

Stories of Northside: The Founding of Our Church

SPEECH WRITTEN BY: S. RUSSELL BRIDGES JR.

In two years, Northside will celebrate its 75th anniversary. As we look forward to all that God has for us in the future, let's also take some time to remember where we are rooted. The following speech was given by S. Russel Bridges Jr.—a founding member of Northside Church—on our 25th anniversary. This Laymen's Day Address is filled with testimony, anecdotes, and a wealth of Northside personality. We hope you enjoy this piece; we look forward to publishing more tidbits from our archives in future issues.

WHAT HAPPENED—TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO?

Well, one thing, it was the start of the Korean War. But let me take you back about eight years even before that.

THE PROBLEM OF LOGISTICS

World War II had gripped the nation after Pearl Harbor, and a Southern boy was ordered by the Army Quartermaster Corps to active duty in Seattle, Washington, to join the military mission to defend against the Japanese and to begin the long

journey to military victory in the Pacific theater of war. Living in the outskirts of Seattle, and with the churches located downtown, his wife and three-year-old daughter were left without transportation to go to Sunday School and attend church, which had normally been their custom.

THE CHURCH'S SOLUTION

But there was a solution. The large downtown Presbyterian church in Seattle responded to fill this need by renting a vacant store within a three or four-block walk from his home. In this store, a Sunday School was started for young children and adults. Thus the church moved out to serve. There was Christian fellowship and Bible study provided for many people who were in the same boat, particularly after the advent of gas rationing. The church extension project glowed with success. The store every Sunday was bursting at the seams.

CAN WE USE THE IDEA AT ST. MARKS CHURCH?

Upon his return to Atlanta after the war, the Southern boy told this story to his pastor, Dr. Lester Rumble, who was then

serving St. Marks Methodist Church. He asked whether it would be possible for St. Marks Church to expand its program by providing a similar extension of its church and Sunday School services to people who were moving into outlying areas of Atlanta. This was a boom period in home building outside of the central city community.

ONLY A FEW KNOW WHAT HAPPENS

Dr. Rumble's response to this idea resulted in the founding of Northside Methodist Church. [...]

After completing his ministry at St. Marks, Dr. Rumble became District Superintendent of the then Atlanta-West District. He proceeded to interest Methodist laymen from several of the District churches in the formation of a non-profit corporation to locate, buy, and take title to land that would later be utilized as sites for new Methodist churches in the District and also to help these churches get started. These men constituted the first corporate board of the Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Atlanta-West District, Inc. [...]



M. Dickey, D. Black, Bob Black, D. Cosper



Original Choir Members
D. Cosper, J. Collins, Eva Holladay,
Margaret Walker, Bob Black

WE STARTED LOOKING FOR A LOT

The first thing we did was to start looking for a lot. The first site we considered was on Peachtree Battle Avenue at Arden Road. Mild opposition was detected though, in that area, from the neighborhood, so we got an option on a parcel of land at West Wesley Road at the corner of Arden Road. However, this site was abandoned later because of problems with the topography. About this time, the Fulton County School Board had overcome neighborhood opposition and was moving to build Northside High School as soon as Kingswood Lane was cut through from Normandy to Northside. [...] The property on Kingswood across from the school site was owned by a Mr. Louis King, who was the son of a Methodist minister. He was pleased to sell to us for church purposes the corner lot of 300 feet on Kingswood Lane with a depth of 200 feet on Northside for a price of \$12,000.

We applied to the Zoning Board for a use permit so that we could be sure that we could build a church on the site. At the hearing on our petition,

everything went well until we had one objector who came in and really was not too near a neighbor. But he said that church people met on Sunday morning and that they would make a lot of noise singing and would disturb his sleep. Fortunately his objection was not considered valid, and we were issued the use permit. Later, through the gift of Frank Davis, a visitor to our church, we acquired an additional 100 feet on Kingswood Lane which is now the parking lot out there. And somewhat later charter members Randolph and Margaret Thrower gave the church another 100 feet of Northside Drive frontage. Our present property was rounded out by a gift from the late Ruddy Ellis and his wife Mrs. Ellis, which increased the depth of our property.

APPROVALS AND FINANCING

Dr. Rumble all the while was working and securing the approval of the local District Board of Church Location for a church on this site. Also, he was securing the support and approval of Bishop Arthur Moore, who was the Presiding Bishop of our Conference at that time. And so eventually we were

cleared to start a church. A grant of \$5, 000 and a loan of \$7, 000 were secured from the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church so that we could get title to the building site. The local Board of Missions arranged to provide us with partial financing of the pastor's salary for a few months.

GETTING THE MEETING PLACE

An arrangement was made with Dr. Paul West, a Methodist layman, who was Supt. of Fulton County Schools, to rent space for our Sunday services in Northside High School. Weddington Kelly, who later became one of our members, was principal of Northside High. Thus, we enjoyed a most favorable and friendly relationship with our landlords.

ORGANIZATION MEETING—THE BIRTH OF THE NORTHSIDE CHURCH

Now came time to organize the church. Early in October, 1950, Dr. Rumble and I went to the Peachtree Letter Service and by reference to the red telephone book, we sent a meeting notice to everyone living north of Collier Road, west



Northside United Methodist Church



Eugene Drinkard, Martha Barron, Bill Floyd, Russell Bridges, Euline Arnau, Caroline Drinkard, Linda Chatfield, Margaret Ellis

of Peachtree Road, south of the Chattahoochee River and east of Bolton. The notice invited anyone interested to come to a meeting at 2:00PM Sunday, November 5, 1950, at Northside High School to learn of plans to start a new Methodist church.

Some 75 people came to hear Bishop Moore and Dr. Rumble throw out the challenge of starting a new Methodist church. Dr. Eugene Drinkard was introduced as the first minister. He made some remarks to the group which were very favorably received. When the cards were passed out for those who wanted to join, only 15 commitments were initially recorded. Since 7 or 8 were pre-committed before the meeting we were not doing too well. At this point, someone said he and his family would join if he had assurance of a Sunday School for his children. As I got up to assure the gentleman that there would be a Sunday School from the very first Sunday, and to try to be convincing that we would have all ages and so on, my year-and-a-half old son Tom slid down from his mother's lap, toddled

to the front of the room, and grabbed my leg. I picked him up and finished my remarks holding Tom in my arms, showing him as exhibit one that we would have a Sunday School.

This was truly a prophetic time because the Lord laid His hand on Tom and this year he was ordained by Bishop Cannon, joined the North Georgia Conference, and was assigned to the First Methodist Church in Thomson, Georgia, as associate minister. I'm also fortunate today because my youngest son David is running the sound system up above. So every time I've been up I've had some assistance from the children. But, at this point, we passed out the cards again and increased our membership total to 23. This number grew to 34 by the next Sunday because there were some who weren't quite ready to jump but found out during the week that they would.

NAMING THE CHURCH

There had been some talk of naming the church Asbury Methodist for the great circuit rider of Early American

Methodism, but the name decision was to be deferred until Easter when we closed the charter membership at 154 members. However, Mrs. Otis Barge, a visitor from Peachtree Road Methodist Church, who attended the organizational meeting, forced an interim decision by asking what name she should use in writing a check to the new church. We told her just to make it to Northside Methodist because we had to open an account at the bank and that name would do the job. So we became Northside Methodist Church. When the charter membership was complete with the 154 members at Easter, the Northside Methodist name was unanimously confirmed. No one wanted to tamper with a winning combination. [...]

THE STEERING COMMITTEE MAKES THE COMMITMENT

A group of eight men met with Dr. Rumble in the living room of my home and he designated us as the Steering Committee to lead the church until we would elect a Board of Stewards on January 1, 1951, which was the start of our first fiscal year. These



E. Quillian, M. Barron, A. Quillian, E. & A.P. Posenecker, M. Thrower, J. Munroe, R. & P. McLarty, Jr., Hal & Ada McCurry

men included Henry Reid, Ed Dickey, Jack Barron, Respass Chatfield, Hal McCurry, Dr. Marion Pruitt, Randolph Thrower and me. Six of the eight after twenty-five years are still in this church. Jack Barron and Dr. Pruitt are transferred to the Church Eternal.

FULL COMMITMENT

Ed Dickey was designated as treasurer and this, he found, meant that he would keep all the money. The plate collection, the regular giving, which made up most of what we had in those days, he would take home every Sunday afternoon, roll the money up, put it in the bank the next day, and maintain the accounts, etc. You see, we had no office or anyone employed to do that. Henry Reid was secretary, and Hal McCurry was named chairman of the ushers at this meeting. I was to coordinate the move from the temporary steering committee to a permanent board the first of the year. I recall that we prayed fervently for the success of our new church, and asked for the Lord's strength, His guidance and His direction. In order to get some seed money in hand, we each paid in

\$50 to the treasurer, but at the same time we committed to each other and to Him that we would underwrite the expenses of the church for the first year, no matter who joined, the principal expenses being the preacher's salary, the parsonage rent, and the rent on Northside High School. When we had so committed ourselves, it was as though the financial burden had been lifted and we moved together to bring new members into our exciting new venture. This act of faith and concrete commitment was needed for us to stand against the well meaning advice of those who said a new church would not succeed.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS

During the first two years of the church's life, everything except the preaching was handled by volunteer work of the members. The business of the church was spread around in the homes of dedicated members. Communications were excellent because there were no inactive members and everyone was present at Sunday School and church unless providentially prevented from being



Elaine & Posey Posenecker, Joy Munroe, M. & R. Thrower, L. Chatfield, Marie & Paul McLarty, Sr., Julia Bridges

there. There was a wonderful spirit of love and of caring for each other as we went about doing the Lord's work. I can recall that during a brief illness I experienced during the first six months of our founding, I was visited at home by almost all of the membership, and flowers, fruit, and cards filled my room.

This spirit was kept alive by the strong preaching of Gene Drinkard and by his introduction of the church motto: To have the kind of church that Jesus Christ could join. " This manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst was reminiscent of the account of the fellowship of believers at the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ following Pentecost.[...]

THE CHURCH IN ACTION

I can recall more than once during our early years that our little band of members responded to special needs resulting from catastrophic disasters striking families in our church, and we accompanied our love and concern with enough money to be of some practical help. We cared for each other.