

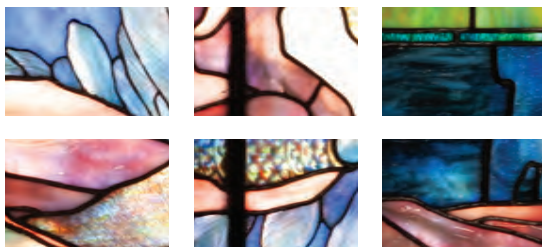


STORIES OF
**HOPE &
FAITH**

OCTOBER 2021



STORIES OF HOPE & FAITH



Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church
1316 Park Avenue | Baltimore, MD 21217 | browndowntown.org

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This 150th anniversary celebration brought together dozens of members of the Brown community. A special thanks to Gayle Barney, who led the work and whose energy fueled the anniversary amid challenging circumstances.

Thanks especially to the people who shared their memories and stories of Brown Memorial. We also gratefully acknowledge the work of the writers and editors, listed below, who compiled the stories.

Christy Macy



Al Fisher

Bill McConnell

Anne Heuisler

Liz Bowie Fesperman

Jim Schuman

Ed Hambleton

Amy Munds

Judy Jones

Dianne Ross

Ann Teaff

Taylor Branch

Shirley Parry

Chrystie Adams

Julie Hanks

Gayle Barney

*Thanks to Rachel Cunningham, Brown Memorial Christian Educator,
and Tom Waldron for their great help with this project.*

*Thanks to Gayle Barney and Jean Savina, Lynda and John Burton, Peggy and Charles Obrecht,
and Ann Teaff and Donald P. McPherson, III for their financial support of this project.*

Thanks to Taylor Karabaich of Design Strength for graphic design.

CELEBRATING
150 YEARS
AT BROWN



Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church celebrated its 150th anniversary during 2020 and 2021. As part of that commemoration, more than 50 people worked to bring the church's rich history alive, culling through records and exploring the church's role in broader societal issues. This group produced nearly 30 stories of hope and faith from interviews with longstanding members of Brown, previous pastors, current staff, and lay leaders. There are also descriptions of some of our programs, including our music offerings and tutoring program. These stories were compiled to create this sweeping collection. Some are in the subject's voice; others are told in the third person, a choice made by the interviewer.

It's important to note that these stories were collected during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021, a period of great challenges and loss for our community, the nation and the world. Brown Memorial canceled in-person services for more than a year but continued to worship through online tools and maintained a strong sense of community – a hallmark of Brown Memorial through the years.

These pages provide informative details about the church – in the past and today. These are stories that tell who we are. The stories demonstrate the deep affection so many have for Brown and its community. They are sometimes funny but also detail our commitment to our mission in the years ahead. Sharing our history around Brown Memorial's witness and work for justice, the stories can motivate us to face challenges not yet met in the community around us.

*Our stories build bridges between the teller and listener.
Our stories connect our past to our future.*

Read on and enjoy listening to these people's stories of hope and faith at Brown Memorial. Let them help guide us in the years to come.



Sunday School During the War

By Jane Tinsley Swope

*J*ane was confirmed at Brown in 1930 and remained a member until her death in March 2013 at the age of 97.

During World War II, many families came from Appalachia to work in the defense industries. They lived in the overcrowded area on Eutaw Place and Linden Avenue and the children came to our Sunday School. They were wonderful children, so responsive and with a real background of faith. Somehow they blended in with our more fortunate children from the suburbs.

Miss Louise Goldsborough was at the door to greet them when they arrived, and she made each one feel special. Juanita Sowell was very much loved by her kindergartners. I started with the first grade and over thirteen years worked up to being Superintendent and worship leader.

We had a little triptych on which we put an appropriate picture and fresh flowers every Sunday. I would spend Saturday evening preparing a worship session, which was largely dialogue with the children, and then have it completely taken away from me when I asked them, "What do you think Jesus would do in a case like this?" by the thoughtful response of a child.

There was a balcony around the open space where the second floor is now, and we spent considerable time chasing little boys around that. I don't know what Ted Griffith taught the Juniors, but peals of laughter would come from his room. Bill Reinke was more sedate with his Seniors.

One time when we were making a diorama of a Hebrew village we lost the interest of the little boys until Charlie and Rodney Stieff came in and sat down on the floor with them and whittled boats for the Sea

of Galilee.

The dramatics we put on from time to time, sometimes in the chancel, sometimes just in our own room, were enjoyable. We always had a Christmas pageant with the Holy Family and the kings and one Easter we did the Prodigal Son with a plump little girl doing a memorable representation of “loose living,” and then a hush as the lights dimmed and Joan Kacik sang, “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” in her beautiful voice.

We tried to visit their homes. Always there would be a picture of Jesus on the wall, but the parents, although they appreciated what we were doing for their children, did not feel comfortable about coming to church. The only time they came was when we had a Christmas party just for the families.

At that time, we also had recreation at the Bolton Street Center (later a synagogue) and we were able to relate to many of the children in the after-school hours. We tried to introduce them to some of the pleasures of city living, such as the Walters Art Gallery, the Lyric Theatre, and Druid Hill Park. We even had a summer day camp at Graham Park.

Continuity is important. The fact that the same teachers stayed on year after year gave the children some stability in a changing world.

After the War we lost touch with them; they moved away. Schools might change their entire enrollment in one year. I would like to know where they are now; whether they blended in or whether they went back to the mountains. This I do know: those were the most challenging and rewarding years of my life.



Court Robinson

Interview: Ed Hambleton, April 2020 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



One of Brown's pastors was Jay Ross Stevenson. He came to Brown from the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, where he was considered too liberal. He came to Brown, was pastor here, and then went on to become president of Princeton Theological Seminary. What makes that interesting is that my dad went to seminary while Jay Ross Stevenson was president of the seminary and knew him. Jay Ross Stevenson had a couple of kids, one of whom was a physician who spent four years in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. He then eventually became head of the church's Mission Committee. He was the one I talked to when Sally and I went to Korea. So we Robinsons have a long history that connects us to Brown in that way.

Our second connection is the Finney family. A famous physician here in town was Dr. John M. T. Finney who was a very active churchman. He served on the board of trustees of Lincoln University and Princeton Theological Seminary at the same time that my grandfather, Dr. Courtland Robinson, was on the board of trustees at Lincoln University and the Princeton Seminary. So we have the Robinsons and the Finneys who have been connected for many years.

We went to Korea in 1960 until 1971. When we came home in 1964 on our first furlough from Korea, we got to know the church. At that time there was a committee called the Business and Professional Women that was made up of many of the wives who did not work at that time. They collected surplus medicines and sent them to me in Korea where I used them to treat patients. That was a long-term tie. When I got back to Korea, the bulk of the students I was training to be physicians were coming to the states to live and work.

After the war, many people were going to church; there was a massive growth in the church population. Brown members said, "We need to be in the suburbs." I think there was some hope back in the fifties that they could sell the downtown church and then move to Woodbrook. There was a rumor at that time that if they sold the church all the money would go back to the Brown family (because they had given the money originally for a church). The Brown congregation decided to have one church at two locations.

So we had one session, one installed pastor, Doctor Ehrhardt, and a couple of associates. They ran the two locations. Then gradually the uptown crowd said, "No, no, let's stop." Around the late seventies they began to say, let's split. We then demanded that we have a downtown pastor full time. That was when the vote was taken for the churches to divide. At that point, we got Associate Pastor Malone; he ran it, and when we divided, he stayed on as our pastor. So we had two separate sessions, two separate churches, totally independent, but kept the same name.

The name for "The St. Johns Seven" came from the fact that the Burtons lived on St. Johns Road in Roland Park. We were all active members who were interested in keeping things going. We realized that Ehrhardt sort of wanted to shut us down. We were interested in keeping the downtown church. At this point our kids were grown and no longer in the Sunday school, so it was just my wife and I – that's why we became more active downtown. She preferred the downtown choir. We just thought there was a purpose to remaining with downtown. We started talking to people – the Finney family. There were several prominent families in the church who said, "No, we've got to stay." So we began to nurture that idea along. "St. Johns" is a bit of a myth, but there is no question that this was a small group of people who were working hard to make the survival of the downtown church happen.

There was a big congregational meeting, and signs were posted giving notice. Everybody turned out; we grabbed every one of our kids, anybody who was a member. There was a difference of one or two votes in favor

of dividing; it was a very close vote. The congregation at that time had about five or six hundred members.

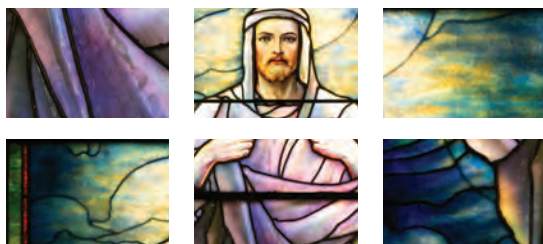
There were a few squabbles over the silver. The silver ended up at Woodbrook, and the bells ended up downtown at Brown Park Avenue. What was interesting was that Doctor Ehrhardt divided the endowment (about a million dollars) pretty much evenly, although the congregation was split about 500 to 100. I was extremely impressed. So the endowment was divided, and that's what we survived on for a while.

When Roger Gench came aboard as pastor, he was probably the first one who pushed us back to survival. My wife realized, though, that he wasn't really very good as an administrator, and she took over as the lay associate. The church was run by Gench, Sally as the lay associate, and Sharon Holley in the office. My wife trained Sharon to be the church secretary.

I have always been interested in the missions of the church. I went down to Nicaragua on a couple of trips and was interested in what our church was doing there. And then we got interested in El Salvador, and that probably turned out to be a better setup. That remained our mission. We're not there to evangelize; we are working with the local Catholic church, which is a very good use of our efforts.

Now in retirement, I spend a lot of time woodworking. I grew up in the thirties. Dad had a bench in a basement where you fixed things; that's how you survived. So I've always had a bench, I've always used my hands. I always had a shop at our place in the Greenspring Valley. When I retired, I would spend time in it. Now, here at Broadmead we have a beautiful shop. I spend about three hours, six days a week down in the shop. It is something to do standing up.

I have created pieces that are part of the church – the Christmas wreaths stand, a goblet for communion, and a stand to keep the Bibles on. I built the platform that the choir director stands on. John Walker needed something to hold onto when he stood up there, so that's how that got created.





Peggy Obrecht

Interview: Christy Macy, October 2020



I arrived at Brown Memorial Park Avenue Church in 1942, the fall after we settled in Baltimore, having left my father's life-long home in Cleveland, Ohio. My parents, Clark and Meg Mock, two sisters, and a brother all attended the church until 1960 when my sister Lynette married and moved out of town and David moved temporarily to New York.

(In later years Lynette rejoined when she and her husband came to live in Bolton Hill). All my siblings' children, again with the exception of Lynette's, joined the church as did many of their children and some of my parents' great-grandchildren.

I knew the names of everyone at Brown Memorial by the time I was 12. In those early years, Guthrie Speers was our minister, and he and his wife graciously took in our family one winter when our furnace "blew up." The services never ran longer than one hour which worked especially well for my mother as she had the entire family along with, often, single women from the church, for Sunday lunch at 12:30. Guthrie was a gifted preacher and the children's sermons, told from the pulpit, were endearing and long remembered. When those sermons were over (the babies having been in the Church House happily watched over by a succession of good "sitters"), the young people left to go to Sunday School classes.

In our mid-teens, three female classmates and I were occasionally allowed out of the church for the main sermon and first found ourselves at my father's office on Lanvale Street (at the Family and Children's Society), playing happily with his typewriters. We finished in just enough time to run down to McMechen and Park for a soda at the drugstore, and then we waited for our parents by the front door.

Once a month the seniors had what we called “The Lord’s Supper” at different homes, led by Mason Lord, the renowned gerontologist at Hopkins Hospital. He was a very effective speaker and much loved by us all. What was especially notable during those years was the fact Guthrie would switch pulpits with African American preachers at least once every year and, not surprisingly, became close friends with many.

We had Communion only four times a year, served to us in our pews by the elders – all of whom were men. It was a short, very quiet service and sometimes it felt as if you really were at the Last Supper.

One day, to everyone’s immense worry, our organist Richard Ross, did not appear at church. By the end of the service, the news was brought to us that he had just died. I remember well the devastation everyone felt, but it also was our great fortune that Eugene Belt was there to take over. I cannot have been very old then because Gene told me I was cast as the littlest angel in one of our Christmas pageants, something somehow lost to my own memory.

In later years, on special birthdays (usually for those over 80) we could request a hymn, and Gene Belt, our organist, was more than happy to accommodate us.

By the time I had majored in religion at college and graduated from a Roman Catholic seminary, I had learned of the baleful history of the Christian-Jewish encounter over the ages; but my faith was fortified by the willingness of new clergy to also address the role our beloved scriptures played in creating that history. My mother had read them to me and to this day, helped by the years at Brown Memorial and its ministers (now referred to as pastors), I still hold tightly to the depth of beauty and inspiration of so many messages within passages, and the exegeses our clergy bring to the Sunday sermons.



Rev. David Malone, PASTOR, 1979–1989

Interview: Al Fisher, February 2021



When David Malone was 16 years old and a junior in high school, his father was diagnosed with lung cancer, and just five months later he died. During those five months, David and his mother provided 24/7 care for his father. While David was working the “night shift” one evening, he was overwhelmed by a sense of anger and grief as he confronted his imminent loss, and he severely “cussed God out” for what was happening to his father and to him and his mother, as well. But his desolation was followed by “a great sense of peace.” That experience, he recalls, was key to his decision to go into the ministry, and it enabled him “to be really good at ministering to people who are suffering,” particularly at funerals, and to help them find a sense of peace, hope, purpose, and sustenance in the face of serious illness and death.

Combined with this strong sense of compassion toward the suffering has been what David describes as his “curmudgeonly” nature, and his tendency to “walk outside the boundaries,” particularly his penchant during his career for “doing things that most other white pastors wouldn’t do.” After growing up in Rome, New York, he attended the University of Rochester and graduated in 1963 with a history major. Then he studied at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, a Baptist seminary, where he was exposed to the ideas of William Hamilton, who gained national notoriety at that time for his espousal of a “Death of God” theology.

More influential than Professor Hamilton’s ideas, however, was David’s assignment by the school to a position as a student assistant at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Rochester, where he was the first white student that the seminary had ever placed in such a position at that mostly Black congregation. Rochester experienced terrible racial

violence in the summer of 1964, which gave him his first close exposure to explosive racial tension and anger. At that time, Malcolm X was invited to speak in Rochester by a Black student organization, which let it be known that they regarded David as a “white devil.” But Malcolm made it a point to say to him, “Brother, you can sit next to me” at his speech.

Following on that experience as a student assistant, David served as an intern at Central Presbyterian Church, also in Rochester. He says of that experience, “The pastor had just returned from a position with the World Council of Churches, and he asked the Divinity School to recommend the five students most critical of local church pastoral ministry, and I was one of the elect, and the only one who went on to pastoral ministry. Already I was developing a reputation as an ecclesiastical curmudgeon.”

He went on to serve as pastor of two congregations in the Pittsburgh area, a small Black church on the east side of town, and a white working-class church on the west side. Subsequently he was the senior pastor of a Presbyterian church in Niles, Ohio. He and his wife, Deborah, made that move to Ohio so that she could commute to do graduate work at the Case Western Reserve University School of Nursing in Cleveland.

In 1979, he was interviewed for an assistant pastor’s position at Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church in Baltimore by a large pulpit committee that journeyed to Niles to hear him preach. They then informed him that, even though his preaching was “not up to their usual standards” intellectually, he would be called nonetheless. At that time the congregation had an unusual “one church in two locations” cooperative arrangement, with the Brown Memorial Park Avenue Church serving the area around Bolton Hill, and the Brown Memorial Woodbrook Church serving a suburban area in Towson. The senior pastor of the two combined congregations had told David he thought that the Park Avenue church “was toast”; attendance at Sunday morning services there was down to about 35 people.

But, David recalls, there was a small core of very committed members

at the Park Avenue church who were “fired up to save the church,” who had great energy, focus, determination, and money, and who were simply and fiercely unwilling to allow the demise of that church. At the end of David’s first year at Brown Memorial, the Session passed a proposal to study whether the two churches could be officially separated, in part for financial reasons, and soon after that study had been completed, the churches did in fact mutually agree to become two separate entities. As a result of that action, David was suddenly transformed from “a third assistant pastor at a [supposedly] dying church to the senior pastor of a [hopefully] not-so-dying church.”

As longtime Brown member Peggy Obrecht wrote later, “The hope was that David’s leadership would secure the church’s growth and survival. By the end of the decade [the 1980s], our wish had been more than generously fulfilled.” David enthusiastically asserts that a vital part of that success should be attributed to the congregation’s calling Rev. Dr. Gloria Albrecht as associate pastor a few years after his arrival. He fondly remembers Gloria’s ministry, particularly her gracious and effective efforts to persuade the congregation to use inclusive language in worship. (And he states that if he could go through his career any differently, he would like to be hired by Gloria rather than hiring her.)

Brown Memorial had a long tradition of warm and collaborative relationships with the Jewish community in Baltimore, dating back at least to the pastorates of Rev. Guthrie Speers, who served as the senior pastor from 1927 until 1957, and Rev. John Middaugh, who served from 1958 to 1968. Speers established an outreach program to Baltimore’s Jewish community and periodically exchanged pulpits with local rabbis, and Middaugh was a regular panelist for 10 years on a weekly television program *To Promote Goodwill*, an interfaith discussion of social and religious issues, produced by WBAL-TV and broadcast worldwide on the Voice of America.

That enthusiastic and informed dedication to strong interfaith relationships continued under David’s ministry. According to

Peggy Obrecht, there were two especially significant expressions of that continued goodwill across faith boundaries. The first was the establishment of an annual Yom HaShoah (Remembrance of the Holocaust) service, which drew significant numbers of Jewish guests. (David had begun doing Yom HaShoah services while pastoring in Pittsburgh and was very pleased to find “that folks in Baltimore were ready for this.”) The second occurred when a new rabbi, Earl Jordan, arrived at the Beth Am congregation north of Brown Memorial, as that congregation’s first full-time rabbi. David quickly reached out to Rabbi Jordan, and together they took members of both congregations (22 people from each) on a study trip to Israel in 1982. As Brown Memorial parishioner Don McPherson wrote: “Before departing on the trip, the group attended weekly education sessions at Baltimore Hebrew University” and immersed themselves in extensive reading and discussion. “The emphases during the trip,” McPherson continued, “were on Christian sites and experiences in Israel, such as the Garden of Gethsemane and St. Andrew’s Church in Jerusalem, known as the Scots Memorial Church; and on Jewish sites and experiences in Israel, such as the Western Wall and Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.”

In a very generous letter that they wrote to Pastor Malone and Rabbi Jordan after the trip, Beth Am members Sonny Hirsch and Chickie Grayson offered these observations about what their travels had meant to them: “The warmth, affection, and respect that you [David and Earl] showed for one another quickly transcended your relationship and brought together the entire travel group of 44 Christians and Jews... You fully understood that seeing Israel is not only a visit to a number of places and sites. It is an intellectual, emotional, cultural, and religious experience. Each place has a past, a present, and a promise of a future. For us, it was a complete and wonderful experience.”

David and Rabbi Jordan co-founded the Bolton Street Synagogue in 1986, first in Brown Memorial’s parish hall, then in the old Reformed Episcopal Church building that Brown then owned, and which the synagogue later sold for a residential development when they moved to

Cold Spring Lane in 2003.

Another emphasis of the previous pastorates of Guthrie Speers and John Middaugh that David continued was the quest for racial justice, including community organizing. Speers had ended racial segregation within the church during his tenure. And his successor John Middaugh was in the forefront of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, particularly when he was arrested in a clash with police at Baltimore's Gwynn Oak Amusement Park in July 1963 as part of an attempt to desegregate that popular attraction. According to the Presbyterian Historical Society, several busloads of clergy, including Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, who was then the Stated Clerk of the national United Presbyterian Church in the USA, and Rev. William Sloane Coffin, along with Rev. Middaugh, attempted to integrate the park by accompanying Black persons into it, but together both Black and white were denied entrance, arrested, and then released on bail.

Following in the tradition of working for racial justice, David became significantly involved in the organization BUILD (Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development), which was, and remains today, devoted to grassroots community organizing in Baltimore. He was Brown Memorial's first representative to that organization and was the only white person on their board. The pastors who have succeeded him at Brown Memorial, Roger Gench and Andrew Connors, along with many lay leaders, have with great commitment and tenacity added significantly to David's initiative and leadership in BUILD.

By the late 1980s, David felt that Brown "had grown beyond my capabilities," and he accepted a position as the associate executive presbyter for urban mission planning with the Presbytery of New Brunswick in Trenton, New Jersey. But after two years there his wife persuaded him that they "needed to be on the ground in New England," closer to their aging parents, and that conviction prompted them to move to Lowell, Massachusetts, where David accepted a call to be the senior pastor at the Eliot Presbyterian Church.

After 14 years in Lowell, he and Deborah retired in 2004. As he looked back on his career, David recalled that among the vows he took at his ordination were promises to “pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.” Perhaps the first three of these “have diminished a bit with age,” he says modestly, “but I hope that I still have love.”

For more than 37 years as a pastor, including 10 at Brown Memorial, this winsome man, with his captivating stories and his lively, self-deprecating wit, embodied what he calls the “curmudgeonliness of being willing to walk outside the boundaries” and to take on formidable challenges, like coming to Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian at its nadir.

Peggy Obrecht said it best: “David was a deeply loved and widely respected first leader of the reconstituted church... and the positive changes that came about during his tenure as pastor came about because of the effective, flexible, and passionate leadership he had so unfailingly provided throughout the decade that he served the church.”

His presence at Brown Memorial was indeed a blessing of love, and that blessing continues as a gift to those around him today.



Sharon Holley, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, 1987–PRESENT

Interview: Christy Macy, February 2021



Sharon Holley was hired as Brown Memorial's new administrative assistant nearly 34 years ago and has been with us ever since. Finding her way to the church's front office, however, was no easy journey. A first-generation Baltimorean (her parents were from Virginia and South Carolina), Sharon kept changing schools, as her family was often on the move. She finally dropped out, burdened with multiple family crises. "My mother was not always well," she explains, "and I needed to protect her from herself during those times." Later, Sharon began to raise her own family, including twin girls, and needed help to support them. With the support of her mother, who had successfully overcome her illness, Sharon was able to earn her GED and complete a clerk typing and word processing course. Then she faced her next big hurdle – finding employment.

After a few dead ends, Sharon saw a newspaper article about Genesis Jobs, which led her to Baltimore's Church of the Guardian Angel. There she met a job counselor and was hired as a part-time secretary at the church. She met people working at Genesis Jobs who attended Brown Memorial. Sharon got to know Ed Nichol and Hilton Randall. She also met Sally Robinson, who at the time was executive director of Episcopal Social Ministries. "Oh, what a wonderful person she was," Sharon says. "She helped me get my first job."

Getting to her new job in Cherry Hill, however, forced Sharon to navigate a long bus ride. As the mother of five young children, she had to find a job closer to home. Hilton Randall told her that the secretary at Brown Memorial was leaving, and the church was looking for a replacement. Sharon applied for the job, interviewed with Rev. David Malone, and was hired after a second interview with Phyllis McIntosh. At first she was a bit nervous. "Some people thought I wouldn't last, that

I was too quiet,” Sharon recalls. “But I loved working at Brown,” she says, “because it stood for justice for everyone.” Sharon had been raised in the Baptist Church tradition. “It was a place where being gay and lesbian was a sin, and men talked down to women,” she explains. But at Brown, “you can be who you are and love who you want to love.” She also appreciated that the church fought for fair wages and helped children through its after-school Child First program. “I was so happy to be at Brown and see all that it did in the community from the ground up.”

Early on, part of Sharon’s responsibilities at Brown was to help supervise the families who were living in the church basement as part of the Bethany Project – an initiative led by the Episcopal Social Ministry that supported homeless families in Baltimore. It was at times a difficult job, but Sharon was particularly pleased with one mother who turned her life around as a result of the program. “She went back to school, her boys got straight A’s in class, and she became a counselor at Job Corps,” Sharon remembers. “She was a real success story thanks to Brown giving her a second chance.”

Sharon appreciates Brown’s ongoing leadership in promoting social justice initiatives around the city. She says that over the years she has brought her own children to community demonstrations – organized by Brown and other churches – that promote demands such as a living wage and marriage equality. “I stood outside the church that election asking people to support the [marriage equality] initiative,” she says, “but I know that when we became a More Light church we lost some of our parishioners.”

Sharon continues to love being part of Brown Memorial. “It’s my family away from family, and I can talk to anyone without feeling they will make light of it,” she says.



Donald P. McPherson III

Interview: Ann Teaff, March 2021 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



I joined Brown Memorial in the early seventies, mainly because our children, David and Cindy McPherson, were enrolled in Sunday School at Brown Memorial Woodbrook. Our family attended church there before the church's division into the two separate churches, Woodbrook and Park Avenue. When our children grew older, they participated in the youth group, led by David Mock. For a while I joined him to show movies to the teenagers on Sunday afternoons.

I have always been excited by my association with Brown Memorial because my great-grand-aunt, Isabella McLanahan Brown, was the person who built the church. The Brown Memorial congregation was founded in 1869 when Isabella Brown gave \$150,000 to build a church in memory of her husband, George Brown. Isabella Brown was the aunt of my paternal grandmother, Elizabeth (Bess) McLanahan McPherson. Isabella's younger relative, Austin McLanahan, was active and a leader in Brown Memorial. He was a partner in Alex. Brown & Sons from 1902 to 1922 when he became president of the Savings Bank of Baltimore, and therefore, not surprisingly, he was responsible for some aspects of the financial affairs of Brown Memorial. In the archive boxes in the Church House, I noted that he resigned sometime in the 1930s as an officer of the church because of a concern he had about church affairs or people.

A highlight for me of my years at Brown Memorial was the effort by our pastor, David Malone, and Rabbi Earl Jordan of Beth Am Synagogue to coordinate activities of the two congregations. They planned and organized a joint trip to Israel in March 1982. That trip was a life-altering event as an introduction for my family to the Jewish community. Many individuals from the group have continued as lifelong friends.

I have been most proud of the church for its support of diversity, civil rights, and inclusivity of all people in the community. The best aspect of the church is its leadership efforts, initiated by David Malone during my membership, although possibly before, to be an all-inclusive, urban church. These efforts have continued through the years, now with the leadership of Andrew Connors, who is committed to addressing the urban difficulties of Baltimore. I also applaud the dedication of Michele Ward for her generous leadership of the youth group. At the risk of lacking imagination, I am pleased to have the church continue in its current direction.

The church devotes time and effort to what I consider the primary needs of the Baltimore community – education, equality, and housing. Continuing efforts in these fields of endeavor are significant and important for Baltimore.



Jim Schuman

Oral history written by Jim Schuman, November 2020



My involvement at Brown began when I left the pastorate of a United Methodist Church in Hampden. During part of that pastorate, E. David Bucher was the organist. He later assumed the position of organist at Brown Woodbrook on North Charles Street.

Previously my partner and I had sung with David. We both wanted to continue singing, so we went there. During this time, Rev. Dr. Charles Ehrhardt was the minister. The Brown Memorial motto was “One Church, Two Locations.” Two young ministers were brought on board so that simultaneous services could be held. Rev. David Malone preached at the downtown church and Rev. Steve Shugert at Woodbrook. The congregation later decided to become two separate churches. My partner opted to go downtown where Gene Belt was the organist. I joined the congregation as a worshipper, then started helping with coffee hour and decorating for Easter and Christmas. I was regular and reliable at worship and numerous times served as liturgist. I acted as if I were a member of the downtown church.

One year, Colleen Bowers approached me, as it was time for election of officers. Individuals were mentioning my name, but I wasn’t a member. The next year, I joined the congregation as a member. The following year I was elected a trustee, and then to Session, and later I served as Clerk of Session. During this time my partner died. This left a “hole” in the baritone section of the choir. So I donned his robe and sang in the choir for many years.

I mentioned decorating – joining a dedicated group of Juliette Hanks and her mother, Julia, Sally Shoemaker Robinson, and Peggy Obrecht,

as well as Chrystie Adams, Colleen Bowers, and an assortment of other faithful members.

As for the coffee hour – I aimed for the festival events: Easter and Christmas, as many people avoided doing them. There were other times, as well. I loved to bake, so there was always a generous supply of home goodies, such as red velvet, carrot, and coconut cakes, and at Christmas, cookies. Adults liked the trifle, appropriately laced, and the children enjoyed the “Dirt,” served from a flowerpot.

One Easter, I collected a massive spray of forsythia from a public area at York Road and Belvedere to be the centerpiece. One Christmas Eve, I served wassail, the British way. The following year I was asked by Session to repeat the refreshments. There was always a regular punch.

During David Malone’s tenure, I was asked to supply the pulpit during his vacation month, July. I told him my plan was to preach on the Tiffany windows. The first Sunday was the Nativity window; this was the Fourth of July, and I wanted to sing carols as the hymns. David said “yes.” Gene Belt, being very traditional, could not believe this, so I told him I had cleared it with David. The following year I continued with the windows. From this I developed my “Tiffany Window Tours.”

During the Malone years the sanctuary received a new coat of paint, covering the old “Dusty Rose” walls. The new paint was gray and helped highlight our windows. It gave the sanctuary the feeling that the interior walls were the stone of the exterior. Today, the “Dusty Rose” paint and gold fleur de lis remain above the doors on either side of the chancel. It was during David Malone’s tenure that a group of Gentile-Jewish couples started worshipping in the assembly room. They later purchased the old Episcopal church on Bolton Street. They have since relocated on Cold Spring Lane. For a number of years, there was an office in the Church House for Jewish-Christian relations called the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies.

During this time the United Methodist Church had their quadrennial

conference in Baltimore. David sent an invitation to the organizers to worship with us. He asked me to preach and administer communion, using the Wesleyan service.

During the Roger Gench years there was another “redo” of the sanctuary. This one was more extensive. The rear of the sanctuary was crowded following the worship service, so a pew was removed, and several others were halved, allowing for the baptismal font to be at the entrance. The transepts were re-purposed. The one on the north side became a columbarium. The wood for the niches came from recycling the black walnut from the pews that had been removed from the back of the sanctuary and the transepts. On the south side, the transept was enlarged to allow for a labyrinth. The design is original, called “Saint Paul,” and is fashioned with dark and light cork. This labyrinth is a memorial to my late son and his wife, Erik Christian and Christine Marie Schuman, who died kayaking on Lake Michigan. In the past, we have had several national groups involved with labyrinths visit ours as part of a larger tour of the labyrinths in the Baltimore area.

Both transept windows were removed, rubbings made of each layer, cleaned, and recreated. Tiffany windows are multi-layered pieces of colored glass. Three and four layers are very common; however, the Nativity window has a spot with seven. Also, a number of the memorial plate areas were redone. The chancel window had previously been restored.

However, the biggest project was repainting the sanctuary in 2001. Easter Sunday was our last service before the work began. Then, scaffolding was erected from front to rear and side to side. Heavy plastic sheeting separated the sanctuary from the chancel and protected the organ. On top of the scaffolding, plywood sheeting was laid. This was called the “dance floor.” To reach the apex of the sanctuary, an additional three-section-high, portable scaffold was erected on the dance floor. The sections of decorative work above the side windows, which I called the “bow ties,” are approximately three-to-four feet long.

The inverted “Hershey kiss,” located in the center of the ceiling, is something to see up close. Someone on the dance floor observed that one of the angels kneeling in the front of the window in the balcony had a bullet hole in one wing. This was repaired with epoxy. The windows are all covered by protective glass. The architect created the spaces we desired; however, his sense of color was “blah.” Sally Robinson, a member of the committee, suggested we ask Sam Robinson to be a consultant. The committee sat down with Sam, and he laid out an assortment of chips of a variety of colors. He grouped together a set of dark blue, red, mustard, white, and Holland Gold chips.

I suggested that we use or modify his choices. I suggested that we replace the white with a cream, which was warmer. Sam’s crew then painted a section of the south transept around the large window and over to the small window on the side. We viewed it. I told Sam it needed more cream, and he said that I had a good eye, as he had used the white. They then painted the opposite transept using the cream. The mustard was eliminated by Sam. When Sam’s crew was adorning the “Hershey kiss” at the apex of the sanctuary, he asked what we suggested. The committee shared their feelings that it needed more Holland Gold. He said that much Holland Gold wasn’t in the budget. They insisted. Sam “ate” the cost. Pieces of decorative plaster were missing at several locations. Alex Robinson recreated and installed them. One day after a committee meeting we learned of the attack on the Twin Towers – on 9/11.

The dedication was GRAND. The sanctuary was packed with congregants and guests; the procession featured the choir and banners.

Roger asked me to coordinate weddings for him. I loved this. Among the couples I helped marry were Patti Flowers-Coulson and Mark Coulson, Grace Peng and Mehran Armand, Joann and Jim Egan, Susan and Joseph Schindler, and Betsy Taylor. There were also a Saudek and two Robinsons.

During my 50-odd years there were same-sex couples: Gayle Barney

and Jean Savina, Rose Glorioso and Donna Senft, Gita Deane and Lisa Polyak, and Morgan Happ and Laura Phillip. Colleen Bowers and I created AIDS quilts for Dick Price, Harry Miller, Don Arenth, Bob Manck, and Bruce Eicher's son.

A number of years ago I visited our sister parish in El Salvador. Later, upon our request, our sister parish created the white frontal, Alleluia, which we use to this day. After retiring, I had the sanctuary open for "labyrinth walks" and Tiffany tours. In more recent years I continue to lead window tours when asked, often following Sunday worship. I became less active after relocating to Cross Keys Village in New Oxford, Pennsylvania. Zoom has made my worship possible during this memorial year.

*It is with honor and pride that I record these memories about
a CHURCH, that some people were ready to close, on this, the
150th ANNIVERSARY celebration. ALLELUIA!*

The pleasure and worship experiences at Brown Park Avenue and the opportunities to support the Christian outreach into the community have thrilled me and also made me grow.



Rev. Gloria H. Albrecht, Ph.D. ASSOCIATE PASTOR, 1983–1989

Interview: Ann Teaff and Gayle Barney, September 2020

Narrative: Anne Heuisler



Gloria Albrecht has had a rich intellectual and professional life. She remembers her years at Brown Memorial as a satisfying period of experience, opportunity, and growth.

Growing up in Catonsville, Gloria was raised in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, which she describes as conservative then and now. She remembers as a child performing in a Christmas show at church. Afterward, a man complimented her and asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. “Out of my mouth came the words I want to be a minister,” she says. “And he laughed, and the grownups around him laughed, and all said, ‘Gloria, don’t you know that girls can’t be ministers? But you can be a deaconess, and you can be an assistant to a boy minister.’ And something went on in my consciousness – because this was years before feminism was publicly ever talked about – but I can just remember thinking to myself, ‘Well, that’s that. I’m certainly not going to aim for being an assistant to some boy.’”

Gloria says her life proceeded as “a teacher, wife, mother of a couple of children; stayed at home for about 10 years or so raising kids.” Gloria became a Presbyterian when her family lived in Granite, Maryland, and attended the local Presbyterian church. Her latent ministerial ambitions were not quelled, and she responded with interest to a suggestion that she take some courses in the ecumenical theological program at St. Mary’s Seminary.

It was at the seminary that she read her first feminist theology and her first historical critical analysis of scripture. As a Missouri Synod Lutheran, she says, “We interpret the Bible literally – none of this

feminist stuff and none of this historical critical method either.” Her studies were new and exciting, inspiring her to pursue a Master of Sacred Theology degree and then look for work as a minister.

She applied for the post of associate pastor at Brown. Her interview with Pastor David Malone made clear that he would welcome her as a professional equal. He insisted that she would be paid proportionately even though working part-time. “I think that’s really rare even today maybe,” she says, “for a male minister with experience to be willing to take on and partner with a woman minister with no experience and treat her as an equal.”

She felt very fortunate to work with David Malone for her six years at BMPA. David and the church were interested in a pastor who could work with women in terms of women’s spirituality but who also would be involved in the social justice activities of the church. Gloria understood that she would be working with a church on the kind of issues she was interested in anyway.

“We did wonderful things in the eighties, but it was we doing them,” she said. “It wasn’t Gloria Albrecht alone. The Schneiders, Shirley Parry and her partner, the Saudeks, Karen Nelson, and so many others were all very active and very interested in doing the faith, not just talking about it. Every other week we were driving down to the subway station in Silver Spring, grabbing the subway and going into D.C., and marching. We marched and we marched and we marched. We were pro-choice, we were antiwar, we were anti-nuclear war, we were anti-mutually-assured destruction – the MAD policy that said if we both build up our nuclear weapons so that we have the capacity to destroy the Earth, then we won’t do it.”

David Malone and Gloria actively supported BUILD. For a while BMPA was the only white church in the city organization; David was the only white pastor, and Gloria was the only woman. Gloria gives a lot of credit for BUILD’s ultimate success to David’s openness and ability to make connections tying diverse people together.

Gloria's focus on community and the needs of the oppressed was intensified on a trip to El Salvador from BMPA. Their group experienced a terrifying encounter with local soldiers who ordered them out of their bus at gunpoint. The soldiers eventually let them reboard the bus, but Gloria remembers the scene "so vividly because it helped me to finally kind of understand what it means to be oppressed. And how these people in this village and the faith that they had kept them resisting and trying to be in community with one another."

Her awakening to issues of race evolved in the church. She recalls an experience with an interracial family: an African American man, a scientist; his wife, a white lawyer; and two children. They told David that they loved Brown Memorial; it was a great church, but they said (in Gloria's words), "In Brown Memorial I would have to speak up to raise a Black issue. And we believe that our children need to grow up in a community that already understands those Black issues. And therefore, the talk will be about how do you deal with them, how do we change them...from the inside as a part of that, rather than from the outside with well-intended good Christian white folks?" Gloria says, "We, thinking that we understood racism, had now to recognize we don't have a clue how it affects the people who are oppressed by it."

She asks herself, "How could we not know what it was like to grow up in a Black low-income community at that time only a few blocks away from Brown Memorial?" Gloria wants the church to be a community of moral discourse, to ask such questions and grapple with them. "I am wrestling with what it means to be a white Christian in America," she said. "I think good people need to get together and start really challenging ourselves and our histories."

"How do we learn to see through the eyes of the oppressed rather than through the eyes of those of us who have benefited from a history of that oppression?" asks Gloria. "That's what liberation theology is all about, and that's why I think the connections with El Salvador, the Native American reservations, and BUILD are so important. However, we cannot go in as saviors, but go in as learners and try to enable those

communities by their definition of the term *enable*, not ours.”

When David Malone moved on, Gloria sought a new direction for herself. The Presbyterian Church (USA) does not permit an associate pastor to become installed in the vacated senior pastor position. Fortunately, the First and Franklin Street Church was searching for an associate pastor at the same time and called Gloria to the post. Gloria served in that position while also pursuing her interest in academic work at Temple University in Philadelphia. She earned a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics in 1992. She subsequently took a job teaching religious ethics at the University of Detroit Mercy, a Jesuit and Sisters of Mercy university.

Brown has been blessed, Gloria said, with a very active congregation, “with people who really want to be involved and who don’t want to be dragged along by the nose. They want to be participatory and get involved and take responsibility.”

She is excited about what Brown Memorial is continuing to do, “but all of us are being faced with deeper issues than I think we have realized in the past.” She thinks we’re living in an exciting time for a variety of reasons: “One, because the issues of race are now up in the public face. Then, of course, horrible things are happening because of that, but at least we’re talking about it. Secondly, because in the last maybe 15 to 20 years so much more research has come out, so much more interest in these questions has come out in the academic world. So many more scholars are African American, Hispanic American, or Latinx American.” She is exhilarated by the knowledge that now there is so much more of feminist thought and scholarship and “so much more of Black women’s theology and ethics. A lot of work is being done,

and there is much to read.”

“But we're all in it. We're all in it, and we're all doing our little part. I have a friend who used to say it's like you're driving up a mountain road, you know – just twists and turns – and you go around the corner, and there's a landslide. There's a huge pile of dirt and stones in front of you. You're stuck. What are you going to do? And he says you get out of your car, and you find a stone you can pick up. And you pick it up, and you throw it over the edge. So, go out into the world and find your stone, pick it up, and throw it over the edge. How's that for a benediction?”



Colleen Bowers

Interview: Christy Macy, June 2020



I grew up on a farm in Street, Maryland, in Harford County, and attended Highland Presbyterian Church just a few miles away. Dean Foreman and I both graduated from North Harford High School and moved to Baltimore County when we were married at Highland in 1974. I worked as a nurse and continue to do so in the pediatric field. Dean worked as a commercial diver.

By 1979 we decided to look for a church in Baltimore, preferring a church with a beautiful building and a good music department. We visited another downtown Presbyterian church but after six months we decided to visit other churches. I knew about Brown, but the location at Woodbrook. The “One Church, Two Locations” model was a bit confusing.

Our first Sunday at Brown there were more people in the choir loft than in the pews. At the end of the service, a lovely woman swept down the chancel steps so enthusiastic and bubbly and happy. “You look like someone who likes to sing,” she said. She was Sally Robinson. All I could think of was to wonder if Brown was a desperate or dying church. Next thing I know Gene Belt, the choir director, approached and asked if I wanted to join the choir. I played the flute all during my public school years but didn’t know anything about vocal music. So, when Gene asked me to sing on the alto line during the audition I had to ask, “Where is the alto line?” I would have loved to know what he was thinking at that moment! And now, 40 years later, I’m still singing with the choir.

Like so many of the church members, we went through the trauma of the two Brown Memorial churches splitting up. Dean and I decided to stay with the downtown church. It was a bold move since the downtown location was not financially stable after the separation. A boost to

the music department after that separation was when Chrystie Adams “acquired” the English handbells from Woodbrook. My father was a skilled woodworker and built the cabinets that house the bells to this day. For a long time after the separation there were few people attending on Sunday. Many thought we would not survive. Rev. David Malone, who guided us through the separation, was a true ball of energy. Brown was destined to succeed under his leadership. Slowly, more people arrived. The choir was strong initially with about 25 members, and four paid section leaders. I learned so much from Gene and remember fondly many of his unique sayings. When we still needed to rehearse a piece, he would say, “Why don’t you take this home and try it out on the ol’ piano?” Each choir director over these 40 years has had their favorite pieces. A few of Gene’s were the Christmas piece, “What is This Lovely Fragrance?”, and an autumn piece, “To Be a Pilgrim.” At Gene’s funeral, so many of Baltimore’s organists participated, each taking a turn on the Skinner organ.

John Walker was so overwhelmingly polite, he could pass as British. During John’s tenure I had a lightbulb moment. There are so many wonderful traditional Christmas pieces that there is never enough time during Advent to sing each one. But then John had us sing a new piece from an Asian or African country. In order to sing that new piece, one of the classics had to be eliminated. When I asked him why we were singing this new piece, his reply was, “But Colleen, it’s Christmas all over the world.” Then I realized that our Eurocentric musical past needed a change. While John was director, the choir grew to 50 members.

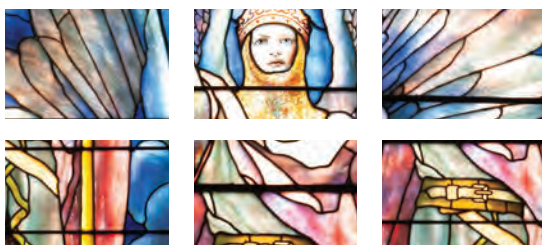
Then Michael Britt arrived – what a prize! He is so good-natured and incredible at keeping up with all of us. I don’t know how he does it. He has a relaxed approach and skill; one of his personal goals is to introduce us to newly composed sacred music. Michael is so willing to help in our many personal outside musical events. Throughout the years whenever we rehearse a piece in which the pages are faded or crumbly, I know that it’s a piece from Gene’s tenure. A nice memory.

Today I live most of the year at our farm in Upstate New York, traveling

back to Baltimore to work one week each month. During my time in Baltimore I return to sing with the Brown choir. While I'm in New York, I sing at First Presbyterian Church in Albany, a church with many similarities to Brown, and the choir in Albany has many of the same music pieces that I've learned from my years at Brown.

Brown has always had many folks who are deeply committed to their own passions on peace and justice, and since its beginning has made bold steps. Many of these issues were controversial. I remember Mary Taylor saying that she became a member of Brown because the minister was in jail! This was during the 1960s' civil rights movement. There have been many issues discussed at length, but sometimes standing up for those without a voice takes longer than I'm willing to accept. There were discussions of becoming a sanctuary church, but we chose not to go there. Becoming a More Light church was a long and painful debate, losing some members and frustratingly sad for those who felt ostracized. Rev. Gloria Albrecht was at Brown in the 1980s, yet it was another 20-plus years before the Rev. Emily Proctor arrived. I was the first woman Clerk of Session, and that sadly did not happen until 1989. Brown has had a close association with BUILD for 40 years, yet the senior staff has not included a person of color.

In summary, my time at Brown has been rewarding not only because of my joy at being part of such a talented and inspiring choir, but also because I have felt a part of history and that stems from Brown's social activism, which is at the core of our church. We have a proud tradition of that, now, and my hope is that will continue and be a part of our permanent reason for being.





Hilda Imhoff

Interview: Christy Macy, April 2020



My husband Ernie and I arrived in Baltimore in 1963, when Ernie got a job as a reporter on the Baltimore Evening Sun. We moved into an apartment in Bolton Hill, and I went looking for work. Teaching jobs were full, so we decided to have a family instead. Our firstborn, Jennifer, needed a baptism. We weren't yet members of Brown Memorial; but the Mocks took us in. That, and the church being within walking distance, meant we had found a home.

Early on I joined the choir as I had sung in a church choir as a kid. To be honest, Thursday night choir practice was also a night to leave the children, now three, home with Ernie. Sally Robinson, a lovely alto, was a choir member and also great at theater. That led to a Good Friday presentation with David Mock and a neighbor Margaret Morelder.

When we arrived at Brown it was "one church with two locations and two points of view." One group believed we could not abandon the city; another believed we needed to serve the suburbs. Ultimately we split. Brown in the city became a smaller and a poorer church. Our neighbors at Memorial Episcopal joined in combining on Sunday Schools for our children and social gatherings for adults. On some Friday nights we gathered in their hall for drinks and then came across the street to Brown for suppers of soup and bread.

The choir had a lot to do with my friendships in the church. Chrystie Adams came early on Thursdays to start a children's choir, then she would join us, the Imhoffs, for dinner. Afterwards, we would have senior choir at night. Sally Robinson actually found me a job teaching at Friends School – a job that lasted for 26 years.

We had wonderful friends and neighbors in the church; but it couldn't touch what we have now. Andrew brought connections with a wider Baltimore City; and John Walker came with his skills and connections to Peabody. The congregation grew because of the music, the thoughtful sermons, and excellent care for our young people. Imagination and humor added by Tim Hughes was inspiring. A more diverse church membership broadened our perspective; and we grew to the challenge.

From my seat, Michael Britt's musical choices reflect that diversity as we enjoy gospel and classical and everything in between. Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church is wonderful



John and Lynda Burton

Interview: Christy Macy, September 2020



John and Lynda Burton began attending Brown Memorial in 1965, inspired in part by their friendship with Jinks and David Mock. And while they moved away from Baltimore a number of times due to John's medical training and military service, they always returned. "Lynda, who immediately joined the choir, came because of the music and stayed because of the music," says John.

The Burtons remember some very lean years and uncertain survival after the split between the two churches, when budgets rarely covered the basics. "It was the music and Gene Belt who held everyone together," John believes. "It was David Malone who helped the church start to grow and reach out to the Baltimore City community in those early days."

The Burtons describe, with some humor, the challenging tasks that the congregation took upon themselves when church funds were particularly low. "Some of us decided that church members could paint the greatly needed outside of the Church House, and one Brown member arranged to get the scaffolding up," John recalls. But a neighbor walked by and asked the group what they were doing. "You can't do that," she said, "and you need to check with the historical society." But no one stopped. "We just kept going and finished the job, declaring the paint color (brown) was necessary to honor the church's name and tradition," says John proudly.

Lynda describes trying to clean up the marble floor in the chancel, which was very dirty. "We used pieces of broken glass to scrape it clean and it was hard work," she explains. And then there was the task of

repairing the steeple, where some of the wood vents were falling off. One of the problems was that the steeple had become the home of hundreds of pigeons. John and another church member were assigned to do the cleanup job. “It took us 30 lawn-size bags of guano to get it done,” explains Lynda, “and in the middle of our work John DeHoff (Baltimore’s health commissioner at the time and Brown member) raised Cain saying the effort would expose us to serious fungal infections.” No one stopped the work. The historic Skinner organ was also in poor condition, including missing keys, but Gene Belt did what he could do.

Lynda recalls that a favorite hymn among the congregation at the time was “Come, Labor On” (“Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain...”). The words felt particularly apt to this determined group of members.

One cherished memory was the night a large contingent of Brown Memorial members drove to Washington, D.C., to join a march to end the Iraq War. It was a very cold and snowy night, Lynda recalls, but the group filled Massachusetts Avenue with songs and chants all the way to the White House. Andrew and others were arrested. There were reports that Peggy Obrecht was dressed in her usual skirt, stockings, and high heels – regardless of the weather.

“What I loved about that night,” recalls Lynda, “was that no one was watching us. We were just doing this to make a statement.”

Both Burtons believe that Brown Memorial has been a huge success since those early years. But they are concerned whether the church can sustain its heavy maintenance overhead. But they have also seen how the church and its congregation have grown over the years, strength-

ened its ties to the community, and reached out to congregations in El Salvador, Cuba, and the Dakotas. “The church will need to figure out new ways to build a robust membership that can afford our church structure,” says John. “While a few very large contributions helped fix the beloved stained-glass windows and made other significant improvements, financing this beautiful old edifice remains a huge challenge.”

Music, says Lynda, remains one of those pillars of the church. To honor her love of music and her more than 50 years singing soprano in the Chancel Choir, the Burton family commissioned an original hymn to celebrate her 80th birthday. Lynda spent months working on the verses. A highly respected composer (and friend of Brown Memorial), Alfred V. Fedak, put her words to music. The piece, called “A New Day,” premiered on Sunday, October 27, 2019. The Chancel Choir was conducted by Michael Britt, with Dr. John Walker at the organ. The church was filled with Burton family and friends, and many of the choir members tried to hold back their tears as they sang the beautiful piece. Referring to her work writing the words, Lynda admits, “I had never done anything like this before.” But then again, breaking new ground and taking risks has always been what Brown Memorial is all about.



Sally Robinson

Interview: Ed Hambleton, April 2020 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



Court and I first joined Brown Memorial in 1964 when we were missionaries in Korea with the United Presbyterian Church. Brown had been one of our supporting churches, and they kept in touch with us when we were in Korea. When we came back to the U.S., we said that the logical thing to do was join the church.

The church's main attractions for me were the Sunday School and the choir. We wanted our children to be in the Sunday School. Downtown did not have much of a Sunday School, but uptown did. We put our kids right into Sunday School there, where we first joined. However, they did not have a sanctuary, so when it became evident we could join downtown, and they also had developed a Sunday School, we decided to do that.

I sang in the choir, first uptown and then downtown. For me the strongest attraction was the music, because I was very much interested in being able to sing in a choir. It is a strong part of our tradition. I was very devoted to Gene Belt, our organist and choirmaster. The church also had a strong mission orientation, and that attracted us, as we were missionaries at that point. That is how we got first involved.

After Peggy Obrecht stepped down from running the Adult Forum on Sundays at 9 a.m., I took it over in 2009 for about 10 years. My focus was to recruit engaging speakers who are interested in faith and to hear how their faith blended with their roles in life. Famous people came to talk to us. There has always been something interesting available for the adults who had their kids in Sunday School to start with, and then for anybody else who was interested. It was always a very well attended

group. The Adult Forum and the choir have been what cemented a lot of the relationships in the church.

I was the director of the tutorial program for 12 years. It was an amazing program and still is going great guns today, as lively as it was then. It got started by Mary Taylor, a wonderful lady. She realized that there were many, many children in Baltimore who had reading difficulties. The program started out at the Maryland Training School for Boys, where kids were not having any education at all. She recruited some volunteers. Many of the women who had kids at home wanted to teach and were trained in how to teach reading. And we're over 50 years old now, one of the first church-based tutoring programs in the country. It is a very distinguished program. Many of our graduates went on into high school and on into college.

We were involved in the renovation of the church in 1995. Oh boy, were we ever! A huge scaffold was put up into the top of the church. I climbed up into the top layer of that many years ago, and you could see the whole church from the top.

Charlie Obrecht helped with decisions concerning the building. I was on the committee to decide what to do with the renovation when it had to do with color. Color is particularly important in a church. We knew we had an amazing sanctuary and world-class windows. When the decision was made to renovate the whole church, we used the Tiffany windows as our jumping-off place. At first, color selections were very bland – beige walls and all that – but people said no way! We called in our son Samuel Robinson, an artist, and he said what you want for the ceiling is a beautiful Madonna Blue. And we said no, that's much too Catholic. He said you wait! The committee looked at it and we said that's it!

All the stained glass was taken out, one small piece at a time and sent off to a company in Minnesota. Every single one of our stained-glass windows was remade, properly cleaned, and properly put back. Watching it happen was extraordinary.

Renovation took about two years. We worshiped in the assembly room. We managed to keep the church together, and attendance didn't fall off. Sunday School kept going. And when it was finished, it was absolutely Wow!

If there have been any disagreements in the church, they arose from conflicting opinions about the way our mission was going. Brown Memorial was considered too liberal by quite a few people. Many of these people got up and left; that's what people do in churches. I don't think people left because we were too conservative. Probably our most difficult issue was the More Light discussion. At that point there were several couples who picked up and left because the church's stance was too liberal.

Then there's the story of the St. John's Seven. Court and I and the Burtons (who lived on St. John's Road in Roland Park) and the Wulffs were the three couples and Sid Leech. We were part of the group resistant to moving uptown. We said no, we are meant to be downtown. We were meant to stay and grow. Presbyterian would have loved to have closed us then. We said no, no, not a chance. That was a big one; it was very close. We survived, and we have slowly but surely built back up again until we are what we are.

I am proud of the fact that we've survived downtown and begun to grow again – the fact that we're as involved as we've ever been in the city. We believe that we are meant to be in the city, and we still are. I would say at one time our great focus was overseas mission. I am less interested in that now because we're a long way away from it. The fact that we still care about the world and the issues of the world and the fact that we are who we are – we're very proud of that. The two of us and several of the others, the old timers, were there at the right time and we stayed at the right time.



A Visit to My Mother's Church

Tom Potts

Tom Potts was born in 1927 and attended Brown Memorial in the first part of his life. He died in 2014.

As we drive through downtown Baltimore to the 1300 block of Park Avenue, I think back to the Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church I first knew more than 60 years ago. On this day, the neighborhood streets are lined with parked cars, and just as my father had done countless times, we search for a parking space within walking distance of the church.

I recall that parking had always been a problem for our family except during the Depression, when Dad could not afford a car. In those days we took a taxi to church each week, using the same driver, who was grateful for a regular Sunday-morning fare.

The church property sits at the corner of a block of three-story row-houses. The building is close to the street, and its gray stone tower rises high above the neighborhood rooftops. I imagine that the street has changed little since 1870, when the church was built, except that horse-drawn carriages parked at the curb have been replaced by automobiles, and the street lights are now electric.

Today is Mother's Day 1995, and it is fitting that my wife and I are attending the church that had meant so much to my mother during much of her lifetime. Since I have not lived in Baltimore for more than 40 years, we enter as strangers. But that changes quickly with a warm welcome in the foyer by a woman who recognizes my name and tells us she had once taught Sunday school with my mother, even though Mother was many years her senior.

We head for the left aisle to sit in the same pew I had known as a boy

but are told that everyone now sits in the front-center section since the congregation is so small. After we are seated, my mother's friend brings the minister to our pew, making us feel welcome both as guests and as members of the church family.

The sanctuary is as I remember it, almost as wide as it is long, with the chancel in front atop several marble steps. The pews are narrow, with dark cushions and short straight backs. Although the church exterior is unimpressive, the interior is elegant and inspires a feeling of reverence and prayer.

Symbolic woodcarvings adorn the pulpit, lectern and choir stalls. The towering chancel window at the front radiates brilliant colors with its panels depicting the 23rd Psalm. The 14 stained-glass windows on the sides of the sanctuary – most of them by Tiffany – portray biblical scenes. The rich deep hues of the glass in the side windows give a subdued light to the worship area.

I remember a children's sermon preached years ago by the only minister I had known at Brown Memorial, T. Guthrie Speers. The sermon was about the first window on the left, illuminated from behind by electric lights since it is not on an outside wall. During the day, the window is dull when compared to those illuminated by sunlight, but at night it takes on a special importance as the only lighted window.

I strain my memory to recall the full message of the children's sermon. Maybe it was about a poor child who was lonely because she didn't have the stylish clothes of her classmates. Then, through her acts of love and kindness, she became the popular one, outshining her peers (just as the one window outshines the others at night).

Gene Belt directs the choir and plays the organ at Brown Memorial – as he has done now for more than 40 years – producing sounds that reverberate praise and joy throughout the building. Mother had been inspired by that music and proud that her church had one of the finest pipe organs in the city.

The first organist I remember at Brown Memorial was the renowned Virgil Fox. I recall singing in a children's choir in a Christmas pageant where I had led the procession from the chancel at the wrong time. I was humiliated by my mistake, and after the service Mr. Fox invited my parents and me to his study to console me and tell me that my error had not been noticed.

Today Brown's minister, the Rev. Roger Gench, preaches standing among the pews rather than from the elevated pulpit, to be close to the fewer than 100 worshipers. The faces in the choir and congregation reflect all races, something that my mother had always longed to see in her church. I know today she would be pleased.

As the pastor preaches, I feel the presence of my mother. I think of the countless times I sat with her in this same building. This church was her strength and her refuge for half a century, and I can picture her, Dad by her side, sitting there – erect, attentive, enveloped in the love of her fellow church members and in the love of God. I see a gentle smile on her face, and I, too, smile – in solemn remembrance of her and in thanksgiving for the church that provided the foundation for my life.

This essay first appeared in the Baltimore Sun, May 12, 1996.



The Brown Memorial Tutoring Program

Amy Munds, Assistant Director, Brown Memorial Tutoring, 2014–2021



As I am writing this, I am living in London during the COVID pandemic, continuing to work remotely with the tutors and students of the Brown Memorial Tutoring Program. Messages from parents and students to their tutors reverberate in my mind.

“I love you Ms. Betsy. Corey went into tutoring with an attitude but came out confident and wanted to actually explain what he did in tutoring versus school.”

“Hey Ms. Hoffberger...I just wanted to update you and really thank you for all that you’ve helped me with. Because of you I am now taking my second AP class in language arts and participating in an AP summer academy...majoring in AP Literature and Composition and AP Language.”

Little did the small group that started the tutoring program 57 years ago know that their dream would grow to such a flourishing reality today. When I think about its history and the many strong women who have led this program, I feel just a mere speck in the great work that has been

done. Started back in 1963 by a small group of church members who saw the need to provide literacy tutoring for the many struggling readers



in the schools of West Baltimore, it has continued to maintain its mission, to provide at-risk elementary school students with literacy skills and awaken in them a love of reading.

Over the years, the tutoring program has evolved from a

small group of tutors working with a handful of Mt. Royal Elementary students, to a program that now serves approximately 90 children in grades 1–5 from Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School, Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary, Dorothy I. Height Elementary, and Mount Royal Elementary/Middle School. These schools have drawn their students primarily from the West Baltimore neighborhoods of Penn North, Reservoir Hill, and Bolton Hill/Midtown, with the exception of Baltimore Montessori, which has 10% of its slots reserved for neighborhood children in the Greenmount West/Midtown neighborhood.

The small group of tutors that were inspired 57 years ago has now grown to approximately 75 tutors. Many of these tutors have been with the Brown Memorial Tutoring family for 10-plus years while some have been there from almost the beginning!

I have heard of the giants that have led this program – names like Mary Taylor, Beth Marshall, Sherry Jelsma, Laurel MacDermott and DeDe Little, Sally Robinson and Lee Williams, and Gail Parker. Sharon Winternitz, Coppie MacFarlane, and MaryAnne Povell, leaders of the past, continue to volunteer as tutors today. Martha Socolar, the current director, who started as a tutor herself, has been serving in leadership of this program for the past 20 years. These women, through their passion for teaching struggling readers, and a true dedication and commitment to service, have created a cornerstone in the community.

The names have changed, schools, tutors, and students have been added, but the continued commitment to the students and families of West Baltimore remains the same today.

Since coming on board in 2014, first as a tutor, then a year later as assistant director, I have seen so much transition with the renovation of our tutoring space into a beautiful state-of-the-art learning center where students and tutors can meet during the school day to work on reading skills. I have watched as students go from having low self-esteem because of their inability to read to blossoming into strong readers and leaders. I have observed tutors go beyond the call of duty to foster a caring relationship with these students, providing gentle guidance, and inspiring a transformative confidence. I have watched the tutoring program adapt and move online during the COVID pandemic and continue to have 40 tutors and 45 students rise above technological challenges to tutor using Zoom. Their online participation has shown the level of commitment both tutors and students have toward reading, learning, and to one another.



As we move forward and through this time of COVID and in our ever-changing world, there is one thing that is certain: Brown Memorial Tutoring Program will continue to stand as a symbol of steadfastness and commitment to the underserved in West Baltimore.





Bonnie Schneider

Interview: Ed Hambleton, April 2020 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



I'm not sure why my parents chose to attend Brown, but they did, so I started going to Brown when I was 11 or 12 years old. I was confirmed there. I then moved away for many years, and then came back. Elden was singing at St. Michael and All Angels, but I didn't like the service – the same thing all the time.

They always sang the Easter Vigil, so we visited other churches on Easter morning. I went with my parents to Brown because they were still members there. David Malone was the pastor at that time. This was right after the time the congregation voted to keep Brown Park Avenue active and running instead of selling it. That was 1978 to 1980. I said to Elden, "I don't know what you are going to do, but I am not going to go to St. Michael and All Angels anymore; I am going to Brown Memorial."

I was growing up at the time we became one church at two locations. I think the arrangement was rather awkward. The minister would go to Woodbrook and preach early and then go downtown, and he would always joke that he would be getting speeding tickets. I was in the youth group, and we would have our meetings at Woodbrook. I would argue for having our meetings at Brown downtown. I tried to integrate the youth group. I went to Roland Park Public School and then Western High School. I would try to bring African American friends to group meetings. It was just awkward; I wasn't comfortable in the youth group with the church being split like that – going to youth group at Woodbrook and to worship services on Park Avenue.

I wasn't around for the vote to keep the downtown church open, but I heard about it later. It was a dark and stormy night; the congregation got together and voted to keep Brown at Park Avenue. The effort to keep

the downtown church won by one vote.

Many years later, as a couple we became more active as teachers with the Sunday School. I had two children, Sam and Sarah, from my first marriage, and we were interested in getting them involved.

Our youngest, Caitlin, was born in 1984. The children in the Sunday School were mostly older. She was the only baby. Our Christmas pageant that year was Elden as Joseph, Bonnie as Mary, and Caitlin as Baby Jesus. We continued to teach. First, Caitlin and Rebecca Adams came, and Rachel Tall came along. Ms. Shirley was the person in charge of the nursery. She was absolutely wonderful with the babies and the older children. We taught different grades, wherever we were needed. We followed Caitlin because there weren't that many children. So the Sunday School consisted of the Adamses, the Schneiders, the two children of the Tift family, Becky Thomson – their family had four children – and Tom Waldron's son Ben.

When the churches split, we started as an ecumenical group with the two churches, but as time went along, the two churches went their separate ways. Brown Memorial Park Avenue had its own Sunday School. In the nineties we became associated with Govans for several years. Ed Richardson, the youth pastor at Govans, played a big role in the youth group. So Govans and Brown Memorial held a joint Sunday School and a joint youth group.

That's when the kids went to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. It started out as a Bible camp, and then quickly evolved into the learning camp. George Demass, from Perry Hall Presbyterian, had a connection to the Pine Ridge Reservation. He got us involved in that. The first learning camps on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation really got started in 1998 with Chrystie and Doug Adams, Becky Thomson, and ourselves. That first year we took a group, junior high school on up. Chrystie really loved it, and it became one of her passions. The young people would break into small groups, and the kids would help out as group leaders. We would always have at least one hot meal. We would send vans, and the kids

would be picked up. They lived at various settlements in the Pine Ridge area. The vans would bring them to Makasan Presbyterian Church, a log-cabin church. We would have our own worship services in the church. There was plenty of open land. You could see all the way into the Black Hills. We had what we called “prairie baseball” and arts and crafts. The church was also the instructional center, where the kids would have their meals. It was an all-purpose room.

In 1999 Ed Richardson took a group of kids from Govans and Brown to Northern Ireland. They went there to run an ecumenical Bible school/learning camp with the Protestants and the Catholics. This was the time during “the Troubles,” when there was a lot of tension and violence between the Catholics and Protestants. The kids loved Northern Ireland. Our daughter Caitlin thrived on the experience. This is how she grew up: going to Pine Ridge, to Northern Ireland, and eventually El Salvador. Her love for the peoples of the world grew out of those experiences with Brown.

One of the things about Brown that we have loved is the depth of intellectual knowledge of world affairs, city affairs, and spiritual affairs. At one point there were so few children. Elden and I, Becky Thomson, the Adams family, and others worked really hard to bring children into the forefront to show that they are important. That inclusion of children has been really important and has grown. The children feel part of the church, they feel comfortable in the church, involved. There are so many opportunities.

Lisa Rzepka was our Christian educational director for a while; she did a lot of wonderful things. That was when we started going to Montreal – the summer camp, the youth conference. The kids loved that; they’re still going. Emily Proctor followed Lisa, and then Tim took over. Now Michele does a wonderful job. Michele is coming up with all these activities to do on Zoom. It has been an ongoing effort to keep children of all ages active and involved in the church. It is wonderful to see the young families joining the church and bringing their kids. There is now a real influx of younger children.

We were involved in the early mission trips to El Salvador. They started in 1986. Elden and I never went on the same trip together because the civil war was still going on. It was pretty dangerous. I also went on a 1982 seminar trip to Israel. David Malone and Earl Jordan led it. That was a joint Jewish-Christian initiative to Israel.

David Malone was the pastor when Elden and I joined the church. Gloria Albrecht, associate pastor, was an amazing and strong woman. She and David made quite a pair. We have always had pastors who were incredibly good at preaching. Roger Gench stood on the floor of the sanctuary to give his sermons. Roger Gench married our son, Sam, and his wife, Maureen. Andrew married our daughter Sarah.

It's not just the ministers, but the assistant ministers and the music directors. We've been so blessed with John Walker and Michael Britt. We've always had really good spiritual leadership from the pulpit.



Elden Schneider

Interview: Ed Hamblen, April 2020 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



I loved the choir at St. Michael's, but I went with Bonnie and her family to Brown, and I was very impressed with the preaching, with the church itself, and the people were very open and welcoming.

One of my suggestions to the committee on the Brown history was to honor those members who were part of that very courageous decision to maintain the Park Avenue church. They were the risk-takers, as Andrew would say, who had the foresight and courage to make that decision to keep the downtown church going. I think it's an inspirational story.

One of my early memories of church life was a dinner we were invited to at the Rozebooms'. They hosted, and the Robinsons were there. We were kind of awed, being in the presence of these members who were pillars of the church. Court Robinson has not changed at all over the years. We were with him on the pastoral search committee that chose Andrew.

This was in the early 2000s; Andrew joined us in 2004. We called him literally on Aidan's actual birthday. She had just been born. When we called him, Andrew had run into the house to get something and so picked up the phone. The search was a long process. Peggy Obrecht went down to hear him preach. It was a really good committee; we did a lot of work, had many wonderful meetings. Cheryl Finney was our chairperson, and she was so well organized. Bonnie and I, interestingly enough, each had half a vote because we were husband and wife. The process took 18 months.

Bonnie and I came to be fully engaged with the church when we were asked to be part of the Christian Education Committee. It was logical;

we were both teachers. At that time, the Christian Education program ran the ecumenical Sunday School with Brown Memorial and Memorial Episcopal across the street, when neither church had a large number of young people. But together we achieved enough of a critical mass to have a pretty nice-sized Sunday School program. That was our first official connection with the church.

In addition to the Sunday School program, we were interested in getting a youth group started. We worked on that. Gilly and Bob Babb were our first youth leaders. David Mock, who taught Sunday School for over fifty years, was always our mentor. This was in the early eighties. David Mock's connection to the Christian Education program goes way back, long before we joined the church. Kate McGraw Phillips was our first Christian Education director.

One of the things that we lobbied for was getting the young people more involved in the church service. I think the church has over time bought into that. There is a Sunday dedicated to the kids leading the worship service. That has been a longstanding tradition now. We can remember when Luke Clippinger, now a delegate in the Maryland legislature, gave the sermon when he was a senior in high school. The young people have been invited to be liturgists and to be included on the Session, where there are always youth elders. During worship, the young kids are brought to the front for the children's sermon, and the ones a little bit older enjoy being acolytes.

Brown has offered us the opportunity to raise children in an environment that supports social justice and offers both local and world connections – as the T-shirt says, “alive in the city and the world.” That has always been the mission of the church. Families like the Taylors and the Robinsons were missionaries. Mary Taylor (Henry Taylor's mother) was such a wonderful educator. Mary established an education center at Towson University. She was an amazing person. She would lead the worship-service children's time and bring in objects from all over the world. The kids were mesmerized by her. The Taylors opened their home, and they had this huge tree with this amazing rope swing. You had to climb to the

top of another tree to get to this swing. Mary's husband, Carl, at 80 years old, climbed right up to the top and did the swing. The youth group went out there, and they had the most wonderful time. Their son, Henry, is a member of the congregation, and he is part of Soulful Revue.

In addition to our mission involvement, the other initiative that we have seen grow and participated in is the association of BUILD. When David Malone first suggested our church becoming one of the member churches of BUILD, there was some pretty strong opposition. It seems that along the way for every major decision we've made – joining BUILD, becoming involved with the El Salvador delegation, the More Light initiative, more inclusive language – there has always been some push back. This goes back before our time – first, during the civil rights movement and then the Vietnam War.

You could say the initiative to be “alive in the city and the world” has been an ongoing focus of the church for generations.



Gilly Babb

Interview: Christy Macy, April 2020



My first memory of Brown Memorial Park Avenue Church was waiting for my mother to come pick me up from the nursery, which back then was located in the now lovely living room to the right when you walk into the Church House. When I started going to Brown Memorial, there were three generations of us Mocks/Brents/Obrechts in the church – my parents and grandparents were all members, as well as David Mock and Jill Brent. Today there are four generations; and it truly is a blessing to have such a long history at Brown Memorial.

When it was time for Sunday School, I attended Brown Memorial Woodbrook and that certainly was a wonderful period of my life. Thanks to Rev. Steve Shugert, who helped administer the Sunday School, we built the city of Jerusalem, staged live manger scenes, and raised money for UNICEF (Mary and Carl Taylor's passion), among other things. The youth fellowship group started in ninth grade and was overseen by Rev. Shugert, along with numerous volunteers, like the Donkervoets and Eastmans, who gave more of their time than any other couples.

Our weekly meetings incorporated lessons on morality and values, a study of the scriptures, along with countless adventures where we went spelunking, skiing, hiking, played board games, hosted bake sales, and raked leaves for parishioners. We also organized square dances and made and served dinner for church-wide gatherings. It was all very wholesome and fun; and I made some lifelong friendships. All of us in the youth group went to different schools, so church was even more special, because we were able to be together. It was a very safe place, thanks to the leadership of Rev. Shugert, who was an amazingly gentle and compassionate man.

I also looked forward to Thursday nights when I sang in the choir with Chrystie Adams leading a group of seven or so high school girls. It was a real highlight. After choir, five or six of us would go to Dunkin Donuts or Morgan Millard (now Petit Louis) to extend our time together, as being permitted out on a weeknight was unusual.

In my high school junior year, I was asked to join the Session – so I became the first youth elder. It was a very interesting time in that the Session did not quite know what to do with me. However, I felt rather strongly that my role was to represent all the young people in the church. Eventually, I served as a sounding board for the Session and a liaison to the Sunday School. During this time, I also worked alongside Hap Bruggman teaching four-year-olds. Spending time with Hap was such a wonderful experience and to this day, I feel privileged to have been partnered with such a delightful, kind, and insightful mentor!

As everyone knows, there was a big split in the church in 1979 – and members had to choose which church they would attend. It was a very painful and difficult decision for me to make. The Mock/Obrecht families chose to attend Brown Memorial Park Avenue, as did so many of their friends. Unfortunately, most of my close friends chose to stay at Woodbrook. Knowing that after college I would probably prefer to worship with my family, I also ended up choosing Brown Memorial Park Avenue.

My first job was as a teaching assistant at Brown Memorial Preschool, whose director was my aunt, Jill Brent. She had remained a member at Woodbrook because of her position in the school. It was not until she retired that she felt she was able to join the rest of our family at Park Avenue.

I was married in the church by both the Reverends: Wally Anderson, my uncle and Brown Memorial parishioner upon his retirement, and the much beloved David Malone. At this time in my life, I also volunteered for the tutoring program, Sunday School, and as a leader for the church's small youth group. When our children arrived, Bob and I loved bringing

them to the half-hour service held in the chancel. This small, intimate gathering was started by Rev. Malone and allowed for those of us with young children to worship in a more casual way.

As a lifelong member of Brown Memorial Church, I have a deep and abiding love for our history, those who have served this church, my fellow parishioners, and our community's passion for outreach. I am proud of the fact that we remain dedicated to social justice issues and that our congregation values all types of diversity.

I am proud of Dr. John Middaugh, our minister when my parents were newly married, who, along with my grandmother, picketed and was arrested fighting against segregation.

I'm proud to have known the Taylors, who were missionaries committed to expanding the church's global mission. I'm proud of Rev. David Malone for his interest in and commitment to enhancing Christian-Jewish relations within our church. The trip he led to Israel with 25 members from both our church and Beth Am Synagogue was life-altering for me and many others. I'm proud of Rev. Roger Gench, who guided us through the tumultuous process of becoming a More Light church. Lastly, I'm proud of Rev. Andrew Connors for his devotion to our city, his ability to attract so many wonderful new members, and his understanding of the importance of ecumenical work. My family has been blessed to have been part of this amazing church community.



The Brown Memorial Park Avenue Bell Choir

*Dianne Ross and Juliette Hanks –
updated from “Brown Downtown – Alive in the City”*



The Brown Memorial Bell Choir started at Brown Memorial Woodbrook with a four-octave set of Whitechapel bells given as a memorial gift by Dr. and Mrs. Phillip Gottling. The G#6 bell was engraved in memory of Sally Cary Clark Wolfe by her grandparents, Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Broyles, in 1967.

When the two locations of Brown Memorial separated, Chrystie Adams, Bell Choir director, and Gene Belt, organist, were instrumental in moving the bells to the Park Avenue church.

The bell choirs at Brown Memorial have been intergenerational from the beginning, with teens, adults, and older elementary children ringing together. The Brown Memorial Bell Choir rings during the Church Year, usually in Advent, Christmas, Lent, and after Easter. The Bell Choir has brought a great deal of pleasure to the congregation and especially to those who have had the pleasure of playing these special bells.

The Ring and Sing Bell Choir was added as a Christmas caroling choir in 1992. Children in first grade and up practiced each December and went to places where elderly members and friends of Brown Memorial Park Avenue lived. The Ring and Sing Choir also visited the Ronald McDonald House to bring cheer to those staying there.

The Brown Memorial Park Avenue Bell Choir had the great honor of being one of the bell choirs at the first Baltimore Area Handbell Festival held at the church on March 14, 2010.

Chrystie Adams served as director of the Bell Choir from 1975 to 2010. This post was then assumed by Lydia Beasley, one of the soprano soloists. The next Bell Choir director was Grace Maldarelli, followed by her sister Mary. Both sang in the choir while being medical school students at the University of Maryland. They each filled this role until becoming interns. During this time, the choir used Malmark choir chimes to augment the bells for performances.

In recent years, the Bell Choir has become a refuge for several older and talented musicians. It also became a way to welcome and engage new members to the life of the church, including families with children of various ages. During Advent of 2019, the concept of the Ring and Sing Choir was reintroduced, with young children and adults leading the choir toward the church altar. The concept of a “petting zoo” was introduced to encourage congregants to join the Bell Choir at a rehearsal time, to experience ringing the bells, and to contemplate joining the group.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenge for the church. But with Michael Britt, organist, as director, it turns out that handbells are a source of inspiration and hope. They can be played at a social distance, and the players are all masked. Music for Brown Memorial continues and flourishes.





Julie Hanks

Interview: Christy Macy, April 2020



I was born on the island of Culion, in the Philippines where my father, Dr. John Hanks, was doing research on leprosy. During World War II, my family survived three years as prisoners of war. My parents and two brothers lived one mile from the leprosy colony. Although the Japanese interrogated the family, they didn't see my dad, as the Filipinos kept him safe in the colony. The Japanese were so fearful of the disease that they didn't enter the actual colony. At the end of the war, we resettled in Boston, where my father established his laboratory, and he continued his research at Harvard Medical School. We moved to Baltimore when my father, a world-renowned microbiologist, moved his laboratory to Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene. Upon moving to Baltimore, I attended Eastern High School for my senior year, and then went on to receive two master's degrees at Johns Hopkins University, one in reading and language disabilities and the other in administration and supervision. I was a teacher in the Baltimore County Public Schools for most of my professional life.

When we first moved to Baltimore we attended Second Presbyterian Church, but soon transferred to Brown Memorial Park Avenue, where we joined the Carl and Mary Taylor family, who were very close friends. Rev. John Middaugh was the minister at Brown at the time and was very engaged in justice and human rights issues. He was a wonderful and caring soul. Rev. Middaugh was very involved with Baltimore's African American community and would become instrumental in the civil rights movement in Baltimore. He and Dr. Marion Bascom, minister at Douglass Memorial, actually were arrested together. It was under his leadership that the church at Woodbrook was built; and we became "One Church in Two Locations."

At the time of the separation of the two congregations in 1980, I was teaching Sunday School at Woodbrook. To me, the growing split was awful, and the meetings during that time were very emotional and often hurtful. Luckily, a core of Brown Memorial families were determined to stay at Park Avenue and kept the church open. The full congregation met to take the fateful vote at Woodbrook – and by one vote the churches were separated. People were crying and cheering and I was devastated. Many friendships were too deep to be broken; and we have remained close friends for decades.

I sang in the choir at Brown Memorial Park Avenue and loved the experience of singing under the direction of Eugene Belt. During that time, I was also active with the international outreach at Brown, which had been supporting the work of missionaries abroad since the early 1900s. I continue that passion of mine and have served on the Global Mission Committee for many years.

Although during the following years, the Brown congregation faced financial stress, the congregation continued to be engaged in the community – both locally and globally. In 1981, under the auspices of Sally Robinson, the Refugee Committee and Session authorized that an additional family from Cambodia would occupy one of the two existing apartments on the third floor of the Church House. In 1982, a family from Kenya occupied one of the apartments. We also had a shelter in the basement of the Church House where homeless people lived for a while. The shelter caused several issues within the community, as well as with the Bolton Hill Association.

During this time, we also had major conversations regarding whether to become a Sanctuary Church. As a congregation, however, we voted no. Even so, the church expanded its commitment to the world and a strong relationship between Brown Memorial and our sister church, Maria Madre De Los Pobres in El Salvador, was developed. This was quite controversial at the time, in part due to the ongoing war. Susan Saudek, Bonnie Schneider, and Phyllis McIntosh were the first Brown Memorial delegation. Since then, many of us have visited. I went in 1989, while the

war was still going on. It was an incredible, scary (at that time), and life-changing experience for me and many others. That relationship remains strong today, as does the significant program developed over the years working with Native American youth on the Pine Ridge Reservation as well as the Pejuhutazizi Family Learning Camp.

In 2005, the Mary Taylor Fund was created in honor of Mary D. Taylor, a beloved member of the congregation, and a personal family friend. I was honored to lead the first delegation to Mbengwi, Cameroon, Africa, along with Betsy Taylor, Willem Errens, and Jeff Boyd, PC(USA) Mission co-worker stationed in Cameroon. The purpose was to fact-find and determine if we wanted to develop a partnership with the Mbengwi Presbyterian Church and four schools. In 2006, I returned with Nancy Bradford and Susan Schindler, where we taught the teachers updated reading strategies. Another life-changing experience. Since that time, the original partnership has become a friendship. Travel has become cost prohibitive.

One thread that has kept strong throughout the last 50 years was the Brown Memorial Tutoring Program, originally created by Mary Taylor. Volunteers in the program worked with students in city schools; and it was one of the first of its kind in the country. Sally Robinson carried on the program for years. There was other Brown Memorial outreach work going on in the community, through efforts like Habitat for Humanity and the Nehemiah projects. We became stronger and stronger partners with the Baltimore community.

I have also served as a deacon and an elder and found great purpose and thanksgiving in those roles. Decorating the sanctuary for Christmas and Easter for many years remains one of my greatest joys.

Today, to me, being a member of Brown Memorial is an honor. It has an amazing history, and I love everything the church stands for. I've seen it through terrible times and wonderful times. I only wish I could be more involved now. I love the music; I love our minister and our staff; and I am proud of the mission of the church to work both locally and globally in the world. It's such a gift to belong to this church community.



Rev. Dr. Roger Gench, PASTOR, 1990–2002

Interview: Gayle Barney and Al Fisher, July 2020 • Narrative: Al Fisher



I grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri, where my mother was a piano teacher and my father was the Supervisor of Public School Music and a voice teacher. My father served as the music director at both the First Baptist Church, where we attended, and for our local Jewish synagogue. I loved attending the synagogue with dad and as a result made many dear friends who were Jewish. These remarkable experiences of Judaism motivated me to question the belief, proclaimed at my Baptist church, that one could receive salvation through Jesus Christ alone. This led to a commitment to interfaith dialogue and action that has continued throughout my life and ministry, particularly through my involvement with the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore (ICJS), including participating in an ICJS-sponsored study trip to Israel. In my preaching and teaching, I worked to counter the Christian teaching that Judaism is superseded, or replaced, by Christianity.

After attending Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Texas, I concluded that the Baptist tradition was not right for me, and I became a Presbyterian, serving a Presbyterian congregation in my hometown of St. Joseph, Missouri. I then went on to receive Th.M. and Ph.D. degrees at Union Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, where I met my wife, Frances.

Among the many issues that were of great concern to the church and to me during my years as pastor at Brown Memorial, three stand out in my memory. The first was LGBTQ rights, particularly whether gay folk could be ordained as pastors, elders, and deacons, which was not permitted by the church's official practice at that time. In the mid-1990s there was a debate within the congregation about whether Brown should

declare itself a More Light congregation. Such an action would mean that Brown would join a national coalition of congregations and individuals in the PC(USA) who were publicly committed to the inclusion of all people in the church, regardless of their sexuality. There were numerous small group meetings in the homes of parishioners and at the church about this issue. In 1996, the Session voted affirmatively to designate the church as a “More Light” congregation.

The next year, the Presbyterian Church added a paragraph to its constitution, stipulating that “Those who are called to office in the church... are to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness,” and that “persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained or installed” as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The clear purpose of this provision was to bar gays from full inclusion in the church. Responding to this change in The Book of Order, in October 1997 our congregation’s Session adopted a Covenant of Dissent. (The official policy of the PC(USA) was reversed in 2010, to permit the ordination of partnered gays and lesbians.)

I certainly don’t look back on this time as the easiest thing I’ve ever done in my ministry! In fact, there were some within the congregation who affirmed gay ordination but took issue with our becoming a More Light congregation. I recall a particular time when an influential parishioner phoned me and, in a tumultuous conversation, raked me over the coals for my support of the proposal that we become a More Light congregation. I then insisted that we meet privately in her home to talk, which we did. By then the woman had undergone a change of heart, however. She had very recently learned, from an article in the Baltimore Sun, that a man whom she had loved for much of her life, whom she had hoped to marry, and who had become an Episcopal priest, turned out to be gay, a stunning revelation that led her to tell me, “I’m not going to stand in your way.” Overall, I concluded that how one regards issues of gay rights “is not a head thing, it’s a heart thing,” and “we need to personalize it” if we are going to change people’s minds.

I also became deeply involved in community organizing through the BUILD organization, in which both the Brown congregation and I personally came to play important roles. In particular, the living wage campaign changed my life, so much so that I would like inscribed on my tombstone, “I participated in a living wage campaign in Baltimore.” I “cut my teeth” in urban ministry through community organizing where I learned, as the famed community organizer, Saul Alinsky, often admonished, “Never do for others what they can do for themselves.” Living in retirement today in Richmond, Virginia, I remain very active in community organizing efforts. In fact, I wrote a book on community organizing in which Brown Memorial is featured – *Theology from the Trenches: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Westminster/John Knox Press).

A third key issue with which I had wrestled all my life but which became more acute for me in Baltimore was race. I grew up in a community (St. Joseph, Missouri) that was racially integrated, including the public schools (my father had Black music students and Black singers in his high school choirs). But there was segregation within the schools, and racism was a constant reality. But in Baltimore, segregation was more pervasive, and the barriers and challenges for African Americans were more severe. Whiteness is a great cancer in American society. White folk need to listen to Black anger so that it is palpable to us and put our bodies in places where we are not comfortable. We need to understand that racial trauma, both past and present, is inscribed on both Blacks and whites – it is at the core of the American tragedy, as it is the place where healing, reparation, and hope may still arise. The Gospel is being spoken to us by the crucified and resurrected people in our midst, especially African Americans, in large cities like Baltimore.

But only identifying the specific issues to which the congregation and I devoted ourselves so passionately during my pastorate at Brown does not adequately convey the powerful impact that Brown’s parishioners had on me. Nearly two decades after I left Brown to accept the call as senior pastor at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., I still remember its people with great affection and gratitude. One

example that came to mind recently will suffice, because I think it is reflective of Brown Presbyterian's deep engagement with the world beyond its walls. I remember especially the church's close and enthusiastic relationship with nearby Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School through our tutoring program and the Child First after-school program – a relationship that included youth choirs, art, and athletic programs, etc. It was a very special relationship that I will always remember.

Brown Memorial remains a congregation of steadfast resistance, compassion, and hope, and it embodies the conviction that God in Christ always brings life out of broken and vulnerable places – including those in our own hearts and lives.



Rev. Andrew Connors, SENIOR PASTOR, 2004–PRESENT

Interview: Bill McConnell, March 2021



Brown Memorial Presbyterian's 150th anniversary coincided with the misfortune of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Like it has so many times over the last century and a half, the congregation and its ministers responded creatively to keep its worship and its missions alive rather than be defeated by difficult circumstances. The church's effort to maintain its role in the lives of members and in the fabric of Baltimore during the trying year of 2020 and early 2021 typifies the determination and creativity of its ministry during the tenure of Pastor Andrew Connors, now in his 16th year with the congregation.

Soon after the decision was made to cancel in-person worship in mid-March, Andrew and the church staff – like so many congregations, nonprofits, and businesses around the world – were forced to give themselves crash courses in mass video conferencing, acquire and set up the necessary equipment, and figure out over a matter of days how to shift their activities online.

“I was really happy with the way we transitioned into the pandemic, and I think in some ways the work I’ve done here and others have done is the work I’m most proud of,” Andrew said. “When everything got thrown up in the air, we just went back to the basics. People need to be gathered together. And it’s not just to receive something over a screen – it’s connection.”

Andrew acknowledged that Zoom services provide nothing close to the satisfaction of face-to-face gatherings. But, “having said that, I think our congregation more than others has used the technology we have to its limits around connection and I love that.”

Church finances have taken a bit of a hit but even when it comes to the books, the congregation has found a way to come through. Although outside income from weddings and baptisms plunged and the 2020 budget missed its target by \$50,000, the giving shortfall was nearly offset by additional funds raised for COVID relief.

“I find it pretty amazing that people gave . . . for direct relief that went directly to organizations, some of our ministries, for COVID relief during a pandemic when people are already feeling the stress.”

Of course, the most devastating aspect of the pandemic is the loss of loved ones, and Brown’s members haven’t been spared. For Pastor Andrew the restrictions on in-person gatherings have made these losses particularly painful.

“It’s terrible that you can’t be with people,” he said. “It’s like tying both hands behind your back in the kinds of ways we care for each other. When people die, when people experience loss, the best medicine is the embrace of the community. I want the literal embrace and figurative embrace. We can’t give the literal embrace and I hate that.”

As difficult and trying as it has been to maintain church operations, which requires “twice the effort for half the amount of engagement,” Andrew says the value can’t be gauged against pre-pandemic offerings. “All things considered...we’re doing pretty good,” he said. “If we look back on this, I think people will say Brown Memorial held its own during one of the biggest crises we’ve ever faced in this country.”

The congregation’s determination to keep worship and ministry alive embodies the spirit that drew Pastor Andrew to Brown Memorial in 2004.

Andrew says he wasn’t looking to leave Idlewild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was an assistant pastor serving his first call since graduating from seminary. But after examining the informational materials sent by Brown member Betsy Nix, whose mother

attended Idlewild, Brown looked like a place he'd want to call home. "Ooh, this sounds like my kind of church," he remembers thinking to himself.

"The things that attracted me about Brown were, first of all, the church's unabashed commitment to the city and to justice in the city. That was like so clear in the materials."

The church's effort to promote LGBTQ rights was also a major draw. "I was part of a group that started the Gay Straight Alliance at our seminary, so my mind was totally made up" on the need for inclusive policies. "Brown Memorial was just very much on the front lines at that point and had been in the Presbytery and pushing for inclusion."

Finally, Brown's work with BUILD and urban ministry in general attracted him. "When I was in college, I had done some work with a community organizing group but I hadn't really done anything with it since that time, so it kind of reconnected me to some college experiences."

Ultimately, he initiated the interview process and spoke with search committee chair Cheryl Finney on the phone. "We had a really good connection and I just remember thinking, 'Man, if there are a lot of people like Cheryl Finney at this church, this might be my church.'"

Upon arriving Andrew soon recognized that however strong the commitment to social justice ministry, there were still lingering tensions about programs. Some felt we risked being too strident on LGBTQ issues, others felt BUILD's political actions were too aggressive. Andrew's approach was to listen to where the congregation wanted to go rather than coercing others to support his own preferences.

"I've never been the kind of pastor that thinks my role is to discern somewhere in the cloud what's right and then go twist everybody's arm or inspire them to come do what I think is right," he said.

“I’ve always kind of flipped that around and felt like the way that God speaks most clearly – and I think this is very Presbyterian actually, believe it or not – is in and through the people. So I really tried to listen deeply within our own community about what drives people – what they’re passionate about – what they hope for.”

Still, Andrew has tried to convey the role he thinks the congregation should have with its surrounding community.

“I just do have the strong sense that the future of the church is inextricably connected to the future of the city.”

That future, he said, “depends on whether we get out of some of these ruts...our housing habits...our relating habits, our political habits,” adding, “The only way to do that is to really deepen relationships that are odd, unusual, or across some of those boundaries.”

So rather than having a “blueprint” for the congregation to follow, the church needs to be proactive in reaching out to leaders of different communities who share “that appetite for transforming the city and their own communities as part of it.”

The congregation’s role in LGBTQ issues was particularly tricky early in his tenure because a legal battle over marriage equality was heating up in Maryland courts just as Andrew joined the church. And, although some members of the congregation were among the parties pressing for equality with the suit, the congregation itself had not decided how public a role Brown Memorial should play in the legal and political debate.

“I found that discernment of how I was supposed to be active in that [debate] to be challenging,” he said, reflecting that after being at the church less than a year, he was “suddenly thrust out in the public [while] we have internal issues that we really need to talk through and resolve.” In other instances, when some of the old ways seem to not be working, his next step has been to help the congregation figure out together how to shift to something new.

An example of that approach is the church's recent outreach to El Salvadoran immigrants in the city – an interest derived from the congregation's mission trips in that country, which were once frequent but have been increasingly difficult to maintain.

A number of individuals involved in the partnership with El Salvador shifted their energy toward deepening relationships with Salvadorans in Baltimore, an effort further strengthened when Bishop Bruce Lewandowski came to Sacred Heart of Jesus and began encouraging those kinds of relationships.

The relationships, which included participation in Spanish classes and potlucks, set up the group to offer desperately needed help when the pandemic hit, by working together to facilitate COVID testing and food relief in the Salvadoran community.

When it comes to local and global outreach, one long-standing tension has been the diversion of financial resources from mission toward our beautiful, but expensive to maintain sanctuary and physical plant.

Andrew has recognized the tension but sees the back and forth over how much of our resources to devote to the building as an ongoing discussion for the congregation itself. "I have come to the conclusion that that decision will never be mine to answer. It really is the congregation's to own and answer."

"If the building would burn down to the ground tomorrow, we would not stop being the church...at the same time, I think the building does have a purpose and a function. Its theological purpose is to actually stand us out from any other kind of structure or building in the world to say, 'the God that we worship is going to take us away from what is known or what is popular.' And then practically, the numbers of people who walk into that space and cry or feel moved or take a deep breath. Even during the pandemic to watch some people walk in that building and just sit down and have a moment. I think it means something more to people than maybe even I gave it credit for when I first got here."

He acknowledges the financial drain caused by the upkeep. “I’m always thinking, boy, if we had that extra...\$250,000 a year we could do a lot of stuff with that.” But “I’m not a cynic,” he said, noting that a common refrain among critics of churches is the amount of money and effort spent on buildings.

The church also has had to navigate changes to the way overall finances are managed, including management of the endowment, which has grown substantially. As the Session and trustees claimed more of a role in overseeing the financial management, the initial debates over how to carry out that function sometimes turned personal – forcing Andrew to help church leaders resolve disagreements over these new duties without hurting each other’s feelings.

“There were some cultural shifts that needed to happen,” he recalls. “We inherited a system of individuals just taking unilateral decisions and responsibility to keep the building afloat. That totally worked for decades at a time when the church needed it to work. As we were kind of coming out of that, I think we needed a different system and that cultural shift took much longer than I maybe anticipated.”

Another area where there has been a cultural shift during Andrew’s tenure has been liturgy and worship. The congregation at Brown has always enjoyed a traditional Presbyterian service, but without discarding the format familiar to readers of any church bulletin, Brown has added new twists as well. A start was a more intentional recognition of the liturgical year, connecting the hymns closer to the sermon, thinking thematically how to pace a worship service, adding interactive components, and incorporating candle lighting into the prayer portion of the service. “People were just incredibly flexible and open,” he adds, musing that the willingness to try something new was due in part because during the years following previous pastor Roger Gench’s departure, there had been a lack of structure in the worship. “The church had been through a relatively rocky transition. People have been so hungry for something more significant for the last year; people were like, ‘Bring it.’”

Andrew credits discussions with former minister of music John Walker for helping with the initial brainstorming. “John Walker is a phenomenal musician, but also a really good theologian...so we could craft different liturgies together.” More often than not, when their ideas were introduced into the service, “people really were responding.”

One of the most painful changes, perhaps, was putting an end to the early Sunday service. Although that service had once been a forum for creative worship, “by the time I got here it was dead.” A few faithful adherents still held the service dear, but only one or two families were likely to show up on any given Sunday. “Its time had kind of passed.”

For the longer term, Andrew reiterated his belief that the future of the church is tied to the future of Baltimore. “In some ways my vision for Brown is not that radical,” said. “It’s for the church to be the church. But I wish we could be a part of transforming the world around us in a more significant way, so that we could reap the benefits of that as a community and be a part of improving the lives of our neighbors.”

With so much poverty and crime surrounding us, Andrew still sees that struggle as a monumental one. “It’s a personal disappointment to me that we have not figured out how to pull on the right levers to change the city and reverse the population decline and just generally get the city on the right track.”

“I hope that Brown Memorial’s vision for itself is similar to the vision that we have for the city, which is a much more equitable place, a growing diversity of people and backgrounds and experience.”



Dr. John Walker, MINISTER OF MUSIC EMERITUS, 2012–PRESENT
MINISTER OF MUSIC, 2004–2011

Interview: Al Fisher, October 2020



Born to a Presbyterian pastor and a piano teacher in Western Pennsylvania, John Walker remembers that while he was growing up, he “always wished that I could be the church organist.” At the age of 5, he began taking piano lessons from his mother, and soon he was “holding his own services” by himself, providing the hymns, the sermon, the special music, and the prayers; teaching himself to sight read by working his way through an entire hymnal; and playing for the other children during Sunday School.

When he was a high school freshman, he asked his parents if he could take organ lessons. They approved, and soon after that the regular organist at his father’s church became ill for a month, and John was “pressed into service” as a substitute. He began his organ studies with Harry Gay, at nearby Wilson College; continued them with Helen Lingelbach, at Thiel College; then pursued them further at Westminster College, with Raymond Ocock and Stanley Tagg. He went on to study at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, where he completed two Bachelor of Music degrees cum laude and two Master of Music degrees cum laude, with organ, music theory, and church music as major areas of study. In 1972 he received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Stanford.

He went on to a brilliant career, in which he became the music director and organist at four large urban churches throughout the United States, culminating with seven years at Brown Memorial Park Avenue, from 2004 until his retirement in 2011. He also became an internationally acclaimed organist, performing at famed venues like the Cathedral of Notre

Dame in Paris, St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the Riverside Church in New York City, and the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan, and he received highly enthusiastic and laudatory reviews of those recitals. (A *New York Times* critic praised both his "impeccable technical command" and his "colorful and imaginative playing.")

While doing all of this he was a professor of organ at several major universities and conservatories throughout the country, including San Jose State University, Duquesne University, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Peabody Institute. A capstone of his career came in 2019, when the American Guild of Organists, a national organization of some 16,000 musicians, which he had served as president, recognized the consistent excellence of his four decades of artistry by honoring him with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

His versatility as a performer has been truly extraordinary and has not been limited to the church and academe. His strong and long-term relationship with the San Francisco Symphony, under the baton of Michael Tilson Thomas, provides striking examples of that. In 1996, he was the soloist for Lou Harrison's avant-garde *Concerto for Organ and Percussion*, sharing the stage with the four surviving members of the Grateful Dead and with Maestro Tilson Thomas at the piano, and with "a hall full of Deadheads" in the audience. And in 2002 he played the world premiere of Steven Mackey's *Pedal Tones*, also with the San Francisco Symphony, with Mr. Tilson Thomas conducting.

In a 2010 *Tidings* newsletter published by Brown Memorial Church, Dr. Walker wrote of "the transcendence of sacred music," calling it "decidedly countercultural.... In contrast with the popular media, which equates music with star personalities, sacred music seeks only to bring worthy worship to God." The music of worship, he said, has "different and nobler criteria than music merely intended for the concert hall or television." And, he asserted, this applied not just to "special music" by choirs and soloists in the church but to congregational singing as well. While performing an organ recital for a large audience is a "great thrill," he said, "playing for a congregation singing with its full heart and soul

is moving beyond measure...through the way I interpret the texts in the hymns.... It's a combination of being an organist, a composer, and a pastor."

In short, his work in helping to create beautiful music in the church has been his first love, and he had very positive experiences at all of the congregations that he served as organist and music director: First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto (1970-1979), the Riverside Church in New York City (1979-1992), Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh (1992-2004), and Brown Memorial (2004-2011).

At Brown, he keenly remembers performances with the choir, particularly Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah* and Gabriel Faure's *Requiem*; and works from other nations around the world, "in recognition of our part in the worldwide community of Christians," including music from Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil, Argentina, China, and Cameroon. He also remembers helping to launch the successful Tiffany Series of special concerts and lectures at Brown, including a speech by the singer Harry Belafonte, arranged through choir member Taylor Branch. In May 2010, the Chancel Choir had a recording session for the FM radio program *Sacred Classics*, produced in St. Petersburg, Florida, by James Howes.

His memories of his years at Riverside and Brown are the ones that he especially cherishes, not just for their splendid music, but because he "recognized the great similarity between the two congregations, particularly the energy they devoted to community outreach," and the boldness of their emphases on social justice. At both Riverside and Brown, he reflects, "Music, and the church, served a wider mission beyond our walls." He began his work at Brown just seven days before the Rev. Andrew Connors became the senior pastor here, and "From the first night that he and I talked on the phone, I thought 'This is just great!' We grew into our positions together; and we had a great rapport that I still treasure."

When asked what changes he has seen at Brown Memorial since he began work here 16 years ago, he responded enthusiastically: "The church is in stronger physical and spiritual condition" than it was then,

with substantial growth in the number of members of the church and of the choir, and it “has become engaged in a phenomenal number of different activities.”

When asked what suggestions he might have for the church to consider in the future, he mentioned the possibility of “exploring electronic media for music and worship,” perhaps by broadcasting worship services on television. (He mentioned the number of people he has noticed tuning in to our current Sunday worship services on Zoom, often from a considerable distance.) He also mentioned the possibility of including musical groups on the kinds of mission trips that our church members have taken to places like Cuba and El Salvador.

John talks about “all of the remarkable blessings I have received” and about “opportunities that fell out of the heavens...none of which I asked for,” and he generously – and by name – credits each of the many teachers who nurtured him for his success, especially his mother, for her extraordinarily effective teaching. And he brings this gracious and grateful spirit to his leadership and performance of music. Perhaps his former colleague at the Riverside Church, the organist Frederick Swann, said it best: “John doesn’t put himself out front. The music and what the music is saying always come first.”



The Tiffany Series

By Shirley Parry, Director



The Tiffany Series, established in 2005, presents high-quality musical programs and important speakers on issues of concern to the Baltimore community.

Over the years, the series has presented a wide variety of concerts in a range of musical styles. Highlighting the church's renowned 1930 Skinner organ, the Tiffany Series has presented concerts by Marie-Louise Langlais, John Walker, Michael Britt, Marvin Mills, James David Christie, and Frederick Swann.

Other Tiffany Series musical programs have included handbell festivals and brass extravaganzas; choral performances of major classical oratorios by the Chapel Choir; recitals by famed sopranos Janice Chandler Eteme,

Marlissa Hudson, and Diana Solomon-Glover (who sang settings of poems by then-Maryland Poet Laureate Lucille Clifton); performances by the Princeton Choir; Appalachian bluegrass artists; a folk singer-beat boxer (body percussionist) duo; and *Songs of Survival*, readings and songs written by women internees in a Japanese concentration camp, performed by the women's chorus of Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.

Speakers have included the actor, singer, and political activist Harry Belafonte, gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson, *House of Cards* show-runner Beau Willimon, Children's Defense Fund founder and president Marian Wright Edelman, peace activist Elizabeth McAlister, and Congressman Elijah Cummings.

Proceeds from Tiffany events support our church's mission work in Baltimore City and beyond.



Rev. Emily Rose Proctor, ASSOCIATE PASTOR, 2009–2013

Interview: Bill McConnell, August 2020



Emily Rose Proctor first visited Brown in December of 2008 after deciding to join her new boyfriend (and future husband) on a road trip to visit his sister, Brown member Elizabeth Reichelt, during their Christmas break from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

The visit to Brown was an eye-opener for the soon-to-be seminary graduate, who was trying to figure out what career moves to make after finishing her Master of Divinity degree at Columbia Theological Seminary. Emily was drawn in by the creativity of the Advent service and the preaching of Senior Pastor Andrew Connors. “The sermon and ethos at Brown really resonated with me – the focus on inclusiveness and justice and urban ministry,” she recalls. “I thought, ‘Whoa, I really could see myself at a church like this.’”

In what could easily be seen as the Holy Spirit at work, the congregation announced that very Sunday it was launching a search for an associate pastor. Brown was seeking an associate pastor who would focus on pastoral care, adult education, global mission, and preaching – all duties that appealed to her. She had some doubt about meeting Brown’s demands, however. The church was seeking a minister with five years of experience. “You weren’t really advertising for someone right out of seminary, but I remember trying to make the case in my cover letter that I had the equivalent of five years’ experience, it just wasn’t post-seminary,” she recalls.

She indeed was convincing and when the call came, Emily accepted. By extending the call to Emily, Brown hired its first female pastor since Gloria Albrecht served from 1983 to 1988. Emily says her gender didn’t seem to be much of an adjustment for the congregation, though.

“I didn’t think much about my gender being a positive or negative, other than I did feel like it was important and valuable to have a female voice in the pulpit to bring that perspective to preaching,” she says.

After about a year and a half on the job, she recalls her first performance review being “pretty negative,” in part because many in the congregation felt she hadn’t made the personal connections necessary for a pastor. “My takeaway from that was maybe I had been a little too task-oriented my first year and a half, too focused on producing an excellent sermon or producing an excellent curriculum and that I needed to shift my focus a little more on relationships,” she says.

A turnaround came that summer when Andrew went on sabbatical. “That was a huge game-changer for me as a pastor and my relationship to the congregation at Brown because people had to depend on me more because Andrew wasn’t there. I think people realized over that summer they could count on me, and I probably did a better job of being intentional about building relationships.”

A visit with Brown teens to our sister parish in El Salvador got her thinking about the possibility of establishing similar personal connections right in our backyard.

“We would go to El Salvador and we would have these great interactions and relationships with the kids there and then we would come back to Brown. But here we had Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary with kids who may be struggling or living in poverty right next door to us.”

As a result, the congregation began examining ways to deepen its relationship with Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary and decided to reach out to the kids and families at Pedestal Gardens, the housing development where many Eutaw-Marshburn students live. Soon, Brown kids and adults were helping children from Pedestal Gardens in the computer lab and were meeting with them on Sundays for touch football and other games.

The outreach wasn't entirely well received by Pedestal Gardens residents and the relationship didn't last. The experience taught Brown important lessons about mission: make sure the communities we reach out to want our attention and make them equal partners in deciding what the relationship should be.

Soon after Emily and Richard married, she left Brown for Florida in 2013, before those lessons could be applied to new missions.

"Part of me wishes I could have been at Brown Memorial longer," she says. "When I was there we were really just getting started in terms of figuring out how to be effective and how to actually connect with [neighborhood] families. But to me, it was at least a step in the right direction – to wrestle with making those connections between our global mission and our urban, local mission and with giving our children and youth and families a chance to explore building deeper relationships in our neighborhood."

Another attempt to reach out to the neighborhood was the simple decision to hang the rainbow flag over the main entrance to let MICA students and others unfamiliar with the church know we're LGBT-welcoming. Andrew wasn't around to OK the decision, but Emily decided "to ask for forgiveness rather than permission."

"I saw students moving in and I remember thinking, 'I wish there were some way to communicate to those incoming students and their families that this church is probably different from the church you grew up in or from the stereotypes you have about church.'"

Other new endeavors she undertook included establishing a confirmation curriculum and helping lead Open Table conversations as a way to engage more members in adult education and leadership.

She's now been away from Brown for the better part of a decade and practices ministry in the Florida Gulf Coast, where churches tend to be more conservative. Emily feels like her experience in Baltimore provides

an anchor for the welcoming, justice-focused Christianity she wants to reflect.

She sees Brown as a “beacon of a church that is passionately, openly committed to welcome and justice with no hesitation and no ambivalence.”

“Coming from the South and returning to the South, where that is rare if not completely absent, just to have that experience and to know that such a church exists helps to ground me in my theology and practice of ministry. It gives hope to others who long for that here and don't see it.” Her time at Brown also carries deep personal meaning as well, she says, recalling “the love that was poured out on me” during the congregation’s send-off as she was leaving for a new life in Florida. She’s still moved by the gifts she received, which included a handmade quilt, a candle set for Tenebrae services, a prayer shawl, and many loving letters.

“It was a place of real growth for me personally and professionally,” she says. “I will always hold that hug from Brown Memorial as a loving, affirming gift from my first call into ministry and being part of a congregation that was willing to help me grow and let me grow and love me through that.”



Rachel Cunningham

Interview: Christy Macy, November 2020 • Editing: Anne Heuveler



Rachel grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri, where she attended church every week with her parents. “We did not have an extended family around us so church was really important to me,” she says. Rachel’s artistic talents drew her away from home to Baltimore, where she graduated in interior design at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA).

Rachel was married at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, but she continued her search for a permanent spiritual home. Her mother, apparently, had some ideas of her own. She reminded Rachel that Roger Gench, who had grown up in their same town in Missouri, was the minister at Brown Memorial Park Avenue. She also reminded Rachel that Roger was a competitive swimmer in their hometown, and his coach was a good friend of the family. So on Easter Sunday 1996, Rachel decided to attend Brown Memorial. Roger was preaching an inspiring sermon that day which included stories of his swimming career. “It all came together,” Rachel says. “I thought OK, I’m supposed to be here.”

Soon after she became a member at Brown, Rachel began to teach Sunday School, a commitment she continued in between caring for her two children. Later, the church was looking for a Christian educator. To her surprise, Rev. Andrew Connors asked Rachel if she was interested. “You know I have no experience or expertise in this field, right?” Rachel recalls telling him. But she also realized that she was ready for a change in her life. At the time she was working at a high-end design firm and realized helping a family buy the perfect \$40,000 sofa was not the legacy she wanted to leave behind. “I wanted to have more impact on the world than that,” she said. “When I started this it was meant to be an interim position until they figured out whether to hire an associate pastor or an educator. Ultimately, Andrew helped Session see we needed both.”

Fortunately, Rachel discovered she really enjoyed her new work and would go on to receive her master's degree at St. Mary's Seminary. "I'm a more behind the scenes person," she says, "and that's where Christian educators tend to be." She added: "I really like being a presence in children's lives and sharing in their curiosity and wonder."

Before COVID started, Rachel explains, Sunday School at Brown had already begun to evolve along with the congregation's changing patterns. When she first came to the job, there were lots of kids, so the classes were divided up like school classes. Over the years, demands on families have increased, which makes it harder for families to attend every week as they did when she was a child. She found herself with a choice to make: lament that Sunday School was not what it was a few years ago or embrace the children in her presence now. She chose the latter.

Rachel says that the numbers of kids attending Sunday School is cyclical, and that when the current crop of toddlers grow up a bit the Sunday School classes will be full again. Then, she says, the question is what those classes will look like in a few years. "The challenge in the future is to ensure we can be a presence in their lives without being an additional burden on their families."

Another significant change that Rachel was engaged in was the remodeling project. The rebuilding and refurbishing that began several years ago aimed to expand and improve Brown Memorial's spaces, including the renovation of the kitchen and meeting room, the redesigning of the upstairs classrooms, and the installation of an elevator. Rachel became a key player in the process. "My background in design helped me to speak the language of the contractors and architects," she says. She says that the renovation – especially the kitchen that everyone now loves working in – has meant far more space was available for both Brown-related and community events. That meant greater capacity to hold wedding receptions, speaker events, and community-organizing training classes. Upstairs, the redesign enabled the Sunday School and tutoring program to improve flexibility and space.

As the COVID crisis took hold, it became clear that Brown had a larger role it could play to address the needs of the larger community. A number of Session members suggested creating a fund that would support non-profits across the city who were meeting the needs of Baltimoreans suffering from the COVID crisis. That idea soon became a reality, and the fund was announced. Over the past few months Brown has raised more than \$35,000 to support community groups including Our Daily Bread, Sacred Heart, Samaritan Community, and various neighborhood gardens. “It’s an example of how a good suggestion from the congregation can get something like this fund rolling,” says Rachel.

The variety inherent in the Christian educator’s job keeps it interesting; one day she might be planning a children’s lesson, and the next she’s creating interactive prayer stations for the congregation or thinking through worship with the rest of the ministry staff.

She’s typically involved in the plans and preparations for most congregational events, and “the truth is,” she says, “I enjoy it.” But she has her limits. Rachel reveals that Andrew has long been lobbying for a live donkey to be part of Brown Memorial’s Palm Sunday celebration. He is, apparently, very serious about it. “But I know I’ll be the one cleaning up after that donkey,” Rachel laughs.



Rev. Tim Hughes Williams, ASSOCIATE PASTOR, 2013–2017

Interview: Christy Macy, April 2020



When I was a kid, ministry was the family business. Both my father and grandfather were pastors, so I got a very intimate picture of the highs and lows of working for the church. Perhaps it was inevitable that I would work for the family business, but that felt far from clear when I enrolled in seminary in 2003. I was in seminary to answer my own questions about living a life of faith as a gay man. Ordained ministry seemed unlikely. As a result, I completed a dual master's program in divinity and social work. One way or another I would be helping people.

I was very fortunate to intern for a beautiful, welcoming Presbyterian church in Boston. It was an image of church that I had not yet seen: Christ-centered, progressive, welcoming of all kinds of people, and right in the middle of a bustling city. After seminary I moved to Boston and worked for this congregation, finally joining the Presbyterian family and officially entering the ordination process. Gay ordination was still illegal but I didn't want to begin my three-year process after the church finally changed its policy.

When the PC(USA) finally allowed gay ordination in 2012, I began a national job search. There was a lot to like about Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church, but I knew I needed to be ordained in a strong congregation that was unequivocally affirming. Presbyteries could still block an ordination on the basis of sexual orientation, and neither the Presbyteries of Baltimore nor Boston had yet approved one.

I was examined for ordination by the Presbytery of Baltimore in February

of 2013. It was a tense moment for me but I was ultimately unanimously approved by the 150 commissioners gathered. Following the vote, Rev. Andrew Connors came forward to offer a prayer. He invited any members of Brown Memorial to come forward. I was astonished to see some 50 people rise from their seats. I had no idea that Brown Memorial had packed the house for this meeting, although in retrospect it was a very “Brown” thing to do. I continue to be so moved by that moment – a clear sign of solidarity from people who did not know me yet. They were there because it was the right thing to do.

Brown called me to serve as Associate Pastor for Youth Ministry. It was a good fit for me, as I had nearly a decade of youth ministry experience by 2013. There was an existing program at Brown but also a clear need for a new gathering, not on Sunday mornings, where young people could really get to know each other. We started “Sunday Night Live,” a monthly youth gathering. I sent a letter to each family with youth, asking them to give me six months of unequivocal good attendance. I was pleasantly surprised when the youth actually began showing up!

We had a lot of fun over the years. The “Good Morning Brown Youth” video series sent adult youth leaders to kids’ homes with a boombox and breakfast in bed (with their parents’ blessing!). We started playing the video footage in Sunday School and these viewing parties turned out to be pretty popular! The retreats and trips and special events are immortalized for me in a fantastic scrapbook that Rachel Cunningham gave me at my going away party.

I will never forget the intellectual and theological curiosity of the young people at Brown. They set a high bar with their honesty, their faithfulness, and their questions. Confirmation became one of my favorite parts of the job, simply for the privilege of having a nine-month conversation with our eighth graders about the key tenets of the Christian faith.

After the Baltimore Uprising in 2015, Brown allowed me to spend a significant amount of my time, about 5–10 hours a week, creating a youth-organizing initiative for young people in Sandtown-Winchester.

The congregation raised \$7,500 to pay stipends to these youth, who learned the principles of organizing and led several successful campaigns to engage with our local officials. A high point for me was when the youth from Sandtown came and facilitated listening sessions with the young people at Brown Memorial. That year, we took two Sandtown youth on our bi-annual trip to El Salvador, and it was extraordinary to hear their perspectives on the struggles of life in Central America.

In March of 2017 I was able to get married to Perry at Brown Memorial. It was extraordinary to consider that five years after gay ordination became legal, I was marrying my husband in the presence of my own congregation! I'm so grateful that the Brown Memorial community was present that day. It was a full-circle moment. We had a reception after the service in the Assembly Room. The Soulful Revue sang *Going to the Chapel*, and Peggy Obrecht threw a classic reception, complete with "church punch" and cucumber sandwiches. It was perfect.

I loved serving at Brown and was not looking for a new call. However, when I learned that Light Street Presbyterian Church was seeking a part-time solo pastor, "calling" is the only word I can use to describe my response. I felt attracted to the entrepreneurial nature of the work and the opportunity to preach on a weekly basis. From the moment I articulated this sense of calling to Andrew and the Session at Brown, they were nothing but supportive. Not every church would be supportive of their pastor moving a mere four miles down the road to another congregation. But the leadership at Brown quickly saw this as a promising partnership that could expand the church's impact across the city. You all loved me so well, and when it was time to leave, you sent me with your blessing. On the day of my installation at Light Street in November of 2017, the sanctuary was full of familiar faces from Brown. I will always be grateful for that support.

I am now nearly three years into my new call at Light Street, and I feel so fortunate to count Brown Memorial as a sister congregation full of dear friends and colleagues. You called me, formed me, and loved me well. I give thanks to God.



Chrystie Adams

Interview: Ed Hambleton, April 2020 • Narrative: Anne Heuisler



I started singing in the choir in September of 1971 and joined Brown Memorial officially in 1973. I had just graduated from college and had a teaching job in Baltimore City. I was a music major and had been singing in choirs for many years. I knew I wanted to be in a church choir. I had two possibilities: Memorial Episcopal, because one of my professors from Gettysburg College was the organist and choir director there, and the other was Brown Memorial because another one of my professors was there. I went to see Eugene Belt, who at that time was the choir director/organist at Brown. He played for me when I auditioned for the choir at Gettysburg College. I knew him fairly well. We got to talking; he showed me the hymnal which I grew up with in the Congregational church; and I took that as a sign from God. I felt like I had found a home and I really did. My husband Doug was Lutheran before he came to Brown Memorial. He was a confirmation mentor to a young man. Sean and Doug did their faith statements and joined the church at the same time in the mid-1990s.

When Doug and I were first members, there were very few children at the church. Bonnie and Elden had their daughter, Caitlin, we had Rebecca, and the Thomson family had their four children, so that was the Sunday School.

At Brown Memorial I started with the children's choir in 1971 and lasted for three or four years – Thursdays after school. When I was working on a master's degree, I got a group of young singers together, including Gilly Babb and Sally Robinson's daughter, Nell, along with other teenagers. I have a lot of good memories from those times.

In 1975 I started the handbell choir. I used to do the Christmas pageant. I played all the music for the pageant, and Court Robinson and his mom, Sally, were directors and costumers. We did very elaborate pageants.

During the 1970s, we had two church locations: Woodbrook and downtown Brown Memorial. There were two separate congregations with two ministers who functioned at both churches. I did the kids' choir out there; and then I would come downtown and sing at Brown, until the church split. I had two choirs at the two locations. That was some fast driving down the Jones Falls, I'll tell you! It was a mad dash!

When they proposed the split between Park Avenue and Woodbrook, I wanted to stay at Brown downtown; and we had a meeting to decide whether to divide the church. Brown Memorial Park Avenue stayed open by one vote. They didn't think that we would last. They didn't think that we would have kids in the Sunday School, and now look at the church.

We used to have two services, an 8:30 service and then our 11 o'clock service. Some people stopped going to the church when they ended that 8:30 service. It was an opportunity to do some less high-church music (without the choir). Some people preferred that early service, which was much simpler.

We started a vacation Bible school in the summer in 1989. We did fine-arts camps with Memorial Episcopal and Govans Presbyterian Church. I spent a lot of time doing music with the Sunday School for many years. I directed the handbell choir for 35 years.

From the beginning, the music program was so foundational. It spoke to me every Thursday and every Sunday. And the preaching: Ian Wilson and Clint Glenn. It was a church that really believed in social justice. I was a big proponent of that from my years in college. I felt comfortable being there. They not only talked the talk, they walked the walk. That was important to me.

When I was an elder, our church became a More Light church. We had

some very serious conversations with members. Some people left Brown because of that. I was a firm believer that we needed to become a More Light church. That was a pivotal time.

I was roped into going out to the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1997 because Rebecca was in the middle school youth group. It included Brown Memorial, Perry Hall, and Kenwood Presbyterian. Rebecca said, "Mom, you have to chaperone." I said, "No." She wore me down and I said, "I'll go once." That started my relationship with the church group at the Dakota Presbytery, and that has informed what I do at Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School. The learning camp at Eutaw-Marshburn is based on things that I learned at the Dakota Presbytery Church. The Baltimore Dakota partnership is a Presbytery partnership, and Brown happens to be one of the organizing congregations. The family learning camp is led by Brown Memorial, Hunting Ridge Presbyterian, another family from Springfield Presbyterian, and a family from Laurel Presbyterian. This summer will be the eighth summer. The kids who began as campers are now staff members. Two of them are going into college; and two others are already in college. We need other families to come. Once they have had that experience, then they come back again and again. It is a partnership about relationships. The Cuba partnership is getting started, the El Salvador partnership is 25 or 30 years old, and the Baltimore Dakota is the newest one.

Doug and I used to be youth group leaders from the time Rebecca was in middle school through high school. We knew a lot of the teenagers back then. You have a different kind of relationship when you do a summer camp, and you go away for a week with a group of kids and adults, than if you just see them once a week. It's a different sort of thing. That is important to me.

We have a large contingent of private school students and a small contingent of public school students. When we first got involved with Eutaw-Marshburn and then when we started the learning camps and such, it was difficult to get the teenagers to commit to doing things like this because they are so overscheduled. It has been difficult for me that

there is this division between the public and the private school kids. Andrew has preached about our children being overscheduled; and his own daughters have been in those situations. We have amazing young people; but I think they have missed some opportunities. The kids who go out with us to Minnesota and to Soaring Eagles learning camps see things in a different light – a changed viewpoint. I am glad for those opportunities, but I wish I could get more of Brown Memorial involved in the actual activity. It's difficult for people to make that commitment.

Roger Gench was my all-time favorite pastor. He used to preach from the floor, and the choir would sit down in front, and I will tell you that out of every 10 sermons I would have tears in my eyes for at least nine.

He used to say to me, “Chrystie, if I see you with tears in your eyes, I know my sermon has hit home, and I worry when you’re not crying.” He was there for 12 years; he was really an amazing man, amazing preacher. I still miss him.



Special Music Missions



EUTAW-MARSHBURN CHOIR AND CAMPS, BY CHRYSTIE ADAMS, DIRECTOR

The Eutaw-Marshburn Choir consists of children from an elementary school near Brown Memorial, and it has been a vital part of our church's musical outreach for the last eight years. We started with seven singers and have seen steady growth to more than 40 singers at our peak enrollment.

The choir rehearses after school for an hour. Our volunteers from Brown Memorial are so appreciated since they provide an additional adult presence at our Siblings Table and assist the rehearsal staff. The volunteers also help with the weekly snack table, and they offer constructive suggestions about how the singers might improve their performance.

The Eutaw-Marshburn Choir performs in December and May and has made it a tradition to share our songs with our adopted grandparents at Linden Hall Apartments. These concerts bring great joy to the singers and the senior citizens who like listening to the children perform. The choir also performs for their school classmates in December and May. As well, the choir has sung in the worship service at Brown Memorial.

It was wonderful to share the musical accomplishments of the singers with their families.

Sadly, the concert that we had planned for May of 2020, that was to include wonderful songs from the musical *Amazing African Americans*, had to be canceled because of the pandemic. Not being able to make music together has left a big hole in the lives of our Eutaw-Marshburn Choir, their directors, and volunteers from Brown Memorial. We hope to be able to come back together in the future to sing our hearts out!

The Eutaw-Marshburn Choir Camp has been a wonderful addition to our outreach in the past few years. Brown Memorial partnered with The Center in Baltimore and a visiting youth choir from the Abingdon Presbyterian Church in the Philadelphia area. The amazing and instant connection that music provided for the singers was extraordinary.

*It was a true testimony to the incredible power
of making music together.*

At the first Choir Camp, *Draw the Circle Wide* was first performed at Brown, and the memory of that circle of singers who were now musical friends still rings in my ears and lives in my heart.

SOULFUL REVUE BY TAYLOR BRANCH, DIRECTOR

Soulful Revue has evolved into a men's musical group of some 15 members of Brown Memorial. We sing in worship services once a year, presenting songs in an upbeat style suggested by our name.

The group began as a spontaneous duet formed in 2006. During the first year of his ministry at Brown, Pastor Andrew Connors visited

the Reichelt family at their home and noticed photographs of Charles playing guitar in an ensemble. They found that they liked the same variety of pop music with a spiritual message. On a lark, Andrew invited Charles to perform together during one of the summer worship services when the choir was idle and attendance was low. They caused quite a stir singing songs like “I Saw the Light” by country legend Hank Williams and “Mary, Don’t You Weep” by Sam Cooke.’

When a number of choir members asked to join in the next year, Andrew minimized the risk of embarrassment by letting the expanded group prepare its exotic blend music for the last Sunday in August, which is traditionally a very sparse congregation. Jim Cox inspired people with his solo in the Thomas Dorsey spiritual “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” Annual attendance slowly grew for the last summer service, and Soulful Revue Sunday became a tradition.

Several women joined the group in early years. Barbara Cook played piano, and Associate Pastor Emily Proctor sang solos. Once the all-female Soulful Sisters made their debut, however, Soulful Revue became a men’s spiritual group. Our repertoire grew in 2012 when Michael Britt added his keyboard skills as our versatile Minister of Music. Later, McKay Jenkins recruited his son Steedman to play stand-up bass, and Mike Reed’s daughter, Emily, delivered a soaring guest solo for the Andra Day song, “Rise Up.”

Every spring the Soulful Revue members scour for a fresh mix of new and old songs. In 15 annual services so far, we have presented music by an eclectic range of performers: Etta James, Elvis Presley, Bob Marley, Ed Sheeran, the Blind Boys of Alabama, the Eagles, Keb Mo’, Patty Griffin, the Staples Singers, Old Crow Medicine Show, and many others. When COVID-19 shut us down in 2020, Rob Tracy found a way to record digital music safely for Soulful Revue Sunday on Zoom.

We are grateful to be part of the music program at Brown Memorial.



Michael Britt, MINISTER OF MUSIC, 2012–PRESENT

Interview: Al Fisher, September 2020



Michael Britt remembers that from the time he was an adolescent, becoming the Minister of Music at Brown Memorial “was always my fantasy job.” He recalls coming to concerts at Brown; learning about the congregation’s tradition of excellent music, especially the artistry of previous organists like Richard Ross and Virgil Fox; and even being invited by the Minister of Music then, Gene Belt, to give an organ recital at Brown. In 2012 he was hired for his dream job, succeeding John Walker, as both the organist and the director of the Chancel Choir at Brown. And today he asserts that his eight years at Brown have not just fulfilled his high expectations but exceeded them.

Michael grew up in Baltimore, in an ecumenical family. His mother taught Sunday School at a Methodist church, and Michael usually went to church with her; his father was an observant Catholic who attended mass regularly. Michael describes his parents as “very free-thinking” about religion. He was raised “to appreciate both of their religious traditions.”

When Michael was 8 years old, he and his mother were running a bit late for worship one Sunday morning and were asked to sit in the church’s balcony, in two chairs that happened to be right next to the organ. He was immediately and “absolutely fascinated” by the organ and asked if he could go back and sit in the balcony the next week so that he could hear the organist play. His mother helpfully asked the organist, “Do you mind if my son sits next to you?” She approved, and even let Michael turn the pages for her. Michael soon learned that “several generations” of his family had been organists, including a grandmother who was both a church organist and a theater organist at the Hippodrome

Theatre in Baltimore City. Michael has followed in her footsteps by frequently writing musical scores to accompany silent movies and then playing them at showings throughout the country. After seeing an article in the Sunday newspaper about a man in Thurmont, Maryland, who had restored a massive Wurlitzer Theatre Pipe Organ in his home, Michael, unbeknownst to his parents, “weaseled” himself into getting an invitation to the man’s home. He began taking private piano lessons with a local teacher and got his first church job at the age of 11, at a Baptist church in Baltimore City, playing the organ as well as the piano there, for \$10 a week. His subsequent church positions included Stone Chapel United Methodist, in Pikesville; his home church, Arbutus United Methodist; and a 26-year stint as Director of Music at the Shrine of the Little Flower, a 10,000-member Catholic church in Northeast Baltimore.



He has given recitals and concerts at Princeton University, at the Riverside Church in New York City, and at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, where he played in May of 2009. Featured at that concert was the *Toccata to the One God*, composed by the late Christopher

Lobingier, who studied composition with Nadia Boulanger.

On April 25, 2021, Michael presented a concert in celebration of the 90th anniversary of our beloved E.M. Skinner Pipe Organ. The program, hosted by Tom Hall, featured repertoire played and associated with the organists who have served Brown Memorial since the organ’s installation. The afternoon also featured interviews with organ historian Jonathan Ambrosino and our organ curator, Michael Hart, in addition to an interview with the grandson of Ernest Skinner, Col. Peter Scott. The recital also included a premiere of the organ work *Triptych*, composed by Alfred V. Fedak in honor of our organ’s anniversary.

Upon coming to Brown, Michael quickly came to revel in the process of creating beautiful music together with the Chancel Choir. One recent example of this was a performance of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, along with singers from the Beth El congregation, on the 100th anniversary of Bernstein's birth, in 2019, and with one of Bernstein's sons in the audience. Another was a performance at Beth El of *Kristallnacht 2019: A Legacy Lost*, on the 81st anniversary of the "night of the broken glass" at the hands of the Nazis, in 1938. Other choral works performed by our Chancel Choir have included the *Gloria* by Francis Poulenc; the *Vesperae solennes de confessore* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; and numerous anthems, hymns, and service music commissioned by Brown Memorial by such composers as Alfred V. Fedak, Haley Olson, William Copper, Rebecca Trout, Wayne Wold, and Marvin Mills.

But the Chancel Choir, which today numbers 45 singers, has been much more than an instrument for creating lovely, impassioned, and sublime music. "The choir, as well as the staff of this church, has become a family for me."

In addition to Michael's great gifts, throughout the year choir members Rob Tracy and Chrystie Adams and Minister of Music Emeritus John Walker have shared their excellent conducting skills on Sunday mornings. Tom Hall, Director of Music Emeritus for Baltimore Choral Arts, is our splendid guest conductor every Easter Sunday, as well as for numerous Tiffany Series concerts. And composer Barbara Baker has shared her creative musical gifts with the Chancel Choir and the Soulful Sisters group on many occasions.

Finally, Michael continues to be attracted by the "incredible sense of mission" at Brown, particularly its engagement in the Baltimore community. "Advocating on social justice issues, through organizations like BUILD, and making Brown a part of the neighborhood, are things that I wanted to be a part of. I didn't want church to be just something that I did inside the church on a Sunday morning. And I embrace it all," he says. "As gratifying as it has been to make beautiful music together, music has been secondary to relationships for me."



Jim Cox

Interview: Liz Bowie Fesperman, December 2020



Brown Memorial tugged at Jim Cox for years. His first association with Brown Memorial was in 2006 when John Walker asked him to audition to sing a piece of music before a Tiffany Series talk by Harry Belafonte.

“I got a phone call from John Walker and he said that Harry Belafonte was coming to Brown to speak and he had chosen a piece of music and he has a fine choir, but he was looking for a particular sound. So he asked if I would come over and sing for him. I got about eight measures into the song and he said, ‘Stop. That is the sound I am looking for.’ I was so honored...I sang with them for a couple of months before Harry actually came. It was so much fun.”

John Walker asked Jim to stay, but he declined, saying he was Episcopalian, and he had a job singing at St. James Episcopal Church for his voice teacher, the acclaimed Baltimore musician Maurice Murphy.

“Oddly, every week after that someone from Brown would call and say, ‘How are you doing?’ It was the funniest thing. I was being recruited, but no one said that. They were just Christians.” When a paid position on the choir became open, John Walker asked again, but Jim at first declined, but then agreed to come to Brown when he saw St. James moving away from a classical music tradition that Jim felt comfortable singing. Along with Jim, John Walker asked Maurice Murphy to join as well. For eight years, Jim sang in Brown’s choir and then quickly drove to St. James to catch the last 10 to 15 minutes there.

But the openness and the friendships at Brown began to pull him

toward the church. In 2014, when Murphy became ill with cancer, Jim decided to take care of him. That meant doing laundry every day. One day, he found his 15-year-old washing machine had broken down. At that minute someone from Brown happened to call, and Jim vented over the phone about his predicament and went off to the laundromat. "The next afternoon, Sears pulls up to my house.... Brown had it delivered the next day. I didn't ask for help; I was just having a conversation with somebody."

After attending churches from California to North Carolina to Maryland, Jim said to himself about Brown, "This is apparently my home." Not long after, he joined Brown as a member, writing an intensely personal account of his faith journey that he shared with the Session.

For Jim, Brown is a place of acceptance and love. "Andrew [Connors] one day introduced to me a guy who had recently moved his membership to Brown. He said, 'And I want you to meet his husband.' And I almost fell out of my chair. And I looked around and almost no one fell out of his chair but me." So Jim called Andrew to express concern that he had just outed the man. "And he said, 'No, I introduce people to you as they introduce themselves to me.'"

"I didn't know nothing about same-sex marriages. You understand? That is a quiet moment that is private and personal and should stay in your bedroom all of the time. No, not at Brown. People are not bothered by it. I am like, boy, this is mighty Christian. People allow people to be who they are, comfortably. And then they move on. They are not threatened or intimidated. They are Christians." Jim saw a congregation where people were comfortable being themselves, but never too comfortable.

"Andrew preached on race relations one day and in the pulpit he said, 'I know you are out there. I know you are listening to me. I know who you are.' He was talking about racists. I mean what the hell, Andrew...I was amazed...so that pulled me in closer and closer."

Jim grew up in the 1950s in a segregated North Carolina, the son of tobacco farmers. “We were sharecroppers. We were poor people.” Jim needed to work. “Instead of missing school, I got up at 3 a.m. and worked and then got dressed and went to school. Then came home and changed clothes and went back out into the fields and worked until dusk.”

After graduating from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Jim worked for Western Union in several states before he moved to Baltimore, married, and had two children. He worked as an investigator for the Maryland Office of the Inspector General before retiring and establishing a catering business with clients that included Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and actor Will Smith.

One day during the pandemic, he walked to the church to sing a solo for a service and found a note that read: “‘The church has left the building.’ Powerful. That is powerful. I stopped and sat on the wall for a moment. I know what it is saying. That is profound to me...no regrets for Brown. I am grateful. I am in it for the long haul.”



Rev. Michele Ward, ASSOCIATE PASTOR, SEPTEMBER 2018–PRESENT

Interview: Judy Jones, November 2020



Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Live the Questions Now" reminds Michele Ward of Brown Memorial, she says, because "it is a congregation full of bright, intellectual thinkers and dreamers and doers who often like to know a lot of the answers before they jump in. But Rilke says we don't need to know all the answers to our questions about God or the world now. Our task is to live those questions now. And by living the questions we will hopefully get to the answers someday."

Michele began living her questions early, sparked in large part by a religious upbringing she recalls as "really fascinating."

She grew up in a large extended family in Northern California in the Central Valley, the oldest of four children, the rest of whom remain in California. She was the first in her immediate family to finish college. Her parents, themselves children of two agnostics, a Presbyterian and an atheist, had evangelical conversions in the 1970s and 1980s. They raised their children in the Calvary Chapel network, a non-denominational church movement started by former surfers in Southern California. Founders were, she recalls, "former hippies who became Jesus followers in the 1960s who, for some reason, felt very drawn to the restrictive principles of fundamentalism but kept a very come-as-you-are attitude at church. People would show up at church in flip flops and sandals, Hawaiian shirts and shorts, but the social and gender codes were very strict."

"In high school, I thought God was calling me to be a missionary because that was my only option: as a woman who felt called to ministry, I could do mission work, marry a pastor, or be a children's or wom-

en's ministry director," Michele says. "But, according to my faith, I could never be called a pastor, I could never preach, I could never read scripture in worship because only men were allowed to do those things. I had such a limited imagination around what I could really do with my aspirations. Then I went with my youth group to Moscow, Russia, for two weeks. There, I was confronted with the reality of what it was like to be an evangelical fundamentalist who is an American in a foreign country and to try to explain why we do things the way we do in that kind of context. It was life-changing."

At that point, Michele knew she wanted to study theology. Her parents disapproved. Women don't become pastors, they insisted. But at the same time, they supported her intellectual curiosity and encouraged her to get a "practical degree at a real university."

She enrolled at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, majored in English, and spent her free time "doing campus ministry-related things. I thought I was going to be an English teacher, but that longing to be in ministry never left me even though I wasn't allowed to be a theology major." As a freshman, she experienced another turning point – seeing a woman preach for the first time. It was, she remembers, "a life-changing thing for me to see someone who looked like me and spoke like me at the pulpit." In fact, that woman, Andi Saccoccio, would become her mentor and was "one of the people who saw me from the beginning of my discernment at 18 to becoming a fully-certified pastor, serving on my Commission for the Preparation of Ministry in the Seattle Presbytery."

She earned a B.A. in English writing and a minor in theology. After graduating, Michele spent a year working with children and families as an intern at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. Michele came to imagine herself becoming a therapist and enrolled at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, taking courses in counseling, psychology, and theology.

Once in graduate school, a class on early Christian traditions in Ireland

and Scotland introduced her to women who had led egalitarian faith communities before priests were required to only be men. There were also women who had led church communities in the Book of Acts, “but my church had downplayed those or entirely skipped over those sections because they felt uncomfortable. I also learned that the evangelical focus on salvation and sin tends to feed shame in people and low self-worth, particularly in women. And that men tend to have a more grandiose view of themselves or feel this pressure to reach this high standard of masculine leadership. So, there’s pressure for men and women to live into these roles that are very strict and that have very specific traits for each role. And I felt freed from that as I learned more about the egalitarian approach. Finally, I began to realize that nothing I did could take away the original blessing that God had given me as one of God’s children.”

“In my second year, around Christmastime, I told my parents I wanted to be a pastor. It was very, very difficult. They were afraid. They said if you become a pastor, you will have a very hard life. We don’t want you to have a hard life. I didn’t want to disappoint them, but I needed to feel faithful to the call that I felt.”

In 2015, she graduated with a Master of Divinity. She went immediately to work as a part-time chaplain at the V.A. Hospital in Seattle, and that summer married Matthew Park, an actor with the stage name Parker Matthews. The young couple moved to Philadelphia to take fellowships, Matthew at the University of the Arts with Pig Iron Theater Company and Michele at Broad Street Ministry where she was a pastoral resident with 1001 New Worshipping Communities with the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

In February 2018, Michele came to Baltimore for the NEXT Church Gathering. “I didn’t tell anyone that I was discerning the call to Brown when I was there because I wanted to totally have that space for myself to do my own personal reflection and prayer and to ask if God was really drawing me to ministry in Baltimore. I fell in love with the city and with the people first, before I ever saw the sanctuary or met the staff at Brown. I heard the Eutaw-Marshburn Elementary School Choir sing

at the NEXT Church Gathering and saw Michael Britt and Chrystie Adams with the children at the school, such a beautiful thing. With The Center's Justice Tour on that trip, I visited different city partners, and I felt really drawn into Baltimore and to the people who were so committed to it – despite the bad rap it gets – and to the work that was happening here.”

Brown invited her to interview in person four months later. “What stood out to me during my interview was how relationship-focused the committee was with me. They were very interested in knowing me and my husband personally. They wanted to help Matthew find contacts for his vocational life. They wanted us to feel at home.”

Her first visit to the church was anonymous. “I felt blown away by the presence of the worship – a very connected, emotionally present worship – as well as the quality of the music and the way people loved one another during the passing of the peace, running around the pews hugging each other, and shouting hellos from across the room.

I loved seeing the joy and the relationships people had with each other – something that has never changed. I also really enjoyed meeting the youth. I felt drawn to their questions about faith and their playfulness and desire to learn about and understand who God was and what their role was in the world.”

She accepted the call to Brown in 2018. They're now well settled in the “very funky neighborhood” of Greenmount West. There she has helped to start a block captain program and, using skills she credits BUILD with helping to hone, she acts as both community activist and relation-

ship builder. She feels accepted as a “bi woman married to a straight man.” She calls her biggest blessings family, her marriage, and her colleagues in ministry. And she practices regularly what she loves – writing, gardening, cooking, playing games, and making dinner.

Stimulated by the academy, she started a Doctor of Ministry program in Creative Writing and Public Theology in June 2021 at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

It’s been “a full few years,” Michele notes, since she has come to Brown, with four months as head of staff while Andrew was on sabbatical – and then maintaining the ministry during the pandemic. As the associate pastor, she describes her role as “generalist, which is to say that I do a little bit of everything.” Specifically, she collaborates on youth ministry with the neighborhood churches, leads Sunday worship, does pastoral care visits, leads Bible study, and preaches monthly.

But the pandemic has rocked everyone. “What does it take for a congregation to be resilient as a community in crisis – in a prolonged crisis – with this pandemic? It’s different when a community is going through a crisis; that is a challenging nut to crack – and very different as a minister. The truth is, when a relatively small part of the congregation is going through something challenging, it’s one thing. But it’s so much more challenging now because we are all going through the same crisis at the same time, 350 or so members all going through the same crisis simultaneously.”

“Biblically, I’ve been leaning a lot on the prophet Isaiah whose book was written during periods of exile when the Israelites were captured and taken to foreign countries. The pandemic feels like an exile, like we’ve been removed from one another. The congregation can’t go to the space where we encounter God. Isaiah talks about God being with the people where they are. I find that to be really comforting right now, that God hasn’t abandoned us, and that we also have each other, even at a distance – which is no small thing.”

What Michele has come to know as certainty serves her now, her ministry, her faith:

“God is with me in my pain and in my suffering. He is with all of us. Faith is something that can fill the brokenness we feel. It is like the Japanese style of art where gold is used to fill in the cracks of broken pottery, kintsukuroi. Rather than throwing the pottery away, the potter fills the cracks in the ceramic with gold such that the repair resembles a beautiful web of gold. Gold is like faith: we cannot damage ourselves beyond repair or beyond God’s love. The mistakes we make or the things that are done to us are more like smoke or dust that falls. With faith, we know God’s love can wipe the dust off.”

“I want to assist people to more deeply know themselves and God so that we can better work together for a just world and for the world that God is wanting us to create together.

I share Brown’s vision – being alive in the city and in the world – for that concept requires us to know ourselves and God in deeper ways.”

