

**AN ECUMENICAL “MOMENT”:
ST. BARNABAS CHURCH OF ARLINGTON, TEXAS, 1977–1986**

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Church historian Albert Cook Outler (1908–1989) of Southern Methodist University (SMU) defined ecumenism as a new theological consensus and argued that following Vatican II (1962–1965) the “post-liberal laity” led a Great Reversal or Ecumenical Union among churches.¹ While many Christians embraced ecumenism, church bureaucracies fell short of fully embracing this effort. This paper explores the limitations of ecumenism at St. Barnabas Church of Arlington, Texas, as a case study. This is a story of a hybrid Methodist-Presbyterian congregation that quickly grew into a successful church community only to have its ecumenical hopes dashed by church bureaucrats in the 1970s and 1980s. Dubbed St. Barnabas, honoring the New Testament’s great “encourager,” St. Barnabas Church’s unlikely formation was, some said, an “ecu-manical” event.

Twentieth-century ecumenism first began among Protestants at the world missionary conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, where delegates proposed ecumenical union in June, 1910. Vatican officials denounced church union, but in 1936 the Church sent Augustin Bea, S.J., to the international conference on biblical scholarship, hinting at Vatican II’s shift towards ecumenicity. Ecumenists like Outler seemed rather surprised with Vatican II’s unionist calls as overseen by popes John XXIII and Paul VI. Vatican II observers, including Outler, characterized ecumenicity as a type of ecclesiastical United Nations. Using an automobile-age metaphor, Outler likened the new zeitgeist to an ecumenical “traffic jam,” with many new cars and drivers at the same intersection—“some honking, more just quietly waiting for someone else to move and no adequate traffic controls anywhere.”² Such controls could have included Vatican II’s “Great Reversal” as casting a wider net to incorporate all Christians, including Protestant churches established in the 1700s or 1800s. What actually happened, however, is that Roman Catholic ecumenism focused upon reunification with Eastern Orthodoxy, essentially picking up where the two churches left off at the great East-West schism of 1054. When Vatican officials broached the subject of Catholic-Protestant unity, their conversations adhered more directly to Lutherans and Calvinists.³ Undaunted, Outler presented the United Methodist Church’s

¹ Albert Outler, “The Ecumenical Movement and the Cause of Christian Unity: A Memoir and a Prospectus, COCU paper for Gerald Maede, Sept. 9–10, 1977,” in file 9, box 1087A, Albert Outler Papers, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University; Leicester Longden, ed., *The Ecumenical Theologian* (Anderson, IN: Bristol House, 2001), 261.

² Outler, in Longden, 146.

³ Outler, in Longden, 109–139, 167, 214, 215.

official ecumenical outreach to the Vatican on October 3, 1970.⁴

The ecumenical ethos signaled by Vatican II had a much wider impact upon the Christian faith worldwide than the Roman Catholics' preferred conversation partners. The language of ecumenicity became commonplace among American Protestants. Church leaders across the United States, including those in the Texas Sunbelt suburbs of Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth, were no exception. In response, suburban Methodists and Presbyterians in Arlington, Texas, formed St. Barnabas Church—the first multi-denominational Protestant Christian church in Texas.⁵

Postwar Origins

In the years following World War II, Christians in the United States faced great challenges both at home and abroad that challenged and renewed their faith. Global conflict spawned a Cold War between the capitalist western world and the communist east. In response to communism's doctrinaire atheism, Christian churches in the United States experienced a rise in membership during what some historians have labeled the “fourth Great Awakening.”⁶

In October, 1947, the World Council of Churches began publishing *The Ecumenical Review* to provide “a worldwide fellowship of churches seeking unity, a common witness and Christian service.”⁷ This broader ecumenical approach to Christian unity inspired the American theologian Reinhold Neibuhr to finally publish his “Serenity Prayer” (1951), which he had been using in sermons since 1932.⁸ Ecumenism percolated in the Lone Star state after World War II. In 1953, the Texas Council of Churches

⁴ Albert Outler, “An Olive Branch to the Romans, 1970’s Style,” in Kenneth Rowe, ed., “Discovery,” *Methodist History* (January, 1975): 52–56.

⁵ *Dallas Morning News* journalist Bill Kenyon claimed in the *Dallas Morning News* (“Denominations Join to Form a New Church,” Oct. 8, 1977) that St. Barnabas was the third ecumenical church in the United States. He may have alluded to two previous ecumenical churches: the United Churches of Christ (1957) and Churches Uniting in Christ (1962), composed of the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church, USA (United Church of Christ, “About Us: The Church of Firsts,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/>, accessed Jul. 11, 2017; The Episcopal Church, “Ecumenical Relations,” http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/eir/110055_42093_ENG_HTML.htm, accessed Jul. 11, 2017).

⁶ Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago, IL: U Chicago P, 2000), argues that the “fourth” religious revival in American history began in the 1960s, but the ecumenical movement suggests an earlier start (“A Brief History of the United Methodist Church,” in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* [Nashville: United Methodist Publishing, 2016], 23).

⁷ *The Ecumenical Review*, published quarterly by the World Council of Churches since 1947, was the former publication of the American Committee of the World Council of Churches (World Council of Churches, “What is the World Council of Churches?” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>, accessed June 22, 2017). For more on how World War II created a catalyst for the American ecumenical movement to influence churches in Germany, see Karl Heinz Voigt, “The Influence of the U.S. Federal Council of Churches on the Ecumenical Organizations in Germany” *Methodist History* 51:1/2 (2012–2013): 61–72.

⁸ Fred R. Shapiro, “Who Wrote the Serenity Prayer?”, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Apr. 28, 2014), <https://www-chronicle-com.ezp.tccd.edu/article/Who-Wrote-the-Serenity-Prayer-/146159>, accessed Sept. 15, 2018.

formed in part because many Texas Methodists had supported the National Council of Churches (NCC). NCC's denominations of Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African-American, and Living Peace churches represented 100,000 congregations or about 45 million people.⁹ The Methodist Bishop of the Texas General Conference, William C. Martin, also served as NCC president from 1952 to 1954.¹⁰

Although some Texas Methodists had strong ecumenical connections, the movement faced persistent obstacles. Mainline denominational identities remained while Jim Crow laws foiled pan-racial collaboration.¹¹ While the Perkins School of Theology at SMU desegregated as early as 1950, in the nearby suburb of Arlington, public high school integration did not begin until 1965, with Arlington High School's class of 1967 becoming the first to graduate African-American students.¹² Integration of institutions like churches and schools occurred haltingly, if at all. In a televised *Meet the Press* interview on April 17, 1960, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously observed that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in America, explaining that "I think that the Christian church should be integrated and that any church that stands against integration, and has a segregated body, is standing against the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ, and [therefore] it fails to be a true witness." Dr. King added: "I might say that my church is not a segregating church—it is segregated—but not segregating. It would welcome white people."¹³ Many divinity students of King's era, the 1950s and 1960s, paved the way for desegregation. A generation of Perkins students found inspiration from the example of ecumenicity advocated by the NCC and from Professor Outler himself.¹⁴

While Outler and others made foundational contributions, a local secular supporter of ecumenism was the young popular mayor of Arlington, Texas, Tommy Joe Vandergriff (1926-2010), whose political tenure stoked the fire of ecumenism from 1951 to 1977. Vandergriff's influence among churches dovetailed from his ability to attract businesses and international attention for Arlington, which one city booster nicknamed "nobody's suburb." Vandergriff's audacious achievements catapulted Arlington from a farming community of less than 8,000 residents to an industrial-urban nexus of over

⁹ "About the National Council of Churches," <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/about-us>, accessed June 22, 2017.

¹⁰ W. Vernon, R. Sledge, R. Monk, and N. Spellmann, *The Methodist Excitement in Texas* (Dallas: Texas UM Historical Society, 1984), 318.

¹¹ Vernon, et al., 342, reinforcing the opinion of *The Texas Methodist*, Aug. 9, 1968.

¹² Vernon, et al., 320; Cathy Brown, "No Blackboard Jungles Despite Changing Demographics," *Dallas Morning News* (Oct. 14, 1998), 7A.

¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on *Meet the Press*, Apr. 17, 1960, episode, https://youtu.be/1q881g1L_d8, pub. on Apr. 29, 2014. Rice University sociologist Michael Emerson defines a segregated church as one that has 80 percent composed on one ethnic/racial group and has found that 92 percent of churches remain segregated.

¹⁴ Albert Outler, "An Olive Branch to the Romans, 1970's Style," 52–56; Ted Campbell, "Albert Outler and the Heart of the Christian Tradition," *Methodist History* 48.2 (January, 2010): 116. Consequently, while a student at Perkins, future Central Texas conference Bishop John Russell claimed that "Dr. Outler was my favorite professor" (J. Russell, interview, Jan. 10, 2018).

350,000 residents by the turn of the twenty-first century. Economic and industrial settlements which came to Arlington included a General Motors plant (1954), Lake Arlington (1956), the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike (1957), Six Flags Amusement Park (1961), Tarrant County College (1965), the University of Texas at Arlington (1967), the Texas Rangers Baseball Club (1971), and Dallas-Fort Worth Airport (1974). Vandergriff's international outreach to Germany occurred at one of the austere moments of the Cold War in Europe, represented in the 1951 mutual recognition of Arlington and Bad Königshofen, Bavaria, as a sister cities.¹⁵

Mayor Vandergriff's leadership in the development of local government, business expansion, and international interest affected the city's culture, including the trajectory of First Methodist Church (FMC) in downtown Arlington. In 1954, following an unimaginable third fire and reconstruction effort, FMC continued to see an increase in membership with nearly 2,700 members by 1963, averaging 778 worshippers weekly.¹⁶ Not coincidentally, the church built a chapel in 1965 and appropriately dedicated as the Vandergriff Chapel. Church growth mirrored the Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth population boom, inspiring area Methodists to form a new ministry for church development. Based on an outreach ministry in Houston, Texas, the Houston Methodist Board of Missions, Fort Worth Methodists created the Metro Board of Missions on December 1, 1965. Like its Houston counterpart, the Fort Worth-based Metro Board was both a central-city ministry and an agency for new church development—an unusual pairing of agencies which usually compete for benevolent dollars. With this new venture, a new model for pastoral leadership would be required to negotiate such overlapping ministries and simultaneously transact property development in the midst of tremendous population growth.

In 1967, Rev. Gilbert Lee Ferrell (1924–2018) left a suburban pastorate at Overland Park, Kansas City, to serve as the Metro Board's third president. After By-laws based on the *1964 Discipline* were adopted on November 2, 1967, Rev. Ferrell dug into the work of searching for potential church properties to meet the needs of new residents throughout Tarrant County, especially Arlington—the county's fastest growing suburb at the time.¹⁷ Located between Fort Worth and suburban Grand Prairie, Arlington's two areas of booming growth lay north and south of the Texas & Pacific Railroad.¹⁸ To gain a foothold into the world of Sunbelt suburban development, Ferrell

¹⁵ "History of Arlington--Hall of Mayors: Tom J. Vandergriff," <http://www.arlington-tx.gov/history/hall-mayors/tom-j-vandergriff/>, accessed Jan. 5, 2018.

¹⁶ *A Century of Service: A Pictorial History of the First United Methodist Church, Arlington, Texas* (Arlington, TX: First United Methodist Church, 1978), 29.

¹⁷ "Metropolitan Board Executive Committee Meeting," folder 12, box 8.5.4, Central Texas Archives, UMC, 2201 E. Park Row Drive, Arlington, TX.

¹⁸ The Cumberland Presbyterian Rev. Andrew Hayter (1818–1900) surveyed a 320-acre half-section of land for the T&P Railroad that he dubbed "Arlington" and helped start many churches across the state in the second half of the nineteenth century (Andrew Hayter State Historical Marker, 2013, digital collection, AHS 00757, Arlington Public Library, Arlington, TX).

maintained regular contact with community researchers, city planners, realtors, and builders. Acting on behalf of the Methodist Church, Rev. Ferrell oversaw purchases and financing for land, buildings, parsonages, new construction, capital improvements, as well as fund-raising for pastor salaries and programs.¹⁹

With Texas Methodist leaders poised to support ecumenism theologically and financially, the next natural step would be to partner with another ecumenically-minded church. Rev. Ferrell placed a telephone call to Mayor Vandergriff—whom Ferrell called "our secular bishop"—and asked if the mayor would facilitate a meeting for cooperative church development.²⁰ Vandergriff's role echoed an observation by Outler (and others) that because denominations did not share any hierarchy and the NCC had no authority to provoke ecumenical ecclesiastical development, churches had to turn to a "secular" authority. Ferrell's appeal to Mayor Vandergriff, as a "secular bishop," made sense: Vandergriff was a lifelong Methodist known for his service to the church and his witness of faith. The mayor wrote to local church heads (bishops, presbyters, etc.) and invited them to a lunch meeting on March 6, 1972, to explore "collaboration over competition."²¹

"Everyone favored cooperation," Ferrell recalled, "But how to make it happen was the next challenge."²² About eight denominations participated in the initial conversation, but after some consideration of denominational differences, the Methodists and Presbyterians found more common ground. The two denominations' leaders had attended the same theological seminaries, both accepted the ordination of women, they were using the same Sunday school curricula, and both accepted the practice of infant baptism. Polity and history divided them: Wesleyanism and Calvinism emerged and developed in different times in different contexts. Both of their histories and theological trajectories informed their ecclesiological structures in ways that might initially appear to have much in common.²³ What they would find in common is what Outler and others prescribed, namely, a focus upon communication, understanding, and emphasizing common ground between sectarian difference.²⁴

¹⁹ Gil Ferrell, "Perspectives," *United Methodist Reporter, Kairos: Metro Board* special ed. (Jan. 30, 1976), in *Central Texas Methodist*, 2; "Metro Board Launches Permanent Fund Drive," *The Texas Methodist* 124.23, Central Texas Conference ed. (Nov. 18, 1977), 1, clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library; "Congregations Build for Ministries," *Kairos: Newsletter of the Metropolitan Board of Missions* (Nov. 2, 1978), 1, clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

²⁰ Allan Saxe, *Politics of Arlington, Texas* (Austin, TX: Eakin, 2001), 55, 108.

²¹ "Happy Birthday, Barnabas!" flier, n.d., from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

²² Gilbert Lee Ferrell, interview, Jan. 23, 2018.

²³ "A Brief History of the United Methodist Church," in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 11–24; and Linda Waits, "Innovative Test," *Arlington Citizen-Journal* (July 15, 1977), clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

²⁴ Bishop E.J.M. DeSmedt of Bruges, spokesman for the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity at Vatican II, laid out nine conditions critical to an ecumenical attitude of Christian love on Nov. 19, 1962 (Longden, 72).

The Founding of St. Barnabas Church

Rev. Ferrell, called the “dean of urban church planners,” thought of ecumenism as related to central-city ministries. Cities had a multiplicity of denominations—in Texas, commonly Presbyterians, Lutherans, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Methodists—so, Ferrell concluded, urban church development should occur ecumenically. As such, he forged ahead and guided the Metro Board to invest in future church sites throughout Tarrant County, ambitiously catapulting Methodists ahead of their would-be ecumenical partners. By 1974, before any formal ecumenical agreement between Methodists and Presbyterians, the Metro Board had already purchased the property that would become St. Barnabas Church. This “Sargent property” included a house on eight acres costing \$75,000.²⁵

With property in hand and the spirit of ecumenism alive, Bishop William McFerrin Stowe (1913–1988) of the CTC collaborated with Presbyterian leaders, including: Rev. John Cunningham, General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Trinity; Rev. A.M. Hart, General Presbyter of the Presbytery of the Covenant; and, Rev. Harold Byers, director of congregational development for the United Presbyterian Program Agency.²⁶ Meeting on January 10, 1975, all agreed to support a “reciprocal new church development” covenant. Since the Methodist Metro Board already purchased said property, the group agreed to a 60/40 split of future development costs. While this decision seemed to make sense at the time, it ran aground on the shoals of church bureaucracy later, as St. Barnabas’ membership evolved. At this meeting they also decided that a Methodist pastor would lead the first ecumenical church—to be followed, according to some reports, by a subsequent Presbyterian-led ecumenical church.²⁷ A supervisory committee formed and

²⁵ The property took its name from its then owners, Charles Ivan Sargent and his wife, Florence (Frankie) Campbell Sargent. Charles was a friend of Ferrell’s from Polytechnic Methodist Church in east Fort Worth; Florence was a CTC board member. Like so many other families in the Texas Sunbelt, they were seeking to transition their property from a farm into a suburb (Gil Ferrell, “Perspective,” *Kairos: Metro Board*, special ed. [Jan. 30, 1976], in *Central Texas Methodist*, 2; “St. Barnabas Church makes history as a joint venture,” *The Central Texas Methodist* [Aug. 19, 1977], 1; and “Rev. Weldon Haynes, Pastor, St. Barnabas Church,” *Arlington Church Directory*, n.d., clippings from St. Barnabas UMC Library). Details of sale found at “Bill of Sale,” dated Jun. 10, 1974, in folder 4, box 8.5.4, Central Texas Archives, UMC, 2201 E. Park Row Drive, Arlington, TX; Board of Directors’ Meeting, July 9, 1974, excerpt, *Memories: St. Barnabas Church*, scrapbook from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

²⁶ *United Methodist Church Central Texas Conference Annual Journal*, 128 (hereafter cited *1974 Journal*); *1975 Journal*, 118; *1976 Journal*, 113; *1978 Journal*, 121; *1979 Journal*, 131; *1980 Journal*, 132; *1981 Journal*, 135–136; and “South Arlington to get a second new congregation,” *Kairos: Newsletter of the Metropolitan Board of Missions*, 2.4 (May 24, 1977). Bishop Stowe spent a good bit of time at groundbreaking events in the booming Sunbelt suburbs of DFW (“Hurst breaks ground,” *Texas Methodist* [Jun. 11, 1976] 1). Hurst UMC grew from 1,800 to 2,200 in just three years.

²⁷ “St. Barnabas Church makes history as a joint venture,” 1; “Rev. Weldon Haynes, Pastor, St. Barnabas Church”; and “St. Barnabas is constituted,” *The Texas Methodist: Central Texas Conference Edition*, 124.22 (Nov. 11, 1977), 1.

declared June, 1977 as the starting date of the new church.²⁸ For a church name, Rev. Ferrell chose his favorite character in the New Testament: Barnabas, or "son of encouragement," citing Acts 4:36.²⁹

Choosing a leader for this ecumenical venture carried a great deal of weight, given the high hopes and pioneering nature of the church plant. A leader would be needed who would be able to respect denominational differences while simultaneously syncretizing practices. This pastor would need to be youthful, experimental, dynamic, and an engaging master of both Presbyterian and Methodist liturgies. Bishop Stowe had just the right person in mind.

A Methodist of Santa Anna, Texas, Rev. K. Weldon Haynes graduated from Santa Anna High School in 1961, where he met his future wife, Arlene Welch. Haynes went on to receive a bachelor's degree from McMurry College in Abilene, Texas, and a master's degree from Perkins. When first approached about the idea of organizing a new church in southwest Arlington, Haynes balked, which was perfectly understandable given the situation and where he was coming from. Haynes had served as an associate pastor at the thriving First United Methodist Church of Richardson, Texas.³⁰ Not only was St. Barnabas to be a new church that needed to be organized, but it was to be an experimental Methodist-Presbyterian coalition.³¹ What career church pastor would take such a risk? Reflecting on his decision a few years later, Rev. Haynes said the Holy Spirit guided him to accept Bishop Stowe's offer of an "empty" church.

With their daughter Elizabeth the Haynes family moved into the parsonage at 6322 Orchard Hill Drive in Arlington, which had been purchased by the Metro Board on May 17, 1977, for \$43,200.³² The 3-bedroom, 2-bath home of 1,658 square feet, located minutes from the "Sargent property" on Old Pleasant Ridge Road, would be their home for the next seven years.³³ A fabulous pianist, Arlene became as integral to the new church as her husband, assisting every step of the way, connecting with other families, and providing all worship music. Daughter Elizabeth attended nearby Little Elementary, which became the seedbed for many St. Barnabas families. Armed with a list of names of families provided by the CTC's ecumenical supervisory committee, Rev. Haynes mailed information about the new

²⁸ "Happy Birthday, Barnabas!" flier, n.d.; "South Arlington to get a second new congregation"; and *Monday Morning: A Magazine for Presbyterian Ministers* 42.17 (Oct. 3, 1977): 20, from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

²⁹ Gilbert Lee Ferrell, interview, Jan. 23, 2018.

³⁰ First Church, Richardson, continues to thrive, reporting 6,000 members who worship at the fourth location of the church since its founding in 1886 (First UMC of Richardson, "About Us—Our History," http://www.fumcr.com/history_timeline-2016, accessed July 11, 2017).

³¹ St. Barnabas booklet, church library, n.d.; *1977 Journal*, 86; "St. Barnabas Church makes history as a joint venture," 1; "Rev. Weldon Haynes, Pastor, St. Barnabas Church."

³² "Metro Minutes extract," dated June 1977, in folder 4, box 8.5.4, Central Texas Archives, United Methodist Church, 2201 E. Park Row Drive, Arlington, TX.

³³ St. Barnabas booklet, church library, n.d.; Tarrant Appraisal District, www.tad.org, accessed June 5, 2017; *1977 Journal*, 86.

church to surrounding neighborhoods. This mailer showed the new church's location in an old farmhouse atop a hill overlooking farmland and trees that marked the newest part of southwestern Arlington.³⁴

While ecumenicity united Methodists and Presbyterians, another motive for collaboration included economic scarcity during the 1974–1983 “age of limits” which resulted from the “oil shocks” to the end of the recession of the early 1980s. After the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reduced the global oil supply, “stagflation” struck the American economy, the first major economic shock since the Great Depression. Until the mid-1970s, America's unprecedented economic boom of the postwar years had been good for churches: from 1950 to 1970, the number of Methodist churches in Arlington increased from one to six, and a seventh church would soon be planted.³⁵ Arlington continued to grow, but economic realists remained cautiously optimistic. Weldon and Arlene Haynes prepared the first direct-mail invitations for St. Barnabas Church to four thousand households within a two-mile radius. In response, many suburban families of southwest Arlington attended the inaugural St. Barnabas Church picnic. These families and more returned for the first worship service.

On August 7, 1977, the tenth Sunday of Pentecost, St. Barnabas Church hosted its first official worship service. Congregants filed into the farmhouse living room, and there weren't enough folding chairs to go around. The first worship bulletin included two graphics: flame (Holy Spirit) and dove (Peace). “Welcome to the first worship service of St. Barnabas Church,” Rev. Haynes announced. “This is a day we have been working towards for the past two months. We hope that you will want to become a part of the ministry of this church.” Next, Rev. Haynes explained how families should sign-up to bring altar flowers, make coffee, and help clean up and care for the property each week. Clip board sign-up was how Sunday school classes began and how one became an usher or a greeter. Steve Rice, chair of the Worship Committee, solicited donations for the purchase of fifty \$4.50 Presbyterian hymnals and worship books. Arlene Haynes played “All Creatures of our God and King” on her upright piano, followed by an offering hymn, “The Church's One Foundation.” They collected \$600 from 162 worshippers representing 30 families. Haynes' sermon, “The Importance of Foundations,” related to the hymns, and readings came from Joel 2:28–29 and Acts 2:43–47, as well as the Apostle's Creed. “It was a day we had been waiting for and it surpassed all our expectations,” Rev. Haynes exclaimed afterwards in a mailed newsletter. “There was a degree of excitement and enthusiasm that I've not seen in a church in a long time.”³⁶

³⁴ “Announcing . . . ,” mailer, n.d., in *Memories: St. Barnabas Church, The First Ten Years, 1977–1987*.

³⁵ S. Nesbitt, ed., and N. Bennett, comp., *History of Epworth United Methodist Church, 1952–2002* (Arlington, TX: Epworth UMC, 2002), n. p. Arlington's Methodist churches in order of their founding: First, Trinity, Epworth, New World, Church of the Covenant, and Aldersgate.

³⁶ “Order of Worship for August 7, 1977, Tenth Sunday after Pentecost,” in *Memories: St. Barnabas Church, The First Ten Years, 1977–1987*.

Following St. Barnabas' inaugural service, eight families expressed "solid" interest, prompting the church to mail out a directory of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of 31 families intending to join. These families represented an educated class of professionals; some had relocated from out of state (Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, Maryland, and Tennessee) or from other Texas cities (Fort Worth, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin), presumably for better jobs. Most of these transplants had previous church experience. Sending churches included Methodist (22 adults), Presbyterian (7), Baptist (4), Church of Christ (1), Lutheran (1), and unspecified churches (4).³⁷

St. Barnabas Church's inaugural Service of Constitution occurred on October 30, 1977. Bishop Stowe (United Methodist), Rev. Cunningham (Presbyterian), and Rev. Hart (Presbyterian) dedicated St. Barnabas with over 300 people in attendance under tents on the hill overlooking Old Pleasant Ridge Road. One hundred sixty-five charter members were received. "We've dreamed about something like this a long time . . . We're breaking down some walls by establishing a window—possibly even a door—between churches in a new area," proclaimed Rev. Cunningham of the Presbytery of the Trinity. Rev. Hart agreed, saying, "It's right what you're doing, and God's going to bless it." "Jesus prayed that they may be one," Bishop Stowe said, "St. Barnabas is bringing this prayer of Jesus to reality. The beginning is but a prophecy of that which shall be."³⁸ The ecumenical movement as represented at St. Barnabas was the idea of a church to the world, or paraphrasing the epistles of Paul, not one just for Jews but also for Greek Gentiles. By virtue of its existence, St. Barnabas represented a belief that sectarian divisiveness had persisted for far too long, beckoning a call for a new type of non- or post-denominationalism.

Rev. Haynes attributed St. Barnabas' rapid rise to four factors: first, population growth in southwest Arlington; second, strong support from the Methodist and Presbyterian governing bodies; third, good publicity from church publications and local newspapers; and fourth, the variety of denominational backgrounds among a core group of ten to twelve families.³⁹ While most of St. Barnabas' families came from Methodist backgrounds, non-Methodist members served as both a tribute and challenge of ecumenism within a congregation dominated by one denomination. Haynes claims that the tenuous arrangement worked because of the increase in Presbyterian mem-

³⁷ All but one family were two-parent households; one family had four children, five families had three, ten families had two, and eight families had one child each. Occupations included engineer, sales, and education. Most of the families lived in the 76016 and 76013 zip codes, where single-family homes outpaced multi-family dwellings ("St. Barnabas News: What a Beginning!!!" mailer, n.d., in *Memories: St. Barnabas Church, The First Ten Years, 1977-1987*). As may be surmised from the large number of Methodists represented, St. Barnabas exhibited a Methodist character from the beginning.

³⁸ "St. Barnabas Church makes history as a joint venture," 1; *The Presbyterian* 5.39 (Oct. 26, 1977), copy from St. Barnabas UMC Library; <http://www.sbumc.org/history/>.

³⁹ Jan Rhinefort, "St. Barnabas adds to success story," *The Texas Methodist: Central Texas Conference Edition* (Jul. 28, 1978), 1.

bership at the time.⁴⁰ The United Methodists weekly news service, published in New York City, carried the story of St. Barnabas Church to UMC offices in Dayton, Evanston, Nashville, and Washington, DC. Each member at St. Barnabas, the wire-service touted, retained his/her own individual denominational identity—accepting dual church memberships. Still, despite what Haynes or anyone else claimed, the Methodist character of St. Barnabas persisted: “Out of the 200 church members, 67 percent [were] Methodists, 19 percent Presbyterian, and the rest [were] ‘other.’”⁴¹

Early Growth and Struggles

By May, 1978, within just seven months of operation, St. Barnabas grew to 230 full members, 93 preparatory members, and averaged 200 weekly attendees. Overcrowded conditions in the farmhouse necessitated the formation of a building committee.⁴² The Fort Worth architectural firm Jackson and Ayers drew up plans for a 400-person fellowship/worship area, 350-person dining area, kitchen, offices, nursery, and pre-school classrooms. Future plans included additional classrooms, offices, a 1,000-person sanctuary, and a chapel.⁴³ Meanwhile, members implemented new activities and programs: Sunday school classes, youth and children’s choirs, a camping group (the “Bushwhackers”), a baseball team (the St. Barnabas Blazers), and a chartered Boy Scout troop.⁴⁴ All this growth culminated in the building of the new sanctuary, which opened for worship on May 27, 1979, attended by 411 members.⁴⁵ The old days of tents on the hillside—the old campy atmosphere of this so-called experimental ecumenical church—faded with this event. The church had grown so fast, Rev. Haynes told Pat Gordon of the *Dallas Morning News*, that it had outgrown even the newly built facilities.⁴⁶ The CTC no longer had to financially support the church, and by April, 1980, a second building committee began planning for more new construction.⁴⁷ St. Barnabas Church appeared a vibrant and active, idyllic Sunbelt suburban community, offering scouting for boys, baseball for dads, fellowship for moms, camping for the whole family, and a shiny new building.

⁴⁰ Luther W. Henry, Sr., interview, Jan. 4, 2018.

⁴¹ “News in Brief,” *Methodist Make News*, stamped received Oct. 31, 1977, 1; Bill Kenyon, “Denominations join to form new church.”

⁴² “Two Newest Congregations To Begin Construction,” *Kairos: Newsletter of the Metropolitan Board of Missions, The United Methodist Church*, n.d., clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

⁴³ “Barnabas to Begin Building,” *Arlington Citizen-Journal* (Feb. 22, 1978), clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

⁴⁴ *Twenty-five Years in the Light of Christ: St. Barnabas United Methodist Church, 1977–2002*; and “How does a church grow? St. Barnabas a good example,” *Arlington Daily News*, Sun., Feb. 25, 1979, 3, clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library. Boy Scout Troop 445 was chartered in 1979, and had their first Eagle Scout awarded in 1982.

⁴⁵ St. Barnabas booklet, church library, n.d.; *Twenty-five Years in the Light of Christ*; St. Barnabas United Methodist Church, “History,” <http://www.sbumc.org/history/>, accessed June 5, 2017.

⁴⁶ Pat Gordon, “3 denominations find quiet housing in single church,” *Dallas Morning News* (Oct. 21, 1979), clipping from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

⁴⁷ *1980 Journal*, 131; *Twenty-five Years in the Light of Christ*.

While St. Barnabas quenched a thirst for Sunbelt suburban family fellowship, it connected with Christian service in the wider world. The 1970s and 1980s gave witness to a nation thoroughly entangled in foreign affairs, as the Cold War intensified following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution. With the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980, two trends emerged that impacted St. Barnabas. First, the so-called “Moral Majority” gained the ear of the president and first lady. Both supported privatization policies that transferred government social services to local non-profits like churches. This placed a greater economic burden on churches.⁴⁸ Secondly, the government welcomed churches’ support for the renewed assault on global communism. When refugees fled communism, churches in the United States lent a hand. In 1980, St. Barnabas welcomed Laotians who fled communist dictatorship following civil war in Laos (1953–1975). The U.S. government had waged a secret war against Laotian communists.⁴⁹ With mainland China embracing market reforms in the 1970s, Chinese Christians hoped market reforms would lead to freedom of worship. To open doors of ecumenism in the Far East, St. Barnabas held a “study” in which Chinese Christians shared their culture. Another major world event of St. Barnabas’ ecumenical era was the solidarity movement of workers in Poland led by Lech Wałęsa. Polish workers protested rising food prices, work conditions, and low pay at government-run industries. Like the Laotian refugees who found open arms at St. Barnabas in 1980, Polish families turned to St. Barnabas in 1981-1982.⁵⁰

Ecumenical Stagnation

Despite rising global ecumenism, local ecumenical bonds unraveled. St. Barnabas supporter Bishop Stowe retired and was replaced by Bishop John M. Russell in 1980. In Russell’s meetings at St. Barnabas, concerns arose. Methodists new to the area didn’t want to take the vows of the other denomination, critics said. The Presbyterian associate pastor, Rev. J. Mark Davidson, and Rev. Haynes struggled to manage their respective church bureaucracies.⁵¹ Methodist and Presbyterian leadership bodies haggled over which church should choose and oversee pastors at St. Barnabas. Another issue surrounded financial apportionments (offerings); how should apportionments reflect denominational church memberships? Presbyterians and Methodists had agreed on a 60/40 split of apportionments and responsibilities, yet Presbyterian membership briefly peaked at 25 percent. Caught in the

⁴⁸ “Metro Board minutes, Aug. 21, 1985,” folder 13, box 6.5.5, Central Texas Archives, United Methodist Church, 2201 E. Park Row Drive, Arlington, TX. Millie Diane Caldwell, *The Degree of Involvement of Local United Methodist Churches in the North Texas Conference in Community Outreach* (M.S.W. thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 1983), vi–vii, 2.

⁴⁹ William Branigin, “U.S. Allies in ‘Secret War,’” *Washington Post*, May 15, 1997.

⁵⁰ *Twenty-five Years in the Light of Christ*.

⁵¹ “Former St. Luke’s minister dead at 75,” *Oklahoman*, Nov. 25, 1988, <http://newsok.com/article/2246979>, accessed Jan. 4, 2018. John M. Russell, interview, Jan. 10, 2018. Dr. Luther Henry, interview, Jan. 4, 2018.

cross-fire of these challenges, St. Barnabas members—especially Methodist-Presbyterian couples—felt abandoned by the church hierarchy. They had good reason to feel that way, given efforts made by Rev. Haynes and Rev. Davidson. For his part, Davidson had supported the “Peacemaking” movement within the Presbyterian Church (USA) and studied Christian ethics at Perkins during his appointment at St. Barnabas from 1982 to 1983.⁵² One would expect him to remain and cultivate more Presbyterian members during the transition to a new Methodist senior pastor. But, in 1983 when the CTC brought in Rev. Larry Van Zile from St. Stephen’s United Methodist Church to become St. Barnabas’ second pastor, the Presbyterian segment fell in relation to its Methodist counterpart.⁵³ Associate pastor George Terry Faison (PCUSA) served alongside Van Zile but for just a year—not an adequate commitment to an already flagging Presbyterian membership.

St. Barnabas’ growth during the Van Zile years (1983–1986) came due to the growing Methodist segment, which culminated in the addition of a 6,800 square foot Education Wing (1984), the first retreat by United Methodist Women (1984), the payoff of the pasturage (1984), and the hosting of “Break Out ’85,” a missional fair.⁵⁴ Money and Methodists flowed in, which outweighed ecumenicity. Prof. Outler had predicted such an outcome as far back as ten years before St. Barnabas Church even appeared. As titular head of ecumenism among Methodists, Outler had warned of two ever-present dangers: (1) getting stuck in the hand-holding stage of unity, and (2) rushing too fast into unity and getting tangled in dogma, membership, and ministry.⁵⁵ St. Barnabas had its share of tangles and lacked an adequate new set of rules to help navigate the complexities church bureaucrats imposed. Membership at St. Barnabas evolved in an unexpected way, as Presbyterians did not join the church in the same numbers as Methodists. Presbyterian membership peaked at 26 percent in 1978, while at the same time funding 40 percent of the program/building/salary, etc.—more than their membership proportion.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, other Presbyterian churches grew and even the First Presbyterian Church itself moved from downtown Arlington southward as the population of Arlington’s suburbs grew faster than its downtown, which at the same time became increasingly developed for commercial use instead of residential.

Furthermore, doctrinal differences which followed denominational lines

⁵² Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, “Peace Discernment Steering Team Appointed: Group will help PC(USA) determine next steps in its peacemaking witness,” Apr. 6, 2011, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/4/6/peace-discernment-steering-team-appointed>, accessed Jan. 4, 2018. *Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling* (1975), <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/peacemaking/>, accessed Jan. 4, 2018.

⁵³ *1982 Journal*, 79; and *1986 Journal*, 92.

⁵⁴ *Twenty-five Years in the Light of Christ*; *1984 Journal*, 180–181; *1985 Journal*, 117, 157; and Tarrant Appraisal District, accessed June 5, 2017.

⁵⁵ Outler, in Longden, 106. Outler delivered this address at Greensburg, Pennsylvania, on Apr. 19, 1967.

⁵⁶ Jan Rhinefort, “St. Barnabas adds to success story,” *The Texas Methodist: Central Texas Conference Edition* (Jul. 28, 1978), 1.

persisted, thereby limiting the potential influence of ecumenicity. For example, when announcing the special charter service for St. Barnabas Church on October 30, 1977, the First Presbyterian Church promoted an event that directly competing with St. Barnabas, namely, Rev. Warren Neal would be preaching at the new Presbyterian Church in Mansfield, a suburb only 5 miles south.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in a Presbyterian publication intended for clergy readers ran an editorial, "Parson to Parson" by Frank H. Heinze (PCUSA), which derided the ecumenical movement as "ecu-mania" led by "ecu-maniacs," and characterized the lightning-induced burnings of Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic churches as "local ecumenical event[s]."⁵⁸ On the Methodist side of this equation sat CTC's District Superintendent, Luther Henry, who characterized St. Barnabas as an ecumenical experiment that failed due to theological and practical administrative challenges what were too large to overcome.⁵⁹

Mainline church bureaucrats' interest collided with those of an ardent minority of ecumenists. Eager to establish a second ecumenical congregation which would be led by Presbyterians, Grace Presbytery chose a committee, a pastor, and a site for development at 5500 Mansfield Road in south Arlington. Violating their 1975 ecumenical covenant, the Methodists declined to support this site as the covenant's second phase and withdrew from the partnership. According to Presbyterian leaders, the Methodists withdrew because they felt the new church site lay too close (3 miles) to an already-established Methodist church, the Church of the Covenant.⁶⁰ It seemed clear that a single ecumenical church—St. Barnabas Church—located in one corner of a Texas Sunbelt suburb would not get in the way of mainline denominations continuing to develop denominationally.

On Feb. 18, 1986, the Committee on Cooperative Church Development voted unanimously to dissolve the ecumenical partnership between Methodists and Presbyterians. Two reasons cited for this action were that both denominational bodies had continued to develop congregations on their own in south Arlington, and the second ecumenical church with Presbyterian leadership was believed to be outside of the formal partnership. According to the published journal notes: "Without casting blame on anyone for the alterations" in the original ecumenical covenant agreement, "the resulting

⁵⁷ *The Presbyterian* 5.39 (Oct. 26, 1977), copy from St. Barnabas UMC Library.

⁵⁸ *Monday Morning* 42.17 (Oct. 3, 1977), 20, copy from St. Barnabas UMC Library. Albert Outler defined an "ecumaniac" *not* as "somebody who loves other churches better than his own, but as someone possessed by a dream of Christian unity that has always exceeded the limits of common-sense realism" (Longden, 215).

⁵⁹ Pam and Ron Hall, interview, Sept. 18, 2017; Bill and Nancy Manning, interview, Sept. 18, 2017; and Dr. Luther Henry, interview, Jan. 4, 2018. Dr. Henry served as a semi-retired associate pastor at St. Barnabas (2004–2018).

⁶⁰ Betty Sicks, et al., "Twenty-Five Years of Grace," June 21, 2010, *Grace Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Texas*, <http://churcharlington.com/about-grace/history-of-grace/the-history-of-grace/>, Sept. 22, 2017. Today, St. John the Apostle UMC literally shares a property line with Grace Presbyterian Church, which illustrates the persistence of denominational rivalry ("New church decides congregation helps, hinders real ministry," *Texas Methodist* [Feb. 13, 1976], 1).

church is not what was originally approved by the two denominations.”⁶¹ Church bureaucracies ruled the day when it came to the development, funding, and logistics of church sites, so ecumenicity found itself in the proverbial backseat. Without missing a beat in their plans for church development, Presbyterians pushed ahead with the organization of Grace Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Texas, holding their first organizational worship service on April 6, 1986.⁶²

When the era of stagflation ended and the 1980s economic boom set in, economic cooperation in the name of ecumenism withered. With the ending of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1981, followed by the Wall Street boom of 1984–1987, the economic linchpin that once brought Methodists and Presbyterians to “Bishop” Vandergriff’s bargaining lunch table—sharing resources for new church development—fell by the wayside. Presbyterian and Methodist church bureaucracies renewed support for denominational development of new churches. Although Bishop Russell of the CTC oversaw the dissolution of St. Barnabas as an ecumenical congregation, his own family history provides some perspective on how circumstances dictate outcomes. His mother, for example, was raised German Lutheran, but when her family moved to Oklahoma, where there were few Lutherans, they became Presbyterians. Bishop Russell’s father grew up Baptist in Oklahoma and then became a Methodist minister. For a short time in Paradise, Texas, Russell’s father pastored a Presbyterian church to meet a local need.⁶³

Ecumenism was by no means an utterly dead letter for Texas Methodists in 1986. Within the CTC, for instance, Methodist leaders appointed several ordained ministers from four different denominations: Kenneth D. Altfather, PCUSA clergy, to Harris Methodist Hospital in Fort Worth; Jann Aldredge Clanton, Southern Baptist, to St. John’s United Methodist Church in Waco; Gary Lyn Hardwick, Southern Baptist, to the Methodist Home in Waco; and, Robert Lee Tice, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to the First United Methodist Church in Hurst.⁶⁴

A Post-Ecumenical Congregation

When St. Barnabas became a United Methodist church in 1986, little changed. For St. Barnabas congregants, the only paradigm that seemed to matter was family, love, and faith. Many married couples had joined St. Barnabas because one spouse was Presbyterian or Methodist, and the other was not. Records are unclear, but perhaps a dozen or few families left the church as a result of this change; the Presbyterians who left joined the new Grace Presbyterian Church nearby in south Arlington. Whether Methodist or Presbyterian, St. Barnabas Church members, or former members, reminisce about the “ecumenical era,” which has now faded over the years as the

⁶¹ *1986 Journal*, 219–220.

⁶² Betty Sicks, et al., “Twenty-Five Years of Grace.”

⁶³ John M. Russell, interview, Jan. 10, 2018.

⁶⁴ *1986 Journal*, 92.

generation of charter members reaches the latter years of life.

Outler's "post-Liberal laity" who led the Great Reversal (Ecumenical Union) "from below" never materialized at St Barnabas. "Old order ecumenism," a product of the liberal 1960s and 1970s, failed to survive the "Reagan Revolution." While Outler blasted denominational bureaucrats as self-serving and too numerous, he counted himself among the "small coterie of leaders undergoing our own respective ecumenical initiations without finding the right formula for involving either the grassroots churches back home or their bureaucrats back at headquarters." We were, he wrote, "like those old Saxon kings who, when they converted to Christianity, took for granted that their people would follow suit."⁶⁵

The first church among Texas Protestant mainline churches to begin as an ecumenical church combining Methodists, Presbyterians, and others, St. Barnabas—"son of encouragement"—was born of an idea popularized over the course of war and conflict in the twentieth century. The church arose in Arlington because of the region's rapid growth in the decades following World War II and the unique vision of leaders who sought to transform the suburban through experimental ecumenism. In the midst of America's economic and social fluctuations of the 1970s and early 1980s, ecumenicity at St. Barnabas Church faded from the foreground while the economy's fluctuations afforded denominational and bureaucratic haggling. Not even the global influence and excitement of Vatican II, or the United Methodist outreach to the Vatican, or other efforts at ecumenicity could bring about the necessary paradigm shift to realize, as Outler stated in his Kantonen lectures, that "[t]he only Christian unity worth seeking is a community of faith and grace and freedom, truly catholic and vitally evangelical, rooted in the Christian tradition but open and sensitive to the needs of the world."⁶⁶

But for a moment, in Arlington, Texas, St. Barnabas Church attempted to realize and truly embody such a vision of ecumenicity.

⁶⁵ Outler, in Longden, 214.

⁶⁶ Outler, Longden, 225.