

CHURCH HISTORY

In October, 1963, the Board of American Missions of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) extended a call to Pastor Lawrence Hunt of Baltimore, Maryland to begin a parish mission in Durham, North Carolina. The Church of the Abiding Savior, Lutheran had its humble beginnings when Pastor Hunt arrived in Durham on January 6, 1964, with the charge to begin a new congregation.

The first organizational meeting was held at the home of Paul and Jessie (Claudette) Kelly. Among those attending were the Kelly's, Pastor Hunt, Dr. Theodore Speigner, and Mrs. Edwina Williams. This group formed the new church committee and, along with parish worker Lucy Bissell, began to canvas the southeastern section of Durham for prospective church members.

During January and February, 1964, eleven people gathered to form the congregation. The first service was conducted March 1, 1964 at the Southeastern Business College, which was located on South Alston Avenue. The church met at this location for one year. On July 5, 1964, ground was broken for the new church at the current site ~ 1625 South Alston Avenue. The church was chartered February 7, 1965 with 19 confirmed members and 22 baptized members.

On December 20, 1964, the first worship service was held in the new building, and the church was officially dedicated March 14, 1965. Pastor Hunt served the congregation until 1968.

After Pastor Donald Huber served an interim appointment, Pastor Virgil O. Wittenberg became the second pastor in June, 1969. Under his leadership the church grew in membership through outreach to the community and to the nation with initiatives such as the Black Adoption Program, Churches in Action, Inc., a strong and vibrant vacation bible-school program, an inspired youth group, and the appointment of many members to local and national church committees and boards. Three members of the congregation were the original founders of the Coalition of Black Members (CBM) of the American Lutheran Church. CBM's purpose was to identify black Lutheran churches and address their unique concerns and needs. Founding members were William Small and Gloria and Roland Cardwell. Dr. Theodore Speigner served as co-pastor with Pastor Wittenberg for a brief period in 1974. The congregation was assisted financially in these early years by a subsidy from the National Board of the American Missions.

On October 28, 1975, Pastor Michael D. Wendt was installed as the third pastor of the congregation. The membership continued to grow, as did the activities of individual members. During this period, the church was represented nationally by members serving on the Board of Pensions, Capital University Board of Regents, Board of Theological Education and Ministry, Coalition of Black Members Board, and the World Council of Churches. The church was represented locally on the United Christian Ministry Board at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) and the Lutheran Campus Ministry at Duke University as a part of the outreach ministry.

Pastor Wendt helped to develop social service programs in Soul City - an intentional community in Warren County, NC founded by the late civil rights activist Floyd McKissick, Sr. During this time, Pastor Wendt also served as the Durham Interfaith Committee chair. Marilyn Bell and Gloria

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Cardwell served on this committee. Geneva Fitts served on the board of Healthco, a regional rural health delivery program. Mrs. Fitts also served on the Commission of Seventy during the organization and formation of the ELCA from the three former Lutheran bodies.

During this time, two sons of the church, Albert Starr, Jr. and Willard McKiver, became pastors in the ALC. Valora Starr, a daughter of the church, became director for Growth and Witness for the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (WELCA) where she has remained throughout her career, currently serving as director for discipleship and coordinator of the ELCA Global Education Network.

In the 1980's, Ulysses Bell became the longest serving member of the Board of Pensions (now Portico Benefit Services), serving as a Trustee for nearly a decade in the American Lutheran Church and, later, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The youth group traveled throughout the country and received national acclaim for dynamic performances of "Are You Listening", a theatrical presentation of African-American folklore, song, dance and poetry, directed by Charlotte "Shoonie" Hartwig. Several young people who participated in these performances were launched into professional careers.

In January, 1981, Abiding Savior increased its financial commitment to its ministry resulting in the congregation becoming self supporting. Pastor Wendt served until October, 1987. Pastor Hugh Beck served as interim pastor until a call was issued.

On January 1, 1989, Pastor Paul Palumbo was ordained and installed as the fourth pastor. He arrived at a time of transition in which the three major national Lutheran church bodies had just merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Members of Abiding Savior had served on the transition team for the new church structure and were elected to serve on boards and committees in the ELCA.

During the 1990's, the church continued to grow in membership as well as spiritually and fiscally. Ecumenical alliances were formed with local churches. Members of the congregation continued to serve locally, synodically and nationally. The men of the congregation organized a chapter of Lutheran Men in Mission, and the women became active in the Women of the Evangelical Church in America (WELCA). Commitment to the community also remained strong. Members of the congregation participated in Durham Congregations in Action and actively supported Churches for Action (CFA) with a majority of the Board of Directors represented by Abiding Savior parishioners. In 1992, CFA purchased and renovated a house at 602 Holloway Street for the purpose of establishing Phoenix House, a transitional home and emergency housing for homeless men. From the beginning, the church supported Phoenix House financially as well as through volunteer member participation. Phoenix House thrived and became a model nonprofit organization in the Durham community, serving hundreds of men for over twenty years, until its closing in 2014.

Pastor Paul Palumbo served the church until August, 1998 when he accepted a call at Lake Chelan Lutheran Church in Chelan, Washington. Pastor Jack Bernlohr was selected to be interim pastor. He led the congregation through December of 1999.

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Pastor Gordon Myers arrived in January, 2000 filled with energy and enthusiasm. He was installed as the fifth pastor on February 6, 2000 and served the church until November 2014. In October 2001, the congregation expressed its commitment to nurturing and developing leadership for the Church by formally entering an internship program to support young seminarians, especially those who had an interest in serving multicultural congregations. Our first intern, Vicar CeCee Mills, began her learning and ministry which encompassed every aspect of parish life and included special outreach to the students at NCCU. In 2002, Abiding Savior received the ELCA approval for designation as a "Horizon Internship Site". Horizon congregations are selected because they offer a unique or desirable context in which persons preparing for ordained ministry can grow and develop their pastoral skills and experience. Vicar Michael Sewell, the first Horizon intern, arrived in September, 2002.

The congregation continued its outreach to NCCU, hiring Rev. Justin Coleman as Director of the Campus Ministry Program for the 2003-2004 academic years. Vicar Linda Norman, the second Horizon intern, arrived in August 2004, bringing a depth of insight and energy to that role. Vicar Lisa Parker arrived in August 2005 and was instrumental in expanding our presence and ministry on NCCU's Campus. Vicar Ben Krey arrived in 2006, continuing to actively engage NCCU students in community service, and opening new avenues for Campus Ministry.

Abiding Savior's youth group remained dynamic and active over the years with a number of our young people serving in national leadership roles in Luther League (ALC) and in the Lutheran Youth Organization (ELCA). In 2004, in response to incidents of racism that our youth experienced as they participated in events around the country, the young people committed to making a video to help others within the church better understand their experiences and provide tools to address racism. Over a span of three years, Pastor Myers interviewed and videotaped members of the youth group as they shared insights and wisdom about their experiences. The result was "What's Color Got to Do With It?", a video and discussion guide resource. The project was shared with every congregation within the North Carolina Synod, featured at two Synod Assemblies, and mailed to approximately 100 other synods, congregations, school districts, seminaries, and other organizations across the nation. The group's efforts were honored in 2007 with the Youth Achievement Award from the City of Durham's Human Relations Commission in recognition of promoting understanding among young people. In addition, several members of the youth group accepted an invitation to conduct a presentation and workshop for the staff at the ELCA headquarters in Chicago and to present the video to the ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and the national Church Council. In summer 2009, our young people conducted four workshops at the ELCA's Multicultural Youth Leadership Event in New Orleans held in conjunction with the triennial National Youth Gathering. Theirs was the only workshop conducted entirely by young people and received a very positive response.

In 2015, current members of the youth group will participate in the ELCA Multicultural Youth Leadership Event and National Youth Gathering in Detroit, carrying on a tradition of active participation and engagement.

As the result of a long range planning process, Abiding Savior identified the need to be more consistent in its campus ministry and more intentional in outreach to the community. As a result,

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the congregation entered into a partnership with the North Carolina Synod and the ELCA to create the position of Outreach Minister to Campus and Community. The partnership also provided for the establishment of "The Evangelism Laboratory", a research and development effort to create new tools and approaches to engaging the un-churched with the Gospel. From 2009-2015, Minister Rhonda Hatton served as outreach minister, helping the church to engage the community creatively and spiritually through efforts with the McDougal Terrace public housing community, NCCU campus ministry, and Living Words monthly spoken word and open mic event, to name a few.

Members of Abiding Savior have served in voluntary capacities, on Church Council, Synod Council, national committees and boards and a host of other leadership roles throughout the Church.

The congregation's Women of the ELCA group has been very active for nearly 50 years, organizing service projects that have included assembling care packages, making quilts, crocheting and knitted "preemie" caps, blankets and baby items, conducting annual Thank offering services, and serving as delegates at synodical and national WELCA gatherings. Flossie Cunningham, Faye Hester, Susan Hester, Mary Holeman, Rosa Small, Eunice Starr, Valora Starr and Janet Wittenberg were among the earliest participants in the group. Eunice Starr, Janette Street and Eleanor Johnson have served faithfully as presidents of Abiding Savior's WELCA. Janette Street, Gail Starr and Marilyn Bell-Hawley have all represented the church as conference presiders and/or WELCA board members in the NC Synod.

Throughout the years, members of the congregation have willingly and faithfully served in leadership roles for the synod. William "Bill" McDonald served multiple terms on the NC Synod Council and regularly served synodical committees. David Johnson served on the NC Synod Outreach Committee. Lee Johnson, Jr. served on the Board of Adjudication, Board of the Mission Investment Fund, and on the Board of Capital University. Each of them served several years.

The North Carolina Synod's African Descent Strategy Team, through the leadership and vision of Diana Haywood, Bill McDonald, Pastor Gordon Myers, Gail Starr, Linda Warren and others around the NC Synod, has been recognized as a cutting-edge model for the wider Lutheran church, with members of the team providing leadership in developing ministry strategies.

Prior to the merger of Lutheran Churches to form the ELCA, William 'Bill' Small and David Johnson served in leadership roles of the Coalition of Black Lutherans in the American Lutheran Church. This organization preceded the NC Synod's African Decent Strategy Team with fostering the concept of a more inclusive church for people of all races and national origins.

In 2008, Diana Haywood was elected as the Vice President of the North Carolina Synod, the first African-American to hold that position

Ulysses Bell served three terms as a Trustee at Lenoir Rhyne College. Gregory Hudgins has served several terms as a Trustee for the NC Synod Foundation Board.

Miji Bell, another daughter of the church, currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees for the ELCA's Mission Investment Fund, a \$650M portfolio that provides lending and investment

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services to congregations, synods and related ministries. She also leads public relations and communications efforts for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service in Baltimore, Md.

When North Carolina experienced changes in political leadership in 2012, members of Abiding Savior were part of concerned groups of citizens across the state that garnered national attention, rallying in protest to challenge new laws that sought to disenfranchise local communities. As part of that effort, Pastor Myers and members of Abiding Savior organized the “Forward Together: God’s Work, Our Hands, Faith in Action” inter-faith conference in 2014, bringing together over a hundred members of Lutheran congregations and other faith communities, local political and civic activists, synodical and national church leaders to explore the intersections between public policy issues, social justice and the Christian calling to support the vulnerable and marginalized.

Abiding Savior’s efforts to support the local community in recent years have also included collecting and distributing over 500 pounds of food to support the Interfaith Food Shuttle’s Backpack Buddies program; collecting and distributing diapers to families in McDougal Terrace public housing community; preparing and serving dinners at the Urban Ministry Homeless Shelter; tutoring schoolchildren; and hosting first-time home buyers seminars.

As we celebrate 50 years of ministry, Abiding Savior remains committed to exploring opportunities for continued ministry, hopeful in its resolve to strengthen its purpose and mission, with a desire to continue growing in faith and making God’s love known!

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The Church Of The Abiding Savior, Lutheran was chartered February 7, 1965 with 19 confirmed members and 22 baptized members.

The current church building was dedicated on March 14, 1965

Charter Members:

Mrs. Helen Battle	Mr. Robert Battle	Mr. Roger Brown, Sr.	Mrs. Virginia Brown
Mrs. Betty Burnette	Mr. Harvey Burnette	Mrs. Gloria Cardwell	Mr. Roland Cardwell
Mrs. Carolyn Hunt	Rev. Lawrence Hunt	Mrs. Claudette Kelly	Mr. Paul Kelly
Mrs. Mary Pinson	Mr. Thomas Pinson	Mrs. Lois Turner	Mr. Walter Turner
Dr. Theodore Speigner	Mr. James Warren, Sr.	Mrs. Edwina Williams	

Pastors 1965 – 2010

Rev. Lawrence Hunt	Rev. Virgil O. Wittenburg
Dr. Theodore Speigner (Co-Pastor)	Rev. Donald Huber (Interim)
Rev Michael D. Wendt	Rev. Hugh Beck (Interim)
Rev. Paul K. Palumbo	Rev. Jack Bernlohr (Interim)
Rev. Gordon Myers	

The Church of the Abiding Savior, Lutheran
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