

A SHALLOWFORD REMINISCENCE--1983-1989

by Charley Rose



“Cease to dwell on days gone by and to brood over past history. Sing to the Lord a new song. Here and now I will do a new thing. This moment it will break from the bud. Can you not perceive it?” Isaiah 43:19

Come and see what God has done! Where do we look? Let's begin on September 18, 1983. On that day I participated in the second worship service of the future Shallowford Presbyterian Church.

September 18, 1983

The initial worship services were held at Forsyth Country Day School at 5501 Shallowford Road in Lewisville, NC. If one had arrived early enough, or perhaps the day before, one would have found Mike McClure and a crew of early Shallowford folks taking down cafeteria tables and setting up folding chairs. Placing them in the shape of a U, they oriented the congregation toward a set of windows, where they could watch the neighborhood dogs go by as they listened to David Partington's (the organizing pastor's) sermons. On this Sunday morning one would have seen the first Shallowford folks making their way cautiously around the long driveway, looking for the cafeteria, finding a few cars in the back, and entering the cafeteria. Once inside, they experienced the beginnings of what was to become the worshipping community of Shallowford Presbyterian Church.

As these folks took their seats in the folding chairs arranged by Mike and his crew, they faced the rather rudimentary beginnings of church furnishings – a small

table with a couple of baskets, a pottery cup, a glass salad bowl - the symbols of worship. On the left side of the congregation, facing the minister, was the small (but fantastic) choir seated next to the piano, played by Brokie Partington, the minister's wife. The rest of those gathered sat in the U, some taking regular seats every Sunday, others moving around a bit.

One of the things one noticed immediately was that all the folks wore nametags. People who had been there before were making a real effort to learn names and to talk to those who hadn't been there before about their idea of starting a new Presbyterian church in western Forsyth County, about this "New Venture." As one participated in the service, one notice that there was lay participation in the service. There were lay readers of Scripture. Everyone was on the same level as the minister. Folks were facing one another in an openly friendly atmosphere.

The service over, the church furnishings, along with a big wooden container that held the nametags, were packed into a couple of cardboard boxes and put into the back of a David's Honda station wagon. The tables were put back up. The chairs went back around the tables. All evidence of the church disappeared from Forsyth Country Day School. That was all that was to be seen after that small group's worship on that September 18, 1983 .

The Beginning

If one had come just the week before, one would have seen the "first service" of this "New Venture." There would have been about a hundred people present. That gathering would have included many visitors from all over the Presbytery. Just how did this group get started? The whole idea began back in the late 1970's with a survey conducted by the Presbytery of Concord indicating a need for a new church in the western part of Forsyth County. In 1980, the Presbytery appointed a church development committee, to implement the results of the survey. And in 1982, the Presbytery of Concord approved the report of the church development committee advocating the establishment of a new church in Forsyth County.

In 1983, the Presbytery issued a call to David Partington to come to western Forsyth County as the organizing minister. David was no stranger to Winston-Salem having been the minister of music at First Presbyterian Church of Winston-Salem for nine years. In 1975, he had decided to make a career change and went to Union Theological Seminary. He graduated in 1978. Upon his ordination he became pastor of two churches in West Virginia. In 1983, he came back to Forsyth County.

Perhaps the first piece of literature that might be of interest to you about this new church, was a little brochure called "A New Venture." I would draw your attention to a couple of passages about the beginnings of this church.

One of the things that strikes one about the brochure is the following quotation:

"Maybe once in a lifetime, maybe never, does one have the opportunity to be a founding member of a church but that opportunity is here and now. A Presbyterian church in your neighborhood, we invite you to be a part of it."

The brochure went on to describe this new venture, including a description of the future site, saying, "It is planned now that the church will be built close to the intersection of U.S. 421 and the Lewisville-Clemmons Road."

When I began coming to the "new venture", I had heard about that site, but I had no idea where it was. I was from Winston-Salem and not familiar with the area. All I knew came from a series of "Burma-Shave"-like signs, announcing the coming of a new church at that location. The brochure went on to say, as far as a temporary site was concerned, that the organizing members would hold Sunday worship services at Forsyth Country Day School located on Shallowford Road.

The brochure said this about the organizing members:

"As defined by Christ's teachings, a church is a body of believers, not a building, not a site, not even a program in the beginning. It is simply a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who want to practice His teachings in their daily lives, then organize themselves so as to learn together and draw strength from each other in a venture in faith. As to the church name, there is none as yet. It will be named by the organizing members, another rare opportunity given to a body of believers."

With that brochure, David and a summer intern, named Buck Malcolm, knocked on 2200 doors in western Forsyth County and assembled a group of folks that began what was to become Shallowford Presbyterian Church. At the first meeting at the manse, there were about 18 folks present. There followed a series of summer vesper services by the lake at Forsyth Country Day School. The first service was held on September 11, 1983. Those were the very beginnings of this church.

Goals and Visions; Commitment and Hard Work

In September, 1983 a group of folks meeting at Forsyth Country Day had as a goal growing to 80 members by the following June so they could be constituted a Presbyterian church.

I think there is another scene that I have to set for you in discussing that goal. I mentioned earlier that at 11:30 on Sunday mornings the church disappeared into cardboard boxes and went into the back of David's Honda. The rest of the business of the church was carried out in the basement of the manse at 197 Sonata Drive in Shallowford Lakes. The manse basement served as the church office with David's files, a desk, and an exercise bike. On any given night one might find, in the manse basement, a meeting of the predecessor of the Session, or a meeting of the forerunner of Christian Education Committee, or a meeting of the future Congregational Care Committee. The church effectively operated in the basement of the manse for those early days.

From the fall of 1983 to the spring of 1984, the church worked at educating itself. Through cluster group meetings in the cafeteria after worship, the congregants selected a name for the church. After a full and open discussion over a

period of two or three Sundays, they created the first Mission Statement for Shallowford Presbyterian Church. The congregation had a sense of openness, cared for one other, was interested in education, and possessed an intense interest in, and appreciation of, worship.

The congregation reached its goal of 80 members and we shift forward in time to June, 1984. A group of folks from Shallowford took our papers over to Banner Elk, North Carolina, to Presbytery, and constituted "Shallowford Presbyterian Church", a name selected by the members of the congregation. On June 24, 1984 in that cafeteria at Forsyth County Day School there was a service of worship celebrating the organization of Shallowford Presbyterian Church. At that service, just as at the very first service, one found the Matrix Brass Quintet. The service began with a call to worship based upon Isaiah, Chapter 43, verse 19 which was to become a special passage for Shallowford Presbyterian Church Isaiah 43:19:

"Cease to dwell on days gone by and to brood over history. Sing to the Lord a new song. Here and now I will do a new thing. This moment it will break from the bud. Can you not perceive it?"

A special part of that worship service was a motet based upon Isaiah 43:19 by Bill Stevens, a Winston-Salem composer, written especially for the Service of Constitution of Shallowford Presbyterian Church. It was a special day and a special time and a special service.

Taking the passage from Isaiah to heart, the congregation did not dwell on days gone by but began work on a new thing. Now that we had 80 members and were constituted a church, we turned to the business of constructing a building to house this new church. Again, the process was characterized by education and discussion. The members of the congregation, in small cluster groups, learned about church architecture. In the homes various members, folks discussed what the new church ought to look like. In my home there were some folks who said, "It ought to look like a church. It ought to have a steeple; it ought to be white; it ought to have shutters." There were other folks who said, "It ought to be modern." There were others who said, "It ought to be flexible." There were others who said, "It ought to express something about us." The result of these cluster groups was a 20-page document accompanied by a questionnaire created by the Long Range Planning Committee. The document provided the basis for discussions with an architect and it produced a plan with which, I think, almost everyone was happy. Once the architect was finished, the building process began.

It was now early 1986. The church had received a gift of \$200,000 from the DeTamble Legacy and had the promise of a \$70,000 low interest loan from Presbytery. The church set for itself the goal of raising \$100,000 to be used for the construction of this new building. One day in March of 1986, one could have seen the congregation, now in the library at Forsyth Country Day, having a lunch after worship and awaiting the tabulation of the results of the first building campaign. Midway through the lunch, when the committee came in to announce the results, the congregation rejoiced in the news that the members of Shallowford Presbyterian Church had pledged \$200,000. That \$200,000 commitment exhibited an audacious faith by the small membership which had been challenged by the pastor's sermon, "Audacious Faith."

Let me take a moment at this point in the history to mention some of the early leaders who assisted the pastor. By this time in the life of Shallowford, Sally Gant had become Director of Music and Brokie had moved into the choir. Sally not only played the piano for worship on Sunday but also directed the choir. In its early days Shallowford was blessed with the leadership skills of several talented young folks.

In the summer of 1983, Buck Malcolm interned at Shallowford and spent his time with David knocking on the doors of those 2200 homes that I mentioned earlier trying to interest people in the "new venture." In the summer of 1984, following Shallowford's organization as a church, Ellen Fowler spent a summer as an intern at Shallowford and provided spiritual leadership and fellowship support in the early days of the new congregation.

Then in August of 1984, Shallowford was blessed with the presence of Allen Wright, a young man who served two years with us as a Tide-of-Life intern in his preparation for the ministry. During the time Allen was here, he provided a real boost to Shallowford, in his work with the youth and the creation of an effective youth program.

Well, we have come through a time of organization and a time of planning for building and a campaign that produced double its goal and now it was time to move from Forsyth Country Day at 5501 Shallowford Road to the new church building at 1200 Lewisville-Clemmons Road. There was a ground breaking ceremony in November, 1986, followed by at least 40 days of rain. But by November, 1987 the new building was complete and the congregation moved to 1200 Lewisville-Clemmons Road. At that point the congregation numbered about 74 households. They still wore nametags. They still had lay readers. They had a pottery chalice upon the altar, and they had a series of banners celebrating different events in the church year. Baptisms were still conducted with a pitcher pouring water in dramatic fashion into the baptismal font. The new building seemed to express the character of this congregation.

Discerning Who We Are

There is a brochure in the pews called "Expressions Faith," describing architectural features of the church and its furnishings. If you haven't read it, read through it, or, if you have read it, remind yourself of some of the things contained in this new building. The building was designed to manifest the congregation's intense interest in worship. We built a sanctuary first. We built a sanctuary with things that were real and things that represented the work of craftsmen from the local community. The runner on the communion table, the offering plates, the baptismal font, the candle stand, are the works of local artisans. The logo is the creation of Fred Barkley one of our members. When you come into the sanctuary, there is feeling of openness and a feeling of warmth and a focusing of attention on the symbols of worship.



Before we move on to the future, let's talk a minute more about another aspect of the early Shallowford congregation. That early congregation had a genuine interest in music. One of the things we did as a part of the thanksgiving and celebration for our new building was create a "Shallowford Series" to celebrate that first year in the new building. The "Shallowford Series" became a permanent series. In cooperation with the North Carolina School of the Arts the series offers free concerts to the Lewisville and Winston-Salem communities on Sunday afternoons.

There were memorable sermons along the way. I mentioned the sermon, "Audacious Faith," as part of our first building fund campaign. The first sermon I heard David preach was a sermon that I think captured the way people at Shallowford felt about music as a form of worship. Shallowford's interest in music was evident in the "the choir practice" at the beginning of worship.

The interest in music is everywhere in this new building. Our first purchase while at Forsyth Country Day School was a piano. If you look near the choir you can see the wonderful grand piano donated by one of our members. I remember when they went off to the auction to bid on the piano and then had the piano reconditioned. How good we felt about getting such a magnificent instrument. I remember the piano in the manse dining room. David sat in the dining room playing the piano and talking about how nice it was to enjoy a Cadillac when you had been used to Chevrolets.

Look at the Guide to Worship for our significant events -- our first service, our service of constitution, our groundbreaking event -- and you will find the Matrix Brass Quintet at each of those services. John Williams, with his rich bass voice, gifts us each year with his music at one of our services and we have special music at other times throughout the year. Shallowford's intense joy in music is evident every Sunday in the magnificent work the Shallowford Singers, our own instrumentalists, and our music director, Sally Gant. You can see the appreciation of the sacred in music in the large stained glass window above the choir in the left front of the sanctuary. Music and the role it plays in the life and worship of Shallowford is one of things that makes Shallowford special.

In 1987, we were in the new building. Again, we didn't "dwell on days gone by" but concerned ourselves with beginning "a new thing." During 1988 and 1989 we worked on a couple of goals. We worked at attracting new members and getting used to our new surroundings. We had members from Winston-Salem. We had members from the Lewisville community. We had a pleasant group of members who came to us from Bermuda Village. We had moved out of the basement of 197 Sonata Drive and we had several Sunday School classrooms. Two women's circles formed. We continued the tradition of monthly breakfasts that had begun at Forsyth Country Day School. There was a church picnic and a retreat each year. The church continued to add special services. There was the service of Tenebrae during Holy Week and the beginnings of what were to become a series of prayer vigils. In addition to getting used to the new building, we expanded the things we did for each other and enjoyed the benefits of the new sanctuary and what it did for our worship and our coming to be one with each other in worship.

In fall, 1989 we conducted a self-study. That first service had been in September of 1983. Now in September, 1989 six years later, we had grown in membership, we had a building, we were getting comfortable in the building, we needed to find out where we had been and where we were going. The self-study was done by a committee of between 30 and 40 members led by Jim Dockery. It

included six meetings and was characterized, I think, by open and wide ranging discussions about the strengths of Shallowford Church and the weaknesses of Shallowford Church. It was a time of goal setting for Shallowford Church. I think I wouldn't be too far from the mark if I said that the bottom line from this self-study was that we were strong in a lot of areas. We set a couple of goals: to work on improving mission and to add to our building.

To be continued. . .