

“The Little White Church”... That Could

Curious what is being built on the west side of route 17 across from the Village Café and TD Bank and a little South of ACE hardware and Dunkin Donuts?

It's simple; “The Little White Church” That Could is coming back to life in a Not So Little fashion.

God's children are hard at work rebuilding the Hampstead United Methodist Church. Hurricanes Florence and Dorian decided the church needed a new roof, interior and major re-construction. At the same time, a brand new 12,000 square foot activity center (largest of its kind in Hampstead) is being added to serve the Hampstead community and touch the lives of many more people in this rapidly growing area.

This is a story of birth, rebirth and growth of a Church that started as a “Little White Church” over 113 years ago and now serves the people of Hampstead, Scotts Hill, Holly Ridge, Surf City, Topsail, Rocky Point, Burgaw, Wilmington and further.

So, where did it all begin? Over a century ago, the people of what was then the small town of Hampstead decided they needed a “Little White Church” and started from nothing.

In 1907, Mrs. Rachel Howard gave land for a church site, to include a building, cemetery and grounds around it. As it also happened, Mrs. Howard's daughter, Hester Howard Simmon, husband, William B Simmons operated a nearby steam-powered sawmill. With the help of the Duck Lake Lumber Company, a “Little White Church” was built with lumber produced at this sawmill. It had all the modern conveniences of the time, being heated by a pot-belly wood-burning stove and illuminated by candlelight.

In 1930, when a severe windstorm damaged the structure, it had to be razed. Maybe God was suggesting that He needed a bigger church, because, with a lot of community hard work and donations, the folks of Hampstead started immediately building a new bigger church on the same site.

This “Little White Church” and cemetery are still there!!! Next time you pass the top of the hill on Route 17 across from the Atlantic Seafood company, please admire the church that served as the spiritual and community center in the Hampstead area for over 60 years.

During those years, there was steady growth with the establishment of a Men’s club, a Women’s club, a Youth ministry, Choir, Music Ministry and other groups. Classrooms, a recreation area, improved parking, a modern kitchen and a social hall were added and became the host of various community functions.

In the late 1980’s, it became apparent that “The Little White Church” facilities were again inadequate to accomplish the mission and growth in the Hampstead community. So, a six-acre site was purchased about a mile north on the west side of Highway 17 which is the present site of the church.

Ground was broken in January 1991 and “The Little White Church” became a combination classroom, offices and a worship center building. Members of the congregation served as the contractors and workmen doing most of the construction themselves, and meals were often provided by the women of the church. On Easter Sunday, April 26, 1992, Rev. Francis Daniel and over 200 people walked from the "old" to the new “Little White Church” to continue the mission of serving God, his people and the community.

During the next few years, a program for assistance to needy families and a community food pantry were established. More growth occurred with the June 1992 arrival of Rev. Bruce Stanley with a second phase building program, a “Mothers Morning Out” group which expanded into a Preschool program, and bible studies, men’s, women’s, youth, scouting and other programs all expanded.

In 1999 after a successful community building fund campaign, 6 new classrooms were completed as a wing in the rear of the building and a 1,500 sq. foot activity building was built behind the rear parking lot.

In 2000, three acres adjacent to the church property were purchased from Mr. Jessie Lea.

In 2002, an opportunity to purchase eight more adjacent acres was given to the church by Mrs. Sylvia Ditmer and because of a \$229,000 Miracle donation event on Sunday, May 19, 2002, the land was purchased and consecrated on June 23, 2002. The donations were received from many in the community in the form of cash, jewelry, stocks and bonds, property, yard sales, etc. Quickly “The Little White Church” That Could grew to 16 acres.

In 2007, the Second Century started for the church and many missions and activities continue even stronger, such as: Music Ministries, Vacation Bible School, Power Kids, Upward Soccer, Youth groups, Appalachia Service Project, Boys and Girls Scouting, Women and Men’s groups, fellowship groups such as Lovely Ladies Luncheon and ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Out), Labyrinth Garden, Prayer Shawl Ministry, a blueberry and pumpkin patch, Leap of Faith food pantry, Martha's Kitchen meals, MUNCH (Meals Until No Child Hungers), Backpack meals, senior adult OWLS (Older, Wiser, Lively Seniors) focusing on a joy of living - and this is by no means exhaustive.

So here we are today, 113 years later, as members of “The Little White Church” That Could. Standing on the shoulders of the giants that came before us. Understanding that it is not the buildings but the people who have come together over the years for the betterment of the community that are the

THAT COULD part.

The new buildings are almost completed. We hope to be using them by April 2020 and have a consecration in June.

We have a lot more to do during this next century. More lives to touch and more people to help.

As our pastor Skip Williams says: “We’ve been brought to this time, this moment, this challenge, a product of an awesome “Little White Church”, brought here to receive the Vision and Trust of God. If today’s “Not-So-Little White Church” is going to accomplish God’s work, it will take all of us to make it happen. And I believe we will.”

“The Little White Church That Could” welcomes all.

Please visit www.HampsteadUNC.org for more information.

By William Pearson

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