



## **Blessed to Be a Blessing Westminster Presbyterian Church from 1887 to Today**

Westminster Presbyterian Church started as a small mission chapel on what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, in Greensboro, NC. A recent survey showed that Westminster had the ninth largest membership among Presbyterian churches (U.S.A.) in North Carolina.

Throughout its history, Westminster has maintained a strong commitment to missions and has tried to be faithful as the body of Jesus Christ. The third oldest Presbyterian church in Greensboro, Westminster was officially organized on Oct. 12, 1887. The genesis of the church came in August 1879, when Greensboro's First Presbyterian Church purchased a lot for a small mission chapel in the 400 block of what was then Asheboro Street. In 1883, a mission chapel was built on the site where Sunday School and worship services were held for the next four years. On October 12, 1887, a commission met and organized the congregation meeting there as Westminster Church. There were 85 members, 80 of whom came from First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro. The first pastor was the Rev. Egbert W. Smith, associate pastor at First Presbyterian. He served Westminster from 1887-1890.

Westminster remained on Asheboro Street until 1958 and replaced its original wooden church building there with a new building in 1913. Following Dr. Smith, Westminster's earlier pastors, (and the year they started) were: Rev. J. Horace Lacy, 1890; the Rev. S. O. Hall, 1893; Dr. Charles E. Hodgin, 1899; the Rev. W. P. Jones, 1937; the Rev. C. D. Mosser, 1949; and the Rev. Marion S. Huske, 1954.

In 1957, with the help of Orange Presbytery, land was purchased at what is now 3906 West Friendly Avenue and the church, with a membership of 202, voted to build a new structure there. Steps were taken to sell the property on Asheboro Street to another denomination. In 1959, the Rev. William D. Varker was called as pastor to Westminster. Services were held at Kiser Junior High while the new church was being constructed. Dedication of the new building, which is the present-day Chapel, was held on May 8, 1960.

Under Rev. Varker's leadership, Westminster began to grow. With this growth, the need for more facilities for the church's Christian education program became obvious, and in 1967 a two-story educational wing was completed. After 10 years, Rev. Varker accepted a call to another church and was replaced by the Rev. Herbert L. Underwood, who served Westminster from 1970-73. Membership at Westminster had reached 571 members in 1971, but by 1974 it was down to 421. Rev. Underwood was succeeded by the Rev. Richard A. Brand, who served the church from 1974-76. During these years, Dr. Joseph M. Garrison served the church on several occasions as interim pastor.

Rev. Varker returned to Westminster on August 21, 1977, and stayed until he retired in 1992. Under his leadership, the church grew again to about 500 members by 1981, and Westminster entered into a major building program, constructing its \$1,448,000 Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall. To help fund the new building, members made gifts and pledges over a five-year period with a loan arranged to cover the remaining cost. The new Sanctuary was completed in time for Westminster to observe its 100th anniversary in 1987. The Rev. John

Redhead, who had retired after many years as pastor of Greensboro's First Presbyterian Church, was guest speaker for the special 100th anniversary dedication program.

Following Rev. Varker's retirement, the Rev. Leighton Culler served as interim minister. During that time, worship at Westminster was enhanced by the purchase and installation of two manual, Schantz pipe organ designed especially for our Sanctuary.

In February of 1993, the Rev. Robert W. Henderson began his ministry at the church. Under his leadership, Westminster tripled its membership from 486 in 1993 to 2,000 in 2007. A contemporary worship service was introduced in 1997, with two additional contemporary worship services added at the Friendly Avenue campus since that time. In January 2005, a third contemporary service at another site was launched. This was the first multi-site effort for the church. The services were first held in at the Greensboro Day School's Sloan Theatre. In 2007, the campus moved from the Sloan Theatre to a former church building owned by Greensboro Day School at 4747 Lake Brandt Road. In addition to increasing the number of worship services, there was a dramatic increase in the church's outreach endeavors, and expanded youth programs during this time.

"Our church is blessed to be a blessing to others," said Rev. Henderson. "Through our worship and Christian education, we seek to bring people into a fuller experience of faith in God and then give them avenues for expressing that faith in very tangible ways by serving others."

In February 2008, Rev. Henderson accepted another call. In October 2009, the Rev. Dr. John S. McCall accepted the call to be senior pastor and head of staff. Rev. McCall had been a seminary teacher and Director of Spiritual Formation at Taiwan Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In July of 2011, Rev. McCall was called to return to the Asian Mission field.

On October 14, 2012, 900+ people celebrated Westminster's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ministry and missions with a joint worship service and lunch at Grimsley High School. Rev. Tom Tewell delivered the sermon and all areas of our music program participated in the meaningful service.

The Rev. Reggie A. Weaver served as Senior Pastor/Head of Staff from June 2013 to May 2014.

In December, 2015 the Rev. Dr. Ernie Thompson was called to Westminster as Senior Pastor/Head of Staff.