

Servant Leaders Seeking Justice:
An Ethnographic Sketch of Trinity United Methodist Church (1774-2023)


by

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Ernest and Ruth Buchholz, who I carry in my heart. The greatest gifts they bestowed upon me were an abiding love of God and a sense of Christian responsibility for making the world a better place.

*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required,
and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.
Luke 12:48 NRSV*

Introduction

On November 20, 1774, a young, itinerant Methodist minister, William Duke, rode into Alexandria, Virginia, and preached to a small group of local people. He recorded in his diary that he had “formed them into a new society.”¹ No pomp and circumstance, no grand gestures or even a modest celebration ushered in this new Methodist society.² Church archives yield sparse documentation of its organization. Few names are associated with those early days when the Methodist movement was planted in Alexandria, Virginia. Yet, if it is evidence one seeks, look no further than 2911 Cameron Mills Road, home of the third “meeting house” of that society, Trinity United Methodist Church, which later became a congregation in an emerging Protestant denomination.

For twenty-three years, Trinity has been my church home. A simple invitation from a friend led me to its doors. I was exploring my new neighborhood, looking for a church similar in beliefs and customs to the Moravian Church in which I was raised. I wanted a church to be active enough to offer a wide range of worship and community activities, but small enough to feel intimate; formal in its doctrine, but open and welcoming of doubts and uncertainties. I sought a church home where parishioners embraced their faith in all aspects of their lives. I soon found the people of Trinity were warm, hospitable, and quick to invite newcomers to their homes for dinner. The pews seemed to be filled with overachievers from what Tom Brokaw would call “the greatest generation.” Doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers, college professors, retired military brass, and high-ranking government officials all called Trinity home. Faithfully, they gave of their time, talent

¹ Fern Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon for God*, (Alexandria, Virginia: 1974), 26.

² Alton S. Wallace, *I Once Was Young: History of the Alfred Street Baptist Church 1803-2003* (Littleton, MA: Tapestry Press, Ltd, 2003), 1. The Toleration Act of 1772 was passed by the Virginia Assembly reserving the term ‘church’ for exclusive use by the Church of England, which was considered the official church of Virginia. Other denominations were limited to calling their congregations ‘societies’ and their buildings ‘meeting houses.’

and treasure to ensure their church would flourish –not to serve themselves –but to serve God, the community and the world. Not as visible was the strong ethos of social justice upon which the church had been built and when black and white members worshiped together. Trinity had given birth to and supported the first African American Methodist Church in Alexandria. Trinity's pastors continually challenged the tolerance of slavery within the Methodist Episcopal Church before the Civil War, and its leaders withstood pressure to join the ranks of the Southern church once the denomination split along a slave state/free state divide.

On the verge of celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2024, Trinity United Methodist Church (UMC) has reason to be proud of its ancestral leaders who stood strong in their opposition to slavery. Yet, Trinity's past also includes decades when its white ministers and members neglected their Christian duties to advocate for voting rights, fair housing practices, equitable education and other social and economic policies aimed at eliminating discrimination. This thesis seeks to reignite the social justice flame that burned brightly in Trinity's forebears by creating an ethnographic portrait of Trinity UMC's record of racial justice activism followed by years of benign detachment to help today's congregation discern where God is calling the church. This paper examines the pivotal influences and historic points in the formation of Trinity's spiritual identity, the contemporary leaders who have shaped its culture, and the current members who will guide its future. The research includes information from Trinity's archives and local historic documents, as well as twenty-two interviews with former Trinity pastors, current members, and community leaders whose work has intersected with Trinity over the years.

Chapter One: Trinity in the Time of Slavery

A Watermelon For God: Dr. Fern C. Stukenbroeker's Gift to Trinity

The foundational story of Trinity UMC was largely researched by Dr. Fern. C. Stukenbroeker (1919-2006) for his 1974 book, *A Watermelon for God*, which was unveiled as the church celebrated its 200th anniversary. The book provided congregants and future generations a literal pathway to the church's humble beginnings when Alexandria was a seaport village, just 25 years old, and the United States was not yet a country. The book's title draws from an account noted in the diary of an 18th century Methodist preacher, who compares the charitable gift of a watermelon from a local countryman to a cup of cold water given in the name of Jesus Christ. This single contribution –aside from the active role Stukenbroeker played as a member of Trinity– is worth noting as he gifted Trinity with its birth and coming-of-age story.

Stukenbroeker joined Trinity in 1949, lending his time and talent as chairman of the church board, a member of the Board of Trustees, and as Sunday School Superintendent. He was perhaps the longest-serving teacher of the adult Sunday School classes –he gave more than 1,000 lessons over 48 years. In his professional life, he worked as a special agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigations for 32 years. He investigated special internal security issues and spoke throughout the United States on the threats of communism and Soviet espionage. After he retired from the federal government in 1975, Stukenbroeker taught criminal justice administration at the Northern Virginia Community College until 1989.³

Assisted by fellow members who conducted local research and by Methodist historians from the Baltimore and Virginia Conferences, Stukenbroeker pored over diaries of itinerant pastors

³ “Obituaries,” *The Washington Post*, accessed December 30, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2006/02/11/obituaries/1b1aeabc-1515-4451-8824-746503692f42/>

and Methodist records to chronicle Trinity's history. His book is a map of early meeting houses with addresses easily passed by –if not missed when driving through the now busy streets of Old Town Alexandria. He writes of early Methodist leaders who interacted with colonial leaders and soon-to-be presidents. He illuminates the faith and fortitude of forebears who shaped a new Methodist society and church, a new town, and a new country while confronting old monarchies, longstanding religious traditions and a festering global issue that would test institutions and governments: slavery.

Defined By an Unequivocal Stand Against Slavery

Today, nearly 250 years later, it may seem to be an exaggeration to claim slavery as the nexus of Methodism, Trinity UMC and the founding of the United States. All three in their own time and scale were defined by their stance on slavery. Yet only Trinity, in its formation, fruition, contrition and revivification remained unequivocally opposed to slavery. Trinity planted itself in the middle of social and revolutionary chaos while growing in its scriptural understanding of justice and liberation based on the theological framework of John Wesley.

Uniquely situated in geography, time and history, Trinity ancestors were creating something new out of whole cloth – analogous to a small band of apostles instructed by Jesus to “feed my sheep.” By 1772, Methodists established a foothold in Virginia and were preaching the Gospel to enslaved and free people alike.⁴ Even before the Methodist denomination was founded in 1784, Virginian Methodists –black and white members– were meeting weekly in worship, song, prayer and private instruction.

⁴ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 40.

While names and faces escape us today, the indelible mark of these early Trinity members is best seen through their social justice stands and deeds. From its formation in 1774 through 1883, Trinity upheld scriptural tenets of justice in three decisively public acts: first, the 1830 creation and support of Alexandria's first African American Methodist church; second, the confrontation in the 1844 General Conference of a Georgia-based Bishop over his enslavement of black people; and third, the resolve of Trinity's leaders to remain a "northern," antislavery church in 1849 even as 200 pro-Southern members were expelled from the church and ultimately formed a southern Methodist church across the street.

What led Trinity's ancestors to such courageous stands? Their adherence to overarching tenets of faith and social responsibility were deeply embedded in their hearts and minds undoubtedly from personal experience, scriptural understanding, and the guidance of John Wesley.

John Wesley's Opposition to Slavery

The global impact of Methodism and its accidental founder, John Wesley (1703-1791), are often overlooked when considering the issue of slavery. It bears reminding Methodists today, who find their denomination in turmoil, that Wesley was not only an English Anglican priest but also a social justice leader. He used his influence within the Church of England, with members of Parliament, and among English Methodist societies to support abolition in Great Britain and its colonies.⁵

Wesley had seen slavery first-hand in the colony of Georgia in 1736 when he arrived in Savannah along with his brother Charles. Their motivation was to bring Christianity to Native

⁵ In 2024, following over forty years of internal debate, the United Methodist Church will officially split over the issue of homosexual ordination and same-sex marriage. Congregations that are choosing to disaffiliate from the UMC are apt to become independent or affiliate with the newly formed Global Methodist Church, which seeks to continue limitations on ordination and marriage.

Americans. Although their efforts failed miserably, their time in Savannah exposed them to the cruelties of a slavery, which Wesley referenced in his anti-slavery essay.

The young itinerant pastors who became the first leaders of Trinity were shaped by the teaching, preaching and writings of Wesley. Although he was credited with starting the Methodist movement resulting in a new Protestant denomination, Wesley's desire was to reform the Church of England during the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40s, a period when European culture and society were being reshaped. Wesley and his fellow Oxford scholars challenged the traditions and doctrines of the Church of England through their evangelical ideas to make Christianity accessible to all, irrespective of social class.

In 1774, while Trinity was establishing itself in Alexandria, John Wesley was on the other side of the Atlantic, voicing his opposition to slavery in Great Britain. That year, he published *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, indicting slavery in England as well as its colonies. Wesley was the first well-known religious leader to take such a definitive and public stand against slavery. His essay sought to dispel notions that the enslaved people had been rescued from desolation and brought to civilization for their eventual benefit, and he refuted many of the leading proslavery arguments being promulgated. His *Thoughts Upon Slavery* was widely read in and beyond Methodist circles. The tract was reprinted thirteen times over thirty years and was even found in George Washington's library.⁶

Drawing from correspondence of the Royal Academy of Science in Paris, Wesley's tract relates the firsthand accounts of Frenchmen who traveled to Africa from 1749 to 1753. They witnessed tranquil communities inhabited by peaceful, curious and resourceful people who were governed by kings with well-established forms of government. Trades and agriculture supplied the

⁶ Irv A. Brendlinger, *Social Justice Through the Eyes of Wesley: John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery*, (Ontario, Canada, Joshua Press, Inc: 2006), 151.

people's needs for food, clothing, shelter and tools. In each village, a local priest gathered people for worship and daily prayer. Related to the residents of Senegal, Wesley writes:

The Government is easy because the people are of a quiet and good disposition; and of well instructed in what is right, that a man who wrongs another is the abomination of all. They desire no more land than they use, which they cultivate with great care and industry. If any of them are known to be made slaves by the white men they all join to redeem them. They not only support all that are old, or blind, or lame among themselves; but have frequently supplied the necessities of the Mandingos, when they were beset by famine.⁷

Wesley takes issue with forceable procurement of enslaved people, their treatment on the ships with scarce food, and the deplorable living and working conditions they experienced upon their arrival. Wesley singles out the laws of Virginia permitting anyone to kill an enslaved person for running away from a slaveowner. Wesley questions:

I would now enquire, whether these things can be defended on the principles of even Heathen Honesty? Whether they can be reconciled with any degree of either Justice or Mercy. The grand plea is 'they are authorized by Law.' But can Law, or Human Law, change the nature of things? Can it turn Darkness into Light, or evil into good? By no means. Notwithstanding ten thousand Laws, right is right, and wrong is wrong still. . . I absolutely deny all Slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural Justice.⁸

Ship captains, slave traders and owners are warned of God's retribution and Wesley pleads with them to invoke the love of God and turn away from the horrid trade and be honest men.⁹

Wesley's notoriety and preaching made him influential with members of the British Parliament, including William Wilberforce (1759-1833). Late in Wesley's life, but early in Wilberforce's political career, Wesley's antislavery views helped shape Wilberforce's initial push to abolish slavery. The actual legislation ending slavery in Great Britain was not realized until 1833, several years after Wilberforce retired from political life. Yet, in the 1790s, Wesley

⁷ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 1774. Reprinted by Andesite Press, 6.

⁸ Wesley, *Thoughts*, 16.

⁹ Wesley, *Thoughts*, 23.

encouraged his followers to appeal directly to Parliament to abolish slavery. They employed a new tactic resembling grassroots advocacy. Their multi-year petition drive demonstrated the depth of their religious convictions and the power of social justice advocacy within the Methodist movement.¹⁰

Slavery arrived on the shores of the thirteen colonies long before Methodism. Would the Trinity Methodists forming a new society in Alexandria be loyal to the tenets set forth by John Wesley with a singular focus evangelizing to nonbelievers or would they be ruled by financial interests and secular rationales to keep slavery intact?

Birth of Alexandria's First African American Methodist Church: Davis Chapel

From 1774 to 1790, Trinity members gathered in private homes and warehouses, organizing around Wesley's 1743 guide for the formation of Methodist societies. In the United States, the Methodist Episcopal denomination was not organized until 1784 at the Christmas Conference held in Baltimore. In 1791, Trinity's first meeting house was completed at Chapel Alley, located in Bushby's Square between Royal and Fairfax Street off Duke Street. The land on which it was built was donated by William Bushby.

By 1804, Trinity moved to its second meeting house on Washington Street. The move to a larger building undoubtedly was necessary following the Great Revivals of 1802-1804, which grew Trinity to over 300 members, making it one of the largest congregations in the Baltimore Conference of Methodist churches.¹¹ The Second Great Awakening was sweeping the newly formed nation. Methodists and Baptists¹² benefited from these large, outdoor, multi-day worship

¹⁰ Irv Brendlinger, "John Wesley and Slavery: Myth and Reality" (2006). Faculty Publications – College of Christian Studies. Paper 116. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/116>

¹¹ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 102.

¹² Alfred Street Baptist Church, the first black Baptist church of Alexandria, was formed in 1803.

services aimed at converting people to Christianity. The enthusiasm of preachers like Wesley made these outdoor revivals popular in England in the mid 18th century as he sought to reach more people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Stukenbroeker describes revivals as, “mysterious bolts falling from the hand of the Almighty . . . inexplicable in origin, suddenly, like a wind, sweeping in from nowhere, rising to volcanic proportions, and then, just as inexplicably, skipping away into nowhere. . . often creating a spiritual dryness which cases many a preacher to pray for its return.”¹³

Because Methodists records did not distinguish between black and white people until 1786, it is difficult to determine the ratio of black and white members at Trinity in those formative years.¹⁴ However, in 1830, of approximately 1,000 members, Trinity had 222 black members on its rolls. By 1833, because of another revival the preceding year, the number increased to 446 and in 1834 to 466.¹⁵

The growth of Trinity demonstrates a spiritual attraction to Methodism transcending the racial divisions that clearly existed. Each week, aside from Sunday worship, small groups known as class meetings convened for religious instruction and in many cases for rudimentary education as well. These class meetings were conducted separately around racial lines with literate white and black men serving as class leaders. Men’s and women’s classes met separately as well. Despite this level of organization and collaboration, the African American members desired to have their own church, and Trinity’s white members respected their wishes and cooperated in the endeavor.

Today, it may seem that the willingness of Trinity’s leaders to birth an African American church was a form of segregation –the very tenet of inequality that has plagued our country since its founding. While I believe that Trinity’s white leaders would have been willing to continue as a

¹³ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 102.

¹⁴ Irons, *The Origins*, 42.

¹⁵ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 156.

single bi-racial congregation, they recognized and responded to the wishes of black congregants to have their own church. White leaders of the church understood the need for black autonomy and were willing to help bring it to fruition.

In 1830, black and white members of Trinity Methodist Church purchased a parcel of land on the west side of Columbus Street between Princess and Oronoco to build the first African American Methodist Episcopal church in Alexandria. This collective vision for a new African American church demonstrated a level of respect and cooperation among the Trinity leaders.

As construction was about to begin on the church building, the August 1831 slave revolt known as Nat Turner's Rebellion arose in Southampton County, Virginia. It resulted in the deaths of 55 white people with an additional 120 enslaved and freed black persons killed in retaliation. Later, following court trials, the Commonwealth of Virginia put to death another 56 enslaved and freed black people for participating in the insurrection. White Alexandrians living near the building site became fearful and objected to the location of the new church. There was concern that the new church and its leadership could incite such violence in Alexandria because Nat Turner had been a black, enslaved preacher who knew how to read and write.

Trinity leaders chose a new site for the church at 606 South Washington Street between two emerging black neighborhoods known as "the Bottoms" and "Hayti," and a mere half mile from the Franklin & Armfield Slave Market.¹⁶ The land was purchased for \$350 and the property deed listed nine trustees --five black men and four white men. The African American church

¹⁶ The Franklin & Armfield Slave Market, one of the largest in United States, occupied 1315 Duke Street, Alexandria from 1828-1836. That site would continue to house slave trading firms until 1861.

founders¹⁷ included Francis Hoy, James Evans, Philip Hamilton,¹⁸ Simon Turley¹⁹ and Moses Hepburn, a businessman considered to be one of the wealthiest African Americans in Northern Virginia. Hepburn played a leading role in the land and shoreline development of Alexandria as well as supporting the church in its financial, educational, and social justice matters. He was the first president of the L.T. Morgan Colored Missionary Society Chapel, founded in 1837, which raised money for missionary activities in Africa.²⁰

In 1834, the same year slavery ended in all British lands, Davis Chapel opened its doors, becoming Alexandria's first African American Methodist Episcopal Church. It derived its name from Trinity's minister Charles A. Davis (1802-1867), who served Trinity from 1833-34 and was instrumental in the formation of Davis Chapel.

The hostilities of proslavery lawmakers and pastors throughout Virginia in the aftermath of the Nat Turner insurrection ushered in a "refined brand of proslavery Christianity."²¹ The Virginia State Assembly imposed new restrictions upon the education of blacks—freed or enslaved. Curfews were imposed upon African Americans gathering for social or religious reasons. Black clergymen were stripped of their spiritual authority. They forbid all unsupervised religious activity

¹⁷ The Alexandria African American Heritage Park includes a sculpture honoring black residents and institutions that helped form Alexandria. The "Truths That Rise From Roots—Remembered" sculpture honors Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church's early leaders: James Harper, Francis Hoy, James Evans, Philip Hamilton, Simon Turley, Rev. James Thomas, Rev. Robert H. Robinson and Rev. James Howard.

¹⁸ Donald A. DeBats, *Philip Hamilton, 'Voting Viva Voce: Unlocking the Social Logic of Past Politics*, University of Virginia, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (2016): accessed January 26, 2023, <http://sociallogic.iath.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/Hamilton%235.pdf> Philip Hamilton (1782-1862) is the only identified black man buried in the Trinity United Methodist Church Cemetery as Davis Chapel did not have its own cemetery at the time of his death.

¹⁹ "Slave Manumissions in Alexandria Land Records 1790-1863," The Friends of Freedmen's Cemetery, accessed January 23, 2023, <http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml> Simon Turley was freed from enslavement on June 22, 1824, by Robert Jamieson. Turley had been purchased from George H. Terrett by Andrew Jamieson in 1817. Turley was freed when he paid back the purchase price.

²⁰ "100-5015-0004 Moses Hepburn Row Houses," Virginia Department of Historical Records, last modified 2004, <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/100-5015-0004/>

²¹ Irons, *The Origins*, 138.

by slaves or free blacks and encouraged slaveowners to assume more active spiritual oversight of their slaves. White pastors began increasingly systematic attempts at oral instruction of enslaved people by preaching a proslavery Gospel to stave off further rebellion and restrain any black interpretation of scripture.²²

Because Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia from 1790 to 1847, these insidious laws did not immediately impact the Davis Chapel congregation.²³ In those early years, church leaders established a Sunday school as well as a secular school for adults who could read and write as an opportunity for further education. However, in March 1847, when Alexandria was no longer part of the District of Columbia and returned to Virginia, Alexandria's black residents fell under the same oppressive laws, forcing Davis Chapel to close its school.²⁴

Years later, following the 1844 split of the Methodist Episcopal Church into a northern and southern church, Rev. Charles A. Davis affiliated with the Southern Methodist Church.²⁵ The congregation chose a new name, "Roberts Chapel" after Trinity's minister (and Bishop) Robert R. Roberts. Founding member Philip Hamilton had suggested the name change. Until the end of the Civil War, Trinity sponsored Roberts Chapel, sharing a white minister who would preach three

²² Irons, *The Origins*, 139.

²³ James Howard, "History," in *Anniversary Celebration: Bishop's Visit and Mortgage Burning, Roberts Memorial Chapel Methodist Church* (November 1943), 9-16.

²⁴ https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/100-5015-0006_RobertsMemorialUnitedMethodistChurch_2004_Final_Nomination.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/D/davis-charles-a.html> accessed January 26, 2023. Charles A. Davis became a Methodist Episcopal minister in 1824 when he was admitted on trial by the Baltimore Conference. His itinerancy would include appointments in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, New York, the Montgomery Circuit of Maryland, Annapolis, the District of Columbia, and Alexandria. In 1832, when the Methodist Episcopal Church Conference convened in Philadelphia, he served as one of its secretaries. While serving in government in Washington, DC, he was accepted into the newly formed Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (South), filling an appointment in Richmond and Portsmouth, Virginia. During his time in Portsmouth, he received the appointment of chaplain in the navy. When the Civil War broke out, he remained true to his country and was expelled by the Virginia Conference of the M.E. Church South. He made peace with the Virginia and North Carolina Conference of the ME Church sometime later. At the time of his death, he was in charge of the Norfolk Naval Hospital.

times a week at each church.²⁶ In 1956, the formal name of Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church was adopted.²⁷ Roberts Memorial UMC remains a vibrant congregation.

The Split of the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1844

With the certitude of documented history, we know how the tensions of slavery would ultimately rip the United States apart in the Civil War and we know the outcome: a Union barely held together, bearing scars so deeply embedded in the enslaved people and animosity running cold in many Southerners who loathed defeat by Northern forces. But for people living in Alexandria prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, there was no certainty. They lived in the tension between the North and the South with no assurances of a peaceful or violent outcome.

“The pre-Civil War Alexandria Methodist was becoming a Christian in a larger world of social responsibility,” observes Stukenbroeker.²⁸ The Trinity members were not spared from such obligations as they lived in liminal times and space. Yet, church leaders undoubtedly took divine solace in the strength of their convictions, yielding no ground to proslavery forces—even when a sizeable number of their own members sympathized with the South.

Between 1837 and 1845, Virginia clergymen were instrumental in the dividing of the national Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist denominations.²⁹ The Methodists’ tensions pitted Bishops against itinerant ministers. With hope of maintaining church unity at all costs, the Bishops used their authority to quash abolitionist platforms at several General Conferences. At the same time, their efforts to prevent slavery from being addressed moved the Methodist Episcopal Church further away from the early Methodism of John Wesley. The General Rules of 1743 included

²⁶ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 156.

²⁷ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 156.

²⁸ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 140.

²⁹ Irons, *The Origins*, 195.

instructions from Wesley to his followers to not enslave people. In 1780, Francis Asbury, introduced and secured passage of a statement which called on Methodist preachers to work for emancipation. At the 1784 Christmas Conference, itinerant pastors voted to expel anyone who would not emancipate their slaves. Six months later the statement was struck and replaced with a strong statement against slavery but with no requirements for disciplinary action.³⁰ Furthermore, the 1804 General Conference decided to print two disciplines as to omit any reference to slavery in the edition printed for southern states. The 1828 General Conference voted down a measure to permit the church to discipline a master who mistreated their slaves. Four years later, the General Conference tabled all proposals related to slavery.³¹

So, by 1844, as Trinity's minister, Alfred Griffith (1783-1871), set out for New York to attend the Methodist Episcopal General Conference, he knew well the continual backsliding from the original tenets of early Methodism. He served as one of ten delegates from the Baltimore Conference, which encompassed both free and slave territory.³² Yet, even with this enormous burden, Griffith was determined to not waver from his moral convictions.

Griffith was the third child of Ruth Berry and Samuel Griffith, a wealthy Maryland farmer. He was admitted into the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1806 and remained a member until his death in 1871.³³ In 1825, during the presidency of James Monroe, Griffith served as Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. He served Trinity from 1833-1834. His ministry was devoted to social issues and

³⁰ Fred J. Hood, "Methodist Bishops and Abolitionism," *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association* 1, (1973): 1-14, accessed January 28, 2023, https://www.mtsu.edu/borders/archives/1/Methodist_Bishops_and_Abolitionism.pdf.

³¹ Hood, "Methodist," 2.

³² Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 161.

³³ Griffith is buried in the Ivy Hill Cemetery located on King Street, Alexandria.

was known for preaching sermons denouncing slavery. He rejected his family inheritance, citing that his conscience would not allow him to accept land that had been worked by enslaved people.³⁴

This resolve brought Griffith and the Methodist Episcopal Church to a turning point in 1844, when slavery was the centerpiece of the General Conference debate. Because so many southern clergymen enslaved black people, they were frustrated that their ministry and advancement within the Methodist church was relegated to territories where slavery was allowed. To go outside of these jurisdictions would mean divesting themselves of the enslaved people.

White southern delegates supported the appointment of South Carolina's William Capers (1790-1855), in hope that his elevation as bishop would give an advantage to southern clergy. The northern delegates not only derailed Capers' prospects, but they challenged another bishop from Georgia for enslaving black people.

Griffith cosponsored a resolution demanding that Bishop James Osgood Andrew (1794-1871) of Georgia step down because he enslaved black people. (How and when he inherited enslaved people is debatable, although all accounts reference one or more of his successive wives enslaved people. More than one account references that at the time of his initial appointment as bishop in 1832, he did not own any enslaved people.) With northern delegates holding the majority, the General Conference delegates passed a resolution stripping Andrew of his episcopal duties.

The Methodist delegates from southern states were offended. Finding these actions intolerable, Capers put forth a resolution to divide the General Conference along slaveholding lines, and with a single vote, the Methodist Episcopal Church was split in two. In 1845, at a convention in Louisville, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was officially formed.³⁵

³⁴ "Bedinger Family History and Genealogy," accessed January 26, 2023, <http://www.bedinger.org/the-griffith-family.html>.

³⁵ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 161.

Trinity's Unyielding Stand Against Slavery (1849-1861)

Although most of the Baltimore Conference, of which Trinity was a part, remained loyal to the Methodist Episcopal (Northern) Church, the Southern Church exerted formidable pressure in Alexandria. Trinity's "Southern-oriented" members were being encouraged by leaders of the Southern Church to "convert" Trinity to a Southern Church. Trinity's ministers, John M. Jones and Ezra F. Busey responded by expelling nearly 200 southern-sympathetic people in early June 1849, who would within weeks form Washington Street Methodist Episcopal Church South.

In the meantime, heightened anger and animosity led to a physical altercation between the northern and southern Trinity members, as each side attempted to seize the church property. The keys to Trinity's meeting house on South Washington Street were seized by the sheriff, and the doors closed, pending legal action and a court decision.

For one year, Trinity was locked out of its building pending a court decision that focused upon the legal wording of the 1803 deed for the church property. Yet, the ministers and the entire board of trustees remained resolute. On June 17, 1850, Justice Tyler ruled in favor of the northern church and the Trinity congregation, while fewer in number, returned to its house of worship.³⁶

The court ruling must have been bittersweet: the Trinity congregation was finally returning to their church building yet knowing that nearly one quarter of its membership succumbed to a perverted Gospel –one where cruel inhumanity to black enslaved people was justified and Christianity was weaponized to keep black people from rebelling against white slaveowners.

In the years to come, Trinity would literally face its transgressors. Washington Street Methodist Episcopal Church South would erect its building across the street from Trinity. Leading

³⁶ "Being Southern in Position: The Division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Alexandria," Library of Virginia, accessed January 29, 2023, <https://uncommonwealth.virginiamemory.com/blog/2022/03/02/being-southern-in-position-the-division-of-the-methodist-episcopal-church/>

up to the Civil War, the Trinity congregation must have felt a sense of isolation as it was one of few Northern churches in the Northern Virginia District of the Baltimore Conference. By 1861, many Virginia ministers voted to become independent of either the Northern or Southern General Conferences, but, as Stukenbroeker notes, “Trinity refused to accept this tight rope walking.”³⁷

³⁷ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 173.

Chapter Two: Trinity in the Time of Civil Rights

Making the Move to Alexandria Suburbs and Silence

When Stukenbroeker authored *A Watermelon for God*, he divided Trinity's history by the various places in which the congregation conducted its worship services. Although parishioners originally congregated in warehouses and storefronts, the first meeting house was completed in 1791 and was located between Royal and Fairfax off Duke Street. By 1804 the congregation had outgrown that space. A second meeting house was then built on Washington Street, where the congregation remained through the challenging times of church and country division.

Stukenbroeker labels the aftermath of the Civil War and the early twentieth century, 1865-1941, as "the long years." During this period thirty ministers led Trinity. Little is known of them, as only two pastors documented their tenure.³⁸ Lay leadership provided stability. The active role of women became more pronounced with the formation of various women's groups including the Ladies Aid Society, the Women's Foreign Society and the Women's Home Missionary Society. Fewer in number, the congregation worshiped and worked together to sustain their faith community.

Following World War I membership ebbed so much that by 1938 a visiting former member observed that "the congregation seemed to be disconsolately awaiting its death knell."³⁹ In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church reunited. In theory, this would have meant Trinity, Washington Street and Roberts Memorial were of like mind and heart, reconciling their differences from the Civil War

³⁸Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 187.

³⁹Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 199.

era. Yet the relationship between Trinity and Washington Street remained strained, which may have contributed to the dwindling membership at Trinity.

In October 1940, Rev. John Haywood Blakemore (1907-1980) was installed as Trinity's new pastor and preached to just ten people at his first Sunday service. Months later, Virginia Bishop William W. Peele (1881-1959) spoke to the congregants, urging them to merge with the Washington Street Methodists. That proposal was soundly rejected. Yet it was clear that three Methodist churches on a small stretch of Washington Street had reached a saturation point and was unsustainable. Blakemore suggested the only alternative was moving to a developing area of Alexandria known as Beverly Hills. The congregants quickly arrived at a bold and unanimous decision to sell the existing property and relocate to the suburbs. The final worship service in the second meeting house took place on December 28, 1941. On August 7, 1942, the cornerstone was laid for Trinity's third and last meeting house at 2911 Cameron Mills Road. Responding to these moves, longtime member Charles Pierpont reflected: "I have long been in favor of changing the location of the church. In the hour of their deepest discouragement Jesus told his disciples to cast their net on the other side of their boat . . . for years we have been fishing in over-fished waters."⁴⁰ Trinity's move to an emerging white neighborhood came during a wartime building boom in the City of Alexandria. Single family homes, apartments and public housing were being built to meet the needs of military families and federal government employees. The North Ridge / Beverly Hills neighborhood was particularly attractive for military and Defense Department personnel commuting to the newly constructed Pentagon. Although Alexandria did not legally pursue segregated districts as allowed by the Virginia Assembly in 1912, local banks relied heavily upon risk assessments of the Federal Housing Administration to decide to whom they would grant home

⁴⁰ Stukenbroeker, *Watermelon*, 215.

mortgages.⁴¹ Funding for African American residents and neighborhoods were considered high risk while white neighborhoods were low risk. In addition, many of the large apartment complexes constructed during the 1930s, 40s and 50s were underwritten with FHA loans that included restrictive covenants stipulating they could only rent to white people. The nearby Park Fairfax development, opened in October 1942, rented to only white residents until 1963 when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) negotiated desegregation with Metropolitan Life Insurance, which owned the development.⁴² As a result, the Beverly Hills neighborhood in which Trinity had replanted itself grew into a white neighborhood. The church, which a hundred and ten years prior had been comprised of white and black people, was now a strictly white congregation.

Silence followed. Reviewing the monthly newsletters dating back to 1945, there is no doubt that Trinity was bustling and growing. But there is also no evidence of social justice activism whatsoever. Foreign mission support was abundant, reflecting a priority of many Protestant denominations of the time. Local congregations would sponsor missionaries serving in other countries. This connection served to bring the needs of a growing global church to the people best able to fund the effort. Such resources led to the building of hospitals, schools and churches in underdeveloped global regions. Nevertheless, the global perspective seemingly elevated the gaze of congregations like Trinity above the local neighbors in need of their support and advocacy. Trinity leaders ignored their Christian duties and their influence as a white congregation residing in the state of Virginia where a disproportionate number of legal challenges were waged by the NAACP. One of the five legal cases leading to the desegregation of schools in the 1954 *Brown vs.*

⁴¹ Krystyn R. Moon, "Exploring Systemic Racism in Alexandria Housing," YouTube Video, March 18, 2021, 20.15 to 23.00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnAoOapXCas>.

⁴² Krystyn R. Moon, "The African American Housing Crisis in Alexandria, Virginia: 1930s-1960s," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 124, no. 1 (2016): 28–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26322559>.

Board of Education originated in Virginia. In the years following the decision, Virginia lawmakers, local officials and residents quarreled over implementation. The integration of public schools was particularly contentious in Virginia as well. The *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967)⁴³ struck down interracial marriage bans in seventeen states.

This silence at Trinity should not be interpreted as universal avoidance. Parishioners undoubtedly held strong opinions. Is there any explanation to be found in the fact that so many members were either former or current military officers? Did their service to our country influence what they deemed Christian duty? With the high number of government employees in the membership, would they have frowned upon being challenged by an ordained preacher to advocate for civil rights? Had the Church's past schisms taught ordained leaders to turn inward rather than risk upsetting members of their congregation? Were racial differences so pervasive that white church leaders were blinded to their Christian obligation to work for justice? Was the silence acceptable because the affluent white congregation was not directly impacted by racial and socio-economic injustice?

Without clear documentation of church leaders' messages and sermons to the congregation, it is difficult to understand the silence within Trinity regarding racial justice. However, Eisner's theory of how educational curriculum is absorbed by children and adolescents may shed light as to why successive generations also remained silent.

Like schools, communities of faith are engaged in teaching through "explicit curriculum" used in Sunday school, Bible school, and catechetical instruction.⁴⁴ Denominations determine the baseline education for Christian formation of children. Goals are well-established, curriculum is

⁴³ Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell's cousin, Mildred Dolores Loving and her husband Richard challenged the 1924 Virginia law prohibiting interracial marriage.

⁴⁴ Elliott W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs, Third Edition*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall / Simon & Schuster, 1994), 87.

endorsed, and written materials are widely disseminated among local churches. But this is not all the church teaches. “Implicit learning” is also occurring.⁴⁵ In each faith community, a culture exists and a set of values is being absorbed by children. The environment in which parishioners worship and interact may reveal more to a child (or a visitor) as to what the congregation holds dear and what they do not cherish. Subliminally, this may be beneficial and enhance a child’s spiritual growth. Yet, it can imply that certain priorities or actions are not welcomed within the community.

The last of Eisner’s curriculum framework is paradoxical but may be the most illuminating for understanding Trinity’s regression from racial justice activism. He names the void of what schools or institutions do not teach as “null curriculum.” He writes:

What schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. I argue this position because ignorance is not simply a neutral void: it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problems. . . . A parochial perspective or simplistic analysis is the inevitable progeny of ignorance.⁴⁶

Eisner’s construct of curriculum also demonstrates the power and influence effective leaders can have on shaping all three levels of teaching within a faith community. The most enduring instruction comes from role models who emulate and articulate the beliefs they hold dear in their own lives and impress those values upon their flock.

The Trinity of today, while far from the impassioned, urgent justice-seeking leaders of its early years, was transformed by two ordained leaders who shaped the church with their tender and steadfast vision for what it means to live out the Gospel call of Jesus Christ: Reverend James Godwin and Reverend Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell.

⁴⁵ Eisner, *Educational*, 92.

⁴⁶ Eisner, *Educational*, 97.

The Leadership of Reverend James Godwin

Rev. James (Jim) Godwin began his service to Trinity in July 1988 following Rev. Howard Satterwhite's three-year term as head pastor. Jim served Trinity until his retirement in June 1997⁴⁷. Signs of his service to the church and community are visible today, demonstrating the endurance of his leadership. Longtime members consistently point to Jim's influence shaping the life of the church and strengthening their spiritual lives and connections to one another. From his home in Berryville, with his wife Lou at his side, Jim recalls his Trinity years reverently repeatedly remarking, "we had a great time," and "I love that church."⁴⁸

Jim was born in Sanford, Virginia. His circuitous journey to Methodist ordination started with his graduation from Bluefield College with an Associate of Science degree in chemistry. While studying for a Bachelor of Arts in history at the University of Virginia, he was asked by the Methodist District Superintendent to consider serving as a local preacher for a nearby small church. From there, Jim went on to serve as a full-time pastor for one year while still at UVA. Ever pragmatic, Godwin was concerned that if he were to pursue a seminary education, he might not be able to provide for his family.

"I always thought that God had some ways of doing things that were really strange. Although I believe you should not test God, I said to God, I need three things: to be accepted at Divinity School, to have a house and an income, and for my wife to be able to get a job." Soon after, Jim received a call from the Durham, North Carolina District Superintendent asking him to serve a parish close to Duke University which included a parsonage. He went on to receive his Master of Divinity from Duke. Later, he also studied at Princeton Theological Seminary.

⁴⁷ James Godwin will be referred to as Jim throughout this thesis, because his personable style has an air of warm informality. He insists to be addressed as "Jim" and longtime members of Trinity call him and refer to him as "Jim."

⁴⁸ James Godwin, interview by author, ZOOM recording, January 5, 2023.

By the time he arrived at Trinity, Jim had served as lead pastor in two Virginia congregations, Duncan Memorial UMC in Berryville, and Wesley UMC in Mt. Vernon.

During Jim's tenure, Trinity became a modernized church, blending reverence for high Methodist liturgy and ritual with new-found dynamism for service outside of the church walls. His wife, Lou, was the first spouse of a Trinity pastor to have a career outside of the home. For the first time, a concerted effort was made to ensure equal numbers of men and women were serving in church governance. A new generation of lay leaders including Dr. Stephen Blood, Sue Stewart, Admr. William Crowe, Judge Daniel O'Flaherty and Lucelle O'Flaherty were raised up and trained in academies led by the Rev. Dr. Robert Prichard of Virginia Theological Seminary. Black people began to serve on the church staff. Most notably, Jim hired Norma Turner, a member of Roberts Memorial UMC, as the administrative assistant. The staff and laity worked to strengthen and grow the church, but it didn't come without debate or healthy disagreements. Jim encouraged such deliberation as he believed it built stronger programs. Rev. Dr. Heather Warren, who served as Trinity's associate pastor from 1988 to 1990, shared an example of Jim appreciating candor:

Jim loved Judge O'Flaherty. He was a big influence. I recall one time when somebody was objecting at a council meeting, saying we shouldn't send mission money to a food program because 'it's feeding communists.' Judge O'Flaherty responded, 'This program is feeding children. And to my knowledge these children's stomachs are neither communist or noncommunist.'⁴⁹

Jim attended to his flock, but also prioritized connecting with people who were not part of a faith community. He ushered in an era of mission work that had a distinct justice-orientation. He recognized that serving one's neighbor and community meant deferring to the needs of people rather than assuming to know what was required, and he embraced learning from and working with different faith traditions.

⁴⁹ Heather Warren, interview by author, ZOOM recording, March 4, 2023.

Jim is proud of his service alongside four other Alexandria faith leaders, who dubbed themselves the “Gang of Five.” Each month for nine years, Jim would meet with Rabbi Jack Moline of Agudas Achim, Rev. George Pera (1929-2023) of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Mike Allen, pastor of Baptist Temple and a Lutheran Chaplain from Alexandria Hospital. Their friendships and collegiality spawned synergies between their respective congregations and collective outreach in Alexandria. Jim recalls how the clergy drafted and sent a joint welcome letter to new residents moving into the neighborhood. The simple act of welcoming lifted the membership of all four places of worship.

The “Gang of Five” provided a network of support beyond their immediate friendships. When Agudas Achim embarked on a prolonged building project in 1995, Trinity welcomed the Jewish congregation to worship in the fellowship hall, bringing with them the holy ark, Torah and Jewish worship symbols. For nearly two years, Agudas Achim met at Trinity. During Sukkot, the Sukkah (tent) was erected on the church lawn and a long extension cord extending from the parsonage provided electricity. Upon completion of the project, a ceremonial parade departed Trinity heading to Agudas Achim. Rabbi Moline carried the Torah back to its Valley Drive home with the four Christian clergymen holding the canopy above it. Jim preached at the building dedication service and under the direction of Wes McCune, the Trinity choir sang.

For Jim, the most enduring story came afterwards:

A member of our congregation came by with her son and one of the boys from Agudas Achim. The boys were friends. They were standing in the doorway of the business office, and we were talking. The little Jewish boy spoke up and said, ‘this is my synagogue’ and the other little boy looked at him and said, ‘and this is my church.’ It’s the greatest story that happened the whole time I was there. It so moved me.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Godwin, interview.

Jim did not shy away from controversial matters. No topic was out of bounds. He believed it was important to apply a theological framework to fully understand social issues. He recalls a discussion with the confirmation class:

I had really sharp kids in confirmation class – Christian Blood, Travis Barton. We met on Wednesdays, and they would all come together. We met in the library. One day, they all came in and I knew something was up. One of them was the spokesperson and asked, ‘What do you think of abortion?’ I was a little taken aback but I never believed in beating around the edges. So, I said, does anyone know what abortion is, and Christian said, ‘yes’ and proceeded to explain in very technical terms. I wrote a letter to all the parents and there was no push back from that.⁵¹

The Leadership of Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell

Undeniably a large of part of Godwin’s legacy is giving Trinity the constant blessing of Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell's, a prominent black Methodist minister and professor of Wesley Seminary. Jim explains their first meeting:

At the time (1985), I was on the District Committee on Ordained Ministry, and Youtha was finishing at Howard Divinity School. She was in an interview with the committee, and I was one of the interlocutors. Somewhere in the middle of that...I guess God does things that are strange...we were pretty well finished with the questions and were impressed with what she offered, and I think she was going to Woodlawn UMC, a black Methodist church near Mt. Vernon. At that time, I was living in that area when I was pastor at Wesley, and I looked over at Youtha and said, ‘you know, you could be my pastor any day!’ And it was just that comment that out of the blue and we talked and when she left that church and needed a place to worship, she and Oliver both came to Trinity. It was wonderful.⁵²

That friendship and gracious invitation brought Youtha into the hearts of Trinity’s members in 1989 as she was embarking on her Ph.D. which led to her serving on the faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary.

Long before becoming an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, Youtha pursued the teaching profession. “I had always seen myself as a teacher, one of the few professions

⁵¹ Godwin, interview.

⁵² Godwin, interview.

open to African American women at that time.” She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from George Washington University, then her Master of Science degree in education from Troy State in Alabama. From there, she studied at the University of Virginia, graduating with an education specialist degree in mathematics education.

The call of the ministry had always tugged at Youtha. “I was always very committed to my faith, seeking baptism at the age of five without the prompting of anyone, I knew I was called to ministry leadership at 16, but I had no model or affirmation from the Baptist community and my congregation.”⁵³ She enrolled in the Howard School of Divinity. At Howard University, her advisor suggested she enroll in an internship program designed to attract black ministers to the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church. It was in that interview process that she met Godwin. Later, Youtha pursued her Ph.D. at American University in Education Supervision and Curriculum Development and became a member of the faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary.

“I just fell in love with Youtha,” recalls Christian Blood, a third-generation member of Trinity:

I remember her first sermon. She was such a force from the pulpit. I remember her voice. I remember she pulled out a rusty nail that was nine inches long and, in my mind, she said ‘alright whities, imagine this going through your hands; imagine this going through your feet. This is what the Lord did for you!’ It was a tremendous awakening to hear this. I felt she was calling us out. Blew my mind. I immediately fell in love with her! I felt like there was an outside (perspective) and we were finally getting some of it.⁵⁴

Youtha recalls that upon her arrival, the only people of color at Trinity were she, Oliver, her husband, and Youngan Copenhafer.⁵⁵ Yet, Youtha and Oliver felt welcomed. Oliver enjoyed the Sunday services and felt comfortable. Youtha brought an immeasurable amount of wisdom

⁵³ Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, email message to author, March 1, 2023.

⁵⁴ Christian Blood, interview by author, ZOOM recording, November 6, 2022.

⁵⁵ Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, interview by author, ZOOM recording, January 26, 2023.

and energy to the church, preaching when the pastor was unable to do so and teaching adult Sunday school classes.

Wes McCune, who served as Trinity's Music Director from 1986 to 2002, witnessed the shift of Jim's leadership and Youtha's influence upon corporate worship. Wes grew the music program exponentially during Jim's tenure. Part of that growth was expanding beyond 19th century choral music, a move that wasn't always appreciated. A few congregants raised concerns about the inclusion of spirituals. Wes was not deterred. "To take music of the black tradition and present it with respect was important. I didn't want to change it. I didn't want to sing spirituals that sounded like an old white man had taken it and rewritten it. The choir needed to understand the history of the spirituals. They had no clue."⁵⁶ Youtha provided an essential bridge to these cultural dimensions of worship. When she introduced the congregation to James Weldon Johnson's historic *God's Trombones*, the combination of scripture, spirituals, and poetry, brought Trinity members a better understanding of the unique dimensions of the black church worship experience.

Youtha's ministry within the UMC Virginia Conference has been immeasurable in depth and breadth, advocating for the role of women in ministry, LGBTQIA ordination and same sex marriage. In 2000, when Roberts Memorial UMC was about to have its first woman minister, Youtha filled the pulpit for the month prior to Patricia A. Jones's arrival, making the transition smoother for Rev. Jones and the congregation.⁵⁷

Youtha has seen Trinity through seven senior pastors and one interim pastor, providing a rare quality of ministerial support through varying seasons of congregational life. In 2015, she was instrumental in Trinity becoming a "reconciling church," following a year-long discernment process about the UMC's stand on homosexuality. Youtha provided grace, patience, and wisdom

⁵⁶ Wes McCune, interview by author, ZOOM recording, November 5, 2022.

⁵⁷ Patricia A. Jones, interview by author, ZOOM recording, January 6, 2023.

when it was most needed. Ultimately, Trinity disavowed the harmful language found in the *UMC Book of Discipline*, which devalues LGBTQIA persons for their sexual orientation. The congregation wrote and adopted a welcome statement affirming the sacred worth of all people and welcoming everyone without exception, regardless of age, race ethnicity, gender, family structure, socio-economic or marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, faith history or life experience.

Rev. Matthew Benton served as Trinity's Associate Pastor from 2011 to 2016. He knew Youtha to have a reputation at the Virginia Annual Conference for saying truths that made people uncomfortable but that needed to be said. Like other pastors, discovering that Youtha would be his parishioner was a tad intimidating, but he quickly found her gracious and supportive. Benton recalls Youtha preaching in the days following Trayvon Martin's slaying in February 2012:

True to her prophetic spirit, Youtha brought a word of judgement against the spiritual forces of wickedness that allow for a black boy to be murdered in the name of order. It was a powerful word that we all needed to hear. I also remember being relieved, relieved that I didn't have to preach that sermon. In the Annual Conference and in my time at Trinity, we relied on Youtha to say the things that we know needed to be said but didn't have the courage to say ourselves. And Youtha loves Jesus enough to stand on that ledge and boldly declare "I have a word from the Lord" even as that word draws ire from the comfortable who don't take kindly towards being afflicted. My regret is that too often we let her stand on that ledge alone.⁵⁸

Servant Leadership Defined

How is it that two people with such varied life experiences have come to be identified as change agents in a time-honored congregation? How, in their own style, did they come to impact the racial and cultural justice work of Trinity?

⁵⁸ Matthew Benton, email message to author, March 1, 2023.

Sue Stewart, a longtime member who served on the Trinity staff from 1983 to 1998, credits Jim with opening Trinity to the societal changes that were occurring. Through trusted relationships with their pastor, the insular church turned its focus to the larger community and to building relationship that had only existed on a performative level.⁵⁹ Carol Bobby, whose family joined in the mid 1980s, describes Jim as an erudite preacher who loved God, science and history and always remained curious. He was a high Methodist preacher who was always approachable.⁶⁰

Youtha exudes confidence, compassion and a calm, joyful disposition that intuitively draws people to her. Congregants use words like wise, kind, gracious, strong and powerfully insightful to describe her. Trinity member Susan Collins considers Youtha to be a “barrier-breaker.”⁶¹ Melanie Modlin describes Youtha as “a tidal wave for good.”⁶² Youtha, now in her early eighties, shines with the inner glow that reflects Godly wisdom and a spiritual endurance for prophetic witness through her words and actions. Matthew Benton observes, “in our baptismal vows, we accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. That is Youtha. That is who she is and what she does. It is her superpower.”⁶³

For thirty-four years Youtha has chosen to remain in a predominantly white Methodist church. Her commitment endures through many pastoral transitions and seasons of life at Trinity, and her service to the community has been immeasurable. She has grown pastors in their roles and supported them with her wise counsel. She has established a reputation for speaking truth and being a visionary within the predominantly white Virginia UMC Conference. Youtha considers

⁵⁹ Sue and Jess Stewart, interview by author, ZOOM recording, November 5, 2022.

⁶⁰ Carol Bobby, interview by author, in person, November 7, 2022.

⁶¹ Susan Collins, interview by author, ZOOM recording, February 28, 2023.

⁶² Melanie Modlin, interview by author, in person, November 17, 2022.

⁶³ Matthew Benton, email message to author, March 1, 2023.

herself first and foremost to be a teacher and she can use every situation as a “teaching moment,” drawing upon her knowledge of God and her own spiritual life.

Jim and Youtha have attained what John Westerhoff describes as “owned faith.” Over the course of their respective lifetimes, they matured in their faith. Experiences of loss, searching, and redirection have taught them what it means to commit their lives to God and achieve personal Christian identity.⁶⁴ They are willing and able to stand up for what they believe in, share their convictions confidently and walk alongside others facing doubts and struggles. They embody personalized and internalized faith in God through Jesus Christ which propels them to witness in their words and in their actions.

Strong Christian leaders live their lives in constancy. Youtha and Jim’s ability to communicate Christ to others stems from their fellowship with Christ. Observing their movements through corporate worship, meetings, visits to unwell congregants or grieving families, or even a chance meeting at the grocery store reveals the faithful, strong core of their being. They are teachers of the Christian life. Wherever they go and to whomever they encounter, they always carry Christ with them. They are ever vigilant discerning how they can best serve God through their gifts and service to their communities and to those in search of community.

Such personal faith is the foundation on which they carry the power of God in their pastoral authority. This divine power is manifested and demonstrated in a way that is the antithesis of worldly power. Effective leaders like Jim and Youtha draw on their faith and pastoral authority for the sake of others. Their chief aim is to love God and promote the spiritual well-being of individuals and the community in which they serve. In fact, the focus of pastoral leadership is so

⁶⁴ John H. Westerhoff, III, *Will Our Children Have Faith? Revised Edition*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 36.

consistently on the people that the spiritual condition of the flock is the only real measure of a leader's success.⁶⁵

Osmer would define Youtha and Jim as “servant leaders” because they are transformational for congregations who have a vision for the future. They lead through times of deep change and journey into unknown territory and circumstances. Their impact transcends the time in which they served a congregation. This holds true for Trinity's early leaders as well who we know only as names lifted from the page. Their Christian witness endures and inspires us nearly 250 years later. It is true for the handful of congregants in 1941 who chose to move Trinity's home to Cameron Mills Road. Bringing congregations through times of deep change requires both carrying from the past and recognizing what must be left behind.⁶⁶

Healthy leadership complements history by looking forward with the “visionary imagination of a prophet.” Westerhoff explains, “the prophet, at home in the memory of the true story, senses its distortions and, through a poetic appeal to the imagination, nurtures and evokes a vision of the alternative future that is the fulfillment of the community's story.”⁶⁷

Trinity has been blessed with servant leaders from its earliest day to now. These leaders have led and challenged the congregation to evolve in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ.⁶⁸ Trusting God alone and leaning into the support of one another, these leaders carried Trinity through seasons of “not knowing.” They pointed Trinity in a sacramental direction. True to their convictions, they envisioned a future with transformative social impact.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 14.

⁶⁶ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 197

⁶⁷ James H. Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, 1985), 74.

⁶⁸ Osmer, *Practical*, 192.

⁶⁹ Osmer, *Practical*, 192.

Chapter Three: Trinity in the 21st Century

The Leadership of Reverend Grace Han

In late June 2018, a large vinyl banner was hung from Trinity's parking lot fence, strategically placed for maximum visibility. It read, "WELCOME PASTOR GRACE HAN." The placard said much more than those simple words of hospitality. It signaled that Trinity was welcoming a new servant leader unlike any minister who had previously served in its pulpit.

Trinity was on the edge of a pastoral transition in 2017 as Rev. William Davis was retiring from ministry and returning to his home in Richmond. The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) was tasked by the Alexandria District Superintendent, Jeff Mickle, to draw up a "wish list" of qualities it envisioned for the next pastor. The list included "youthful and energetic; comfortable with a traditional service but able to be flexible, innovative and open to new ideas; a leader who will exhibit and foster a spirit of community outreach, evangelism and discipleship; a pastor able to relate to people who are at different points in their spiritual journey and encourage their growth."⁷⁰ Mickle reported back that he had the perfect candidate in mind and he soon introduced the committee to the Reverend Grace Han, her husband Chris Meserole, and their two children, Dahae and Auden.

Grace⁷¹ and her family immigrated to the United States when she was in elementary school. Her father, a Methodist minister and missionary, completed his seminary studies in Georgia before moving his wife and two daughters from South Korea to Atlanta. Grace speaks often of her formative years and the challenges of changing cultures, learning a new language, and feeling the

⁷⁰ Jeff Lane, email message to author, March 26, 2023.

⁷¹ Reverend Grace Han will be referred to as Grace as she is personable and is known as "Grace" or "Pastor Grace" by her parishioners.

“otherness” in a predominantly white, English-speaking society. Her spiritual formation grew in Korean United Methodist Churches where both her father and mother served as pastors.

In 2002, Grace received her B.A. in U.S. History from Oberlin College. She then worked as a community advocate for a domestic violence agency for Asian immigrant women. In 2009, Grace graduated from Yale Divinity School with a Master of Divinity. In June 2017, she was ordained in the UMC’s Virginia Annual Conference. Before arriving at Trinity, Grace was director of youth ministries and then an associate pastor at St. Matthew’s UMC in Annandale, Virginia.

Grace came to Trinity in the summer of 2018 ready to embrace pastoral leadership on a senior level. In the early days, she embarked on a “listening tour” of Trinity, learning as much as possible about the people of her congregation. She found the congregants welcoming and open to “what could be next.”⁷²

The United Methodist Church’s Next Breaking Point

What would come “next” was beyond anyone’s imagination. The UMC’s General Conference convened February 2019 in St. Louis to determine if the denomination would become a more inclusive church by welcoming the ordination of LGBTQIA people and allowing same-sex marriages to be conducted by ordained clergy. By a vote of 438-384 the global delegates voted in favor of the so-called Traditional Plan, which continued existing restrictions and added even more draconian penalties for bishops, annual conferences and clergy who refused to uphold the new statutes. Progressive and mainstream UMC congregations like Trinity were stunned by the results and felt outmaneuvered by conservative church organizers. In the aftermath, Grace would write:

I was incredibly discouraged by the state of the UMC and its future. By passing the Traditional Plan, we became a church that prioritized rules and punishments at the expense of our beloved family in Christ and continued the harm done to our

⁷² Grace Han, interview by author, ZOOM recording, March 17, 2023.

LGBTQ+ members, families, and allies. Not only did we take a step in the wrong direction, it was clear that our church was broken – and that there was no obvious way to move forward together.⁷³

To heal the hurt felt by congregants at Trinity, Grace launched a multi-pronged mitigation plan. Her first response was to reach out personally to Trinity families directly impacted by the harmful vote. She quickly followed with a mass email to all congregants informing them of the General Conference proceedings and inviting them to take part in a candlelight response held in the sanctuary that same evening. The gathering allowed concerned members to share their anger and frustration, to be comforted by one another and to be supported by their pastor in a safe and sacred space. A large print of Trinity’s inclusive welcome statement was framed and hung in the narthex for everyone to see as they came through the doors, and a multi-colored banner restating that welcome was hung where the “welcome Pastor Grace” sign had been only a matter of months before. Next, Grace tasked Jeff Lane, a reconciling church leader, to draft a letter to the interim Virginia bishop stating the intent of Alexandria’s reconciling churches to remain supportive of the LGBTQIA community and committed to the UMC’s full inclusiveness. The letter was co-signed by Fairlington UMC and the Beverley Hills Community UMC.

The congregation’s initial shock and hurt dissipated. Yet members’ sacred outrage was motivating them to be more than just an affirming faith community. Many came to the realization that aspirational hopes, prayers and messages needed to be reinforced with action sorely lacking on all levels of the UMC as it had so long been focused on its inward battles.

⁷³ Grace Han, “What Happened at UMCNext?,” *Virginia Methodists for a New Thing* (blog), May 21, 2019, <https://www.anewthingva.com/blog/what-happened-at-umcnext>.

Extraordinary Challenges: From COVID to Police Brutality

For a while, the crisis was averted as UMC leaders looked to split the UMC in an amicable way. Then, in early March 2020, the COVID virus reached its critical mass in northern Virginia, forcing schools to shut down for what first appeared to be a matter of weeks. Quickly it became apparent that the virus would force closures of schools, places of worship, businesses, and restaurants for a longer duration. While the secular world grappled with economic and public health consequences and the logistical challenges of the pandemic, religious leaders were expected to reinvent worship and ritual. The sacramental life of community was impossible to move forward without the threat of viral exposure, sickness, and death. Once again, Grace was leading Trinity through unprecedented circumstances and events. “I was guided by John Wesley’s three rules –do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. . . trying to balance safety with the need and the importance of gathering as the body of Christ.”⁷⁴

Looking back, she can now see that the pandemic was clarifying for the work of the church because it forced a paradigm shift. She distinguished between what was foundational to the life of the community. “I remember the Christmas of 2020. We had over fifty people standing in the pouring rain, because it meant something for all of us to join together on Christmas Eve. COVID helped clarify what is most important, what can fall away and what can be changed.” But she also found people experiencing deep spiritual hunger in their efforts to examine their lives and humanity.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and the anti-Asian discrimination associated with the rise of COVID intensified the nation’s racial divisions and caused people to reevaluate their lives and their places in society. Massive demonstrations and peaceful protests

⁷⁴ Han, interview.

took place in every corner of the United States –including in front of the White House. People of faith pondered their roles and responsibilities in a world simultaneously witnessing massive death due to a virus and the heinous killings of black people at the hands of law enforcement officers. For some white people, their eyes were opened to the discrimination, the brutality, and the lack of equity existing in America for black and brown people. There was a broader understanding of the depths of racism. Then, after a highly divisive presidential election in 2020, the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol undermined the tenets of democracy and peaceful elections. The cascading events challenged white churches to reevaluate their role in society and whether their mission was giving priority to the full Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Servant leaders, at their best, seek to deepen the spiritual identity of their congregation and inspire members to act in mercy and justice. At times, the personalization of faith can both overshadow Jesus’ message to love your neighbor and downplay the Christian responsibility to activate that love. Grace describes the work of the church as meeting people where they are in the seasons of their lives as well as challenging them to move beyond their comfort zone.

“The fundamental tension point for clergy is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted. Some people come to church seeking comfort; they need respite; they come to feel a sense of God’s love surrounding them. It’s wonderful. But if that’s all the church is –a giant hug and support group--we never leave our comfort zone. We need to say God loves us and therefore our job is to go and love others and that is the much harder work requiring us to leave the walls of the church and go into a community we don’t know or talk to people we don’t know or do things that make us feel uncomfortable. We call that sanctifying grace –a natural extension of our faith. But that is hard work. That’s a conversation the church always needs to be having.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Han, interview.

Grace and Youtha demonstrated how to engage in healthy conversations about race and racism in June 2020, following the Floyd murder, and again in April 2021⁷⁶ as Anti-Asian hate crimes surged. They recorded two hour-long conversations, which were incorporated into the respective online worship services, and then posted on the church website. Sharing their perspectives as ordained women of color, they candidly addressed the complexity of identity and the “otherness” they have experienced. For a brief time, white congregants heard candid reflections on the lives of two beloved leaders most often viewed from the pulpit. Their second conversation closed with Youtha and Grace pointing to the church as the nexus for their friendship, where diversity and unity could and should coexist.

The pathway to greater understanding begins in conversation. Youtha and Grace wonderfully demonstrated how life-affirming it can be when we share openly with another. At a time of great political and racial polarization, the church should be leading more consequential discussions.

But conversation cannot be the destination. Our call as Christians is to reflect God’s justice and mercy through our attitudes and behavior. Faith is an action, something we do, not words we say. Justice is realized in our equitable treatment of and advocacy for all. Youtha speaks to the importance of acts of compassion, largely aimed at helping individuals, and acts of justice which are aimed at eliminating systemic impediments to racial and socio-economic equality.

There is a difference between compassion and justice, and we have to be about both. We excuse it with “the poor are always with us.” But that is not a faithful interpretation of what Jesus is saying. We can create ways of interacting with one another so that we can work to eliminate poverty.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Trinity United Methodist Church website, “Race and Racism Conversation.” Accessed March 29, 2023. <https://www.trinityalexandria.org/race-and-racism-conversation>.

⁷⁷ Hardman-Cromwell, interview.

Being the Future Church

In March 2022, Grace engaged Trinity's Church Council in a retreat to plan for Trinity's future and develop a strategic plan. Since then, focus groups and surveys have been conducted to glean input from Trinity's members about the future mission of the church. There is great satisfaction with the status quo. Undoubtedly, after a multi-year pandemic which left most people feeling some degree of isolation, the return to church is a comfort. However, a deep hunger persists.

Most congregants interviewed for this thesis spoke of their abiding love for their faith community coupled with a desire to grow the diversity of Trinity's predominantly white membership. That sentiment is most strongly felt by the younger generations who work and are being educated in culturally diverse environments. Yet, as a community church tucked in an affluent neighborhood with a history of red-lining, that goal of racial diversity remains elusive. "It's kind of nuts how white Trinity is when you have one of the most diverse high schools down the block," notes Katherine Lehr, a third-generation member. "I hope in the future Trinity reflects the area in which we live, but that will take deliberate, intentional human connection."⁷⁸

The journey to a multi-cultural church starts with introspection of who we are as white Christians and how we grow, reconcile and heal with our black and brown siblings in Christ. "It's hard work and we are here to do the hard work," states Jon Hoganson, whose wife Michelle and three sons joined in 2013.⁷⁹ His family has been actively engaged in all facets of the Trinity and he is part of the team writing the strategic plan for Trinity's future. His reverence for his faith community is rooted in seeing how his family connects to their faith. He has watched his sons learn the importance of Christian service through youth group projects and Appalachian mission trips, and he's witnessed their growth in taking part in worship. Yet, he also sees that Michelle, as

⁷⁸ Katherine Lehr, interview by author, ZOOM recording, November 2, 2022.

⁷⁹ Jon Hoganson, personal interview by author, November 9, 2022.

a teacher, and his sons, as students at Alexandria City High School, are part of a multi-cultural learning environment during the week that is not reflected in their community of faith.

Jon's son, Taylor, shares his father's love and admiration of Trinity but he acknowledges the discrepancy between diversity of his classmates and the homogeneity of his church family. When I interviewed Taylor, I asked him what he thought about the fact that Trinity gave birth to two congregations (Roberts Memorial UMC and Washington Street UMC) that are still in existence today. His answer stays with me long after we spoke. Taylor observed, "The fact that all three churches remain today relatively unchanged says to me that even to this day a divide –and a strong one at that –still exists."⁸⁰

Reconciliation between the congregations of Roberts Memorial UMC and Washington Street UMC is a work in progress, and it reflects the larger racial divisions of our nation. The journey has been undertaken by Rev. Dr. James Daniely, lead pastor of Roberts, and Rev. Thomas James of Washington Street UMC. Kimberly Young, a member of Roberts Memorial UMC, has served as Director of Church and Community Engagement at Washington Street UMC since 2018. She has been part of the conversations taking place between the two churches alongside two additional Baptist churches located in Alexandria. In 2019, Daniely and James started conducting joint worship services on a quarterly basis for their respective congregations. They've been challenged by differing approaches to worship, which is slowly being overcome through the cooperation of their respective church choirs. Nevertheless, a lack of understanding of how to fully engage in a multi-cultural community persists. "This goes beyond prayer," James concedes.⁸¹

When I interviewed Kimberly Young, who is a life-long Alexandrian and active in all levels of the Virginia UMC Conference, I asked about her experience as a black faith leader in the

⁸⁰ Taylor Hoganson, interview by author, ZOOM recording, January 2, 2023.

⁸¹ Rev. Thomas James, in-person interview by author, November 9, 2023.

UMC and how white Methodists can open themselves to the work of racial justice. Despite the long journey she has witnessed between Roberts Memorial and Washington Street UMC congregations, she believes it is essential to engage beyond performative worship and be in human relationship with one another:

I think we are supposed to do this together. Not that we are not supposed to work on ourselves independently. This is when Youtha becomes my Queen Mother in every aspect because I've seen her do it. We must be in relationship and there are those who God properly positions to be able to walk on the journey with folks. And we must be willing to walk together when we can do that, we can learn authentically. . . My healing is inextricably linked to yours –just like the history of Trinity, Roberts Memorial and Washington Street –whether we acknowledge it or not. That's the mission. That's when we become Christlike.⁸²

Trinity's journey back to its racial justice roots will require servant leaders prepared to have the tough conversations through times of discomfort, tension, and dissonance. It will entail the activation of lay leaders to use their voices, influence, and votes to bring justice through systemic change of racist policies and social norms. The process will yield fruit in the spiritual awakening of our community to reclaim its identity in Christian servanthood to God and to one another.

⁸² Kimberly Young, interview by author, ZOOM recording, January 23, 2023.

Conclusion

Susan Beaumont tells congregations to “remember rightly”⁸³ so that one generation to the next understands how to interpret the present and live into our shared values. That advice is best coupled with a call to “act boldly,” and press forward with the same level of urgency the Gospel writers portrayed to new Christian believers.

Our understanding of Christian community is based on shared experience and this thesis seeks to remember and share a sacred story. This story began with Jesus Christ choosing a handful of disciples called to walk alongside and learn from his teachings and examples and witness his death and resurrection. The story continues in Acts and Paul’s letter with early leaders of the ancient church working to define our core Christian identity. Centuries later, young itinerant pastors brought the Methodist movement to the shores of America and formed a church on the bedrock of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and the Protestant principles promulgated by John Wesley.

Today this rich history is embedded into our liturgical life, sustaining, and nurturing us in ways so subtle we may not be able to even identify their origin or fully grasp their significance. Our tradition is upheld by servant leaders who continue to shepherd the church through difficult times. Their challenge is to maintain the church as the Body of Christ, balancing form and reform, agile pragmatism and creative imagination, but always mindful that God acts in world affairs, using flawed but beloved humans to propel God’s kingdom on earth.⁸⁴

⁸³ Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You are Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*, (Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2019), 97.

⁸⁴ James H. Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, 1985), 76.

The journey of this thesis has brought me to a fuller love and a deeper appreciation of the spiritual leaders who shaped and sustained Trinity UMC through its many life seasons. Profiles of contemporary and historic figures demonstrate that by using ordinary people to further divine will, God is present and attentive to humanity and history. I am in awe of the courage and fortitude with which these leaders held true to their Christian beliefs and acted uncompromisingly against the evils of slavery. They withstood pressure to “go along to get along” with Southern sympathizers and Confederate forces, who fomented evil compromise of the scripture and Christian beliefs. Their courageous racial justice stands were tested time and again. Yet they held true to their purposeful work as servant leaders exemplifying the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I have been blessed to spend hours in conversation with ordained leaders like Jim Godwin and Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, who have shaped the church of today. I am grateful to the many congregants who have shared their personal stories and their hopes for the future of Trinity. I better understand that I was divinely drawn to the United Methodist Church and Trinity as my church home because of the sacred seeds planted long ago and nurtured by hallowed witnesses who expressed their faith in word and deed. These elements fuel my spiritual growth today and challenge me to be a more faith-filled, action-oriented Christian. Like our forebears, I feel restless, a “good trouble⁸⁵” kind of restlessness that is awakening me to the wholeness of the Gospel and my obligation to fully embrace my role in God’s transformational vision for the world. I hear a call directing me to active justice, working to end the burdens caused by racial discrimination in our community, country, and world.

Trinity UMC will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2024, the same year that the UMC will reorganize following more than three decades of debate over homosexual ordination and same-sex

⁸⁵ John Lewis (1940-202), term made popular by the civil rights activist and member of Congress. “Good Trouble” is the name of a 2020 documentary about his life’s work.

marriage. Progressive congregations such as Trinity are remaining with the UMC while more conservative ones are choosing to disaffiliate, becoming independent or joining the Global Methodist Church formed in 2022. The UMC will be a smaller denomination but will continue to have a worldwide presence.

Trinity's celebration will not be diminished by this denominational schism for we know who we are and whose we are, having addressed the issue of homosexuality in 2015 when Trinity chose to become a "reconciling church." As a reconciling congregation we disavowed the harmful language found in the *UMC Book of Discipline*, which devalues LGBTQIA persons for their sexual orientation. We wrote a congregational welcome statement affirming the sacred worth of all people and welcoming everyone without exception, regardless of age, race ethnicity, gender, family structure, socio-economic or marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, faith history or life experience.

The justice work we have done inside Trinity and the United Methodist Church has opened us to God's call to go deeper into the divine love of diversity. Its power is galvanizing. Yet Trinity's "welcome" remains aspirational. We have not fully realized the words we so carefully crafted and placed upon the wall of our church narthex. The "welcome" is our Christian communities' covenant to work for God's kingdom in the here and now of our community, state, and country where tentacles of racial discrimination remain deeply embedded. The sacred worth of all people is realized when we use our gifts, influence, and privilege to change the social norms, structures and policies that diminish equality and equity for all of God's children.

The next chapter of Trinity will be written by succeeding generations who demand more of their institutions. With a swipe of a small screen, young people have witnessed societal change in real time --steps forward and leaps backward-- and yet they still believe. They remain "hopeful

for the future of our church as a community unwilling to look away from the hard things our siblings in Christ experience every single day, unwilling to shy away from what is uncomfortable or requires us to re-examine ourselves and what we know.”⁸⁶ They believe the church has real power to promote racial justice and are willing to work to achieve it.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Caroline Cheek, email message to author, March 16, 2023.

⁸⁷ Taylor Hoganson, interview.

Appendix
Letter of Information and Consent 2022-2023

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to allow me to interview you for my master thesis. I am on the final steps of my journey at Virginia Theological Seminary with plans to graduate in the spring of 2023. All seminary students must complete a thesis or capstone project that is related to their faith community.

My thesis is an ethnographic sketch of Trinity United Methodist Church, reviewing some of the pivotal times and events in our history, but more importantly answering where we are today and where we hope to go tomorrow as a community of faith. I'm hoping to delve into multi-generational viewpoints of our faith community. Most pointedly, I am focusing my research on why mainline Protestant churches in racially diverse communities remain largely segregated and how white churches, such as Trinity, with a historic legacy of support for racial justice, can reignite its advocacy and fight passionately for justice, equality, and inclusiveness in the 21st century.

Process: If you consent, you will be asked several questions in an oral interview which will roughly take 30-45 minutes. If you are agreeable, I will make an audiotape (or ZOOM) solely for the purposes of supplementing my own notetaking and recollection. If you prefer, I can limit the documentation to just my notetaking.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the interview at any time.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of the conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. First and foremost, this interview contributes to the research I am undertaking for completion of my studies. It may have secondary benefits to Trinity United Methodist Church.

Confidentiality: Your name will be kept confidential in the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to the recording. If, as I am writing the thesis, there is an experience, story or quote that would be advantageous to attribute to you, I will ask you ahead of time, in writing, to review the text and provide your approval or denial of consent for full attribution.

Sharing the Results: I plan to construct an ethnography –a written account of what I learn –based on these interviews together with my reading and historical research. This thesis will be submitted to my thesis advisor, Dr. Lisa Kimball; to the Director of MA Programs, Dr. Hannah Matis; to Dr. Joseph Thompson, Jr., Associate Dean of Multicultural Ministries; and to Dr. Melodye Knowles, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

All my best,
Mary Beth Buchholz

I _____ have consented to participate fully in this interview and research project and understand the parameters of participation and confidentiality as outlined above:

Signature

Date

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