HISTORY OF THE
FIRST PARISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
SACO, MAINE
1762 – 2018
Table of Contents

Clicking on the below descriptions, page numbers, Ministers or dates will jump to the noted items

**Church History**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Page #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Polity and Ecclesiastical Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetinghouses and Church Building</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Beginning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our First Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Second Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Third Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fire of 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Fourth Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ministers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Dates of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Fairfield</td>
<td>Oct 1762-Apr 1798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elihu Whitcomb</td>
<td>Jul 1799-Oct 1810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Cogswell</td>
<td>Oct. 1810-Oct 1828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Johnson</td>
<td>Nov 1828-Feb 1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Hopkins</td>
<td>Feb 1836-Nov 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward S. Dwight</td>
<td>Dec 1844-Aug 1852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis B. Wheeler</td>
<td>Dec 1854-Mar 1859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles B. Rice</td>
<td>Dec 1859-Nov 1861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. Windsor</td>
<td>Sep 1864-May 1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson M. Frink</td>
<td>Jun 1870-Jun 1873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George P. Blanchard</td>
<td>Jun 1874-Dec 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John T. Blades</td>
<td>Jan 1877-Apr 1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles T. Stowe</td>
<td>May 1879-Dec 1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmond C. Ingalls</td>
<td>Nov 1884-Oct 1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John B. Carruthers</td>
<td>Mar 1889-Feb 1893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Philip H. Moore ............................................................ Jun 1893-Oct 1899
Leroy S. Bean .......................................................... May 1900-July 1903
Carl M. Gates ......................................................... Mar 1904-Dec 1908
Chester B. Emerson ............................................... Sept 1909-Dec 1913
William F. English ................................................. May 1914-Sep 1916
George W. Judson .................................................. Oct 1917-Dec 1922
Lawrence B. Walker ............................................... Apr 1923-Oct 1929
Clement F. Hahn .................................................... Apr 1930-Dec 1935
Malcolm W. Garland .............................................. Apr 1936-Mar 1943
Stanley A. Gould .................................................... Jun 1943-Sep 1950
Andrew C. K. Richards .......................................... Feb 1951-Sep 1955
Birger T. Johnson .................................................. Dec 1955-Sep 1960
Harry A. Aufiero .................................................... Feb 1961-Feb 1963
  Richard H. Huleatt ............................................ Jul 1981-Feb 1992
Daniel B. Randall ................................................ Feb 1993-Jul 1994
  * William Heinrich .......................................... 1994-Dec 1994
Peter W. Mercer .................................................. Jan 1995-Sep 2002
  * David Pearson ................................................ Sep 2002-Mar 2004

  * Deborah Breault .......................................... Sept 2016

  * Interim

**CHURCH POLITY AND ECCLESIASTICAL BACKGROUND**

For more than 200 years, our religious and civic governments were one. Church and town were interdependent and town meetings were held in the church as soon as one came into being. The minister and his judgments were followed as though he were a town officer setting the standard for civil decisions.

The first house of worship for the settlers along the mouth of the Saco River was built on Church Point at Winter Harbor (Biddeford Pool), according to records as early as 1629, continuing at first the use of the Episcopalian service, familiar to the majority of English settlers. The difficulty of securing Church of England ministers, as well as freedom of conscience and influence of Puritan Boston played a part in the changing form of worship.

In 1634, application was made to the General Court of Massachusetts for a minister to preach to the East-West Saco congregation so they sent Rev. Tomas Jenner, the first “Puritan Missionary.”
In 1675, there was a population of only 5,000-6,000 in the whole state of Maine, settled along the coast and riverbanks which facilitated traveling by water for trade purposes and provided mutual protection from Indian marauders and wild animals, especially wolves which were very numerous in the thick forests at that time. Relations with the native Indian population were relatively peaceful in the Saco settlement until two unfortunate incidents occurred. The Squando Incident: A British sailor caused the drowning of the Sagamore's only son when he threw him into the river to “see if Indian babies could instinctively swim.” The Weymouth Incident: One of the British Captains kidnapped five Indians by a trick and took them to England on his ship. These along with other mistreatments turned the heretofore friendly tribes into vicious revengeful neighbors. There soon followed a series of Indian wars, horribly destructive of life and property and mutual trust.

From 1718 to 1757, East and West Saco continued to worship together at the first Biddeford Congregational Parish church, built on lower Pool Road in 1730. (It’s 1843 reconstruction still stands.) The First Congregational Parish church building on the Saco side of the river was finished in 1757 near the present site of the old burying ground in what is now Pepperell Park. This ecclesiastical division of East and West was the first step toward separation and led directly to the second step, which was division of the municipal government effected three months later with the Saco side of the river re-named Pepperellborough.

Though most agree that Congregationalism began when the Pilgrims landed in America, we date our denomination's history from the time our own church was “gathered” on October 13, 1762, though we had already been attending this as a town church.

MEETINGHOUSES AND CHURCH BUILDINGS

In The Beginning...

From the time of the earliest settlements at the mouth of the Saco River, what are now Biddeford and Saco comprised one community, known by a number of names. Formal organization of a church was accomplished in April 1730 and residents of the east side of the river made the journey across the river by ferry to fulfill their obligation to attend Sunday worship at the meetinghouse constructed on lower Pool Road. As you can imagine, this could be a difficult and treacherous journey especially in the winter months.

At a town-church meeting in March 1752, it was voted to build a meetinghouse in Saco “East” for which thirty inhabitants there had petitioned. Four acres of land had already been set aside “for a meetinghouse for the
public worship of God and their settling of an orthodox minister in the Congregational way and manner, as by law of this province established, and for a burying place and for the setting up a school house for no other purpose whatsoever.” After many delays, a meetinghouse was constructed in the vicinity of the old burying ground in what is now Pepperell Park and occupied in 1757 as its house of worship. At first religious services were held only occasionally. Rev. Mr. Moses Morrill, minister at the established church across the river was permitted by vote to preach on this side of the river one-third of the time for a year. It is likely that this practice continued for a longer period.

Mr. John Fairfield a young licentiate and recent Harvard graduate was invited to preach his first sermon on August 23, 1761. A year later, he became ordained and received a unanimous Call to the Pastoral Care of First Church in the town of Pepperellborough that had been set apart as a distinct township by the Massachusetts Legislature earlier that year. On October 13, 1762, Rev. John Fairfield and a group of ten members wrote and signed a Church Covenant and called for a day of Fasting and Prayer to mark “the solemn and important occasion.” These hand-written documents are in a vault at Saco & Biddeford Savings Institution and it is a thrill to read them. Thus, with a voluntary mutual agreement between minister and brethren, the roots of our beloved First Parish Congregational Church of Saco were established. We celebrate Founders Day each year on October 13.

**Our First Building . . .**

Our first building at the end of School Street was small, very plain, no spire with a room behind the pulpit where gunpowder was stored. A militia drummed the people to church. There was no heat in the building and churchgoers brought small burners, which they placed in their pews during the service to keep warm. Our first minister, Rev. John Fairfield, stood on a larger burner arranging his robe so heat was channeled upward to keep him warm. The building was used as a meetinghouse for the City of Saco (then called Pepperellborough) and supported financially by the City. This building was torn down in 1810 and sold for firewood.
Our Second Building . . .

In 1805 the first church on the Beach and Main Street site was completed. Designed by noted architect Bradbury Johnson "the edifice was regarded as the largest and most elegant in Maine for a considerable period." (George Folsom, historian, 1830) Tom Hardiman, former curator of Saco Museum, wrote of this building:

"Details like the arched and double-arched doors, the Palladian windows in the tower, and the very tall, slender, almost gothic pilasters introduced elements of English neo-classical design that had been previously unknown to Saco. The dominant feature of the exterior was the enormous tower and spire. Rising out of a deeply projecting pavilion, the tower climbed in three simple, box-like stages to a lantern and spire, an incredible 126 feet in height. The jewel of the steeple was the octagonal lantern, supported by slender colonnettes and surrounded by glass. From here one could see the ocean, Portland, and even the White Mountains. Navigators used the steeple as a beacon.

The interior was revolutionary and breathtaking. Upon passing through the enormous double-arched main door, one was confronted with a large circular staircase, probably the first in the region, that led to the galleries and the bell tower. The main hall was filled with 78 paneled box pews of pine painted light putty green with mahogany cap rails. Two side aisles led to the highly unusual liturgical end of the building. The pulpit was not against the back wall . . . but was free-standing in the body of the church. It was rectangular with convex French corners, and was elevated on slender fluted columns. Behind it a double staircase descended to the floor, and . . . the front row of pews arched in a semi-circle around three sides of the pulpit. Above, the gallery arched in a similar semi-circle around the pulpit." There was an octagonal sounding board suspended by an iron rod over the pulpit.
The bell in the steeple was cast by Paul Revere in Boston. Lithographs of a drawing by Charles Granger of this building are displayed at the Saco Museum and in the 2004 church building. The cost of the building and furnishings -- $18,000. It burned to the ground on July 8, 1860. There are several theories about the cause of the fire which originated in the steeple: A late-fired Roman candle from Independence Day celebration might have ignited clock cleaning rags that were left behind or could it have been deliberately set? The steeple clock stopped at 5:00 a.m. Because it was a slow-burning fire, bibles and other items were rescued from the sanctuary before the steeple fell into the building.

When this fire destroyed the church building, the Parish House (built only a year earlier) was saved because the minister at the time (Charles Rice) suggested the carpets in the sanctuary be dampened and placed over its roof to prevent the fire from spreading.

Worship services were held in Saco City Hall for three years while a new church was being constructed.

Our Third Building . . .

Exterior photo of 1863 Building

Interior photo of 1863 Building
(After the 1912 Renovation)

In 1863, a new church building on the same foundation was dedicated. This building was designed by Boston architect John Stevens, who designed a number of churches in the New England area. The Romanesque and Italianate style building became one of the most architecturally significant landmarks in downtown Saco. The
cost this time -- $14,800.

The first of eight beautiful stained glass windows was installed in 1899.
It is interesting to note which attributes from the earlier church were carried over to the new building. A 126 foot spire (same height) again held both a four-faced clock (E. Howard, gift from the City) and the recast Revere Bell (partially from the molten metal available after the fire). Again, double-arched doors led to the narthex at the front of the building. Instead of one spiral staircase in the narthex leading to the balconies and tower, there were two. Repeated were the double aisles in the sanctuary but the pulpit area was moved from its projected position into the nave and placed against the back wall. The striking double pulpits and chancel were not added until 1912.

In 1893 we became the first church nationally to serve communion in individual cups. This distinction is noted in an article entitled "The Progress of the Individual Cup Movement, Especially Among Churches" by Howard Anders, M.D. published in 1897. This trend led to discontinued use of common drinking cups in churches, at town pumps and public places, as well as in some homes.

In 1911 Colonel Richard Cutts Shannon made the gift of a beautiful Estey organ in memory of his brother, Charles, who was organist and choir director for 50 years. At the time, it was the largest pipe organ north of Boston.

Fairfield Hall was built in 1955 joining the sanctuary and the Parish House. The Parish House was remodeled at that time.

Inside renovation and outside painting were completed in 1990 and in the year 2000 extensive renovation was planned and begun.
Once again fire destroyed the church building on August 31, 2000. A major restoration project was underway to replace its slate roof and repaint the building. The steeple clock presented to us by the City of Saco in 1864 had been removed and staging had been erected. The project was about two/thirds completed when a lighted cigarette ignited the chemical solvent that had been sprayed on the building to facilitate removal of the many layers of lead paint. Several workmen escaped from the scaffolding with their lives. Despite the heroic efforts of fire departments from five communities, the building and its contents were declared a total loss. The entire community mourned with our church family.

While the building was still in flame, a bystander opened an account at Saco and Biddeford Savings Institution to rebuild the church and gifts poured in from near and far. Thornton Academy offered use of its Garland Auditorium for worship and Atkinson Dining Commons for church school classes on Sunday mornings at a minimum rental cost. Other churches and organizations offered help in such areas as printing bulletins and providing meeting space. A trailer was moved to the church site for use as an office.

History was made on Wednesday, October 18, 2000 in Saco City Hall Auditorium when the Church Body voted overwhelmingly to rebuild on the site at the corner of Beach and Main Street, Saco. Senior minister Rev. Peter Mercer and the church staff worked with the Church Council and standing committees to sustain the church’s ongoing ministry while new ad hoc committees and subcommittees were created to deal with the complexities of rebuilding.

It took four long years. The Church Council and the building committees were committed to decision-making
by the congregational process throughout all phases of design, financing, construction and furnishing. Countless meetings gave members opportunity to express opinions and ask questions as information was provided and votes were taken each step of the way. It wasn’t always easy and not everyone agreed on every aspect of the design, but with great faith and determination the church family continued to move forward with the building process. The Building Design Committee worked with two architectural teams that joined forces for the project: Barba Architecture & Preservation of Portland and Donham & Sweeney of Boston. The Finance Committee worked with Pierce Atwood of Portland to achieve settlement of our insurance claim. The Building Construction Committee worked with Allied Cook Construction to build the new church. Church member Robert Fralley, who has a background in construction chaired the Building Committees and served as Project Manager. Church member John Brockington, a fifth generation descendent from our first minister, Rev. John Fairfield was construction manager employed by Allied Cook.
Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on April 13 and construction began on May 5, 2003. As soon as the structure was enclosed and could be safely maneuvered, monthly tours of the church were conducted by members of the Building Construction Committee following Sunday worship at T.A. Three significant design changes had been decided by the Church Body. The first major change is placement of the steeple over the Beach Street entrance to the church. A second change reversed the interior of the sanctuary with the chancel now on Main Street where once narthex and front doors of the church had stood. (Four lanes of traffic on Main Street, U.S. Rte 1, no longer made front doors on Main St. accessible.) Thirdly, the organ and choir loft are moved to a position on the first floor instead of the balcony as had been in the previous church.

Entrances from Beach Street and the parking lot lead into an atrium gathering space which can be divided into smaller or larger spaces as needed. The sanctuary seats 460 on the ground floor and balcony. The church kitchen is set up with the modern appliances and pantry storage. Offices and meeting rooms are on the upper level and the entire lower level of the building is devoted to education with classrooms, teacher workshop, nursery, youth and choir rooms.

Three treasured pieces of the former church were salvaged from the fire and are ensconced in the new building. Pieces of the Paul Revere Bell, cracked when the steeple fell to the ground, were recast into a new bell for the tower by Meeks, Watson & Co. Georgetown, Ohio. The marble baptismal font which broke into four segments and had many of its decorative lilies chipped off was restored by conservator Ron Harvey in Lincolnville, ME using dental tools for some of the intricate work. The four-sided steeple clock restored by David Graf, Kittery Point, ME is lighted at night and chimes the hour from the new steeple. A new round stained glass window designed and constructed by Lyn Hovey of Boston adorns the space above the chancel and a cross is suspended
in front of the nave. An organ selection committee worked with Faucher Organ Company of Biddeford to build our new combination pipe/digital organ. A Historical Time Capsule has been sealed into the wall beneath the gallery of ministers’ portraits on the landing between the stairways leading from the atrium to the balcony.

On December 5, 2004, lead by a bagpiper, Minister and Congregation carrying cross and bible joyously processed from Thornton Academy down Main Street and entered the new sanctuary for the first worship service in the new Church building. Five commemorative events were planned for the new church. A free concert performed by the eighty-five member, University of Maine Singers on March 2, 2005 was presented as a thank you to the greater Saco/Biddeford/Old Orchard Beach communities. On April 2, 2005, individuals and organizations beyond the church membership were invited to a Community Service of Thanks and Recognition for their efforts on behalf of First Parish Congregational Church since the fire of August 31, 2000. A commemorative plaque, cut from a beam of wood salvaged from the fire was presented to a representative of each organization. May 13, 2005 was the date of the Premiere Showing of the Documentary “Take My Hand” which tells the 2000-2004 Journey of First Parish Congregational Church of Saco Maine. Videotapes and DVD’s are available. The fourth event took place during worship on Sunday, December 4, 2005 and recognized church members who had given so generously of their talent, time and effort to the re-building process. The new Faucher organ was dedicated in October, 2005 with an organ concert by guest organist Nicholas Bowden, Atlanta, Georgia.
Rev. John Fairfield was born in Wenham, Massachusetts in January 1737. He came from a family prominent in both religious and governmental fields. After graduating from Harvard College in 1757, he taught school and preached in several Massachusetts communities before coming to Maine. Mr. Fairfield preached in the Arrowsic Warehouse, Georgetown and in the First Parish at Scarborough and then returned to Massachusetts to preach for a time at Dunstable.

In 1753, the population of settlers living on the east side of the Saco River had grown to more than thirty families. Their petition to form a separate parish was granted and construction of a simple wooden meeting house near the present site of the old burying ground in Pepperell Park was completed by 1757. Mr. Fairfield was invited to preach his first sermon there on August 23, 1761. A year later, he became ordained and received a unanimous call to the Pastoral Care of First Church in the town of Pepperellborough which had been set apart as a distinct township by the Massachusetts Legislature earlier that year.

First Parish Congregational Church, UCC dates its founding to October 13, 1762 when its new minister Rev. John Fairfield and ten members (all men, no women) signed a covenant and formally “gathered” for a day of fasting and prayer. These hand-written documents are in a vault at Saco & Biddeford Savings Institution and it is a thrill to read them. The following day was one of feasting and joyousness. Mr. Ebenezer Ayer provided the dinner, on the town's behalf, though at a charge of “25 coppers” from each. It consisted of 64 lbs. beef, 2 geese, 3 turkeys, 5 fowl, 43 lbs. pork, 1 barrel beer, 2 gal. rum, 2 qts. brandy, sugar, butter, flour and spice “in proportion.” It was served in a large tent set up on the property across Main Street from the present day location of the Saco Museum.

At age 26, Parson Fairfield married Mrs. Mary Cutts, also 26 (the daughter of Capt. Ichabod Goodwin and widow of Foxwell Cutts, Esq. of Berwick). Four years after his marriage to Mrs. Cutts, her seven-year-old son Samuel from her previous marriage died of “nervous fever” after five days in a coma. (One wonders what his
Rev. Fairfield enters this interesting note in his diary showing a custom of the time: “At the funeral were the following persons to whom for their special services we gave gloves” and he proceeds to name the doctor, chaplain, bearers, ministers who spoke, “watchers”, etc. thirty-two pairs were given!

John's “amiable Mary” (as he called her) died April 16, 1774, at the age of 37 leaving him with one son and five daughters, ranging in age from 6 days to 11 years. It is not known how he managed to care for the children and carry on his pastoral duties but we can surmise that the church folk he had been serving for some twelve years stepped in with help. Journal entries also refer to his father's death in Boston and the possibility that his father's “negro maid” came to Saco to serve the family here. Mr. Fairfield, in 1785, married his cousin Martha Ruggles (daughter of Capt. Joseph R.) and when she died, took a third wife (1808) Elizabeth Sweetser Fairfield (widow of his cousin Joseph Fairfield,) who had settled in Saco some years before. There were no children from these unions.

A fair mental picture of him gleaned from conversation with six descendants must be fairly accurate: short, well-rounded, ruddy-cheeked, dark-eyed and dark-haired (later pure white). Rev. Fairfield seemed to have boundless energy as evidenced by entries in his diaries. He was acknowledged by many of his time to have been a striking figure striding or riding about with his long red cape billowing behind him, a characteristic robe of the gentry of that time. This garment is perfectly preserved today and is hanging in the Saco Museum. He seems to have been pleasant, even-tempered, always cheerful and much beloved, less austere than most clergymen of that period, an example of a person well able to adjust his thinking to the changing religious philosophy of a kindly loving God in place of an angry punitive one, which transition many strictly reared and trained ministers found it hard to make. He seems to have been very human, broad-minded, close to his congregation, helping them with secular as well as spiritual matters. He even braved exchanging pulpits with his friends for which many in that day were severely reprimanded, fined or even dismissed.

Rev. Fairfield had excellent penmanship which is fortunate since the early church records were written by him. He used to write his sermons, which were folded into pamphlets about 4” x 6”, carefully held together with string or thread. He delivered the first part of his Sunday sermon at the morning service, taking him about one third through the pamphlet, and completed the discourse in the afternoon. He always ended the sermon with ideas on practical application of the text to the lives of his parishioners, which was sometimes pointed and severe. Some of these sermons are available in the Maine History Room at the Dyer Library and the church has a few in its archives. His earlier penmanship is fine print, growing larger in later years as he began to lose his
sight until he finally put only two or three words on a page.

The Reverend Fairfield was an astute businessman as well as a beloved minister. His diaries record many financial transactions involving animals, wood, etc. On many occasions, the town was in arrears with his salary. At one time, he reminded the moderator that he had an annual interest fee to pay as well as a family of eight to support.

Shortly after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Rev. Fairfield read this great document in its entirety from the pulpit. He was a good friend of other ministers in the area. One writing explains his moving to lower Ferry Road so he could easily cross the Saco River to visit his close friend Rev. Moses Morrill, minister of the Congregational Church in Biddeford.

During his long ministry of 36 years, 778 were baptized, 220 Half-Covenanters were accepted (i.e. all benefits except Holy Communion) and only 9 full communicants (six were female) under the existing strictness of examinations. He left at his own request after 37 years of faithful service. He remained in Saco to the end of his life.

Ichabod was John and Mary Fairfield's oldest child and only son. He was active politically and became an excellent cabinetmaker. A secretarial desk and two card tables made by him are on display at the Saco Museum. He married Sarah Scammon and the oldest of their five children. John became a governor of our state, a U.S. Senator and also was one of the founders of the Unitarian Church in Saco. It is speculated that John may have rebelled against the strictness of the Puritan First Parish or perhaps his grandfather's successor Elihu Whitcomb was a disappointment.

Elizabeth was the oldest of five girls in the Fairfield family. She married James Scammon. Mary, like her mother, married a minister, Benjamin Titcomb. Sarah was to become the most affluent of the Fairfield siblings. She married Daniel Cleave, a successful businessman. Their home, named Seagirt Castle, is still standing at 115 Cleave Street in Biddeford. It has been greatly altered and is now an apartment house. The drawings of the original house, a portrait of Sarah and other items from the Cleave home are at the Saco Museum as well. Hannah lived the longest. She married Captain Samuel Hartley and died at the age of 91. The last child is referred to as both Ann and Nanney. She married Phineas Hemmenway of Arundel.
ELIHU WHITCOMB
(1799—1810)

Mr. Elihu Whitcomb was invited first by the town and then by the church according to their partnership custom. He was a Harvard graduate of 1793. He came at a relatively peaceful period, though “witch-hunting” was in vogue and the Wells minister, George Burroughs, had just been arrested, innocently involved because of a bad dream he had told. Somehow, Saco managed to keep quietly out of the controversies seething about at that time. Mr. Whitcomb seems to have had effective speaking ability but annoying habits and a rather crude sense of humor and the fitness of things. One story told of him is that one Sunday he mounted the pulpit as usual, read a verse from the Bible concerning Jesus “sitting” among the multitude and preaching (Matt.5:1) and remarked that he would do likewise, thereupon returning to his chair, sitting down, and preaching his sermon. Probably he had other peccadilloes, as feeling mounted against him and he resigned “by request” in June 1810. However, 11 years of service in which he secured 25 new members through confession of faith, not counting Half-Covenanters, was not a bad record.

In the third year of his ministry, 1805, a meeting was called to choose a building committee responsible for the new church to be built on the corner of Main and Beach Streets, on the lot given for the purpose by the Commonwealth. Some of those listed to raise money for it were Foxwell Cutts, Esq. Deacon Scammon, Capt. Seth Storer, James Gray, Esq. Daniel Granger, Edmund Moody, Bradbury Johnson, the last also being Master Builder. It was stipulated that all subscribers must live in Saco and that no one should subscribe for more than one pew. They were to sell by lottery all not taken by subscription, but 83 names came in. Since only 60 families could be accommodated on the ground floor, these would be assigned by ballot and the balcony seats by lottery.

The Church was built 90 feet by 54 feet, huge for that day, with a 126 ft. spire sheltering a graceful “lantern tower.” The light from the lantern could be seen from Portland and the beaches. The building was painstakingly built on a solid granite foundation, erecting massive timbers, and the lacy look of the tower affected by elaborate “gingerbread” carving mostly done by hand with penknives. A gallery was made around three sides with a double row of seats. After a rather hot discussion pro and con of the evil effects of bringing comfort into the heretofore bare interior of the church, the weighty decision was finally made to have the aisles carpeted and seats cushioned below and in one row of the balcony, a noteworthy concession. The “singing seats” were at first in a half circle behind the pulpit, but in 1837, at Rev. Hopkins’ wish, they were moved to the rear. Those “thick of hearing” were seated in front; otherwise, the congregation was seated according to sex and rank. The pulpit was projected into the nave, with an octagonal sounding board suspended by an iron rod over
the “desk” as in most meetinghouses of the time. It was said that none but the architect himself could have raised the tall steeple in its intricate frame, which was set in place one piece at a time. It took five years to complete the building. Upon completion, the new bell was rung all day to express their spirit of rejoicing. The treasured organ and resonant bell could be heard all over the city. Thus the meeting house with its beautiful steeple, brilliant light and fine Paul Revere bell given by Col. Thomas Cutts were the pride and delight of the town as well as the Congregational Society for its entire 50 years, when the Great Fire reduced it to ashes.

At this time, still under Massachusetts, all records were kept separately in the name of the appointed “Proprietors of the new Congregational Meetinghouse, Saco.” It was not until 1903 that the Church and its Parish were united.

JONATHAN C. COGSWELL
(1810-1828)

The Church, for the first time, took the initiative in calling Rev. Jonathan Cogswell in 1810 after asking the Selectmen if they would concur in the choice and he “took over the gospel ministry of the town” for the next 16 years. Thus, for 66 years we had only three pastors. Rev. Cogswell married Elizabeth Abbott of Westford, and in the ensuing years five children were born to them: Mary, Louisa (who died at the age of nine from “being thrown against a bench at school while playing with a lad”), Elizabeth, a second “Louisa” and Ann Walter.

One chronicler writes, “at this time the church became modern.” Among his new activities were mid-week prayer meetings, a Bible Society, a Temperance League, a tract society, missionary endeavors, a new covenant, the building of a vestry, and the introduction of organ music. Revival meetings seemed to be in the air all over the country and he invited some evangelists to preach, besides doing considerable “reviving” himself. There was criticism for emotionalism and “temporary” conversions. Mr. Cogswell had success himself in winning converts, leaving 266 members where he had found 26! Probably easier transportation was one aid—sometimes 45 carriages stood about the church on Sunday. It was a period of deep religious fervor.

Mr. Cogswell was said to be of “tender loving spirit” and did much to mitigate severe public punishments and censure, though he unjustly came in for a bit himself. His character was attacked by two men of his congregation (for allegedly criticizing a local schoolteacher) but his diary gives a spirited account of his vindication at a church business meeting. Feeling ran high, especially against the two troublemakers, and they were soon dismissed from membership.
The War of 1812 came, and though British interest centered on acquiring and using the well-fortified towns of Eastport, Castine and Belfast, one disturbing incident made its impact on Saco. There arrived off Wood Island on June 16, 1814, a 90-gun British frigate. In the first flurry of excitement “a sea-faring man” was quickly put on duty in our church tower with a spyglass to report on proceedings. Many buried their silver and moved other treasures to places of safety but were soon assured the attack was solely on the property of Col. Thomas Cutts, a distinguished citizen whose family had been established in the shipbuilding and commerce with the West Indies for over 100 years. He himself had been carrying on a flourishing trade and suffered severely from the looting of his three-story warehouse and burning of his ships and shipyard, which had long benefited the townspeople as well as himself. It seems that he had “offered some indignity” to the English captain years before, who was now trying to even the score. Capt. Thomas’ father had warned him that he should move his warehouse and shipping to another port, but he hadn’t considered it necessary. Bill Parcher, clerk in the store located on the first floor of the warehouse was forced to give the invaders whatever they demanded, which included $1,000 worth of clothing. Our harbor never again carried on as lucrative trade. The end of the war was celebrated in Saco by a “Peace Ball,” proceeds of which went to the poor. Also, the “Preceptor” of the Academy declared a holiday and dismissed all the children so that they might join in the celebration.

Several historic events now took place in quick succession. On July 26, 1819, the separation of the District of Maine from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was voted in an important meeting and effected March 4, 1820, when Maine was admitted to the Union, the 23rd state to join 11 slave states and 11 free. In 1822, the York County Congregational Conference was organized here, the rapid growth of which attested to the need for closer cooperation with neighboring towns. In 1825, there was a “gathering” of the Congregational Society and “First Parish” was set off as an entity, given permission to have its own meetinghouse, and relinquished thus all right to support by taxing of the whole town. Two years later the Calvinistic Baptist Church was organized, the Episcopal Church opened, and the Unitarian Society Second Parish was transferred from Biddeford to Saco. At the same time the Catholic community was given the same privileges along with other denominations to hold office and build their own churches on land free of taxation.

**SAMUEL JOHNSON**

(1828-1835)

Perhaps because records were destroyed in the fire of 1860, we know little of the activities of the next few years. One commentator called Rev. Samuel Johnson “the most notable minister in the history of our church.”
We know only that in his seven years in Saco, 106 communicants were received and the number of Half-Covenanters doubled. Upon leaving, he became Agent in the Maine Missionary Society.
SAMUEL HOPKINS
(1836-1844)
Rev. Samuel Hopkins came from Montpelier, Vermont. From May 1841, he spent a year in Europe for his health. He had resigned but consented to return. During his eight years, the Sunday School “became better organized” than it ever had been, and one day all of the Congregational churches in the country joined in fasting and prayer on account of a severe drought. He is said to have been the “most admired and most popular minister in that half-century.” Prosperity was gaining headway, and at this time the area now called Old Orchard was beginning to be recognized as a resort town and taking its first “summer boarders.” The favorite recreation was to ride in carriages along the beach at low tide.

EDWARD S. DWIGHT
(1844-1852)
Rev. Edward S. Dwight, modest and intelligent, spent a productive eight years here.

FRANCIS WHEELER
(1854-1859)
Rev. Francis Wheeler served as minister of First Parish Congregational Church for five years and must have been an inspiring speaker as he brought in 185 members, 76 of whom were communicants. Dr. Wheeler returned to Saco to give the 100th anniversary address. He told a reporter this amusing anecdote: One Sunday morning, rushing in a bit late and nervous because the congregation was already seated, he plunked down forcefully on a rather rickety haircloth chair. The seat gave way and he was left with trunk and “long legs” sticking up through” He observed, “It might be called a drop in theology!” He retired to Poughkeepsie, New York after leaving Saco.

CHARLES B. RICE
(1859-1861)
Rev. Charles Rice was destined to be in charge when the “great fire” occurred on July 8, 1860. He had been here only six months. Someone meeting Mr. Butts, the sexton, on the street soon after Mrs. Edward Burnham had reported the fire, bemoaned the fact that the church was in flames, the sexton exclaimed, “I know better! I have the keys in my pocket” as though that settled the matter, but it was sadly true. Most loose things were
saved from inside the church, as the fire evidently had started in the bell tower. The minister's presence of mind had some of the men pull up the carpet and put it on the roof of the little vestry (built the year before), keeping it well soaked, which saved that building. Only the massive granite foundation of the church was left on which to rebuild. 145 pounds of molten metal of the old Paul Revere bell was rescued and most of it was later incorporated into the casting of the new bell. There had been no insurance.

For the ensuing three years, meetings were held in the Town Hall with no settled pastor, but Rev. Dwight, Tuxbury and Asa Rand are known to have filled in. Mr. Rice stayed only a few months after the fire. As Mrs. Frye writes in her “Historical Paper”, in 1912: With commendable promptness an informal meeting was called July 13 and the situation discussed. A formal Parish meetinghouse was petitioned for by Philip Eastman, T.M. Hayes, E.R. Wiggin, Ivory Dame, Daniel Smith, Jr. and S.T. Shannon, which assembled July 21st and adjourned from week to week until August 27, but no real progress seems to have been made until May 31, 1862, when a new building committee of Tristram and Rishworth Jordan, Jr. Daniel Cleaves and Charles Sawyer were appointed. Mr. John Stevens of Boston was chosen as architect. By June 12, they presented their plans and estimates and they were authorized to proceed as soon as subscriptions warranted. Others were added to solicit for an organ and bell; S.T. Shannon, Samuel Osgood, Paul Sands and William and Charles Littlefield. By July 6, 1863, their work was finished. The whole cost, including the organ ($1100) and bell (($700), carpet, cushions, fence grading came to $14,800, which they admitted was a reasonable sum. The town presented the gift of the tower clock. By vote, special thanks were extended to Mr. Cleaves and Mr. Thomas Hill, builder.

**JOHN H. WINDSOR**

(1864-1879)

Rev. John Windsor who was here for the dedication of the new church, remained four years but left because times were so difficult that his salary could not be raised.

**BENSON FRINK**

(1870-1873)

Rev. Benson Frink followed Rev. Windsor. Both of these ministries were fruitful in drawing new communicants. Mr. Frink, before his ordination was given a rigid test on his theology. The church was beautifully decorated for his ordination. There was fine music and President Harris of Bowdoin College preached the sermon. Before Mr. Frink left, he was given a surprise party with gifts. He, like his predecessors
had much success in winning converts. One member of a neighboring church's Ladies Circle remarked, “Were not our religion best, we'd go to his church.”

**GEORGE P. BLANCHARD**
(1874-1876)

During George Blanchard's ministry, John F. Stearns of Bay View became Superintendent of the Sunday School, the following year Deacon and later Treasurer.

**JOHN T. BLADES**
(1877-1879)

The use of the envelope system for Sunday offerings was adopted during Rev. John T. Blades term of service.

**CHARLES E. STOWE**
(1879-1882)

Rev. Charles E. Stowe was hired for a year on trial before becoming ordained. His father, Prof. Lyman Stowe was a professor at Bowdoin College after teaching 15 yrs. at Cincinnati Theological School and his mother Harriet Beecher Stowe was author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* “to show what an accursed thing slavery was.” Three hundred thousand copies were sold in America alone in the first year, and it was immediately translated into 23 languages. When President Abraham Lincoln met her for the first time, he exclaimed, “What a little lady to
have started such a big war!”

Mr. Charles Stowe did not find his ministry here a bed of roses, but he soon won his way with his earnest sincerety, meticulous attention to visiting the ill and other parish duties. Many things he did were severely criticized—he was once advised “he had best be silent on matters of doubtful concern and preach the pure simple truths of Salvation by Faith and Obedience.” He joined the church on October 1, 1881 and was ordained soon after. He was kindhearted and sympathetic. On one occasion, when he called on Mrs. Lucy M. Scamman, to give solace for the recent death of her 13-year-old son, he gave her a book entitled “Words of Comfort for Bereaved Parents of Little Children.” He had known such sorrow when his family had lost two young boys by drowning. In fact, the book had been given to him on that occasion. He remained three years and his son Lyman II was born during that time.

Apparently Rev. Stowe did not realize that his congregation disapproved of serving wine at their service of communion and he caused quite an uproar by so doing. At the next communion service Mr. Stowe announced that he could not conscientiously administer the sacrament otherwise, so it was not served at all. However, he later relented in the interest of peace and harmony. Nevertheless, a segment of the congregation continued to resent his views which they considered too liberal.

After three years Mr. Stowe left the ministry and became a lecturer and writer. Mrs. Stowe came back to Saco for several summers and stayed at the Bay View House.

A piece of history returned to First Parish Church in October 2007. The church received the gift of a baptismal gown and petticoat worn by Caroline Stowe Goodier the first baby baptized by Rev. Stowe while he was minister. (She was given Stowe for a middle name in honor of the occasion). Rev. Stowe's mother Harriet Beecher Stowe taught Sunday School to several members of the Goodier family. The gown is on display in a case in the church narthex.

EDMOND C. INGALLS
(1884-1888)

The Sunday School, an auxiliary of the Maine Sabbath School Union to which it sends an annual report, observed its 175th anniversary under Rev. Edmond C. Ingalls in 1884. The occasion was marked by a sermon by Rev. Brink and special organ music by Prof. Charles Shannon. Of Mr. Ingalls, it was said by one that “we
are having better preaching” and by another that he was “of singular integrity and purity.” The church again found itself in debt and was forced to sell some of its securities and borrow $1,000 from the Saco Bank. Immediately the Ladies Aid went to work and refurbished the whole interior of the church. A sum of $900 was contributed. Under the ingenious leadership of Rev. Ingalls, an “ABC Club” was formed: “A” was responsible for four “B’s” willing to give $10 and enlist four “C’s”; the B's would get a like pledge from their C's etc. in a chain until all members had a chance to do their part. Very soon the needed funds were raised. A missionary was also supported to work among the Tennessee Mountain people.

REV PHILIP CARRUTHERS
(1889-1893)
He succeeded Rev. Ingall's ministry and welcomed several recent Scottish immigrants into church membership.

PHILIP H. MOORE
(1893-1899)
Rev. Philip Moore began preaching while still a senior at Bowdoin College. He was evidently quite a fiery and dynamic person and took his preaching, citizenship and political responsibilities seriously. He drew large crowds. He married while here a girl from Gorham, N.H. But she found life as a minister's wife irksome, became involved with a servant of a local family, saying she “didn't care what people thought” and left Philip. He divorced her, an unpropitious beginning.

Rev. Moore chose dramatic ways to impress people. Once he had a speaker come to talk on the needs of Africa, and when the speaker got to the height of his talk he produced a group of poorly clad African children who sang hymns—at which the “whole congregation fumbled for their handkerchiefs” (and doubtless, for their pocketbooks!) He introduced stereopticon slides with his lectures, especially on his travels in England and Italy.

The Salvation Army, recently settled in Saco was the butt of jokes, and Mr. Moore invited them to the church and preached on their behalf, thus helping them hold their ground and win respect. He and Rev. John L. Marsh, Unitarian, were dubbed “intellectual gadflies” because they held seminars on William James' psychology and weekly discussions on methods of pedagogy. He shows a liberality of feeling when he says “one obsolete thing to be banished: Let us not say that hell and fire eternal awaits him who doesn't repent, but welcome him in our
midst,” and that we should “apply educational methods above all others in spreading religion” and “cultivate an intelligent social life.” He expounded on “modern heresy,” blasting men who conducted business contrary to their religious lives and teachings. In one sermon he said, “Salvation is not the escaping of some sulphurous hell but a growth process, a cooperating with God to save the world.” His last sermon was on the political responsibility each has for voting in every election and considering the good of all rather than what will benefit you as an individual.

It was during Rev. Moore’s ministry that the use of individual cups for Communion was introduced for reasons of health. First Parish is recognized as the first church in the nation to institute the custom which became widespread. When Mr. Moore left, he became a physician.

Our first stained glass memorial window was accepted in 1897 after controversy about the propriety of accepting such a “decoration” against the calvinistic bareness of a New England church.

**LEROY S. BEAN**
**(1900-1903)**

Our 17th minister was Rev. Leroy Bean, a sympathetic, brilliantly intellectual, strong in spirit but weak in body. He has been our only pastor to die in office. He was highly philanthropic and faithful to the details of his office. He put the church on a “fine correct working basis not known for years,” with sound progressive instruction. He was a conscientious, strict, earnest teacher of simple Bible truths. He was discreet about debatable topics that stirred controversy. His death was a great shock to his parishioners who had become very fond of him. On one occasion they had expressed their feeling for him by presenting him a dozen solid silver teaspoons.

It was during his brief stay that our Church and Parish united and were incorporated as the “First Parish Congregational Society.” In the same year the city turned over the deed of the lot on which the present church stands. Also in this period First Parish again entertained the York County Congregational Conference.

**CARL M. GATES**
**(1904-1908)**

We seem to have no record of Rev. Carl M. Gates’ ministry except that he was a tall, elderly, scholarly gentleman.
Elvira Lord writes “It was a happy day for us when Rev. Chester Birge Emerson came to Saco, fresh from Bowdoin College, in September 1909.” His early education had been in Farmington, New Hampshire. He was installed in October by Dr. Raymond Calkins. As there was still no parsonage at the time, he lived in the Fred B. Wiggin house, corner of Beach and James Streets and Mrs. Josephine Jellerson was his housekeeper. He threw himself into his new work with all of his youth and vigor and enlivened the parish with endless activities for all groups and ages: clubs, suppers, games, family social evenings, minstrels, plays. He had the small Parish House remodeled and enlarged, adaptable to many uses—a daily social gathering place filling a great need, especially for teenagers. At this time there was a considerable immigration of families from Scotland, and he welcomed them, incorporated special Scottish dances into weekly entertainments, ending the evenings, according to their pleasingly sentimental custom, by joining hands and singing Auld Lang Syne. These newcomers immediately made themselves an important part of the church body, being willing workers, faithful attendants, loyal friends and supporters. He conducted our 150th anniversary while here, when the new organ was inaugurated with a fine concert by Archer Gibson of New York City. It had been presented by Col. Richard Cutts Shannon in appreciation of his brother Charles’ fifty years of service to the church as organist and choir director. He furnished the name for the new Madisses class by combining “Madams” and “Misses”. He quickened young people's meetings and organized the Men's Forum. He once said, “The ideal relation between a pastor and his people is a friendship that involves mutual confidence, forbearance and helpfulness in all good works.”
Mr. Emerson was extremely sensitive to beauty in all its forms: music, poetry, art, architecture, and the power of language. He wrote inspiring poetry himself and was highly creative in various ways. His sermons were impressive, sincere, fearless, philosophical and deeply religious. Many were moved to join the congregation, not temporarily as with some, but permanently. Mr. Emerson was deeply and sincerely religious, yet aware of present needs of his ministerial calls and other duties. He designed the beautiful altar and communion table for the giver, Miss Sarah Abbott.

Rev. Emerson went to Detroit from Saco. In World War I he went to France and served in the Divisional Headquarters area keeping in touch with Saco acquaintances through correspondence. In 1934 he exchanged pulpits for the summer with a rector in Stoke Poges, England. He turned to the Episcopalian faith before going to his Cleveland, Ohio church which he served until his retirement. Both before and after his retirement he preached summers in St. Anne's-by-the-Sea in Kennebunkport, Maine in which town he had a vacation home.

**WILLIAM F. ENGLISH**
*(1914-1916)*

Rev. William English came from Lowell, Massachusetts in May 1914, the fourth generation of Congregational ministers. Although land had been bequeathed for a parsonage, it had not been built and a home was rented for him on Main St. It was during Rev. English's ministry that our beloved Prof. Shannon, organist and choir director for fifty years retired. He had been completely blind for several of his last years but still played beautifully from memory.

**GEORGE W. JUDSON**
*(1917-1922)*

It was voted in June 1919 to build the parsonage on the North Street lot which had been held for eight years. Mr. Joseph Stickney, husband of Dr. Laura B., was the architect. It was completed the following year, and Rev. George W. Judson with his wife and daughter Margaret were the first occupants. He came to Saco from Orange, Massachusetts, a member of one of Stratford's pioneer families. He was a fine gentleman and the church prospered. Mrs. Judson supplemented his work with her trained musical ability, directing choruses and entertainments and making herself very much beloved. The family enjoyed the attractive brick parsonage which they were able to occupy about the middle of his ministry. He went from Saco to Winsted and
Huntington, Connecticut, retiring at the age of 78. He observed his fiftieth year of service in 1935 and died five years later.
From a job as public relations man at General Motors, Lawrence Breed Walker blew in like a tornado, and left about as much destruction behind him. To tell it his way he “had 35 present for his first sermon with no enthusiasm there as if from a sense of duty and responsibility—three years later hundreds of new faces!” Yes, this was true for a while—his popularity grew apace. He “modernized” the church as he happily called it, introducing new, magnetic features: “symphonic sermons,” “dramatic book talks, special speakers (famous Billy Steinke, husband of our late local Alice Stapes of Beach Street, drew over 500 to his cartoon demonstrations); conducted a special “Sanford Night” which he “hoped would become an annual affair,” featured good music—Miss Helen Hill was still our faithful organist—Miss Ruth Mayo sometimes substituting— and the soloist choir director was Mme. Héloïse Painchaud-Renouf. He created the job of “minister's secretary” had extensive repairs done at the parsonage, a new heating plant put into the church, moved the library from the church to the Parish House, organized new clubs (Sakokis, Kumsumore). Ex-principal of Thornton Academy Ernest Rolliston Woodbury, affectionately known as “Prof” by most of his graduates, gave up his Madisses Class (which he had conducted for over fifteen years and had built up to a membership of over 100) because so few attended, and “Prof” was not easily discouraged. This minister wanted new members—the old were expendable. Great numbers of his own congregation were disappearing, either offended at his constant belittling and lambasting and were joining other churches, or knowing that this phase could not last, temporarily withdrawing and attending other services.
He seemed to have a maniacal craving for numbers. He counted his audiences and cars around the church as Silas Marner counted his gold pieces: “62 motors parked outside,” “church filled and 130 extra chairs in the aisles, 30 standing and 300 on the lawn outside.” He was gleeful when an editorial in the Saco News by Mr. Ferris read “so great are the crowds that our trained ushers are accustomed to hang latecomers on hooks in the hallways and clothes closets to make room for more.” Yes, he drew numbers, but the growth was not healthy, constant or substantial. He took pride in the number who came from out of town, and treasured opposition and criticism, rating enemies a sure sign of success.

Thanks to some of the faithful workers in the church many of the bills were paid. The Women's Aid put on suppers and entertainments and paid the secretary's salary; the Madisses gave unstintingly of their time and energy putting on fairs, sales, suppers, and helped pay the minister's salary, supply worship bulletins, buy a piano, and fill in wherever they could in devoted service; a private group of admirers raised $200 to assure the minister a good vacation; the Ladies' Missionary Society, Men's Brotherhood, Church School (under Howard P. Black) and Tri-U all did their part to keep the ship on an even keel. But when Mr. Walker resigned he left behind him a sad tale of tremendous indebtedness, squandered securities and broken spirit. He had alienated his old members and replaced them with hordes of strangers who had been interested only in his dynamic
sensationalism, not by any stretch of the imagination in the support of the church or their own spiritual enlightenment. It was a real crisis in the life of the church. Could the wanton sacrifice of all these years of labor and accomplishment be recovered?

He said upon resignation that he had “tried to make it a church for common people, not the wealthy.” Had he taken a preceptive look first, he would have realized that he had launched forth from a purely false premise, as the church had been born of passionate democracy.

Mr. Walker passed away a short time after this, broken down mentally and physically, a sorry ending to what might have been a brilliant productive career.

CLEMENT F. HAHN
(1930-1935)

It was into this difficult situation that Rev. Clement F. Hahn stepped in April 1930. Young, strong, courageous and high-spirited, knowing exactly what hardships he was facing but still willing to take them on. He was born in Pensacola, Florida where his parents Mr. And Mrs. Alfred Hahn were visiting relatives. They soon returned to Battle Creek, Michigan and there he received his education through high school, then on to Morningside College for his B.A. Degree and graduated from Boston Theological School in 1926. His grandfather, A. F. Hahn and Uncle Eli Hahn had been ministers in Iowa. He held pastorates in Haskell and Dixon, Nebraska,
Rowley, MA and four years in North Chelmsford, MA where he was ordained by the Andover Association. He arrived with a charming wife and three fine young sons.

As Mr. Hahn remarked, “The first glorious day set the tone for my whole ministry in First Parish!” and in spite of, or perhaps because of the rueful remark of his son when he found only 15 attending the church school (“Dad, I guess we're going to have a lot to do around here!”) He pitched in, in earnest, first passing out questionnaires to see how many faithful he could depend upon as a nucleus. The 1930 depression had taken severe toll. The York Mills and Saco-Lowell, chief sources of employment, had nearly closed down for lack of orders. Many families here were out of work. The minister, organist and sexton of our church volunteered to take percentage pay cuts in salary.

The small group who had expressed a desire to help the minister and many who had been going to other churches returned, along with some who had just sat at home riding out the storm “picked up the broken threads,” as his report at the end of his service expressed it, and bent all efforts first of all to raise money to wipe out the huge debts, while the minister interested himself and assisted in every phase of the work. Within three years, most of the debts were paid, the church school numbered 200 with a fine group of teachers, including Rev. Hahn himself. Several public school teachers also pitched in to help. A bus was engaged to transport the Ferry Rd. children back and forth; the steeple, which had been damaged in a severe wind some years before, was repaired, new classes were formed—the SOS Class (Serve Others Sincerely) by Mrs. Mary Hawkes and the Queen Esthers (for pre-teen girls). The Church was repainted white, which cheered the spirits and added dignity and attractiveness; the Saco Lodge of Masons was invited to visit and the Biddeford-Saco Rotary (to both of which the minister belonged) and various other groups. Thornton Academy held its Baccalaureate Service here as had been frequently done in the past. The State Conference with its 300 delegates was invited to hold its annual meeting here for the first time since 1900. The minister acted as chairman in 1931 for the celebration of Saco's 300th anniversary; Mr. Edward P. Johnson directing a massive pageant depicting its founding, in which hundreds took part; the young people's groups raised money to send delegates to Camp Medomak, Washington County since at that time we had no leadership training camp of our own. Again the old church was gaining back its stable membership, reputation and usefulness in the community under forceful and effective leadership. Rev. Hahn moved from Saco to Worcester, MA and subsequently to Spokane, WA to continue his ministry.
MALCOLM W. GARLAND
(1936-1943)

Rev. Malcolm Garland was born in Portland, Maine, the son of a Methodist minister. Mr. Garland received his post-secondary and theological education from Boston University and was ordained in 1935. He and his wife Dorothy and two young sons moved into the parsonage and he began his ministry at First Parish in Saco on Easter Sunday, 1936. He worked much with the young people, helping them with their meetings and activities and inspiring them by his refreshing democratic example, putting special emphasis on reaching out to help others and on all-round good citizenship. In addition to Sunday morning worship services, Rev. Garland conducted Sunday evening and mid-week services which were well received. He found the church in solid financial condition so was able to make improvements. The interior was completely redecorated, aisle carpets were replaced with new ones, more effective lighting was installed and grounds improved. Improvements to the Parish House included a more convenient and efficient kitchen. In 1938, a garage was built for the parsonage. The church school thrived under the superintendency of Mr. Elliot MacLean.

Mr. Garland’s father died in August 1936 in the first year of his son’s ministry here and his funeral was held at First Parish. (He had come from Uxbridge, MA to attend the funeral of a relative in Portland at the time he was stricken.)

The Men’s Club was active and Mr. Garland participated in its meetings and activities such as Christmas parties for underprivileged children and frequent suppers prepared and served by the men themselves.
The pastor took part in several community activities: He was President of the Biddeford/Saco Ministers Union, Chairman of the Board of Visitors of the Provident Society, on the executive committee of the York County Children's Aid, Chairman of the Ministerial Standing Committee of the York Association of Congregational Churches. When the 1938 hurricane struck, he was helping paint the walls of the kindergarten room and all the lights went out. It was several days before electricity was restored and the job finished. During this disaster a large number of local people were housed and fed in the Parish House until their homes were made safe to reoccupy.

Mr. Garland arranged for the beautiful stained glass memorial windows to be illuminated each evening the week before Christmas which added to the spiritual appreciation of that holy season, not only for his own flock but for all passersby. The lovely, graceful steeple stood out against the sky, directing the eyes aloft, beckoning on toward higher aims and clearer vision.

After seven years in Saco, Rev. Garland went to the Bedford Park Congregational Church, New York City for three years, then on to Park Congregational Church of Norwich, CT for eight years. In 1955, he became first Executive Secretary of Greater Lynn Council of Churches. He wrote of his stay in Saco, “I was less than 30 years old, with much to learn; people were very patient with me and I learned lessons there which have been invaluable in my subsequent ministry. God richly blessed us during those years and to Him belong’s the praise and honor for any progress that was made.”

STANLEY A. GOULD
(1943-1950)
Rev. Stanley Gould came to First Parish from Millinocket and with his wife and three son’s, Howard, Mark and Keith and moved into the parsonage. It was a precarious time financially, as WW II was well underway with rationing in effect. Meanwhile, current debts had not been taken care of, so once again the constantly-recurring money-raising problem was with us.

Many young people had offered their services in the Armed Forces on land, sea and air, as well as many draftees having been called up. Thus in December of 1943, Mrs. Nina Goodchild and Mrs. Hazel Chadbourne obtained a fine service book and beautifully inscribed in it the names of over 70 men and women of First Parish who were taking part in the international struggle, with a photograph of each and notation of the outfit in which he served. They and Mr. Gould refinished a beautiful old pulpit which had been in use by our church some 50 years before, to serve as a rest for this “Book of Remembrance.” He held an impressive service on Dec. 5, 1943, and for the duration of the war new names were added as young people entered service. A soft light was placed over the book and fresh flowers kept beside it, expressing the constant and anxious remembrance of these young people in the thoughts and prayers of First Parish.

At the end of the war, a Congregational Conclave of the State Conference was held here and the subject of “A Free Church for a Free World” was discussed. Soon afterward, Rev. Gould preached one of his most interesting sermons on “Some Elements of a Continuing Faith” on the occasion of the meetinghouse's 184th birthday.
Rev. Andrew Richards came from South Main Congregational, Manchester, NH with his wife Sybil (of Dexter) whom he had married while at Bangor Theological Seminary and daughter Sybil Ann. A second daughter Andrea was born in Saco in Feb. 1953.

His “Service of Recognition” was held April 23, 1951, and was quite a family affair. The Scripture was read by his brother, Rev. Charles Richards of the Federated Church, So. Berwick; the sermon delivered by his father, Dr. Andrew, of the Second Congregational Church, Dorchester Center, MA. Several local ministers also took part in the service.

Mr. Richards had been educated at Maryville College, Tennessee, Bangor Theological Seminary and Williams College. At Maryville he had been star tackle on the football team and continued his interest in sports here by joining the Maine Football Officials Assoc. for which he umpired about 18 games a season. He had been chaplain and teacher at Peekskill Military academy, NY and was only 28 years old when he came to Saco. He quickly became a favorite among the young people and membership in the Youth Fellowship grew under his leadership. He organized and led trips to New York City to visit the United Nations and other places of interest, once taking part with two of them in the “Break the Bank” TV show there, from which they emerged with $50 for their efforts.
Mr. Richards was instrumental in the ordination of church member Ben Currier who became a lay preacher at the Congregational Church in Sanford and assisted Rev. Spencer Aungst to achieve recognition in full standing in the York Association, encouraged Roy Leo to study for the ministry at Bangor Theological Seminary and then go into the ministry.

Soon after his arrival at First Parish, Mr. Richards established “The Messenger” a monthly newsletter that was an enormous asset in keeping members in touch with parish activities. In summarizing his work, he wrote that he increased membership 50% and doubled the budget, conducted 107 funerals, 91 baptisms and 51 mid-week services beside his regular Sunday sermons. He still found time to substitute for other pastors so that they might take needed rest, take active part in the Saco Dramatic Workshop, do Masonic work and act as chaplain for the Saco Fire and Police Departments. He once said, “With all the problems and all the work, I wouldn't trade my job for any 40hr. per week position that marries you off to a timekeeper's clock!” Rev. Richards left Saco to serve the Congregational Church, UCC in Lynnfield, MA.

**BIRGER T. JOHNSON**

(1955-1960)

Rev. Birger Johnson and his wife Carolyn and two sons came to Saco from New Jersey. Rev. Johnson was educated at Colgate University and Union Theological Seminary. Rev. Johnson proposed dividing the parish
into “Shepherding” neighborhood groups for the purpose of communication and caring for the needs of one another.

This was the time of the great economic recession which caused the closing of the Bates Mills and the moving of a majority of the Saco-Lowell Machine Shops to the south, taking with it many of the members of First Parish Church. Despite the challenge to maintain financial support of the church, under Mr. Johnson's leadership, members of the parish took on the enormous project of enlarging the parish house to include a fellowship hall. Groundbreaking was held May 13, 1956. About $45,000 was raised for the project and several gifts of furniture and equipment for church school as well as hands-on work projects were accomplished. For a couple of months that fall, church members gratefully accepted the invitation to worship with the folks at the Unitarian Church until the work was finished in November. A coffee hour following Sunday services was instituted.

Student exchanges with other countries became popular and in 1958, the Pilgrim Fellowship arranged its first exchange. Deacon and Mrs. Eliot MacLean generously opened their home in Saco to receive as a “daughter” Renate Pinnow of Goettingen, Germany while FPC Ellen Clark lived for a year in a German family. The year abroad was financed by the Pilgrim Youth and Women's Fellowship organizations.

In addition to serving the church, Rev. Johnson held offices in several local organizations: Saco Parent-Teachers Association, Arundel Ministers Association, York County Board of the American Red Cross and Mental Health programs, several phases of the York County and State Conferences, as well as volunteering with the young leaders at Pilgrim Lodge. He enjoyed the distinction of being a delegate from Maine to the Second General Synod at Oberlin and Cleveland in 1959-60, at which the statement of faith and constitution were accepted for the newly merged “United Church of Christ.”

Rev. Johnson accepted a call to ministry at the Woodfords Congregational Church in Portland, ME to share the pulpit with Dr. Fred Thompson. In later years he served as chaplain to the Long Creek Youth Development Center and was elected Maine state representative.

HARRY A. AUFIERO
(1961-1963)
Rev. Auferio came from the Beamsville Congregational Church, Greeneville, Ohio with his wife Margaret and three daughters. In the short time he served First Parish Church as pastor, he also chaired the Evangelism Committee of the Biddeford/Saco Council of Churches, served on a committee for the York Association of Congregational Churches, represented the Congregational Conference on the board of the Boston Seamen's Friend's Society and found time to enjoy the Saco Lodge F and AM and the Rotary Club.

As part of the 200th anniversary observance, landscaping of the church grounds was improved with shrubs and trees donated by Robert Moody of Moody's nursery, a new sign board was erected and a special week of programs and observances were planned.

It was during Rev. Aufiero's ministry that First Parish Congregational Church voted in 1961 to join other Congregational Christians as a stepping stone to membership in the United Church of Christ.

PAUL K. WEIMER
(1963-1973)
Rev. Paul Weimer arrived at First Parish church as a fairly new minister but as a man experienced in the business world with much acquired wisdom and sensitivity. Born in Cleveland, Ohio he attended Ohio State University and had a successful career in the field of graphic arts before receiving a call in his middle years to become a minister. Mr. Weimer and his wife Gertrude (“Trudy”) and son Brent moved to Maine so that he could attend Bangor Theological Seminary. His two older daughters Nancy and Barbara were college students when the major life change occurred. A great deal of sacrifice was made by the entire family to allow Mr. Weimer to pursue a compelling desire to serve God's people through the church.

The ten years that Mr. Weimer served First Parish Church was a decade of growth and healthy change. Mr. Weimer will long be remembered for his counseling of those in need and for his special healing touch to those who were ill or in crisis. He started an eight-year tradition of weekend spiritual retreats at Rockcraft Lodge, where parishioners had an opportunity to meditate, search and grow in their faith. During his tenure, two prayer groups were started, bible classes were offered and a Couples Club was formed. Interdenominational baccalaureate services were continued. Special musical events were offered under choir director Rena Deis, including the rock opera, “Jesus Christ Superstar.” Contemporary music was added to worship, a rhythmic choir performed at special services. Teacher-training workshops were held for church school teachers, and special emphasis was placed on youth activities for teens.

The schedule of activities, and increased demands on the minister, prompted some members to desire the services of an assistant minister. This did not happen but a student intern, Carl Shesler, came weekends from
Andover-Newton Theological Seminary to assist in worship services and youth work.

Mr. Weimer became a leader in the community as well, serving as president of the Biddeford-Saco Council of Churches, president of the Saco Provident Association, member of the Ministerial Standing Committee of the York Association and conference delegate for the Synod of the United Church of Christ. He was also an active Rotarian.

Mr. Weimer was challenged by Parkinson's Disease, during the later years of his ministry, which caused him to retire a few years earlier than he had anticipated. Even so, his tenure was the longest of any minister at First Parish since 1828.

**JAMES W. FLETCHER**

*(1973-1980)*

Rev. James Fletcher was born in Madison, Maine and grew up in East Wilton. He graduated from Barrington College in Rhode Island and Andover-Newton Theological Seminary. He served parishes in Poland and Mechanic Falls before coming to Saco with his wife, Paula. He was installed at First Parish on November 25, 1973.

Among the goals of the church in the seventies was to build up a sagging stewardship program. This was accomplished and helped establish First Parish as a leader in per capita giving to others. Strong lay leadership
was developed with greater participation of the laity in decision-making and in worship leadership. A model ecumenical youth ministry was established with the Baptist Church. Extensive work was done on the building with insulation, painting, an overhaul of the organ and other major repairs. The church also participated in a variety of community project, including initiating the Crop Walk to raise funds alleviating world-wide hunger.

One of Rev. Fletcher's most appealing sermons followed the birth of his firstborn, a son named Christopher. This sermon was in the form of a letter to Christopher. Many people requested a copy of that sermon and treasure its words.

Mr. Fletcher left Saco to serve as minister of State Street Congregational Church, U.C.C. in Portland, Maine.

REV. ROBERT BAGGS  
Much-loved and revered, served First Parish as Interim Minister following Mr. Fletcher's departure. He prepared the congregation to welcome the new minister by reviewing First Parish history and tradition, basic Christian ideals, and philosophy of worship and fellowship.
RICHARD HANNA HULEATT
(1981-1992)

A Connecticut native and graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, Rev. Huleatt came to Saco in July 1981 from McLean, New York’s Community Church with his wife Susan and son Samuel. Two daughters Eliza and Sarah later joined the family.

Called to the church at a time when the future of the church was similar to its geographical crossroads location, Mr. Huleatt became a caring enabler who led, supported and motivated the church family to thoughtful prayer and meaningful action. Under the guidance of “Rick” as he is fondly known to parishioners and friends, productive changes have been made. The consolidation of the deacons and deaconesses into the diaconate was finalized, a food pantry sponsored by the Biddeford-Saco Council of Churches was established at First Parish, the Bylaws were reviewed and rewritten, and an active Parish Peace group was formed. A relationship was entered into with Andover-Newton's “Field Education” program where students Mark Pitton and Virginia Gorham worked at First Parish on weekends. Rev. Kenneth Read became part-time Minister of Visitation and full-time secretarial help was added. Cambodian families were graciously resettled, the parsonage on North Street was sold and a new more energy-efficient parsonage on Timber Oaks off Old Orchard Road was bought. “Rick” was active in the community and civic projects, including the planning and building of a local Y.M.C.A.

Several physical adjustments and repairs to the church and parish house were made as energy-saving devices and for the convenience of people using the buildings. In 1990, a major fund-raising effort “Church at the
Crossroads—preserving the Past for the Future” with a goal of $300,000 was successfully conducted to make repairs and improvements to the church and parish house, accessibility to the sanctuary and fellowship hall, and organ repair. Pledges and individual gifts accomplished repair to the stained glass windows as well.

Rev. Huleatt and his family moved from First Parish to serve the Congregational Church in Suffield, Connecticut.

REV. ROBERT FISKE

He served as Interim Minister for one year.

DANIEL B. RANDALL
(1993-1994)

Rev. Daniel Barron Randall and his wife Greta grew up in Sheldon, Iowa. After graduating together from the University of Northern Iowa, Dan pursued his formal religious training at Yale University Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. Following ordination, Dan served as Associate Minister in Zion's Reformed Church in Greenville, PA. and then as Pastor in Windsor, Wisconsin.

Dan began his ministry and moved with his wife and two young daughters into the parsonage in February of
1993. His installation service was held on May 23, 1993. The church looked forward to a promising future of shared ministry.

Sadly, Greta Randall died after suffering injuries in a fall at Two Lights State Park in Cape Elizabeth on July 3, 1993. Her son Lucas Barron Randall was born July 3, three months premature and died July 4 at Maine Medical Center. Rev. Randall took a two month leave of absence to care for his daughters and recover from his grief. He returned to his ministerial duties in September but it was difficult for him and for the church to carry on with full attention to the needs of the church.

In November, Rev. Randall announced his intention to start anew and seek another pastorate. The following March, he gave his letter of resignation and accepted a Call to the Church of the Valley in Scottsdale, Arizona effective July 1, 1994. He married Anita Kimball before beginning his ministry in Arizona. After only one year, the Randall’s re-located to New Hampshire where Dan began his ministry at Lee Church, U.C.C. He served in Lee New Hampshire for seven years. Their son Gabriel was born 8/8/01. Dan joined the Air Force reserves and was called to active duty as chaplain in 2002.

**WILLIAM HEINRICK**  
(1994-1994)  
He served as Interim Minister

**PETER W. MERCER**  
(1994-2002)
Rev. Peter Mercer grew up in the suburbs of Boston and graduated from Dickinson College before going on to Andover-Newton Theological Seminary. He “landed” a job as chaplain at Governor Dummer Academy in Byfield MA before he completed studies and graduated from Seminary. Peter met and married his wife Eleanor Sager whose parents taught at the Academy. Three years later in 1971 Mercer was ordained as a minister and brought his wife and two young sons to Maine where Peter accepted a position as pastor of Falmouth Foreside Community Church. In 1975, the family moved to Bangor where Peter served as pastor of the Hammond Street Congregational Church until 1978.

For the next ten years, Peter and later Ellie returned to academic life. Peter became chaplain and taught ethics and bible studies at Suffield Academy in Connecticut. Eventually Peter became the school's director of counseling and Ellie took over as chaplain.

In 1988 Peter was called to the Easthampton Congregational Church in Easthampton, MA. to help a troubled church after the imprisonment of the previous minister. He was able to focus on healing deep wounds and resettling the foundation blocks of community, spirituality and mission.

Ellie Mercer accepted an Associate Pastorate position at Woodfords Congregational Church in Portland and
Peter was commuting to Maine when he received “The Call” in 1994 from First Parish Congregational Church in Saco. He became Senior Minister in January of 1995 and his installation service was May 25, 1994. His wife Ellie was later hired as Director of Faith Education.

It was during the Mercer’s ministry that First Parish Church undertook a study and discussion on becoming an Open and Affirming Church. A vote of the membership at the January 25, 1998 Annual Meeting adopted the following statement:

“The First Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, sits at a crossroad at the center of Saco Maine. Our doors on that crossroad symbolize our welcome to those who come in search of God’s presence in their lives.

We are a faith community of diverse people whose common ministry is to rejoice in God’s love, as well as to heal the brokenness with each other and with God. Responding to that call, we welcome all persons of every age, race, gender, ethnicity sexual orientation, marital standing, physical and mental ability, economic status and family structure into the life, membership, leadership and ministry of this church.

We affirm each person as a child of God, worthy of God’s love and our love, and covenant to support one another in our celebrations, sorrows and spiritual growth. We invite all over the threshold of Christ’s open door to engage with us in the work of this church in the world.”

As a result of this Statement of Inclusion, the United Church of Christ recognizes First Parish as part of the family of Open and Affirming UCC congregations throughout the United States.

Peter considered that he “actually had two careers while at First Parish church. One was drawing to a close just before the fire of August 31, 2000. I felt that the church was in a good place. I thought it was time for some new energy. One week before the fire, I told a few people that I was planning to retire.”

“And then, as I stood on the street and watched this beautiful building burn down, I became instantly aware that I was beginning a second career. As people arrived in utter disbelief, there was a lot of pastor work that needed to take place right on the street.”

On the Sunday following the fire, during an emotional service of worship held at Thornton Academy's Garland
Auditorium, Peter Mercer told this story. A young boy stood quietly with his grandfather on the curb opposite the burning church watching the fire. Looking up he gently tugged at his Grampy's sleeve and asked to be picked up. Snuggling close, he whispered in his grandfather's ear, “Did God get out okay?” This story became a metaphor in the weeks, months and years of rebuilding as the church responded with a resounding “yes” to God's spirit alive in the hearts and minds of the people and the mission they set out to accomplish.

So Peter stayed on for two more years to comfort, guide and support the congregation as it took on the task of rebuilding while continuing to “Be the Church.” He saw his role as the keeper of the process—“the congregational way” of conducting business. Peter shared two vivid impressions of what happened after the fire: “the way that First Parish members pulled together and were willing to rediscover who they were as a church and secondly, an enormous sense of an outpouring of support from throughout the Saco community.” He made it clear however, that he would not be the one to lead his congregation into the new church. Peter said that would be the role for a new senior pastor.

A farewell Service and reception was held on September 22, 2003. Peter and Ellie moved to Scarborough, ME following a cross country trip by automobile across the United States.
REV. DAVID PEARSON
(2002-2004)
From Rochester, NH, he served as Interim Minister from September 2002 to March 2004.

REV. DOUGLAS E. NIELSEN
(2004-2016)

Rev. Douglas Nielsen grew up in New York. He attended New Rochelle High School and graduated from Springfield College in 1974. He received his M. Div. in 1977 from United Theological Seminary of Twin Cities, MN and his D. Min. in 1998 from Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, MI. His first pastorate served three small Vermont Churches, followed by 16 years in Monson, MA. and six years in LaGrange, IL before coming to Saco in March 2004. The Nielsen’s have two grown children, a son and a daughter.

“Doug” and his wife Karen were invited by the First Parish Search Committee for a weekend visit Dec. 5-6, 2003. The new church building was still under construction and Sunday morning worship and church school were conducted at Thornton Academy. Despite a raging snowstorm, the church's Christmas Fair was held on
Saturday in the Fairfield School cafeteria, giving the Nielsen’s an opportunity to meet and greet the many church members who turned out to welcome them. A unanimous vote was taken following the Sunday service with Doug leading the worship and “The Call” to Ministry was extended to the Nielsen’s with a starting date of March 2004. On September 19, (once again at Thornton Academy) an Ecclesiastical Council of the York Association, UCC was convened, followed by a Service of Installation.

Rev. Doug E. Nielsen had the honor and privilege to lead the procession of church members from Thornton Academy down Main Street, Saco into the new First Parish Congregational Church, UCC to worship for the first time on December 5, 2004. It was an emotional event. Small wooden crosses that had been fashioned from a timber salvaged from the burned church were suspended from a red ribbon and placed around each person's neck as he/she entered the building. A TV was set up in the atrium to accommodate the overflow crowd.

In 2005, Doug builds a team. Christian Education was strengthen with the addition of Kris Galasyn as director. Peter Stickney was also hired as organist and choir director.

Since the fire and rebuilding, a major emphasis of First Parish ministry and outreach has been mission, giving back to the community where there is need. First Parish supports the Saco Food Pantry, Bon Appetit Meal Program, mission trips by youth and adults to Honduras and to New Orleans to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina, York County Homeless Shelter, Heifer International, Caring Unlimited, Biddeford Free Clinic, Interfaith Climate and Energy campaign, the Amigos Feeding program for school children in Honduras and countless other local efforts.

The Audio Visual System was completed in 2007. With projectors and cameras we were now able to record our services. This lead to the idea of live streaming services. Rev. Abby Lynn was hired to create more church programs. The facility became home for many activities. Other innovative programs include a Music Series featuring professional artists at well-attended concerts and Saturday Night Coffee House formats give local musicians a time to shine. A Creative Arts Journal *Seeds* is now in its second year of quarterly publication.

A major decision was made in January 2008 at the Church's Annual Meeting. In the aftermath of the fire of August 2000, First Parish received many generous donations from individuals and businesses throughout the local and wider community. It also received reimbursement from its insurance company. Now that the rebuilding process was complete, the church voted to give away the Fire Fund in one fell swoop instead of using
it to support the church's general operation budget. The donation program called “Twelve Weeks of Giving” distributed more than $63,000 to various local, national and global charities.

The first organization to benefit was the Saco Fire Department. Fire Chief Alden Murphy was on hand September 7 to receive two checks—one for almost $4,000 which the department used to purchase a special dryer for its dive equipment. The other for $1,575 which repaired the department's Learn Not to Burn trailer. Other local organizations receiving funding from First Parish include the Biddeford Free Clinic, $1,575; Ruth's Reusable Resources, $1,575; and the church's own New Orleans Work Camp teams, $10,162.

On the state, national and international level, the beneficiaries include the Maine Council of Churches, the Four Directions Development Corporation, the Sharing Foundation, No More Victims and the Central Asia Institute.

The Four Directions Company is a nonprofit established to help improve the social and economic conditions of Maine's Indian tribes by investing in affordable housing and tribal business ventures. The Sharing Foundation is an orphanage in Cambodia. No More Victims helps war-injured children get the medical care they need. The Central Asia Institute helps villages in the Middle East build schools that focus especially on educating girls.

Life's most persistent and urgent question is,“What are you doing for others”. In 2008 this became the theme for our church to open its doors and give to the needy on Martin Luther King Day. Food, clothing and services were given to anyone. This began an annual event with other group participating.

Doug's contract provides him with a Sabbatical after five years of ministry and he is planning for a time of Pastor/Parish Renewal 4/20/09 – 8/16/09. Former minister Rev. Peter Mercer and Director of Program Development Rev. Abby Lynn Campbell provided pastoral duties in Rev. Nielsen’s absence. It worked out well for both the church and Doug. The parish found out it's strengths and Doug re-evaluated his role with the church.

In 2011 we began to develop a new form of governance for the church. It was restructuring, to give the Church Counsel more time to work on the long term issues. Teams were grouped into thee ministries. They were Worship, Assets and Discipleship/Fellowship.

The following year, 2012 was very busy. The By-Laws were revised for the change in governance. The new ministries were formed. We also celebrated our 250th Aniversary. Several events occurred during the year. It was during this year that we learned that Karen Nielsen had cancer.
After more than a years discussion, a Stephen Ministries program was begun in 2013. Rev. Peter Gray assumed the position of coordinator. Several individuals were sent out for training and the program was started.

In 2014, we celebrated our tenth anniversary in the new building with a repeat of the march down Main Street from Thorton Accadimy. It was also the tenth anniversary of Doug, Peter Stickney and Kris. It was a sad time when Karen Neilson passed away.

Doug Neilson retired in June 2016. A transition task force was created to help with the loss. Their job was to bridge the gap until a search committee could be formed. In the fall Peter Stickney also turned in his notice.

Interum Minister
Rev. Deborah Breault
2016 -

A search committee was formed by January 2017. Jacqueline Savage joined us in July as the new Music Director. Our church profile was completed and we are beginning our search for a new pastor and strong hopes for the future.