

A COVENANT FOR THE PEOPLE

1892-1992

100 Years of the First United Presbyterian Church

Cambridge, MA

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In January 1892, a group of Presbyterians, perhaps some of the recent immigrants from Canada's Maritime Provinces, met in Citizens Trade Association Hall, 604 Main St., Cambridge. Dr. R.A. McAyeal of Lawrence moderated this small group whose mission was to found a church in Cambridge. Fifty-one persons became members, with 5 elders, 7 deacons and 5 women on the advisory board. Dr. A.A. MacLennan of the Boston Presbyterian Church at Berkeley and Chandler Streets offered Gaelic preaching and the fellowship of other Cape Breton immigrants, but Cambridge residents from the Maritimes probably sought a neighborhood church. About 400 of these people lived in Cambridge and over half made their livings as domestic servants.

By 1892 the city of Cambridge had a population of nearly 100,000 and was rapidly becoming an industrial center in addition to expanding its university base. Many new immigrants were attracted by the increasing numbers of factories that clustered in the Lechmere and lower Cambridgeport areas.

The Boston Presbyterians had been the first to succeed in this stronghold of Congregationalism. The Puritan "Parish Principle" restricted the growth of other denominations for over two centuries. The Parish Church, by law Congregational, controlled the political, educational, social, legal and religious aspects of Boston life. Presbyterians had been expelled in 1643 and 1719 and Huguenots in 1753. In the years from 1730 to the mid 1840's, a fledgling Boston Church maintained itself as part of the Londonderry Presbytery.

A corporation of 40 charter members purchased property at 1418 Cambridge Street, and Cambridge building permit #3571 was granted June 29, 1892. On July 2, 1892 the "Cambridge Tribune" reported that construction of a chapel had begun. The architect was Metcalf and Hoyt and the builder Robert H. Oliver. Inman Square was largely residential at that time so that the Church in design and location began as a good neighbor in the area.

The "Cambridge Chronicle" for September 24, 1892 reported that the Presbyterians' "pretty new chapel" was Gothic in style with a shingled and stained exterior and a white wood and frescoed interior. It was designed for expansion on the Cambridge Street side. The pastor's study and Sunday School room flanked the main sanctuary with its off-center aisle and 300 ecclesiastical chairs whose seats were covered in red leather.

On October 16, 1892 the chapel was dedicated in a series of morning, afternoon and evening services. Just a week later Rev. John A. Paisley was installed as pastor. By 1893 the church had 84 members and was located in a solidly residential area. The 13 room Victorian house of Miss Madden at 1426 Cambridge Street was built in the same year as the Church and is still its neighbor today, although now a photographer's studio occupies the ground floor.

The commercially active Central, Inman and Kendall Squares were surrounded by the attractive homes of storeowners, clerks, Secretaries, bank tellers, municipal employees and professionals. The "Cambridge Chronicle" and city offices were nearby. It was the largest, most thriving and most varied section of the city, very different from either more industrial East Cambridge or more scholarly Harvard Square or Old Cambridge.

Temperance and Cambridge's "No-License" movement, a ban on all bars and saloons, were major political and social issues at the time of First United Presbyterian Church's founding. From 1886 to 1933 Cambridge was officially a dry town. While difficult to enforce, this policy did seem to bring about some ecclesiastical harmony. Rev. David Beach and Father Thomas Scully of First UP's neighbor, St. Mary's Catholic Church on Norfolk St., noted how Catholics and Protestants had overcome "those hateful lines of local jealousy and antagonism.

During its first decade of life, Cambridge Presbyterian Church grew under Rev. Paisley's guidance in the Lord. The city around the church continued to prosper economically and socially and experienced the increased intellectual and practical effects of being Harvard University's neighbor. What was once a rural town across the Charles River from the "Athens of America" became by 1900 a diverse and interdependent urban center.

A theological difference forced a split in First UP Church in Spring 1893. By June 5 of that year, the majority vote to install an organ in the sanctuary caused the opposing faction to leave and form the Reformed Presbyterian Church. This congregation still occupies its original Antrim Street church and worships without a musical instrument and sings only the Psalms.

After the seven-month stay of Rev. William A. Barr, Dr. James A. Alexander began his six-year pastorate in June of 1900. In 1901 it was perhaps a budget shortfall or an extremely cold winter that forced the Standing Committee (not known as Trustees until 1927) to request a special collection for coal. Fuel envelopes became a regular feature through the 1950's. An outbreak of disease (possibly malaria) caused the Cambridge Board of Health to ask for the closing of all churches on June 22, 1902. In 1903, under Dr. Alexander, the first Thanksgiving service was held - an annual event still important to today's congregation.

By June 1906, Dr. Elihu C. Simpson came from Ohio to serve as First UP's pastor for eight years. While in New England he served in many influential posts, including the chaplaincy of the New England Evangelical Association. At First UP Dr. Simpson helped resolve a choir dispute over the propriety of singing anthems. The Session used General Assembly guidelines for music to negotiate a settlement allowing other than hymns as part of worship.

Budget difficulties and low giving were familiar concerns for Cambridge Presbyterian in its first two decades, in spite of a healthy membership in 1913 of over 200, with 250 registered in the Sunday School. As a fund-raiser that year the Standing Committee presented "A Nicht wi' Burns", a lantern show, to the Scottish community in greater Boston. Five dollars from the proceeds went to the Law Enforcement Association at Prospect Street Congregational Church, a group battling the illegal sale of liquor at drugstore speakeasies.

During the dark war years a dynamic and personable leader, Rev. Everett A. McGary was pastor. The times were unsettling and this was reflected in the Church's life. Membership reached a high of 400 and the financial picture brightened, but perhaps personal magnetism rather than deep spiritual commitment played a part. Rev. McGary proposed new pews, a new roof, electric lighting, a new furnace and finally moving to a new building. Of all these changes only the pews replaced the original red leather seated chairs in 1916. These pews, still apparently in use today, were bought for \$200 from a neighboring church which was being destroyed.

Rev. McGary's grand designs for First UP included joining the Presbyterian Church USA and leaving the United Presbyterian Church of North America. He felt that PCUSA was the more forward looking body, and all the elders but one and 183 of the 208 members at the June 16, 1918 meeting agreed. Because the vote was not unanimous, however, church property legally remained with the UPC.

Taking with him the majority of members, church records, \$750 and church memorabilia, such as the war honor roll, Rev. McGary tried to establish a new church. This seemed to have failed and former First UP members, including Rev. McGary, were absorbed into other congregations. He eventually left the pastorate for a business career and was listed as Sunday School Superintendent at the Old Cambridge Baptist Church, 1151 Massachusetts Avenue, in a history of that church. After an initial financial investigation by the Boston Presbytery into the matter, the Standing Committee voted to close the subject in December 1918.

Sunday by Sunday pulpit supply provided the congregation with a preacher for the next two years. This period was difficult and income fell to \$154.01 for the last quarter of 1919. Individuals often shine in hard times, however, and Robert McLean urged the congregation to contact all former First UP families of returning World War I soldiers to offer a welcome and a church home. The war had been a galvanizing social force in Cambridge, with the city sending more than 8000 men from every level of society to war.

The Inman Square area, which was already quite residential by the turn of the century, was even more stabilized by Cambridge's first zoning law in 1924. In the same year Congress enacted the often prejudicially applied quota system for immigrants. Many of the Irish, Scots and Canadians to join the Church in the early 1920's remained members well into the 1970's.

After the schism under Rev. McGary, the Church rebounded somewhat as these new members worked out their faith and witnessed in Cambridge. In order to attract a new pastor during the postwar housing shortage, the congregation discussed acquiring a parsonage. The next pastor, Rev. Cameron Reed, also pressed for housing, went so far as retaining an architect to design a house next to the Church. Nothing permanent seemed to have come of either of these efforts.

Rev. Paul Reynolds, listed as student supply, filled the pulpit until the installation of Rev. Cameron Reed in 1921. The pastor was being paid \$550 a year in 1920, \$900 in 1922 and \$2000 by 1925. Collections varied considerably, however, and the Church often fell under budget. Rev. Reed undertook a building program. Special pledge barrels from the Worcester Salt Company were given to Church families for contributions and architect Henry Ramsay was hired to design a new building.

A new Moller pipe organ, separate gas heat to the tower room and side room, and a church enlarged to its present size were the actual outcome of all these plans. The work cost \$25,000 and left the Church with a debt of \$20,000. During the worst economic times ahead, the pastor could not always be paid and Cambridge Presbyterian Church was supported by the denomination as a "mission" church.

Another attempt at acquiring a parsonage came when Rev. Reed's successor, Rev. John A. Gregg tried to secure the house at 18 Ellsworth Avenue in 1927. There was much congregational discussion, but no action. The Standing Committee, now the Board of Trustees, negotiated a \$3,000 a year salary with Rev. Gregg. During his pastorate (1928) the privet hedge and chain link fence were installed.

During these postwar years another individual repeatedly showed his deep commitment to the work of the Church in Inman Square. Robert Rogers and his wife celebrated their 50th anniversary in the church in 1927. He had served as moderator for the corporation since the Church's days without a pastor in 1918. Hector McLean, longtime financial secretary and elder was another faithful member whose death in 1920 grieved the entire congregation.

As First UP edged toward the half century mark, some issues that arise regularly into the present day, were surfacing. Physical care of the Church property was uneven at times. Relations with neighbors needed regular attention. Differences in how to conduct the musical part of worship arose. Use of budgeted missions funds for other expenses occurred. There was outside fund raising to supplement offerings. The congregation discussed the need for outreach.

If regular prayer was a part of all these concerns and discussions, it was not always reported. The spiritual tenor of the church is hard to discern during some of these hard times, yet, as already noted, God's faithfulness is apparent in the lives of certain lay people in the Church.

The decade of the 1930's presented challenges everywhere. On the national front the Great Depression had the country by the throat. In Cambridge, population decreased for the first time since the city's founding. Property values dropped; tax rates rose; the city debt increased. Industry relocated and politics was blamed for it all. In 1940, after years of political infighting, Cambridge citizens finally voted to change the charter from an elected ward-based City Council and Mayor (Plan B) to an elected at-large Council and Council appointed Manager (Plan E). In April 1940 First UP hosted a speaker who promoted Plan E. All church members were invited to this particular "Men's Brotherhood" monthly meeting.

Spiritually too the First UP Church was being challenged. There had been few mentions of God's work in the preceding committee minutes. In the early 1920's Rev. Reed and the Standing Committee had stressed welcoming strangers to further "the work of the Kingdom in this place", but a real assessment of the Church's place in the neighborhood or even amongst other Boston Presbyterians is years away.

God proved his faithfulness once again to the congregation in Inman Square. His instrument was Dr. Andrew A. Graham who pastored the congregation through the Depression and World War II. Four new elders, ordained in 1934, met regularly for a season of thanksgiving. During Dr. Graham's pastorate many familiar names appeared in committee reports. Mr. and Mrs. Crouse served many terms on Trustees and Women's Missionary Society, for example.

The addition of elders meant that for the first time in several years no elders from other churches were needed to serve communion. There was also talk in 1935 of buying the larger Harvard St. Unitarian Church, an indication, perhaps, of increasing membership.

In 1936 an oil burner replaced the old coal one and made the sidewalk easement to Fayette St. unnecessary. Ashcans from the coal furnace were rolled along this right of way on garbage collection day. By 1939 this path had to be locked because it served neighborhood boys as a hideout.

The organist received a raise to \$3.00 per Sunday in December 1936 and 4 p.m. Sunday musical vespers were proposed by Director of Music Burton Cleaves. The clerk thought

combining the vespers with the regular evening service might attract more people. In 1940 another musical improvement came when Mrs. MacTavish donated a piano.

Several fund-raisers occurred to finance such projects in the Church as interior painting, a new downstairs floor and general redecoration. The Church mortgage under Janet Elliott's direction was burned on June 23, 1939, signaling better financial health. By the 1930's women were taking more leadership roles in many church-wide offices and projects. This would continue to the present with Betty Graham and Laura Stewart serving as clerk for many years in the 1940's-1960's and women elders ordained in the 1970's.

During Dr. Graham's pastorate, the social life of the church and a concern for neighborhood outreach appeared to take on an importance that has carried on into the present day. Church members of all ages enjoyed activities with each other. Alvin McKinnon started Boy Scout Troop 43 which Gray Trembly has helped lead since 1944. Movies and church socials were popular all through the 1940's.

Various First U.P. pastors have been active in the Central Square Ministers Association. Dr. Graham proposed joint youth activities among the churches and supported the December 1938 cooperatively sponsored evangelistic meetings. During Lent, Wednesday noontime services have been a longstanding tradition of this same clergy group.

World War II meant rationing, blackouts and shortages. In the fall of 1942 elders held meetings in their homes to save on church utilities. The Trustees discussed air raids and made blackout shades for downstairs windows. In December 1942 a blackout occurred during a meeting at Dr. Graham's home and Mrs. Graham served tea and cake in the dark. In 1943 each member was asked to buy a Bible and leave it at Church at a time when the budget could not support the purchase. New pew Bibles were again bought in the late 1970's as a memorial to John Stobo. The Stobo Family name also appears in "Great Songs of the Church," a hymnal used in the 1950's. "The Hymnbook," official hymnal of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, has been in use for the last 40 years, with new copies purchased by the Worship Committee in the mid '80's. "Hymns," the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship hymnal and various chorus and praise song volumes have been a part of First UP worship services throughout the 1970's and '80's.

Since nearly 15,000 Cambridge citizens went to war and 401 died, World War II had a great personal impact on local families. First UP felt the impact and did its part. It set up a "Buddies Box" at the back of the Church to collect money gifts for the troops. The "Crusader," a Church newsletter for soldiers, began publication in the McKinnons' living room in 1944, but Mrs. McKinnon encouraged the publishers to find another home after she found ink on her drapes. This newsletter was last published in February 1965, but has been followed in recent years by the "Grapevine" and the "Good Newsletter."

Roof work in 1944 and 1945 was necessary along with floor repair downstairs. After the long-standing debt of the 1920's and 30's, the congregation was reluctant to start more repairs without money up front. In 1946 various church groups volunteered to work on different areas in disrepair. Trustees still contribute much of the labor that goes into church upkeep and physical improvements. God has faithfully provided First UP Church with skilled and willing hands.

The well-loved Dr. Graham retired in June 1945 but continued to preach until October.

Church lay leaders fostered by his pastorate served this Church and others into the 1970's. The Azadian family were such leaders encouraged and trained by Dr. Graham. He died on Easter 1950 and the scholarship in his honor was established in the same year. An annual Christian education offering was dedicated to the fund so that many future seminarians could receive financial aid.

Rev. Marvin Derby served First UP from 1945 to 1948 and was the first minister to have a Church phone and car allowance. Rev. Derby encouraged young people's programs and leadership throughout his ministry.

In spite of a post-war economic boom in Cambridge, First UP again was unable to pay its pastor a full salary. The Church requested a \$500 per year grant from the Board of Home Missions between 1947 and 1950. This covered the year-long student pastorate of Roy Butler who spent much of his later ministry among the Navajos in New Mexico.

Known throughout the Boston Presbytery as a constant witness for Christ, Rev. Elmer Murdoch led the congregation from November 1949 to December 1957. His pastorate resulted in much spiritual and physical well-being in the Church. He reached out to the needy in the neighborhood, encouraged lay leadership among such faithful members as the Hoffmans and married the Tremblays, the Gene Blacquiers, and the Hamiltons, among others. Rev. Murdoch also directed the Church's most extensive renovation between 1949 and 1951.

This remodeling included providing a center aisle, building the front platform, carpeting the sanctuary, and installing chimes and a PA system. Memorial gifts included new hymn books, children's Sunday School chairs, a new oak baptismal font and communion table, a brass cross and vases and a new pulpit Bible. Most of the improvements reported upon in the 1951 "United Presbyterian," the denominational magazine, are still very much in use.

All these renovation were finished in time for the church's 60th anniversary celebrated in 1952. The congregation's anniversary notes stated that, in spite of pessimism about First UP's future in Inman Square, the 123 members and friends of the church "look on the future without qualms, trusting that with God's help we shall continue to grow and serve Him in this community."

Rev. Alvin McKinnon and his wife, the former Dorothy Azadian, are examples of God's servants prepared in the Cambridge Church. Rev. McKinnon was ordained on June 21, 1956 and they served in the Palisade Presbyterian Church, Union City, NJ. First UP has had a continuous history of sending individuals out into Christian service and still sees an important ministry there.

The city of Cambridge was changing in the late 1940's and '50's. By 1950 the population reached almost 121,000; it subsequently declined. The war initiated an influx of scientific research and development at Harvard and MIT and brought people to the city. By the late 1950's renting unimproved apartments in Cambridge's two family houses gave way to suburban living. By the 1960's singles, particularly women, and childless couples increased in the Inman Square area. Fewer children were evident. The universities developed larger campuses and spawned many new electronics, engineering and research and development firms.

Robert Lantz, a senior at Gordon Divinity School, followed Rev. Murdoch in February 1958.

The Boston Presbytery appointed him student supply and he was ordained as pastor on June 28. Some of the men among the 138 members painted the sanctuary light green in 1960. Rev. Lantz and seminarian Ron Minor were also members of this painting crew. In July 1961, Mr. Minor succeeded Rev. Lantz and was himself ordained as First UP pastor on June 3, 1962.

Rev. Minor recalled his shared ministry with Rev. Lantz as a time of "forth-right preaching of the Word and encouragement of leadership from the congregation." It was a time, he noted, of fewer members whose belief in God's faithfulness enabled them to look ahead to a future time of strong witness.

Between 1967 and 1977 there were dramatic changes in First UP. Rev. Minor chronicled these in his May 25, 1977 statement the "Mission of the Cambridge Church." The charismatic movement that touched many Christian bodies in the country became an important force in the Cambridge congregation and drew many area graduate students to First UP. Political and spiritual response to the Vietnam War was at its height nationwide. On many Sundays in this period Church pews could not seat everyone and extra chairs were set up in the side room.

The mission statement declared that the "increased sense of mission has not been reflected in congregational growth". There were 100 active members in 1967 and 136 in 1977. Instead "God has been using (the) congregation to prepare leaders and (send) them forth..." In those ten years seven members left to become pastors, two became part-time pastors and thirteen became involved in other full time Christian service. In 1977 there were ten in the congregation preparing for the ministry-either as pastors or missionaries. This preparation and sending out of seminarians and others has continued to be an active role for First UP.

Living together in close and committed community became another hallmark of Rev. Minor's pastorate. Small groups involved all congregation members. Little Folks Fellowship nursery school, now in its 20th year, began in this period. A food coop was active in the late 1970's; a communal supper was shared each Wednesday evening; prayer vigils and fasting for famine relief were part of the weekly commitment. Dave Chase became associate pastor. The vine and grape sanctuary decoration was the most important of many banners produced in the 1970's. A restored thirteen-rank tracker organ replaced the electro pneumatic instrument in 1980. Emma Jane Trembly has played both instruments in her many faithful years as Church organist.

Between 1979 and 1981 about one third of First UP's membership, including its two pastors, had become resident members of the Community of Jesus in Orleans, MA. There followed a two-year search for a new minister during which Dr. Gwyn Walters of Gordon Conwell Seminary and Rev. Frank Miller filled the pulpit on a regular basis.

God's faithfulness was evident in the provision of Rev. Barton L. Kelso as pastor. Ordained in November 1982 and installed in January 1983, Rev. Kelso's ministry has been highlighted by committed preaching of the Word, witness to international students, encouragement of women in the ministry, strong emphasis on Christian impetus for social, economic and political change and a focus on missions. The summer and winter retreats at the Barnet Center, VT Presbyterian Church have continued into their fourth decade under Rev. Kelso. A Luso-American Pentecostal congregation and a Brazilian Presbyterian fellowship have been sharing the Church building for several years. Portuguese has become the other neighborhood language of the Inman Square area. Students and young professionals constitute the rest of the population mix. Many of the

longer-term First UP members now commute from outlying suburbs.

Various recent improvements to the Church building and grounds have included new roofing, outdoor play equipment installed as a memorial to Ruth Sullivan, and a major handicapped access renovation. Rev. Kelso has led the Centennial Committee in its planning of history nights, an anniversary worship service and a gala banquet.

First UP Church enters its second century mindful of its purpose to proclaim the gospel of Christ in Inman Square. Often Scripture recounts the Lord's faithfulness and His mighty acts on behalf of His people. A history such as this is a testimony to God's demonstrated care and an encouragement to future witness.

Through His prophet Isaiah, the Lord says, "I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people (49:8). I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me (49:16)." So it is with His Church in this age. First United Presbyterian Church in Cambridge is part of this holy promise and witness.

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