

Aldersgate UMC's History

In 1949, members of New Ark Union Church heard God's call to begin a new community of faith on Concord Pike. Named for the London mission on Aldersgate Street where John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed, ground was broken for our first building in August, 1950. On Thanksgiving Day, 1951, these 74 founding members first worshiped in the sanctuary and nave built to seat 300 persons. Under the leadership of the Reverend Gerald A. Foster, membership grew to 450 by 1955 in the fastest growing area of Delaware.

During the ministry of the Reverend James R. Hughes from 1955 to 1969, Aldersgate became the largest congregation in the Peninsula Annual Conference. To keep up with the growth and vitality of our membership, the building was expanded in 1956 and again in 1962, providing more Sunday school rooms, offices, and the present sanctuary. Membership was then 1800.

After Jim Hughes' death, the Reverend J. Robert Mackey led the congregation for five years, followed by the Reverend Olin J. Shockley. In 1982, the Reverend Dr. Thomas C. Short started his 17-year service with the church. Tom helped increase the membership and attendance, in a by-then demographically stable area. Under his leadership, the third major building expansion was started. This addition, opened in October, 2000, includes rehearsal rooms for voice and bell choirs, a student ministry center, and storage space.

The Reverend Dr. Jonathan E. Baker became senior pastor in 1999. Under his leadership, many adult discipleship groups were formed, and a renewed emphasis was placed on congregational care in response to rising needs within the church. The music program was enhanced by a major refurbishing of the pipe organ by Cornel Zimmer Organ Builders in 2004. Also, the auditorium was equipped with modern audiovisual equipment so that more contemporary worship experiences could be offered. Rev. Baker also led the church in a revisioning process designed to sharpen the church's focus in living out Christ's teachings as we meet the needs of our local and world communities.

In July of 2008, Pastor Steve Ackerman was appointed as our senior pastor. As a part of our Rethink Church campaign in the fall of 2009 we launched a new worship experience known as The Journey. This service is designed to reach out to younger adults and families with children to provide them a different way to connect with the Good News of Jesus Christ by featuring contemporary music and multimedia resources in an interactive environment. To make the sanctuary more inviting and useful for traditional worship and special presentations, we upgraded lighting and sound systems.

Pastor Ackerman also led the church in a restructuring task force in order to simplify the process to create new ministries within the church. A simplified mission for Aldersgate was also developed – one that everyone could more easily identify with. “With God's and through prayer, our mission is to Gather as God's people, to Grow in faith and love, to Go into the world as Jesus' Disciples.

In July 2011, we welcomed as our senior pastor Reverend J. Chris Pennington, who grew up in Brandywine Hundred and attended the University of Delaware. We look eagerly toward the future and all the plans that God has in store of the family of Aldersgate as we serve out our mission as Christians.

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Aldersgate offers ministries designed to help meet life's challenges, including Divorce Care, GriefShare and Financial Peace. We have a very wide range of Small Group offerings and Christian Education for all. Aldersgate was accredited as a Safe Sanctuary in 2009, which is a United Methodist program to prevent child abuse in local churches and within the Peninsula-Delaware Conference and to protect local churches, their staff and clergy from allegations of improper conduct. Read the [Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Form](#).

Since 2010, we've opened our doors for one week each quarter as a member church of Family Promise of New Castle County homeless "family" shelter ministry. We continually seek out opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the community, the nation and the world.

In 2011, we received accreditation from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministry as a Caring Community, which means that we intentionally minister to persons with mental illness and their families.