.

In 1966 the Rev. George C. Owens, his wife Karolyn, and their two sons, Clay and John, came to St. Paul. Under the leadership of Rev. Owens the church continued to grow. In 1968 St. Paul Methodist became St. Paul United Methodist Church, when the Methodist Church united with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. With this merger a new structure was initiated, and it was not long before St. Paul was organized in keeping with this new plan.

In 1970 the debt on the parsonage was eliminated, and other improvements were made, not the least of which was the air conditioning system installed in the church at a cost of \$10,000. Many of our older members fondly remember the paper fans provided by the local funeral home, which were always in the pew racks along with hymnals prior to the addition of the air conditioning. Before we added the stained glass windows, the windows in the sanctuary could be opened on hot days.

Our original sanctuary had natural oak and pine woodwork, and the choirs were seated on both sides of the altar. The communion rail ran straight across the front of the church closing off the altar and the choirs. A large print of Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* was directly in the center of the wall behind the pulpit. Mrs. Ruth Jones often brought a vase of fresh flowers to place in the window near where she always sat. Since members walking out the back of the sanctuary had to wend their way through the choir chairs, almost everyone leaving the church walked out through the front door, where the minister always greeted and shook hands with everyone. After church adults visited on the lawn under the magnolia trees while the children frolicked and played. Sliding down the banister of the front stairs and playing hide-n-seek in the tall bushes were popular games.

The Rev. Benjamin B. Barnes was appointed to St. Paul at the Annual Conference in 1970. Mrs. Sue Barnes assumed the leadership of the adult choir after Mrs. Lucile Lyda, who was a tireless church worker during her years in New Ellenton, retired to North Carolina. Their children, Will, Susan, and Benjie, were active in our children's and youth programs. The church then had 392 members. Two highly successful Lay Witness Missions were held during his ministry. Our popular evening church services consisted of singing hymns by request followed by altar prayers (altar prayers that alter lives).

Although the church has always been “mission minded,” it became more personally involved in community outreach and foreign missions during the 1970’s. A senior citizens group, made up of seniors from both St. Paul and other local churches, was started in July 1972. It was known as the Morning Glory Club until June 1979 when it was renamed in honor of one of its major supporters, M. L. (Lynn) LeGrand. The Lynn LeGrand Senior Group grew to be one of the most active groups in the church. A sound system was purchased using funds donated in memory of Lynn LeGrand, and we began a tape ministry to provide audio tapes of services to members who could not attend church services.

The church sponsored Matt Boatwright and Rev. Ben Barnes on a trip to Fortaleza, Brazil. There they performed manual labor to assist in the building of a Methodist Church. Since that time, a number of others have been sent on such missions by St. Paul. These personal experiences have proved to be a valuable source of spiritual uplifting to the participants and the church as a whole.

There were many young people, and both junior-high and senior-high UMYF groups were active. Many current adults remember the retreats at the Blands’ cabin in the mountains, the Barneses’ house at Edisto, and at Oconee State Park and Whitewater Falls. The children and youth participated in the Aiken church basketball league. Our mite girls team coached by Sammie Riddle won the Aiken Department of Recreation championship in 1970-71. In September of 1973 a bus was purchased to provide transportation for the many groups actively worshipping at St. Paul. We held an annual church picnic at Aiken State Park accompanied by a popular softball game. There was an annual summer trip to Six Flags over Georgia for the youth. Our membership reached 401 in 1975, an all-time high.

In June of 1977 the Rev. Donald F. Funderburk and his family moved into the parsonage. Meetings were held immediately to finalize plans that had been started during Rev. Barnes’s tenure to renovate the sanctuary. A bank loan was secured for \$47,000.00, and work began in July of 1977. During the renovation, services were held in the Fellowship Hall. On October 30, 1977, services were again held in the newly refurbished sanctuary. Members of the Renovations committee were O. S. Mitchell, Mrs. Mildred Akins, Matt Boatwright, Carroll Griffith, McKellar Eubanks, and Mrs. Jean Smith.

The renovations moved the choir loft to its present position behind the pulpit, and the stairs leading to the fellowship hall were removed. The woodwork was stained brown, and exposed beams added to the ceiling. A lighted stained glass of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane was added behind the choir. A communion rail in a semicircular shape around the pulpit and new light fixtures hanging from the ceiling added to the present appearance of our sanctuary.

Stained glass windows were added in 1978, each window being purchased by individuals or groups in memory or honor of a loved one. These windows were installed at a cost of \$11,362.00 by Stained Glass Associates of Raleigh, North Carolina. The windows were dedicated on September 17, 1978, when St. Paul celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Fellowship Hall was also renovated during this period. Membership of St. Paul in 1978 stood at 391 members.

A monthly newsletter was started in February 1978 to keep the membership better informed of activities of the church family. Our first pictorial directory of the membership was also

published that year. Mrs. Funderburk encouraged us to start a church library, and Clyde Hill built the shelves for the books. Nettie Jean LeGrand was the first librarian.

In June of 1978 the trustees purchased 2.751 additional acres of land adjacent to the parsonage and extending from Highway 19 to Old Whiskey Road from Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Blackmon for \$6,877.50. This additional land would allow growing room for the church's future. We added a softball field behind the parsonage on some of this land.

May of 1979 was an exciting month for our children and youth when they performed in Down by the Creek Bank under the direction of Karen Wyont, who had taken over the duties of children's choir director two years earlier. More than one performance was necessary due to this musical's popularity. George Stowe designed and built a special stage for this production and for future children and youth choir cantatas and plays. Outstanding musical productions for our young people became a tradition at St. Paul.

In 1980 Rev. Charles Polk and his wife Hattie became our parsonage family. During this period the children participated in Super Sundays, and our young adults began meeting regularly outside of Sunday school. On the missions front, we supported Rev. Paul Rogers in the West Indies. The LeGrand Senior Group was active and growing. The Rev. Frankie Sann visited our pulpit and described his prison ministry at the CCI in Columbia. Two additional tracts of land beside the parsonage were added to our facilities. In 1983 we purchased 1.7 acres for \$3,500 from the Blackmon estate, and one additional tract was donated. Our budget for 1983, our church's 30th year, was \$70,896.00.

In 1984 Rev. Henry Thomson became our minister. We supported the Murrays, missionaries in the South Pacific, and the Lee Memorial Mission School in India during his ministry. In February 1986 the Alcoholics Anonymous group started meeting regularly at our church. The UMW and the UMYF were active. We restarted our UMM group which had stopped meeting several years earlier. The young adults continued to meet regularly. The Family Life School served as our summer vacation Bible school. In 1987 we replaced the neglected flower circle in the middle of our cemetery with a marble cross. On May 5, 1986, the Administrative Board decided to cancel our Sunday night worship services because attendance had dropped. One of three recorded visits of the bishop occurred on October 12, 1986, when Bishop Clark attended our charge conference.

Henry Thomson passed away on April 8, 1987, following an extended illness. He continued to serve our church and Christ through much of his final illness, preaching on a stool behind the pulpit his last few Sundays. We were inspired by his planning to provide for the needs of his family after he was gone. He is buried in the St. Paul cemetery. His wife Mae, who was a local teacher, and their three daughters made their home in New Ellenton afterwards.

During the period of time when our pulpit was empty after Rev. Thomson's passing, various laity of the church provided our Sunday messages and fulfilled the other duties of the church. In June 1987 the Administrative Board recognized McKellar Eubanks, in particular, as a member of our church who "made the ministry of the church go forward" until the Conference could send us a new minister.

Rev. Ray Smith and his family moved into the parsonage in June of 1987. He started a popular summer recreation program for children known as Wonderful Wednesday. His wife Sarah, who worked as a public health nurse, reinvigorated our UMYF program for the youth. McKellar Eubanks donated new insulated windows for the church in 1988. This same year we enlarged the parsonage. Our mission programs during this period included the Stone Soup luncheon to benefit UMCOR, the Community Crop Walk, Thanksgiving baskets for the needy, family week contributions to the Heifer Project, and an angel tree to provide Christmas presents for residents of local nursing homes. God's storehouse generated contributions from our members for excess vegetables from our gardens. In 1989 the UMYF attended retreats at Springmaid Beach and at Lake Junaluska.

Several other significant events took place in 1989. We set up a perpetual care fund for the upkeep of the cemetery at Old Springs. We replaced our hymnals. A controversial plan to add a steeple to the church was voted down on August 6, 1989. Our Sunday school classes began providing monthly devotions at the Parker Home. The Council on Ministries decided to change from monthly meetings to quarterly meetings. Jane Morris began a Sunday school class for disabled students.

Several members participated in Volunteers in Mission trips during this period, including Bill Compton to Ecuador, Rev. Smith and Marie and Amos Renwick to Andros Island in the Bahamas, and Rev. Smith and Bill Compton to Haiti. Several of our youth participated in the Salkahatchie program during the summers. A new generation of children performed Down by the Creek Bank in March of 1990. On March 11, 1990, Bishop Joseph Bethea visited our church and presented the morning message. The UMM began participating in the Adopt-A-Highway program in 1991. For most of the 1990's our church was a distribution center for government commodities and was staffed by member volunteers on distribution day.

In 1991 we began placing crosses and flags on veterans' graves in our cemetery on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Veterans Day. Our missions contributions went to the Woffords, missionaries in Brazil. That year we also set up a perpetual care fund for the St. Paul cemetery. With the donation of a computer, we added this new technology to our clerical work at the church. We held a Lay Witness Mission in October of 1992. Wallace Brock and Joe Roberts went on a UMMVIM trip to Eluthera Island in the Bahamas in 1993. Barbecue picnics at the church accompanied by a softball game became a popular new tradition.

We added a pitched roof to the educational building in early 1993 and celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on February 28, 1993. Our annual budget that year had grown to \$124,923.00. Typical Sunday school attendance in the spring of 1993 was between 100 and 120. In 1993 we also merged the Administrative Board and the Council on Ministries into a single Administrative Council.

Rev. Michael Bruce became our minister in June of 1993. We started Children's Church in 1994 to allow the young children to leave the sanctuary after the children's sermon and go downstairs for a program more appropriate to their needs. This was also the year we purchased a van to replace the bus, which we sold in 1993 after several years of little use. We had noticed for years that the age mix of our membership was changing. Rev. Solomon Muwanga from Uganda visited in May of 1995 and began a period of St. Paul support for the United Methodists in that African nation. The tape ministry under Alice and Shirley Johnson became even more active when we began making videotapes available to our shut-ins.

We hired William Greer, a Wofford College student, over the summer of 1995 to work with our children and youth. Sharon Wiley, a seminary student, worked with children and youth during the next two summers, and we employed her during the 1997 year as Director of Family Ministries.

When Rev. Bruce was reassigned to another church prior to the normal June moving day in 1999, Rev. Bill Berry, a retired United Methodist minister from Georgia, ably filled our pulpit for several months, until Rev. Randy Taylor was appointed as minister to St. Paul in 1999.

As we approached the 50<sup>th</sup> year of St. Paul, attendance at morning worship was just over 100. Sunday school attendance hovered between 50 and 75. A small group attended vespers on Sunday evenings. A prayer group met on Tuesday mornings. The adult choir under the direction of Gail Ferguson provided an anthem each Sunday, and the children and youth choirs under the direction of Karen Wyont sang for us on a regular basis. Our monthly newsletter kept members informed of church events, and we all enjoyed Betty Fischer's "Life in the Christian Lane" and other special articles.

Although we had fewer children and youth, we provided a strong Christian education program. Several summers we hired a college student to work with our children and youth. Elizabeth Williams in 2001 and Melanie Rollins from 2002 through 2004 provided this special summer programming. Family Week was a popular summer program, with classes for all ages. Children enjoyed our traditional Easter egg hunt, a fall festival around Halloween, and an outside pageant with live animals or a musical at Christmas.

We continued to be involved in local missions. Alcoholics Anonymous continued to utilize a room under our sanctuary for daily meetings. Scout troops were utilizing our facilities. The Aiken Area Council on Aging provided a lunch and program for senior citizens each weekday in our fellowship hall. The Sunday school classes continued to provide devotions monthly at the Parker Home. At Thanksgiving we provided baskets for the needy, and at Christmas we served as angels for the local nursing homes. During the summer our youth participated in Salkahatchie Summer Service, and we fed the Salkahatchie youth working in our area. Our annual Stone Soup Lunch reminded us of the hunger in our world. Each summer God's Storehouse provided funding for missions when excess produce from local gardeners is sold to our members. Each Sunday during the children's sermon, the children gave Pennies for Missions, and before they left for children's church, they prayed at the altar with the minister.

Several traditions and worship services were significant events in our church year. At Christmas the symbolic Chrismon tree and poinsettias decorated our sanctuary, and the communion service on Christmas Eve was popular. On the front lawn we placed our life-size nativity scene, as we have for decades. At Easter we looked forward to the special Palm Sunday and Tennebrae Services, the Easter lilies surrounding the altar, and the flower cross on Easter morning. We held a Fourth of July ceremony to honor our members who served in the Armed Forces and placed crosses and flags on the graves of our veterans three times a year. A horn of plenty decorated our altar at Thanksgiving.

On October 4, 1998, our church voted on a ten-year plan to build a new church complex on the land adjacent to the parsonage. The first step in this process was to be the building of a Family Life Center. The Leap of Faith Fund was started to raise money to build the Family Life Center. This was an ongoing fundraising project for many years.

The various Leap of Faith fundraisers, both by individuals and by groups, revealed a deep commitment to the goal of providing this facility for our church and community. One of the most creative was Santa Faye's, a flea market set up inside an old house near Oak Hill, with most of the proceeds going to the Leap of Faith. Over the years the planned function of the Family Life Center shifted from a metal building with a gymnasium to a new fellowship hall, but the dream remained.

We celebrated our church's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 20 and 21, 2003. Saturday was a time of fellowship and renewing friendships, with a barbecue dinner provided. Sunday was a worship service, with the Rev. James Alewine providing the message. Six charter members--Virginia Steele, Carole Owens Thames, Charles Thames, Julia Johnson Bryson, Eugenia "Jean" Smith, and Laura B. Mitchell--were in attendance. Rev. Alewine, in his message, asked us to invite him back for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. (If we have a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we know he will be there with us.)

As Rev. Randy Taylor reached the end of his service at St. Paul, the church membership felt the need for a young minister to serve our congregation, since we were an aging membership and needed new involvement from our younger couples. We expressed this desire to the district superintendent and reduced the base salary to ensure that our request was considered.

In June of 2005 we welcomed the Rev. Brian Gilmer, his wife Jennifer, and their 3-year-old daughter Bryson to our parsonage. This was only his second appointment and his first single church. He brought new enthusiasm and programming to the church, especially short-term studies on Sunday and Wednesday evenings for the adults. Our membership began to increase during his tenure, and many of the new members were retirees moving into our community.

Mrs. Tara Buffett was hired in April of 2006 to work with our children and youth. Her husband Matt had been the church pianist for several years. Our UMYF started meeting regularly again, but we struggled to increase the number of children participating in our Sunday school and other activities. The year 2006 was highlighted by the groundbreaking for our long-awaited Family Life Center on August 13.

On May 27, 2007, the Family Life Center was consecrated by Rev. Gilmer. He noted that "this house has been built for praise and prayer." He warned about a "failure of vision which would confine our worship and fellowship within these walls." Everyone saw the new facility as a milestone in the history of the church, as well as a challenge for our future.

During 2007 the church also put new shingles on the roof, removing the chimney, and we added a new wheelchair lift at the back door, replacing the old lift that had stopped working. While the new lift was being installed, services were held in the new Family Life Center, and for the first time we experienced the new technology of computer-projected photos and song lyrics on a large screen behind the pulpit during the services. We installed an improved sound system in our sanctuary and started producing copies of our service on DVDs for shut ins. We began to support the programs of the nearby non-denominational Christ Central Mission Station. Our youth attended the spiritual life retreat at Springmaid Beach, held their annual summer retreat at Asbury Hills, and participated in Salkehatchie Summer Service.

The success of our services in the Family Life Center and the need to reach out to new members prompted us to start a second worship opportunity in a contemporary format prior to our Sunday school hour.

The new service called Alive at 8:55 and meeting in our FLC began on April 6, 2008. Praise music (with guitars, keyboard, and drums), the earlier hour, and the laid-back style of the alternative service attracted a respectable crowd. The youth enjoyed a trip to Lake Junaluska in June, including a whitewater rafting experience.

As we began the year 2009 St. Paul had 244 members. We purchased a new 14-passenger bus, which was more accessible for the seniors. The adults started taking more trips. The UMM went to the newly renovated Asbury Hills on a retreat in June. Typical attendance at the Alive at 8:55 service was about 30 worshippers each Sunday morning, at the traditional service in the sanctuary between 70 and 90. Sunday school attendance was 30 to 40, but with only a handful of children and youth attending. UMYF was meeting twice a month on Sunday evenings, and eight youth and four adults attended two different Salkehatchie missions that summer. We did not have our traditional Family Week; instead we had a series of weekend events for the children, for which we rented inflatable games. Although ten youth participated in the confirmation class in October, we continued to have concerns about our aging membership and the small number of young couples attending. Many of our older members who had built St. Paul and supported the church for so long were passing on, and we were not gaining new members to replace them.

During a cold winter, highlighted by the first measurable snow in ten years, the youth attended Revolution in Columbia, the new conference youth revival that replaced the spiritual life retreats at Springmaid Beach. The spring of 2010 was highlighted by a well-attended Easter egg hunt at Aiken State Park, where we had been going each spring for several years. We made plans to have several Family Funfests this summer in lieu of a traditional Vacation Bible School. On May 16, 2010, Rev. Gilmer announced that the conference was moving him to Lyman, SC, in the upstate and that our new minister would be Rev. Tresco Shannon.

Rev. Shannon began his ministry at St. Paul on July 4, 2010. Several weeks later thirteen St. Paul youth and adults, a record number of participants from our church, participated in Salkehatchie Summer Service. Three adults and two youth went to the Travelers Rest camp, where Rev. Gilmer was co-director, and the others attended Black Swamp Camp in Hampton. Attendance on Sundays was decreasing, with Sunday school attendance around 30 and attendance at both worship services combined around 80.

The most active programs in 2011 were the series of adult trips, such as to the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre and a fall trip to Myrtle Beach, organized by Jane Morris. In October we held a three-night revival, sponsored by our new Witness Committee. During the waning months of 2011 we took a critical look at our finances, and we drastically reduced the budget for 2012.

In the spring of 2012 we learned that a new pastor would be coming to St. Paul. In July Rev. Jacqueline Connelly became the first female clergy person to serve our congregation. Over the next year we completed several renovation projects at the parsonage, including replacing the plumbing and the HVAC ducts under the parsonage.

In January 2013 our membership stood at 228, and our average attendance for worship on Sunday mornings between both services was 84. The Nurture Committee started planning evening outings for young adults in an effort to get this demographic more involved in the church.

In April the Witness Committee sponsored a Community Worship service at our FLC in conjunction with Corinth Baptist Church and Four Mile Missionary Baptist Church. Charles Goodman, Jr., and Kevin Liles were active lay speakers, now called lay servants, serving both our church and the surrounding area.

The youth attended Revolution in Columbia, and in July five adults and two youth participated in Salkehatchie Summer Service. In August the youth visited Savannah, Georgia, and Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island. The adults were still taking special trips, and they planned a second Caribbean cruise. In July 2013 the 8:55 Alive contemporary service stopped meeting when Brad and Jayne Williams, two of our musicians who had taken the lead in this service, stopped coming to St. Paul.

In September 2013 St. Paul turned 60. We changed the times of Sunday school and church to 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. and started having a brief time for fellowship and refreshments before Sunday school. Sunday school attendance stood at around 30. After our 2014 stewardship campaign, we approved a lean annual budget, planning to pay only a portion of the apportionments from the Conference.

In May 2014 Gail Akins Ferguson, who had been our adult choir director for the past 31 years, gave up the position preparing to retire and move to Florida. VBS for the children that summer was popular, as was a separate adult program in July. Our membership stood at 175. Attendance at morning worship had leveled off at about 50.

In April 2015 we learned that we would be welcoming a new minister. Our expectations were high that a change in pastoral leadership would be what we needed to prop up our dwindling attendance. Rev. Robert Reeves and his family moved into the parsonage the last week of June, 2015.

That fall our church began sponsoring a Good News Club at Greendale Elementary under the supervision of Jennifer Akins. Pastor Robert began a Bible study at Flowers Restaurant in town. We sponsored a well-attended Educators Appreciation Breakfast. We also participated in the Atomic City Awakening, along with Corinth Baptist and several other churches in town. Worship attendance initially increased to around 70 each week.

We began 2016 with 172 members. We hired Doreen Arns, a new part-time secretary, so that Betty Fischer, who has been our secretary for many years, could begin training her to take over these duties. We also hired Laurie Knapp to be our new music director and pianist to replace both our choir director and Audrey Ateca, who had been our pianist for the past few years. As an outreach to the community, we tried to provide free coffee and doughnuts for several Thursday mornings as people drove to work, but SRS traffic just whizzed on by for the most part.

The committees worked hard in the fall of 2017 to get our expenditures in line with our giving. Our pledges were decreasing each year as more and more faithful members passed on. Our membership secretary reported that in the last nine years we had gained only three new members, and two of those of those had already withdrawn. The average for Sunday morning worship was between 40 and 50. St. Paul did not pay anything toward our Conference apportionments in 2017, the first time this had ever happened. For many years up until 2010 and again in 2012 we had paid 100% of our apportionments.

The one bit of good financial news was that we were able to reduce our monthly payments on the FLC mortgage when we refinanced.

We began 2018 with our Finance Committee making a commitment to pay something towards our Conference apportionments each month, with fundraisers playing a major part of the plan. The fundraisers, like a Stone Soup luncheon, would also be fellowship opportunities to bring our members together. We eventually paid just over 30% of our apportionments for the year. At this point we finally faced the fact that we had to reduce our pastoral expenditures, and we began exploring our options.

We celebrated the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our church on September 30, 2018, and the homecoming crowd of 148 filled the church and FLC for the first time in recent memory. Two former pastors, Ray Smith and Randy Taylor, were with us for the occasion, and Revs. Alewine, Barnes, and Gilmer sent letters which we read to the congregation. One charter member, Dent Johnson, was in attendance. Sadly, we learned that day that Rev. Barnes had passed on the previous Friday.

We turned over responsibility for the Good News Club at Greendale Elementary to Talatha Baptist Church for 2019-20. We still provided Thanksgiving meals and Christmas gifts to the children in our community through our work with Stepping Stones, which had taken over the local ministry from Christ Central. The Parker House closed with the passing of Drucilla Parker, but we provided transportation to our services for several of the men who continued to attend our church after moving to the We Care home. AA was still meeting in our basement twice a week. Several outside groups and local churches rented our Family Life Center for gatherings. Pastor Robert conducted a confirmation class for six youth in the spring of 2019.

In March we learned that our new minister would be a provisional deacon named Susan Pennock. She had been serving in the Western North Carolina Conference for the past twenty years working with children and families impacted by poverty, primarily through church collaboration with public schools, and she continued this work. Her part-time status in our pulpit would help our financial situation, but we did not know how this would affect the ministries of the church. She and her family did not live in the parsonage. Pastor Susan's first Sunday with us was June 30, 2019. It soon became apparent that her part-time status was overshadowed by her enthusiasm and energy for the work of the church, and she felt called to begin working toward ordination as an elder. She encouraged members of our congregation to increase our outreach into the New Ellenton community.

As the year 2020 began, our members were beginning to feel optimistic about the future of St. Paul because attendance and giving were both increasing. Our membership started the year at 135, with attendance at morning worship typically 60 or more. We hired Robin Coward to be our new office manager/secretary. Visiting and keeping in contact with our sick and homebound members was a vital part of Pastor Susan's ministry here at St. Paul, and she encouraged us to set up an organized program to visit and send cards to our homebound members.

On Sunday, March 15, 2020, we streamed our morning service on Facebook Live in case we had to move to virtual worship in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic enveloping our country. The Bishop announced later that week that all in-person services should be cancelled indefinitely, so we moved to the online platform for our worship services. We were fortunate to have the technical skills of Charles Goodman, Jr., as we addressed this crisis.

Our youth were disappointed when the Salkehatchie Summer Service program was cancelled for the summer. Our only in-person service that summer was on July 12, when 23 members attended a special service in the FLC during which we practiced how we could implement various social distancing procedures.

St. Paul began meeting in person again on September 13, 2020, in the FLC where the individual chairs allowed us to control the social distancing. Our services followed the Conference's safety guidelines, which prevented handshakes and hugs, and we did not sing hymns or have a choir. Everyone in church wore a mask. Communion and some hymn singing were held outside after we exited the building. Our services continued to be streamed online, and many members stayed home out of concern for their own safety. Former members who had moved away were able to view the services, and we often had as many viewing the services online as we had in person at the FLC. Despite the tough year, we paid 100% of our apportionments in 2020, the first time in eight years.

Pastor Susan was busy taking the courses required for her to seek ordination as an elder in full connection. She began living in the parsonage in late January. With her expected ordination set for June 2021, our Administrative Council and SPRC were hoping that she would be assigned to us as a full-time minister. By spring many of our members were able to receive the new vaccine to prevent the Covid virus. The public schools went back to full-time instruction in March. We even held an outdoor hotdog meal for the whole church after the Easter egg hunt.

In March 2021 we learned that Pastor Susan would not be returning to St. Paul. Our new pastor would be Rev. Joseph D. Kovas, a young man just graduating from Duke Divinity School. Pastor Susan was ordained at the Annual Conference in June and was assigned to Bethesda UMC on James Island near Charleston. Her last Sunday in our pulpit was June 13, after which we held a Low Country Boil for our members. This was our first inside meal in over a year. The Conference had loosened the social distancing guidelines several weeks previously, and most members had stopped wearing masks during the service.

Since the Salkehatchie program was again cancelled for the summer, our church conducted a work mission in New Ellenton for our youth, in conjunction with the Stepping Stones ministry.

Pastor Joseph's first Sunday with us was July 4, 2021.

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The history of St. Paul United Methodist Church is so much more than a listing of our different buildings, programs, and various ministers over the years. It is the story of generations of Methodists from our community who lived and died, who experienced both happy times and sad times, while worshiping as members of our St. Paul church family. There are so many fond memories to cherish. We pray that God will continue to bless our fellowship for generations to come.

## **ST. PAUL UMC MEMBERS WHO ENTERED THE MINISTRY**

At least four members of St. Paul have gone into the ministry.

Paul Hickman, who became active in the 1970's with the Lay Witness Mission movement, went on to become a Baptist pastor in Alabama. His son, Paul Jr., followed his father as minister of Calvary Baptist in Childersburg, Alabama.

Lucille Lyda became a certified lay speaker at St. Paul before she retired from the Plant and moved to North Carolina. She went on to become the director of the lay speaking school in the Asheville, NC, district, and in 1990, at age 75, she became a Methodist full-time local pastor.

Kevin Liles, whose career was in the law enforcement field, became active in the district lay servant ministries, and he is currently serving as a part-time local pastor while studying to become ordained.