

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“A Quick Peek at Our Spiritual Ancestors”

Dr. Bill Barron

Luke 12:48; Acts 3:3-6

May 15, 2022

This morning will not be a traditional sermon but a message of thanksgiving for (1) the saints who established the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church and for (2) First Presbyterian Church downtown that made it possible. It is also a message of thanksgiving for all the saints who have gone before us and helped us grow and learn what being the church means.

Let us pray. Quicken our hearts and minds, O God, to be inspired by what you have done in this church. And to you be the honor, glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Before we look at the formation of Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, it is important for us to acknowledge the global situation at that time. World War II had impacted the United States in profound ways. Our current world order and domestic tranquility are threatened by the War in Ukraine, so we can identify at least in part with those who lived through WWII and struggled physically, economically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our spiritual ancestry is even more extraordinary because of the hardships they had endured.

The dream of examining the possibility of a new church in West Knoxville began in the office of Dr. McGukin at First Presbyterian Church in 1943. A sessional committee was formed to study the possibility because of the number of members of that congregation who lived in West Knoxville. In a meeting in 1945, the congregation at First Presbyterian embraced the dream and overwhelmingly approved supporting a new church.

Providentially, a young Navy Chaplain, Julian Spitzer, who grew up in Knoxville, was returning home in April of 1946 after being stationed in the Pacific Theater in World War II. He was attached as an associate pastor at First Presbyterian with the charge to investigate this possibility of the new church. Julian Spitzer started a Sunday School that was housed in what is now Sequoyah Hills Elementary School in 1946. Things took off from there. In a called meeting of Knoxville Presbytery on May 22, 1947 – exactly 75 years ago next Sunday – 75 people were received into the new church that was formally organized by Knoxville Presbytery as **Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church**.

At a home on Scenic Drive Julian Spitzer was installed as the first pastor on Sunday, November 2, 1947. First Presbyterian secured 6 lots in Sequoyah Hills on which the church now stands and made an additional gift of \$40,000, which was used to buy more property. First Presbyterian even encouraged members of their downtown church who lived in this area to join the new church. Finally, enough pledges were made to borrow money to build the first unit. In 1949 the church moved into its new facility – the chapel and a few offices and classrooms.

Everyone who joined the church following its organization in May 1947 until December 1949 was designated as a Charter Member.

The DNA of this congregation was quickly established. **“To whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48)”** The young church quickly adopted the example of First Presbyterian – not focusing solely on this congregation but feeling God’s call to assist the formation of other churches. They organized Lake Hills Presbyterian which was chartered in 1957 and West Hills, which later left our denomination. Over the next 25 years, Sequoyah Hills sent around 150 members to those two churches and \$50,000 each to support the new congregations. Additional gifts to New Church Development were made through the Presbytery.

Having been housed in a school, the Sequoyah Hills Session voted to house a school. The newly-organized Webb School of Knoxville was started with four students using this church basement and the Chapel. After the second year, the school had outgrown what the church could provide.

Under Dr. Spitzer’s leadership, members of this congregation were involved in the building of Camp John Knox on Watts Bar Lake and in securing Ft. Sanders Presbyterian Hospital in the name of the Church. In later years we welcomed The Korean Presbyterian Church of Knoxville to use our facilities for their worship and fellowship.

From the beginning, this congregation was a neighborhood church! Dr. Spitzer was called on for pastoral care in the community regardless of membership or denomination. This commitment was a firm foundation for even greater ministry to the neighborhood. In the following 43 years, Sequoyah has opened its doors widely to the neighborhood. Boy and Girl Scout troops, McKinnon and Myers, Lockett Playgrounds, recreational basketball, exercise classes, Wednesday Night Suppers, art classes, pottery classes, multiple 12-step programs, community bible studies, Vacation Bible School, afterschool recreation, and the very popular Chancel Choir Christmas Concert. As a matter of fact, several years ago you could come by the church Monday through Friday and find as many who were not members as those who were.

After 32 years as pastor of this church, Julian Spitzer retired in 1979, leaving a legacy of faithful service to others and his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I was blessed to have followed Dr. Spitzer in March of 1981 as the second head of staff and to have inherited the congregation that he had so lovingly nurtured. It retained an orientation toward service to others that was Julian’s passion.

After about a year of focusing on getting to know our members, I was encouraged by the enormous talent and commitment here. We always have a deep pool of talent from which to elect those who will serve as Elders and Deacons and lay leaders. These lay members – not all of them officers – have been wise visionaries and hard workers and are supported well by the church staff. A few examples of these ministries instigated by lay members and endorsed by the Session are listed on a bulletin insert. Please refer to it.

Each of us has the responsibility to use the gifts God has given us for His Glory. You are a part of the legacy of Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church. Whether an elected officer or leader in any capacity, you have the right and obligation to submit your visions for this congregation. Because God is calling YOU to use your time and talents to further the cause of Christ!

Two stories of saints who have gone before us deserve to be told. The first is about **Paul Brown**. Paul served two terms as an elder and many more years as an usher. His business was in Cherokee, North Carolina, 81 miles from this church. He never asked for an excused absence and he never missed a Session Meeting. I suggested that he should ask for an excused absence whenever it was necessary, because of the burden of driving so far. I will never forget his response, “Whenever I have something more important than my vow as an elder, I will ask for an excused absence.” People like Paul Brown are saints!!!

Then there was Mac McKinnon. Mac was a deacon at the time and volunteered to take full responsibility for the upkeep of the church grounds. I saw him working on a hot summer day and went out to speak to him. He was up in years, and I said that the church should be responsible for paying for yard service and that he did not need to give so much time and energy to this cause. Mac said, “It’s my pledge, and I got it from one of your Bible studies.” From the 3rd chapter of Acts where a crippled man was in front of the temple in hopes that Peter and John would give him alms, Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give to you!” Mac said, “Whenever the church feels my work is insufficient, tell me and I will stop.”

Polly Clements and Marion Callaway had groundbreaking roles of leadership by a woman in this church. Women were contributing in multiple roles before this, but in 1970 these two became the first female Elders elected to the Session.

Of course, traditional ministries are vital: worship, funerals, weddings, significant Christian calendar services, enrichment studies, fellowship groups, Christian Education, Youth Ministry, Women’s Ministries. Ushers, flower guild, youth activity hosts, servers, planners, teachers, and musicians are all using gifts God has given to His Glory.

Three goals for the church were established by the Session early in the 1980s. They were to be a (1) Praying Church, a (2) Worshiping Church, and a (3) Giving Church, with the Session modeling these goals for the entire congregation. They have endured over the years, and we continue to be a praying, worshipping, and giving church!

Our giving has been a real sign of faith and commitment, whether to capital campaigns and building programs, the annual budget, benevolences, missions, or support of the ministries of the Presbytery and Christ’s work throughout the world.

Another goal for years in this congregation is posted on our sign outside. **“Inwardly strong and outwardly focused.”** The church staff has been amazingly dedicated, talented, and faithful – the skeleton on which all these ministries have hung. Two associate pastors who have served Sequoyah the longest are **Carson Salyer** for 12 years and **Mark Lampley** for 17 years. In March of 2011 the congregation called Dr. Holton Seigling as the 3rd head of staff and in September of 2019 Dr. Jay Howell became the 4th.

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church is poised for continuing this remarkable history. I can’t wait to see and celebrate what God has in store for us! And to God be all the Glory!! Amen!

Programs and Ministries Envisioned by Our Laity

Church-wide and Women's retreats

Stephen Ministry/Grief Care

Parish Nurse

Advent by Candlelight

Out of the Darkness

Ministries to Jails and Homeless Shelters

Mission Trips (to Appalachia, the Mississippi Gulf Coast , Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Haiti, Guatemala, and Mexico)

Habitat for Humanity

Community Luncheons and Joy Fellowship

Church Camping Retreat

Pond Gap Back-Pack Program

Roses Creek

Bible Studies and Prayer Groups

SHEEP

Food delivery

Wednesday Night Fellowship Suppers

Prayer Chain

Visitation and Transportation

Columbarium

Meals for shut-ins

Library

..... and many, many others