

Bethany Assembly of God

110

year anniversary

— 1904–2014 —

History

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History of Bethany Assembly of God

Introduction

In the Book of Joshua we are told how the children of Israel took twelve stones from the Jordan River as a memorial of the faithfulness of God in the deliverance of His people. Joshua said that some day future generations would ask, "What mean these stones?" and that question would provide another opportunity to tell the story of God's power, mercy and love.

Those stones, like this written testament to follow, provide an opportunity to tell the story of how God has had his hand on Bethany Assembly of God over the last century. This history is not written to glorify the past, although it is indeed glorious. It is not written to relive the past, although much can be learned from what has gone before. It is not written because the best days of Bethany are in the past. In fact, Bethany is seeing its brightest, most prosperous and exciting times at present and we look forward to the days ahead. This history is written because the events that helped shape this church are the "stones" by which we remember and rejoice in the continual mercy, love and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The following text represents the most accurate and, hopefully, most interesting history of our church ever undertaken. As with all historical works, we have relied upon the facts that were available to us at the time this was written. Interviews with persons having personal knowledge of events were conducted and many hours of research and fact gathering have gone into this work. When

appropriate we have attempted to disclose speculation about certain dates, persons and events and such speculation while interesting should not be considered by the reader as factual. Unfortunately during the years 1905 to 1924 there is not as much written material as the later years and there are no present survivors from that time period. We have done our best to assemble as accurate a history as possible and have sought to give credit to those persons and texts that we have used. Any inaccuracies or errors are unintentional. We recognize that over the years there have been many assumptions, stories and unfounded beliefs about the people and events detailed in this history. We hope we have been able to correct and enlighten with respect to many of such "stories".

Most of all, it is our desire that this history be the "stones" that serve as a remembrance of things past, encouragement for things present and hope for things yet to come.

Bethany Assembly of God

1905-2005

The Atwater Family

The history of Bethany Assembly of God is as much a history of America, New England and the 20th century Pentecostal revival as it is a history of the church itself. As with all historical events it is not the story of one event, but many events. It is not the story of one person, but many people. It is these events and these people, that helped to shape our nation and in some cases whether directly, or indirectly helped in the creation and development of Bethany. The confluence of these people, times and events culminated in the creation of Bethany Assembly of God, as it came to be known, over 260 years from when David Atwater and his brother Joshua emigrated from England in 1637.

The Atwater ancestral home was located in Lenham, England. The estate is described as an "ideally beautiful" building located on a charming spot of land that sloped down to a lake. It is suggested that this close proximity to the water is how the family received its name "At-water". The structure was famed for its oak woodwork through the house. There were beautiful oak carvings in the wall panels, oak pilasters and a mantel about the old fireplace was described as "very beautiful". Surrounding the home were green fields and there is no question that it was quite a comfortable dwelling. This makes it all the more difficult to

understand why David and Joshua Atwater would leave England.

David, Joshua and sister Ann were the children of Thomas Atwater and Susan Narsen. The Biblical names, David and Joshua, suggest that their parents were Puritans. Thomas died in October 1636 and Susan died in January 1637. In June 1637 David, Joshua and Ann arrived in Boston, Massachusetts. David was 22 at the time. There is no explanation as to why they left the comfortable surroundings of Lenham, England. The proximity of the date of their mother's death -January 1637 and their subsequent arrival in Boston -June 1637- suggests that they left rather quickly after their mother died. No information is available as to what happened to the estate. Perhaps it was sold and the money used to fund the trip to the colonies and purchase land. That appears likely since both David and Joshua invested large sums of money (David invested 500 pounds and Joshua invested 300 pounds) in the company that owned the New Haven Plantation. However, colonial New England was far from an attractive place in 1637. Perhaps the young Atwaters came, as so many others did, to experience religious freedom and tolerance that was not present in England. It is documented that in 1637 the Davenport-Eaton Expedition to the colonies included people who had "great distempers against the church". Since it appears that the Atwaters were people of economic substance in England the conflict with the Anglican church was most likely their reason for leaving. It is intriguing to consider that the early ancestors of Mabel Atwater Weaver were probably as religiously committed as their future relative.

Whatever the motivation, be it religious, economic or some other reason, David, Joshua and Ann made it to Boston in June 1637. Apparently David and Ann stayed in Boston for a period of time while Joshua went to Quinnipiac in the autumn of 1637. In the spring of 1638 David and Ann follow and David signed a plantation covenant on June 4, 1639, that commenced the New Haven Colony - that would ultimately become the State of Connecticut. This all took place 140 years before the American Revolution.

In 1636 the Native Americans from Agawam sold William Pynchon land on both sides of the Connecticut River for 18 fathoms of wampum (about 36 yards), 18 coats, 18 hatchets, and 18 knives. After learning the Indian languages the Puritan Pynchon became very successful as the dominant trader in the region. The settlement was named Springfield in his honor, after his hometown in England.

In all likelihood the Atwaters passed by Springfield and Agawam and possibly met or perhaps even traded with William Pynchon, not knowing what role Springfield and Agawam would play in the lives of future Atwaters and Bethany.

So when David Atwater - age 22 -arrived in this environment with his younger brother and sister - it is a harsh environment and a far cry from the lovely estate and rolling fields of Lenham, England.

David Atwater and Joshua thrive however. David is more than a mere settler, but a part of the New Haven Colony. He is described as one of the first "planters" of New Haven and is recorded in the first division of lands to the settlers. David is present at the first public worship service in Connecticut. He was assigned a farm in the "Neck" - a tract between the Mill and Quinnipiac Rivers. He lived there until his death October 15, 1691.

Joshua moved back to Boston after conveying his New Haven properties to David and it is believed that a portion of the land he owned ultimately became the campus of Yale University when it was established in 1701. Little did Joshua know that several future Atwaters would attend the prestigious Ivy League school, one of whom would be the grandfather of Mabel Atwater Weaver. Joshua died in Boston in 1676, and his line became extinct. We know that a granddaughter, Mehitabel Atwater Rolfe, was killed in an Indian massacre in Haverhill, Massachusetts in 1708. His sons must have died without surviving children. In any event, all Atwaters now trace their ancestry to David Atwater.

David Atwater married Damaris Sayre some time before March 10, 1646-47. They had ten children together. Damaris died April 7, 1691 and David died October 5, 1692 and is buried in the Cedar Hill Cemetery in New Haven, Connecticut. Their progeny included farmers, merchants, soldiers, patriots, ministers, college presidents and businessmen. They marry men and women

with names like Yale, Hotchkiss, Tuttle, Bradley, Hall, Hull and Prescott. In the late 18th century another David Atwater, Isaac Atwater and Jothan Atwater were killed by the British in the Revolutionary War. James Atwater was taken prisoner by the British and never heard from again. One Jeremiah Atwater was the steward of Yale College for many years. Noah Atwater graduated Yale and became a minister in Westfield, Massachusetts around 1774. Isaac Atwater became a missionary to the Indians and was probably killed by them in North Carolina. Another Jeremiah Atwater graduated Yale and became president of Middlebury College and later Dickinson College in Pennsylvania.

What follows is a genealogy of epic proportions that rivals those of the Old Testament. David and Damaris had 10 children, one of whom was John Atwater (b.1654); John Atwater married Abigail Mansfield and they had 10 children, one of whom was John Atwater (b.1683); John married Elizabeth Mix and they lived in Cheshire, Connecticut. They had 10 children, one of whom was, as you might expect - John; John married Hannah Thompson and they break a family tradition and have only 6 children. There may have been a John, but we are concerned with their son Jeremiah Atwater who lived in New Haven and married Lois Hurd. True to the Atwater form they have 10 children, one of whom was in fact named John. However, we are concerned with another son, Charles Atwater born August 18, 1786.

This is where things get interesting.

Charles Atwater was born on August 18, 1786 in New Haven, Connecticut. He graduated Yale College in 1805 at age 19. There he studied theology under the first Dr. Dwight and was ordained and installed as pastor of the Congregational church in North Branford, Connecticut. He married Mary Merwin and they had two children; Charles Merwin Atwater, who died in 1824 at the age of 13 and George Merwin Atwater born October 29, 1814.

By the few accounts that are available Charles Atwater was a remarkable man. From the Atwater history we have the following description:

" Mr. Atwater was a man of commanding presence, portly and erect, his voice was loud and clear. A lady parishioner speaking of him said, ' His voice was like the sound of a trumpet'. He had in the pulpit an earnest manner that commanded attention and his sermons were methodical, biblical and impressive. He was a faithful pastor and much beloved by his people. During a powerful revival in 1821, 45 were added to the church and 96 during the 16 years of his ministry which were terminated at the early age of 39."

It is interesting that Charles Atwater would be involved in a revival in 1821, long before the more famous revivals took place in America and England in the later part of the 19th century. For later on perhaps the greatest group of

preachers, missionaries and evangelists ever to affect a given time period came together.

George Merwin Atwater was 11 years old when his father died in 1825. His mother remarried in 1827 - to a man named Abijah Fisher of New York. George received private schooling in North Guilford and Branford, Connecticut after which he sought employment. He became a clerk in Mr. Murdock's dry goods store in New Haven, Connecticut. After a time he received an opportunity to become a clerk for the Baldwin Kent & Co. wholesale dry goods house in Richmond, Virginia. He left for his new position by means of a schooner from New York. Within a few years he returned to New York as a resident partner of the firm, supervising buying and other responsibilities. George Atwater seems to have inherited the Atwater traits that made his ancestors some of the most successful, and influential people in their day. He maintained business and property interests in New York throughout his adult life. In addition to his early years in Virginia he also spent some time in Cleveland Ohio. According to newspaper records, George Atwater began to acquire property in Springfield, Massachusetts as early as 1854. He would have been 40 years old at that time. He also had textile interests, as he owned the Glasgow Company in South Hadley Falls, Massachusetts, a manufacturer of gingham, dress goods and cotton yarns. He owned valuable railway leases in Cleveland, Ohio at the time of his death. He had a variety of business and personal interests and particularly loved nature, trees and horses. We know that he maintained homes in New York

and Springfield all his adult life. His obituary read as follows:

"He was a conservative and yet a progressive man with large business interests, unostentatious and untiring in his promotion of great enterprises, but commercial and religious. Removing to Springfield, Massachusetts he was the originator of Glasgow Mills at South Hadley Falls, for the manufacture of gingham, also the Springfield Street Railroad, which he founded and supported during the trying years of its beginning and also was closely identified with the Memorial Church of that City, in fact, he and Dr. J.G. Holland may be said to be its founders. His friendships were strong and tender and he was broad in his religious views and ***much given to hospitality and especially fond of entertaining clergymen***"(italic added)

George Atwater married Minerva Merwin, who died in 1843. He then married Harriet Brodhead, daughter of Jacob Brodhead and Eliza Bleeker. George had three children: H.M. Atwater born in 1842 but who died January 3, 1850 at 8 years old, a daughter Harriet Brodhead Atwater born November 8, 1853 and Mable Bleeker Atwater born November 28, 1857. Harriet married George Walton Green and they resided in New York. While we do not have much information on Harriet, at least one story has her traveling with Mabel Weaver to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles between 1906 and 1909. Her husband George Walton Green owned the Green Motor Car Company in New York and was probably an acquaintance of George Atwater. He was one of the executors

of George Atwater's estate as well.

It is the success that George Atwater has with the Springfield Street Railway that really establishes his fame and fortune. Further, it provided the resources for Mabel and Albert Weaver to be as generous as they were and devote so much of their time to the Lord's work.

The street railway project was first undertaken in 1868. The pioneers of the effort were Chester W. Chapin and Henry Alexander. They had in mind the establishment of a horse-car line. Charters were granted to them by the state legislature in May 5, 1868. These charters were issued by the state, and essentially were permits to undertake the project, with certain pre-conditions to be met. The law at the time provided that at least 50% of the capital for the project had to be paid before the charter became effective. Unfortunately, the money could not be raised. Apparently investors were not enthralled with the idea and were unwilling to risk any capital in the project.

George M. Atwater then came on the scene. He had spent some time in Cleveland, Ohio where he had been exposed to a similar railway project. Through his hard work and sharp business acumen he succeeded in getting the names of 64 subscribers to the stock. They organized and purchased the old bus lines that had ceased operating. A stable was erected in 1869 on Hooker Street and 2 1/2 miles of rail track was laid and completed in March 10, 1870. The Springfield Street Railway System was off and running, so to speak.

The railway was started with 4 bobtailed cars, 12 feet long - driven by horses. The cost was 8 cents or 16 rides for \$1.00. In the winter the cars went off the rails and operated on runners. In 1888 the company petitioned to use electricity and by 1891 all lines were electric. Fares were then 5 cents. In 1905 the electric railway company had 94 miles of track - equal to any railway system in any city in the country. Forty-eight miles of track were located within the city proper. The railway system had 107 closed cars and it is said that no other factor enhanced the value of property as the street and rail system. And, for George Atwater and his partners this business amounted to a monopoly in public transportation that was extremely rewarding both civically and financially.

George Atwater's good business sense in the areas of the railway and manufacturing were probably only exceeded by his keen understanding of the value of real estate. The Hampden County Registry of Deeds shows that from 1850 to 1934 either George or his estate acquired interests in over 400 parcels of real estate and in many cases he held mortgages on many properties throughout the city. It is not coincidence that much of the Atwater land ended up under the tracks of the railway system, providing lease payments for years to come. By the time of his death in 1902. it would not have been an exaggeration to say that Mr. Atwater owned practically the whole north end of Springfield

Let us depart from the Atwaters for a moment to see what else was

happening in the country at this time.

REVIVAL

Certain conditions that lead up to the great revival of the turn of the century were taking shape in similar ways in different parts of the country. These conditions were like the convergence of several mighty storm fronts forming a perfect storm, the "storm" of the century, if you will, and many of these events were taking place in the northeastern United States.

There are only a handful of documented pentecostal/charismatic events between the second century and the middle 1800's. Approximately 24 separate events are known over 1700 years but they are all marked with similarities - literal interpretation of the scriptures, following the apostolic church and a reaction to corrupted Christianity. Most of these events however, led to social and religious expulsion, extremism, fanaticism, heresy and abortive revivals. For whatever reasons, the experiences were short-lived.

In the last half of the 19th century several prominent evangelists rose to the fore. Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), Charles Hadden Spurgeon (1834-1892) and Albert Benjamin Simpson (1844-1919) were three of the most popular and effective evangelists of the latter part of the 19th century. They helped usher in the movement that would result in the great revival of the early 20th century. These men founded schools and colleges, wrote extensively, fostered mission programs and missionary outreaches around the world. They certainly were not

the only ones but they were standouts in an era filled with dynamic preaching and progressive teaching on the need for personal salvation experiences and the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit particularly with respect to divine healing. These men were well known around the world and had incredible impact for the work of the Lord.

Of particular interest to the Bethany story is the life of A.B. Simpson.

Albert Benjamin Simpson was born in Bayview, Prince Edward Island, Canada. His mother had lost a young son and early in life dedicated her next son to the Lord. As a teenager he became interested in the ministry. However, he did not understand or appreciate a true salvation experience, as we would describe it today. He struggled with reformed theology regarding the total depravity of man, the pre-destined damnation of those who were not "elected", and the condition of his own soul. As a young man he fell into a deep depression and suffered a physical and emotional breakdown. He was prayed for by his father and recovered somewhat. Soon after, he read a book entitled "Gospel Mystery of Sanctification" and truly committed his life to Christ. Simpson attended Knox College in Toronto and studied theology. Upon his graduation at age 21 he was licensed to preach by the Presbyterian Church.

Simpson took the pastorate of a large church in Hamilton, Canada. During his 8-year tenure there the congregation grew to 750 congregants.

Prayer and missions were emphasized. Even as a young man Simpson was in great demand as a speaker both in Canada and USA.

He next went to Louisville, Kentucky in 1873, shortly after the Civil war. As an outsider from Canada he brought restoration to an area of the country that had been torn with racial and political strife. While there he was involved in meetings with evangelist Major Daniel W. Whittle. Major Daniel Webster Whittle was born in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. As a young man he moved to Illinois where he joined the Union Army in the Civil War. He served with General William Sherman on his famous march to the sea and was seriously wounded at Vicksburg. Whittle was brevetted "Major" which title he kept throughout his life. After the war he was serving as the treasurer of the Elgin Watch Company in Chicago 's when he met D.L. Moody who convinced him to become an evangelist. He formed a close relationship with Moody and Whittle's daughter married William Moody, the evangelist's son. Major Whittle is buried in Northfield, Massachusetts not far from his friend and mentor. He was a gifted speaker and song writer, having penned, "Showers of Blessings", "I know Whom I have Believed", "The Banner of the Cross" and 43 other hymns. As a result of the Louisville meetings evangelism became Simpson's personal focus and the focus of his ministry.

After six years in Louisville, Simpson went to New York City in 1879. He had concluded that since all missionaries needed to go through New York and he

was increasingly focused in missions this would be the place he could have the greatest missionary impact. He pastored the prestigious 13th Street Presbyterian Church. However, one of his struggles was that most of his Presbyterian congregants were middle class or wealthy and did not seem to have the same heart for the lost as Simpson did. While in New York he engaged in missions work in the city to the poor, the downtrodden and immigrants. Soon, divine healing became a major part of his ministry.

At age 37 Simpson was ill again with a heart ailment and heard the sermons of Dr. Charles Cullis during a vacation at Old Orchard Beach in Maine and he received a dramatic healing in his own life. This experience changed the direction of his ministry. Upon his return to New York Simpson was baptized by immersion in a Baptist church, an event not appreciated by his Presbyterian brethren. Simpson became convinced that divine healing was as much for today as in the New Testament church. By mutual agreement Simpson left the Presbyterian Church as his leaders thought he was excessive in some of his theology. Simpson then formed the Gospel Tabernacle in New York City. Within two years the church had grown to 1000 members. His intent was to establish a loose affiliation of like-minded churches and ministries. It was not meant to be a denomination. However those associated with the alliance were to understand and accept the "full Gospel" message. That meant being agreement with his "four-fold" gospel - Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King. The basic tenets of faith would later be recognized in the Assemblies of God

statement of fundamental truths and also in the Foursquare Gospel Church, which was started by Aimee Semple McPherson who was heavily influenced by Simpson's teaching.

In 1886 an assembly of like-minded Christians met for a convention at Old Orchard Beach and voted to form two societies -the Christian Alliance and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance. In 1897 they merged the two groups into the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The period of 1891 to 1897 saw rapid growth of the Alliance in the United States and Canada.

During his life A.B. Simpson started a publishing house, edited a weekly magazine, wrote 101 books, wrote famous hymns, pastored churches and formed the Missionary Training Institute (now Nyack College in New York). After his healing in 1867 he continued for another 52 years in the ministry until his death in 1919.

Mabel Atwater and Albert Weaver

The generally accepted oral history of the church held to the understanding that Mabel Atwater Weaver was the major benefactor and driving force behind Bethany's creation and formative years. It clearly was the wealth and resources of Mabel Atwater Weaver and her family that provided the funds for the early work. The limited view of Albert was further supported by the dearth

of information about Albert Weaver and also his visual absence from the church. However, new research has completely altered that impression of Albert Weaver and the reader will now be pleased to view him not only in a more favorable light, but indeed with a great deal of respect and admiration. This newly discovered information has only added to the richness of the heritage of Bethany.

Albert Weaver was born 1865 and came to Springfield, Massachusetts from Sarnia, Ontario, Canada (just over border between Lake Huron and Lake Erie East of Michigan). His purpose in coming was to study at Springfield College under Dr. David Reed. This occurred in 1892 when he was 27. He actually attended the "School for Christian Workers" (later known as "International YMCA Training School" and finally Springfield College. D. L. Moody was one of the first trustees of the college). We know that Albert was doing "cottage work" in the Glenwood section of Springfield related to his college studies. The Glenwood area was close in proximity to Atwater estate and that is where he first met Mabel Atwater. Mabel was unmarried at age thirty-six and Albert was eight years her junior.

Albert and Mabel were married in 1893 in New York at the residence of her father George Atwater. The ceremony was performed by Rev. A.B. Simpson. From this we can reasonably assume that a relationship with Simpson had already been established, possibly through Mabel's father George. We know of his fondness for clergymen and that he was an associate of D.L. Moody, having

served as a trustee at the Moody schools in Northfield. Moody and Simpson were close acquaintances. Moody admired Simpson and is said to have stated, "No man moves me like that man (Simpson)". George Atwater with his wealth and religious leanings probably became part of that inner circle. George maintained New York residence at Lexington Avenue and 39th Street for many years and so did the Weavers after his death. Much like today, people of significant wealth maintained residences in New York for a variety of reasons. Many did it for the cultural and social connections. The Atwaters seem to have done it for business and religious reasons. Albert and Mabel stayed in New York for several years after their marriage and we know that they did "settlement work" on Delancey Street, New York, an area with a large Jewish population. During this time in New York Albert and Mabel became interested in the fledgling Christian Missionary Alliance Church and formed a lasting relationship with Rev. A.B. Simpson, its founder. They were in New York during a period of significant growth of the Alliance both here and in Canada.

While in New York Albert became head of the old Rivington Street Memorial Church's department for the care of people of the Jewish group. He worked there with the well known Dr. A. F. Schaufler, a Presbyterian clergyman who was the head of the New York City Mission and Tract Society, a significant organization that still exists today.

The earlier information regarding the historical and financial significance of

the Atwater family can now be seen as critical, for the immense wealth that George Atwater accumulated and later passed on to his daughter allowed Mabel and Albert Weaver to live extremely comfortable lives and gave them the freedom to pursue their religious endeavors. (Using calculations the value of George Atwater's estate was somewhere between \$5,000,000 and \$15,000,000 at his death) There is no record of Albert Weaver ever having a traditional job or profession. His obituary states that he wrote over 100 tracts during his lifetime and these were translated into seven different languages. It is said that over ten million copies of his tracts had been distributed during his lifetime. If this is accurate that was quite an accomplishment. It could not have been financially rewarding and the Weavers more than likely paid for the printing and distribution of these tracts from their own resources. Fortunately copies of some of his tracts still exist and the back of each indicates that readers interested in the message of the tract could contact, " The Writer, Rockrimmon, Springfield, Massachusetts" (Rockrimmon was the name of the Atwater home in Springfield). No publisher is listed. But it appears that such endeavors were the Weaver's mission and purpose in life. One of the goals of the New York Mission and Tract Society was to print and distribute tracts to immigrants arriving in New York that were written in their own language. A.B. Simpson and his organization were also devoted to missionary efforts both here and in foreign lands. Both organizations had specific outreaches to the Jews. No doubt Albert Weaver developed his desire and skill for writing tracts and his zeal for foreign missions work through his affiliation with these groups.

Albert developed a special desire for reaching Jews with the gospel. He worked with Dr. A.F. Schaffler at a time when there was a powerful revival among Jewish people in New York. His affection for the Jews is believed to stem from the possibility that Albert Weaver was of Jewish descent. Perhaps this explains the many trips to Jerusalem that he made during his life and also the Star of David that appears at the top of the beautiful stained glass window that was installed in Peace Chapel and now occupies a similar place in Memorial Chapel in the new Bethany building in Agawam, Massachusetts. Since the window was designed specifically by Mabel Weaver for Peace Chapel and the window contains more traditional Christian emblems (chalice and cross in a crown) it seems clear that the inclusion of the Star of David was done with purposeful intent.

Part of the unfair assessment of Albert Weaver stemmed from the fact that most of the surviving members who remembered him only go back to no earlier than 1922 when his involvement was limited. There was also a common belief that perhaps Albert did not have the same sympathies as Mable regarding the new Pentecostal experience that was sweeping across America in the early 1900's. We now have information that shows that Albert Weaver had a significant role in the church in the earlier years of 1905 to 1922 and he was thoroughly Pentecostal.

Unknown to most members was that in addition to tracts, Albert Weaver wrote religious articles for a variety of publications including the Pentecostal Evangel (and its predecessor the Christian Evangel), the Latter Rain Evangel and Confidence, a publication from England. In the last of Albert Weaver's articles printed in 1941 the Evangel editor noted with sadness the death of, "our dear brother Albert Weaver". Some 14 other articles were written and published by Albert and fortunately they are preserved in the Assemblies of God archives. A copy of a 1911 Confidence magazine refers to him as "Pastor Albert Weaver, Springfield, MA". Perhaps Albert was more involved in the earlier years than people realized. With the later association with the Assemblies of God and the hiring of full time pastors, Albert had the freedom to engage in his one true love - missions. He made over 20 trips to the Middle East and India during his life, no easy feat at the turn of the century.

While A.B. Simpson was expanding his ministry in New York and the Weavers were involved in ministries in New York as well, another movement was taking place in the country.

The freedom in this country to worship as one pleased and also to change churches and start new movements was a major factor in the religious revival of the late 1800's and early 1900's. The Holiness movement emphasized prayer, missions, and the authority of the scripture. Most of the Holiness groups rejected the "cessationist" view that the gifts of the spirit ceased with the end of the

Apostolic Age and they sought a new experience in their Christian lives.

During the period of 1850-1900 there less than a dozen recorded episodes of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. These events occur in New England, Ohio, Tennessee, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Carolina and Arkansas. All are isolated incidents and short lived. In 1875 in Providence, Rhode Island Rev. R. G. Swan reported the baptism of the Holy Spirit in his services and claimed that some of his people had experienced the gift event before that time. Six different people from five New England states were mentioned and they came to be known as the "Gift People". As would be expected they were ostracized but reports of great healing miracles were associated with the "Gift People". During this same time Maria Woodworth Etter, a minister in the United Brethern Church had healing and tongues reported in her services. The Holiness Movement was taking hold in the country and the impact of evangelists like Finney, Spurgeon, Moody, Whittle and Simpson was spurring a spiritual awakening in the United States.

Dr. John Alexander Dowie was born in Scotland in 1847. He immigrated to Australia where he was converted and entered the ministry. He believed in divine healing and suffered much persecution for his beliefs to the extent of being arrested numerous times. He came to America in 1888 and in 1900 he established the "Christian Catholic Church" in Zion, Illinois. While his ministry exhibited some excesses, there is no question that many people were healed in

his services and his ministry was a portent of things to come.

In 1898 Charles Parnham, a Methodist minister who had received a healing in his own life, started a ministry in Topeka, Kansas for the purpose of providing an open environment for people seeking a deeper spiritual experience and divine healing. It was somewhat patterned after Dowie's Zion, Illinois ministry. In 1900 Parnham actually went to Zion City to meet with Dr. Dowie and also to Nyack, New York to meet with A.B. Simpson. This is when the Weavers were still living in New York and ministering there. Upon his return to Kansas he started Bethel Bible College where he encouraged his students to study the Bible and seek an understanding of the New Testament experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The students all concurred that the baptism was evidenced by speaking in tongues. A few minutes after midnight on January 1, 1901 a woman named Agnes Ozman who had studied at A.B. Simpson's school in Nyack, New York was the first person reported to have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues. The experience was so great that she could not speak English for three days. One account says that the language we spoke was Chinese as verified by a local person who was fluent in that particular dialect. Within a few days many other students received the Baptism and in spite of criticism and persecution the modern Pentecostal revival was born.

During the years 1901-1905 the Pentecostal revival spread through

Kansas and into Missouri and finally Texas where in 1905 Charles Parnham moved his Bible School to Houston to train the growing number of workers needed to teach and disciple new converts. One of the "students" was a black Holiness preacher named William J. Seymour. He became convinced that the Pentecostal experience was real although he had not experienced speaking in tongues yet. A woman named Neeley Terry of the Negro Nazarene church visited Parnham's school in Houston. Upon her return to Los Angeles she told her church about William Seymour and he was invited to hold meetings. In his first message Seymour spoke on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The message was not well received and he was accused of teaching a false doctrine. However, there was a spirit of revival taking hold in Los Angeles. Rev. Joseph Smale, a Baptist minister had returned to Los Angeles from a visit to the great revival taking place in Wales, England and after being forced to resign his church he began to hold prayer meetings with several Holiness groups. Seymour moved his meeting to a private home and on April 9, 1906 a group of African American believers were filled with the spirit and the meeting spilled out into the street. Seymour was able to secure the use of 312 Azusa Street, an old 2 -story frame building in serious disrepair located in the industrial district of the city. Word soon spread and the Azusa Street Revival was under way, lasting three years with world-changing effect. Many who went to Azusa Street and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit returned to their homes and ministries and the Pentecostal movement grew like "fire". The oral history of Bethany has it that Mabel Weaver traveled to Azusa Street and experienced Pentecost there. There

is no direct evidence that that occurred although as we will see later, it might be reasonable to assume that she did. However, it appears that she experienced Pentecost in New York City at Glad Tidings Tabernacle pastored by Marie Burgess Brown and Robert Brown some time in the 1906-1909 period.

The Pentecostal Movement was affecting many different churches and denominations, one of which was the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Pastor Thomas A. Cullen

Assuming that Peace Chapel was built in the time period of 1904 – 1905, as is commonly believed, the first person that appeared to have been the pastor of the church is a man by the name of Thomas A. Cullen.

Prior to the research done for this history of the church, Reverend Cullen was not known to members of the church and his name does not appear in any of the official records of the church. However, as has been stated before, this is not surprising since the church was not incorporated until 1924 and the practice of keeping formal minutes of church meetings of the congregation and the board (if there was one) does not seem to have started until the early 1920's.

We become aware of Reverend Cullen through two different sources. A copy of a 1948 New England Evangel contained an article about Bethany (written by J. Robert Ashcroft, the father of the former Attorney General of the United

States and a pastor in Hartford, Connecticut) in which a list of former pastors heretofore unknown appeared. Mentioned in this list was “Reverend Cullen.” A check with the archives of the Assemblies of God did not show any minister by the name of Cullen ever being licensed by the Assemblies of God. However, it could be assumed that the tenure of Reverend Cullen occurred prior to the formation of the Assemblies in 1914.

A second and more significant lead came from a source that was unexpected. In the book Azusa Street by Frank Bartleman, Reverend Bartleman, an eyewitness to the Azusa Street Revival, journals his trip across the country in 1907 during the middle of the great revival. In his book he speaks of stopping at a church in Springfield, Massachusetts. He refers to the church as “Peace Chapel” and mentions that they specifically saw “Sister Weaver”. More importantly, he states that the church was a “CMA Church”, referring to the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and that the pastor was a “Brother Cullen”, who also was affiliated with the CMA.

This was a major breakthrough, for the information regarding the first decade of the church’s history had been non-existent.

After contacting the archives at The Christian and Missionary Alliance, we were excited to learn that not only was Reverend Cullen mentioned at length in several documents in their archives, but so was Peace Chapel and Albert and Mabel Weaver. Apparently the years that the Weavers spent in New York City from 1893 – 1899 made an impression on Dr. A. B. Simpson and other leaders of the CMA. Both Albert Weaver and Mabel Weaver appear to have had significant

involvement in the early days of the CMA.

For example, Mabel Weaver is listed as the president of the Prayer Union for World Evangelism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She was also a speaker at the opening and dedication of the Christian and Missionary Alliance seminary, now known as Nyack College.

Albert Weaver wrote articles for the Alliance magazine and together with Mabel they are pictured in the Alliance magazine as "Missionaries to the Jews." It may be supposition but it does not appear unreasonable to assume that Albert and Mabel Weaver had their zeal for saving the lost here and abroad, heightened during their time in New York and by their association with Dr. Simpson and the CMA.

It was apparently this association with CMA that led to the attendance and officiating of A.B. Simpson at the dedication of Peace Chapel in 1905 and the subsequent affiliation with the CMA, to the extent of a CMA Pastor being appointed to the church.

The information we have learned about Thomas A. Cullen is interesting but ultimately tragic. From the CMA archives we learn that Thomas A. Cullen was born in 1867 and came from Edinburgh, Scotland. At age 17 he was "radically converted" to God. He graduated from Simpson's Missionary Training Institute in 1898 and became a missionary to Peru as a young man. He later gained prominence in the CMA. He was married with children. His missionary work must have taken place early in his ministry because we find that in 1904 he was listed as an attendee at the Philadelphia branch of the CMA annual

convention.

At that time he is listed as being from Portland, Maine. We also learned that due to the health of his wife he was forced to return to the United States. Yet he is regularly referred to as a missionary to Peru, even after he returned home.

His years in Peru were as an independent missionary and he did not affiliate with the CMA until he returned to the States.

In any event, he quickly rose to prominence in the CMA. In 1904 at age 27 he became the local superintendent of the CMA work in Washington D.C. At a convention in Philadelphia in 1904 he had charge of the services and received compliments from the CMA leadership. He was with A.B. Simpson when Simpson dedicated a new building in Washington D.C. in 1906. The future of the church in Washington was described as “bright” due to the “faithful and efficient” labor of Reverend Cullen and his wife.

In 1906 Reverend Cullen was listed as the main speaker at the 11th annual convention of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and Washington D.C.

There are several other references to Reverend Cullen who clearly was a rising star in the CMA where he became pastor of humble Peace Chapel in 1907. Unfortunately there is not too much information about his days in Springfield except that in June of 1908 he conducted all day meetings at “Peace Chapel, Glenwood”.

In February 1909 it is reported in the Alliance paper that Reverend Cullen was leaving Springfield to take over the CMA work in Portland, Oregon. It is also

reported that he had some solid workers to assist him in the Portland work and that after a visit in June 1909, Brother Cullen was left “in good condition.”

Tragedy struck in September of 1909. According to the account in the 1909 – 1910 President’s Report, Brother Cullen drowned while trying to save his young daughter during a family outing.

According to Dr. Simpson Brother Cullen had achieved “high rank among us spiritually and in the qualities of a safe, strong leader”. He was not yet 33 at the time of his unfortunate death.

Thomas A. Cullen was the first pastor of Bethany and displayed the qualities of leadership, missionary zeal and high standards that would exemplify all the later leaders of our church

Henry Kenning

Henry Kenning was a minister with the Christian and Missionary Alliance who achieved a high level of recognition, primarily due do to his music ability. He pastored in Hopeville, Ontario, Canada some time before 1903. He then came to New York to work with the music ministry of the CMA. He also helped established the “Training School for Home Workers” for which he received high praise from the leadership of the CMA. He was in charge of the song services at Gospel Tabernacle, the main church of the CMA in New York.

The early Alliance magazine has many references to Reverend Kenning in

the early 1900's. He regularly led the song services at major CMA meetings and conventions. On one occasion he is said to have conducted a song service "with spirit and enthusiasm". He was actually teaching music at Nyack College in 1909 when he received the call to go to Peace Chapel in Springfield, MA after Pastor Thomas A. Cullen had moved to Portland, Oregon.

The Springfield City Directory has Revered Kenning residing at Crestwood Street as late as 1914, so it appears that he may have served for about 5 years. While in Springfield he apparently traveled two days a week back to Nyack College to continue classes there.

He was noted for his devotion and abilities. He clearly had a prominent position in New York both at the Gospel Tabernacle and Nyack College. Yet it is said that he felt deprived by not being in full time pastoral ministry and found "great joy to be again engaged in full service for the Lord and the salvation of souls."

Yumna Grace Malick

We have seen that the formation of the Assemblies of God and the beginnings of Bethany share some common people and events. Azusa Street was a springboard for the Pentecostal movement and ultimately the Assemblies and it also directly affected Mabel Weaver. A.B. Simpson and the Christian Missionary Alliance were forerunners of Pentecost and provided many leaders for the new Assemblies. We have already seen the close association with Simpson at the CMA that Bethany and the Weavers had and the influence upon the

church's early years. In many ways the Assemblies of God and Bethany were on the parallel and ultimately intersecting paths.

Another area that Bethany and the Assemblies shared in common was the influence of women. Many women are prominently mentioned in the Pentecostal movement from Agnes Ozman to Marie Brown to Alice Reynolds Flower to Maria Woodworth Etter. Of course we would add to this list our own Mabel Atwater Weaver. However, there were many devoted, spirit-filled and anointed women that perhaps do not receive as much notoriety as others. One such woman was Yumna Grace Malick.

Sister Malick was a graduate of the ELIM Bible Institute in Rochester, NY. Formerly known as the Rochester Bible Training School, ELIM became a center in the East for the Pentecostal movement. According to William Menzies in Anointed to Serve, ELIM was noted for, "inculcating a love for the Bible, a profound practical faith for the supplying of daily needs and a sacrificial spirit."

Yumna Grace Malick as best we can determine was born in either Lebanon or Syria in 1873. Some documents state that she was "Born, saved and baptized in the Spirit in Palestine". We do know that she was from the Middle East and as we will see, had a burden for the lost in that area of the world. Sister Malick apparently had relatives in the Springfield, Massachusetts area since it appears that this may have been her "home base."

Our first knowledge of Sister Malick comes from the old 1948 New England Evangel article that listed her along with Reverend Thomas A. Cullen and others as former pastors of the church. We know that Sister Malick was

located in Springfield during the years 1918 – 1920 since she is listed in the Springfield city directory. In 1918 it showed her as being a “boarder” at 824 Armory Street. In 1919 – 1920 she was listed at 37 Silver Street. Other city directories refer to 37 Silver Street as the “Bethany Home”. It appears that this was a property owned by the church for several years, probably to house people like Sister Malick. In 1920 she is listed as the “matron” at the Bethany home.

Sister Malick was first ordained by the Church of God at Rumney, New Hampshire on August 30, 1915. She would have been 42 years old at the time. In 1919 she applied for an ordination certificate with the Assemblies of God. Since the Assemblies of God was formed in April 1919 Yumna Malick was probably one of the first women to be ordained. She listed her home or headquarters as 44 Crestwood Street, Springfield Massachusetts and her present address as 37 Silver Street in the same city. She described herself as an Evangelist/Missionary. She noted on her 1919 application that she had been in the ministry for over 20 years. She stated that her mission field was Springfield, MA. From all accounts Sister Malick appears to be cut from the same cloth as Lillian Trasher and other women missionaries in the early years of the Assemblies.

For some reason Sister Malick filled out and submitted two more applications for ordination. The second was some time after 1919, but not too long since she listed her age as 45 on both. The main difference was that on the second application she listed herself as a Missionary to Palestine. On her first

two applications she received the recommendations of such notable ministers in the Assemblies as Robert A. Brown, Charles S. Leonard, J. Eric Booth Clibborn and J.T. Boddy. These were significant men. Robert Brown was the pastor of Glad Tiding Tabernacle in New York City. J. Eric Booth Clibborn was the grandson of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. Rev. Clibborn became a missionary to Africa and perished there. Sister Malick also had the endorsement of E.N. Bell the first General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God and Stanley H. Frodsham an early editor of the Pentecostal Evangel.

Her period of “pastoring” the church seems to be relatively short probably only 2 years from 1917 – 1919, for in 1920 Sister Malick wrote an article – more of a praise report – in the Pentecostal Evangel. In the article she described meetings at Bethany Pentecostal Chapel and refers to sermons preached by “Our Pastor, Brother Coxe.” We are aware that it did not take long for her love of the Middle East and her missionary zeal to take over, for in 1921 she was already on the mission field serving as the first Assemblies of God missionary to Syria.

According to the records with the Assemblies archives Sister Malick served on the mission field from 1921 to 1966. Some reports have her dying in Lebanon while others say she died in Springfield, MA. We are sure through correspondence written by her in the late 1950’s that she was still in Syria. Even so she would have been well into her eighties at that time. She died in February 1966 at the age of 93.

During her years in Syria she established a school and orphanage. In addition to ministering to the Muslims in those areas she reported that she was

reaching Jews as well. From 1921 to the late 1950's the Pentecostal Evangel is replete with articles from Yumna Malick regarding the struggles and the triumphs occurring in Syria.

One can only imagine how hard it must have been, as a single woman, Pentecostal, witnessing to Muslims and Jews in a barren and hostile environment. Yet it seems that she not only endured but also thrived. She also seems to have been pretty feisty as at least one report in her file in Springfield, Missouri relates a conflict she got into with some of the Assemblies of God officials over property owned in her name in Syria.

While it appears that Sister Malick was only in service at Bethany for a short time, her life and ministry are testimonials of a faithful life. Nothing sums up her ministry better than a short article in the Pentecostal Evangel on February 23, 1924 in which Sister Malick writes from Shweifat, Lebanon enclosing a \$2.00 offering from her Sunday school children for the new Central Bible School in Springfield, Missouri. She described it as their "first fruits offering". Such sacrifice epitomized her life and ministry. Bethany was richly blessed to have her influence in the church and no doubt the strong missionary emphasis over the years is due in some part to leaders such as Sister Yumna Malick. She is specifically mentioned in the Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity under "Early Pastors" where she is listed as a "notable single Pentecostal" woman missionary to the Middle East.

John Coxe

John Coxe was born in England in 1853. He was affiliated with the Methodist church when he immigrated to the United States. He was engaged in the ministry in several places. We have evidence that he was associated with and ordained by the Christian and Missionary Alliance on December 7, 1905. Shortly after that time he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, since, when he attended a special service at Nyack College in 1907 he was already Spirit filled

At a CMA meeting in January, 1908 Reverend Coxe testified as to the personal blessing and advantages of the Pentecostal Baptism. It is reported that after his testimony prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit occupied the remainder of the services.

John Coxe was at age 52 already a mature pastor and teacher when he was ordained by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. It is not surprising then, that he was quickly recognized for this talent and leadership. The Alliance paper regularly mentioned Reverend Coxe as a speaker at conventions. He pastored in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Butler, Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois. He wrote articles for the Alliance magazine and later for the Pentecostal Evangel and the Latter Rain Evangel. In the Latter Rain Evangel he wrote an article entitled "God's Purpose in Pentecost" in April 1917. In it he states that he was baptized in the Spirit ten years earlier (1907), which confirms our previous belief about his Pentecostal experience. A reading of the article leaves no doubt about where Reverend Coxe stood on this doctrinal point.

Reverend Coxe rose in stature in the CMA but in 1916 he applied for

credentials with the newly formed Assemblies of God. He stated on the application for his license that he was presently serving as the pastor of the Stone Church in Chicago, Illinois. The Stone Church was, and remains today one of the significant churches in the Assemblies of God fellowship.

The archives of the Assemblies of God show that the Eastern District of the General Council of the Assemblies of God was formed in 1917. The Eastern District included Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, New Jersey, New England, and other states and John Coxe was elected as the first chairman of the Eastern District (later the title "Chairman " was changed to Superintendent). At that time John Coxe was listed as being from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. However, the official list of ministers in the General Council of the Assemblies of God showed John Coxe as a pastor from Zion City, Illinois. According to an Alliance article in 1917, Rev. Coxe left the CMA to assume the pastorate of a Pentecostal work in Zion City. This church was not associated with the work of Alexander Dowie, who by this time had been recognized for his fanaticism, but rather one that grew out of the Azusa Street Revival.

Since John Coxe was pastoring in Chicago in 1916 it seems logical that he moved to Zion, Illinois in 1917 prior to moving on to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In 1918 he helped start a new work in Wilmington, Delaware. In any event John Coxe rose to prominence in the Assemblies in much the same way that he did in the CMA. He serves as chairman of the Eastern District until 1918 when Robert Brown, Pastor of Glad Tidings Tabernacle of New York City, replaced him.

Some time between 1918 and 1919 John Coxe arrives in Springfield, Massachusetts where he apparently serves as pastor of Bethany Pentecostal Chapel. Aside from the 1948 New England Evangel article that refers to Reverend Coxe as pastor, we have found other reliable references as well. The 1920 Springfield City directory lists John Coxe (with wife Alice) residing at 44 Crestwood Street Springfield, MA. This street was next to the church and is the address listed on his official record with the General Council and it also lists him as Pastor of Bethany Chapel. (From the records of George Atwater's estate, this property was owned by him and by this time was part of his trust). In addition, an article appearing in the September 1920 magazine Word and Work and reprinted in the October 1920 Pentecostal Evangel speaks of a convention held in Springfield at Bethany Pentecostal Chapel. The article refers to Brother Coxe as the pastor of the church two times and also states that he was a Presbyterian. Coincidentally the article was written by Yumna G. Malick who had earlier served as pastor at Bethany before going to Syria as a missionary. Of significance is that on August 20, 1920 John Coxe called for the New England District to be formed. He arranged for the organizational meeting to be held at his home in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was elected as the first chairman of the New England District, a position that he held until his death on October 31, 1921 in Wilmington, Delaware. He was 68 years old.

Brother Coxe was a significant Christian leader in the early 1900's. His pastoral skills are evidenced by his pastorate at the Stone Church in Chicago. His leadership and organizational skills are shown by his role in forming and

leading both the Eastern District and the New England District. It was under his leadership that Bethany Pentecostal Church became affiliated with the General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1919, five years after the council was formed in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

John Coxe had two children, Sara Coxe and William A. Coxe, Sr. Sara became a missionary and served in India first under the CMA and later as an Assemblies of God missionary. William A. Coxe became an evangelist and was ordained by the CMA. He later transferred to the Assemblies of God. He had five children - the grandchildren of John Coxe – four of whom became pastors, evangelists or missionaries. The Pastor Coxe left quite a spiritual legacy with his family as well as to Bethany, who from that time would play a significant role in the New England District of the Assemblies of God.

Hiram T. Carpenter

Born in 1837 on a farm in Westmore, Vermont, Hiram T. Carpenter was an unlikely candidate to be a minister, much less a Pentecostal one. As a young man in his late teens he was living a life away from God when, while in a state of drunkenness he happened upon a Salvation Army hall. It was there that he had a salvation experience and dedicated his life to the Lord. He married the former Cora E. Fuller at Newport, Vermont on September 6, 1906 and he joined the Salvation Army. In 1910 he took the pastorate of the Pentecostal Church in Worcester, Massachusetts. He soon became well-known in Pentecostal circles and was a leader for services in Worcester held by the famous evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson.

In 1922, a large automobile drove up to the home of Hiram T. Carpenter in Worcester, Massachusetts. One can only imagine what the four young Carpenter children thought as they watched the dark, foreign-looking chauffeur open the door for Mabel Atwater Weaver. As the adults sent the children out to play, Mabel Weaver made an offer to Hiram Carpenter that he readily accepted – to become pastor of Bethany Pentecostal Chapel in Springfield, Massachusetts.

At the time Hiram T. Carpenter was 35 years old and while he had a modest seventh grade education, he had already been pastoring for eight years. He had been ordained by the United Pentecostal Council on June 3, 1917 and affiliated with the Assemblies of God soon thereafter.

As was stated earlier the prior pastor of Bethany was John Coxe who had recently died in the fall of 1921. Reverend Coxe was an outstanding leader and administrator as well as a pastor. From what we can learn he was very busy, traveling extensively. At the time of his death he seemed to be splitting his time in Springfield with a work in Delaware. It could have been that the fledgling congregation in Springfield did not need a full time Pastor. Also, since Reverend Coxe had been the moving force in the creation of the New England District of the Assemblies of God and was serving as chairman, those duties may have occupied a lot of his time.

Whatever the reason, Mabel Weaver was on a mission that day in 1922 and that mission was to find a full-time pastor for Bethany, one who would minister to the needs of the people and lead the church forward. She found such a pastor in Hiram T. Carpenter.

As previously stated, prior to this time there are no official written records of the

church. No minutes exist and most information for this book has been gathered from outside sources. With Pastor Carpenter two important things took place: The legal incorporation of the church and the keeping of regular minutes for board meetings and business meetings.

The church was incorporated in late 1923 and the first official minutes are dated March 28, 1924 entitled "1st annual business meeting after articles of incorporation". The meeting commenced at 9:00 p.m.

For the first seven or eight years the minutes were hand-written by the meeting secretary. This was long before ballpoint pens. The minutes were usually written in cursive with an old-fashioned dip-pen and ink. However, the records are remarkably well preserved, detailed and complete. With minor exceptions they appear to have no missing pages or gaps. Fortunately, from a historical standpoint, a decision was made at the first meeting to have meetings on a quarterly basis, on the 28th day (or last Friday) of every month. From these records then one can easily follow along with the events and decisions that helped shape the church in the early days.

For people that were relatively unsophisticated in business or corporate affairs the first business meeting was a model of corporate efficiency and decorum. While the Atwaters and Weavers had close dealings with lawyers and Mabel probably had one prepare the incorporation papers, there is no mention of any lawyer present at the first meeting.

Pastor Carpenter, who served as chairman, called the meeting to order. All temporary officers resigned (the law then and now required a president, secretary and treasurer to be listed on articles of incorporation so there probably were officers in place

before the meeting) and Sister Emma H. Lemon was appointed temporary secretary. A written ballot was taken to vote for secretary and John A. Levy was elected. He immediately took over duties and kept the minutes of that meeting.

No further ballots were taken as the members designated the chairman to cast one decisive ballot for all of the remaining offices. (Apparently, as today, people wanted church business meetings to be brief).

Francis E. Elliot was elected treasurer. F.A. Wright, Charles Psholka, Alvin Sjordahl and Francis E. Elliot were elected as deacons.

Mrs. Albert Weaver, Mrs. F. A. Wright, Mrs. H. Hodges and Mrs. Mildred Sjordahl were elected as deaconesses.

Pastor Carpenter, F. A. Wright, Francis E. Elliot, Frank W. Searles, H. H. Hodges and Mrs. Albert Weaver were elected as trustees.

The major business of the evening, after the elections, was to review a proposed lease of the church building from Mabel Weaver to the church.

[Note. George M. Atwater, Mabel Weaver's father, died in 1902. His significant estate involved many different holdings but a large portion was real estate. Most of this estate went into a trust for the benefit of Mabel A. Weaver. George Atwater held the mortgages on many pieces of real estate which no doubt created a significant income stream for the beneficiary Mabel A. Weaver. In any event, the property at the corner of Springfield and Armory Street was owned by the George M. Atwater Trust. So technically the land and building known as Peace Chapel, later Bethany Pentecostal Church was owned by the

trust. Mabel A. Weaver clearly had a degree of access and control over the property and that remained the case until 1929. George made a provision in the trust that allowed Mabel to access principal for charitable or religious donations.]

No decision was made over the lease. Next, a letter from J. Roswell Flower of the General Council of the Assemblies of God regarding gifts the church had made to the missionary fund. As we have seen from earlier records missions was a significant part of the church's history from its inception.

The meeting seems to have gone smoothly, with all things done decently and in order. It adjourned at 11:05 p.m.

One of the things that marks the early portion of Pastor Carpenter's term of service is the rapid growth and the bringing together of members that were to have not only immediate impact on the church but for several generations to come. For example, in 1933 the first "official" membership list was created (it appears to have been typed up and then added to as new members joined). The list contained 112 names, many of which are known to this day -- Carpenter, Choquette, Polsholka, Lemon, Finch, Pardo, Martin, Burt, Wilson, Lockerby, Tatro, Candyliis and others. Of the 112 members, relatives of 31 are still active in the church and number in the hundreds and include some of the most faithful families and significant and capable leaders over the years.

Cora Carpenter died in 1924, 2 years after coming to Bethany. Hiram then married the former Lena Nilson.

Aside from the original construction of the church in 1905 the first of several building programs occurred in 1931. The minutes tell us that in April 7, 1931, the board

authorized Pastor Carpenter to meet with city officials to obtain necessary appraisals to move the church building to the rear portion of the property.

Only the oldest of members can remember that the church was originally located 40 feet closer to Springfield Street. The records at the building department at Springfield City Hall reveal that a building permit application No. 10123 was taken out on July 21, 1931 and the builder was Alfred Wight. The work was described as, "...moving present church back just 40.0" to parallel to Springfield Street. Excavating under building a new foundation for the church." The work was completed on October 21, 1931. The estimated cost of the project was \$4,600.00

From this vantage point it appears that this was a major undertaking for the small church. Yet the records do not indicate that there were a lot of meetings or discussion about it, and it was done in fairly short order – 3 months from start to finish.

This building project was the first major work done by the church after ownership had been transferred to the church from Mabel A. Weaver. They soon realized one of the burdens of property ownership was the responsibility of paying for the upkeep and maintenance of property. The church was facing a cost of \$4,600.00 in 1931, just two years after the commencement of the Great Depression. It must have been an extremely onerous financial burden had it not been for the continued generosity of Mabel Weaver. The church minutes show that on July 24, 1931 the church voted to accept the offer of a \$4,600.00 mortgage from Mabel A. Weaver, through the trust of George M. Atwater. Interest would be 5 ½ percent and the loan would be secured by a mortgage on the church property, payable in 5 years.

Whether it was the continuing economic depression or the church being

unrealistic about its ability to repay the loan, by December 1933 an extension of the loan was necessary and the trustees of the George M. Atwater trust recorded an extension of the mortgage through January 1, 1946.

Church Services

As previously stated, we do not have any records regarding the day to day matters of Bethany prior to 1924 and it is not known how the services were conducted at that time. However, we have a very clear picture of the services during the years of Pastor Carpenter's tenure.

The services began at 2:00 on Sunday afternoon with Sunday school that lasted until 3:00 when a worship service began. The church, as today was blessed with a series of talented and dedicated musicians. The main instrument in the church was a grand piano located on the right side of the platform. There was no organ in the church until 1950. There were probably a few reasons for this. One was the expense. The installation of a pipe organ was financially out of the question and the technology had not yet developed to the point that electric organs were available. More likely though is the view that the organ sound was too "high church" and reminded members of the older, traditional denominations from which they came. There clearly was a sentiment against looking and sounding like a liturgical church. But Bethany did not suffer for lack of musical talent. Catherine "Kitty" Alexander was an accomplished pianist having studied at the Boston Conservatory of Music. She also had developed the "evangelistic style" of piano playing to which we have grown accustomed in our church and other Assembly of God churches. She was also a piano teacher in Springfield and taught many of the young people in the church. She was the first piano teacher of Lewis G. "Bud" Martin

who would later be the minister of music for some thirty plus years.

In addition to the piano, violins were played by twin sisters, Enola Choquette and Viola Choquette – who coincidentally had married brothers – Alfred and John Choquette, respectively. David Stone, the boys Sunday school teacher, played the trombone, Elizabeth “Betty” Bacon played the Hawaiian guitar and on occasions Dr. Hall, a dentist from Northampton, Massachusetts would play his trumpet in the evening services.

Most of the songs that were sung were hymns from two paperback books entitled “Pentecostal Songs” and “Tabernacle Hymns Number Four” and later by the hymnal published by the Assemblies of God.

Talented singers were also a part of Bethany. Edwin “Ned” Alexander, husband of Kitty Alexander sang tenor solos. David Stone, a bass and Betty Bacon, a soprano also sang solos. During the offering it was common for Kitty Alexander to play a piano solo or for Enola and Viola Choquette to play a violin duet.

The 3:00 services lasted until 5:00 when the members would gather in the church basement for an evening meal. Sometimes it was a potluck affair and other times members brought their own dinners, but it was generally a time of fellowship and relaxation.

At 6:00 a young people’s service began that lasted until 7:30 when the evening service began. The evening service was similar to the morning with the exception that there might be more music of a special nature. For example, a quartet comprised of Ned Alexander, David Stone, Alfred Choquette and Edmund Otto regularly sang on Sunday nights.

It was not unusual for Bethany to hold special “revival” meetings. The minutes reflect that “Brother McAlister” and “Brother Nicholoff” came for special meetings. Brother Staats from Dallas, Texas came and had such success that he extended his meetings for three weeks. Reverend Marie Brown, a founder of Glad Tidings Tabernacle in New York City, was a favorite guest speaker. She and her husband Robert Brown were early pioneers in Pentecost and it is believed that Mabel Atwater Weaver received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at meetings held by the Browns in New York.

Missionaries also were an important part of the church and when in the states would be speakers. In the early 1920's it appears that Ruth Pemberton and Clara Siemens, both missionaries to the West Indies and Yumna Malick, missionary to Syria were supported by the church.

Older members can remember the Weaver “entourage” arriving at the church in a large chauffeured car. Mabel and Albert Weaver along with a personal secretary of Sister Weaver would attend. The Weavers sat in the same pew on the left side of the sanctuary near the front entry door. This was a change from the practice of the early years when Mabel Weaver would sit on the front row and hold the offering basket as members placed their offerings in the plate. Prior to 1929, Mabel Weaver paid all expenses of the church, including the pastor's salary. Presumably she used the offerings to offset the church expenses. It was not doubt a losing proposition financially. After the church property was given over to the church, the Weaver's level of involvement decreased somewhat. It is known that Albert Weaver traveled extensively and from 1924 forward he was not as present as he had been earlier. Mabel continued to have a presence serving as a deaconess, trustee and continuing benefactor.

Howard Weaver, son of Albert and Mabel Weavers was conspicuous by his absences during this time. He would have been in his mid 30's during this time and had developed an affection for the Episcopal Church. This was borne out later in his life, as he ultimately became an ordained Episcopal priest and left the sizable Atwater-Weaver estate in trust for the benefit of young men seeking the Episcopal priesthood.

With the advent of Pastor Hiram Carpenter, Mabel Weavers' involvement diminished, especially after 1929 when the church property was conveyed to the church. In fact the change with respect to her involvement was so remarkable that a statement was entered into the official church minutes stating that her role going forward was going to be that of a regular parishioner, and that she had no special obligation to support the church in the manner she had in the past. Sister Weaver did however continue as a deaconess and trustee of the church for the rest of her life.

On April 2, 1936 Sister Weaver was elected as an honorary deaconess. She died May 2, 1936 in Florida, where she apparently spent the last few months of her life. The board voted to hang her picture in the church as a memorial. Her obituary was very short containing none of the information that we have come to know about her and her many accomplishments. This is in stark contrast to the obituary of her father George Atwater and even her husband Albert who died several years later. In many ways though, the simplicity of the obituary was a mirror of her life and the way she conducted herself. From all reports that we have she did not assert herself in the church affairs as she could easily have done. Whether this was her personality or an indication of the times, her father and her husband seem to have taken the lead in many things. But there is no question that several things will be remembered about Sister Mabel Atwater Weaver.

First, she was a strong Christian woman who spent her time, talents and considerable treasure in the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She was “born again” although that term was probably not used as extensively as it is used today, and she was Spirit-filled and Pentecostal in her beliefs. She was a woman of prayer as we have seen from her involvement with the Christian Missionary Alliance and the prayer meetings she held at Rockrimmon for the women of Bethany. She had a missionary zeal as she and her husband ministered to the Jewish immigrants in New York City and set the course from the church’s future with respect to missions and evangelization of the community and the world. She was exceedingly generous and while some would argue that she had the financial capacity to be generous, not all wealthy people have the degree of largesse that Mabel Weaver demonstrated.

Above all Mabel Weaver was a woman of great vision. We can only speculate about what she thought the future would hold for tiny Peace Chapel. After viewing her life from this vantage point one might think she would be surprised that Bethany has turned out greater than she might have hoped and dreamed. The church can only hope that it has lived up to her expectations. Or, just maybe, it has all worked out just the way she planned it, with God’s help.

The minutes of the church show many mundane decisions but some are interesting insights into the church’s early life. In many cases it is an example of how when things change the more they stay the same. For example, at one point in 1937 expenses were exceeding income to the point that it was the topic of discussion at a business meeting. Apparently the church had established a building fund into which they were depositing extra cash. Some thought that the building fund might need to be suspended until things improved. No further discussion occurred and it could be that things turned around. What is notable, six months later is a discussion concerning

missionary giving to Ruth Pemberton, Clara Siemens and Yumna Malick. This suggests that missions giving was never suspended even during the difficult times. Readers need to remember that the country was still in the Great Depression and times were financially difficult for the whole country. In 1939 there was a discussion about the “summer slump” in giving and a decision was made to take extra offerings as the need arose.

In November of 1939, Pastor Hiram Carpenter resigned after 17 years as Pastor of the church. The significance of his role in the history of the church cannot be overstated. Not only was his tenure long, he was a stabilizing influence in a church that had had a series of qualified and dedicated pastors, but whose terms were short. The association with the Assemblies of God, the legal incorporation of the church and the acquisition of the church property set the course for the future. Pastor Carpenter arrived at the church during a time when the Pentecostal movement was not popular, particularly in the Northeast. He led the church through the depression and helped establish and mentor leaders in the body that would capably take the church forward. He was well-respected in the movement and served as the District Superintendent of the New England District, which was not a full time position as it is today, but reflected upon his status among his ministry peers. While his resignation could have been viewed as a disastrous event, the minutes indicate a level of spiritual maturity probably due to the guidance of Pastor Carpenter. It is stated that the resignation was, “accepted as God’s Will,” and the church simply moved forward. Candidate names were given and discussed. Some of them were Brothers Anderson, Bowley, Cartwright, Stuarts, Nicholoff and Kulbert. After one meeting shortly after the resignation it was noted that it was “good to be here” and they encouraged each other to “keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.”

William John Belbin

It only took about three months to fill the vacancy left by Pastor Carpenter. Apparently during this time (November 1939 – January 1940) candidates were considered. There is no record of how many, if any, came and officially candidated but the minutes show that William J. Belbin spoke at some time during this period since on January 14, 1940 he was invited to come back and speak “again”.

On January 19, 1940 the body felt the unanimous “witness of the Holy Spirit” and an offer was extended to Brother Belbin at the princely sum of \$25.00 per week. On January 21, 1940 Brother Belbin accepted the invitation “without hesitation”.

The invitation to Pastor Belbin was a dramatic change from the prior 17 years of Pastor Carpenter’s ministry. Pastor Carpenter was 53 when he left and had what was described as a “fatherly” image. No doubt this is from the fact that Hiram Carpenter was the only pastor many of the members had known, especially the young people who were either born or came to church at an early age during his tenure.

William J. Belbin was 29 years old at the time he accepted the call to Bethany. He had attended the Beulah Heights Bible School in North Bergen, New Jersey, one of the well-known Pentecostal bible schools that emerged from

the great revival of the early 1900's. Others who would attend this school were Rose Vivian Frederickson and missionaries Howard and Olive Hawkes.

Brother Belbin was ordained in 1935 by the New England District. His application for credentials was endorsed by Hiram T. Carpenter as District Superintendent and William Mitchell, a former superintendent and Pastor of the Chelsea church. It is clear that Brother Belbin was known by at least the officials of the New England District. Since the number of churches in the district was small at the time, and not that many applications were being submitted for ordination, a handsome, young, energetic man like William Belbin would stand out.

Brother Belbin started his ministry as pastor in New Jersey when he was 23 years old. In 1938 and 1939 he was serving as a Pastor/Evangelist in Everett, Massachusetts. Whether the time was right or whether Brother Belbin was a catalyst for change, Bethany seemed to move along in a progressive way.

In what would become the "standard operating procedure" for Bethany in the years to come, a decision was made to liquidate the mortgage debt that had been incurred in the 1931 move of the church to the rear of the property. The original \$4,600.00 debt to the George Atwater Trust remained due as the original term had been extended for an additional 10 years though 1946. No doubt the affect of the great depression had taken its toll on the ability of the young church

to pay down the debt. In any event, in 1940 a vote was taken to take special offerings, which would go entirely toward the principal of the debt. The regular Sunday offering would be used to pay the interest and normal expenses. The program for debt reduction appears to have worked as we see from the records at the Registry of Deeds that the mortgage was discharged on June 28, 1943, three years before the due date. By this time however, both Mabel and Albert Weaver had died and their son Howard was the sole beneficiary of the Atwater – Weaver fortune. It was Howard who issued the discharge of the mortgage and it is not known whether this was the result of an early payment in full or whether Howard was being generous or acting on the wishes of his now deceased parents. More importantly is that the church had started a practice of debt reduction that would continue over the next 50 years with great success.

While the United States did not officially enter World War II until the dramatic events of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America was beginning to emerge from the depression and the defense industry was leading the way. Even before the country's entrance into the war, manufacturing of defense related products were on the uprising in 1940. Jobs became plentiful and William Belbin began to work in one of the plants in Springfield. While there was some concern over this having an effect on his ministerial duties Brother Belbin convinced the church that it would not have a negative impact. Working a second shift on a part time basis probably did not take him away from his duties at the relatively small church. Perhaps it was a way to supplement his income or

he may have considered it his patriotic duty in the war effort.

Brother Belbin was married to the former Dorothy G. James and had one son at the time. The church had rented the property at 79 Milford Street, Springfield, Massachusetts, as a parsonage being a short distance from the church. In September of 1941 the house became available to be purchased and at the urging of Pastor Belbin a vote was taken to purchase the property and borrow \$2,400.00 to accomplish the transaction.

It seems that over the ensuing months, the purchase of the house became a contentious item as a minority of the members objected to the transaction. To his credit, the record reflects that Brother Belbin was prepared to put the matter aside to avoid further discord within the body, but church leaders felt it was a wise thing to do and proceeded forward. It must have created quite a stir since District Superintendent Roy Smuland was brought in to help alleviate the problem. He stated for the record that everything had been done legally and orderly and that he too felt it was a good decision for the church. He encouraged the dissident minority to "get over it" and move forward. From that point on the church made a series of well-thought and prudent decisions regarding property acquisitions culminating with the purchase of the 51 acres of land in Agawam in 1976.

The last major change involved the moving of the services from the 2:00

afternoon services to the split services of morning and evening, as they are known today. As with all changes this item was discussed over several months but finally the decision was made to go to two services in 1942.

Rose Vivian Frederickson

Pastor Belbin left Bethany in the fall of 1943. His leaving was rather sudden and the church leadership looked for a way to fill in some time while the search for a new pastor took place. On Sunday, November 11, 1943 a business meeting was held that was chaired by Brother Alfred Choquette. At the meeting it was decided to invite Sister Rose Vivian Frederickson to serve as interim pastor. Business as usual was conducted during this same meeting since two months later a vote taken to establish the first Sunday of each month as missions Sunday with all offerings doing to missions.

Except for two years spent as a Pastor/Evangelist in Dunn, North Carolina, Pastor Belbin pastored the rest of his life in New Jersey. He served as the District Secretary/Treasurer for the New Jersey District in 1957. He died on April 6, 1994 in Elma, New Jersey. He was survived by his wife of over 50 years, Dorothy.

Born on April 17, 1911 in Quincy, Massachusetts, Rose Vivian Frederickson was the daughter of Albert and Ellen Larson Frederickson. She grew up in New Haven, Connecticut. She too attended Beulah Heights Bible

School in North Bergen, New Jersey. She was a classmate of Howard Hawkes, later a missionary to Bangladesh and a close friend of Bethany. She was ordained by the New England District on May 3, 1939 at the age of 28 and became a pastor in Greenfield, Massachusetts. A woman named Beth Beckly assisted her there.

As we have already seen, women had a major role in the Assemblies of God from the beginning. It was not unusual for single women like Vivian Frederickson to become missionaries or pastors. At this same time Olive Hawkes (before she was married) was pastoring a church in Brattleboro, Vermont with the help of Florence Tubman. Howard Hawkes was the pastor in Keene, New Hampshire and Howard, Vivian and Olive would regularly meet on Saturday mornings for fellowship and to encourage one another.

Sister Vivian (only her mother called her Rose) was a woman remembered for her fine singing voice and speaking ability. She never married and while her application for credentials stated that when she was ordained as a missionary she ministered throughout her life in the United States and in New England in particular.

She also ministered as an evangelist, which is what she was doing at the time she accepted the interim position at Bethany. No doubt her past service in Greenfield and her association with the District established her as a known

quantity to the church leaders.

She served at Bethany for approximately five months from November 1943 to the end of March of 1944. She continued serving as an evangelist until 1950 when she became the pastor of the Assemblies of God church in Manchester, New Hampshire where she remained for 16 years. She later worked as a housemother for the State of New Hampshire at a nursing school in Concord, New Hampshire. She retired in 1977 to Sanford, Maine where she died on August 24, 1993. Sister Vivian is remembered by those who knew her as a fine preacher and a warm and caring person. She was committed to the Lord's work through her entire life.

Frederick Eide

In March 1944, the church continued to search for a new pastor. Reverend Alfred Coleth was considered but he declined. Reverends Howard and Olive Hawkes met with the church but probably due to their calling to be missionaries they did not feel comfortable committing to any extended period as pastor. (Within a year they had received their appointment as missionaries to India. The Hawkes later became the first Assemblies of God missionaries to the newly formed East Pakistan.) The relationship between the Hawkes and Bethany continued from the time they left for the field in 1946 until the present as Sister Hawkes still regularly visits Bethany.

Later in March of 1944, Frederick Eide was offered the position as Pastor

and on March 26, 1944 the congregation officially voted him as pastor. Brother Eide was ordained by the Eastern District on April 24, 1927 and received his credentials one month later. He was pastoring in Wrightsville, Pennsylvania when he accepted the call to Bethany. He, his wife Bertha and their three children, Alice, Lois and David moved into the parsonage at 79 Milford Street in Springfield.

Frederick D. Eide was born on July 14, 1907 and was 37 years old when he was elected Pastor at Bethany. Several events helped shape his ministry at Bethany, not the least of which was the ending of World War II. Many of the young men of the church had served in the

armed forces and it is a testimony that all returned home safely. This began the “baby boomer” period of Bethany as many of the second generation of Bethany members married and had children. Brother Eide performed most of these marriages sometimes having one or two a month for several months in a row. As these young families grew it became evident that the church facility needed to grow also.

In February of 1949 the church obtained a building permit for its first major building program since the moving of the church in 1931. At this time the square footage was 1553 square feet. The addition was to be 1447 square feet, almost doubling its size. The cost was estimated to be \$24,700. With minor exceptions the work was done entirely by men of the church. The attendance at church business meetings has been a problem for many years and it was no different in

the late 1940's. Pastor Eide instituted a church dinner preceding the annual business meeting. It seems to have had the desired effect as 134 members are recorded as present at the 1949 meeting when the dinner was first held. This practice would continue for many years.

Pastor Eide resigned on July 24, 1949 to take the pastorate at Bethel Assembly in Newark, New Jersey where he remained until 1961. He was later elected District Superintendent of the New Jersey District of the Assemblies of God. He held that position until 1961. He remained in active ministry until 1978 when he went into semi-retirement. He died on May 23, 1994 at the age of 86.

While at Bethany Brother Eide served as the Assistant District Superintendent and would be one of five of Bethany's pastors who would serve as a

District Superintendent. He was a strong and dedicated leader of the church who is fondly remembered by church members.

Albert Skymer

When Pastor Eide resigned two possible candidates were discussed. Brother Fanin of New Haven, Connecticut and Brother Skymer of Salem, New Jersey. Brother Fanin declined to be considered and on August 11, 1949, Albert Skymer was elected as pastor.

At age 22, Albert Skymer had been ordained as an Assemblies of God minister in the Potomac District. He had served as Pastor in Pennsylvania and New Jersey before coming to Bethany.

As Bethany continued to grow and became more established new opportunities presented themselves. In late 1950 Pastor Skymer was asked by local radio station WHYN to do a Sunday morning radio show. The church prepared some sample tapes for the station to review and WHYN indicated they wanted Bethany to do the program on one condition – Bethany needed to purchase an organ, as the station did not like the piano music. As stated previously, until this point the church only used a piano in it's services. The cost of a Steinert Spiner Hammond organ was \$1,300. The board elected to proceed to purchase the organ and the "Bethany Hour" was born. It has continued without interruption for over 50 years and is still a part of Bethany's outreach to the community. Since the radio station donated the airtime for over 40 years, the purchase of the organ proved to be a wise investment.

Another sign of growth was the need for Sunday school rooms and a building project was undertaken to create six new Sunday school rooms in the basement of the church.

In 1951 Brother Skymer began another tradition of the church – missions

conventions. While Bethany had always been a missions church, the institution of a missions convention launched Bethany into another level. A convention allowed several missionaries were able to attend a series of services and allowed the church to respond to the need of world missions. As Bethany grew into a “World Missions Church” the missions conventions became a highlight of the year and as a result it’s commitment to world missions giving grew dramatically.

The church record is replete with instances of the church responding to the needs of others. For example during Brother Skymer’s tenure the New England Bible Institute in Framingham, Massachusetts was struggling and on several occasions Bethany responded generously to this need.

In 1952, a house that was only a year old and located across the street from the church became available and the board voted to purchase 815

Armory Street for \$17,000 to serve as the new parsonage. The Milford Street property was sold and a \$2,500 mortgage taken out to purchase the new house.

This property would remain the parsonage until the 1980’s.

Unfortunately Pastor Skymer’s health began to fail and he found it necessary to resign in November of 1953. Pastor Skymer subsequently served as pastor in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York before retiring to Florida. Brother Skymer died on November 2, 1998 after a long struggle with Alzheimer’s

disease. His time and work at Bethany set the stage for the second half of Bethany's first century, which would see unparalleled growth both here and abroad.

By now the church board was a solid group of experienced men who had served under Pastor Carpenter and some young, energetic men who had essentially grown up in the church. Accordingly, choosing a new pastor was not too daunting a task as they had been through the process before.

David W. Flower

The Pentecostal revival of the turn of the century, the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the Assemblies of God all came together in the form of Bethany's next pastor.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance Gospel Tabernacle in Indianapolis was one of their major churches in 1907 when a major revival broke out there. One of the main families of the church was named Reynolds and their daughter Alice received the baptism in the Holy Spirit on Easter Sunday of that year. During these meetings a young man named J. Roswell Flower was saved and later received the baptism as well. Although he was studying law at the time, his life took a dramatic turn after Indianapolis, not the least of which was his marriage to Alice Reynolds and his entry into the ministry.

The significant role that J. Roswell Flower played in the formation of the Assemblies of God is well known and documented. In addition to being the editor of the Pentecostal Evangel he held positions at the highest level of the Assemblies for most of his life. Alice Flower was known and respected as well having a gift for writing and teaching.

They had six children, all in the ministry as pastors, missionaries and district superintendents. However, it is the youngest child, David W. Flower that directly affected Bethany.

After a successful college career at Houghton College in New York – he had been a star athlete, class president and senior class speaker – Brother Flower pioneered a small work not far from Houghton College. In 1948, he married Doris Thompson who had been his father's secretary in Springfield, Missouri. He then became pastor of the church in Augusta, Maine. He was acquainted with Brother Skymmer and also had preached for Brother Eide.

Bethany was poised for dramatic growth when David W. Flower accepted the invitation to come. He received “overwhelming support” at the business meeting on December 11, 1953.

It was a good fit. At 34 years of age Pastor Flower was a contemporary of

many of the leaders of the church and they teamed together from the start. Barely a month had passed from the time that Pastor Skymer resigned and when Pastor Flower was elected, so the church did not miss a beat.

Things began to happen as soon as Pastor Flower arrived. Within a month, new missionaries Howard Hawkes, A. Walker Hall and Mark Buntain were added to the missions commitment. A weekly church newspaper was created and the board engaged an aggressive debt repayment plan for the existing mortgage balance on the parsonage by sending sixteen advance payments to the bank.

It was in 1954 that the name of the church was officially changed from Bethany Pentecostal Church to Bethany Assembly of God in order to be more closely identified with the Assemblies of God Fellowship.

Sunday school was emphasized and Bethany became a church that had something for the entire family. As a result, new families came and growth followed. Soon the house next to the church was purchased for further expansion. The "Annex" as it was known was built and the entire church refinished with gray "Permastone". The attractive new structure was featured on the cover of the Pentecostal Evangel on June 9, 1957. The accompanying story described how the new additional rooms provided for 200 students and the property was now valued at \$100,000.00. All this took place in the first three

years of David Flower's tenure.

Pastor Flower was known for his excellent pulpit skills and was a much sought-after speaker. He traveled both here and abroad, traveling to the Dominican Republic on a missions trip and to Michigan for camp meetings.

Some of the former outstanding church leaders were now retired, such as Al Choquette and Charles Posholka, two of the four men to be named as honorary deacons at Bethany (Edmund Otto and Louis DiLorenzo being the others). But the church moved forward. Perhaps the following statement from the 1958 annual report sums it up best.

"A good spirit of unity existed throughout the last year with all factors, including our pastor, the people and the board in agreement on all church matters. We have had, and will continue to have the blessing of the Lord in our midst where harmony and oneness of purpose exists." (Edgar Overstreet, Secretary)

It was apparent to all that Bethany was growing at a pace that was hard to keep up with.

The last building project had cost \$17,000.00 but the church had a \$6,000.00 mortgage. Within 4 years it was down to \$3,000.00 as a result of the "double tithe" Sunday once a month. All the excess funds were used to reduce

the debt.

In 1962, another house became available and the church purchased it for \$19,000.00. However the next project was going to be something that was far more significant than anything undertaken in the past. Until now the church members had handled all the building programs. With minor exceptions no outside contractors were used. Now the proposed new sanctuary was something that would require a real step of faith. That faith is borne out in the story related by Pastor Flower.

In January of 1962 the balance of the church's debt was paid off and the Sunday it was announced was cause for joy and celebration. The next day Pastor Flower contacted an Engineer/Architect and laid out the general plan for a new 500-seat sanctuary. Pastor Flower said he told the builder, "we have no money, we just paid off our mortgage but we need to start right away. All I can say is that if you work with us to do this project we will never miss a payment to the bank."

This profession of faith so impressed the builder that the project started without the usual financial assurances that are required. The past history of debt service helped the church secure a \$130,000.00 loan to build the new sanctuary. Since this was 10 times larger than any loan taken out before, there may have been some "deep gulps" at the time. While the church was growing, this time

there was no Mabel Atwater Weaver standing on the sidelines ready to help out with her great wealth. No, this time it was going to be an effort by the people of the church and they would rise or fall on their own.

Ground was broken in the spring of 1963 and the project completed in February of 1964. The large 500-seat auditorium was like nothing most of the members had seen before. Of note is that at the annual meeting following the completion of the building the minutes reflect that the project was completed for \$125,000.00 and that the church was able to meet all its missions obligations and the special needs that arose that year.

After being in the building for almost one year Pastor Flower was elected as District Superintendent of the Southern New England District. His brother George Flower had held that post since its creation in the 1950's. After 11 years of rapid but beneficial growth Bethany needed another pastor again.

After 10 years of service as the District Superintendent Brother Flower went on to pastor Bethel Temple in Dayton, Ohio where he remained until retirement. His term at Bethany "jump-started" the church into its 2nd 50 years. When the sanctuary was completed in 1964, many of the older members remarked that it was the last church Bethany would need to build. Fortunately, they could not have been more wrong.

Pastor Edward B. Berkey

1965 – 1974

Reverend Edward B. Berkey was pastoring in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania when he responded to the call to become Bethany's pastor. Pastor Berkey had been to Bethany when Pastor Skymer was pastor and he had been acquainted with Pastor Flower when they both spoke at a youth camp. He pastored for 16 years in Pennsylvania and held numerous positions in the Eastern District. Once again, even though an effective and loved pastor, like David Flower was leaving, Bethany was not hindered in its prayers and within two months Pastor Berkey was installed in August 1965. He arrived with his wife Gladys and their children Dale, Douglas and Damaris, probably not realizing what lie ahead in the next 25 years.

It may be beneficial to describe where Bethany stood as a church. In 1965, the Sunday school attendance was not quite 300, Sunday morning attendance averaged ____ and the church's annual income was \$46,924.00. Bethany supported 14 foreign missionaries and 10 home missionaries with an annual budget of \$8,700.00.

Even though the new sanctuary project was the largest financial undertaking yet by the church resulting in a \$130,000.00 mortgage when completed, Bethany did not reduce its impact in giving to other ministries that

were in need. In the late 1960's and early 1970's the church gave financial assistance to the Northampton Assembly of God for it's new church building and parsonage; to the True Vine Church of God in Christ Pentecostal and the Wethersfield, Connecticut Assemblies of God. In 1970, the pastor of the Spanish Christian Assemblies of God, Reverend Juan Carde, approached Pastor Berkey about his growing congregation's need for a building. The church board agreed to assist Pastor Carde when an appropriate building was found. Within 2 years a Jewish Synagogue relocated and the building became available. According to Reverend Carde, it was the monetary gift given by Bethany that allowed his church to purchase the building. Reverend Carde is still the pastor and it has grown to be one of the largest and most stable Hispanic churches in Springfield reaching many in the Spanish community.

Even though the new sanctuary was complete, additional work needed to be done in the original building. Renovations to the chapel, offices and basement resulted in the naming of "Carpenter Chapel" in honor of Pastor Hiram T. Carpenter. Shortly thereafter the renovated Christ Ambassador room was named Wilson Chapel in memory of Calvin Wilson, a young man of the church who lost his life in Vietnam. Calvin was tragically the only service member of Bethany to lose his life in either World War 1, World War 2, the Korean War or Vietnam.

While Bethany was growing physically and financially the need for ministry

outreach was growing as well. After the resignation of Arnold McLellan in 1965, Bethany began to hire a series of ministers who would have great impact both here and in subsequent ministries.

In 1969, Reverend Joseph Biddle and wife Judy were soon hired as minister of youth. He also led song service and assisted in the radio ministry. Judy Biddle became the director of the children's choir. One of Bethany's own, Lewis G. "Bud" Martin had served in music ministry in a variety of ways from the time he was a young man in the church. An accomplished pianist, organist and choir director, Brother Martin became the Minister of Music and Bethany had it's first true pastoral staff.

Internally Bethany was growing it's ministries to meet the needs of it's ever-growing congregation. In 1968, Bethany started its very own weeklong summer camp for the Royal Rangers and Missionettes. Although the name of the camp would change to Youth Camp and divided into Junior and Senior Camps, it continued under the faithful direction of William Hildreth for 33 years.

By 1970 the missionary staff had grown to 27 foreign and 11 home missionaries with a budget of \$12,000.00 per year with actual missions giving of over \$16,000.00, almost double the amount from just 5 years earlier. By 1974 that number would be \$28,200.00.

In 1970, Bethany once again found itself in a religious revival that was taking place around the country. The “Jesus Movement” was a growing reaction to the troublesome 1960’s and a revival broke out bringing many young people to Bethany.

In 1970, Reverend John Butrin became the Youth Pastor. Pastor Biddle resigned to start a pioneer work in Fall River, Massachusetts where he still serves as Pastor. With the revival of 1970, Bethany had extended revival meetings led by Reverend George Butrin, father of John Butrin. The number of young, un-churched people flooding the church brought the creation of “Bethany School of the Bible”, in an effort to meet the needs of the new converts.

The missions program of Bethany grew in many ways. Bethany Interim Missions was created to help send youth on various missions’ assignments. A missionary fair was also started to help acquaint the congregation with the various missionary efforts represented at each mission’s convention. The choir, dressing in native attire started the “missionary parade” at the coronation of the mission’s convention.

By 1974, average Sunday morning attendance was approaching 500 and the annual income exceeded \$171,000.00. After the resignation of John Butrin, Reverend Dale Berkey, a recent graduate of Wheaton College became Youth Pastor. Reverend Earl Hart was hired as Minister of Visitation as Bethany

continued to meet the ever expanding demands of it's growing congregation.

During these years Bethany was blessed to have many great speakers and musicians minister at the church, such as: Bob and Lillian Waters, Mark Buntain, William Caldwell, Willard Cantelon, Charles Greenaway, Sam Johnson, The Couriers and the Revivaltime and Evangel choirs. When the new Yamaha grand piano was purchased for the sanctuary in 1966 a young Dino Karstanakis played a special dedication concert.

On December 31, 1972 a memorable mortgage burning service was held. God's faithfulness and the generosity of the congregation allowed for the debt to be paid off in less than 10 years. As a result of the double-tithe and aggressive payments on the principal, Bethany was now debt free. Pastor Flower attended the service and the words of his farewell sermon must have echoed in his heart and in the hearts of the congregation as he had challenged the church to press on to even greater accomplishments in the years to come. What no one probably realized was the many great tasks and accomplishments that lay ahead in the next few years.

Since Bethany was located in a residential community, parking began to be a problem as the church grew. Mabel Weaver probably did not anticipate the subsequent growth of the church nor the increased used of automobiles. When

Peace Chapel was built it literally had a hitching post for horses to be tied to at the front of the church. Now several hundred cars would appear on a Sunday morning and they needed to be parked somewhere. In 1971 and 1972 the adjacent properties at 314 Springfield Street and 306 Springfield Street were purchased. The houses in those lots were demolished and off-street parking lots were created. In 1974 the property at 35 Crestwood Street was purchased for housing for associate pastors. No one at that time probably realized that 44 Crestwood Street just a few doors away had been the first real parsonage of the church in the early years of 1905 – 1919.

By 1975 Bethany experienced real problems with space both in the church building and in parking. A land investigation committee was formed as no further adjacent properties were for sale and it was no longer practical to attempt more expansion at the present location. Double worship services on Sunday mornings with simultaneous Sunday school classes helped alleviate some congestion, but the growth continued.

After a year of investigation Bethany's membership voted to purchase two parcels of land: a 49-acre parcel of land in Agawam from Albert "Corn King" Christopher, a local farmer, for \$150,000.00 and the 2-acre property at 580 Main street that included a brick house and barn. This parcel bordering on Route 57 and Main Street was necessary for access to the 49-acre site. The purchase price for the entire 51-acre parcel was \$240,000.00

The congregation was then challenged to help liquidate the debt by trusting the Lord for monies to pay a seed faith promise in 1 year's time over and above tithes and missions faith promises. This seed faith promise concept was presented June 2, 1976. The cost per acre was broken down into half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth of an acre packages with the approximate cost of one-sixteenth acre being \$300.00. A map of the land was drawn up and placed in the church foyer. As seed faith promise monies were received, the land area was shaded in to keep the progress before the people. One acre was set aside and divided into \$5.00 and \$2.00 amounts so that the children could take part and see the results of their investments. Over \$96,000.00 was received in seed faith promises. Together with the available general funds the entire debt for the land was paid and Bethany held a mortgage burning service on Sunday evening August 28, 1977.

In 1976, a building committee was appointed and an architect hired. On June 1, 1977, the congregation was asked to consider the plans for a new church building. The original design was 2 round buildings. The 3,000-seat sanctuary was round with a pulpit in the center. Although the plans initially received a favorable vote, the size, cost and design was questioned later. In retrospect, God's guiding hand was clearly on Bethany during the several congregational meetings held to reopen discussion of the proposed building plans, rescind the previous actions and to develop new plans, with different size and design

options. Looking back it is now clear that the original worship complex design would have exceeded our borrowing capacity and would not have fit into the community.

In 1979 a new firm from Georgia was hired that specialized in church buildings. On December 27, 1978, new plans for a 47,000 square foot (later expanded to 54,000) colonial styled facility with a fan shaped auditorium with balcony seating 1250 was voted for by written ballot. The projected cost was \$2.1 million but banks gave the church a credit ceiling of \$1.3 million. It was decided that the current Springfield facilities be sold prior to groundbreaking and construction.

On May 28, 1980, the Springfield Daily News ran a picture, story and classified advertisement for our Springfield Street church as “For sale; one church. Lovely church in prime Springfield area. First time offered. Have grown too large and must offer this beautiful structure for sale. Treed lot with off-street parking, numerous classrooms, office space, banquet hall, chapel to seat 100 and sanctuary to seat 550. Also a 7 room modern parsonage.” On October 22, 1980 the congregation voted to go forward with the building project by authorizing the board to arrange the necessary loans and proceed with construction of the superstructure with the intent to have the footings poured before winter. The groundbreaking service was held on November 9, 1980 at 12:30 pm following the Sunday morning worship service. The theme was

"Together We Build." ("The God of Heaven He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build." Nehemiah 2:20.) District Superintendent Hugh Corey gave the invocation. Pastor Berkey recognized the guests and led the congregation in a litany of dedication. The building committee members each dug a spade full of earth with ceremonial gold painted shovels. While financing was being sought the membership was urged to a double tithe once a month for designation to the building program. Due to extreme cold the building process was suspended December 28, 1980 until spring.

The Bethany window was removed from Carpenter Chapel, repaired, placed in a new frame and coated with a protective lexan screen in preparation for reinstalling it in the new memorial chapel in Agawam. On November 12, 1981, to let the people view the construction process, a Nehemiah service was held following the Sunday morning worship service. The people who had given so generously to the Lord and the building project were then allowed to tour the unfinished complex and rejoice in what God was doing one year after the groundbreaking.

The financial conditions in the country in 1981 were creating difficulty in receiving a construction loan. Interest rates had risen to 18% and higher. In addition that 54,000 square foot facility was the largest church project that most banks had seen. Generally there was concern many banks about what the building could be converted into if the bank were to foreclose and take over the

property. Since the church was a custom design and single use facility. The value as collateral was lessened. But more importantly the banks did not understand who Bethany was, its beliefs, its faith and the commitment of its people. That would soon change.

As the reluctance of local banks became evident the church was forced to seek alternative forms of financing. The issuance of bonds was considered, but the cost and time involved was prohibitive and many of the bond companies had failed in the middle of a project. Insurance companies and other institutions were considered but to no avail. Finally, in what seemed to be a miracle, contact was made with an Assemblies of God layman in California who was referred to the church through a mortgage broker. This layman, who had what appeared to be good references, explained he represented a wealthy European family who was investing monies in the United States through that American son-in-law. For some reason this family saw churches as a good investment and the church was offered a \$2,000,000 loan at 10 percent. Both the size of the loan and the interest were apparent answers to prayer. Armed with the written loan commitment the church proceeded to commence full construction using it's own funds first before borrowing funds that would require interest payments. Several hundred thousand dollars were spent as the building progressed. In the spring and summer of 1981, as the church funds diminished, arrangements were made to access the construction loan funds. Delay after delay occurred, followed by excuse after excuse. All kinds of reasons were given to the delay; taxes, international tariffs, exchange notes, government waiting periods, red tape and

so on. By the end of the summer of 1981 not only had the church exhausted its funds, but it had incurred bills of over \$500,000.00. By the fall of 1981 it was painfully obvious that the committed funds were not real and the representations made to the church were fraudulent.

Just when things appeared to hit rock bottom other tragedies hit. In September of 1981, Bradford R. Martin, the church treasurer and member of the building committee suddenly passed away at the age of 56. A board member for over 25 years and a member of the building committee for the Springfield sanctuary made his passing at this time more difficult. At this same time two staff members were dismissed under trying circumstances. All together, the situation looked bleak in the fall of 1981.

The building exterior was essentially complete but no door or windows were yet installed and the interior was yet to be commercial. To avoid damage and vandalism the building was closed up for the winter as the leadership tried to determine the best course of action. One concern was dealing with the contractors that were over the \$500,000 incurred to that point. Also, the idea of the building sitting for an extended period with no activity did not make for an attractive loan candidate for the banks. It was as Pastor Berkey would later recall, the “darkest days.”

If this was a, “time that tried man’s souls”, then the church rose to the

challenge. It easily could have been a time of dissention and discord. Members could have left or created division. Instead the body rallied together. Clean up days were regularly held at the site and construction work led by Emilio and Americo DiLorenzo accomplished the plumbing and heating and HVAC insulation during the winter.

By the spring of 1982 the church once again made overtures to banks for a loan. This time several banks were invited to a joint meeting hoping that a consortium could be formed among several banks. Apparently the approach was not successful. A young board member was assigned the job to call the banks after the meeting to see if there was any interest. As he made silent prayer before each phone call, each bank declined to be involved. With one bank left, one final prayer was offered up before the call was dialed. After much discussion a senior officer of the bank agreed to allow a brand new loan officer to review the loan as he had no other pending files to work on. If the young loan officer could put together something “maybe” the bank would look at it. Within a few minutes the new loan officer called requesting information and eager to review all the plans and financial history of the church. Soon he wanted to know what tithing meant. Then he wanted to make sure about the past payment history of loans on an accelerated basis. Also were the attendance figures right? Did that many people actually go the Bethany on any Sunday? Soon, things began to take shape. Finally, the loan officer called the young board member whom he had worked with now for several weeks. The bank would do the loan on one

condition – they wanted to see if the congregation was behind the project financially. The loan officer asked, how much did the church think it could raise in pledges to be paid in 6 months? \$300,000 the young board member responded quickly without thinking to check with anyone or get approval. The bank said “OK” - if the \$300,000 in pledges were raised, the loan would be approved. Almost immediately the young board member regretted his excited utterance. What would he tell Pastor Berkey? Upon being told the situation Pastor Berkey was non-plussed. “I guess we’ll just have to do it!” was his response. Quickly arrangements were made for a special Sunday to raise the pledge. The theme was “Together We Sacrifice”. Missionary Bernhard Johnson happened to be available and preached on May 4, 1982. It was exciting to see the response of the church as almost \$270,000 was raised. The next day the bank was told that the pledge was \$30,000 short. The loan officer said it didn’t matter as the loan for the full amount was already approved. The banks just waited to see the church’s response, which was more than adequate in the eyes of the bank. The new loan closed May 25, 1982. Construction once again resumed. On November 14, 1982, the second anniversary of the building program, the cornerstone was laid during a special service following the Sunday morning worship service. The words of Luke 24:50, “He led them as far as to Bethany and lifted up His hands and blessed them.” are so appropriately inscribed on the cornerstone. We reflected on the words of Isaiah 28:16 (LB) “But the Lord says, see I am placing a foundation stone in Zion, a firm, tested, precious cornerstone that is safe to build on.” Then we were again allowed to tour the new building

and see all the work to date and anticipate its completion.

The congregation of Bethany crossed the river on April 3, 1983 Easter Sunday, with joy cut the ribbon and entered into our new church home. More than 1,000 worshipers and a 44-member choir praised God for the glorious manner in which He enabled us to build such a beautiful building for His glory. On May 29, 1983 Bethany held a formal dedication service at 3 p.m. District Superintendent, Hugh Corey, former senior pastor Frederick Eide and Dr. Gordon Fee from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary were among the special guests. Pastor Berkey expressed thanks to those who gave sacrificial gifts and to those who willingly gave of their time and talent to erect this complex. He said, "It is our prayer that the beauty of this church shall ever be eclipsed by the beauty of the presence of the Lord in the midst of His people." An estimated audience of 1,300, requiring extra chairs, attended the service followed by tours of the building and refreshments.

The loan was paid in full on Easter Sunday, 1991 – 12 years before it was scheduled to be paid. From that point on Bethany's financial worries were a thing of the past.

1985 – 1994

Within a few years of moving into the new building Bethany grew at a rapid pace.

At the time of the transition in 1983 average Sunday morning attendance was 600. By 1985 it was 821 and by 1989 it was 1,025. There were corresponding increases in the children and youth services as well. Double-digit growth in finances allowed the church to use fifth Sunday offerings as additional principal payments on the debt. By 1989 only \$389,116.00 remained to be paid on the over \$2,000,000 mortgage. Plans were put in place to pay off the balance in 2 years.

In response to the growth, Reverend Timothy Schmidt was hired for the newly formed position of Minister of Evangelism and Young Marrieds. Other transitions occurred as Pastor Greg Hubbard left to pursue full-time evangelist work and Pastor Joe Suter replaced him. After ten faithful years of service Pastor Ken Milton resigned to become a senior pastor in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

The late 1980's saw the development of other areas of ministry. In 1985 the Bethany school of the Bible introduced the International Correspondence Institute (ICI) courses with any members participating in the classes. Vacation Bible School was instituted with hundreds of church and neighborhood children attending. Junior Bible Quiz flourished during this time as well as did the summer camps.

The new facility allowed for an expanded choir, which had grown to 60 by

1986, and the orchestra had tripled in size. The Singing Christmas Tree had become a holiday institution in the Pioneer Valley with over 5,000 attending the four presentations in 1987.

Bethany was heavily involved in the Billy Graham crusade that came to Hartford, CT in 1985. That same year Pastor and Sister Berkey were honored for their 20th year as pastor. A gift in the form of a trip to China with J. Philip Hogan was presented at the celebration banquet.

The continued growth required a change to two Sunday morning services in 1987, only a mere four years moving to the new facility. The softball team divided into two separate teams due to increased interest and a new computer was purchased for the first time a few years prior needed to be doubled in its capacity. Trips to Israel and Europe were also undertaken during this time.

As the decade ended Pastor Tim Schmidt resigned to become Senior Pastor in Lynnfield, MA. Pastor Lowell McLane was hired to fill that position. Pastor Jamie Tims had replaced Pastor Joe Suter as youth pastor and after his resignation in 1989, Pastor Chris Davison was hired. Pastor Gene Leopard replaced Pastor Ron Young and Pastor Brian Tracy was hired for the newly created position of Children's Pastor.

The 70th anniversary celebration was held in 1989 with many former

pastors returning for special services.

During the 1980's, missions continued to grow. By 1985 the mission's budget had grown to \$116,767.00 with 54 foreign missionaries and 16 home missionaries on Bethany's staff. Missions trips from Bethany itself commenced with Pastor Greg Hubbard leading a group of youth to the Lillian Trasher Orphanage in Egypt with missionary Dwight Dobson. The next year Pastor Bill Owen led another group to Portugal to help construct a Bible school and conduct a Vacation Bible School. In 1987 a group went to the Canary Islands to assist missionary Anthony Giordano. By 1987 Bethany's world missions giving totaled \$229,211.00. It would increase to \$281,599.00 in 1989 with 70 foreign and 20 home missionaries on staff.

At the end of the decade of the 1980's everything appeared to be on an upward trend. Attendance, income, programs, pastors all were in full great and growing. The period of 1965 to 1990 were one of unparalleled growth for Bethany.

Then in May of 1990 Pastor Berkey was elected as District Superintendent of the Southern New England District of the Assemblies of God. After 25 years of service, the departure of Pastor Berkey was akin to that of Pastor Carpenter in 1939. Both were pastors of long tenure. Both had seen the church through difficult times – the depression of the 1920's and the building programs of 1981 – 1983. However, as with Pastor Carpenter, Pastor Berkey had remained and

developed a core of strong leaders who with the existing pastoral staff would be able to maintain things while a search commenced for a new pastor.

On July 19, 1991 a memorable evening was held with a banquet in honor of Pastor Edward B. Berkey and wife Gladys. In addition to other tokens of recognition Pastor Berkey was honored with the title of "Pastor Emeritus" in recognition of his outstanding leadership and faithful service to Bethany for 25 years.

A pulpit search committee comprised of the church board commenced and interviews took place in the summer and fall of 1991. After meeting several candidates Pastor George D. Cope from Alton, Illinois was presented to the congregation for consideration and he was elected as Pastor on October 3, 1990. On November 11, 1990 Pastor Cope was installed and commenced his duties with wife Cheryl and daughter Jessyca.

Change in church life is inevitable and additions to the Pastoral staff continued. In the spring of 1991 Pastor Miguel Colon was hired as Minister of Evangelism. In 1992, Pastor Bill Owen resigned as Minister of Music and Pastor Ken Bryars was chosen as Minister of Music and Communications.

As in the past the transition to a new pastor did not have a dramatic impact on Bethany as the church moved ahead with it's ministries and programs.

The Singing Christmas Tree presentation was revised in 1990.

The Bethany Hour radio program, now in its 40th year continued to minister to the valley on Sunday mornings. The choir was invited to sing at the Eastern States Exposition (The Big E). It was the first church choir to be asked.

Easter Sunday, March 31, 1991 proved to be a momentous day as the mortgage burning service was held. In only 8 years Bethany had retired the over \$2,000,000 debt that was scheduled to be paid in 20 years. This was a remarkable event and a testimony to God's faithfulness considering that a few short years before it was difficult for the church to obtain a loan commitment. The blessing of the Lord and the faithfulness of the congregation was once again displayed as the "darkest days" of Bethany's past had given way to a bright and shiny future.

By 1992 with no debt, Bethany was surging in its missions giving as it reached a high of \$385,007.00. A church plant was started in Enfield, CT to commence Pastor Cope's vision to plant a church in the North, South, East and West of Bethany. Missions trips to Jamaica, Mexico, El Salvador and Russia as well as a home missions trip to Newark, New Jersey continued the emphasis of engaging members in direct missions outreach.

Moments to Remember 1995 - 2005

In 1995, the members of Bethany voted to change the business meeting format to two meetings. This would help to ensure a quorum for elections as well as providing the nominating committee sufficient time to produce a slate of nominees. The first meeting is to be held on the first Wednesday of February for annual reports and information and the second to be held on the last Wednesday of April for Elections and new business.

Some spiritual highlights were “Heavens Gates and Hells Flames” in 1996 and Evangelist Jimmy Davis who came for six weeks in 1997. It was a nightly anointing of the Spirit where many were saved, healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Several well-known ministers came to Bethany including Dr. Richard Dobbins, Charles Blair and Reverend Brent Grosvenor who portrayed the life of Billy Sunday. In 2001, the Living Lord’s Supper was presented on Good Friday depicting the painting of Leonardo De Vinci. Each disciple spoke of their feelings for Jesus and who he was to them. It was a memorable event, which was done for many years.

On March 7, 2002, Bethany declared this day to be a day of fasting a prayer followed by an evening with all those who had been in leadership the preceding 10 years. This was a day of reconciliation and closure for many. On February 5, 2003 Bethany became a self-governing body and on April 30 elected officers.

1995 – 2005

Bethany's growth in all areas continued in the mid 1990's. By 1995 world missions giving approached \$240,000.00 with 71 foreign and 19 home missionaries. Adult missions trips to assist Latin American Child Care sent teams to Bolivia, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic. Youth teams went to Costa Rica and Peru.

Income rose to \$1,828,736.00 in 1995 and ministries increased. In 1995 VBS had a record 500 children attending and more adult electives were added to the Sunday school curriculum. That same year Bethany began it's Royal Family Kids Camp providing a weeklong camp experience for abused and neglected children. This program still continues today.

During this same period, transition was taking place among many of our staff pastors. First, Pastor Chris Davison resigned to become a missionary to Mexico. Then Pastor Lowell McLane resigned to join Rapha ministries and six months later Pastor Brian Tracey resigned to lead a church plant in Wilbraham, Massachusetts named as Evangel Assembly. It took several months but soon Pastor Peter Patterson was hired to be the Family Life Pastor and Pastor Andrew Statezny became the youth pastor.

During this transition, many lay people filled in admirably to assist in

running the various programs of the church. Within a year Pastor Ray White was hired, as children's pastor and Pastor James Grove became Pastor of Evangelism and Congregational Care.

If the sanctuary that was built in Springfield in 1964 was viewed as the "last church we will ever build", one can only imagine what makers thought about the new sanctuary in Agawam sitting on 57 acres of land. But sure enough, by 1995 the church was considering an expansion, particularly in the area of youth and children. The youth group on Wednesday night had out-grown the fireplace room and was meeting in the gym. This interfered with the use of the gym by the Royal Rangers. Everywhere there seemed to be a shortage of space. The nursery that seemed so large at the time was already too small and some Sunday school classes were doubling in size with nowhere to go.

By 1999 income for the church exceeded \$2,000,000.00 for the first time. It took the church about eighty years to reach one million dollars in annual revenue. It only took another ten years to go from \$1,000,000.00 to \$2,000,000.00.

In 1998 Pastor Ray White resigned and was replaced with Pastor Rich Moore. Also Andrew Statezny resigned and Pastor Tim Moen became youth pastor.

The expansion plan was studied and reviewed from 1995 to 1997 when the church voted to commence construction of the new addition. The new space would have a youth and children's auditorium, a new nursery, children's classrooms and adult classrooms. Early estimates placed the cost of the 30,000 square foot addition at over \$3,000,000.00.

Since the mortgage had been paid off in 1991 the church had been debt-free and had systematically saved funds in anticipation of future expansion. By the time the church was ready to build in 1997 over \$1,000,000.00 had been placed in the future development fund.

The first Agawam building program was a true test of faith but the second program was an example of efficiency and professionalism. A loan was easily secured for the project as the church now had a well-known reputation as a good credit risk. Lessons learned from the first program secured leadership well as the project was completed on time and under budget. A dedication service was held on Easter Sunday, 1998, and the resulting mortgage was only \$1,900,000.00 by maintaining the same payments that would have been made had the mortgage been larger. The church once again was on an accelerated loan repayment program. By the spring of 2005 the loan was due to be paid in another 2 years or sooner.

The new facility increased the total size of the building to 84,000 square

feet and allowed for expanded ministries in other area. Divorce Care and Grief Share classes commenced. The bookstore was relocated and expanded. One of the new adult classes served as a research library with hundred of books available to members. Additional classrooms allowed for expanded adult elective curriculum, membership classes and discipleship classes.

As in the past, when the church seemed to be reaching a peak the loss of a senior pastor took place. On March 28, 2000 Pastor George Cope was selected as President of Zion Bible Institute, which had recently come under the Assemblies of God. Once again a testing experience that few envisioned lay in store for the congregation.

From 1954 to 2000, a period of 46 years, Bethany had only 3 Senior Pastors. Even though there had been a steady flow of associates, particularly in the 1990 thru 2000 period, the stability that came from having steady leadership in the senior pastor could not be inc_____. Based on national averages, most churches would have had 10-12 pastors during this same period. Bethany was blessed not to have to endure the problems that often accompany changes in the senior pastor position.

With all the experience of the past, one would have expected that the selection of a new pastor would have been rather simple, especially since there was a full compliment of associate pastors available to make sure that ministries

were continued and the pulpit was filled.

Unfortunately that was not the case. At his point in time it would not be beneficial or expedient to delve into the many issues that came to the fore after the departure of Pastor Cope, but it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that it was the most difficult and trying period in the history of the church.

The discord and strife rose to such a degree that in an unprecedented action a portion of the church membership availed themselves of a little-known provision of the General Council by-laws that allowed sovereign churches to request the divest assistance of the executive presbytery.

In an action that had not occurred before or since. General Superintendent Thomas Trask came to Bethany and chaired a special business meeting. As a result of that meeting as evidenced by a vote of the congregation, the church board was dismissed and Bethany voluntary came under the control and authority of the Southern New England District. This was done with the good that after the appointment of an interim pastor and a period of healing the church could once again regain it's sovereignty, elect a new senior pastor and proceed to do the work of the Lord.

It is to the credit of the congregation and certain of it's leaders that they accepted, and even welcomed the rather humbling even of sacrificing it's

sovereignty in order to save itself. In many ways it was akin to humility that each person much endure in giving up their own will to accept the direction of the General Council and work for the next few years to restore Bethany to it's prior position.

Within a few months, the District had chosen Dr. Howard S. Ryan to serve as the interim pastor. Dr. Ryan commenced his duties in October 2000, in what most thought would be a short period of stabilization. However, the issues and difficulties ran deep and Dr. Ryan soon realized that the restoration process would take more time than originally thought.

Pastor Ryan went about his task with equal pares of diligence, experience and good humor. His soon ingratiated himself to the congregation and in spite of some turmoil along the way; he was able to help bring restoration to Bethany. However, even Pastor Ryan would be the first to admit that without the Lord dealing with individual hearts and giving the spirit of forgiveness, no amount of hard work or experience could have brought about the necessary change.

During the period of Pastor Ryan's interim ministry Pastor Rich Moore and Pastor Jim Grove both resigned. While hiring pastors during a period of transition can be a challenge Pastor Alden Tinsley was hired as Children's pastor and Pastor Tim Reed was hired to fill the position left by Pastor Jim Grove. Toward the end of his tenure, Pastor Gene Leopard left, but by then things were

beginning to turn around. Within a few short months the church was ready to become sovereign again and commence it's search for a new senior pastor. On February 5, 2003 the church voted to return to sovereignty.

On April 20, 2003 new board members were elected and their first order of business was to establish a pulpit committee – which by agreement was the entire board – and commence a search for a new senior pastor.

Under normal circumstance finding candidates that would be interested in Bethany would be an easy task. However, after having been a District-supervised church for 3 ½ years, it surely gave some candidates pause as they considered Bethany.

But as it was in Bethany's past, God had the right man for the right time, and he could not have come from a further distance. After several months of interviews, phone calls, resume reviews and trips, the pulpit committee selected one of our own; Richard Adams had been a missionary for 17 years to the Chinese through China Radio in Taipei, Taiwan. Born and raised in nearby Belchertown, Massachusetts, Pastor Adams took a circuitous route to Bethany's pulpit.

After serving in the Vietnam War and being saved in Korea, he returned to Western Massachusetts briefly, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Bethany

and soon went off to Southeastern Bible College. After pastoring in New York, he began his missionary work among the Chinese. As God's providence would have it, Pastor Adams was home on furlough when the pulpit committee was doing it's search. His subsequent election as senior pastor in March of 2004 was a confirmation in his own life and yet another sign that God has always had His hand on Bethany.