

III

GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

It is not surprising the first organizations of which we have record within the church are women's groups. In the Puritan church, women were considered inferior in mind and body. They had neither voice in church affairs nor the opportunities to meet socially. Their primary role was that of motherhood. Abigail Adams had not yet written to her husband John, as he attended the Second Continental Congress in March, 1776, requesting he "Remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than were your ancestors."

Early Stoughton was a farming community. As farmers' wives, the women were employed full-time in the struggle for survival which the role demanded. In order to care for the needs of their families, the women raised and preserved food, cared for and butchered farm animals, spun cloth and made clothes. All this, in addition to bearing and caring for children, as well as the sick and elderly, and maintaining and running a household. The lives of both farm men and women centered around the family unit.

In the early 1800's, many farmers took advantage of the economic opportunities offered by the Industrial Revolution. No longer would their survival depend solely on the sweat of their brows as they toiled on their farms alongside the women and children of their own family unit. Because the men became more aware of the larger community, they participated more actively in community affairs.

About this same time, women, too, started to take advantage of educational opportunities. For many, the missionary societies in the churches were the vehicles which allowed women to move out of their, heretofore, restricted lives of home and pew. In the church societies, the women were able to develop their skills, express their gifts and respond to their faith. Still, they had no vote in church affairs.

The women's groups of which we have knowledge are listed:

"Some Benevolent Charitable Society"
(Name Unknown)

In 1818, a group of women met with Rev. Ebenezer Gay for the purpose of organizing such a society.

Ladies' Reading Circle

Rev. Gay instituted this group in 1819.

The Stoughton Home Missionary Society (Future Ladies' Benevolent Society)

The purpose of this group was to aid in the support of western missions. The year of the Society's formation is unknown, but its constitution was said to have been revised in 1847. The original group was composed of one hundred sixty-four women; later they were joined by eleven men. All meetings began and ended with scripture and prayer. The meetings were held in members homes and lasted all day and occasionally into the evening. According to the constitution, "the meetings shall be spent in work, reading and conversation."

During the Civil War, the members rolled bandages and made clothing for the soldiers. In May of each year, missionary barrels filled with clothing and household goods were shipped to the mission station in Iowa. In 1877, the name of the group was changed to Ladies' Benevolent Society.

Lend A Hand Society

This group of twenty-one women was established March 5, 1890. The object was "to promote a missionary spirit among its members." The Society relied on the Women's Home Missionary Society for direction in performing its work. Later, the members voted not to be an auxiliary of Women's Home Missionary Society, but to work for the Indian school in Nebraska. Lend a Hand also voted to support "a little mulatto girl" so that she might attend a school called "Straight University" in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Lend a Hand was probably the forerunner of the women's group which called itself the Women's Missionary Society. The group was active as late as 1952. In 1953, Women's Missionary Society merged with Ladies' Benevolent Society.

The Foreign Missionary Auxiliary

This group was established in 1903 as an auxiliary to the Norfolk and Pilgrim branch of Women's Board of Missions. The Auxiliary was forerunner of what is known today as Pilgrim District Women of which we are part.

The purpose of the Auxiliary was the Christianization of women in foreign lands, the collection of monies for foreign missionary purposes and the cultivation of the missionary spirit among the members. The members supported missionaries in Africa, China, Micronesia and Turkey. Eventually, the Foreign Missionary Auxiliary merged with Ladies' Benevolent Society, thus uniting home and foreign missions.

Webster Class

This group had originally been the Busy Bees Sunday school class. Their teacher, Abbie Webster, died unexpectedly on Christmas eve 1904. The group stayed together and in 1910 reorganized and renamed the class in memory of their beloved teacher.

The service projects of the Class included distributing cards, candy, fruit and flowers to sick and shut-ins; raising money for a flag pole at the town farm, as well as providing a tree and entertainment there each Christmas Day. The Class also gave a white carnation to each newly baptized child and potted plants to the young children on Children's Day.

The motto of the Class was "Live up to the best that is in you." One source is quoted as saying one of the purposes for the Class's organization was to provide an outreach to the young women who worked in Stoughton's factories.

Miss Fannie Burnham (1860-1942), a school teacher by profession, was a Webster Class teacher for twenty-eight years. She served the Sunday school for sixty years; first as teacher, next as department leader and finally as superintendent.

In a day when there were few social service programs to aid the needy, deaconesses of the church often played an active role in that area. Miss Burnham served as a deaconess for fifty years. Surely, it is persons such as she to whom we look back with much gratitude. They wove the fabric of the church's life with strong, sturdy threads and shining colors.

Philathea Class

This class was organized in 1908 by Rev. Abram L. Bean and Mr. Eaton, high school principal, at the suggestion of Miss May Bird who had come to Stoughton from Dorchester. The group was a Bible study class.

According to by-laws, the objective of the group was to promote among the ladies of the parish an interest in the church and in the needy. An annual pledge was made directly to the church. Other projects were providing music for the choir, new offering plates and, at one time, new church steps.

Ida Goward Guild

In 1933, a group of young married women, feeling they had much in common with each other, withdrew their membership from Webster Class to form a new organization. The group took the name Ida Goward Guild in memory of a much-loved, dedicated deaconess who had met a tragic death.

The Guild's objective was to help the church in all possible ways. Over the years, the group gave gifts of furnishings, choir robes and ministers' robes as well as small gifts to shut-ins at Christmas and layettes to needy mothers.

Congregational Women's Union

In May, 1937, Mrs. Hugh P. Hughes invited to the parsonage the presidents and officers of all the women's organizations to consider federating the groups. On June fifteenth, at a meeting to which all the women of the church were invited, Mrs. Ethel Grabill, state president of Congregational Women's Work, spoke on the advantages of federation. The vote was to form this new organization and to call it the Congregational Women's Union. The organization was formally established and held its first meeting September 13, 1937.

Each individual group would retain its own identity and carry on its own projects and charities as before. The object of the Women's Union was to unite all organizations of the church and all other women, including those who did not belong to a group, into a fellowship of friendship and cooperation for effective service to our church, community and world. The Union would strengthen the church by making the women church-minded, as well as group-minded, and would coordinate their outreach. For many years, Women's Union carried out its purpose with much success.

Women's Fellowship

By 1963 the group attendance figures had dropped sharply. It seemed wise to review and consider further changes. One option under consideration was to eliminate all existing groups including Women's Union and establish a Women's Fellowship. This change would bring all church women into one group. The goal was "to cultivate the spirit of Christ in every area of human life, beginning with our own lives and reaching out to home and community and the uttermost parts of the earth."

Various areas of work were promoted, each with its own chairperson. The areas corresponded to the church committees with a special emphasis on women's contributions to undergird the work of the whole church. Areas of work included Spiritual Life, Christian Education and Family Life, Missionary and Stewardship, Social Action and Friendly Service.

Some of the groups in this church did not relinquish their own identity at this time to become part of the Women's Fellowship. Over the next few years, Ladies' Benevolent Society, Webster Class and the Ida Goward Guild continued to meet.

Each local Women's Fellowship was a part of the state conference Department of Women's Work and could receive help and direction from that source if desired. However, in 1962, the Massachusetts Conference, UCC had established a new Council for

Lay Life and Work. It promoted the theory of men and women working together and discouraged the existence of separate women's organizations. Eventually, the conference Department of Women's Work was eliminated. This action proved a death blow to the women's fellowships in many churches including our own.

However, in 1974, our present Women's Fellowship was reorganized and continued the previous areas of work in service and mission projects. That we were able to do so was partly due to the existence of a strongly committed group of women at the district level who kept the work of Pilgrim District alive in spite of the fact they were no longer receiving help or direction from the state conference. By 1976, the Massachusetts Women's Fellowship was also reorganized. A Pilgrim District woman, Alberta Komich of Randolph, who had fought persistently for the recognition of women's contributions at the state level, was installed as the first state president.

Pilgrim District women are those who belong to the over thirty churches which make up the Pilgrim Association, one of the divisions of the Massachusetts State Conference of the United Church of Christ. District meetings are held spring, fall and winter; each is hosted by the women of a Pilgrim Association church. Their purpose is to help the women of the churches better understand and participate in fellowship, worship, study and action. Three women from our church have served as Pilgrim District president. They are Mrs. Elmer Maltby (Elizabeth), 1935-1938; Mrs. Richard Bailey (Jane), 1966-1968; and Mrs. Clifford Fowler (Amy), 1989-1991.

The Women's Fellowship in our church is open to all, regardless of age. We believe the life of the church family is enriched as we become better acquainted. There is much we can learn from each other. Each meeting consists of a devotional time and a program which might range from a social evening of relaxation to a learning experience and opportunity for service in church, community or world.

The women of the group participate in various service and mission projects. The most enduring one is "Friendly Service." Friendly Service assembles health, sewing and school kits for Church World Service; makes sewing kits for distribution by Boston Seaman's Friend Society and sews patchwork quilts for needy persons, including Church World Service, homeless shelters and Aids babies.

Men's Club

The date of the organization of the earliest men's club is unknown. It is on record that Men's Club was reorganized November 20, 1931 during Mr. Hughes' pastorate. Another Men's Club was organized in January, 1950, early in the pastorate of Mr. Gibson.

Each men's club had the common purpose of bringing together, once a month, men of all ages in the church to enjoy a supper meal and good fellowship. After the meal, the men usually heard a speaker with an inspirational and/or educational message or enjoyed a

musical program, a movie or game time. The men engaged in service projects in connection with the church school and maintenance of the church property.

Youth Groups/Fellowships

The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor (Y.P.S.C.E.)

The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was formed in this church in 1888. The Society's objective was "to promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance and to make them useful in the service of God." The motto was "For Christ and the Church."

The opportunities the Society provided for Christian growth and leadership training resulted in a commitment to the life and work of the church which remained with many throughout their lives. The continuing presence in the Stoughton church of persons so trained as young people was, and still is, a source of strength and hope. The Christian Endeavor Society was active until the late 1940's.

The Y.P.S.C.E. formed a union with like groups in Canton, Sharon, Easton and Brockton. They also sent delegates to state, national and international conventions. In her notes, Frances Chase stated in 1897 a "graphophone concert" was held as a fund raiser to send a delegate to a meeting in Washington.

Pilgrim Fellowship

In the early 1950's, the youth group was called Pilgrim Fellowship. The purpose was to bring together our young people for worship, study, work and play in order to enable each young person to build his/her life on a sound foundation.

Youth Fellowship

The present day youth group has a similar objective. "The members are friends with themselves, with each other and with God" as quoted from a Christian Education annual report.

Youth group activities may be as deeply spiritual as a Good Friday vigil; as serving as catering a church supper; as caring as participating in "Walk for Hunger;" as much fun as planning a dance or ski weekend. Our church's life is enriched by the presence of its young people. Our gratitude to those who serve as their advisors.

Town Clock Club

The Town Clock Club was founded October 29, 1940. The purpose of the club was purely social. Anyone over twenty-one years of age could join. The club's name was chosen because the clock in the steeple of the Washington Street church building was called the "town clock."

The Club contributed to various projects of the church including a scholarship for high school seniors. They also gave to the Easter flower fund and Christmas white gift. After the loss of the Washington Street church building by fire, the Club started a fund in order to buy clocks for the new church. Town Clock was an active group into the 1970's.

Wedded Ring

This young married couple's group was organized in 1950 under the guidance of Rev. John Gibson. The requirement for membership was one member of the couple be under thirty years of age as of December 1, 1949.

The most memorable projects of this group was the annual production of a play for a period of nineteen years. The group also held auctions and served fair and steamed clam suppers for fund raisers.

The recipients of Wedded Ring's outreach were many and varied. It might be a contribution to the Sunday school movie projector fund, a sponsorship of a delegate to summer youth conference, an annual scholarship to a graduating senior or a donation of a resuscitator to the local fire department.

The members repaired and redecorated some of the church property. They staffed the nursery. They paid the first month's rent on the parsonage and helped pay for the Pierce Street land. It is impossible to mention all the ways the church benefited from the generosity of this hard-working group.

In 1970, the name was changed to Friendship Ring. The purpose of changing the name was to allow all members and friends of the church, whether married or single, to join the group.

Icebreakers

Icebreakers was formed in late 1958. The purpose was to welcome all married couples new to Stoughton or to the church; to help them "break the ice" into the fellowship of the church. The group was organized primarily as a social group rather than a working group. Their plan was to help the church financially once a year. Icebreakers participate and

assist in church activities, such as the church fair and its supper, as well as contribute to the Christmas white gift and the summer conference fund for our youth.

Circle of Friends

This adult fellowship group was formed during October, 1992. The purpose was to provide new opportunities for Christian fellowship and service within our church community. Participation is open to all members and friends of the church.

An especially delightful project of this group has been the delivery of spring baskets to church members and friends in special need of cheer. Another project is serving an appreciation brunch in tribute to all the people who bring music to the congregation.

We wish this newest organization a long, happy existence.

Scouting

On June 10, 1914, townspeople were invited to Town Hall to hear a lecture explaining the Boy Scout movement. Mr. Elmer Maltby, chairman of the Board of Trade and a dedicated layman of the First Congregational Church, presided.

In July, Troops 1 and 2 were organized. Troop 2, the one which became Troop 57 sponsored by this church, met at Maltby Business School. Mr. Maltby later became scoutmaster and his son, Freeman, troop mascot.

Over a period of years, the troop met in several different locations, one of which in the 1920's, was our church. When the Board of Trade disbanded its Scout Council (c.1926), the troop obtained its charter from Old Colony Council. The troop continued to be designated Troop 2 into the 1940's.

The first official meeting of Troop 57, sponsored by the First Congregational Church, was held April 4, 1950. The first scout charter under this church's sponsorship was presented on May 2, 1950. The charter is renewed annually.

In August, 1951, Sea Explorer Post 57 was organized. Pack 57 was sponsored by the church in 1952.

From that day to this, the church has been sponsor of an active scouting program. In 1974, Troop 57 held a Court of Honor at the high school at which time ten scouts achieved their Eagle rank.

For many years some of the scouts have chosen a church-related Eagle project, thus making the church the recipient of their labors and training. The outdoor chapel is

mentioned elsewhere in the chapter "Our Six Houses of Worship." Other Eagle projects include turnaround renovations, sidewalk cement project, driveway lines and signs, the walkway to the chapel, the outdoor flag pole and the portable staging for the fellowship hall.

The church facilities have also been available for use by other community organizations that are not church related. In the 1960-1970's, Girl Scout troops of all age levels met at the church. Presently, only a Brownie troop meets. Other groups include Stoughton Police Auxiliary, Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon, Alateen, Weight Loss, and Stamp Club.

IV

OUR JOURNEY

The First Congregational Church of Stoughton, Massachusetts, United Church of Christ, gathered on August 10, 1744, shares a common birthday with all other churches in Christendom. The history of the Christian Church has its beginnings in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the pages of the New Testament.

The second chapter of the Book of Acts describes the gathering in Jerusalem of the apostles to observe the Jewish harvest festival of Pentecost. It goes on to tell us how the house was filled "with a sound from heaven like a mighty wind" and how "there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributed and resting on each one of them." The apostles began to speak, and to the wonderment of all, devout Jews "from every nation under heaven" were able to understand their words. From this moment, the apostles were enabled and empowered to teach and preach the good news of Jesus Christ as they had been commissioned to do. It is this moment that is sometimes referred to as the "birthday of the Church."

The term "church" comes from the Greek word "ecclesia" meaning "those who are called." It denotes an assembly or congregation of believers.

Through the succeeding centuries, history shows from the time of the first gathered church in Jerusalem, the church has had as its conscience, men and women who warned of losing sight of the elements on which it was founded. These are faith and hope in the only Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, love for Him and his followers and the power of the Holy Spirit.

History also tells us from the beginning this vigilance has cost the believers dearly. Church tradition says each of the twelve disciples, with one exception, met a violent death because of his faith. For almost two thousand years, it has been ever so. The story up to the present day is one of power struggles, religious wars, conflicts, cruelty, persecution and death.

Congregationalism began without a name, but as a way of belief. It developed as a system of church doctrine and government based on the principle that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and all Christian congregations are related to each other through Him. Because He is present in each, each has the authority to govern itself freely. It was not until the early colonization of New England that Congregationalism took shape and was recognizable as a distinct part of the Christian Church.

To understand more fully how this way of belief developed, it would seem appropriate, as well as necessary, to consider some of the figures and events that played significant roles in the shaping of the denomination. With basic knowledge of who we are and from

whence we came, we can look back with gratitude to those who were true to the faith of their day.

John Wyclif (1329-1384), an English scholar and priest demanded reform. He proclaimed the Bible to be an all sufficient guide, not only in matters of religious faith and duty, but of ecclesiastical order as well. He taught that Jesus Christ was the only head of the Church, thus rejecting the authority of the pope and papal officers. He insisted upon personal piety as a prerequisite to church membership and believed every holy and humble man should be free to read and interpret the holy scriptures for himself. To this end, Wyclif and two other scholars made the first English translation of the Latin Bible, the *Vulgate*, which was used at the time by all Roman Catholic churches in Europe.

Wyclif's followers were cruelly persecuted. In spite of this, the numbers of supporters increased and they helped to spread the doctrines of the Reformation. Wyclif was followed by other reformers. Prominent among them were Martin Luther (1483-1546) in Germany; John Calvin, the Frenchman (1509-1564), in Switzerland, and John Knox (1505-1572) in Scotland. As a result of the influence of these leaders, reform churches were started in Europe. Church history tells of the terrible toll of human life taken by the civil religious wars which followed, particularly in Holland, France and Germany.

Because of its proximity to the continent, East Anglia, the southeastern region of England, became the area to which many of these religious refugees fled to escape persecution and death. They brought their dissident beliefs with them, greatly influencing the life and thought of those communities as they married into the freedom-loving English families.

In England, the first years of the Reformation were not so violent. During the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547), the decision to break from the Roman Catholic Church (1534) was largely political. The power of the Church remained the same with Henry VIII as the head rather than the pope. In 1539, Henry VIII ordered every church should make available copies of the English Bible, not only on the altar, but also at the back of the church, for the common people to read. King Henry could not possibly have imagined what struggle and bloodshed this act would cause.

Everyone was required to belong to a parish church regardless of personal belief. The individual had no voice in the doctrine or government of the church. In the lives of many believers, this call for unquestioning obedience led to great unrest and inner turmoil. After the death of Henry VIII, the throne went to his young Protestant son. For the next six years (1547-1553), until Edward VI's death at age 16, the reformation ideas of Luther and Calvin took stronger hold in England.

The next monarch (1553-1558) was Edward's half-sister, Mary Tudor. Mary forced England back to Catholicism and earned for herself, in her five year reign, the name "Bloody Mary," because of the three hundred Protestant martyrs she caused to be burned at the stake.

Finally, there was Mary's Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth I, who reigned from 1558-1603. It was in her time that the Mayflower Pilgrims began to live their lives. Elizabeth ruled much as her father had ruled. She forced all of her subjects to attend church; no books could be printed without her consent. Her bishops had the power to question, imprison, hang or burn at the stake anyone holding "dangerous" religious views.

More and more clandestine meetings were being held. By 1570, hundreds considered themselves separated from the established church. They came to be known as "Separatists." In 1582, the English Parliament passed a law making it an act of treason, punishable by death, to worship in any way except in accord with the Church of England.

Another important event of 1582 was the publishing of Robert Browne's book, *A Treatise for Reformation without Tarrying for Anie*. It set forth systematically the basic principles under which the movement, later to become Congregationalism, took place. Robert Browne (1556-1636) was a native of the East Anglia region where victims of religious persecution on the continent had found refuge at an earlier date. Browne has been called the founder of Congregationalism; followers of this way were sometimes referred to as "Brownists."

By 1590-1592, many Separatists were held in London prisons and many of their leaders executed. As a result, many who survived fled to Holland where their writings, sufferings and experiments in gathered churches laid the foundation for Congregationalism.

It was into this time of religious ferment that William Brewster was born (1566 or 1567). He would eventually become the organizer and ruling elder of the church of Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts. As a child, William was taken to live at Scrooby Manor in Nottinghamshire where his father was overseer and postmaster. At age 14, Brewster entered Cambridge University, the only function of which was the training of ministers for the Church of England. However, for many years at the university, open-minded, freedom-loving churchmen had been influenced by what they read in their Bibles or by the ideas of Luther and Calvin.

Up until now, Latin was considered the language of the scholar; Hebrew and Greek were relatively new subjects in the college curriculum. To be able to study the books of the Old and New Testaments in their original tongues gave to the Scriptures new meaning and significance and is said to have formed the core of the "Puritan Awakening." Puritans, as compared to Separatists and Brownists, were equally anxious for reform in the Church of England. However, Puritans were waiting for the change to come from within the Church itself rather than by separation.

William Brewster was not able to complete his Cambridge studies because family illness necessitated his return home. It does, however, stand to reason, he was greatly influenced by his Cambridge experience. Later, as a young, married man, William and his family attended a church in nearby Babworth. The rector was Richard Clyfton, a Cambridge educated man. He was a minister of the Church of England, who believed strongly in the

need for the Church's reform. It was in the Babworth church the Brewster family met the teenaged, orphaned boy, William Bradford. Their friendship was destined to last a lifetime. Their names stand out in the annals of Plymouth Colony.

In 1603, Elizabeth I died and the son of her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, became King James I of England and James VI of Scotland. Because James I had been brought up in Presbyterian Scotland, the English Puritans and Separatists had reason to hope the new king would be open to reform. Their hopes proved to be ill-conceived. James I's religious views were even more strongly Church of England than Elizabeth's had been.

Soon after James I's coronation, eight hundred Puritan ministers put their names to a petition calling for a number of reforms in the Church. They asked the king to grant them liberty of conscience. James knew the reformers wanted to elect their ministers from among their own congregations. As king and head of the Church, James chose the bishops, who, in turn, chose the ministers. Any attack on the bishops was an attack on royal power. The canon of 1603 expressed King James' hostility. It forbade all private religious meetings and the use of anything other than the Church of England prayer book.

Many Puritan ministers refused to obey the new laws. Within a year, three hundred preachers had been removed from their parishes. By refusing to allow the Puritans to change the Church of England from within, King James made them his bitter enemies. The Puritans continued to bide time hoping to take control of the Church and reform it completely at a later date.

In 1606, forty to fifty people started to meet secretly at Scrooby Manor. Richard Clyfton, who had given up the Babworth parish because of King James I's 1603 canon, was called as pastor of the group. Reverend John Robinson, who had also been obliged to give up his pastorate, went to the Scrooby church as teacher. William Brewster served as elder; William Bradford was a member of the congregation.

When the authorities discovered their secret meetings, the members of the congregations were hunted and persecuted on every side and could no longer live in peace. The decision was made to leave England and go to Holland where there was religious freedom. The story of the sojourn to Holland and the eventual voyage to the New World on the Mayflower is well-known and needs no repeating here.

From the time the Pilgrims reached the new shores, they conducted regular worship services as had been their custom in Leyden, Holland. William Brewster was their ruling elder. John Robinson, beloved pastor of the Pilgrims in Leyden, was never able to make the voyage to the New World, but the Pilgrims' fellowship reflected the influence of Mr. Robinson's gracious and tolerant spirit.

With the death of James I and the accession of his son, Charles I, in 1625, the situation of the Puritans deteriorated. In 1629, Charles dissolved the House of Commons. In protest, many Puritans emigrated to America.

John Endicott and John Winthrop were among the first to come. Winthrop, an attorney, had lost his position because of his religious views. Upon arrival in the New World, he joined with other Puritans to set up the Massachusetts Bay Colony and became its governor. In 1630 alone, a fleet of ships, known as "Winthrop's Fleet," brought more than one thousand Puritans to the Massachusetts Bay region.

The town of Dorchester, England is said to have emigrated as a body and named its new home after the town from whence they came. Coming to Dorchester aboard the "Mary and John" were Mr. and Mrs. Israel Stoughton. In 1632, they became the parents of a son, William, for whom our town was named.

William Stoughton (1632-1701) had a theological education. He served for some time as assistant to the Reverend Richard Mather, who was pastor of the Congregational Church in Dorchester for thirty-three years. William declined, on six different occasions, to accept the call to be the settled pastor of the church. He did serve the church as a ruling elder. Mr. Stoughton also served in political office as a selectman, agent of the Massachusetts Colony to England, lieutenant governor and acting governor. Moreover, William will long be remembered as the presiding judge at the Salem witch trials (1692-1693).

By 1640, twenty thousand persons had crossed the Atlantic Ocean to Massachusetts. They were not Separatists, but Puritan ministers and laymen of the Church of England looking for freedom. The Bible was their guide and the churches they founded in Massachusetts were Congregational in form like those of Plymouth Colony.

When Dr. Samuel Fuller, the only physician in the Massachusetts colonies and a deacon in the Plymouth church, traveled to Salem to treat an outbreak of scurvy, he talked with the Puritan leaders about his free Congregational beliefs and the blessings God had granted in Plymouth. As a result, the newly founded Salem church (1629) sent a letter requesting the approbation and guidance of the Plymouth church. In response, a delegation, headed by William Bradford, was sent to extend the right hand of fellowship. The historian, Williston Walker, referred to this occasion as the time when the fellowship in Christ was introduced to balance and enhance the freedom in Christ already enjoyed by the congregations.

In 1646, an important event took place which guided the churches of New England for almost two hundred years. At the request of some of the ministers of the Massachusetts Colony, the General Court requested the churches assemble by their representatives in a synod for the purpose of agreeing on a uniform practice in all the churches. The final and most important session of this synod opened in Cambridge in August, 1648. It was the first Congregational council in history.

The first four chapters of the Cambridge Platform state there is only one form of government prescribed in the word of God; that is, the Congregational one. On the matter of church organization, the platform stated, "Although churches be distinct and therefore have not be confounded one with another, and equal, and therefore, have not dominion

one over another; yet all the churches ought to preserve church communion one with another; because they are all united unto Christ." This fine balance between independence and fellowship is the Congregational way.

The Cambridge Platform was adopted by the Stoughton church when it gathered in 1744, but it was never adopted by all Congregational churches. Nevertheless, the platform is considered the most important document produced by the Congregationalists of the seventeenth century. It marked the beginning of Congregationalism as a defined denomination.

The Platform may be regarded as the foundation of the American way of life. The Congregational way of independence and mutual dependence provides the religious basis for freedom in civil rights, education, commerce and government. It recognizes the inviolate integrity of every individual as a child of God and encourages each person's development with the least possible interference from society.

This chapter about our beginnings cannot, by any means, be considered the complete story. However, from the portions related, we, of the Congregational branch of the United Church of Christ, can, at least, begin to understand we are inheritors of a priceless legacy. We can know those who left us this legacy bought it at a tremendous and, sometimes, terrible price. Truly, they experienced the cost and joy of discipleship and we look back with gratitude.

DORCHESTER TO "OLD" STOUGHTON

In 1629, the Puritans who came to New England as the Massachusetts Bay Company were granted a royal charter. Unlike the patents which the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony and other colonists obtained, the charter was worth far more. It provided both a trading company with proprietary rights and a colonizing corporation under an elected governor and a General Court which would frame the laws and regulations of the company and colony. This gave the company the right to govern any colony established; it placed the Puritans in a position of power and control. The charter could be rescinded only by the Crown.

In 1684, the royal charter was indeed revoked. This action was precipitated by the Massachusetts Bay colonists' unwillingness to abide by English laws, especially with regard to trade, as well as a general attitude of defiance of royal authority.

When William and Mary ascended the English throne, Increase Mather, eminent Dorchester-born clergyman from Boston, went to England to seek a renewal of the Massachusetts charter. In 1691, the charter was renewed, but it was not what Mr. Mather and the old theocracy had in mind. Instead, the charter was a compromise which specified the retention of an English governor, an extended franchise not dependent on church membership, and religious toleration. These conditions were the antithesis of the Puritans' stifling theocracy, rigid intolerance and brutal persecution of those who dared refute their mode of worship.

At the same time, the charter gave the Massachusetts Bay Colony the official sanction to absorb both Maine and Plymouth Colony. Thus, seventy-one years from the time the Pilgrims landed on these shores, Plymouth Colony ceased to exist as a separate entity. Naturally, the Puritans welcomed these latter conditions.

The information about the charter is included to help the reader understand the significance of the petitions to the royal governor and General Court which Stoughton residents were required to make when they wished to establish their own precinct and church. We, of the Stoughton church, can also feel much gratitude for the religious tolerance mandated in the 1691 charter.

If our town of Stoughton, Massachusetts were said to have a mother-town, that town would be Puritan-settled Dorchester. In 1715, a part of Dorchester was set apart as the "New Grant" or "Dorchester Village." This land included present day towns of Canton, Sharon, Avon and Foxboro. Also within these perimeters were the six thousand acres of the Ponkapoag Plantation which the General Court had set aside at an earlier date, for exclusive use by the Indians, at the insistence of John Eliot, Apostle to the Indians. The area would eventually be divided into three precincts.

The following list is an attempt to clarify the divisions which eventually culminated in the gathering of Third Church of Christ in Stoughton on August 10, 1744. Third Church would eventually become First Church when the first and second precincts became the towns of Canton and Sharon and each church became First Church of that particular town.

- 1715 Part of Dorchester set aside as South Precinct
- 1717 A church was gathered with Rev. Joseph Morse as the first settled minister
- 1726 Town of Stoughton incorporated (South Precinct ceased to exist); 1717 church became First Church of Christ of Stoughton
- 1740 Present day Sharon became Second Precinct of Stoughton; gathered church was Second Church of Stoughton
- 1743 Present day Stoughton became Third Precinct of Stoughton
- 1744 Church gathered August 10, 1744 became Third Church of Christ of Stoughton
- 1765 Second Precinct of Stoughton became the district of Stoughtonham
- 1783 Stoughtonham became town of Sharon; the 1740 church became First Church of Christ of Sharon which meant our 1744 church became the Second Church of Christ of Stoughton
- 1797 First Precinct of Stoughton became the town of Canton; the 1717 church became the First Church of Christ of Canton; the Third Precinct retained the name of Stoughton, thus making the 1744 church the first Church of Christ of Stoughton.

THIRD PRECINCT IS FORMED
OUR CHURCH IS GATHERED

With the incorporation of the town of Stoughton on December 22, 1726, the 1717 church became First Church of Christ of Stoughton. The location of that meeting house was in the vicinity of the present First Parish Unitarian-Universalist Church at 1508 Washington Street, Canton.

In the seventeen hundreds, there was no separation between church and state. The church fathers and the town fathers were one and the same. Consequently, one building served both purposes, a matter of economics, as well as convenience. Strictly speaking, the term "church" referred to the times the building was used for religious services; the term "meeting house", to the times the structure was used for civic, political or other purposes. However, the term "meeting house" was commonly used interchangeably. At the first town meeting held on January 2, 1727, George Talbot was chosen a selectman and assessor.

The aforementioned meeting house on Washington Street in Canton was the one to which residents of the area comprising present day Stoughton were expected to travel in order to worship God according to their covenant obligations or to take part in town or precinct business. Reverend Samuel Dunbar succeeded Joseph Morse as pastor in August of 1727. Mr. Dunbar's pastorate terminated at his death in 1783, over fifty-five years and eight thousand sermons later.

In those days, the roads were rough and crude. Their primary purpose was to facilitate travel between farms in the area. Most people walked, rode horseback or traveled in farm wagons to worship service. It wasn't until 1741 that the selectmen officially laid out "Stoughton Road" which followed Pearl Street, Stoughton and connected with Pleasant Street, Canton. Bay Road, which divided Precincts One and Two, was another route of access to the parish church, as was a six-mile line trail, Pigwacket Way, which became Page Street, Avon/Stoughton and York Street, Canton. For residents in the outlying areas of the town, the journey to the meeting house could be up to eighteen miles!

One can readily understand why those dwelling in this area would desire permission to form their own precinct. So it was, on November 9, 1743, a petition was presented to the colonial governor, William Shirley, and to representatives in the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony, asking permission to form a third precinct of Stoughton.

George Talbot, Simon Stearns and Ralph Pope filed the petition, the reason for it being "the vast difficulties both with regard to the public worship of God and the management of the affairs of the precinct to which we belong, on account of the great distance many of us

live from the place of public worship, it being almost seven miles." The petition was granted the day on which it was presented.

The first meeting of the Third Precinct was held a month later, December 12, 1743 at the house of George Talbot. This is the same George Talbot who was named a selectman at the very first town meeting after the "old" town was incorporated in 1726. At this time, Mr. Talbot was chosen to preside at the meeting and serve as precinct clerk, chairman of the prudentials, treasurer and chairman of the assessors; he was also authorized to provide preaching for which the sum of forty pounds was raised.

In 1692, the members of the General Court had passed a law, approved by the king, that every person would pay his proportionate share toward the support of "an able, learned and orthodox minister to dispense the word of God to them." The General Court would grant no petition to form a new town or precinct until provision for the support of a minister was ascertained. To the early settlers of New England, ecclesiastical matters took precedent over civil ones.

George Talbot's home, a large, two-story house which could accommodate seating for twenty people, was located some distance off Stoughton Road. It was used as the meeting house during the first months of the new Third Precinct. An entry in the earliest treasurer's book of the Precinct states George Talbot was paid at the rate of ten shillings a Sabbath for keeping (providing food and lodging) the ministers.

A Reverend John Newman was the first preacher found by the committee and he stayed from December 17, 1743 until April 1, 1744. He was compensated for fourteen Sabbaths at the rate of three pounds per Sabbath. Other preachers receiving payment were Mr. Jonathan Winchester and Mr. Charles Gleason.

On August 10, 1744, the Church of Christ Third Precinct of Stoughton was gathered. "The churches by whose assistance it was done were under the pastoral care of the Reverend Messrs. Dunbar and Curtis both of Stoughton." The congregation of our present church, having met for over two hundred and fifty years in six different houses of worship, is living proof a church is not a building made with hands, but a people. The walls of the 1744 church had been raised in June of that year, but it was not until August the people gathered to "own the covenant." They adopted the "Covenant and Platform of Discipline" set forth at the synod in Cambridge in 1648 as was mentioned earlier.

The covenant, in its entirety, as it appears in the old church record book, is much too long to include here; however, the opening paragraph gives an indication of the solemnity of this document. It states, "We whose names are hereunto subscribed, inhabitants in the third precinct of the town of Stoughton in New England being, by the grace of God, about to settle in a way of church order and fellowship do at this time, solemnly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with dependence on the gracious assistance of his holy spirit, enter into covenant with God & with one another, as followeth, viz." Next came the covenant promises and statements of faith which were divided into eight parts.

In an attempt to better understand the schism in the congregation which occurred in 1822, I include here some phrases from the covenant which appear to me to have some bearing on the vote taken for separation seventy-eight years later:

1. "That having chosen the Lord Jehovah to be our God. . .to be his people. . .hold communion with him as members of Christ's mystical body."
2. "We promise to keep close to the truth of Christ. . . resolve to use the holy scriptures as our Rule and Platform. . .by which we may discover the mind of Christ, and not be led away and entangled with the unscriptural inventions of men."
3. "to worship God according to all the particular institutions of Jesus Christ, taking the great Emanuel, the Son of God to be our Saviour. . .especially in the use of both seals of the covenant of grace viz. Baptism & the Lord's supper."
4. "to instruct them all under our charge, in the knowledge & fear of God. . .especially in the use of the orthodox catechism of the assembly of divines, the truth of which we do now profess."
5. "and will endeavor to maintain an holy orthodox ministry among us in this place."
6. "We will endeavor with the help of God, to govern & regulate ourselves in the management of church discipline according to the advice and direction given in the word of God, and we trust according to the method of the churches of Christ in this land. . .the true congregational churches of Christ, of which particular denomination we publicly profess ourselves to be. . ."

The covenant was signed by twenty-four male members of the church:

Humphrey Atherton	Samuel Waters
Daniel Talbot	John Withington
Henry Withington	George Talbot, Jr.
Joseph Smith	John Osgood
Peter Talbot	George Talbot
Simon Stearns	Elias Monk
Thomas Blackman, Jr.	Nathaniel Adams
Timothy Fisher	Isaac Stearns
Ezra Fisher	Ebenezer Talbot
Zechariah Watkins	Edward Esty
Jabez Esty	Samuel Bracket
John Atherton	Nathaniel Holmes

At the time our church was gathered, a religious revival, called the "Great Awakening," was reaching its climax in New England. The revival stemmed from the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton and was a return to the Calvinist faith of the Puritans with a great concern for salvation.

In response to the teachings of Jonathan Edwards another religious movement took form. This was called the "Enlightenment" and was known for its questioning of religious doctrines in the light of reason. As the story of our church evolves, the influence of these two religious movements will become evident.

According to the Cambridge Platform (1648), the requisites of church membership were repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. To be a member, one must be born again, give an account of the conversion and show signs of sanctification; i.e., live in a way which witnessed to these confessions.

As early as the second and third generations after the Cambridge Platform was written, there were those who qualified in all other ways but, could not say with confidence, they had experienced a moment of new birth. Our sister church in Sharon, Massachusetts referred to this requisite for membership as "a miraculous change of heart."

Without this confession, many men of good character and influence had no voice or vote in church affairs; neither could they present their children for baptism nor, in most churches, partake of communion. The whole issue of new birth was dealt with at length in the local synod and even in the legislature.

As a result, a qualified sanction was given the practice of admitting all baptized persons to half-way covenant membership. These members owned the covenant and promised to conform to the discipline of the church, and, in so doing, received limited privileges, thus moving away from the strict Puritan standard. The Salem church adopted this type of covenant as early as 1665. The existing records of Stoughton's First Congregational Church do not indicate at what point the half-way covenant was accepted.

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

In 1744 when our church was gathered, the term "parish" referred to the civic organization of Stoughton, Third Precinct. It was used to denote the geographical area as well as the people who dwelled therein. The church, a much smaller membership, was the ecclesiastical organization within the parish; only church members or their children were eligible to receive the sacraments, i.e. baptism and communion.

The purpose of forming the precinct was to give the residents of the area permission to provide for their own weekly public lectures on "piety, morality, and religion." This, of course, required the calling and support of a minister and the building of a meeting house.

Consequently, the minister had a dual role; first, to provide for the church members religious leadership in the worship of God and, secondly, to foster proper conduct and good citizenship within the whole parish. In light of this twofold responsibility and the lack of separation between church and state at the time, it does seem equitable that all residents, with the exception of Anabaptists, Quakers and members of the Church of England living within a five mile radius of a church of that denomination, be called upon to finance the minister's support, regardless of whether they were church members or not. The selection of the minister was usually done by the church, but it was the parish which voted to call.

It is appropriate to state here the oldest surviving church record book gives scanty information. The first pages contain a copy of the covenant and its twenty-four signers along with a statement about when the church was gathered. There is also an entry concerning the call of Rev. Mr. Thomas Jones of Dorchester on September 18, 1744 and an entry concerning the call of Rev. Mr. Jedidiah Adams on September 6, 1745. From February 19, 1746 to May 28, 1792, there is nothing on record. A statement in the book says, "For an account of the transactions of this church during the ministry of Mr. Adams, see the records which he has kept if any there are."

However, by studying the treasurer's book and the parish record book, one is able to glean some details. For instance, the treasurer's book states "Mr. Jones was paid three pounds, ten shillings for preaching on August 18, 1744." Later, when the parish vote was evenly divided, eighteen to eighteen, for the calling of Mr. Jones, he declined. There is also a mention of a Mr. Joseph Belcher who preached in July, 1745.

After Rev. Jedidiah Adams graduated from Harvard in 1733, he spent several years candidating and traveling. At age thirty-five, when he received the call to the Stoughton church by a unanimous vote, he accepted. The yearly salary agreed upon would be one hundred eighty pounds and a settlement of three hundred pounds. "Settlement" was the term used for the sum of money allowed the minister for the purpose of buying a

homestead or the setting up of the household. This provision corresponds somewhat to the parsonage equity fund of current times. Another entry from the treasurer's book, dated October 28, 1751, reads "and also ye Precinct granted a further Sum of four Pounds Lawfull Money in order to Provide wood for our Rev. Pastor." In addition to these provisions, the Reverend Adams was expected to supplement his income by the sale of garden produce and meat products from his farm. It was voted Mr. Adams' pay would vary with variances in the price of corn and meat in the Boston market.

Jedidiah Adams was a first cousin, once removed, to President John Adams and Governor Samuel Adams. He shared with them, as well as with many of the Congregational clergy of New England churches, the support for the struggle for American independence. By order of the "Council," July 17, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was printed and a copy of it "sent to the ministers of each parish of every denomination within this state," and they were "severally required to read the same to their respective congregations, as soon as Divine service is ended in the P.M. on the first Lord's day after they shall receive it. And after such publication thereof, to deliver the said Declaration to the clerks of their several Towns or Districts, who are required to record the same in their respective Town or District Books, there to remain as a perpetual memorial thereof." It was recorded in our Precinct records October 2, 1776.

In 1774, Reverend Samuel Dunbar of Stoughton's First Precinct parish church, had greatly influenced, with his fiery patriotism, the writing of the Suffolk Resolves, a precursor of the Declaration of Independence, at Doty Tavern in Old Stoughton. It has been said when the Lexington alarm was sounded in Stoughton, the members of the Stoughton militia were at worship. It was Mr. Dunbar who gathered the minutemen together before they started the long march. Several of the participants had been signers of the covenant when our church was gathered in 1744, thirty-two years earlier. We are amazed at their strength and fortitude for obviously, by this time, they were not young men. A man was eligible to serve from age sixteen to sixty years; a large percentage of older men filled the ranks.

In 1779, the parish records state, "August 9, 1779 the Town made choice of ye Reverend Jedidiah Adams for our Delegate to sit in State Convention, for ye sole purpose of forming a new Constitution." A committee of three, including two deacons, and another committee of thirteen were appointed to "acquaint him with ye vote of ye Town" and "to prepare instructions for ye Delegate that is to set in State Convention, for to form a Constitution." Mr. Adams went to the convention well instructed as to the wishes of the residents of Stoughton Third Precinct. They guarded jealously the right of representation for which so much was being sacrificed.

For the last seven years of Rev. Adams' fifty-three year pastorate, because of deteriorating health, he was aided by a colleague pastor, Rev. Edward Richmond, who had been called in 1792. In order that there be no future criticism of his sermons, Mr. Adams burned all of them. It has been conjectured the church records may have met the same fiery fate because, unfortunately, none has ever been found to cover these early years of the church. At the time of Rev. Adams' death, Rev. Richmond wrote of his colleague,

"Constitutionally mild and benevolent, he was easily formed to a candid and liberal mode of thinking. His manner soft, modest and unassuming received the finishing touch of genuine politeness. It may truly be said of him that he was learned without pedan, polite without affectation, moral without austerity, pious without superstition, and devout without enthusiasm." "Enthusiasm" in this case means extravagant religious emotion. It would seem the Church of Christ gathered as the Third Precinct of Stoughton had been blessed for its first fifty years by the loyal leadership of a kind and godly pastor. During his long tenure, one hundred fifty-seven members were admitted to the full communion of the church.

VIII

WINDS OF CHANGE

With the coming of The Reverend Edward Richmond in 1792, we have the earliest existing church records. Because the records were stored elsewhere, they were not consumed in the fire which destroyed the First Parish Universalist Church in 1966.

In studying these early records, one realizes how seriously the Stoughton church adhered to the Cambridge Platform edict to the Congregational Churches of Christ to recognize each church's autonomy and to "preserve church communion with one another; because they are all united unto Christ." The pages are filled with entries of meetings held in response to letters from other churches requesting the presence of delegates from the Stoughton church at ecclesiastical councils. The councils might be for the ordination of a minister, the approval or ratification of his dismissal or an attempt to resolve differences between pastor and parish. Deacons traveled as delegates in all kinds of weather, over crude roads, in primitive conveyances, to places as near as Sharon or as far away as Peterborough, New Hampshire. One can only marvel at the conscientious way they responded to these duties and to the high priority they attached to the fellowship between churches. In 1994, our church still elects delegates for the same purposes. However, I think it is fair to say the members of the present day church consider this work of much less importance than did the members of the eighteenth century church. Even though our pastor and delegates may represent us conscientiously, there is little, if any, documentation in the church records to inform us of this fellowship in Christ which has taken place.

Other entries in the old church record pertain to aspects of local church life and are, sometimes, of a very personal nature. For instance, the entry dated November 19, 1795 states a committee of two was named to investigate the reason a certain church member had been absent "for so long a time from communion and public worship." When it was discovered the member was financially embarrassed and could not afford to "clothe himself in a manner decent enough to attend public worship," a committee was formed to find out how much was needed and the deacons were "empowered to transmit it to him."

An entry on April 28, 1799 read "the church tarried after meeting to hear verbal complaints about a church member accused of intoxication and unchristian language bordering on profanity." The pastor was to acquaint the accused of the complaints in writing and to "invite" him to confer with the committee two weeks hence.

In 1803, an entry recorded the gift of an "elegant quarto Bible" and a vote "that in the future a portion of scripture be read as a book of publick worship." This may be a reference to the uninterrupted reading of scripture without a running commentary which, before this time, in the Puritan/Congregational churches was called "dumb reading" and thought to be useless.

Still other entries noted the vote to discontinue the reading of Psalms and hymns "in separate parcels" by the Deacons in communion service. Instead, members of the Society, who were not members of the church were to be invited to sing in communion service. This reference to "Society" may have been a general invitation to the members of the parish who were not members of the church or, it could have been a reference to Old Stoughton Musical Society. In either case, it demonstrates relaxation of a formerly rigid practice.

In August, 1808, after the women had made a generous contribution to the furnishing and trimming of the pulpit in the new meeting house (House of Worship II), a vote is recorded that "the sisters also be invited to stop when church stops after divine service for the purpose of transacting business." We must remember the "sisters" still had no voice or vote in church affairs; English common law, which was predominate in the colonies, gave married women no legal standing or existence. But, at the same time, we can be grateful for forward movement in the direction of equal rights and another example of willingness to adopt a less rigid code.

We can also be grateful to Rev. Richmond for his thorough recordkeeping from 1792 to 1817 under the heading "Bill of Mortality." Not only did he list the name and age of the person, but the cause of death, which, in his day, was not generally done. It is sad to note Mr. Richmond's list contained the names of his first and second wives and his twenty-year old daughter, Lucy P., all of whom died within a six-year period.

The second wife died September, 1816, the same month in which their daughter was baptized. This raises the possibility Sarah Manning Richmond died of complications of childbirth. In all the causes of death listed in the "Bill of Mortality," only one death is attributed to childbirth. The practice of obstetrics, being what it was at the time, probably makes this an inaccurate statistic. However, in these instances, the cause of death may have been listed under other headings such as symptoms of "debility" or "languishment." Other causes of death listed in the "Bill" were "hooping cough", scarlet fever, typhus, worms, dysentery, fits, canker, consumption, peripneumony, mortification and death by accidents.

Although people during the early days of our church did not live under the nuclear threat of the twentieth century, they did endure constant stress and suffering in their daily lives. Without modern "miracle drugs" and advanced technology, individuals were forced to come to terms with the reality of illnesses for which there were no adequate treatments or cures. They had to face, at close range, their own mortality as well as the mortality of those they held most dear. The "Bill of Mortality," recorded by Dr. Richmond during his twenty-four year tenure, lists two hundred and fifty-two names.

Mr. Richmond also kept a complete list of the baptisms performed during his ministry. It is interesting to note, in the baptismal records, the mother, due to the non-status of women, was not even named, though she may have given her life to birth the child.

In searching the church records, there is only one entry that would point to anything but a peaceable ministry during Dr. Richmond's term. In 1813, an entry notes a committee was appointed to ask Mr. Richmond not to preach politics in the pulpit. In October of 1815, a committee of four, in connection with the pastor, was chosen "to consider the expediency of requiring candidates for admission into church covenant a particular confession of antecedent moralities;" i.e., questioned the necessity of a candidate being required to divulge all prior indiscretions. This indicated another example of willingness to at least consider adoption of a more tolerant stance. And, finally, without any prior indication of dissension, on December 8, 1816, the church records state, "after divine service the pastor requested that his ministerial relations to this church and society be dissolved." Four days later, the church met to "adopt some measures to induce the pastor to recall his request." Being unsuccessful in these efforts, they were forced to proceed with plans for an ecclesiastical council to approve and ratify his dismissal.

In his letter requesting dismissal, Dr. Richmond stated when he accepted the call to Stoughton in 1792, it had been his intention to spend the rest of his days in the service of the people of whom he "took the oversight," but that it had "long been evident that the labors of others were more acceptable."

The historian, D. V. T. Hunton, in the August 21, 1880 issue of the local newspaper, published under the title, "A Leaf From Stoughton History," a document reputedly written by Dr. Richmond explaining more fully his reasons for resignation. Hunton believed the document to be authentic. Since the principal participants in the events were deceased, Mr. Hunton felt it would not create ill feeling to publish the article for historical purposes.

This article quotes Mr. Richmond as saying it was his desire to depart in peace without "crimination or recrimination," but having been urged strongly to state the reasons for his resignation, he felt impelled to do so. Mr. Richmond made it clear from the beginning his request for dismissal had nothing to do with salary or a call to another parish, and when he left Stoughton he "would trust divine Providence for employment and means of subsistence." He went on to say the principal reason for the request was the existence of a "discontented spirit" in the people and a disposition unfriendly to his happiness and usefulness. This spirit had been apparent for a long time and had embittered most of his days in Stoughton.

An incident which gave Mr. Richmond particular pain occurred in 1807 when townspeople gathered near the meeting house to hold a loud and raucous demonstration at which they hung in effigy a man accused of murdering a political rival in Boston. When Mr. Richmond attempted to halt the proceedings and reprove those involved, the townspeople responded by moving to a nearby tavern where they planned to repeat the demonstration on an even larger scale the following week. Mr. Richmond described the second demonstration and procession as including a large part of the parish and all the parish officers! To describe the townspeople as having "a discontented spirit" seems the ultimate in human forbearance.

Dr. Richmond went on to cite numerous instances when the pulpit was filled by other preachers without his knowledge or consent. Amelia M. Clifton, First Parish Church historian, in an article published about 1890, reported an incident said to have occurred during Mr. Richmond's ministry. A group of people in the parish wished to hear the preacher, Elias Smith, and Mr. Richmond would not relinquish the key to the church for that purpose. A member of the group climbed in the window, unlocked the door from inside and the meeting was held as planned. This action was completely contrary to the custom of the day and deliberately disrespectful and hurtful to the settled pastor. The timing of some of these infringements seems particularly insensitive and callous. One occurred when Mr. Richmond's first wife was on her death bed, and another, the day after the funeral of his twenty-year old daughter, Lucy Palmer Richmond. Dr. Richmond concluded his explanation by stating it was with extreme reluctance that he felt obliged to repeat these instances. He would, and could, cheerfully and sincerely forgive all past offenses if he saw reason to hope their actions would not be repeated, but he could see no such hope.

So it was, January 15, 1817, the ecclesiastical council convened at the house of the pastor and voted to accept Dr. Richmond's request. The house referred to is the house of Federalist architecture located at 15 Seaver Street which Dr. Richmond bought in 1793 in preparation for his coming marriage. The house originally sat kitty-corner on Park Street but was moved around the corner in the 1890's. On January 19, 1817, the church record entry reads, "Mr. Richmond bid us farewell."

In an attempt to better understand the "discontented spirit of the people" to which Dr. Richmond referred, it is appropriate to look at the activities and controversies taking place in churches in other areas of New England and in Boston in particular. In 1793, at the same time Mr. Richmond became colleague pastor with Rev. Adams, John Murray (1741-1815), the founder of organized Universalism in America, was installed as pastor of First Universalist Society of Boston. His Calvinism took the form of believing Christ's atonement was not limited to the elect (predestination).

Hosea Ballou (1771-1852) is considered the most vigorous intellectual and spiritual leader of Universalism. His famous publication, "Treatise on Atonement," a definite espousal of Unitarian thought, appeared in 1804. In the publication, Ballou affirmed the belief man is not a sinful creature and, therefore, Jesus did not atone for the sins of mankind with His death on the cross. Ballou believed the greatest importance of Jesus is found in His teachings and example, not in His being our Lord and Savior. By 1818, Ballou was preaching three times every Sunday to crowded congregations at the Second Universalist Church in Boston. His son, Massena, would later be called as minister to the church which would become Stoughton's First Parish Universalist Church.

All of the seventeen colonial churches in Boston, with the exception of one, Old South Meeting House, became Unitarian. Old South maintained its orthodoxy. In opposition to the rising tide of liberalism, Andover Theological Seminary was founded in 1808 "with generous provision for the training of orthodox ministers." It has also been said the

building of Park Street Church on Brimstone Corner was another response. Some say the gunpowder stored in the cellar during the War of 1812 suggested the Corner's name; others liken to brimstone the fiery sermons of its early ministers as they upheld the Trinity in response to the Unitarian wedge in the Puritan churches.

Dr. Richmond was referred to as a "liberal." At that time, liberal was a term used to describe the theology of those who had moved away from strict Calvinism and its concept of predestination, to one which offered salvation to all who had faith in Christ and repented of their sins.

The following is an extract from a sermon written by Mr. Richmond in 1809:

"Our Savior, coming into the world 'to seek
and save that which was lost' has, indeed,
made provision amply sufficient for the
salvation of the whole human race. But though
he had brought life and immortality to light,
though he has done and suffered so much for our
restoration, yet, unless we comply with the
terms on which these advantages are tendered, we
shall eventually 'fail of the grace of God.'
These terms which are 'faith in Christ'
and 'repentance of sin' are stated in the
scripture of truth as indispensable conditions
of salvation."

The reference to Savior, salvation, the suffering of Christ, faith in Christ and repentance of sin seem to indicate clearly Mr. Richmond had not yet espoused Hosea Ballou's "Treatise on Atonement;" i.e., Rev. Richmond was not yet a Unitarian. As previously stated, we know from the church record, at the time Mr. Richmond submitted his request for dismissal, the church members asked him to reconsider. This tells us there were those who approved of Mr. Richmond's ministry. On the other hand, the actions of some other members of the parish led Dr. Richmond to believe his ministry was an exercise in futility. Is it a reasonable deduction to say in Stoughton First Parish there were diverse religious leanings?

Into this environment of discontent came Dr. Richmond's successor, twenty-five year old Harvard graduate, Ebenezer Gay, to settle in his first pastorate. That he came with high hopes and youthful idealism is evident in this excerpt from his acceptance letter dated December 4, 1817:

"Brethren pray for me - that my hands may be
strengthened, my heart encouraged, my labor
successful, and my ministry a blessing to you
and your children."

It appears the people of Stoughton had called a young man who also had the great strength of his convictions. If the people had not been satisfied with Dr. Richmond's "liberal" preaching, they now had a minister with strong Calvinist convictions. Fifty years later, in August, 1869, when Mr. Gay was asked to come back to Stoughton's First Congregational Church and present two historical sketches, whether as lectures or sermons, we do not know which, he felt it necessary to give the long 1744 Covenant in its entirety "to show how explicit and decided were the obligations then assumed, by those who professed to belong to this Church of Christ." These were the promises Rev. Gay had made and the rules by which he conducted his ministry.

In 1809, at a Unitarian Church in Baltimore, Maryland, William Ellery Channing delivered an ordination sermon which defended the liberal position. Channing stated the authority considered ultimate was not the voice of the past as revealed in Scripture, but the voice of experience and reason. Such a belief put Mr. Channing on a collision course with New England Calvinism (orthodox), and out of the storm of controversy which followed, the American Unitarian Association was born in 1825.

Meanwhile, the entries in the church record book of Stoughton started to reflect this controversy. On May 31, 1819, a committee recommended first, those who have owned the covenant be reminded of their obligation and, secondly, a day be set apart as a day of fasting, prayer and renewing Covenant engagements. On the following August twenty-seventh, the entry lists the names of the thirty-eight men and women members who took part in the day of fasting and prayer and "renewed their Covenant with God in a public and special manner."

An indication of the ferment taking place in the parish is seen in a March 1820 parish warrant held by the Stoughton Historical Society. One of the orders of business is an article to consider the dismissal of Rev. Ebenezer Gay.

There is no mention of it in the church record book, but in 1820 there was a pamphlet war in Stoughton. The subject of the debate was the interpretation of scripture by the colonial churches versus the interpretation according to the tenets of the more recently formed Universalist denomination.

In May, 1820, Rev. Joshua Flagg, a Universalist missionary from Scituate, preached in the Stoughton meeting house. Apparently, the parish was continuing the practice, which began during Dr. Richmond's tenure, of inviting preachers of other persuasions to speak, regardless of the wishes of the settled minister.

In August, 1820, Mr. Flagg's sermon was published in pamphlet form. Rev. Ebenezer Gay preached a sermon in rebuttal which was also printed as a pamphlet. Next into the debate came Rev. Richard Carrique, minister of the First Universalist Society in North Attleborough, with a third pamphlet, which rebuked Mr. Gay's sermon.

In June, 1821, a session of the Southern Association of Universalists met in Stoughton. In the past, the Stoughton meetings of the Association had been held in a hall, but according to the account written by Thomas Whittemore, ordinand of the day, "permission had been obtained to hold the public services. . . in the meeting house of Rev. Mr. Gay." Rev. Hosea Ballou, "the most vigorous, intellectual and spiritual leader of Universalism," preached the sermon. Among those in attendance were the Reverends Flagg and Carrique, Mr. Gay's opponents in the pamphlet war. It is obvious Mr. Gay would not have given permission for this group to meet in "his" meeting house. But the parish had granted the request.

To hold a Universalist Association meeting of such status (an ordination) "in Mr. Gay's meeting house," at which a leading luminary of Universalist/Unitarian thought brought the message, could be interpreted as a deliberate affront to all for which Mr. Gay stood. If he were to remain the respected, settled pastor of Stoughton's Church of Christ, a strong response would be required of him. It appears the gauntlet had been thrown down, the "paper war" was over and the struggle for survival was drawing to a climax.

On December 14, 1821, a committee reported a list of members in good and regular standing. The count was twenty-seven males and fifty-one females. A committee was formed to approach five persons on the list who, it was said, had been attending the Methodist Church, located then in West Stoughton.

Additional complaints were registered against Lemuel Bird, grandson of Rev. Jedidiah Adams and veteran of the American Revolution. The complaints concerned Mr. Bird's failure to attend worship, to partake of communion and to support the ministry in Stoughton. Furthermore, Mr. Bird was said to have "withdrawn from our society and united himself with one that is contrary to the doctrine that we have learned thus causing divisions and offenses. And that he has also embraced and endeavored to propagate the doctrine of Universal Salvation which we consider contrary to the holy scriptures." It was thought Mr. Bird may have been attending the Norfolk Universal Society founded in 1819 in Canton, which he later joined.

The entry continues detailing several attempts, first by Reverend Gay alone, next by a church member and finally by a committee of three which included Deacon Nathan Drake, to meet with Mr. Bird for the purpose of admonishing him to repent and return to the path of duty. Another portion of the entry reads, "According to the Savior's direction tell the matter to the church that measures may be taken to regain our offending brother, or that he may be dealt with according to the rule of discipline laid down in God's holy word."

The above-mentioned committee of three was also to meet with the one brother and four sisters, who reportedly had united with the Methodists, to determine whether or not they intended to return to our communion. The results were to be reported on January 25, 1822. On that date the committee reported Mr. Bird remained inflexible. It was voted action on this matter, as well as that concerning the Methodists, be deferred once more to the next lecture day. It was also voted Mr. Bird be informed of the action and requested

to attend and show reason why the last step in church discipline should not be taken with him.

On March 8, 1822, Mr. Bird did not attend the church meeting nor furnish any apology or acknowledgment. Once more the business concerning him was deferred to April fourth immediately after public exercises on Fast Day. The entry on April fourth reads, "The church met according to adjournment and after long, candid and deliberate discussion relative to case of Mr. Lemuel Bird voted that he is thereby excommunicated." The church voted that those who had joined the Methodist communion were no longer "under our watch and care." The meeting closed with prayer.

Two weeks later the church met at the house of Reverend Gay and voted to ratify the letter of excommunication of Mr. Bird, to read the letter in public and to send a copy to Mr. Bird. The entry ends, "Attended to our covenant vows with feeling, union and brotherly love." The preceding entries have been included to demonstrate the action culminating in Mr. Bird's excommunication took place only after long, painstaking, prayerful attempts to bring him back to his covenant obligations.

Nothing more is written in the church record book until July 1, 1822, but in the parish record book there is an entry for May thirteenth to see if the parish will dismiss Mr. Gay by yeas and nays. The votes were yeas eighteen and nays twenty-six. Another entry for June third states a committee was formed to see on what conditions Mr. Gay would leave the parish. On June 24, 1822, Mr. Gay wrote a letter where he agreed to terms and resigned, effective July 7, 1822. The parish was technically the employer, so now action had to be taken to call an ecclesiastical council to advise the church in their difficulties and, if proper, to dissolve the pastoral relation.

On July 3, 1822 the entry in the church records reads, "In consequence of the exertions made of late by certain persons in this place, to deprive us of the enjoyment of Gospel privileges, and the dispensation of those doctrines which are according to our belief and profession, in separating from us our present Pastor, and this with the professed design to substitute in the room thereof a more liberal and lax kind of preaching; ...Be it voted by this church that it is expedient for us to associate, and form ourselves into a Religious Society, with certain other persons in this place, who may be disposed to unite with us, for the purpose of maintaining the Gospel according to the principles and practices of our forefathers, who came to this country for the sake of establishing a church founded on Christ and him crucified and of maintaining and defending the doctrine of grace, ...and that we henceforth hold public worship in such places as Providence may, from time to time direct." After a free and full discussion, a vote was called for the above proposition. Voting to separate (7): Deacons Samuel Tolman and Nathan Drake and Brothers B. Marshall, Timothy Gay, John Holmes, Amos Guild and Elijah Monk, Jr. Voting against separation (2): Brothers James Capen and Elisha Capen. One might well be startled that only nine persons made this momentous decision. However, when one remembers only the twenty-seven male members had the vote, it is seen in a different light.

On July 9, 1822, the ecclesiastical council met with a minister and one delegate representing each of six churches. The Council voted to dissolve the pastoral connection effective July 16, 1822. It urged "in recommending Ebenezer Gay to any of the Churches of Christ or religious societies who may think proper to invite him to preach or settle with them in the work of the gospel ministry, as a man of good moral and Christian character and as a distinguishing useful preacher, and as one held in high estimation by his acquaintances in the ministry." Rev. Gay was offered tender sympathy in his afflictions and trials and assured of their continued interest in his future usefulness and prosperity.

The council wished the church divine wisdom and direction and assured them they would be there to encourage and assist to the best of their ability. Council deplored the state of things which rendered their presence and advice necessary. They offered condolences to the afflicted church and expressed hope the trials would result in greater prosperity and happiness. Council ended by imploring the benediction of heaven on the people of the parish and wishing "they may have wisdom from above."

The following day, July 10, 1822, a document announcing the formation of "The First Congregational Church and Society in Stoughton" was filed with town clerk, Richard Talbot. The document lists sixty names, fifty men and ten women. The document was for the purpose of "signing off" from the parish church in order that they be no longer taxed for its support. The ten women listed, eight of them widows, were property owners and therefore tax liable. The membership of the First Congregational Church would include many other women, wives and relatives of male members; their names, of course, would not appear on this list.

On Friday, July 12, 1822, an entry in the interim church record of First Parish reads, "Voted to let Mr. Gay's party have the use of part of the church vessels the next Sabbath provided they return them to the Church without injury." This would seem to demonstrate a certain degree of good-will in spite of differences.

A July 15, 1822 entry notes the church met at the house of Rev. Gay to accept the result of the council. A vote chose Mr. Gay as standing clerk and moderator of the church "when his pastoral connexion shall be dissolved." At this time a committee was elected to meet with the brethren of the parish who had, at an earlier time, owned the covenant and "admonish them of their duty and entreat them to . . . walk with us according to our covenant engagements."

One may well wonder why Mr. Lemuel Bird did not simply "sign off" as others had done when they wished to attend some other church. The parish church in Stoughton, like its counterpart in cities and towns all over New England, was being split apart by the divergent views of those who retained the orthodox views of conservative Calvinism, under which the church was gathered in 1744 as opposed to the liberal views of Universalism/Unitarianism. In Stoughton, the church excommunication of Lemuel Bird appears to have been the catalyst which precipitated the reaction that divided us into two congregations.

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY

When the people signed off from the parish church on July 10, 1822 to become members of the First Congregational Church and Society, they found themselves in the same situation as their forefathers had been on August 10, 1744. They were a gathered people who had "owned the covenant," but with no house of worship.

The first communion service after the separation was held July fourteenth in a large unfinished "upper room" of a house located at 423 Plain Street, the property of Daniel Hayward. Eventually, regular worship services were held in a "commodius hall" in the store owned by William Holbrook on the northerly corner of Wyman and Washington Streets. This practice would continue until the newly built meeting house was ready in 1825.

At the time of the separation, the Congregationalists took with them the covenant, the church record book, some "church property and furniture" and church money held by Deacon Nathaniel Drake. According to the Massachusetts Supreme Court's Dedham Decision of 1819-1820, the portion of the church that remained with the parish was the continuing church; thus, the parish church was within its legal rights to demand the return of the church property. However, the Congregationalists believed they more closely represented the orthodox church of the very explicit covenant which they had "owned." Such a belief can hardly be contested. In a recent study the Unitarian scholar, Conrad Wright, is quoted as saying the Dedham Decision was a bad law based on a bad reading of history.

The entries in the church record book after July 16, 1822 were deleted with black ink, but with persistence some can be rendered readable. One can only surmise whether the destruction of the record was perpetrated by the Congregationalists before they returned the book or by the parish church after the record was returned to them. A September 9, 1822 entry states even though the Congregationalists, according to their vote, believed the parish church had no just right to their property, they would follow the Savior's direction "If any man would sue you at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Thus, the church furniture and the money held by Deacon Nathaniel Drake was returned to the parish church. The records and the covenant were retained by the Congregationalists, although they did offer a copy of the church records if the parish church desired.

On March 10, 1823, the parish church adopted a new covenant. The original church record book was finally returned in October of 1828 and then it would seem only because the parish church intended to resort to legal process. For many years to come the parish church would retain the name of "First Church of Christ of Stoughton."

By May, 1823, the Congregational Church group was able to purchase its own sacramental vessels, cloths and cabinet. At the beginning of the separation they were fundless as well as homeless. Consequently, they were unable to support a settled minister. Rev. Ebenezer Gay, though no longer their pastor, remained as a member of the congregation for a few months until he received the call to Bridgewater. Rev. Gay's support was invaluable at a crucial time. The pulpit was supplied by visiting ministers from neighboring towns. Among them, the Reverend Jonas Colburn, Charles Bowles and Henry Lincoln. The Rev. Job Cushman came in April 1823 and stayed for several months during which time the church experienced a period of revival. Finally, in 1825, when the congregation completed its own house of worship, the Rev. Ebenezer Gay traveled from Bridgewater to preach the dedicatory sermon. What a joyous occasion!

Much of the continuing history of the church is contained in two other chapters, "Our Pastors" and "Our Six Houses of Worship." This chapter is an attempt to include additional information not supplied elsewhere.

When the learned Dr. Calvin Park came to Stoughton as the first settled pastor of the Congregational Church in 1826, he purchased the same house located on the corner of Park Street that Dr. Richmond had purchased as a parsonage in 1793. Rev. Ebenezer Gay gave the closing prayer at Dr. Park's installation in December, 1826. An historical sketch based on the church records before they were destroyed in the March 1942 fire states at the time of Dr. Park's installation, the ecclesiastical council of eighteen churches also affirmed the right of the church to the title of "First Church." During Dr. Park's fourteen year pastorate some highlights included:

1. March, 1827 - Institution of weekly prayer meetings
2. May, 1827 - Opening of a Sabbath School with Dr. Park as superintendent; Rev. Gay had started a school in 1819 before the separation
3. October, 1829 - Church adopted the "Articles of Faith and Covenant" of the church in Dedham
4. Winter, 1831-32 - A revival meeting resulting in the addition of thirty new church members
5. July, 1832 - Church took action on temperance

Dr. Park's salary during his tenure went from \$250.00 to \$300.00 per annum plus fringe benefits of horse, carriage and hay. Park School, the small building next to the Methodist Church, was also named for him.

Edwards Amasa Park, one of Dr. Park's three minister sons, is also listed as an early Sunday school superintendent. Edwards went on to be a renowned professor of theology at Andover Newton Seminary and is credited with the idea of establishing the

Congregational Library, 14 Beacon Street, Boston. Another note of interest is his marriage to Ann Maria Edwards, great-granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards.

Rev. William Cornell, who served our church as pastor from 1846-1850, studied under the professorship of Dr. Park at Brown University. Rev. Cornell had also boarded with the Park family, so Cornell knew Dr. Park well. In one of the books Dr. Cornell wrote, he included a tribute to Dr. Park which described him as "an excellent parishioner, always kind and tender in his remarks, a devoutly pious man, modest, retiring and all that I could desire in a parishioner, who had for many years been the faithful pastor of the same flock."

During some of the years of Dr. Park's ministry, the First Parish Church was under the pastoral guidance (1831-1853) of Massena Ballou, son of Hosea. Massena and his family lived next to the First Parish meeting house so the Parks and the Ballous were neighbors. Massena Ballou was quoted as saying, "It has always been my endeavor and most earnest desire to live in peace and the exchange of kind offices with all the people with whom I am associated, without regard to religious or political opinions." These two men, Dr. Park and Rev. Ballou, were of far different educational backgrounds, undoubtedly held differing theological beliefs, but both seemed to have possessed calm, kindly and conciliatory spirits. It is quite possible the spirit of their leadership was a contributing factor to the goodwill and cooperation between the two churches which endures to this day.

Just one year after the thirty-year old Rev. Albert Perry came to Stoughton, the new 1852 church building at 825 Washington Street was dedicated. On an 1854 town map, a drawing of the house at 32 Perry Street is labeled "Congregational Parsonage." This was the house to which Mr. Perry brought his bride, Sarah, and in which his daughter and son were born. Perry Street was very likely named in honor of Rev. Perry. After a stay of only five years, the congregation was deeply saddened when their young minister was forced to leave because of failing health. In 1881, when eight stained glass windows were installed in the church, one was dedicated to Rev. Perry's memory with the scripture text, "For me to live is Christ" Philippians 1:21.

On April 10, 1856 the "prudential committee of the church" was instituted. A vote of the church required all members received from other churches publicly assent to the covenant of our church.

At the annual meeting in 1866, a communication was received from the Methodist Episcopal Church giving thanks for providing them with a place of worship for several months. In 1868, the annual meeting voted for the first time to observe "the week of prayer." In 1869, "Songs of the Sanctuary" replaced "Church Psalmody" in order to cultivate congregational singing. A vote in May, 1870 granted the use of our church for six months to the First Parish Church while their building was being remodeled.

Rev. Thomas Wilson (1856-1876), during his long pastorate, served on the school committee. He was influential in establishing the town's first high school. He also represented Stoughton as a state representative. Rev. Wilson was honored in one of the

stained glass windows installed in 1881. The inscription read, "A faithful pastor, a true friend, an eminent scholar, a respected citizen."

In February, 1877, upon the vote of the church, members of other churches could be received into membership. On March 14, 1877, a new creed and covenant was adopted. At the annual meeting of 1878, committees were chosen for the purposes of visiting the sick, performing acts of charity and determining the spiritual condition of the people.

The eight stained glass windows given to the church in 1881, at a cost of fifty dollars each, were said to be largely due to the subscription of Amasa J. Stetson, who seemed to have had a particular interest in this field. Ours was not the only church building in which he encouraged the addition of stained glass windows. One of the windows was a memorial to his father, sister and brother; one was in honor of Rev. Ebenezer Gay who, at the time, was eighty-nine years old. Two other windows have already been mentioned in references to Rev. Albert Perry and Rev. Thomas Wilson. The memorials and inscriptions on the other four windows, if any there were, are unknown.

According to a newspaper article of the time, the addition of the windows did not please everyone. Some complained the sanctuary was dark and gloomy; others resented being unable to raise their eyes without having their view obstructed by a "gravestone window."

The church manual was revised in 1888. The next year, the use of offering envelopes was instituted. The church treasurer served as weekly offering clerk until February, 1897, when Miss Hattie Clapp was elected as weekly offering clerk. Miss Clapp kept this office until her death thirty-one years later.

In January, 1891 the Church voted the Sunday school would have a separate treasurer. In October, 1895, as a result of an amendment to the constitution, the church withdrew from the direct management of the Sunday school. Sunday school became a separate organization, but auxiliary to the Church.

In the early 1890's, the women became members of the Society. We can assume women now had a vote. Due to the autonomy of Congregational churches, there is no one date upon which all women of the churches received the privilege of voting. Each individual church decided this matter for itself.

In the early 1890's, the Swedish-speaking people of Stoughton held religious services in our church on Sunday afternoons. The service was conducted in Swedish by the pastor of a Swedish church in North Easton.

In 1896, a "Boys Brigade" was formed. At a meeting held on June 4, 1896, the vote was taken to organize a corporation under Chapter 404, Acts of 1887, for religious worship and Christian instruction in accordance with the faith and polity of the Congregational Churches of the United States. The meeting adopted the Confession of Faith, the Covenant and the By-laws as reported by a committee. The by-laws stated the officers

must be members of the church and should consist of the pastor, a clerk, a treasurer, three deacons and three deaconesses. This is the first mention of deaconesses. Our first deaconesses were Adeline A. Mosman, Sarah A. Carpenter and Helen C. Hathaway.

On June 16, 1896, the Certificate of Incorporation #6799 was issued by the secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Now, we are "The First Congregational Church of Stoughton, Massachusetts, in contrast to the former, "The First Congregational Church and Society of Stoughton, Massachusetts." Until this time, members of the parish (society) who attended the church did not have to become church members in order to have a vote. The incorporation eliminated this privilege and some who had been faithful supporters withdrew. Soon after the incorporation, the clerk reported the church had one hundred twenty-seven members, twenty-seven of whom were non-resident. Rev. Caleb Lamb Rotch was the pastor who, during his second term, guided the congregation through these organizational changes.

WE ENTER THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Rev. Henry E. Bray (1899-1902) was our pastor at the turn of the century. He and Mrs. Bray had expected to go to Micronesia as missionaries but were not accepted because of the state of Mrs. Bray's health. However, they proved to be effective missionaries right here in the local church by creating an awareness and encouraging a concern for mission starting in the Sunday school and youth groups and spreading throughout the church.

In June, 1905, Mrs. M. Emeline Farrington, whose land with a two-story dwelling adjoined the church property on the northerly side, offered her house to the church with certain specifications for use as a parsonage. This was the year the church received town water and members no longer needed to pump and carry water from the Farrington house next door.

At an adjourned meeting of the church in November, 1909, a missionary committee was elected. The committee was to consist of the heads of the various departments of the church.

In 1910, Lucius Clapp, a prominent Stoughton citizen, but not a member of our church, made the church a recipient of his philanthropy. Mr. Clapp gave a gift of one thousand dollars, the interest of which was to be used to aid "the worthy poor, sick and afflicted."

When Rev. Abram L. Bean tendered his resignation in July, 1912, the local newspaper credited him with the successful organization of the Stoughton District Nurse Association. Rev. Bean stated the need and benefits of such an organization two years earlier at a Missionary Society meeting at our church.

Early in the ministry of Dr. Frederick T. Mayer-Oakes changes were made in the church constitution and by-laws. In 1914, the ordination of Miss Mary Macomber in our church was front page news. She had been supported and encouraged in the achievement of this goal by Dr. Mayer-Oakes at a time when her own denomination, Methodist/Episcopal, did not allow the ordination of women.

In 1921 occurred the first mention of a church fair instituted by a dedicated layman in our church and chaired by him for the next fourteen years. It appears likely this was one of the efforts to fund the very costly repairs and alterations undertaken in preparation for the centennial observation of the separation (1822-1922) of the First Parish and First Congregational churches.

The raising of the necessary funds was a tremendous challenge to the congregation. In 1922 and 1923, applications for grants were made to the Old South Society in Boston. In response to each request, the Society agreed to grant \$2500.00 for each \$5000.00 the church was able to raise.

In the letter to the Society requesting funds, some pertinent facts about the Congregation can be found. "The resident membership of the church is 135. Ladies Benevolent Society, 80, Sunday School 390, and Christian Endeavor 39. About 250 men receive notice of our Men's Club activities, and there are about 275 families connected with the church."

Although the actual centennial observation had to be postponed because of the extensive nature of the project, we can rest assured that in January, 1924, the week-long activities for people of all ages and inclinations were a source of great rejoicing. There were, along with all the usual worship activities of the church, social evenings, song services, reunion suppers and special guest speakers.

In early October, 1929, the Stoughton News-Sentinel reported since World War I there had been a general movement toward the union of Protestant churches. In keeping with this trend, the First Parish Universalist Church and our church each formed a union committee to explore the possibilities of a merger.

Later in the month, an unofficial vote was taken in each church in an attempt to ascertain the wishes of the parishioners. Less than one-fifth of the families of the two churches took part in the voting. The Universalist vote was forty-four to thirty-six in the affirmative; the Congregational vote was sixty-three to eleven in the affirmative.

In early November, the newspaper reported a special meeting of the Universalist Parish Society at which time it was voted not to continue the efforts toward church union. They wished to continue friendly relations as in the past, but did not feel the time was right for uniting the two churches into one religious body.

At the annual meeting of December, 1933 (during the years of the "Great Depression"), Rev. Mr. Hughes (1927-1949) voluntarily took a ten per cent (\$200.00) cut in salary. This amount was not restored until 1945.

In 1935, Mrs. Elva Belcher, not a member of our church, offered Rev. and Mrs. Hughes one of her houses on Seaver Street for use as the parsonage for the remainder of his pastorate at no cost to the church. Mrs. Belcher's gesture made the existing parsonage available for rental and, thus, an additional source of income.

In addition to personal crises endured by church members during the Depression years, the late 1930's saw them struggling over and over again to sustain the 1852 church building. The ravages of lightning strikes, hurricane damage and rotting sills resulted in repairs costing thousands of dollars, none of which were fully covered by insurance.

In December of 1941, when our country entered World War II, the trustees responded to the national emergency. In cooperation with the Red Cross, the trustees offered the use of our church building, with kitchen and feeding facilities, in case of evacuation from damaged war areas.

Finally, in the early morning hours of March 9, 1942 came the final blow---destruction of the 1852 structure by a fire of unknown origin. By the time the alarm was sounded, flames were shooting out at the base of the tower. In twenty minutes the steeple toppled. The church bell which had been used for many years as a fire alarm to save other buildings, had been unable to do anything to save itself. Except for the torrential rains which fell that night, the conflagration might well have destroyed the entire center of town.

The boiler room was not destroyed and was covered and locked for protection. Rev. Mr. Hughes saved the pulpit Bible. Silverware, dishes and choir robes were also salvaged. The most enduring symbol of Christian faith recovered from the fire is one which we see each time we enter the front doors of our present church building---the restored brass cross which stands on the communion table in the lobby.

Once more, the First Congregational Church of Stoughton was a people (church membership in January, 1942 numbered 261), who, like their forebears in 1822, would "henceforth hold public worship in such places as Providence may, from time to time direct."

On March 20, 1942, at a special meeting called by the trustees and attended by over one hundred people, the church voted to accept the offer of Rising Star Lodge, A. F. & A. M. to use their facilities for church services until other arrangements could be made. Chicataubut Club also allowed use of their lodge building.

Explorations were made as to the expediency of using the facilities of First Parish Universalist, the Methodist or Trinity Episcopal Church as a temporary solution. The final decision would be to use Trinity Episcopal and to share the expenses of heat, electricity and water. Our church service would be from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. on Sunday morning and Sunday school would be from 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. Some church families found the new hours inconvenient and withdrew their participation.

In May, 1943, the Sunday school presented the World War II service flag to the church. At the first dedication service, seventy-one stars were pinned on the flag. Each star represented a young man or woman, with an affiliation with this church, serving in the armed forces of our country. Each star was placed by a family member. During the war, there were four other dedication services when additional stars were added. At the end of the war, the flag was packed away unfinished.

Almost forty-five years later, in May, 1990, the flag was completed and the sixth, and final, dedication was held during the morning worship service. The flag contains a total of

one hundred forty-two stars, six of which are gold, denoting those who gave their lives to their country in World War II. As a reminder of this part of our history and in honor of all those who have defended their country in war time, the flag is hung on the wall of the sanctuary each Memorial Day.

Meanwhile, the church building committee was working hard to secure various proposals and estimates for a new church building. One plan was to have the basement of the 1852 church renovated and roofed over. The motion was defeated.

At an adjourned meeting called by the building committee chairman on September 16, 1943, a vote accepted the lot of land on Pleasant Street (present site of Randolph Savings Bank) given to the church by Miss Gertrude Belcher for the purpose of building a new structure. It is appropriate to note Miss Belcher's family was affiliated with another church, but as a child she had been invited to attend our Sunday school. This invitation resulted in an interest and support of our congregation which endured throughout her long life (1872-1966).

In April, 1945, those attending a church meeting were disturbed there was no recent report from the building committee. Renewed efforts were made to consult architects, secure plans and organize a fund raising campaign. We must remember the war was still going on. The cost of labor and materials was high; sometimes materials were not even available. Church headquarters in New York offered neither pictures or plans, nor much in the way of encouragement for the building of a new edifice.

At the annual meeting in December, 1945, the church voted for Rev. Hughes to meet with one of the architectural firms and ascertain the cost of securing a picture and plans for a proposed church. At a meeting called June 11, 1946, the ecclesiastical architect, Arland A. Dirlam of Boston, made a presentation and was empowered by the building committee to prepare contract drawings, submit them to contractors and report the bids to the church people. A brochure was also to be prepared to be ready prior to the building fund appeal scheduled for September 22, 1946. The estimated cost as it appeared in the brochure was between sixty and seventy thousand dollars. At a meeting called October 1, 1946, the trustees were authorized to sell the Washington Street property, the site of the 1852 church building. It would not be possible to use the basement as the foundation for a new structure.

The building committee continued to meet periodically with Mr. Dirlam to discuss plans and consider expenses. On March 18, 1947, at a special church meeting, it was voted "to authorize the treasurer to pay out of the building fund such money as may be approved for the erection of a parish house or the shell of a church."

On September 4, 1947, Mr. Dirlam presented plans to several contractors for bids. The bids were all opened in the presence of Mr. Dirlam on October fourth and ranged from eighty-five to one hundred thirty-five thousand dollars. The plans were cut back, revised and submitted again for bids. On November 26, 1947, the bids were again opened and

ranged from fifty-one to fifty-five thousand dollars. By this time, the plan was scarcely recognizable when compared to the original plan of the proposed church. Yet, the costs remained high. The high cost, along with the fact the site did not have provision for adequate parking, probably sounded the death knell for the project.

Records have not been located which tell of the final sequence of events which resulted in the abandonment of the plan. However, there can be no doubt the members of the building committee, who had worked so hard and long to bring the plan to fruition, must have felt keen disappointment to see it come to naught.

In 1947, serious exploration took place to determine the feasibility of a federation with the Methodist Church. Rev. Ralph M. Timberlake, president of the Massachusetts Congregational Conference and Missionary Society located at 14 Beacon Street in Boston recommended this type of interdenominational cooperation to form a community church. Rev. Timberlake stated the priority of the conference was to use their funds to develop new churches in the many new housing areas. Thus, the conference was both unwilling, and unable, to erect a full church facility in a community already well-equipped. The proposals for merger submitted by the Methodist Church were not acceptable to the Congregationalists so the union was never consummated.

On November 23, 1948, the church voted to purchase the estate of the late Dr. Charles L. and Josephine S. Swan located at 30 Pearl Street, and the gathered people of the First Congregational Church of Stoughton were on the way to their fifth house of worship. In 1949, Dr. Charles Mazouch served as interim pastor between the pastorates of Rev. Hughes and Rev. Gibson.

We look back with gratitude to all the members of the congregation who stayed together through these difficult years. Special thanks go to those who gave their very best efforts to the demanding, challenging and, at times, discouraging and frustrating task, of providing a building we could once again call our church home.

A CHURCH HOME OF OUR OWN

On the morning of October 30, 1949 familiar hymns pealed forth from the tower chimes of the newly remodeled church building at 30 Pearl Street. Parishioners, in a spirit of joyful anticipation, came from far and near to be part of the first worship service. It had been a long, arduous journey of seven and a half years. It was sweet, indeed, to have their own church building once more. The home-like atmosphere of the sanctuary added to the feeling of warmth and community. A class of thirteen children was received in baptism. It was a time for rejoicing!

And rejoice the people of the First Congregational Church did by enthusiastically launching the very first week all manner of activities for those of all ages. The Christian Endeavor Society sponsored the movie, "The Great Commandment" and gave a Halloween party for the children of the Sunday school. The Ladies' Benevolent Society held an all day meeting; the Women's Union held a board meeting; the church held a special business meeting and the senior choir rehearsed accompanied by a new Baldwin console organ.

In November, 1949 the church voted unanimously to return to Miss Gertrude Belcher, with thanks, the deed for the Pleasant Street property. The property had been given on condition a church would be built on the site.

During 1950, four Protestant churches of the town, Episcopal, Methodist, Universalist and Congregational, formed the Stoughton Council of Churches. Numerous cooperative endeavors were undertaken including the Christmas Eve service, New Year's Eve service, Lenten series, Good Friday service and Easter sunrise service. During the last week of June, a daily vacation church school was also conducted.

Communion was taken to any sick or shut-in person upon request. The members of the Diaconate Board acted as communion stewards. Another innovation occurred in February, 1951 when the Women's Union gave the church a tape recorder to tape the worship service so the service might be taken to the homes of shut-ins. Thus, those physically unable to be present in the sanctuary could continue to feel they were very real members of the community of faith.

By June of 1953, the congregation realized the 30 Pearl Street building was inadequate for its needs. At a church meeting held that month, a five member building committee was elected. Ten working committees were formed. The chairperson of each, plus the five members of the building committee made up the executive committee. The ten committees were:

1. Worship and Religious Arts
2. Christian Education
3. Fellowship and Recreation
4. Plans and Construction
5. Finance
6. Promotion
7. Furnishings and Equipment
8. Memorials and Special Gifts
9. Women's Interests
10. Administration and Special Facilities

In 1954, even a small child could contribute to the church building fund by dropping a penny into a sugar bowl placed on a table in the church hall. The "sugar bowl fund" did not engender large amounts of money, but it was a constant reminder of our goal to build and invited participation of everyone.

In 1955, average attendance at Sunday school was one hundred and eighty-five with a total enrollment of three hundred. There was a continual need for more teachers and more space. Some classes met in the town hall. In 1954, Children's Day exercises were held in the town hall auditorium; another year, the exercises were held in the high school gym.

In 1956, the church was blessed by the interim pastorate of D. Horace F. Holton. This dedicated and highly respected clergyman was a stabilizing force who urged us to go forward, together, with God. After Mr. Thomas resigned in December, 1955, seminarian Clarke B. Schaaf, whose family lived in Stoughton, served as assistant minister to Dr. Horace Holton. Mr. Schaaf's enthusiastic commitment to the church was an additional source of stability and encouragement at a time when many changes were in the offing.

By 1956, average attendance at church school had increased to two hundred and forty. The increase was attributed to the dedication, planning and energetic leadership of Clarke Schaaf, as well as to the fact there were now two church services and double sessions of church school. The growth of the church school, more than any other single factor, demonstrated how desperately we needed a new church edifice.

In 1956, again in 1959, and possibly at other times, Miss Belcher demonstrated her continuing support of our church. She made substantial gifts of securities and shares of common stock to the building fund. Miss Belcher also offered a challenge gift to be applied toward church furnishings if the congregation could match her gift. The congregation met Miss Belcher's challenge.

The financial campaign was under the direction of Mr. Reuben Coleman of the City Missionary Society of Boston. Loyalty dinners were held in 1956 and 1958 with every member and friend of the church being contacted beforehand.

In May, 1957, a delegation of four, including our pastor, Rev. Robert J. MacLeod, traveled to New York City to meet with the secretary of the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Church. Consequentially, applications for both a loan and a grant were forwarded through the office of Dr. Myron Fowell, secretary of the Massachusetts Congregational Conference. As a result of these efforts a loan for \$100,00.00 was secured through the auspices of the South Boston Savings Bank thus assuring the funds to proceed with the building of the Pierce Street church.

April 6, 1958 was the last Easter Sunday observed at 30 Pearl Street. There were three worship services attended by a total of seven hundred people!

When the Pearl Street property was sold to Ahavath Torah synagogue in October, 1958, the headliner in the newspaper read, "Brotherly Love Works in Stoughton." The article cited the transaction as "an example of religious cooperation which the world well might follow." Not only had our church sold its building to the synagogue, but the synagogue had sold its building to the Knights of Columbus.

The pews which the Knights of Columbus found in the synagogue had been donated originally by the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church. The Knights of Columbus had received a gift of new pews, so they donated the ones from the synagogue to our Pierce Street church until we could purchase new ones. Upon arrival of new pews for our sanctuary, the temporary pews were donated to a Baptist church in Hingham. If pews could talk, these "traveling pews" would no doubt have had many interesting interfaith and ecumenical stories to tell about the worshippers who sat upon them in this community of Stoughton.

When, in October of 1958, the Pierce Street church building, our sixth house of worship, was dedicated, it was a gala day of celebration for the congregation. The day started with a 9:30 a.m. service for the youth and their guests. The service was conducted by Rev. Robert Hardina, Minister to Youth, assisted by Rev. MacLeod. The sermon was given by Rev. Clarke B. Schaaf, former Minister to Youth. There was a dedication of the church school teachers. The service was followed by the cornerstone ceremony. The cornerstone box contained a historical sketch covering the years 1744-1952 written by G. Lester Gay, personal remembrances of Mrs. Frances A. Chase, oldest member of the church in years of membership (1900-1958), construction and building committee reports, a message by the pastor, The Rev. Robert J. MacLeod, and photographs and reports of highlights leading up to the dedication.

The sermon at the eleven o'clock worship service was given by the Rev. Dr. Frederick Mayer-Oakes of Detroit, Michigan. Dr. Mayer-Oakes had served as our pastor from 1912 to 1917 and in September, 1958 had celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination.

At eight o'clock in the evening, the actual service of dedication took place. Greetings were brought from the Massachusetts Conference of Congregational Christian Churches, the Pilgrim Association former ministers, ministers of youth and interims. Rev. Stephen

V. Weaver of Foxboro, whose parents were active members of our church, also participated. The dedication sermon was by Dr. Roy M. Pearson, Dean of Andover Newton Theological School.

The act of dedication, conducted by Mr. MacLeod, included the presentation of the key to the church. A representative of the builder presented the key to the chairman of the building committee and the board of trustees; in turn it was presented to the chairman of the diaconate board and then to the minister with the request the church be dedicated. The prayer of dedication was given by Dr. Mayer-Oakes.

This act of dedication of the 76 Pierce Street building made official the transfer of the congregation of First Congregational Church from house of worship V to house of worship VI. Thus, the congregation demonstrated once more, the church is not a building, but a gathered people.

We were in the 30 Pearl Street building a comparatively short time. Nevertheless, the building provided a wonderful opportunity for which we all can be grateful. The members of the congregation were allowed to regroup after the fragmentation which followed the 1942 fire. Not only did they regroup, but they grew so much as a community of faith, the church family's needs required a new home.

XII

THE PIERCE STREET YEARS

1958 - 1969

During the busy building years preceding the dedication of the 76 Pierce Street church structure, the members and friends of the congregation and their pastor, with dedicated determination, expended incalculable time and effort to achieve their goal. All experienced, first-hand, the cost, as well as, the joy of discipleship.

At the same time, they had continued to "be the church." In worship services, they affirmed the very reason for the church's existence and its true source of growth and strength; in Sunday school and youth groups, they proclaimed the good news to a new generation; in the work of committees and groups, they demonstrated the Christian life and outreach in word, deed and service. To all these Christians who engaged in the work of the church, we owe a debt of gratitude.

In January, 1960, a mission and stewardship committee came into being. Its duties included missionary education, promotion and coordination within the church, guiding the church in the growing practice of Christian stewardship and preparing the mission budget for consideration in the annual church budget. Someone once defined Christian stewardship as the grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love.

At the recessed annual meeting, December 13, 1960, the church voted unanimously to approve the Constitution of the United Church of Christ. During the mid-twentieth century, there was a strong spirit of ecumenism among various like-minded Protestant churches. In June, 1957, the United Church of Christ was formed. This merger brought together into one denomination the churches of two previous mergers. Many of the churches of the Congregational/Christian denomination and the churches of the Evangelical/Reformed denomination became the United Church of Christ. In the true spirit of Congregational autonomy, each church voted as to whether or not they would be part of the newly formed denomination. With the vote in December, 1960, we became First Congregational Church of Stoughton, Massachusetts, United Church of Christ. There were other Congregational/Christian churches who voted not to join the merger and, thus, continued to be part of the pre-existing Congregational/Christian denomination.

In 1961, the mission and stewardship committee selected a missionary family in the foreign field for direct support from our church to bring about a more personal relationship with United Church Board of World Ministries. Chosen for this missionary relationship were Donald and Geraldine Abbott at the Chikore Mission Station in southern Rhodesia.

From March fourth to June twenty-fourth, 1962, Dr. Hugh Penney (1888-1975) served as our interim pastor. During this time, an inspiring series of Lenten services were held on

the theme, "A Vital Faith in God." On Sunday evenings, there were adult seminars with special speakers along with programs for those in kindergarten through high school.

In 1963, the Abbott family visited our church. Don preached the sermon; "Jeri" met with the Sunday school and before the day was out, every group had an opportunity to hear their story. In January, 1966, the family was forced to leave Rhodesia. Subsequently, the Abbotts served in Zambia and Turkey. In the ensuing years, southern Rhodesia became independent. In 1970, Don and Jeri visited Stoughton again and met with the mission and stewardship committee. In spite of the fact Don was dealing with long-standing cardiac problems, he and Jeri returned to Chikore in 1986. In December of that year, just two days after arriving back in this country, Don died.

In 1988, Jeri returned to the mission station once more to work as teacher, chaplain and counselor. At the end of May, 1994, Jeri's term as an official missionary representative of the United Church Board for World Ministries came to a close. However, because of her deep love for the people of Zimbabwe, many of whom she considers family, and her commitment to the mission at Chikore, it is Jeri's intention to retain these special relationships and return to Zimbabwe to visit whenever possible. During the May events of the 250th Anniversary celebration, the Stoughton church was privileged to host a visit by Jeri Abbott, one of her final presentations as a UCBWM representative, and hear, once more, of her love for and work with God's beautiful children in Zimbabwe.

In 1964, the Men's Club guest speaker was John R. Heine, a young man from Micronesia who was studying for the ministry at Andover Newton Seminary. When he completed his studies, John's plan was to go as a missionary to the seven American Indian churches on the Fort Berthold reservation in North Dakota. John told of the Indian pastors' wishes to be able to present each Indian mother with a new layette for her baby, possibly the only new clothing the child would receive.

In 1965, the mission and stewardship committee chose Fort Berthold as a homeland missionary relationship. For the next twenty years there would be an active program of outreach. The "Papoose Party," a layette shower for Indian newborns, became an annual all-church event. The party involved the children, youth and adults of the church family as well as cub and boy scouts. In story, drama, sign language and dance, the program taught a respect for and an understanding of the Indian culture and its many contributions to our own lives. At the same time, the party gave us the opportunity to come together as a church family and share the joy of giving to answer the needs of others. In addition to layette items, many warm hats, mittens and sweaters were sent to help the older children survive the harsh Dakota winters. The "Muffin Sunday" sponsored after church each October continues the outreach to Indian youth in the care of Charles Hall Youth Services in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Throughout the years, mission committees have guided the congregation in ways of showing Christ's love and compassion to the less fortunate at home and abroad. Members and friends of the church are given the opportunity to pledge to Our Church's Wider

Mission when the annual budget is presented. In addition, we have donated food to the local food pantry, baked pies and/or waited on tables at the soup kitchen in St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brockton, Massachusetts and sent toys and mittens to the children in hospital pediatric units and shelters for the homeless.

We have the opportunity to support the hungry and needy throughout our country and the world by contributing to special offerings such as One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, Heifer Project, Veterans of the Cross and the Church World Service Blanket Appeal. In times of earthquakes and floods, there are additional appeals to meet the specific needs.

In 1966, the first Fairless Fair proved to be a success. The fair was a new venture in sacrificial giving and continued for a period of four years. It involved fair contributions of money given by individuals and/or groups, pot luck suppers to which the entire church family was invited, displays featuring varied aspects of the church at work and a special stewardship speaker and program.

In 1968, we welcomed Miss Elsie B. Simmons as part-time director of Christian Education, a position she would fill until December, 1985. Elsie continued on a volunteer basis as Christian Education Resource Advisor and we continued to be the recipients of her skills, experience and enthusiasm.

On the evening of May 28, 1968, a mortgage burning ceremony was held in the sanctuary. "Certificates of Appreciation" were presented to many of the persons instrumental in bringing this day to pass. The chairman of the Diaconate Board presided at the session and encouraged the members to commit themselves to a new era of spiritual life. The celebration ceremony was followed by a strawberry dessert and a musical program sponsored by the combined choirs.

Also during 1968, gifts were received to establish an organ fund. The trustees report stated, "Our beautiful Allen organ was installed." It truly was a year with genuine reasons for celebration and giving thanks.

With this mention of the new organ, it is appropriate to recognize and show appreciation for the contributions made to our services of worship by the ministry of music. So many changes have occurred in this area from the time it began with the "lining out" of the psalms by the deacons, as dramatized in our historical Thanksgiving services, to the present day organist/choir directors and the adult and youth choirs.

The early colonial churches did not have organs. We do know the 1825 building on Washington Street did have an organ prior to 1850 because, in March of that year, a vote of thanks was given to Mrs. Mary T. Loud for her long continued performance at the organ without pay. In November of the same year, the church voted to purchase a new organ.

The first mention of a choir appears when, in 1878, a "committee on singing" was appointed. There was a diversity of opinion with the final vote being the congregational singing be led by a choir of young people.

During Edwin A. Jones' twenty-two year term as our organist (circa 1883-1905), the church quartet composed of soprano, alto, tenor and bass singers often provided music for the worship service. In January, 1910, the first music committee was formed.

To all the many individuals who have led the congregation in making "a joyful noise to the Lord" these many years, and especially to the choir members themselves, we express our grateful thanks.

XIII

OUR CHURCH 1970-1994

In January, 1970, when the Rev. Ernest O. Geigis began his ministry in this church, he became its twenty-fifth senior minister. At the time of writing, Mr. Geigis has completed twenty-four and a half years in this pastorate, making him, in years of service, second only to the very first pastor, the Rev. Mr. Jedidiah Adams who served for fifty-three years.

The year 1973 saw the return of the traditional church fair. Eventually, the fair would be an all-church event, administered by a fair committee rather than by the women's groups as in years past.

In March, 1973, many members of our church took an active part in an Ecumenical Lay Witness Weekend held at the Methodist Church. To participate in the carefully planned activities and worship programs with Christians of other denominations in our community was truly a rewarding and uplifting experience.

Through the years in the field of ecumenical and interfaith fellowship, our pastors have taken an active role in the Stoughton Clergy Association. The annual inter-faith Thanksgiving Eve service is an example of this cooperative spirit.

In May, 1976, Edward C. Church was ordained in our sanctuary. Mr. Church served as our seminarian for a two-year period.

Another cause for celebration in our church family, in the spring of the same year, was the graduation of David Staples from Gordon Conwell Theological School. David had grown up in our church. He and his wife, Sharon, were preparing to serve as missionaries in Brazil under the auspices of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Missionary Society.

The year 1976 was the two hundredth birthday of our country and the two hundred fiftieth birthday of our town. In keeping with this theme, on Thanksgiving Sunday, we held a historical worship service in the "spirit of '76." We worshipped according to the order and form of our Congregational ancestors of two hundred years ago.

After many years of anticipation and planning, a groundbreaking ceremony was held Sunday, April 24, 1977, to begin the second phase of the building program as described in the chapter "Our Six Houses of Worship." The land was cleared by one of the scouts as part of his Eagle project. On May 24, 1978, the service of dedication for the new addition was held. Special guests were the former ministers who had served at 76 Pierce Street as well as dignitaries from Pilgrim Association and the Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ. Indeed, it was an evening of celebration. Another dream fulfilled!

A project of the church fair in 1979 was a church family calendar. The project was dedicated to the memory of Florence E. Buker, a gifted Sunday school teacher for forty years. For many of those years, Miss Buker taught the third grade with warm enthusiasm and remarkable ability to make the Bible stories "come alive." In his annual report, Mr. Geigis said, "Her interest in and commitment to teaching the Bible, her love for children and her love for Christ and the Church, and her wonderful Christian life and spirit represent the kind of dedication the church needs from all of its members and friends if the Church is to go forward in a strong and vital way and if the cause of Christ in the world is to be strengthened and advanced."

It has been said, next to the service of worship, Christian education is the most important activity in the life of the congregation. This narrative names one dedicated teacher as representative of the hundreds of others who have given of themselves so selflessly that our children and youth may come to know the love and will of God in their lives.

The fall of 1979 found the Church confronted with the issue of whether selling raffle tickets as a means of fund raising was acceptable and appropriate. There were active and dedicated church members on each side of the issue. At a special church meeting in January 1981, in true congregational fashion, the issue was put to a vote. The result---no raffles.

In response to the women's movement for equal rights in the secular world which had a strong impetus in the 1970's, the Church looked within itself for improvement in this area. By 1982, we had a woman chairperson of the diaconate board, the highest lay office in our Congregational/United Church of Christ tradition. Deaconesses were serving communion. Women were serving on the board of trustees and women were serving as seminarians. Certainly this was a giant step from the policies of the 1744 church when women had no rights at all!

In the fall of 1983, a handbell choir was established. A two octave set of English hand bells was given to the church by the family and friends of Grace E. Ivaldi (1905-1983). A third octave was given to the choir the next year. The first performance of the handbell choir was on Thanksgiving Sunday 1983 at which time the handbells were dedicated. Edward W. Ivaldi, Sr., the energetic, enthusiastic and musically-talented son of Grace, was the bell choir director. The official name of the group became "The Grace Notes." In a later report, Edward W. Ivaldi, Sr. stated, "We take all different size bells and make a symphony of music. The church takes all different size people, regardless of race or color or religion, and molds them together into the family of God."

On the afternoon of December 11, 1983, a dinner and program were held following the Service of Dedication to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dedication of the 76 Pierce Street sanctuary. Again, all the former ministers who had served at this location were our special guests.

The 1984 annual meeting formed a Memorial Gifts Committee. The committee would review and establish policy in regard to memorial gifts and be responsible for proper acknowledgment and recordkeeping in the Abiding Memorial Book currently located in the church vestibule.

A tone chime choir was formed in November, 1987 for children beginning with the first grade. A three octave set of tone chimes had been donated anonymously to the church. The new group brings gladness to the hearts of the congregation whenever they participate in a worship service. A youth handbell choir was formed in the fall of 1990 to introduce our young people to the joy of ringing.

In 1988, the By-Laws Review Committee completed their task. The by-laws revision provided for a new stewardship committee charged with interpreting and promoting Christian stewardship throughout the year. The committee would also be responsible for the annual stewardship appeal in the fall.

Through the years, our church has been the recipient of many legacies. At the present time, the Board of Investment, composed of dedicated church members with financial expertise, works hard to insure the most productive returns. All the members of the congregation are recipients of the many benefits this arrangement provides and we are grateful.

However, at denominational seminars conducted by the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ, the members of the Stewardship Committees learn that endowments can be bane as well as blessing. Substantial endowments can result in an attitude of dependence on these funds rather than an "attitude of gratitude" coming from the grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love." Ideally, this faith lies at the heart of each individual's Christian stewardship. When giving to one's church comes from a "faith response" rather than a "fund response," then the blessing of endowments results in the church's ability to enlarge the circle of Christ's compassion, love and service in its own congregation, the community and the world.

The church ushered in the decade of the nineties with a celebration of our pastor's twentieth year. The festivities were held immediately following the church service on January 14, 1990. Because the Women's Fellowship was scheduled to provide a simple, mid-winter luncheon, the celebration aspect was a complete surprise to Mr. Geigis. All seminarians who had served under Rev. Geigis' supervision had been contacted. Those who were able attended the occasion. Many others sent greetings. It was a wonderful event to begin a new decade.

In the fall of 1991, the Church Growth Committee sent out a comprehensive questionnaire asking members and friends for comments about various aspects of our church life. The responses were organized, discussed and acted upon in a variety of ways. The aim of this committee, since its formation in early 1985, was to find ways to renew the interest of

inactive members and to welcome new ones. In 1992, the committee was disbanded and its functions assigned to the reactivated Church Council.

The 250th Anniversary Committee held its first meeting in June, 1992. The committee would continue to meet monthly for the next two years in order that the observance would be one of which we all could be proud. The celebration would begin with a service of rededication at morning worship on August 8, 1993 and would end on August 7, 1994.

In 1993, a caring committee was established under the direction of the Diaconate Board. Caring committee members would be called "shepherds" and would be assigned to those living in a given area of the town. The aim of the committee is a program of visitation to the sick and shut-ins, inactive members, as well as potential new members and friends. The shepherding program was not an anniversary event per se, but its affirmation of the church family and its formation during the time of the year-long celebration seemed especially appropriate.

As the 250th Anniversary Committee proceeded with its work, the motto "Looking back with gratitude, Looking forward with faith" was selected. Several gifted members of the congregation created art work using the motto as a theme. The designs were used throughout the year on bulletins, booklets and anniversary sale items.

The committee planned one, or more, special anniversary event each month. The events were designed to appeal to a wide range of interests. Some of the activities were the planting of a memorial golden rain tree on the church grounds complete with a bronze commemorative marker, a historical fashion show, a lecture on charting genealogy, a handbell concert and a float in the Fourth of July parade followed by an ice cream social. An anniversary hymn was written by our organist/choir director; a new cookbook was compiled and a new church history was written.

The Old Stoughton Musical Society held its spring concert in our sanctuary and featured a piece of music written by Laura Gebhardt, a former organist/choir director of our church. The Stoughton Historical Society hosted an open house honoring the common heritage of our church and the First Parish Universalist Church.

Former ministers and seminarians were contacted and several came back to preach and renew acquaintances. A joint service of worship was held with the First Parish Church followed by a simple colonial luncheon attended by town dignitaries as special invited guests.

In the final weeks of the celebration, our church was honored by the presence and preaching of the Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry, national President of the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Paul R. Sinn, Associate Conference Minister for the southeast area of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Rev. Bennie E. Whiten, Jr., President of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ. Their

presence among us affirmed the fellowship in Christ, which, along with our independence in Christ (our autonomy), constitutes the true "congregational way."

The last event of the 250th year observance was homecoming weekend. Displays were featured throughout the church building of current work, activities and outreach as well as memorabilia of times past. Fittingly, the weekend culminated at the morning worship service on August 7, 1994 with special music and times of recognition and rededication.

As this part of our story comes to a close, we are truly grateful for the hundreds, and yes, thousands of people of this church, who, since 1744, not only kept the faith, but handed it on to us. May we remember always to "look back with gratitude; to look forward with faith." Then, the cause of Christ in the world will be strengthened and advanced, and the First Congregational Church of Stoughton, Massachusetts, United Church of Christ will be a viable source of spiritual power in this community for many years to come.

A HYMN OF CELEBRATION

words and music by
Kathryn Rosenbach

Worshipping together we faithfully rejoice
In joining as one family, singing as one voice.
Praising all God's glory-strengthening our choice,
Hearing our God's message with free will as one voice.

The unity of our spirit formed by faith, hope and love
From our fathers before us remains guided from above.
United in God's service, working hand in hand,
They made our present nation our church and our land.

For our celebration we sing and soon we'll heed
With bread and cup we'll recreate God's most holy deed.
Our children will inherit these traditions of today;
We all pray for their future-the world we'll send their way.

Our daily tasks do carry us through our paths each day
And it is with God's love that we shall find the way.
We thank God for our children, our families and those above.
We'll teach eternal messages of faith, hope and love. Amen.

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