

# The History of CALVIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*Reflecting on the Past, and Looking Ahead in God's Mercy*



## *Beginnings*

In 1953 a group of families living in this eastern section of the county felt the need to establish a new church. Reverend C. Ransom Comfort and the members of Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church agreed to allow their missionary effort to begin. Rutledge Lilly and George Bickel found a piece of property available next to the proposed Watterson Expressway. The land was part of a large tract owned by the Rite family. Several early land grants joined one another in this area – Rite, Herr, and Crogan. Carl Crawford financed the loan to purchase the ten acres of land for \$30,000, and later gave the property to the church in his will. The group was called “The East Chapel of Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church.” They first met in the Perryman home behind Walden School, then at Stivers School (now Walden) and moved again to Greathouse School (now St. Matthews City Hall). In 1956 the Fellowship Hall (the current atrium section) was built and dedicated. The East Chapel congregation was chartered as *Calvin Presbyterian Church* of the Transylvania Presbytery on June 9, 1957. There were 120 members. Reverend Charles Allen from the Presbyterian Mission acted as our first moderator. Dr. Arie Bestebreurtje was our first called pastor, coming in the fall of 1957. Membership mushroomed as did growth in this part of the county. The completion of the sanctuary in 1959 was subsequently followed by four building expansions over forty years, and a major remodel of the sanctuary and narthex in 2012.

Still moving as a mission church, a group set out to plant another church further east on Westport Road. In 1960, the John Knox congregation began meeting at Zachary Taylor School until a sanctuary and education wing were completed in 1965. John Knox Presbyterian Church was chartered March 1966 by the Transylvania Presbytery. One hundred and forty-one Calvin members were the charter members of John Knox Church. Calvin Church financed the purchase of the land and the construction of the building and later forgave the debt.

Dr. B resigned in 1966. Dr. McCrory acted as Interim until Calvin called Rev. F. Morgan Roberts from Mt. Vernon, New York in 1967. Reverend Roberts served as pastor for five and a half years until his departure in 1972. Dr. Stimson served as Interim until we issued a call to Rev. David Searfoss in 1973. Rev. Sim Fulcher was called as Associate Pastor in 1975.

Through this period membership grew from 120 in 1956 to 1,505 by 1971 – fourteen years of unprecedented growth. Two Calvin women, Irene Lewis and Louise Welch, were elected elders – the first women elders appointed at Calvin and in the state of Kentucky.

Into the 1980s greater expansion occurred. The sanctuary was enlarged. In 1982, an expanded kitchen, a gym, and new offices were built under the direction of Chuck Milspaugh and Lucy Nasser who put in many hours over design and decoration. An outdoor beautification program was initiated as well. Andy Clark pushed this and an outdoor sprinkler system was installed to save grass, bushes, and trees. Jane Gentry spent many hours weeding the ivy by the front door. Howard Kamin began a garden which supplied fresh vegetables for the mission kitchens downtown.

Changes within the national Presbyterian church took place at this time as well. The northern and southern segment of the Presbyterian Church united to form the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. In 1983, Calvin and all Presbyterian churches in Louisville were put in the Louisville Presbytery, later renamed Mid-Kentucky Presbytery. With reorganization a new headquarters was needed and Louisville was chosen as the site for the whole church.

While there has been much change in ministerial and program staffing over the years, Calvin has had only three church secretaries. Ruth Adams was the secretary from the very beginning until 1996 – 40 years. Jayne Smith was added to the office staff in 1974. In 1996 Jayne became sole Secretary and Office Manager. Jayne retired in 2005, and Donna Jentes assumed the role of Church Administrator the following year.

### *The Ministry of Music*

In the beginning the choir sang to an Allen organ played first by Ronald Cockrell and led by John Whatley. Willa Faye Williams led the choir in 1965. It was under her leadership that the Casavant pipe organ was installed in 1970, in memory of Elizabeth Hawley. This marvelous instrument has been a frequent tool for special recitals, concerts and organ crawls. Maurice Hinson served as both Organist and Choirmaster. Anne Blake directed the young boys in a hand bell choir. The handbells were a gift from Dr. Bestebreurtje. Frieda McGee and others led a children's choir. From our beginning, music has always been very important in the life of Calvin Church.

Hank Buckwalter and Ronda Rogers assumed Dr. Hinson's post as choir director and organist, respectively. In 1989 Dr. John Cummins was hired as full-time Minister of Music, following again our tradition of combining the Organist and Choirmaster role.

As an extension of the church's great love for great music, the Calvin Academy of Music was founded in 2004. Its chartered goal was to offer musical instruction and nurture for children, youth, homeschoolers, and adults of varying skill levels, all within a Christ-centered environment. Over the years hundreds of students of piano, organ, violin, guitar and woodwinds have honed their skills at the Academy, presenting two public recitals each year and occasionally sharing their talents in Sunday worship. The Academy has been blessed by talented, dedicated instructors and program Coordinators: June Bailey was the founding Director, followed by Rhonda Hibdon in 2008. Marcia Hemingway began her tenure as Coordinator in 2010. Nearly every day, year-round, music students and their teachers could be heard from various locations around the building. The legacy of the Calvin Academy of Music will continue as the program becomes the core offering for a new Academy for the Fine Arts at Broadway Baptist Church in 2022.

Dr. Paul Detterman served as our Director of Music and Organist from 1998 until 2000, when he became Lead Pastor. Dr. Don Hustad came on board as Director of Music and Organist. Debbie Detterman directed our handbell choir. With Dr. Hustad's departure in 2003, Dr. Wesley Roberts became Organist. Sida Roberts soon joined the staff as Choir Director. During this era, our ministry of music and choir have been led by a number of gifted musicians: Neil Willsey, Susan Haddon, Laura Meyer and currently Laura Foley.

### *Education and Spiritual Nurture*

Beginning in the mid-70s through the early 80s the youth program became a center of focus for the whole church. Associate Pastor Rev. Fulcher gave special attention to the youth with the new youth pastor Cal Maleno. Rich Fifield then took over the program for the better part of the 1980s. The Youth were active in sporting leagues among the neighboring churches. Bill Starr coached the girls. Fred Fitschen coached the boys. Retreats and mission projects were popular. Becky and Scott Lycan and Lorne and Ramona Belden helped out as volunteers. The youth group flourished when in 1989 when Rev. David Welch accepted the call as Youth Pastor. Attendance grew at an astonishing rate as did the youth's participation and contributions to the congregation and the community as a whole. The youth went on mission trips and attended countless conferences and retreats with the invaluable devotion of numerous members of the church. These were people who enjoyed the boisterous nature of young people and evangelizing to the next generation. In 1994 the construction of Calvin's youth wing off the gym provided a new place for our growing youth group to congregate.

Children's ministry has also been a valued ministry at Calvin. Calvin ran a daily kindergarten program during the church's early years. A Mother's Day Out program was later launched, headed for many years

by member Barbara Lehr. Calvin offered Vacation Bible School for many years, drawing many children and families from the neighborhood; Wednesday night activities and Bible study; several children's vocal and handbell choirs (complete with their own robes!); a Bible memory program started by Grace and Fred Kleinschmidt. Children's worship was an important component of their Christian education. Elementary-aged children were invited to their own service with age-appropriate learning and activities. As this ministry evolved, children remained in worship with materials on their reading level. A children's sermon delighted both children and adult listeners! In the advent of mutual ministry between the three congregations, Calvin headed up children's Sunday education which included children and teachers from all three congregations. Over the years, Calvin has been fortunate to have many dedicated people to plan and work with our children – Rev. Sarah Hamilton, Mary Charnes, Rev. Melissa Sevier, Rev. Junior McGarrahan and Donna Jentes.

Vacation Family School, later called Summerfest, was a regular exciting event each summer, involving children, youth and adults in learning and fellowship. Rev. Fulcher spearheaded the program, which continued at Calvin several years after his departure.

Calvin adult education has been renowned for its spiritual depth, caliber of its leadership, and dedicated attendance. Classes were led by pastors and staff, professors from both the Presbyterian and Baptist seminaries, visiting missionaries, and guest presenters sharing their expertise on spiritual and social topics of the time.

### ***Mission and Outreach***

Giving was such that by the 1990s, Calvin was able to commit almost one-third of the church's budget to support programs within the PC(USA), the community of Louisville, and mission overseas. Calvin helped build a Habitat for Humanity house. Calvin once served as one of local collection centers for Operation Christmas Child. Members have generously given of their resources by sponsoring food drives for St. Matthews Area Ministries, warm winter clothing drives for Wayside Christian Mission, shoes for WaterStep, and pull tabs for Ronald McDonald House. In the early years Calvin was home to a kindergarten program; in the 1980s a Mothers Day Out program was launched as great outreach to moms and their preschool children. Great efforts were made as Rev. Fulcher encouraged the membership to share their faith, to tell their story, to reach out as Jesus commanded us in the Great Commission. "Dialogue on Sharing Your Faith" prepared members to winsomely articulate basic Christian beliefs. Participants visited those who visited Calvin. During worship, members occasionally shared their testimonies with the congregation. In the 2000s Calvin launched the *Alpha* program as an outreach to those seeking answers to basic faith questions, and as a tool to further equip our members to share the Gospel.

Calvin has been blessed by the presence of many doctors and nurses who have tended to the needs of members as friendly consultants and helpers in times of crisis. In 2001, the HHUGGS ministry (*Helping and Healing Under God's Grace*) was created by Ramona Belden and Judy Petry. This parish nursing ministry performed home and hospital visitation, provided support to grieving families, and offered health support as appropriate.

From our earliest days the women of Calvin not only served the church but extended care and concern to our community and world mission. The Calvin Women hosted numerous circles that met for Bible study and fellowship, took up collections for local and international mission, and engaged in hands-on ministry, such as the clowning ministry to children and senior adults, and volunteering at the Presbyterian Community Center. The circles later merged into one large group, actively participating with the larger mission and outreach of Presbyterian Women and Church Women United. The women formed a weekly prayer group that met in person, and sometimes by phone! This tight group of faithful women kept the mission of the church, and the needs of the community and world, uplifted before the Lord.

The Calvin Men were equally involved in weekly Bible study, beautification of the facility and grounds, and hands-on mission. The men planned, built and maintained the walking path around the property, and put in many hours volunteering for Supplies Over Seas. Rev. Searfoss established a Saturday morning Men's Bible Study. That same group met faithfully for nearly forty years, led by subsequent pastors and lay leaders.

### *Sharing the Blessings of Our Facility*

As an extension of Calvin's ministry of mission and outreach, the church campus has served as home to many community programs. Boy and Girl Scout troops met in our building. Louisville Diversified Services, later Zoom Group, used classroom space for many years to provide day activities for adults with disabilities. Several Alcoholics Anonymous groups met regularly in our classrooms. A community choir utilized our choir room space for rehearsals. The Taiwanese Church started a Chinese School for their younger generation. Windy Hills City Council met monthly at Calvin, and held community events on the lawn. A homeschooling co-op met weekly in our education wing. The Board of Elections utilized Calvin as a neighborhood polling place. The Youth annex and gym was a favorite overnight stop for other youth groups traveling to and from camp. The vast outdoor field and indoor gym were used by sports leagues and schools for youth soccer, field hockey, basketball and softball; several exercise groups also used the gym and loft. The original playground was dramatically updated and refreshed in 2008 with new equipment funded by the City of Windy Hills for neighborhood use, but maintained by the church.

Whether it was volunteers who sanitized toys, washed linens, repaired leaky faucets, or tended the flower beds — or professional staff who buffed floors, washed windows, mowed lawns, and cleaned up after church dinners — Calvin has been blessed by folks who have maintained the facility with dedication and care. Over the years scores of volunteers have kept ministries going by tending to both visible and unseen facility needs. Staff such as Harry Cannon, Rick Howland, Dave Gillenwater, Steve Hellerich, and Alvin Pendleton have faithfully maintained the building and grounds as a tool for ministry.

In 1989 a Presbyterian group of 88 Taiwanese immigrants sought a facility where they could worship in their native language and enjoy the cultural connections. Calvin welcomed this fellowship to our campus, setting aside Makemie Hall off the gym for their worship and fellowship meals. They grew to be a vital and integral part of our church family, joining us in mission and seasonal joint worship services. Twenty years later, they were constituted as the Louisville Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, ordaining their long-time lay leader Winston Wen as pastor. That same year, members of both Calvin and LTPC spent ten days doing mission in Taiwan. Rev. Wen has since retired, and several other pastors have served the congregation. Rev. George Lai currently leads the congregation.

Once again, Calvin welcomed another congregation in partnership, the Korean Presbyterian Church of Louisville. Although an established congregation, they were looking for a worshiping home in Louisville's east end. They became part of our mutual ministry in 2004. Rev. Moongil Cho served as their pastor, and later Rev. Martin Han. Yohan and Janice Kim became an important part of our first service worship team and children's ministry. Prior to the sale of our building, the Korean Church relocated to Harvey Browne Presbyterian Church.

The presence of the three diverse congregations under one roof prompted a re-envisioning of our identity as *The Church Gathered at Calvin: Three Congregations Serving One Lord*. While many activities remained separate, the children of all three churches learned and played together. Each church worshiped in their own language and style at different times and locations around our campus. But we came together on many occasions for mission, worship and celebration, each time thanking the Lord for this small glimpse of the kingdom of God on earth.

## *Did You Know...*

Through the years, a number of common fixtures around the building and grounds were gifts to the church:

- The chandeliers in the Narthex came from Holland and were a gift from Dr. B.
- The baptismal font and pedestal were given by the Welch family in memory of Louise Welch, mother of Jim Welch
- The green chancel chairs which now sit in the Narthex were purchased from funds given in memory of Joyce Phelps.
- Children's wing artwork was given in memory of Joyce Phelps. After the sale of the building that artwork was gifted to Joyce's daughter, Mary Phelps Norfleet.
- The beautiful oak table at the back of the sanctuary was handcrafted by Ed Black and Mike Johnson in memory of Irene Black and Ginny Johnson for use in the children's ministry.
- The sanctuary candlesticks are in memory of Ginny Johnson
- Lennie and Dick Anderson gave the sanctuary grand piano in memory of their daughter, Deborah
- Mary Norris Helm, and Irene Lewis, mother of Virginia Sherman and Joy Riggs, sewed one of the communion cloths which we use regularly.
- Jane and Ed Ritchey made the small front chapel room and dedicated it to their son, Larry.
- A number of trees in the yard were given in memory of various members:
  - the holly trees from Dr. and Mrs. Bruce Vance
  - the dogwoods around the parking lot in memory of Muriel Searfoss's mother
  - the plum trees in the circle in memory of Bill Hawks
  - The pines along the expressway were a gift by George Bickel
  - The gingko tree at the Sojourn entrance, and the wrought iron bench and tree on the walking path were given in memory of John Petry
  - The weeping cherry in the circle drive, in memory of Bob Dather
- The framed list of charter members in the Office was in memory of Anne Tyler Brooks Stallings
- Marion Sanford gave the seascape painting in the Church Office in memory of her husband, Bill
- The Bushmeyers gave a beautiful creche to the church in memory of their daughter who died at a very young age.
- The Presbyterian Hymnals were given in memory of Mary Norris Helm, and the *Renew!* hymnals were given in memory of Mary Grant Peter.
- The watercolor painting of the building was originally a gift to Dr. B by the session. His daughter, Mary Ann "Mikey" Bestebreurtje re-gifted the artwork back to Calvin in 2012.
- The portable pulpits were constructed by Fred Banks using material from the original built-in pulpits that were removed with the sanctuary remodel of 2012.

*We realize this is likely an incomplete list – our apologies for any gifts we may have overlooked or whose provenance were unknown!*

## *Crisis, Opportunity and Change*

The 1990s was a decade of huge transition for the church. We launched a second, contemporary worship service that met before the Sunday School hour, in hopes of meeting the needs of a diverse, restless membership, and as a tool for outreach. We struggled with an aging congregation, the loss of

membership, fewer incoming families, and the reduction of our budget. Conflict, dissatisfaction and division ensued. An outside arbiter from the Alban Institute was engaged to help promote reconciliation and healing and guide us to envision our future. As a result, Rev. Searfoss retired in 1997 and Rev. Welch left to accept another call. Dr. Cummins moved on as well. Calvin called Rev. Dr. Victor Priebe as Interim Pastor later that year. He was instrumental in bringing healing to a divided congregation. Rev. Fulcher remained with Calvin until 2000.

After a long pastor search, Calvin called Rev. Dr. Paul Detterman as the new head pastor of Calvin. Paul actually had been serving as our Director of Music and Organist, with many years of experience pastoring other congregations. Donna Jentes joined the staff as Director of Christian Education. Marcia Hemingway joined the staff as Church Treasurer in 2002, following a long history of diligent, skillful people who stewarded our financial resources, including Reynold Lindell, Jerry Schweitzer, Jim Martin, and others. In 2004 we called Rev. Sarah Marsh as Associate Pastor. In 2007 we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary Jubilee in grand style with visits from former members and staff.

Calvin was a hub of activity at this time as our endeavors sought to fulfill our calling as Christ's church. We faced another monumental transition when Dr. Detterman left to pursue another call in January 2007. In July we called Rev. Dr. Bob Johnson as Intentional Interim Pastor for his gifts for preparing the congregation for a permanent pastor and a new season of ministry. After an extended pastor search, Calvin called Rev. Paul Wissink as Calvin's fifth senior pastor in 2010. Pastor Paul launched a series of outreach events to draw Calvin out of our comfort zone and to draw the community in. Pastor Marsh departed in late 2010.

Calvin had been struggling with membership loss and financial uncertainty for a number of years. These challenges were always in the forefront of any long-term planning. Maintaining the building and grounds with a shrinking budget was the most critical concern. Both the session and staff wisely pursued various options and opportunities to ensure the church's future. Pastor Paul guided the session and congregation through the discernment process of letting go of the building while embracing new opportunities for ministry. Negotiations for the sale of the Calvin property began with Sojourn Community Church in 2014. Sojourn proved to be the providential partner: purchasing the building ensured the continuation of Calvin's life and ministry, in the same location! All three congregations would inhabit the building, sparing us the trauma of restarting in a new place. The following year, after much deliberation, the congregation and Presbytery approved the sale, becoming official on October 8, 2015. Sojourn began some extensive remodeling of the building before taking up residence in January 2016: the gym and youth room was repurposed for their worship space; Whitman and Tennant Halls razed to create an open gathering area; the children's Sunday School wing remodeled and refreshed; and later the kitchen would be completely transformed into office and meeting space. Calvin Church also enjoyed a new look: a Church Office was constructed at the circle drive entrance; the Ritchey Chapel was repurposed as Pastor Paul's office; and the circle drive doors became Calvin's exclusive entrance. By 2017, the original church kitchen off the Narthex was fully remodeled for Calvin's use. Rooms 101-102 (the first Calvin office!), 206 and 207 were reserved for use by Calvin and the Taiwanese.

Nancy Wissink became Director of Senior Ministries in 2016, focusing on member visitation, and establishing the worship technology and sensory mitt ministries. With the addition of video recording hardware and software we are able to make all worship services, recitals and concerts available online after closed captioning was added. The sensory mitt ministry gives members a hands-on opportunity for mission, creativity and fellowship by creating mitts to help calm the restless hands of those with Alzheimer's or dementia. Mitts are distributed to individuals and facilities locally and across the country.

Calvin Church celebrated our 60th anniversary in 2017. That same year we began a partnership with the Joyous Singers, a community chorus of adults over 55. They used our sanctuary for rehearsals and gave several public concerts from 2017-2020.

In March of 2020, the church faced an altogether different kind of crisis and challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered businesses and churches, severely limiting our physical contact with our families and one another. Thankfully, Calvin Church was uniquely poised to offer virtual worship for our folks at home. Communication continued electronically and by mail and phone. We were able to restart in-person meetings by November. Our returning congregants were few; many were still leery of close personal contact, while others could not leave their home communities because of restrictions. We powered through this pandemic by maintaining worship, keeping in touch with our people, extending opportunities for ministry, and praying mightily. Even though sensory mitt did not meet together, diligent participants gathered supplies weekly to work at home. Folks still dropped off food for St. MAM, and Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. The church family responded faithfully to the call to stewardship – despite the shut-down, our people kept up with their offerings, fulfilling their commitment and ensuring that we would meet our budget.

During the pandemic a Long-Range Planning Committee assembled to assess Calvin's future as a viable, vibrant community. The *desire* to continue was present, but declining finances, membership, energy and physical abilities were realities that could not be ignored. Our greatest desire was to finish our ministry strong and faithfully distribute the resources that remained. A proposal was made to the congregation in December 2021 for closure, followed by two informational meetings to address the congregation's questions and concerns. At the congregational meeting of January 30, 2022, the people of Calvin formally voted to conclude our corporate ministry by June 12, 2022, and requested that Mid-Kentucky Presbytery concur with that decision. The date was specifically chosen to coincide with our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 9. Our final six months were consumed with decisions regarding our remaining financial and physical assets, and care for staff and members. Many furnishings will continue to give God glory at other churches and local ministries. Calvin Chapel at Cedar Ridge Camp, funded by Calvin Church with other Presbytery congregations, will continue our legacy and house many of our sanctuary furnishings. Endowments have been established to continue the generosity toward our numerous mission partners and ministries near to our heart.

For over twenty years, Calvin Presbyterian Church has adhered to the following statement of our mission and purpose as the Body of Christ:

*The Church Gathered at Calvin exists to worship and glorify God and to  
Seek the lost with compassion,  
Share the Gospel with conviction, and  
Send disciples into the world to Serve with humility and joyful urgency.*

The means of living out this mission has taken various forms over the decades, reflecting the personality of the congregation and the leadership styles of our pastors and staff. Cultural and societal changes have also had their impact. Success, failure, loss, grief, joy and perseverance have all shaped our character as a congregation and as individual followers of Jesus Christ. The way we have done ministry has changed dramatically over the past 65 years – but our love for our Lord, the sureness of our calling, and the indwelling power of the Spirit has remained the same. *Thanks be to God!*

*Primary source material by Nancy Helm Thomas (1997)  
Revised by Brent Owen in 2007, and Donna Jentes in 2022*

