

## The Secrets of the Purple Tub

### A sketchy journey through history

[When it was finally decided how the fiftieth anniversary of the congregation was to be celebrated, there was much discussion and little agreement on what should be written about it. Jane Rosenquist undertook an exploration of a large plastic tub which resides in Mary's Closet. This tub constitutes what Emmanuel has as archives. Here is some of what she found. ]

As I began to work on this article, I began to wonder, what causes people to start a new church, to start a mission? What makes them think that the hard physical work of clearing a “grubby thicket” is worth it? The early records describe nearly every Saturday before groundbreaking spent on the three-acre plot with rakes and shovels, removing dumped debris. Such images of beginning the work of establishing a new congregation don't seem attractive. In fact, reportedly Pastor Reissig stopped a dump truck in the roadway, and got him to take away a load of rocks and debris on one occasion ... and gave the driver a \$20 bill.

Here, the new congregation has gathered at their new property, Proudly announcing to the world that Emmanuel has begun its work.



The more I read in the great purple tub (the repository of most of our historical information), the more I realized that these were special people ... and yet they were ordinary. Jeanne Timken, one of the first leaders of the Sunday School, saw this and began a scrapbook with copies of bulletins and photos of the new Sunday School. It did not start large. Bob Weise reports in his musings for the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary that Pastor Reissig succeeded in gathering 49 Charter members during the first year ... through door to door house calls in the new church area. However, the records note that it took fifty calls to get one household to “sign up.”



The Board of American Missions called Frederick E. Reissig, Executive Secretary of the Washington Council of Churches, on November 9, 1960. He was called initially as a mission developer, and later as pastor, and stayed until June 30, 1965, when he retired. During this period we also saw the establishment of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) by merger of several smaller church bodies, and Emmanuel was one of the first congregations to adopt the LCA constitution.

Pastor Frederic E. Reissig and his wife, Florence.

There were many “firsts” in our church record. The first worship service was April 16, 1961, and the first church school session was in September of 1961. The first baptism was October 8<sup>th</sup> of 1961, and the organization of the congregation was December 10<sup>th</sup> of 1961. Pastor Reissig wrote to the congregation on the occasion of its organization that “*we now belong together, and together we belong to Christ.*” Our first choir appeared on January 7, 1962, and our first confirmation service on June 10, 1962. At the first worship service, held at Burning Tree Elementary School, there were 145 in attendance (many of whom were members and the choirs of Augustana Lutheran of DC) and at the first service after the organizing service 34 attended!

Ellen and Jim Herd, in reminiscences prepared for a later anniversary, talked about Emmanuel's tradition of tables of twelve for Maundy Thursday services. Apparently, because of the high cost of renting the school facilities for Maundy Thursday services, Pastor Reissig set up a communion table of twelve for members in his garage. This custom continued on (though not in the parsonage garage after the chapel was built.)

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This group of “ordinary” people was extraordinarily faithful. Each knew he or she would be missed if they were not present. So they did pass the initial test of a mission congregation – they survived the first summer of their vacation days. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1961, a group of six couples met at the parsonage (on Tulsa Drive in Bethesda) and engaged in sufficient planning so that Pastor Reissig concluded that the future of the church was assured.

Church school classes began on September 17<sup>th</sup> of 1961, and were divided into kindergarten, primary and junior. An “intermediate” class was added later. Of those we recognize from our recent past, Jeanne Timken taught the “juniors,” and Scudder Georgia the Intermediates. 31 children were enrolled. The Adult class, a 30-minute period after the morning service, was popular. It was called the “Talk-it-Over” class.

They began with fifty new Service Book and Hymnals [the old Red Book], a gift from the Board of American Missions. Gifts were provided from churches in the area, as well as individuals. December 10, 1961 was “Organization Sunday.” At this meeting they organized, adopted a constitution, elected six deacons and six trustees, which formed the Board of Administration. Seventy-one baptized persons were received into membership; 41 confirmed and 30 children.

At the end of this first year of ministry, characterized by calls, one child baptism, weekly confirmation class, preaching thirty-one sermons, he states that the end of his first year of service here would be remembered “for both its frustrations and its joys ... we are now convinced that our name ‘Emmanuel’ is proving to be true in our church life — ‘God with us’.” The congregation initially was supported by Augustana Lutheran Church’s Board of American Missions, New York Conference, whose place was later succeeded by the Lutheran Church in America’s Board of American Missions after the merger that formed the LCA. Some of the early players from the Board of American Missions included Rev. Reuben A. Lundeen, Dr. Theodore E. Matson, and Dr. Henry J. Hokenson. They offered financial support for architect fees and other costs of building, but also offered much in the way of guidance and non-financial support. The Board of American Missions purchased a parsonage in January 1961 at a cost of \$30,800, and a corner site of 3.1 acres at \$42,930 in July of that year.

Pastor Reissig’s pastor’s report in January of 1962 notes that average attendance at all services from April 16<sup>th</sup> through December 31 (1961) was 39, including the children. He remarked that the church at large could “prepare a liturgical service better suited to the early days of a mission church. Our service is rich and beautiful, but it requires a good singing congregation led by a choir to make it inspiring.” He noted that Emmanuel had always had a good piano player! The groundbreaking for the new church building, the chapel, was in December 1962.



This groundbreaking event is believed to be that for the initial building on the “Grubby Thicket” site in 1962. It looks chilly.

In January of 1963, their total baptized membership was 104 – 61 adults and 43 children, and average attendance was 55. Twenty percent (Dingwall would love this) were in the choir! Reissig looks to the future in this report, noting that while the numbers were small, it was important to turn their attention to the youth of the congregation. Secondly, their constitution called for at least two committees ... and these were evangelism and “social missions.” There was an Emmanuel Church Women’s group, and Pastor Reissig recommended consideration of what kind of men’s ministry would work for this fledgling congregation.

Pastor Reissig retired at the end of June, 1965, to spend more time with family in Rochester, New York (one of his children was pastor of a Lutheran church there) and also to serve part-time for a congregation in Pompano Beach, Florida. In his retirement, he planned to put in book form the children’s sermons he delivered at Emmanuel over four years. [continued on page 7]

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

The Rev. Harry Yeide, of George Washington University, served as interim pastor from July through October 1965. Pastor William Schaeffer began his ministry as Emmanuel's second pastor on November 1, 1965.



Pastor William Schaeffer

Pastor William Schaeffer came from a post with the Lutheran World Federation in Britain to his call at Emmanuel in October of 1965. Previous to this service, he had organized and served two congregations, St. Michael's in Greenville, SC (1948-1951) and Holy Trinity, North Augusta, SC (1951-1958.)

In 1969, he writes that he sees new areas in which to expand: worship and education, social responsibility, and stewardship and evangelism. He thinks about how the church should position itself in the 1970s, as he noted a "plateau" in new members (comparable to other churches' experience in the area at the time.)

In 1969, the educational wing was completed. In 1972, Milan G. Delany, who came to Emmanuel from the Washington Voice of America, joined the church as an associate pastor. He was unpaid, and his work at Emmanuel was the result of a change in "tent-making" rules that allowed Lutheran pastors to work as pastors while holding down outside jobs, just as St. Paul is said to have evangelized while making tents to support himself. Pastor Delany's tenure is interesting, because he brought a Swahili-speaking service to Emmanuel. He was a Czech cleric who was born "on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro," and had previously been a Lutheran missionary in East Africa. His service, and the tenure of the Swahili-speaking congregation, ended with his death in 1978. He also supported a Czech ministry beginning in the early 1970s which continues to this day, although not with a Czech-speaking pastor.



Pr. Jan P. Lookingbill

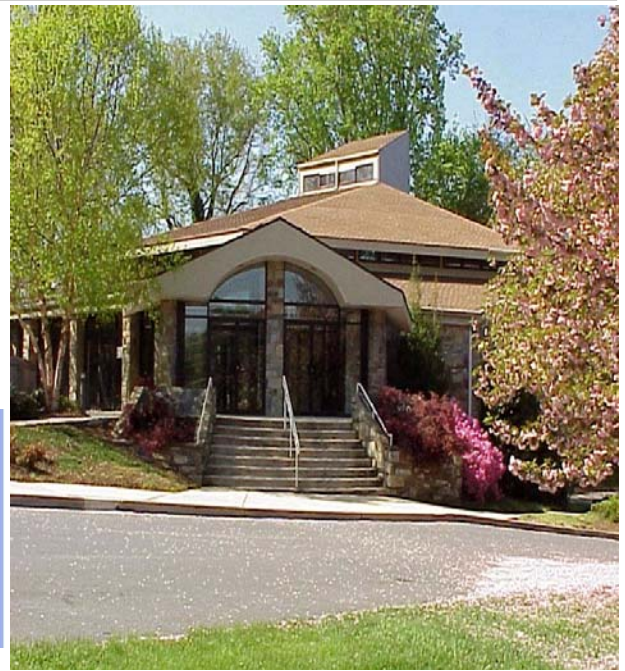
In May of 1979, Pastor Jan Lookingbill was called to serve Emmanuel. Pastor Lookingbill came from a congregation in East Baltimore, a more urban environment. Four years later the congregation voted to support the construction of a new sanctuary and ancillary facilities. Emmanuel broke ground on its new sanctuary in June of 1988 with the theme *Built on a Rock*. Member families brought rocks that were incorporated into the new Sanctuary's foundation. Mary Kruse (for whom Mary's Closet is named) writes about the rocks for the foundation. She noted her own rock proclaimed "on this rock I will build my church - Matthew 16:18", her husband Jack wrote on his "building to enhance God's word," and George and Barbara Baglin wrote on theirs: "My hope is built on nothing less."



Statements of faith incorporated in the Sanctuary's foundation.

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The new sanctuary was dedicated in 1990. The "cross tower" is shown peeking over the roof top. In springtime, the cherry tree at the right seems almost to glow



The cross window in the "cross tower". The altar at the foot of this window is the focus of our weekly worship.



The new sanctuary, built in 1990, is familiar to most of us, and is notable for the large "cross tower" that is incorporated into the design of the window. In October of 2002, Emmanuel broke ground on a new parish education and administration wing. This new project provided 7300 square feet for administration, education, parish life, worship and music, and youth. As part of the dedication of the new facility, the congregation collected rocks to form part of the foundation, decorated with a favorite Bible verse, prayer or symbol, just as it had done when the Sanctuary was built.

In several places we learn of the individuals who helped build the church. They were not all those "first" pioneers of the early 60s. Many, like Jack Kruse, took their responsibilities as "head usher," or greeter, quite seriously. In one tale, Emmanuel had a larger than usual congregation, and Jack obtained all the hymnals he could ... including Pastor Lookingbill's, with his sermon notes inside. It turns out the individual holding the "special hymnal" was Judy! Ellen and Jim Herd wrote about their many memories ... from the confirmation of their four daughters by Bill Schaeffer, the weddings of their daughters and nephews, to the baptisms of their grandchildren by Pastor Lookingbill. It is a treasured tradition when Pastor Lookingbill walks the aisles of the sanctuary to "introduce" those newly baptized to their larger family, the congregation.

The great purple tub offers many glimpses of Emmanuel as it grew ... the faces changed, the players were sometimes different. Gail Keeney writes in 1986, when the theme was *25 Years of Witness*, that the buildings at the intersection of Seven Locks and Bradley Boulevard somehow told the story ... "and Emmanuel stands on the southeast corner and gives witness to the fact that, though we are all surrounded by government and business and traffic and the daily routine, God is with us."

An early choir in the Schaeffer era, captured in full throat by Bill Moser.

