

Blair Road United Methodist Church celebrates 50 years

By Carolyn Steeves
The Mint Hill Times

Roughly 2,900 Sundays have passed since Blair Road United Methodist Church opened its doors.

On February 1, the church will kick off its 50th anniversary celebration with a joint church service. Nancy Rankin, the senior pastor, said that they hope the service will launch an entire year of celebration.

For the joint service, the church is inviting former ministers as well as town officials. They plan to show a video with old photos and some interviews with parishioners saying what the church means to them.

Jean Holloway, church historian, said they are hoping to invite people who were baptized at the church, people who were married at the church, and other events throughout the year. She said they will be selling a revised version of an old cookbook and making a new church directory.

In its 50 years, the church has expanded from 30 charter members meeting in a house to around 1,000 members meeting in a church, education building and family life center on 35 acres of land.

William Michael Elliott was in the fifth grade when his mother and father founded the church. In September of 1958, 13 people were meeting in Elliott's house. They moved into a larger rental home by October of the same year.

Finally, in 1959 Blair Road Church was chartered.

"I was there when we did the groundbreaking on the little brick building," Elliott recalled. His father, who worked in construction, helped to build it.

"I'm really proud of it," he said about the church. "I'm proud of my mom and dad and the sacrifices they've made."

"I've seen it come a long way and it's been great," Elliott said.



Blair Road United Methodist Church will celebrate its 50th anniversary beginning February 1. At left: The charter members of Blair Road United Methodist Church stand in front of the house in 1959 where they worshipped.

Elliott said that as the church has been growing, it has also been expanding its presence in the community.

Rankin also hopes that the church can have an impact on the town of Mint Hill.

"What we want to do is be a witness to the community of the love of Christ and how we can help," Rankin said. She said the church is a huge place for Boy and Girl Scout meetings along with basketball and other activities. "The community interfaces with us in a lot of ways."

"This is literally a seven-day-a-week church," Rankin said. "These facilities are well-used, there's nothing sitting idle."

Elliott said that many community leaders have come from the church. He said that many church members have served on town committees and served other leadership roles.

"People growing up in the church turn out to be good citizens in the community," Elliott said.

Mission Outreach

The church has missions that provide various types of assistance to communities nearby and overseas. Parishioners have traveled to Haiti, Africa, New Zealand and other locales.

There are programs to help the homeless, donate livestock through the Heifer International organization, visit prisoners, teach English as a second language and other services to the public.

Holloway said that she and her husband have been a part of eight building teams and her husband went to Africa on a mission trip.

"There's an attitude that we want to reach out to the community," Rankin said.

Rankin recalled a time when parishioners serving an orphanage in Haiti needed money to add a classroom. She appealed to the congregation and the money, around \$2,000, was raised in one Sunday.

"There have been moments like that where the church just shines," Rankin said.

Elliott is proud of the community service work the church does. "That's what churches, I think, are supposed to be about," he said.

The next 50 years

Growth seems to be the key word when it comes to the future of Blair Road United Methodist Church. "The potential for

growth is here," Rankin said. "There's no reason why this church can't have a very bright future."

Rankin said that the church's vision statement is thousands of faithful, fruitful followers. "We don't think that's far-fetched," she said.

"The church is getting larger," Holloway said. "The church has the opportunity to bring more people in. Especially younger people, we would like to get more young people." She said they would like to attract the college generation: "Once they go to college, they never seem to get back until they're in their 30s and have families."

Rankin would also like to attract more college-aged parishioners. She started a class specifically targeted for people in the 20s and early 30s—a demographic many churches struggle with retaining. She said they launched the class in the last few months. There are 15 people who regularly attend and it is growing.

Elliott agreed that "the possibilities are enormous."

"We've already outgrown our current facilities and need more room," he said.

Elliott thinks that Rankin, who became pastor in July, will be instrumental in the growth of the church.

"It's going to continue to grow and we're going to do everything to see that (Rankin's) successful," he said. "She's going to do everything to see that Blair Road is successful."

Holloway could not pick out her favorite moment in 30 years of attendance.

"The whole church is special to me," Holloway said. "The fellowship that I find there, and the pastors, have always been gracious and caring."

A timeline...

1958: Charlotte Mission Society is told a new rural church is needed. A search is made for a lay leader and a minister. Rev. Poindexter is brought in to start a new church.

Sept. 1958: 13 people, 8 families, meet in William Elliott's home. Soon they moved into a larger space.

Feb. 1, 1959: Blair Road United Methodist Church is chartered with 30 members. The first church is built.

1975: Present sanctuary is built.

1980: Groundbreaking is held for Education Building.

1981: Construction on Education Building is completed.

1996: Contemporary Service is started.

1998: Church purchases 27 acres surrounding facility, bringing the property to 35 acres.

2000: Gymnasium is converted into Family Life Center.

April 2000: Groundbreaking is held on a new Education Building.

April 2001: New Education Building is completed and dedicated.

Feb. 1, 2009: 50th anniversary of Blair Road United Methodist Church.

List of pastors over the past 50 years:

1959-1964: Rev. Poindexter

1964-1965: Rev. Robert Forward

1965-1968: Rev. M.B. Lee

1968-1979: Rev. Herbert Blackmon

1979-1981: Rev. Wannamaker Hardin

1981-1990: Rev. Frank Stith

1990-1994: Rev. Paul Lowder

1994-2008: Rev. Jacob C. (Ted) Troutman, III

2008-present: Rev. Nancy Rankin

(All information from Jean Holloway's History of Blair Road United Methodist Church)