

A History of the Laurel Presbyterian Church

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Laurel, Maryland

1986

Table of Contents

- I. [Introduction \(2004\)](#)
- II. [Introduction \(1986\)](#)
- III. [Chapter I: Beginning](#)
- IV. [Chapter II: Drifting](#)
- V. [Chapter III: Surging](#)
- VI. [Chapter IV: Drifting](#)
- VII. [Chapter V: Growing](#)
- VIII. [Chapter VI: Reacting](#)
- IX. [Chapter VII: Concluding](#)
- X. [Bibliography](#)
- XI. [Appendices](#)
 - A. [Appendix A: Higher Judicatories Related to Laurel Presbyterian Church, 1860-1986](#)
 - B. [Appendix B: Pastors and Stated Supplies. 1860-1986](#)
 - C. [Appendix C: Demographic Table](#)

2004 Introduction

My family and I lived in Laurel, Maryland, from 1984 to 1987 while I was doing graduate work at the University of Maryland. During that time, we became involved in the life of the Laurel Presbyterian Church, and in the course of things I offered to write the history of the congregation. They took me up on the offer, and the church published the final product of my research in 1986. That experience afforded me a fascinating glimpse into the history of the Southern Presbyterian Church, the State of Maryland, and the city of Laurel, as well as the church itself. It was also a good experience because of the strong support and encouragement that the congregation and its pastor, the Rev. Frank Hayes, gave me throughout the research and writing process. "LPC" was a relatively strong congregation in the 1980s, in part because of the close relationships between its members. We were fortunate to have shared in those relationships and to have made the congregation our church home, if only for a brief period of time.

In early June 2004, my wife, Warunee, and I visited Laurel and attended worship at "LPC" for the first time since we'd left in 1987. Old friends there greeted us warmly, and it was gratifying for me to be remembered by them as "the guy who wrote our history." It was also gratifying to learn that the congregation has placed my history of the church on their website [since dropped]. The current pastor of the congregation assured me that the church continues to make use of history and that she herself found it helpful in her D.Min. studies.

The *History of the Laurel Presbyterian Church* is apparently out of place on a website devoted to the study of the Thai church, but I feel that it is fitting that it be included here. The three years that I spent in the United States up to 1987 were a period of preparation for my impending return to Thailand to do church history research under the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). My studies at the University of Maryland comprised an important part of that preparation, and the work I did on the history of the Laurel Church was another part. I expected to emphasize local church research when I returned to Chiang Mai, and in writing the history of LPC I was experimenting with ways to do local church history. What readers find here, that is, represents something of a prolegomenon to my research and writing in Thailand from 1988 down to the present. So, there is a connection to Thailand, at least for me and my family.

I also hope, however, that websearchers and websurfers may come across this history and find it helpful in its own right. In a modest way, it offers insights into the histories mentioned above, as well as providing a very little slice of the American pie from the 1860s through the 1970s. The story of the Laurel Presbyterian Church is a very special piece of the pie, a history of a fine group of people who lived their lives "in between"- in between Baltimore and Washington, in between the South and the North, and in between America 's rural past and suburban present.

I have made no changes in this version. It reads just as it did in 1986. The LPC electronic version, however, has a number of errors introduced by scanning, and I have corrected all that I found. The scanner especially had trouble distinguishing "1" from "7" and "0" from "8," which played some havoc with dates. Otherwise, the text is the original. I don't know if I was happy with it then, but by-and-large I am now.

Herb Swanson
Ban Dok Daeng
August 2004

1986 Introduction

The past has a strangely nebulous yet powerful hold on the present. Human groups quickly forget all but a few of the many events and Ideas that shape them. Those same events and ideas, however, create traditions and patterns of acting and thinking that persist for decades and even centuries. The very fact that these patterns are forgotten makes them all the more powerful. Their influence goes unchallenged and remains beyond conscious control. Past experience, past events, and past thinking, then, play a largely unseen but potent role in how people think and act in the present.

History, the critical study of the past, provides an opportunity to rediscover the hidden past and its influences over the present. Such study raises vital questions about how humans change and fail to change. The histories of living nations and institutions, therefore, do not belong to historians. They belong, rather, to the peoples whose stories they tell. Historians are merely stewards of those stories, the ones who listen, who question, and who 'put together' what they hear.

When I first proposed the idea of this history to the Session of the Laurel Presbyterian Church, Laurel, Maryland, in the Fall of 1984, I did so on the basis of the above ideas and my experience in researching and writing local church histories in Thailand and Australia. The churches it was my privilege to work with in those two nations taught me that the past, its triumphs and its hurts, plays a vitally important role in shaping the lives of local churches. I learned from them that, if approached circumspectly, congregational-wide studies of a church's past can help churches understand themselves and reflect upon the nature of their Christian commitment as a church. Such studies can also help churches heal the wounds of old fights and long-remembered misunderstandings.

These have been, then, my goals as I researched and wrote this history: to provide an opportunity for the Laurel Presbyterian Church to rediscover and reflect upon its past; and to allow it, where possible, to learn from its own experience. Such learning, reflection, and rediscovery are not ends in themselves. They are means to a much more important end: the discovery and affirmation of peacemaking ministries that allow a church such as LPC to demonstrate in concrete, effective ways God's love for the world.

For those who read this history, you should understand that in your hands is not a history 'textbook,' which has the purpose of marshalling facts and dates in neat (but boring) rows across tightly printed pages. This is a manual for reflection. It is intended primarily for the use of LPC. The facts and the dates are in here, but so are trends and patterns that should cause every member who reads this book to think about the meaning of LPC's past... for its present... and its future.

This history also contains a pastoral component. It is an exercise in pastoral listening, the primary concern of which is not factual accuracy for its own sake but healing, growth, and the spiritual journey committed Christians must take. I am firmly convinced, nonetheless, that a 'pastoral history' demands of the pastoral historian the same high historiographical standards expected of all historians. Otherwise, the work of the pastoral historian simply perpetuates misunderstanding and fails to expose the reality of the hidden past. It is my feeling that, as I have tried to chart a careful course which tells the story of LPC honestly and pastorally, this history accurately reflects the most important patterns of behavior and belief of the Laurel Presbyterian Church. If it stimulates reflection and discussion on the congregation's historical experience, I will feel that it will have successfully completed the course it charts.

As is customary in introductions, I want to take this opportunity to thank a number of individuals and groups who have assisted me in completing this study. Don't blame them, however, for any shortcomings!

Frank Hayes, the pastor at LPC, has been instrumental in initiating, sustaining, and bringing to fruition this study. We have spent many hours sharing our reflections on it. The Reflection Committee, appointed by the Session to support this research project, deserves special commendation for their constructive, critical review of this text. A significant number of members, former members, former pastors, and friends of the church took time to talk with me, and they provided invaluable information. The entire congregation, particularly members of the Session, showed interest in and supported my research.

Doris Bowie, Martha Garrison, and Blackie Blackstock devoted hours of time to proof reading draft copies. The church secretary, Joan McNeil, assisted the research and writing of this history in many ways. John Wayne provided assistance in printing the final text. The Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia and the Union Theological Library in Richmond both supplied research materials and answered reference inquiries in a polite, efficient manner.

To all of these individuals this study owes a large debt of thanks. And, even beyond them, my deepest thanks goes to Warunee, whose boundless patience, love, and interest upholds it all.

Herbert R. Swanson
Laurel
April 1986

Chapter I: Beginning

The passage of more than twelve decades has obscured the origins of the Laurel Presbyterian Church and made its founding something of a lost event. The records left to us tell a great deal, but the telling does not answer the question of why the church was founded in 1860 near Laurel Factory, Maryland. Nor do the earliest records concerning the Laurel Church reflect as clearly as we might wish the sense of crisis abroad in the United States in 1860 as the nation sank slowly towards the Civil War, the most traumatic event in its history.

On an even larger scale, those same records fail to reveal the deep traumas of vast social change which Americans experienced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The women and men who established the Laurel Church in April 1860 had grown up in a world where the industrialization of the economy, the urbanization of society, the rapid growth of Catholicism, the primitivism of life on the western frontier, and the rise of competing religious and secular ideologies appeared to threaten the purity of their American Protestant civilization. The old order in which the lower classes gave deference to the higher, families produced all that they needed at home, and orthodox Calvinism gave meaning to life disintegrated around them stage by stage.

Laurel, Maryland, has a modest and still largely ignored history going back to the family of Richard Snowden. Snowden received a grant of land in the area in the mid-seventeenth century. In the next century, Richard Snowden, Jr. discovered iron ore on the banks of the Patuxent River and with other men established an iron works, which attracted more settlers into the area. Over the course of the decades, the community grew into a manufacturing and transportation center and became known as 'Laurel Factory.' However, only in the 1840s did Laurel Factory achieve sufficient size to warrant the establishment of churches. In that decade, the Methodists, Episcopalians, and Catholics all founded congregations still in existence today. The community has now forgotten that the Presbyterians also founded a congregation in Laurel in that decade because that church survived for only a brief period.

Presbyterianism established itself early in colonial Maryland with active churches in the late seventeenth century, and Maryland remained a center for colonial Presbyterians for some decades thereafter. The particular story of Presbyterians in Laurel, however, actually began in 1837 when the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America divided into 'Old School' and 'New School' camps over issues of theology and church politics. The Old School faction represented the more traditional, Calvinistic side of Presbyterianism and viewed the New School group as johnny-come-lately innovators. Most Maryland churches stayed with the Old School denomination. The New School Church, however, established the Presbytery of the District of Columbia in Washington, and, in 1843, that presbytery received reports that prospects in Laurel Factory favored the establishment of a Presbyterian Church. The presbytery sent Charles F. Diver, a licensed preacher, to Laurel Factory. In November 1843, Diver founded a church with nine members. For unrecorded reasons, the small Laurel Factory Church disappeared from presbytery records after 1845. The New School denomination lacked strength throughout the larger region and most likely could not provide the church with pastoral leadership or with encouragement. Quite possibly Laurel Factory Presbyterians also reacted negatively to the strong anti-slavery stand taken by the New School General Assembly beginning in 1846 and found it difficult to sustain a church representing an anti-slavery denomination in an area sympathetic to the South.

In the years following, slavery and the growing tensions between North and South increasingly dominated national life. Maryland, as a border state, felt the national distress with particular force because the geographical regions of the state reproduced within the state the same divisions found in the nation. Over the course of several decades, western Maryland developed close ties with the Northern economy and culture, while southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore remained inherently Southern in culture, economy, and sympathy,

This same regional cultural geography situated Laurel Factory on the northern edge of the southern region, and the majority of its people sympathized with the South.

In the midst of the growing tensions and national divisions, the Presbyterians initiated yet another attempt to establish a church at Laurel Factory. According to the historical supplement of *The Presbyterian Observer* (published in Baltimore) for its October 28, 1886, issue, the Revs. J.E. Nourse and E. Bosworth of the Old School's Potomac Presbytery established churches at Beltsville and Laurel Factory, apparently in 1859. The Beltsville Church laid the cornerstone for a building in August 1860. The relationship between these two clergymen of the Potomac Presbytery to the Presbyterians in Laurel Factory remains unclear. Apparently, however, most of those with whom they had contact and who showed interest in founding a Presbyterian Church there lived north of Laurel Factory itself and within the bounds of Baltimore Presbytery. In any event, a small group of Presbyterians did establish a church just north of Laurel Factory in Howard County. At that time, Prince George 's County fell within the bounds of Potomac Presbytery and Howard County within the bounds of Baltimore Presbytery. In the absence of any direct records, it seems reasonable to speculate that the initiative of Potomac Presbytery led to the establishment of the church founded just beyond Laurel Factory.

[*Note:* According to an entry in Nourse, *The Presbytery of Washington City* , at the time of its founding, Potomac Presbytery initiated missionary work in a number of Maryland communities, including Laurel. The entry states that, "At its first meeting, November 30th of the same year [1858], its two earliest acts were the appointment of a Committee on assessments, and the adoption of a resolution that every minister should spend, in the intervals of the stated meetings, at least one Sabbath in missionary labor. The earliest result of this last named act was the revival and continuance of Presbyterian services at Laurel, Maryland." Citation: J. E. Nourse, *et. al. The Presbytery of Washington City and the Churches Under Its Care*. Washington: Gibson Bros., 1888. (p. 14) - HRS, 12/20/12]

The only record remaining of the founding of this new congregation appears in the minutes of Baltimore Presbytery, the parent body of the church. The minutes for April 4, 1860, reports:

Mr. [Gustavus] Ober presented a petition from sundry persons in Prince George, Anne Arundel & Howard Counties, asking to be organized into a church. Messrs. Hamner, Dickson, & J. N. Brown were appointed to organize a church if the way be clear in the neighborhood of Laurel Factory...'

Those same minutes recorded that the presbytery also appointed a regular schedule of preachers for the church on an every-other-Sunday basis beginning April 15, 1860, with the Rev. Dr. James G. Hamner. A second entry, dated June 12, 1860, reads, 'The committee for the purpose reported that they had organized a church at Laurel Factory consisting of eleven members & that Edward Snowden & Benjamin L. Holt had been elected Ruling Elders.' Baltimore Presbytery then enrolled the new church as the Oak Grove Church. It may safely be assumed that Snowden, a member of the highly influential old Snowden family, played a prominent part in the founding of the congregation as did other Snowdens in the establishment of the Methodist and Episcopal churches in Laurel.

The above mentioned minutes, unfortunately, do not provide an exact date for the founding of the Oak Grove Church. They do seem to imply that the church began officially on April 15 since the first preacher, Hamner, was also a member of the committee appointed to establish the church. William Snowden, one of the eleven original members, remembered forty years later that the church began on April 14, 1860, but in his account of the founding of the church Snowden either misremembered or omitted several significant facts so that his statement that the church began on April 14th is not entirely reliable. In short, the founding date of the Oak Grove Church is probably April 14th, might be April 15th, and most certainly is one of those two days.

In his brief sketch of the history of the Laurel Presbyterian Church just mentioned, William Snowden also remembered that the Oak Grove Church met for worship in its first years at the All Saints Methodist Church, just two miles outside of Laurel Factory in Howard County (on what is now a wooded lot on Whiskey

Bottom Road just beyond the sharp curve at the intersection with Stephens Road). The All Saints Church, which no longer exists, itself had an interesting past. It started as a Protestant Episcopal Church. In the years after 1821, that denomination suffered a split in Maryland between 'high church' and 'low church' factions. At this same time, the Methodist Episcopal Church underwent a major split that resulted in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1828, that newly formed Methodist denomination established a 'class' at Savage Factory, which soon moved to the nearby All Saints Church and eventually took it over as a Methodist Church. Evidently, the Methodist congregation at All Saints was a small one, since the Presbyterians alternated Sundays with them in using the building for worship. The available records give no insight into the relationship of the All Saints Church to the Oak Grove Church. The Presbyterians may have used the All Saints building only because it was available. Or, the All Saints Church may have been more of a parent to the Presbyterians. We do not know.

Although the process by which the church was founded seems relatively clear, nothing in the records available explains why the Oak Grove Church began when it did. It may have been that it took until 1860 for enough Presbyterians to move into the area and express interest in starting a church. Snowden's brief sketch implies this. Or, it may have been that in this area of Southern sympathies the increasingly anti-slavery conflicts in most of the major Protestant denominations caused them to join the Old School Presbyterians, who had suppressed the conflict in their denomination. Whether national or purely local events led to the founding of the Oak Grove Church, we do know that the church grew from its original eleven to twenty members in its first year. Presbytery supplied its pulpit, and the church had neither a pastor nor a stated supply. The new congregation established a large Sunday School of some 60 pupils, and its total expenditures in that first year amounted to \$150, probably mostly used to pay the preachers.

After the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election of 1860, national events quickly enveloped the subsequent history of the Oak Grove Church. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (Old School) could no longer ignore the deep split in the nation. In May 1861, the General Assembly resolved its support for the Union in a hotly contested debate. Border state delegates, including those from Maryland, opposed any statement of Union support because they still hoped to avoid a split with southern Presbyterians. Most of the southern presbyteries, however, did not even send delegates to the General Assembly. They met instead, in Augusta, Georgia, in December 1861 and formed the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America.

We know very little about the Oak Grove Church during the Civil War. In its second year the church reported a membership of 21 with an addition of six new members but a net growth of only one. The Sunday School remained at 60 pupils. Baltimore Presbytery continued to see to the supply of the Oak Grove pulpit by various preachers until April 1863, when it appointed the church's first stated supply, Dr. Hamner, who had been on the commission that established the church and had preached the first sermon in it. Hamner also preached regularly at Beltsville while supplying Oak Grove. Notably, Hamner had belonged to the New School Presbytery of the District of Columbia at the time that presbytery established a church in Laurel Factory in the 1840s. Hamner must have left the anti-slavery New School denomination because of his own Southern sympathies just as he later left the Northern Presbyterian Church (Old School) because of its anti-slavery pronouncements, and one cannot help but speculate whether or not Hamner had connections with and influence among the Presbyterians around Laurel Factory even prior to 1860.

Naturally, national events continued to dominate the history of the Oak Grove Church. As the Civil War progressed, the General Assembly of the Northern Church (Old School) made increasingly sharp pronouncements against slavery. At the same time, Baltimore Presbytery began to debate more localized issues arising from the war. Factions developed. Matters turned for the worse in June 1863 when the Rev. Dr. J. J. Bullock, pastor of the Franklin Street Church in Baltimore and the leader of the Southern-leaning group, read a paper before presbytery. In it he criticized the General Assembly and Baltimore Synod for making pronouncements on civil matters; that is, by voting support of the Union and condemnation of slavery. Bullock wanted the presbytery to take a stand against such pronouncements, but it instead voted (18 to 12) to table the

issues raised by Bullock. The Oak Grove Church 's stated supply, Hamner, and its representative, Elder Edward Snowden, both voted with Bullock against tabling the matter, and in later votes Hamner consistently aligned himself with the Bullock faction. It is not clear how much Hamner influenced the vote of Snowden and the subsequent relationship of the church to the presbytery, but after June 1863, the Oak Grove Church, after three years of faithful attendance, never again sent a delegate to Baltimore Presbytery.

The end of the Civil War did not improve the church's relationship to its denomination. The General Assembly of 1865 met in an atmosphere of national anger just after the assassination of President Lincoln, and it took actions which virtually declared slave-holding and rebellion sinful. Thus, the General Assembly killed any hopes of a reconciliation with southern Presbyterians. After the General Assembly, Louisville Presbytery issued a 'Declaration and Testimony' which found the General Assembly's actions heretical and refused to be governed by them. Eventually over 100 Border State Presbyterians, including a few from Maryland, signed this document. The Northern Presbyterian Church could not ignore the challenge of Louisville Presbytery's 'Declaration and Testimony,' and in a bitterly fought battle on the floor the northern General Assembly of 1866 adopted resolutions condemning Louisville Presbytery's 'Declaration and Testimony.' It also refused to seat that presbytery's delegates and suspended all signers of its document from sitting on higher church courts. In the meantime, the former Confederate Presbyterians met in December 1865 and voted to remain a separate denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS),

All of this maneuvering had serious consequences for a handful of Maryland Presbyterian churches including the Oak Grove Church. A few days after the close of the 1866 General Assembly, Bullock addressed his congregation, the Franklin Street Church. He attacked the General Assembly for taking stands on political matters and allowing itself to be swayed by public opinion. The General Assembly, he charged, had denied the headship of Christ over the Church. With this address, the Franklin Street Church withdrew itself from the Northern Presbyterian Church, and the Franklin Square (Fourth Presbyterian) Church, led by the Rev. Jacob A. Lefevre, a staunch ally of Bullock, quickly followed. Baltimore Presbytery attempted a reconciliation, but Bullock and Lefevre refused to change their stand, and in September 1866, the presbytery ordered their names stricken from its rolls.

On November 23, 1866, these two churches and the tiny West River Church met formally to create the independent Presbytery of Patapsco. The presbytery justified its formation on three grounds: first of all, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. had acted unconstitutionally; secondly, the General Assembly had turned the denomination into a political organization; and, thirdly, the Northern Church had shunned southern Presbyterians. The new presbytery immediately displayed strong sympathy for the Southern Church, still suffering in the aftermath of the Civil War, and its churches raised funds to help rebuild PCUS church buildings and pay pastors' salaries,

At the first stated meeting of Patapsco Presbytery, held April 18-19, 1867, the Oak Grove Church requested that it be admitted to the presbytery. Patapsco Presbytery received the church and seated its representative, Elder Edward Snowden, as a voting delegate. During that same meeting, the presbytery elected commissioners to attend the PCUS General Assembly and seek admission to that denomination, a policy it confirmed at its Fall 1867 meeting by passing a formal resolution for union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Patapsco Presbytery and the Oak Grove congregation completed their union with the PCUS when that denomination's General Assembly, meeting in Nashville, voted on November 21, 1867, to receive Patapsco Presbytery into full membership in the Assembly, and seated its representatives. In June of the next year, Baltimore Presbytery dropped the Franklin Street, Fourth (Franklin Square), West River, and Oak Grove Churches from its rolls. Their brief moment on center stage now ended, but all of these events marked a momentous beginning for the small Oak Grove Church, and even though it was the most minor of minor actors in those events, the congregation won for itself a place in the footnotes of Presbyterian Church history.

In the midst of these complex events and issues surrounding the first decade of the Oak Grove Church 's history, one clear pattern emerges. The Oak Grove Church lived culturally and denominationally on the borders

between North and South and chose, as only a very few Maryland Presbyterian churches did, to be a 'southern' church. In doing so, it allied itself with a regional denomination distinguished by its conservative theology and seriously weakened by the Civil War. The choices the Oak Grove Church made in 1867 to join first Patapsco Presbytery and then the Southern Presbyterian Church profoundly influenced the pastoral leadership it could obtain, the role of its women played in its life, its relationship to other Presbyterian churches, and the type of theology it believed in and preached. Those choices, noted but not explained in the available historical record, set the course of the church's experience for a century, Seldom do local Presbyterian churches so clearly choose for themselves the path of their own future.

With vast events on the national stage no longer influencing the small Oak Grove Church as forcefully as they did during and after the Civil War, the history of the congregation focuses more narrowly on the flow of events in Laurel itself. General Assembly statistics for the Southern Presbyterian Church for 1868 show that the Oak Grove Church had only seven members. It listed the Rev. John B. Ross, one of the founders of Patapsco Presbytery, as stated supply of both the Oak Grove and Bladensburg Churches. He lived in Bladensburg. In October 1868, the Oak Grove Church acquired its first piece of property (on what is now the southeast corner of Fifth and Main Streets in Laurel). In a deed dated October 24th, George and Mary Hall sold the property for \$305.79 to the Trustees of the 'Presbyterian congregation worshipping in [the] village of Laurel Factory.'

Those trustees were Edward Snowden, William Snowden, James Nicols, John W. Whiteside, and Ephraim Plowman.

The year 1869 opened with the congregation dedicating its first church building, on January 7. In recognition of the church's now permanent relocation from Howard County to Laurel Factory, Chesapeake Presbytery (formed in 1868 when Patapsco Presbytery merged with another presbytery) officially changed the name of the church on April 21, 1869, to the 'Presbyterian Church at Laurel.' While these events made 1869 a significant year for the Laurel Church, the year also proved less auspicious in another way. The church moved to call its first full-time pastor, and in April Chesapeake Presbytery approved the call of John Ross by the Oak Grove Church. Ross, however, fell ill and could not be installed at Oak Grove. In spite of that disappointment, the congregation showed modest growth from seven to twelve members and reported a huge Sunday School of ninety pupils and teachers in its first full church year (April 1 to March 31) as a part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

During the next church year, 1869-1870, the church continued to have only twelve members in spite of taking in three new individuals, and the Sunday School dropped off drastically to only 40 pupils and teachers. Ross' illness quite possibly prevented him from carrying out even the duties of stated supply. If so, the church went without pastoral leadership of any sort for the year.

The next year, 1870, however, offered new opportunities. In April, the presbytery received the Rev. W. W. Reese of the Methodist Protestant Church and approved his call to the Laurel Church. After presbytery installed Reese in May, the congregation showed an immediate resurgence. Membership grew to 11 and the size of the Sunday School climbed back up to 65. It should be noted that the presbytery paid the full amount of Reese's salary, \$250, for the church. Unfortunately, Reese's ministry as the Laurel Church's first full-time pastor remains undocumented except for William Snowden's statement of thirty years later that, "During his pastorate there were many manifestations of Divine Grace,-congregations were larger and membership increased." For whatever reason, this happy period of ministry did not last long, and Reese moved to another church in the presbytery after only nineteen months at Laurel.

By leaving as soon as he did, Reese established a precedent followed altogether too frequently by his successors. Indeed, its lack of competent pastoral leadership remained a serious problem in the life of the Laurel Presbyterian Church, and in the nineteenth century the congregation failed to successfully call an experienced Southern Presbyterian pastor. Of its four pastors from 1860 to 1899 only one remained for even as much as four years. Of the remaining three, two left under clouds of controversy and the third, Reese, left after an unusually

brief stay. In short, the Southern Presbyterian Church found it difficult to maintain strong pastoral leadership in this small congregation on its northern periphery, and in spite of a few notable exceptions, relatively poor pastoral leadership continued to plague the congregation for much of the first century of its existence.

After another year without regular pastoral leadership, the church presented a call to Mr. H. E. C. Baskerville, a ministerial candidate under presbytery's care, in September 1872. The Laurel Church's experience with Baskerville only raised more pointedly the issue of competent pastoral leadership. Instead of immediately accepting the Laurel call, Baskerville asked the presbytery to nominate him for overseas mission work. A special committee of presbytery appointed to examine him reported back that, while not fully qualified for the mission field, he did have a deep sense of a call. Presbytery then did nominate him for missionary work, but evidently the reservations the special committee raised about his qualifications caused the presbytery or one of the mission agencies to have second thoughts. Baskerville, as it happened, did not go into mission work, and the presbytery ordained and installed him as pastor at Laurel on December 5, 1872. Not surprisingly, the presbytery also made him chairman of its Foreign Missions Committee.

By April 1874 denominational statistics show that the Laurel Church grew to a new high of thirty members, while giving rose from a mere \$164 (\$9.65/member) in 1870-1871 at the end of Reese's first year as pastor to an impressive \$749 (\$24.97/member) in April 1874 at the end of Baskerville's first fifteen months in office. One might almost say that in those fifteen months the Laurel Church went from being 'tiny' to being just 'small,' The presbytery did continue to assist the congregation with \$250 per year given to help pay the pastor.

Yet, something was amiss. The Chesapeake Presbytery minutes for April 1874 do not list Baskerville as pastor of the Laurel Church although they show him still living in Laurel. Furthermore, in that same month of April 1874 the presbytery licensed Elder James Nicols of Laurel to preach, a preliminary step necessary to ordain a man lacking a formal theological education. Presbytery, it appears, intended to replace Baskerville with Nicols, suggesting that problems existed in the relationship between Baskerville and the church. The full extent of those problems surfaced in the presbytery minutes of May 1874 when Baskerville confessed before the Chesapeake Presbytery that he had treated his wife 'harshly.' He reported that he had already confessed as much in a congregational meeting of the Laurel Church, and he asked for a dissolution of his pastoral relationship with the church. But, he stated, he felt repentant and sorrowful for what he had done, and he requested that presbytery not suspend him from the ministry. Presbytery responded to his confession and plea by dissolving the pastoral relationship between Baskerville and the Laurel Church as of May 24, 1874 and by voting fifteen to one to suspend him from the ordained ministry. This event must have had a hurtful, unsettling impact upon the small Laurel Church.

Chapter II: Drifting

The loss of Baskerville, however, also opened the door for a founding member and elder of the church to become pastor. The pastorate of James Nicols marked the beginning of a new era. The turmoil of the Civil War era had already ended, and the disappointments of calling a pastor who could not come (Ross), a pastor who stayed for less than two years (Reese), and a morally defective pastor (Baskerville) now also ended. A period of drift set in.

On June 30, 1874, a special meeting of the presbytery completed Nicols' ordination examination and that evening ordained and installed him as the Laurel Church's third full-time pastor. Born in 1837, Nicols lived out in the country in Howard County next to the All Saints Church. If William Snowden remembered correctly that Nicols paid for the land in Laurel Factory on which the church building stood, Nicols must have been a man of some means as well as deep commitment to the Laurel Church.

The historian looks back on Nicols' long pastorate with mixed sentiments, On the one hand, Nicols ministered to the Laurel Church in a way no other pastor could. He was a close friend of the people, rooted in the whole history and experience of the church. And, in fact, a deep sense of mutual trust does seem to have pervaded his relationship with the church. On the other hand, Nicols provided little administrative leadership throughout most of his ministry. The church did not grow under his leadership but rather drifted quietly for some two decades. One cause of that drift was Nicols' health which was never very good. Within four years of his assuming the pastorate, in 1878, he tried to resign from the church for health reasons. Both the congregation and the presbytery, however, refused to accept his resignation. The statistics of the congregation for the following church year, 1879-1880, reflect the more general condition of the church in this entire period. Of the ten churches in Maryland Presbytery, to which the Laurel Church now belonged, Laurel and the Mt. Washington Church tied for 8th and 9th in size. Expenditures remained at virtually the same level as when Baskerville resigned as pastor six years previously; and in this same period the church grew by only two members.

The minutes of the Session for 1880 expressed with painful awareness the Laurel Church's own sense of its limitations. The 'State of Religion' report for April 1880, for example, noted that during the year 1879-1880 the church experienced no special manifestations of God's love during the year. Attendance at Sunday and Wednesday evening worship was poor. The church had a small but 'healthy' Sunday School and showed a slight decline in membership. The report particularly lamented the church's isolation from other Southern Presbyterian churches, arguing that this isolation from other churches and pastors weakened it and prevented it from being able to compete with the churches of other denominations in the area, which were growing. Later in the year, the Session discussed the need to increase the activity and giving of the church but took no definite actions in that regard. Still later in 1880, the elders set for themselves the task of visiting all the members of the congregation from time to time to '...exhort them to greater diligence that the Divine blessing might be liberally bestowed upon this vine of His own planting.'

The Ladies Aid Society comprised one of the few active groups in the church at this time and for years to come. The year 1879-1880 provides a typical example of its contribution, just over \$90 given to the church for building improvements. Although American Protestantism generally and the Southern Presbyterian Church in particular severely restricted the role of women in their churches, the Laurel Presbyterian Church had such a small amount of male involvement that at times it had to put women in official positions. The first known instance came in 1880 when the Session appointed a woman Sunday School superintendent.

Taken together, the statistics of the church and its official records provide a striking contrast. Statistically, women made up 56 (or 68%) of the 82 individuals who belonged to the church between 1880 and 1902. The church roll for 1899 lists only seven adult males (17 per cent) among its 41 adult members. Over a decade later, the church roll for 1912 shows 72 women (74 per cent) on a total list of 97 names. Yet, the records of the church seldom mention women or their activities, Yet, again, the whole church invariably turned to its women in times of financial need and depended upon them not only to fill the pews but also staff the Sunday School and participate in church activities.

This contrast between the role of women, over two-thirds of the membership, in the activities of the church and their lack of a significant administrative role reflected a much larger aspect of nineteenth-century American society. In the years after 1800, Americans increasingly defined the relationship between women and men in terms of 'spheres' of activity. Men worked out in the world. They displayed aggressiveness. Women, however, lived and worked in the home and acted in passive ways. Society expected women to counteract the aggressiveness of their husbands and sons and to nurture their families in a humble, Christ-like manner. In the course of the nineteenth century, American society increasingly defined religion as more within the female than the male sphere, women dominated the churches numerically, and church work proved to be one of the few significant places outside of the home where women could use their talents. Yet, the traditional European and American belief that women should have no voice in the churches also persisted. The Presbyterian Church in the United States was among the most conservative of the denominations concerning the role of women, and as late as 1925 it passed a resolution forbidding women to speak or pray in church meetings. Not until 1964 did it permit women to hold church offices requiring ordination. It ordained its first woman minister in 1965.

The minutes of the Session for 1880 record one more event which provides insight into the life of the church during Nicols' pastorate. At the end of the year Elder Pilson reported that a member (unnamed) of the church was spreading in the community 'unscriptural views' which denied both the existence of a soul and the 'annihilation of [the] wicked.' The Session asked Nicols to call on this man, warn him, and exhort him. The minutes for February 1881 note in passing that this member had stopped teaching his views. The congregation's brief flirtation with theological controversy highlights two important themes. First of all, the church expected its members to express their faith in conservative, traditional Presbyterian language and ideas. Secondly, the church allowed no room for overt public expressions of divergence which might harm the public image of the congregation.

As of 1880, then, the Laurel Presbyterian Church projected the image of a small church of limited resources unable to obtain and keep competent outside pastoral leadership. The church adhered to conservative principles in the place it gave to its women, in the range of public theological expression it allowed its members, and in its relationship to its community. It felt itself isolated denominationally.

And so the years went. In 1881, William Snowden, Clerk of Session, noted in the annual narrative that the church experienced a continued peace and harmony with numerous examples of mutual affection within the church. But in that same year, the congregation fell short in meeting the pastor's salary. Nicols responded in a statement to presbytery by saying that during 1880-1881 the church showed him 'many acts of kindness' far in excess of any salary that it might owe him. The death of Nicols' daughter in 1882 shattered the peace of the church, but the grief the church shared with the Nicols strengthened the harmony of its membership. Yet, the annual narrative for 1882 again noted the need for a more dedicated spirit within the church.

The statistics for that year also show that in April 1882 fully seventeen of the church's 37 members (46 per cent) were non-residents. Indeed, membership records indicate that from at least the 1880s the Laurel Church experienced a high rate of turnover with many members living too far away to participate actively in the life of the church. In short, the congregation's effective strength was considerably less than even the small official membership figures suggest. A century after 1880, most members of the Laurel Church believed that the church had become socially mobile only in recent decades whereas, in truth, social mobility actually shaped and limited the role of the laity in the life of the church from at least 1880.

During the next church year, April 1883 to March 1884, Nicols' health posed renewed problems for the church, and in September 1883 he again tried to resign his office in order to save the church from having to pay his salary. Dr. Lefevre, mentioned in Chapter One as one of the founders of the Patapsco Presbytery and a long-time friend of the Laurel Church, came down from Baltimore to moderate a congregational meeting and that meeting once again refused to accept Nicols' resignation. His illness lasted nine months all told, and at points the church feared he would die. During that time, Dr. Bullock, also mentioned in Chapter One as a founder of Patapsco Presbytery, filled the congregation's pulpit. Bullock had by this time become one of the Southern Presbyterian Church's most distinguished churchmen, having served as Moderator of the General Assembly. At the time he supplied Laurel for Nicols, he was serving as Chaplain to the United States Senate. Not until February 1884 did Nicols feel well enough to resume his duties.

As the years passed, Elder William Snowden increasingly took over the mantle Edward Snowden had once worn as 'chief' elder of the church. The year 1884 cemented that position for him. In April, Elder Robert Pilson attended his last Session meeting and soon left the community, leaving Snowden as the only resident elder. The loss of Pilson must have been a blow to the congregation as he had long been a prominent resident in Laurel. Years earlier, Pilson introduced the first loom for weaving cotton cloth into the Laurel cotton mill, superintended the cotton factory when it burned down in 1855, and in 1869 conducted then President Ulysses S. Grant on a tour of the rebuilt cotton mill.

Born in 1833 and living in an old family estate, 'Birmingham,' left to him by his grandfather, William Snowden belonged to the historic Snowden family which had long been a major influence in the Laurel area. In 1851, he married Adelaide Warfield, and three years later the young couple joined Snowden's parents in establishing the Oak Grove Church. Such was the congregation's trust in the younger Snowden, that when the unfortunate case of Baskerville came before Chesapeake Presbytery it sent him as its representative. Thus, we know that he served as an elder from at least 1874. Almost as a confirmation of Snowden's key role in the Laurel Church and certainly as a reward for his years of faithful attendance at presbytery, Maryland Presbytery elected him as its commission representative to the 1884 General Assembly of the PCUS.

Leadership of the church, then, devolved into the hands of Snowden and Nicols. The evidence suggests that they had some trouble sustaining it. A major renovation of its building, which included digging a cellar and putting a furnace in it comprised the only significant activity of the church from April 1884 to April 1886. The total renovation cost over \$600 with the seldom spoken of but always active Ladies Aid Society financing the project. The narrative for 1885 recorded that two of Laurel 's three elders, one of its two deacons, and over one-half of the communicant membership lived outside of Laurel. As in past years, the presbytery continued to pay \$250 of Nicol's salary. Elder Snowden, who in addition to his other duties also superintended the Sunday School, made the leadership situation of the church all the more murky when he moved to Baltimore in early 1881 leaving the Laurel Church with no resident elder.

In fact, some aspects of church life actually improved when Nicols was left to lead the church by himself. In the church year 1887-1888, the church experienced a minor resurgence particularly in the Sunday School, which shot up from a membership of 25 in 1887 to 75 in April 1888. The Ladies Aid once again distinguished itself by providing a substantial sum of money to keep the church out of debt. In October 1887, Maryland Presbytery honored Nicols by electing him, for the second time, Moderator of Presbytery. Still, in spite of this resurgence the activities of the church in the 1880s remained limited to four basic areas: worship, administration-finances-property, Sunday School, and the Ladies Aid Society. As always, the Ladies Aid Society plus a handful of men in the church sustained the congregation's life through their time and concern.

Nicols found it burdensome to have to lead the church by himself, and in September 1888, he appealed to the presbytery in his frustration. He shared with them again his feeling of being isolated from his fellow ministers. So limited was the leadership capacity of the church that Nicols could not even arrange a pulpit exchange because the church had no one suitable to host a guest preacher! In spite of Nicols' frustration, the church continued to grow in a very modest way over the next two years. As a result of Nicols' personal

leadership, the church's Sunday School compared favorably in size with those of other churches in the presbytery. The congregation also acquired a new piece of property, on Laurel Avenue, in the late Fall of 1889 primarily through the efforts of Arthur P. Gorman.

The April 1890 narrative in particular portrays a definite sense of renewal. Attendance at worship improved and the church sensed in itself a deeper commitment to the Christian faith. Under Nicols, the Sunday School had reached the impressive size of 110 teachers and pupils. It functioned more as a community Sunday School than anything else since non-Presbyterians made up the large majority of both its staff and student body. The 1890 narrative does note that Nicols made sure that the Sunday School remained thoroughly Presbyterian in its teachings. By April 1892, however, the Sunday School dwindled down to only 32 students because Nicols felt compelled to move its time from Sunday afternoon to Sunday morning in order to allow him more time to work with it. When the church saw its Sunday School drop off so rapidly because non-Presbyterians were much less able to attend on Sunday morning, it moved the time of Sunday School back to Sunday afternoon and attempted to give Nicols more free time so he could oversee it. By April 1893, the Sunday School climbed back up to an enrollment of 75. In all of the years before 1900, this 'community' Sunday School run by Nicols and housed at the Presbyterian Church seems to have been (from the record as we have it) the sole 'outreach' ministry of the congregation in its community. Its large enrollment indicates that it did indeed fulfill a Christian education need in Laurel. The dependence of the Sunday School on Nicols further emphasizes how dependent the church was on its pastor in this period of little lay leadership. Its fortunes rose and fell with his.

The Laurel Church now entered the final years of Nicols' ministry. Late in 1892, Elder Snowden and his family returned to Laurel after an absence of five years, and the church now lived through a period of quiet stability marked by its own smallness. As in past years, the church relied upon friends, such as the Ober Family, for help. The narrative for 1894 records: 'Pastor's Salary paid in full for the year -- through aid from friends outside the church.' Indeed, the financial situation in that year reached such grim proportions that Nicols again considered resigning in order to help the church become more self-supporting, Snowden dissuaded him from doing so. In April 1895, Maryland Presbytery elected Nicols its Moderator for the third and final time.

Nicols' ministry ended when he died at his home outside of Laurel on December 21, 1895. Maryland Presbytery memorialized his life and work by remembering that he had lived with long periods of great pain and 'constant ill-health.' Through it all he distinguished himself by his 'self-sacrificing loyalty' to Christ and to the Church. In Laurel, Nicols' death confronted the church with a crisis as it lost the only man who had ever pastored it for any length of time. Nicols' pastoral ministry to the 'Presbyterian Church at Laurel' encompassed two-thirds of the church's history, and his life and friendship encompassed it all.

The congregation moved quickly to end the leadership crisis caused by Nicols' death. In a congregational meeting called on April 19, 1896, it elected the Rev. G. Wilbur Shipley, a Methodist Episcopal cleric from Upstate New York, as pastor. Maryland Presbytery examined Shipley, who had studied for a year at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, approved his call, and installed him as pastor at Laurel on May 24, 1896. As in the cases of both Reese and Baskerville, the church again immediately entered into a period of renewal. By April 1898 the church added fifteen new members and reached the unprecedented size of 58 communicant members. These new members included some staunch Southern Presbyterians such as Mr. George B. McGaughy, an ordained elder, and Mr. Allen Wood, a deacon. The Laurel Church immediately elected both of these men to those same offices in Laurel. Giving also rose substantially even as Maryland Presbytery reduced the amount of its support from \$250 to \$200 per year.

Shipley sought to regularize some of the financial and property matters of the church. He re-established the Board of Trustees, which had not met since 1868. But in everything the smallness of the church weakened its attempts to progress. Shipley had to call two congregational meetings before he could get enough votes to constitute the Board of Trustees, because, as he understood it, only men over the age of 21 could vote for the Board. Although this new Board never did meet, Shipley did have Articles of Incorporation drawn up for the church. The 1898 Annual Report of the congregation presented an upbeat picture: Improved worship

attendance, greater participation by the lay leadership, increased zeal in the Ladies Aid Society, a great increase in home Bible and catechism study, considerable improvement in the financial situation, and the organization of a Children's Missionary Society and of a Junior Christian Endeavor Society.

But once again it was too good to last. The church almost immediately lost its new lay leadership when the two new strong families, the McGaughys and the Allens, moved to Washington. But the worst was yet to come. It should have been a happy occasion when the presbytery elected Shipley Moderator at its April 1899 meeting. Instead, Shipley found himself presiding over a meeting that heard read a letter addressed to it from Elder Snowden and Deacon John W. Whiteside. In part that letter stated:

On account of the unsatisfactory relationship between Rev. G. Wilbur Shipley and many members of the Laurel Presbyterian Church, we request the Presbytery to appoint a committee of inquiry, at as early a date as convenient, into the condition of the church, and report to Presbytery the measures they deem best for the peace and welfare of this church.

Presbytery did appoint such a committee, and it met with Shipley and the Laurel church officers in that same month. All parties agreed that it would be best for Shipley to resign. He finally did resign in September, and in the next year presbytery dismissed him at his own request to Baltimore Presbytery in the Northern Presbyterian Church, even though he did not have a call to another parish.

Apart from the letter to presbytery, other evidence also indicates that the Laurel people liked Shipley neither as a person nor as a pastor. Membership, usually an accurate gauge of congregational morale and feelings, dropped precipitously between April 1898 and April 1899. Shipley's record some 25 years later, when he returned to the Southern Presbyterian Church to serve two of its Maryland churches simultaneously, shows that the problems he had relating to people pastorally were not confined to Laurel. He had to be relieved of the pastorate in one of those churches within three months, and the presbytery took the initiative to dissolve his pastorate at the other church before he completed four years there. More than likely, his having to follow the much beloved Nicols and being a northern Methodist trying to pastor a Southern Presbyterian Church only compounded Shipley's personality problems in Laurel.

The last years of the nineteenth century brought one more crisis to the Laurel Church. On December 15, 1899, a great fire destroyed the church's building. The fire could not have hit at a worse time as the congregation was without pastoral leadership and weakened by its strife with Shipley. Nevertheless, the membership displayed a strong desire to rebuild the church as soon as possible, and it once again turned to the Ladies Aid Society to provide a significant portion of the funds for rebuilding the church building.

Six patterns of congregational behavior, then, summarize the experience of the Laurel Presbyterian Church and its tenacity in the face of adversity in the nineteenth century. First of all, the fortunes of the congregation rose and fell in accordance with the quality of its pastoral care. Secondly, the church experienced a relatively low level of pastoral care. Thirdly, the congregation also had difficulty in maintaining its lay leadership. For the most part, its lay leadership did little more than function in a role subsidiary to that of the pastor for the maintenance of the bare essentials of congregational life. Fourthly, the congregation displayed a high degree of social mobility. Fifthly, the church depended upon the generosity of wealthy former members, friends, and the presbytery to keep its doors open. And, Finally, the church compounded the problem of its smallness by restricting the role of the majority of its membership, the women of the church.

Taken together, these six general patterns add up to a church with a very low level of activity and a relatively weak witness to its beliefs and message. The congregation had little sense of ministry except to sustain itself and its worship, educate its children as Christians, and raise funds for its needs and activities. Statistics for the nineteenth century confirm that most of the church's concern was with survival. 'Benevolence' giving to causes outside of the church remained low and accounted for only a small percentage of total giving.

In short, the Laurel Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century was a small, denominationally isolated Southern Presbyterian Church that could just barely maintain itself organizationally.

Chapter III: Surging

Although interesting and instructive, the history of the Laurel Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century contains little after 1867 that might distinguish it from other churches in its community or presbytery. In this sense, the first four decades of the church's past do not prepare us for its fifth decade. As the congregation went about rebuilding its burnt building, it also presented a call to the Rev. Adolph E. Baker. Baker accepted the call of this unpretentious little church with a membership of only forty, a Sunday School of just 25, and a total giving for 1899-1900 of \$331.20.

Mr. Baker was born on August 13, 1870, in Jerseyville, Illinois, and when his father died he came to Baltimore to live with an uncle. After receiving a B.A. from Johns Hopkins in 1894, he attended Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, and upon graduation from Union in 1897 he accepted a call to the Springfield Church in Maryland Presbytery. There he quickly achieved a reputation as a capable pastor, and the Springfield Church displayed visible dismay at having to part with him when he accepted the call to Laurel. Presbytery approved that call in June 1900, but illness delayed his installation, and, presumably, his assuming full pastoral duties. His illness, however, did not prevent presbytery from electing him in September 1900 its Moderator. Nor did that illness prevent him from setting a new, hopeful tone for the future of the church within months of his moving to Laurel. The presbytery finally installed him in October 1901.

Changes came rapidly in the Baker years. In November 1900, he moderated a congregational meeting at the Masonic Hall where a new Board of Trustees was elected to take charge of the nearly completed new church building and to assume control of the church's financial affairs. Baker promptly organized the Board, and on November 28, it elected William Orr chairman, Emmett Pettit treasurer, and George Earle secretary. Immediately thereafter, the Board began regularizing the church's financial procedures, reorganizing the collection of funds, obtaining clear title to church property in the Board's name, and checking into the incorporation of the church. This board represented something entirely new in the life of the church: a large, relatively business-like, energetic administrative board. As Elder Snowden quietly faded from the scene, this new generation of lay leadership on the Board of Trustees took an increasingly large role in the administrative oversight of the church. The Board first considered the problem which constantly threatened to undermine the growth of the church in the decades ahead: finances. Church receipts at the end of 1900 amounted to less than half of the sum needed to meet expenses, the most important of which was the pastor's salary. Nevertheless, the congregation opened the twentieth century in fine style by occupying its new building on January 6, 1901, the first Sunday of the new century. Dedication came some months later, on May 5th, as the congregation had to wait for its new pews to be installed.

Events after Baker's arrival contributed to a notable sense of optimism in the church's 1900-1901 annual report. That report pointed to a number of indications of increased spiritual growth and activity in the six months prior to April 1901, including: increased attendance at worship; greater attention to meeting financial obligations; promptness in paying the pastor; a cordial Christian fellowship and sociability among members; a willingness to cooperate with the pastor in all of his plans; and additions in church membership.

These supposed indicators of spiritual growth provide a clear statement of certain values that appear as threads throughout the Laurel Presbyterian Church's records. The church, strikingly, gave worship a central place to the degree that it appeared to be the single most important reason for the church's existence. It almost seems as if the very fact that the church held regular worship services justified its existence. These indicators of spiritual growth, taken together, show that the church drew very clear boundaries between itself and the outside community around it. The church sought to sustain and augment its worship of God by harmonious internal

relationships, by avoiding falling into disrepute for not paying its debts, and by expanding its boundaries to include larger numbers of individuals.

In spite of the death of John U. Whiteside, the church's sole deacon, the next church year, 1901-1902, continued the hopeful trends of the previous year. Financial records for that year show a phenomenal increase of 683 per cent in giving to benevolences and to the general fund. Although funds given for the new building inflated this figure somewhat, it still represented a substantial gain over all previous years. At the same time, membership rose to fifty.

The following church year, ending in April 1903, proved to be a year of significant changes. Baker energetically collected funds to pay off the debt on the building, and his efforts received a considerable boost when John K. Ober, a trustee but not a member of the church, gave a substantial contribution to that end. The election of George Earle as treasurer in July 1902 focused his active commitment to a stronger congregational life directly on the financial problems of the church. His assumption of the treasurer's duties came just months before Maryland Presbytery began pressing the Laurel Church to become fully self-supporting. This meant that the congregation had to find another \$150 to pay the pastor's salary. The Ladies Aid Society further complicated matters by asking that its annual pledge of \$125 to the pastor's salary be ended. After further communication with presbytery, the Trustees decided that the church would try to do without presbytery's assistance. For that decision, it received commendation from presbytery, and as of April 1, 1903, the Laurel Church became self-supporting for the first time since 1870.

Change piled upon change. William Snowden, still the sole elder of the congregation, died at the end of 1902, and even though he had moved out of Laurel in the Fall of 1901, the church felt his passing keenly. Administratively, his death had less impact on the church. Because of his advanced age and the distance he lived from Laurel, the church had been without a functioning Session for at least a year. The Board of Trustees had responded to this situation by assuming greater responsibility for the total life of the church, and, after Snowden died, the Trustees called a congregational meeting to elect a new Session. It also nominated two individuals to be elders. The congregational meeting held on January 25, 1903, accepted the Trustees' nominees and elected William Orr and George Earle elders. Almost as an afterthought, the congregation also elected Mr. A. R. Weston and Mr. Herbert A. Filer as deacons.

Snowden's death and the election of a new Session without a Snowden on it marked an important administrative turning point. The church now had a more active Session to complement its active pastor. But, Snowden's death also meant that church lost direct contact with important elements of its own past, especially its first decade. The church, in effect, forgot that it had ever been something other than a Southern Presbyterian Church or that it had participated in the great events of the 1860s.

The new Session immediately organized itself and formulated a new program for the Church. It elected Earle Clerk of Session. It adopted an aggressive plan for seeking out newcomers to Laurel and inviting them to attend the Presbyterian Church. It started regular advertisements in the local papers. The Session also took steps to ensure that the church gave visitors a warmer welcome than had hitherto been the case. New life flowed in other places as well. The Ladies Aid Society expanded women's concerns and role by forming a Ladies Foreign Missionary Society. The Trustees continued to reorganize their work by amending the church's Articles of Incorporation clauses regarding elections to the Board. In March 1903, the church elected a new Board of nine members. All members of and contributors to the church voted. The Session also initiated plans for a Christian Endeavor Society for its young people.

In spite of the great advances made during the year, the church year ending April 1903 closed on a financial sour note. The Trustees found it necessary to appeal to the members to increase their giving to meet the pastor's salary. Some did. But others either reduced their giving or stopped giving entirely, because they resented the pressure they felt being put on them. Thus, the pleas of the Board of Trustees resulted in only a minimal increase in giving. One could sense in the church a certain financial tension as the congregation entered

its first year of self-support. Still, the statistics for 1902-1903 show that the church grew by sixteen members to 66 while the Sunday School increased from 52 to 78 students in the same period. These figures reflect a new level of activity and of confidence in the church.

The next church year further demonstrated not only the Laurel Church's new level of activity but also a deeper involvement in its larger community. In April and May of 1903, the church held a series of 'men only' gospel services for the church and the community. At these meetings some sixteen men publicly pledged to live better lives. These meetings included a strong dose of temperance concern. They gave impetus to the Presbyterian Church's joining the Episcopal Church in protesting to the Laurel City Council over the presence of two saloons on Main Street between the two church buildings. As a direct result of these men's services, a group of men met at the Laurel Presbyterian Church on May 15, 1903, and established a permanent Temperance Association in Laurel. In July, the Session made plans to invite a temperance speaker to lead services in August and hold a special temperance service in September led by the Superintendent of the Maryland State Anti-Saloon League. In fact, the church's involvement in the temperance movement also demonstrated a new level of ecumenical openness in the church. For example, when Baker took his vacation in August 1903, pastors from the Baptist and the two Methodist (Northern and Southern) churches took turns filling the Presbyterian pulpit.

Baker influenced every aspect of the church's life. In May 1903, he led the founding of a 'Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor.' And as the total program of the church took on new life, the congregation faced a problem it had never before experienced: so many new people showed up at worship that the church had to have ushers to show them to their seats! Yet, the old problems did not disappear. Several members persisted in their inactivity while some others had moved but failed to transfer their membership. A fairly heavy debt still hung over the church. The Session felt that the level of commitment of the church needed to improve. These problems did not dampen the growing excitement of the congregation, and nothing witnessed to that excitement more than the first Annual Meeting ever held by the church. The reports and statistics of that April 1904 meeting reveal that church membership had again risen (to 75) and that the Laurel Church had become the seventh largest church in Maryland Presbytery. Even more encouraging, the Sunday School had climbed back up to 95 (fifth in the presbytery) and the church's Christian Endeavor Society for young people was the second largest of nine such societies in Maryland Presbytery. The annual narrative for 1903-1904 stated that the church felt a strong undercurrent of expectancy that it would soon experience even deeper spiritual blessings.

The annual report for 1904 presented one set of statistics that particularly underscored the gains made under Baker. Of the forty members on the roll in 1900, thirteen removed their letters and the Session had moved seven more to the non-resident list by April 1904. Within four years, in other words, one-half of the 1900 membership no longer participated in the life of the church, and the church continued to be remarkably mobile. In addition, by April 1904, twelve of the 51 members added between 1900 and 1904 had also removed themselves from the rolls or were listed as non-resident. In short, in this brief four year period, the Laurel Church lost as active, resident members one out of every three of its old and its new members. The annual report presented this data to demonstrate how successfully Baker had dealt with the transience of the congregation since the church had grown rapidly in spite of a substantial loss of previous members. The report did not find this constant movement in-and-of-itself unusual. Just a few years later, George Earle, upon returning to the church after a year's absence, noted that many of the members of just a year before had moved away and that many new faces had appeared.

Baker proceeded to throw all of these gains in doubt in December 1904, when he announced his resignation in order to accept a call to a church in North Carolina. On Sunday, December 15, Baker preached his last sermon to a teary-eyed congregation, and in the evening, all of the pastors of Laurel - at their own initiative - conducted a standing-room-only farewell service for Baker. In that less ecumenical and tolerant age, even Father Donlan of St. Mary's Catholic Church planned to attend, being unable to do so only at the last moment. Each of the clerics present (Baptist, Episcopalian, and two Methodists) lauded Baker. The service moved Baker deeply. In the days following the service, the town's newspapers also expressed the general sense

of loss. The *Laurel Leader* for December 23 noted that Baker was widely respected in the community irrespective of creed or politics, while the *Laurel Democrat* pointed to his wide circle of friends in the community. The church made it perfectly clear to the presbytery that it parted with Baker only with extreme reluctance.

Baker's leaving marked yet another organizational milestone as the church elected its first pastoral nominating committee. That committee, composed of three women and two men, joined with the session in the search for a new pastor. Mr. Pettit served as chairman and Mr. Earle held the post of secretary. They found the going rough. The committee started out by sending out 'feelers' to various individuals asking for their suggestions. They then pursued a number of leads and invited prospective candidates to preach at the church. After the congregation heard a number of these preachers, the committee began to hear a consensus as to the one most generally favorable to the church, and the committee then called for an election with several names placed in nomination. Among those recommended to the church was Andrew R. Bird, a Johns Hopkins graduate studying at Union Theological Seminary, whose credentials included a fourteen months trip to the Holy Land as the personal secretary of the Rev. Dr. W.W. Moore, President of Union Seminary and a leading PCUS churchman. Bird's pastor at the Franklin Street Church recommended him as '...an exceedingly bright and promising young man.' While pursuing Bird and other candidates, the committee experienced considerable friction within its number and some tension with the congregation. The inner friction had to do with the fact that giving dropped so dramatically after Baker left that the church couldn't pay its regular supply preacher, the Rev. E.N. Kirby, Mr. Pettit ended the fight about what to do by undertaking to pay Kirby out of his own pocket. Meanwhile, the congregation criticized the committee for moving so slowly.

In time, the committee did present four names to the congregation, and on Sunday, April 2, 1905, it elected Bird as pastor. He received eighteen of the 24 votes cast, and church records called this election 'controversial,' for reasons not stated. Another problem arose after the election of Bird. He responded to this call slowly and had not yet made his thoughts known to the church even after presbytery approved the call, pending his passing the presbytery exams for licensure. He did finally accept the call, passed his exams in June 1905, and preached his first sermon as pastor at the end of that month. The Laurel Presbyterian Church stood at the threshold of one of the most impressive periods in its history, one which exceeded even the achievements of Baker's ministry.

Bird, a handsome, square-jawed young man, took hold swiftly. He instigated a religious survey of Laurel conducted by the young people of the Christian Endeavor Society, the purpose of which was to identify potential new members for the church. He also urged that the older girls of the church form a 'society' called the 'Miriams' which they did in September 1905. Bird pressed the congregation to make a significant contribution to foreign missions and the Session to involve itself in 'colored evangelism' in Laurel. When one of the poorer members of the church approached Bird for financial assistance, he referred her case to the Ladies Aid Society. The women assisted this needy woman so effectively that the Session asked them to take charge of the Deacon's Fund and responsibility for aiding other needy members, since the church again had no resident deacons.

By October 1905, change reached a new pitch of enthusiasm. On Sunday, October 16, Bird appealed to a congregational meeting to pledge \$400 to foreign missions for the coming year. The church responded to the plea of their youthful pastor with pledges totaling \$556, a commentary on how well the church received his leadership. A week later, Elder Orr, chairman of the Committee on Work Among Colored People, reported that he and Bird had established a Sunday School with four teachers and 28 students at the Industrial and Agricultural Institute for Colored People (located some two miles north of Laurel). Bird initiated a Friday evening sewing class for young girls at this same time. At this same time, the addition of Mr. Emmett L. Pettit to the Session strengthened its capacity to lead the church. In the midst of all of this activity, Maryland Presbytery ordained and installed Bird on Tuesday, October 31, 1905, in a well-attended service that included Dr. Moore of Union Seminary and Bird's uncle, the Rev. Henry Van Dyke, a prominent Northern Presbyterian figure who taught at Princeton University.

In the last two months of 1905, Bird maintained this hectic pace of program expansion by revamping the poorly-attended Wednesday evening service, reorganizing the Board of Trustees, and laying plans for a deeper ecumenical relationship with other Laurel churches. In December, he organized a 'Covenanter Company' of boys as a parallel to the Miriams in youth work. Bird then started the new year in equally fine style by his involvement in initiating and carrying out a series of ecumenical services with the Baptist and two Methodist churches. These services again displayed the temperance sentiment that had been a mark of Baker's ministry, and they now became an annual January event in Laurel.

A positive spirit permeated the 1906 annual reports. They show that the Ladies Aid Society had carefully organized itself to care for the poorer members of the church, while also conducting church socials every other month and a program of visitation of newcomers to Laurel, encouraging them to attend the Presbyterian Church. The Women's Missionary Society actively promoted the study of missions in the congregation. Bird formed a Junior Miriam's group in March, and the Covenanter Company of boys grew from eight to nineteen members, It helped to cut and haul wood for several needy Laurel families. Bird led all four of the youth groups including the Christian Endeavor Society which, with its 59 members, acted as an umbrella group. All of the youth groups engaged in significant amounts of mission study. Meanwhile, the black Sunday School grew to forty students and its leaders planned to make it self-supporting and to have it collect funds for African missions.

Comparison with the other churches of Maryland Presbytery underscores the impressive quality of all of these achievements under Bird. The Laurel Church reported 78 members, which moved it up into the number six slot for size. Given that size, it was amazing that the church sponsored four of the eleven youth groups found in the presbytery. The membership of those four groups totaled 94 young people, 36% of all of the young people in youth groups in the presbytery! Only three large Baltimore churches reported more children in Sunday School than the Laurel Church.

While Bird deserved full credit for the increased level of activity the church achieved beginning in 1905, at least three other churches in Laurel showed growth in this same period. The rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church saw his church grow sufficiently by 1906 to ask for a substantial increase in salary. In 1907, Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, South, started construction of a new building. Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, meanwhile, called a pastor in 1906 who displayed something of the same dynamic leadership as Bird and built up an impressively large and active men's organization for which the church built a special addition to its building. Thus, the Presbyterian Church thrived in a general climate of religious growth in Laurel, and, significantly, under Bird it more than held its own.

As the church entered a new church year in April 1906, the nature of Bird's ministry changed. From that point on, he proposed very few program changes and directed his efforts primarily to maintaining the very active program already in place. Both Bird and the church began to experience the limits of their reach. That church year also began on a very positive note for Bird personally. In late May, he married Lisette Fries Moore, daughter of Dr. Moore whom we have already mentioned as President of Union Seminary and a very influential voice in the Southern Presbyterian Church. After their marriage, the Birds were away from Laurel for some eight weeks as Bird extended their honeymoon into a health leave for himself.

A few setbacks soon tinged the excitement of Bird's ministry. Although Elder Orr struggled diligently to maintain the black Sunday School, the Institute it served suffered serious financial trouble, and mention of the Sunday School disappears from the church's records after July 1907. In May 1906, the Trustees created another Sunday School Building Committee, the second of a succession of such committees, and within six months Bird had plans prepared and collected \$1400 in pledges for the proposed building. But the momentum dwindled and that building went unbuilt. Furthermore, a potentially worrisome split appeared in the Session as Elder Earle displayed uneasiness over how the heavy benevolence giving of the church seemed to limit giving to the general fund. Earle argued that the church should meet its own financial obligations before giving large sums to foreign missions, and he especially objected to any plans to add more special collections. By April 1907, the church, in

fact, owed Bird two months' salary. Over against Earle, Elders Pettit and Orr wanted to maintain as high a level of mission giving as possible.

Yet, on the basis of past years, 1906-1907 could not be judged as other than one of the best in Laurel Presbyterian Church history, even if it did not match up to the fast pace of the previous year. The church sustained the gains of 1905-1906, maintained a high level of congregational giving, and grew even more in size so that it became the fifth largest church in the presbytery. Its record in mission giving was little short of astounding as only the very large Franklin Street Church gave more to missions in actual dollars in the presbytery. But Laurel gave an amazing \$5.95 per member to foreign missions, far more than Franklin Street's \$3.22 per member. The congregation's own records claim that it gave more per capita to benevolences than any other church in the entire Southern Presbyterian denomination.

During the next church year, 1907-1908, Bird took a ten-week, expenses-paid trip to Norway in a year otherwise marked primarily by the continuation of the programs already begun and commitments already made. The often troublesome financial situation of the church improved temporarily, and the church not only kept up its benevolence giving but also paid off its debts and met its other commitments. In the months after April 1908, however, the financial picture of the church became more problematic. The church habitually owed Bird back pay, anywhere from \$14 to over \$200, and the Trustees directed more and more appeals to the church to increase congregational giving. By October 1909, the situation was becoming more critical as the church fell further and further behind.

At the end of 1907, on November 3, Bird preached what may be the earliest sermon preached at the Laurel Church for which the manuscript still exists. Preaching from Jonah 3:10, Bird presented the historical background of the passage in vivid images and contrasted the wealth and power of Nineveh with the lowly state of God's prophet, Jonah. After expounding on the meaning of the scriptural passage, Bird sought a contemporary application and urged, in effect, that the young men of the church needed to consider becoming ordained ministers and guide people religiously as did Jonah. The manuscript of this sermon indicates that, at the very least, Bird prepared competent and interesting sermons.

Two changes in the Session took place during the 1908-1909 church year. In April, Earle moved to Rockville. The Session appointed Elder Orr as Clerk of Session in his place. In December, Pettit moved to Baltimore and transferred his letter to a church there. The church then elected Mr. Jullien Winnemore to cover the vacancies so left. In May 1909, Winnemore took over the clerk's duties when Orr asked to be relieved of them. The statistics for 1908-1909 again showed that the Laurel Church compared favorably with the other churches in the presbytery. In April 1908, it reached a peak membership of 98.

In November 1909, George Earle returned to Laurel, thus causing the church to plan yet another change in leadership. An entirely unexpected event, however, interrupted his scheduled reelection to the Session. On October 21, 1909, Bird was stricken with 'nervous prostration' and left Laurel, unable to work. After a brief spell in Baltimore, the Birds went to South Carolina so that he could have a complete rest. But as the months dragged by, his condition did not improve sufficiently for Bird to return to Laurel, and, in a letter dated March 31, 1910, Andrew Bird resigned his position. Maryland Presbytery made that resignation effective May 1.

More than any previous pastor, including the very capable Baker, Bird had communicated to the Laurel congregation his own understanding of Christian spirituality. Throughout his years, the church's program emphasized mission study and giving, assisting people in need, individual and corporate Bible study, and prayer. He took the church to new levels of growth and activity in pursuit of those spiritual goals. He even sacrificed the security of a dependable salary and his own health to reach high levels of mission giving and congregational activity. Thus, Bird's ministry at Laurel showed the marks of an unusually capable and dedicated young man, one who, nonetheless, was a young man and who in his inexperience overextended himself. He started too fast and reached out too high. He nevertheless gave the church some of the best pastoral leadership it would ever have, and he apparently learned from his experience in Laurel. In his next pastorate, beginning in

January 1911, Bird took charge of Second Presbyterian Church in Washington. In that church, later renamed Church of the Pilgrims, Bird became one of the most successful and widely respected pastors in the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Many years later, Bird's son, himself a retired pastor, remembered that his father's success at that church and in Laurel grew out of three important elements in his ministry. First of all, Bird paid close attention to his pastoral duties. Secondly, he saw opportunities and made the most of them. Finally, he depended upon prayer rather than personal confrontation to solve difficult problems. Although not hinted at directly in the records of the church, Bird also reflected in his youth, his activism, and his bearing the 'manly' virtues so highly prized in the era of President Teddy Roosevelt. In those exciting years of reform, national growth, and idealism, many Americans sensed new purpose and strove to attain new goals. Bird must have embodied something of the best of the Progressive Era for his congregation.

On the surface, the decade of 1900 to 1910 appeared to be considerably different from the previous four decades. Yet, the only obvious difference in those ten years was the quality of pastoral leadership the church received. Baker began to make an obvious difference in the church even before Elder Snowden, representative of the 'old' lay leadership, stepped aside and then died. Pastors after Bird, as we shall see, could not sustain the direction and momentum of his ministry. Indeed, the church in the thirty years after Bird resembled the church in the forty years before Baker with an almost amazing fidelity to its image as a small, drifting, insignificant church on the geographical and cultural fringes of its denomination. The 'magic' of the Baker-Bird decade resided in the personalities and skills of two better-than-the-average pastors.

The Laurel Church followed Baker into temperance and Bird into missions and study because it respected and trusted their leadership. Still, behind the church's willingness to follow the lead of these men lies another pattern, namely, its inability to set directions for itself apart from pastoral leadership. The ups and the downs of the church reflected a remarkable sensitivity to the personalities, interests, and abilities of each succeeding pastor. In its first fifty years, the church showed no evidence of having a sense of its own particular mission or a sense of its own direction. It embodied no obvious ministry beyond the fact of its own passive existence. Of itself it did not prod its members to spiritual growth or biblical-theological study. Of itself it did not seek a social ministry in its community. Of itself it did not even carry out its nuts-and-bolts administrative tasks very well.

If the Laurel Presbyterian Church had called a succession of capable pastors over the years, the church's nearly total programmatic dependence on pastoral leadership might not have been an important pattern. The weakness of the pattern was that in its first fifty years only Baker came to and left the church in a 'normal' manner, Nicols entered his ministry without prior training and during a difficult period, He died in the office after a ministry circumscribed by illness. Bird's health gave way. Baskerville and Shipley left under clouds, Reese stayed only nineteen months, The realities of human frailties made such singular dependence upon pastoral leadership a questionable proposition at best. As the next chapter will show, the years after 1910 only confirmed the generally dismal experience of the church with pastoral leadership.

Still, the other side of the coin should be noted as well: given competent pastoral leadership, the church could and did respond with a level of commitment and giving equal to that of any church in its denomination. It could, and did, develop a program that would have been impressive in a church much larger than itself, The Laurel Presbyterian Church had considerable potential, Unfortunately, except for this decade, that potential remained mostly just that...potential.

Chapter IV: Drifting

For a time, it appeared that the Laurel Presbyterian Church called as Bird's successor yet another pastor of the quality of Baker and Bird. On August 14, 1910, the church's pastoral nominating committee, constituted in much the same way as the one that called Bird, recommended to the congregation the Rev. Walter W. Edge, of Davis, West Virginia, as pastor. Edge had a good record in Davis, and the church there held him in high regard. That congregational meeting elected Edge pastor, and he occupied the Laurel pulpit for the first time on September 27, although presbytery did not formally install him until April 19, 1911. Within a very brief time, Edge initiated changes in two areas: Sunday School and worship. In the Sunday School, he reorganized its entire structure by making it, for the first time, a graded school with eight classes. He instituted better records keeping procedures, established a new financial system, and arranged for substitute teachers for every class. He also had a librarian elected.

Whereas these Sunday School reforms caused little or no friction, Edge ran into problems in his attempts to change worship by introducing the church's first permanent choir. When Louise Gray, the organist, resigned, the search for a replacement led to a number of rumors and misunderstandings which Edge had to correct publicly. Meanwhile, in late November 1910, the Session voted to establish a choir and elected seven members (including six women) to it. The Session appointed Mr. and Mrs. A.B. Chase to direct both the choir and the church's entire music program. When the choir sang for the first time on January 22, 1911, however, only four persons took part. The presence of a choir in worship raised certain problems as the organ had to be repositioned to make room for the choir. All of this disruption and the moving of the organ, which had to be done several times to find a suitable arrangement, caused quite a bit of dissatisfaction in the congregation. Edge, meanwhile, had to face yet another problem concerning worship, Church records state that a small group of people regularly sat in the rear of the church and made snide, rude comments concerning those things of which they did not approve. Edge finally rebuked this group during worship and two members of the church walked out. The heckling, at least, came to an end.

All of these seemingly small irritations underscored a change in the tone of congregational life, a change also reflected in the outcome of a series of evangelistic services held at the Presbyterian Church in March 1911 by evangelist J.W. Atwood. The church hoped that those services would attract a large attendance from the larger community and result in numerous conversions. In actual fact, little came of the poorly attended services, and even members of the church, especially the men, showed little enthusiasm for them. In short, unlike his two immediate predecessors, Edge did not open his ministry in Laurel with the style of pastoral leadership which generated excitement and an impressive response to church activities. Edge failed to communicate a vision of ministry and mission beyond the walls of the church building to which the church's members could commit themselves. Thus, he could not sustain the sense of momentum initiated by Baker and sustained by Bird even though church records show that the church kept much of Bird's program in place during Edge's ministry.

The church year of April 1911 to April 1912 witnessed a number of changes. The congregation elected another Sunday School Building Committee which, after some study, reported back its conclusion that the church could not afford to build a Sunday School building at that time. Elder Winnemore left town and gave up his position as Clerk of Session. Elder Orr took over the office as he was the only member of the Session left. The church did elect two new deacons, Mr. W. Roland Thawley and Mr. Warfield Peters, to fill the vacancies in that long moribund body. Perhaps the biggest accomplishment and 'change' of the year came with the purchase of a manse. After a long, complicated period of negotiations the church sold its Laurel Avenue property and purchased a house on Collins Street. The Edge family moved into the new manse in early January 1912.

The statistics for 1911-1912 do suggest that the church responded positively to Edge's ministry in a modest way. Both the size of the Sunday School and the amount of church giving increased over the previous year, and the church resumed giving relatively substantial amounts to benevolences. Although membership did drop, the weeding of the church roll caused that drop. The annual report of April 1912 also noted a steady improvement in worship attendance as well. In short, Walter Edge's ministry did show promise of a quality of program better than anything the church had experienced prior to Baker and Bird. The flames of the 'great decade' did not leap so high, but they did not die out either.

But, then, it happened again. After a ministry of only two years, Edge accepted a call to a Northern Presbyterian congregation in New Jersey. The church expressed regret over his loss when the presbytery accepted his resignation, effective October 1, 1912. As already noted, Edge did maintain some of the gains of the Baker-Bird decade, and he appeared to have the potential to do even more than just maintain their programs. Considering the degree to which the congregation depended upon pastoral leadership, Edge's departure shattered any hopes that the church would continue along its new path. The church now reverted to its old nineteenth century patterns. Indeed, Edge recalls the ministry of Reese in the early 1870s-an apparently good but very brief ministry that led to a period of decline.

The records do not state why Edge left, but one problem stands out as a probable cause: money. In a lengthy treasurer's report for April 1912, George Earle established clearly that church receipts could not meet all of the church's obligations, especially the pastor's salary. After Earle resumed the treasurer's position in January 1912 (when the previous treasurer, Winnemore, moved), he made strenuous efforts to improve congregational giving, but in April 1912 he reported that his efforts had not improved the situation enough to make any difference. He also reported that he had offended some members by those efforts. Earle noted that the deaths over the years of a number of wealthy 'friends' of the church had deprived the congregation of an important source of funds. Thus, Edge quite possibly left Laurel because the adverse financial situation of the church showed no hope of improving. The loss of leadership on the Session, which left only Elder Orr on that body, must have given even more weight to Edge's doubts about the church's future.

Following the usual pattern, giving and attendance immediately dropped off when Edge left. Elder Orr as the sole remaining member of Session took it upon himself to soften the blow of Edge's leaving by shortening the interim period. Acting on his own authority, Orr presented the names of four candidates for pastor to the church in January 1913, and the congregation elected the Rev. Henry C. Bird, a member of Washington City Presbytery of the Northern Church, to the pulpit. In conferences between Bird (not to be confused with Andrew Bird) and the church, the church appeared uncertain as to whether it could actually pay a full pastor's salary or not. Bird then proposed that he serve the church as stated Supply with a reduced salary, and he began work on these terms in March 1913. His brief stay proved to be a less than happy one. A stormy congregational meeting in November 1913 found Bird in tension with a large number of the members of the church and the church divided in its opinion of him. Congregational records state that several people believed he accepted the call to Laurel only so that he and his family could live in the manse rent free until they built their own home in town. Bird could not continue under these conditions. The only event of any significance during his brief stay took place in April 1914 when the Trustees elected Olive Rogers church treasurer. Rogers thus became the first woman to hold an official, elective church office outside of the Sunday School.

After the departure of H.C. Bird as stated supply, the Laurel Church called Mr. Raymond S. Hittinger, a licensed preacher and recent graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary from Lehigh Presbytery in the Northern Church. Hittinger passed his presbytery exams on October 1, 1914, at Second Church in Washington, Andrew Bird's parish, and presbytery ordained and installed him the following week. Bird gave the charge to the congregation as he had when Edge was installed,

So few records remain from the period of Hittinger's ministry that it is difficult to make an informed judgment concerning it. The 1915 annual report indicates low attendance at worship and only a few faithful contributors. Hittinger, thus, became the first pastor in the history of the church, excepting only the special case

of Nicols, who failed to show gains in attendance and giving within the first year after his arrival. Indeed, Trustees' records display an almost frantic concern over the finances of the church. By April 1916, the Trustees asked Hittinger to go to presbytery and get a renewal of aid to the church. At that point, Hittinger also reported to presbytery that the Laurel Church had to borrow money to pay his salary, Unfortunately, presbytery responded only with a statement that it already supported more churches than it could help adequately. Laurel had to get along on its own. The election of George Earle and J. Arthur Remington to the Session in September 1915 strengthened that body but did not help the church solve its financial problems. In October 1915 Orr resigned as Clerk of Session and Remington replaced him.

Matters came to a head in September 1916 when the Trustees sent a letter to Hittinger informing him that the church could no longer afford to pay his \$1000 per year salary. The letter blamed Hittinger for the situation because he would not allow the church to use fund-raising methods other than pledging and Sunday morning offerings. The letter also stated that the condition of the church generally caused several people to stop giving or even to leave the church entirely. The letter asked Hittinger to meet with the Trustees on the matter.

On October 3, Hittinger met with the Session, Trustees, and representatives of various church organizations. He stated that the church's finances were not as serious as the Trustees claimed. George Earle disagreed with him and a lengthy discussion followed. That discussion revealed that the church was divided into strong supporters of Hittinger over against the rest of the membership, Under the circumstances, Hittinger could do little else than resign from the church, which he did in December 1916. When presbytery dismissed him, it passed a resolution of sympathy for both Hittinger and the Laurel Church. It sympathized with Hittinger for not receiving his salary regularly and on time. It sympathized with the church for having to struggle with a salary it could not really afford. Presbytery also advised the Laurel Church that it should not call pastors for salaries it could not pay. Significantly, Andrew Bird had a large hand in the drawing up of this resolution, and it likely reflects something of the pressures he (and Edge after him) experienced in Laurel.

Although brief and unproductive, Hittinger's ministry proved significant in at least two ways. First of all, that ministry clearly demonstrated the dilemma the Laurel Church faced in trying to obtain competent pastoral leadership. As a small church, It faced all of the needs, issues, and problems larger churches experienced. But its smallness meant that it had difficulty finding the leadership it needed to deal with its situation. It did not have the resources needed to pay regularly a salary high enough to attract that level of pastoral leadership. Secondly, the end of the Hittinger ministry led to the first significant period since the 1860s during which the church had no pastor. By a divided vote of seventeen to eleven, a congregational meeting in February 1917, voted to postpone calling a pastor until the church could pay off its debts,

Thus, we meet the Rev, Henry C. Bird again. At his suggestion, the church agreed to pay him a half-salary as stated supply, and he began his second stint in that position in April 1917. This time his ministry seems to have brought an immediate sense of relief and calm. The church's condition even began to improve slightly, and Bird's formal relationship with the church continued until June 1919. Bird gave most of his attention to financial and property matters to the point that when Rogers resigned as church treasurer, in June 1911, he took her place. One of the most intriguing events of this period took place just before Bird became stated supply again. In March 1911, the congregation took the unprecedented step of electing three women, namely, Olive Rogers, Miss M. Edmonston, and Mrs. R.G. Knowlton, to the Board of Trustees. Not again until the 1960s would the church elect women to serve on one of its governing boards.

Frustration marked the year 1919. Although Bird resigned as stated supply in June, he seems to have continued unofficially to fill that office beyond that date since the church did not relieve him of his position as church treasurer until September 1920. In the meantime, a congregational meeting held in June 1919 expressed the church's deeply felt need to call a new pastor by voting thirty to one to rescind the 1917 decision to postpone seeking a new pastor. The church subsequently, however, twice failed to call a pastor, once in September 1919 and again in December. Finally, the church went to the presbytery with its plight, and in April 1920 presbytery's

Home Missions Committee granted the Laurel Church up to \$400 in assistance as needed to reach a salary of \$1400. Even then a third man declined a call to the church.

The congregation finally succeeded in acquiring a new pastor in August 1920. The Rev. Theodore B. Anderson faced a difficult task of rebuilding when he assumed pastoral leadership of the church in September 1920. The statistics of the preceding April showed giving had dropped to a mere \$724 in 1919-1920 (as opposed to \$1514 in 1916-1917), and the Sunday School dropped from 44 to only twelve pupils in that same period. Although the church rolls showed a decrease of only four during those four years, the actual strength of the church decreased by much more, as many members had been placed on the non-resident list. Church records reveal little about Anderson's first months at Laurel, but statistics and reports for April 1921 show that the situation improved considerably. Giving, attendance, and membership increased. The congregation again participated in ecumenical services and activities. The women re-established their missionary society. Life seemed to return to the body.

Yet, certain basic realities in the life of the Laurel Presbyterian Church remained constant. First of all, attendance at the Sunday and Wednesday evening services continued to be low, with very few attending the Wednesday evening prayer service. Sunday morning worship, on the other hand, saw some 30 of the church's 49 members in worship. Secondly, the church's gender imbalance remained a problem. The rolls for 1921 showed 31 women and fourteen men listed as members. Women continued to make up better than two-thirds of the church's membership. The fact that a number of the men and a few women of the church worked in either Washington or Baltimore made this imbalance all the more serious as the male leadership of the church had less time to give to it than did the majority of women. Thirdly, the church remained a highly mobile congregation. While its 1917 statistics showed only three non-residents among its 64 members, by 1920 the non-resident roll grew to some fourteen of 60 total members. And in 1921, the statistics showed an increase of eleven members but a total membership of only 49 with seven non-resident members. Thus, resident membership dropped from 61 to 46 in just four years, and even with vigorous growth in 1920-1921 it dropped even further to 42.

Symbolic of all of this coming and going, former elder Emmitt Pettit returned to Laurel in 1920 and once again became an elder. Even though by 1920 the congregation had been highly mobile for several decades, significantly, all of these membership changes led to no major changes in program or direction. At best, particular combinations of members and lay leaders at any one time influenced the effectiveness of pastoral leadership. As in chemical experiments, the personality and abilities of the pastor remained the catalytic agent.

Under Anderson, the congregation focused its attention on the Sunday School, because it believed that the Sunday School was the church's most important source of new members. Anderson initiated a strategy for strengthening the church in the long term by strengthening the Sunday School. Anderson and the congregation assumed that they could improve the Sunday School's program only through the construction of a Sunday School building, and in May 1921, the congregation elected yet another Sunday School Building Committee. By December 1921, the congregation approved a set of plans for a new building to be built right behind the church building. In the meantime, Anderson sought to strengthen the Sunday School by instituting a system of prizes for those who memorized verses and for those who brought in new students. He sought to make the Sunday School program more attractive,

The church appeared to respond to Anderson's ministry with some of the enthusiasm of the golden decade of 1901-1910. On the last day of the year, the church surprised him with a gift of a \$20 gold piece, given in appreciation of the success of his first sixteen months in Laurel. The church's annual narrative of April 1922 gave further evidence of Anderson's effectiveness. It reported that attendance at Sunday morning worship had risen to 80 per cent of the membership (about 31-38/Sunday) while Sunday evening attendance had grown to 50 per cent.

In this atmosphere, the Session addressed a letter to presbytery urging greater assistance in paying Anderson as the church wanted to raise his salary substantially. The Session argued that Laurel, halfway

between Baltimore and Washington, occupied a key geographical position for the PCUS. The Southern Church had almost no presence in this large area. The Session noted that even in Laurel fewer than one person in three belonged to a church. Therefore, the Laurel Church had an especially important role to play, and Anderson had already laid the groundwork for fulfilling that role, He was indispensable to the church's carrying out the role it could play. The presbytery responded by granting the Laurel Church an increase in assistance to \$600 for 1922-1923.

This brief era of good feelings in the church extended to Elder George Earle as well. In June 1922, thirty members of the church held a surprise birthday party for him on the occasion of his 70th birthday. This signal honor touched Earle deeply. Further recognition of his long years of service came to him in September 1922, when Potomac Presbytery elected him Moderator. Between its founding in 1912 and 1925, Potomac Presbytery so honored only two other laymen, and no other elder of the Laurel Church before or since achieved this same prominence. Hard upon the heels of his election to the moderatorship, the presbytery also elected Earle a delegate to 63rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S., 1923, which met at Montreat, North Carolina.

It did indeed seem that the church had returned to the days of Baker and Bird. In the church year 1922-1923, it established a Men's Association, a Boy Scout troop, and a Christian Endeavor Society. The year came to its culmination on April 1, 1923, when the church occupied its new Sunday School building with an Easter sunrise service. The church's records emphasized Anderson's active role in pushing the construction of the building and in collecting funds for it. He accomplished what even Baker, Bird, and Edge could not achieve. For some time afterwards, the church used the Sunday School building heavily in support of the church's most active program in a decade. In another letter to presbytery, the Session described the experimentation and growth Anderson had brought to the church and gave him most of the credit for it all. The Session observed that, 'The Spirit of the Church has changed entirely; from being a listless body it has become a Church Militant eager for the fray.'

In light of the above statement and all that Anderson achieved, the events of 1924 seem baffling and disconcerting. Below the surface of all of these accomplishments there must have been something else festering, for on Sunday, February 11, 1924, the Session voted two to one to inform Anderson that 'the church' wanted him to hand in his resignation because, according to these elders, the church was not growing as rapidly as the Session felt it should. They blamed Anderson. The Session met with Anderson a week later and Elders Orr and Remington called again for his immediate resignation in spite of Anderson's request for time to consider their charges against him. Whatever caused this sudden about-face, it divided the congregation into factions with George Earle leading the 'pro-Anderson' group. Finally, however, Anderson did resign, but the presbytery accepted his resignation only after consultations by the Home Mission Committee with him and the church on the matter. Presbytery then dissolved the pastoral relationship as of June 16, 1924. These events took place in spite of the fact that the church's statistics right up through April 1924 showed membership, giving, and church activities increasing.

For a time, then, it looked as though Anderson would lead the church back to something akin to the great years of 1900-1909. Whatever it was that brought on the dissatisfaction with Anderson not only killed that possibility but also resulted in a weakened, divided church that did not recover for years. After Anderson left, the church's most prominent elder, Earle, never again attended a Session meeting. Unfortunately, the causes of the events that led to Anderson's forced resignation stand just beyond the boundary of the church's living memory. Later, in May 1926, the church elected Mr. Walter D. Lanahan, a younger life-time member, and Mr. B.H. Yoris, a new member from Washington, to the Session.

The next two pastorates, those of Rev. L. H. Eikel (September 1924-November 1926) and the Rev. W. L. Smith (February 1927-October 1928) made little or no impact on the church. Evidently, the church, particularly the youth, thought well of Eikel, and, in later years, the church credited him with strengthening and

solidifying the church's youth program. The church thought less well of Smith, and his brief pastorate was one of the shortest pastorates in the church's history.

The next sixteen years in the history of the Laurel Church passed quietly. From October 1928, the Rev. Lewis R. Watson supplied the Laurel pulpit for nearly three full years until he became too ill to continue. Watson worked for the government and only came up to Laurel on Sundays. In the meantime, Rev. A.E. Baker had returned to the area as pastor of the Dickey Memorial Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, and he retired from that charge in April 1931. The Laurel Church then called him as its stated supply with presbytery giving \$300/year to help pay his salary. Baker took up that position on April 1, 1932. A letter from the church's Clerk of Session, Elder Remington, to the Stated Clerk of the presbytery indicated that the Laurel Church felt content in its arrangement with Baker. It was glad that the widely liked former pastor had returned to Laurel. The church's gratitude at having an experienced pastor must have increased in the next few years as the life of the church, along with that of the nation, slowed under the weight of the Great Depression. Potomac Presbytery minutes recorded, for example, that nineteen of its 35 churches in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia depended upon presbytery aid while an unspecified number of other churches received direct assistance from a few of the presbytery's very large churches. Thus, the years up to 1937 passed uneventfully, marked mostly by the deaths of some of the older members including George Earle who died in 1933. The church elected Mr. A. R. Weston to the Session. It also engaged in evangelistic services on at least one occasion and also reinstated mid-week services, which had lapsed.

The Laurel Presbyterian Church of the later 1920s and the 1930s was a small, conservative Southern Presbyterian church organizationally isolated from the Laurel community. The Christian Endeavor Society emphasized Bible study, memorizing verses, and learning catechisms. The church worshiped in a very formal manner with little or no lay participation in worship leadership. The women participated in the life of the church only within carefully circumscribed bounds. The Laurel Presbyterian Church of those days between the wars had a certain stiffness and sense of propriety about it that harkened back to even earlier decades. It gave no thought to making the Bible or church 'relevant' to the larger world nor did the church seek any mission beyond itself. Its members were people of modest means and modest learning, and the 'big' events of its life included an annual picnic and a special Christmas Eve service of giving, candles, and dedication of self. Elder Lanahan organized the scouts into a fife and drum corps, and he became an increasingly predominant voice in the life of the church.

Thus, the congregation remained a quiet corner in an increasingly brutalized, anxious world and drifted without much internal tension under the gentle, almost grandfatherly guidance of its stated supply. Baker, like the church itself, was soft-spoken and without the zeal and fire of his previous years in Laurel. By and large, those still living who participated in the church of the 1930s remember it fondly. As for youths and young adults, the church functioned almost as a family for them, and many of the adults, particularly the Sunday School teachers, played an important part in shaping their lives and their understanding of the Christian faith.

By 1931, however, portents of change appeared on the horizon as the smaller churches of Potomac Presbytery, including the Laurel Church, emerged from the trials of the Depression. Baker reported to presbytery that the Laurel community was growing rapidly and that attendance at worship had improved. The church's statistics for April 1937 indicate the first growth of any significance in the church since 1928. The advent of World War II gave some further impetus to growth in the church as its membership lurched forward fitfully to just over sixty members by 1943-1944. Even though giving and the Sunday School remained at the same levels as they had for several years, the tremendous demographic changes assaulting the entire Washington region would soon affect the Laurel Church as well. Thus, when Mr. Baker died in October 1943, shortly after having resigned his position as stated supply, the church stood on the verge of a new era. It would be another year before the church sought a replacement for Baker, and that year was the last year before the congregation began to feel the force of the demographic changes taking place around it.

The Laurel Presbyterian Church of 1944, in a sense, still lived in a world rapidly passing away in the expanding East Coast megalopolis in which it was located. It clung to a slower paced world of 'old time' values which still set apart Sunday as a holy day and frowned on such activities as horse racing and dancing. It was still very much a Southern Presbyterian Church, a church comfortable with a retired minister who had entered the ordained ministry back in the 1890s. This Laurel Presbyterian Church still lived in a Laurel that epitomized the small Southern town of segregated races and distinct roles for men and women. It was a traditional church solidly rooted in the nineteenth century.

Chapter V: Growing

On November 11, 1944, three officers of Potomac Presbytery attended a congregational supper at Laurel Presbyterian Church, urged the church to take immediate steps towards securing a new pastor, and recommended the Rev. Joseph H. Cudlipp, a retired Richmond pastor. A congregational meeting in January 1945 voted to accept their recommendation, and Cudlipp began his duties as stated supply at Laurel on September 1. Just a month later the church ordained Mr. Elmer Brown, a man who would play an important role in the church over the next two decades, and Lt. Com. James C. Hargreaves elders. Cudlipp took hold administratively immediately, and by the end of the year Session reorganized its committees to include a New Membership Committee headed by Mrs. Remington and Mrs. Lanahan working with Hargreaves and a Building Committee headed by Brown. Under Cudlipp's leadership, the church began looking again for ways to respond to the demographic growth taking place in and around Laurel.

Cudlipp, a strong preacher and a strong personality known as 'Colonel' Cudlipp because he once had organized a boys' brigade, performed his pastoral duties in a manner quite different from Baker. His pastoral style, in fact, provided a good bridge between the Laurel Presbyterian Church of 1940 and that of a decade later. While he preached what some might style 'old time religion' with an emphasis on the Bible on one hand, he also displayed a real interest in youth and a genuine openness to new people moving into the Laurel area on the other hand. He organized an inter-church youth fellowship in which the youth of the Berwyn Baptist, Laurel Methodist, Mt. Zion Methodist, and Beltsville Methodist churches along with the Laurel Church met monthly for fellowship and study. He turned the Sunday School building into a gym and had the youth doing gymnastics and playing basketball. He started a church drill team and headed up a very good youth program aided by Doris Bowie (nee Lanahan), Lucy Voris, and others. Cudlipp brought new energy and a sense of urgency to the life of the church, things missing for some time.

Under the pressure of World War II, the greater Washington area including Laurel grew rapidly, and the church entered an era of modest but still unprecedented growth. The minutes of Potomac Presbytery for April 1946 described what this population growth meant for the Laurel Church when it observed that, 'Not in a generation has this church moved so fast in accessions and other activities.' Among its most immediate benefits, this growth began finally and permanently to improve the financial condition of the church. Historically, financial limitations had always restricted the church's prospects and program. By late 1946, however, the financial situation showed marked improvement, the church found itself able to meet all of its expenses regularly, and actually requested that presbytery reduce the amount of its support of the church's budget. In November 1946, the church committed itself in principle to achieve self-support as soon as possible, and the next year it raised Cudlipp's salary to the newly established presbytery minimum of \$2400 per year while presbytery further reduced its support of the church's budget. Finally, in 1949 the Laurel Presbyterian Church, along with three other churches, received official congratulations from presbytery for achieving full self-support.

Even as this new era in financial self-sufficiency dawned, another serious issue, the question of an improved facility, loomed large in the life of the church. The increased membership forced the church to look more closely at its need to maintain and improve its physical plant which became increasingly inadequate as the church grew. The election in October 1948, of two long-time members of the church, Mr. William B. Anderson and Dr. Jesse A. Remington, to the Session planted the seeds of another issue. Their election meant, in effect, that three 'old' church members, including Elder Lanahan, sat on the Session with only Elmer Brown, the fourth member, a representative for the newer, younger members. This seeming imbalance on the Session and the emergence of the church building as a problem slowly melded into a major crisis in the next decade.

From the perspective of later years the figures may not be impressive, but in 1950 a church membership of 125 seemed very large indeed to the Laurel Presbyterian Church. Cudlipp's leadership and the growth in membership, taken together, increased church activities to their highest level in 25 years. The Session organized a men's group. Cudlipp held a series of special services in October 1950 to deepen the spiritual awareness of the growing church. By 1952 the church held its first Vacation Bible School. Still, this expansion of the church's activities did not satisfy Cudlipp. Aware that LPC had to compete for the attention of the new people in town, Cudlipp encouraged the church to be more publicly visible and more active in the community. Sessional minutes show that the membership did begin to give greater attention to the activities of the church, and the Session went so far as to appoint a publicity representative.

Underneath it all, however, the question of facilities continued to fester, and the church began to split into two sides. The growing agitation for change came from the newer, younger members who questioned how the church could conduct an adequate Christian education program in a Sunday School building so appallingly inadequate. The pattern for future discord emerged as the Session's Committee on Religious Education tried, without any success, to formulate plans that entailed no major change but still allowed for the better physical arrangement of the Sunday School.

In the midst of these concerns, Col. Cudlipp resigned in the Fall of 1952 to take up a stated supply position in Virginia, and the church entered a unique period of a year when the Session governed the church almost entirely without an ordained moderator, interim pastor, or stated supply. Elder Walter Lanahan normally moderated the Session, and his voice more than any other influenced the course of church policy. While the Pulpit Nominating Committee worked, the youth program expanded to include Junior and intermediate groups. The Church Improvement Committee continued to prepare recommendations for the church, but it postponed final action on building matters until the church called a new pastor.

On February 15, 1953, the church called John W. Eckerson, a 26 year-old Floridian and recent graduate of Union Theological Seminary. Presbytery ordained and installed him in June. Eckerson's ministry began, as had most others, with a flurry of activity marked particularly by an improvement in the church's statistics. Although membership did not increase, giving rose substantially from an average of just over \$6,700 per year in the period 1950 through 1953 to \$11,384 in 1954, Eckerson's first full year. Furthermore, the church also went through a brief period of organizational renewal. It increased the Board of Trustees membership to nine. It reconstituted the Board of Deacons and limited the deacon's term of office to three years on a rotating basis. The Board of Deacons took responsibility for the church's physical plant and property and soon became an important body in its life. The Session also approved Eckerson's proposals to establish a men's group, a young adults' group, and a youth group. Finally, the church also set up a building fund.

On the surface, then, the situation of the church appeared promising in 1953-54. In fact, Eckerson had walked into a deteriorating situation which increasingly divided the church along generational lines and according to length of residency. Indeed, the younger, newer members dominated in certain parts of the church's program such as the new men's group and Young Adult Fellowship (later known as the Family Fellowship). Many of these new members felt uneasy with the traditional-minded Laurel church they joined in the late 1940s and early 1950s because it appeared to them that a small clique of older members dominated the church and ran it in a dictatorial fashion. National political and social events and trends in the early and middle 1950s encouraged Americans generally and these young Laurel Presbyterians in particular to react negatively to hints of organizational oppression. The widespread fear of communism reminded people of the dangers of a totalitarian state, a danger that had plunged the nation into World War II. At the same time, the discredited Joe McCarthy and the emergence of a more visible Civil Rights Movement encouraged increased sensitivity to issues of repression.

In this social context, younger members of the Laurel Church felt that they suffered under domination by the older members who, they believed, refused to take those steps needed to improve the church. Specifically, the older group dominated the Session and appeared to use their power on it to block badly needed

changes, particularly concerning the church's physical plant. The older members, of course, saw things differently. They felt that they had dedicated an important part of their lives to the church and by their efforts had sustained it through many lean years. Before this influx of newcomers, the church functioned with a minimum of friction. Furthermore, each member of the Session received his position in accordance with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S. The older members also believed that the younger faction irresponsibly wanted to overextend the resources of the church and to use improper fund-raising methods, such as church suppers, to shift the burden of church support from the church's members to the larger community. Thus, while the younger members believed the older to be unprogressive and dictatorial, the older believed the younger to be irresponsible and unprincipled.

The church fought out these differences in a series of clashes in 1955 and 1956. In the first clash, the Family Fellowship asked the Session for permission to raise funds for a new organ. Session hesitated, only agreed with what appeared to the younger people to be considerable reluctance, and specified that the Family Fellowship could not solicit support in any form from outside the congregation on the principle that Presbyterian churches must support themselves by the voluntary contributions of their own members. The Session went so far as to distribute to the congregation a pamphlet on 'the proper methods of church support.' Under these strictures and almost as an act of defiance, the Family Fellowship went ahead and bought the organ.

The younger members wanted to prove to the Session that they and the church could do more than the Session believed possible. Unfortunately, the whole matter of the organ erupted into an open misunderstanding in January 1956. The Family Fellowship sought Session's permission to hold a recital to dedicate the new organ. Session granted permission. But then the Family Fellowship advertised in the local papers that the recital would include a free-will offering. Session, by a three to one vote, withdrew approval of the recital until it received assurances that the recital would not include an offering. Both sides felt betrayed by the other.

Another series of clashes began in the Summer of 1955 when the Board of Deacons, dominated by the younger faction, went to the Session with a request to renovate the sanctuary. The Session initially approved their request and the letting of a contract for a painter. On the very next evening, July 4, after it made these decisions, the Session reversed itself and postponed all work on the sanctuary until it could call a congregational meeting. Evidently, concern for the possible reaction of the congregation to the renovation and for certain questions about the letting of the painting bid caused these second thoughts. The Deacons ignored the new decision and went ahead with the scheduled renovation. Session did not meet again until September, and, at its first meeting after these events, it voted three to one that the Deacons acted in a manner contrary to Presbyterian church law by ignoring a lawful order of Session. Eckerson, who had generally not taken sides, agreed with the Session. As usual, Elmer Brown found himself a minority of one in this and most other controversial votes taken during that time. On October 11, the two boards met jointly, and the Deacons agreed to submit all projects to the Session thereafter.

Within days of that meeting, a congregational meeting again split the church along new member-old member lines. At that meeting the Building Committee presented plans for a new Sunday School building. The older members held a majority that day and carried a motion to substitute other plans for remodeling the old Sunday School building. The issue of Sunday School facilities held greater stakes for both sides. The younger faction needed better facilities for their children. The older faction doubted that the church could undertake any serious building project.

Although both sides largely kept their thoughts to themselves and seldom discussed the church's problems with non-members, the tension in the church reached serious levels. The younger faction took the next action.

In accordance with what they perceived to be current PCUS practice, the younger faction began to press for a rotary elder plan by which the church would elect its elders for set terms of three years. In a congregational meeting held in November, Eckerson had to rule one of the younger members out of order for bringing up this

proposal in a meeting called for other purposes. By January 1956, the younger group gathered a significant number of signatures on a petition requesting that the Session call a congregational meeting to consider the rotary eldership plan. Leaders of the younger faction appeared at the February 14 meeting of Session with that petition. The older members caved in at that point. Within a week most of them, including three elders, left the church. Although only seven members left the church, those members held a significant number of offices and positions in the church. A March congregational meeting voted to go to the rotary eldership plan and elected James Cross and Raymond Bauer to join Elmer Brown on the Session.

If any one person was an innocent victim of these events, that person was John Eckerson. He was caught in a situation not of his own making and one that he could not calm. He finally had to give up, and in February 1956 at the height of the tensions, he announced to the Session that he intended to resign. Thus, even as the lay leadership suffered serious losses the church also lost its pastor, who preached his last sermon on March 25, 1956. Those who knew Eckerson remember a likeable, friendly young man who blamed himself unfairly for much of what happened.

Although traumatic and painful, the transfer of lay leadership from the representatives of the 'old' Laurel to those of the 'new' Laurel resulted in less change than one might expect. Those who replaced the old leadership in many ways shared their generally conservative vision of the church as an institution which provided moral training for children and a place for adults to find community. The younger group revolted only because it wanted a more vigorous program not because it wanted to alter radically the program itself. The next decade, in fact, saw no real changes in the types of activities in which the church engaged or in the mildly conservative theology it espoused.

Yet, an essential change did take place in the middle 1950s, and the split between older and younger members of the church accented and hastened that change. The Laurel Presbyterian Church took a long step away from its past as a Southern Presbyterian church. The influx of new people and the loss of the old Laurel leadership brought the congregation into the fold of 'main line,' national Protestantism where the distinction between 'northern' and 'southern' made increasingly less sense. Only after almost one century from its founding did the Laurel Presbyterian Church start to lose something of its border state identity.

In the wake of the organizational chaos which resulted from the 'Great Split,' the congregation began in the Spring and then Fall of 1956 to reorganize itself. That reorganization involved more than merely filling in the gaps left in the structure of the church by the departure of several key members. The new leaders, among whom Elder Elmer Brown had substantial influence, proceeded to act on their belief that the church could and should achieve more than it had under the old leaders. As a matter of faith in the future of the church, they decided to call a full-time pastor at a relatively high salary level. As a result of that decision, the congregation called the Rev. George Clayman as pastor. Clayman's church in North Carolina, however, refused to concur in his request to dissolve his pastoral relationship with them, and it took some time to overcome their objections. Clayman assumed his new duties in Laurel in December 1956. As the new year, 1957, dawned, the church stood on the threshold of the most remarkable period of growth in its history.

Members generally remember George Clayman with affection and gratitude as a man with a firm but gentle hand. He spoke to the values of the congregation in his commitment to Christian education, a viable youth program, improving the church's physical plant, and increasing the membership. The death of their daughter in 1960 further cemented the deep, sympathetic relationship of the congregation to Clayman and his family. In the first months of Clayman's ministry, the church reorganized its Sunday School, put together a calendar of events, produced a church directory, started a choir, resumed Sunday evening services, and established a Church Extension Committee to stimulate numerical growth.

Space proved to be a more difficult problem. At one of Clayman's first Session meetings, the Session discussed the church's need for more room and appointed a 'Property Procurement Committee' chaired by Elmer Brown. The membership generally assumed that the Fifth and Main property no longer served the needs of the

church and that the church needed to relocate. By November, the committee located a three acre piece of property on the edge of town, on Sandy Spring Road, and the congregation agreed to purchase the property for \$10,000. The next month the Session appointed two new committees, a Building Finance Committee and a Building Planning Committee.

The next four years were a whirl of activity that centered on the church's Christian education program, numerical growth, and a building program. The building program began with a new manse, built under the direction of a committee chaired by Mr. Fred Thomas. Even with the sale of the old manse, the church could not afford to contract out the construction of its new manse. Therefore, the men of the church did nearly all of the work on it themselves. They soon felt that this important experience gave the church, particularly the men, a new sense of purpose and a deeper sense of community. Furthermore, the church accomplished an identifiable, difficult project primarily out of its own resources. The congregation voted permission to build the new manse in July 1958, and the men completed it by October 1959. The Claymans moved into the house before it was completed, and Clayman devoted almost all of his energies for some months to its completion.

In the meantime, the church voted in October 1958 to accept the plans presented to it by the Building Planning Committee. By those plans, the church would construct a new building in two stages beginning with a Christian education/assembly hall unit followed by a sanctuary in stage two. Thus, the building that the church eventually erected very much embodied the historical experience of the church itself and symbolized not only the concern of the young parents of the middle 1950s to see their children trained by the church, but also the decades long struggle of the church to build a decent, permanent educational building. The small church of the 1920s could not afford a fully adequate facility, and it did the best it could do with the resources at hand.. But the unavoidable compromises it made, when it constructed its educational unit, led directly to the dissatisfaction of the 1950s and, ultimately, the decision to build a Christian education unit first.

After a hiatus of nearly a decade, the church started growing numerically again. At the end of 1956 it had 122 members, only two more than in 1948, but at the end of the 1958 calendar year it had a membership of 202. Financial giving and Sunday School enrollment rose in a similar fashion. Increased membership only added to the sense of crisis over space and forced the church to go to two, and eventually three, services a Sunday. In the Spring of 1959 the church had to send some of its older children's Sunday School classes over to the Armory on Fifth and Montgomery. The church had so many new faces that at the end of 1959 it started a coffee hour after worship so that people could get to know each other better. In four short years, then, the church went from a relatively small church where almost everybody knew everybody else personally to a church where coffee hours became necessary. Symbolic of the growth of the church, the Session in January 1960 appointed Dr. John Arneal, a retired Northern Presbyterian pastor from Baltimore living in Laurel, Minister of Visitation. For several years thereafter Dr. Arneal helped supply the pulpit, visited, and even moderated the Session on occasion.

During the years 1957 to 1959 the church engaged in three central activities: Christian education, property, and worship. In 1959, for example, the Session considered 107 items of business including 41 purely routine matters such as the reception and dismissal of members. Of the remaining 66 items, however, 23 concerned Christian education and youth work (34%), 18 property (27%), and ten worship (15%).

With the manse completed, the church took steps towards starting construction of its Christian education building. A congregational meeting held on December 13, 1959, approved a building fund drive to be held in February 1960, with a goal of \$80,000. It was an exciting time, but it could also be a tense time as tempers sometimes flared in meetings and differences on major and minor points had to be worked through. The plan for a new building hit something of a snag in that February drive. It collected less than half of its goal and had to be extended until June. Some months later, the church would also find that no local banks wanted to loan it money, and it finally had to go to a Catholic savings institution to get the financial help it needed. Nevertheless, by July 1960, the church authorized all of the necessary plans and actions necessary to proceed with construction of its new building. Groundbreaking took place on November 6, 1960, and for the next year the church directed much

of its attention to its building program. Major issues included financing the building, preparing to move into the new building, and selling the Fifth and Main property.

Ironically, that last item proved more difficult emotionally for some 'older' members of the church than they might have anticipated. These older members always accepted the necessity of leaving that old church building, but they had belonged to the church for up to fifteen years. They had a lot of memories invested in the old church building. Indeed, when the congregation met in July 1961 to consider a bid on the old property by its neighbor, the Methodist Church, the membership had to be reminded that expressions of personal regret were out of order. The Session gave final approval for that sale on October 15. All of the intense planning and preparation bore fruit in September 1961 when the congregation used its new facilities for the first time. It dedicated the building on Sunday, October 8, 1961, with a full delegation of denominational worthies and a large number of members present.

On one level, the congregation used its intensive building program as a platform upon which to rethink and expand its general program. The Every Member Canvass Committee, for example, established in late 1961 a special team to evaluate the physical plant and total program of the congregation. Several months earlier, in May 1961, the Women of the Church sponsored a film on the subject of church extension, and *The Presbyterian*, the church newsletter begun in 1960, observed, 'Since we are building a new church and have a growing community also, this film should be very inspiring to us in evangelizing Laurel.' Sunday School attendance, as another example, doubled in the first month after the church moved to its new facilities.

On a deeper level, nevertheless, the church's range of activities in the early 1960s demonstrated how little the church had actually changed in spite of its physical removal from Fifth and Main to Sandy Spring Road. Returning to a major theme of earlier chapters, the role of women remained essentially the same as at the turn of the century. The Women of the Church, as the women's organization was now called, continued a relatively high level of activity that included mission and Bible studies, fund raising activities, visitation, and contributions to the financial needs of the church. Outside of their own organizations, the women played a particularly large role in Christian education where they supplied most of the teachers for Sunday School and virtually all of the staff for the Vacation Bible School.

The fact that by 1964 the proportion of women in the church had dropped to 54 per cent only indicated that their participation dominated the life of the church less than twenty or thirty years earlier. They still sat on no boards of the church. They influenced church policy and decisions only through men, and the church's official records continued to ignore them. Women played, at best, only a marginally larger role than before and remained second class citizens in the life of the church. The list of potential nominees for church office presented to the Session in September 1965 symbolized the limits of their voice and influence. Only two women appeared on the list of names. At the same time, the presence of large numbers of women in Christian education and the role of the Women of the Church as fund raisers and providers of meals for church functions suggests that in terms of hours of time spent in participation in the church's life women contributed substantially more than 54 per cent of the hours invested. One senses here the lingering presence of the old nineteenth century idea that women's 'nature' made them more fit than men for carrying out religious activities.

Nor did the relationship of the church to the larger Laurel community change in any significant way even though church membership topped 350. In 1964, a survey of announcements and news items in *The Presbyterian* for the years 1960 to 1962 discloses a consistent pattern which emphasized social activities within the community of the congregation. The Youth Group, the Women of the Church, the Men of the Church, the Family Fellowship, and the Come-Double Club encompassed much of the church's activities; and all of them conducted a wide range of largely social activities such as suppers, picnics, square dances, trips, parties, and programs not always of a distinctly religious nature. The world outside of the church intruded into its life only occasionally, such as in November 1963 when the church held a memorial communion service for the late President John F. Kennedy or when it opposed the plans of a local bowling alley to open a cocktail lounge.

Use of the new building also reflected the congregation's distance from the larger Laurel community. While the new building did afford the church opportunities, such as hosting a meeting of presbytery in May 1962 for the first time in many years, the Session tended to discourage use of the building by community groups other than the church-sponsored scout troop. When the new building attracted several requests for use, most were turned down. Thus, while the church, in the years 1961 to 1964, attracted many new members, it otherwise showed little interest in or connection to the Laurel community.

In addition to its heavy emphasis on social activities, the church continued to give Christian education a high priority, and the Christian Education Committee of the Session coordinated the largest, most active program of the congregation. The church also conducted an active music program. In the single month of April 1962, for example, the Senior Choir joined the choir of the Liberty Grove Methodist Church, Burtonsville, for a concert held at that church. The program featured Clayman, an accomplished vocalist, as a soloist. The Junior Choir participated in and hosted the Joint Youth Choir Festival, and it also joined with the Youth Choir to present a Cantata.

At various times, however, the Session and pastor had to contend with tensions concerning music leadership, particularly concerning the position of choir director for the Senior Choir. Those tensions led, eventually, to the Session adopting the policy of not hiring members of the church for paid positions, such as choir director. Yet, serious as were such tensions at the time they were felt, they did not reflect larger historical trends.

In sum, the congregation continued to have a strangely intimate yet distant relationship with its own past. On the one hand, the patterns of its activities and the relatively conservative attitudes expressed by its leadership simply reflected long-standing themes in the life of the church. It continued to behave much as it had since at least the 1880s. On the other hand, as the decades passed it increasingly lost touch with the actual events as well as the meaning of its own past. The death of Robert H. Sadler (1875-1963), church treasurer for thirty years and church officer for some sixty years, for example, symbolized the church's loss of memory. The deaths of Alice Wilson, a member since 1902, in 1967 and of Lucy Voris, a member since 1921, the next year further contributed to the church's loss of institutional memory. Just as the death of William Snowden in 1902 cut off the turn of the century Laurel Church from the church of 1860, so the deaths of these long-time members severed the church of the 1960s from the church of the early twentieth century. The loss of those other long-time members during the controversies of the middle fifties only made the passing of the older generation in the 1960s all the more critical historically.

The early 1960s represented a lull before the storm. As in the early 1940s when great demographic changes forced a period of tension on the church, so in the early sixties a period of great social changes loomed on the horizon. Tension would follow. The Session heard the first not so distant rumblings of events over the horizon in its meetings in the last half of 1964. In its June, August, and November meetings, the Session received reports on racial segregation in Southern Presbyterian churches, the General Assembly's views 'pertaining to the racial revolution of the present day,' and inter-racial activities in the Washington area. Not since the ill-fated 'colored' Sunday School the church conducted from 1905 to 1907 had the issue of race relations intruded into the deliberations of Session.

Clayman notified the Session at its regular meeting in December 1965, of his desire to dissolve his relationship with the church so that he could work with the Church Extension Committee of Potomac Presbytery in starting a new church in West Springfield, Virginia. Not unexpectedly, the Session and the congregation expressed sincere regret at his decision. In eight years under his pastoral leadership, the church grew from a small church of 122 members to a congregation of 352 members and accomplished the enormous task of relocating to a new building and constructing a new manse. His leadership not only helped the church recover from the bruising battle over lay control of the church in the middle 1950s but also to create a larger, more complex and diverse church program. Clayman and the congregation felt a deep bond of personal affection. Only Nicols served the church as pastor for a period of time longer than Clayman. An article in the

January 1965 issue of *The Presbyter* written at the time the Claymans left concluded, 'Pastoral relationships can be dissolved, but not relations of friendship; and so we give to every member of the Clayman family our love, our appreciation, and our good wishes.' Although not apparent at the time, January 24, 1965, the effective date of Clayman's resignation, marked the passing of an era.

Chapter VI: Reacting

For its next pastor the church turned to an experienced man, who had most recently pastored a large church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Rev. Stuart A. Ritchie represented a 'new breed' of Southern Presbyterian clergyman, men who spoke out against racism and wanted the church to champion social justice. Looking back twenty years later on the years he spent at the Laurel Presbyterian Church, Ritchie remembered in sharp, pointed phrases that:

The sixties, particularly the late sixties, were times of change-great change. Institutions were challenged and toppled-or at least exposed for their weaknesses. The age when we venerated ideas and idols had ended. The world and all things in it stood upon feet of clay. We looked-not for champions, but for corruption. We challenged, we questioned, we experimented. It was as if we had no past upon which to build. Thus, we began to build new ways. We did not know what final form they would take. We did not even know where these ways might lead us. 'The past is dead! Long live the present!'

Ritchie responded to the ferment of the sixties with a distinctive ministry, which sought to change fundamentally the church's relationship to the Laurel community. He opened the doors of the church to social turmoil and asked it to respond with creativity, innovation, and relevance to that turmoil. When Potomac Presbytery installed Ritchie on July 11, 1965, the church entered the most unsettled period in its history, a period which lasted some fifteen years.

A headline in the September 1965, issue of *The Presbyterian* stands out among the early signs of change. It read, 'Divorce - Sex - Drinking' and announced the topics of Ritchie's sermons for the Fall. In the months that followed, Betty Ritchie started an issues-oriented class for post-high school youth. The church started a class on loneliness. The Session appointed a committee to study community problems. Alcoholics Anonymous began using the church buildings for meetings. In September, the church elected a Church Planning Council, consisting of five members and chaired by William Snyder, to plan for the construction of a sanctuary. By January 1966, the council's plans progressed far enough for it to hire an architect. Most startling of all, perhaps, a congregational meeting in October 1965 voted to expand the Session from six to nine elders and elected Isobel MacKenzie, a native of Scotland and already an ordained elder (in Scotland), to hold a one year term on the expanded Session. The church called her its first 'lady elder.' Potomac Presbytery thereafter appointed her first alternate commissioner to the next General Assembly.

The new year, 1966, thus, opened on a positive note, and church records indicate that the new climate of issues, questions, and challenge spread throughout the church as the year advanced. The Session's Christian Action Committee, tried to live up to its name by contacting other churches in Laurel on the possibilities of joint social ministries. It sponsored a seminar on fair housing. The older youth, meanwhile, discussed issues of sexual morality and drug addiction, and the church helped sponsor one young person's work with poor children in Washington. The church conducted a drama workshop and involved itself in a coffee house ministry in Laurel.

Increased awareness of social issues did not, however, infringe upon the other realms of church activity. The church continued to devote a considerable amount of time to its Christian education program. Social activities, if anything, increased, and the Family Fellowship remained strong and active. The church sponsored a softball team and a winning bowling team. The Men of the Church and the Women of the Church still met, and the women had five active circles. The church's music program also remained strong, as indicated at the end of the year when the Senior Choir joined with the choirs of other churches in a Choir Festival held at the First Methodist Church, Hyattsville, under Dale Krider, a former member of the Laurel Church. LPC, in short,

achieved a level of activity higher than it had ever achieved in its past. The Planning Council ran into one of the few snags of the year. It had to suspend any decisions on the new sanctuary until the State Roads Commission decided whether its plans for an access road for interstate 95 would infringe on the church's property.

In October 1966, the church nominated six women to the offices of elder and deacon and then elected Katherine Birdsong to a two year term as elder. 'Kitty' Birdsong was the first woman ordained by LPC to the office of elder. She had been active in the church for years particularly in the leadership of the Vacation Bible School and the Women of the Church. She also served on the pastoral nominating committee which called Ritchie. Her election represented a larger trend. In January 1966, the Session had appointed or approved members of nine committees, a total of forty committee members. That total included seventeen women.

A sense of optimism pervaded the congregation in 1966, and a report prepared for the Church Planning Council reflected that optimism. Drawing upon the congregation's recent rate of growth and projections of population growth in the Laurel area, that report estimated that LPC would grow to a membership of 980 in 1986 and 1,770 by the year 2000. A revised estimate made in another report in 1969 still showed the church growing to a membership of 757 by 1977.

The church's records for 1967 further reflected this sense of optimism. The church had to go to two Sunday morning worship services. It also hit a statistical peak when it added 95 new members and reached a total membership of 440. Giving grew by nearly twenty percent during the year, and even the Sunday School, which had declined significantly in enrollment the year before, grew substantially in size. The diverse, innovative program of the previous year continued to expand. Ritchie himself developed community contacts and became a recognized leader in programs for social change in the community. The church began to talk about the need for a second pastor.

The church also continued to open its inner councils to new voices. At the end of 1967, It elected Kathryn Brown to the office of deacon, the first women so elected in the church's history. The church also elected a youth to the Church Planning Council. The call for a more inclusive American society in the late fifties and sixties, then, spilled over into the church and led to the first steps towards a more inclusive Laurel Presbyterian Church.

Ritchie's leadership carried the congregation into yet another area of innovation when the church, in cooperation with the First United Methodist Church, held its first 'Mod Worship' in November 1967. The Session approved the continuation of these services using contemporary expressions of worship. The church held them once a month on Sunday afternoons (later Sunday evenings), and under the leadership of Floyd Werle, a creative professional musician with the Air Force band, these services explored different mediums of expression for worship.

The mod worship services also symbolized the strengths and weaknesses of the church's ostensible break with its own past. Some, in fact, broke with the past more than others. While some members found the mod worship format stimulating, others called the services 'weird,' and a few, evidently, considered them disrespectful of God. Still others simply ignored the services entirely. Innovation, experimentation, and a more liberal approach resulted in excitement, ambivalence, resistance, and even animosity.

At the start of 1967, Elmer Brown stepped down from his position as Clerk of Session, after more than a decade in that position. Brown had become the elder statesman of the congregation, a man whose voice was trusted. Raised in a Northern Presbyterian church in Tennessee, he embodied something of the border state and Southern tradition of the old Laurel Church, and of the more cosmopolitan, national attitude which entered the church beginning in the late forties and fifties. By the end of 1967, Ray Bauer, another long-time member and influential voice, gave up his position as church treasurer which he had held for seventeen years.

In 1968, the church reached an almost feverish pitch of creative ideas, of outside speakers, of innovative programs, and of opportunities for involvement. At the center with Ritchie, stood a corps of people who shared with him his concerns and vision. Chief among that group was Elder John Guy, chairman of the Session's Committee on Commitment. Under Guy's leadership, that committee planned a film festival, a second money management clinic, a vocational guidance program, and a couples in crisis program. In addition, the Women of the Church began to assist Project Outreach, a program of the Episcopalian women, aimed at providing services to lower income families in Laurel. Ritchie involved others in a program of interracial understanding and involvement which brought some Presbyterians into contact with black poverty in Laurel. Members of the church helped plan interracial events and the church itself engaged in activities with the local black Methodist Church. At the same time, more and more community groups used the Presbyterian Church building.

The Poor People's March on Washington in the Spring of 1968 brought a number of issues together, with unhappy results for the church. In his role as a civil rights leader in the community, Ritchie very naturally took part in local planning for that mammoth protest event. At the last minute, he found himself in the position of having to ask the Session to house some marchers in the church building. Although most of the elders agreed, if reluctantly, Ritchie's request resulted in conflict with an element in the church. Whether or not that element represented the thinking of others, church statistics for 1968 indicate that the church lost something of its momentum of 1967. Membership in 1968 dropped by five after its huge increase in 1967. Giving, especially in the first half of 1968, did not match pledges and the church had to tighten its belt for a period. Benevolence giving grew by much less during the year than it had for several years previously. The Sunday School's total enrollment dropped by a third.

Those statistics did not represent a rejection of Ritchie personally. They did represent, instead, an increasingly apparent ambivalence about his program. Most of the people liked Ritchie and even considered him charismatic, although his 'can do' style and emphasis on 'secular' concerns also put some people off. People in the church, generally, considered him an excellent preacher, and they felt that his preaching attracted newcomers. Those newcomers appreciated him because he was sensitive to their need for help in finding their way into a new community. Some members of the church, however, criticized him for 'not preaching from the Bible,' and a few found Ritchie's liberal style and program so objectionable that they left the church entirely. A larger group felt drawn to his program, excited by it. For them Christianity took on a new meaning. The majority, however, simply did not catch the vision that Ritchie sought to communicate.

Involvement and controversy took its toll on Ritchie himself. He had experienced a similar pattern of ambivalence and resistance before, and he increasingly adopted the position of some other liberal churchmen that the acid of social irrelevance would soon destroy the organized church. In those stirring, frightening years of the late sixties, Stuart Ritchie felt his faith drawing him away from the pastoral ministry and the institutional church.

The year 1968 closed with an event that clearly demonstrated the church's growing uncertainty about its own future. In November, the Planning Council presented its plans for a sanctuary to the congregation and members of the church, as they examined the council's recommendations, raised a number of issues. Some questioned the congregation's ability to pay for a new sanctuary. Others found flaws, major and minor, in the plans themselves. The meeting finally voted to delay approval of the plans for six months and returned the plans to the council for further study. Behind the doubts raised in the meeting itself, evidently, lay two other sets of feelings. On the one hand, the substance of Ritchie's preaching and concerns influenced some and caused them to doubt the wisdom of the church's 'wasting' money on itself by building a sanctuary. Some more traditional members, on the other hand, had little enthusiasm for a sanctuary in the round, the style called for in the plans. While the congregational meeting did not reject the plans or the need for a sanctuary outright, the vote to wait six months effectively terminated the church's building plans. A detailed study issued by the church Finance Committee the next year, in September 1969, counseled, in effect, that the church should postpone plans for a new sanctuary for at least five years.

Only in retrospect can it be seen that, by the early months of 1969, the church had already passed a peak in its history even though the church continued to exhibit a high level of activity. During those months, the Session approved a rearrangement of the sanctuary, Potomac Presbytery elected Elder John Guy to represent it at the General Assembly, and the Division of Family Life of the Southern Presbyterian Church selected the Laurel Church as one of three to test a special course on human sexuality. The congregation's brief excursion into the realm of relatively intense engagement with the world, however, ended abruptly at the end of April when Ritchie announced his resignation, effective May 31, 1969.

The pastoral nominating committee formed to find a new pastor moved quickly to fill the leadership gap left by Ritchie. In July 1969 it reported back to the church that it had found a suitable successor, the Rev. Dr. Albert G. Harris, a resident of Georgia who had only recently returned from several years service as a missionary in Brazil. The congregation accepted Harris, and presbytery installed him in September.

A brief controversy marred the process. The Harris family agreed to come to Laurel only if it did not have to live in the manse. The manse's isolation on the edge of town reminded them of the isolation they had experienced living in a missionary compound. They also asked for a housing allowance. While the congregation readily acceded to these requests, some members felt disappointed that the Harrises did not live in the manse, especially because it was built by the men of the church. Others felt that having to pay a housing allowance when the church had a manse available put an unnecessary burden on the church. These irritations and the Harrises' awareness of them hinted at a pattern that emerged more clearly in the ensuing years.

In spite of the growth and progress of the previous two pastorates, Harris came to the Laurel Church at an awkward time in its history. Once again growth split the church into older, long-time members, who tended to be traditionalists, and younger, newer members, who tended to favor change. Ritchie had attracted a following of definitely more liberal individuals, some of whom felt uncomfortable with traditional church structures. Ritchie and the church held the potential tensions between traditional and liberal elements of the church in check partly by the force of Ritchie's own personality and partly by the maturity of some older leaders who did not let changes drive them away and who, in a few cases, responded positively to those changes. As he took up his work in the Fall of 1969, then, Harris faced a potential breakdown in the balance achieved under Clayman and Ritchie.

The condition of the church's lay leadership aggravated the situation Harris and the church faced. Many of those attracted by Ritchie, including key leaders, simply could not accept any successor, and they soon began to leave. Older members, on the other hand, had already ceased to exercise as much leadership as they had under Clayman. Patterns beyond the control of Harris, then, conspired to weaken the church's structure of lay leadership, and Harris himself later remembered feeling with particular force the loss of Elder Elmer Brown, a strong spiritual leader and a moderating influence, when he moved away from Laurel in November 1970.

Demographic trends in the Laurel area further complicated the church's prospects. The rapid growth of the area drew a significant proportion of younger families to it. The church, as a result, contained a large number of younger couples just beginning to establish themselves professionally and just starting their families. They could not afford, they felt, to give relatively large financial amounts to the church. They also could not contribute to a mature, stable lay leadership. These same demographic trends enticed the United Presbyterian Church USA to establish, in 1966, its own congregation, Oaklands Presbyterian Church, in the area. LPC now had to compete for Presbyterians.

The political and social climate abroad in the nation only added to the potential problems the church faced in late 1969. Racial unrest continued to pull at the social fabric of the nation. Growing civil resistance to the Vietnam War added to the sense of social crisis, and Americans felt more and more alienated from each other and from their leaders. Residents of suburban Washington, many of them employees of the Federal Government, felt these national tensions with a particular force.

Throughout the Fall of 1969 and Spring of 1970, the church experienced a series of troubling trends, which further contributed to a sense of decline. The congregation sponsored little in the way of youth activities. It had trouble finding people willing to serve as officers. Attendance at social and educational events dropped off significantly. Church records, over all, show that the church refocused much more of its attention on its own internal concerns and needs. The trend which most disturbed the Session, the deacons, and others was the drop in church giving.

These problems, on the one hand, reflected difficulties, mentioned above, over which the church had little control. But, they also arose out of a deteriorating relationship between Harris and some members of the church. LPC received, early in 1970, an inheritance bequest of \$11,850. The gift actually created the difficult issue of how to use it. Harris participated in the tug of wills, and the result was hard feelings on the part of some key members.

Only in two areas, Sunday School and contemporary worship, did the church continue to prosper. In Sunday School, attendance grew by an impressive 65 per cent from 115 per Sunday in October 1969 to 190 per Sunday in October 1970. An expanded adult Sunday School program provided the key to this growth. The 'Mod Worship' program also continued to present creative contemporary worship experiences. Otherwise, the most creative program established by Harris took place entirely outside of formal church structures. The Harrises led a succession of informal small groups composed primarily of young church leaders. The Harrises sought to create within these groups the closeness of a family, and for a number of participants the groups resulted in a deep sense of fellowship. They provided spiritual and personal growth.

Those same informal groups, however, also resulted in ambivalent feelings within the church. Since the groups were by invitation only, some who did not receive invitations resented being left out. Some participants felt that the groups, at times, delved too deeply into feelings and emotions. In later years, members, as well as Harris himself, remembered that the Harrises tried to get too close to members of the church. Harris' desire to create close family feelings within the church had unintended results: it created an atmosphere of acceptance which many members interpreted as moral laxity. It also did not take into account the fact that family ties can, in their very closeness, create tension and unhappiness. In short, these and later small group programs led to deep, rich sharing experiences for some and greater disaffection for others.

In spite of the strengths of certain elements in the church's program, the financial situation of the church continued to decline at an alarming rate. By the end of 1970, actual giving fell short of pledges by well over \$4,000, and the church would have gone into debt had it not dipped into reserve funds. From early 1971, then, the Session placed heavy emphasis on church visitation plans as it sought to reach out to both inactive members and potential new members. Trends in giving and participation forced Harris, the Session, and the entire church to look even more inward and community involvement largely died away.

While the church became more self-absorbed in 1970 and 1971, the Women of the Church seemed less influenced by events and trends than other facets of the church's program. If anything, the WOC gave more to community programs and missions than before, and national women's organizations such as Church Women United kept current issues alive among the women. In February 1971, the WOC numbered 66 members, roughly one-third of the total number of women in the church. It continued to function as something of a church within a church, a place for women to take the full leadership role they did not have in the life of the total church.

Under other circumstances, December 1971 might have been a happy time for the church because in that month it burned its mortgage, first taken out in 1958. The congregation, instead, found itself rapidly slipping into a depressed and tense state. A growing number of members and officers felt, rightly or wrongly, that they could not get along with their pastor. While some felt dissatisfaction with worship and others with the quality of administration, personality clashes between Harris and individual members caused most of the unrest in the church. During the course of the year, three deacons resigned, and then in December 1971 three elders resigned.

A number of members expressed their feelings by engaging in gossip, which added to the atmosphere of disaffection and polarization.

The tensions that spread throughout the life of the church defy simple analysis because they had to do with personalities and patterns of events which records and documents cannot fully capture. Some members found Harris too much of the ebullient Southerner, while Harris felt alienated from the more reserved nature of life in suburban Washington. In the years before 1972, the one factor that may have hurt Harris' relationship with the church more than anything else was the widespread perception among church members that he lacked tact. In some cases, people came out of meetings so hurt and angry that they never returned to the church. The year 1972, then, opened with the church and its pastor feeling increasingly beleaguered. Once again, the Fall stewardship campaign had failed to produce an acceptable budget, and the Session and the Board of Deacons spent hours pasting together a budget on which the church could operate.

The resignation of the three elders in December did open one unexpected door for the women of the congregation. In October 1971, the church elected Judy Young as an elder, the first woman elected to a full term as an elder, and, then, in December it also elected Fern Nicholas as an elder. Thus, January 1972, marked the first time in the Laurel Church's history that more than one woman sat on the Session. Later in the year, the Women of the Church celebrated another happy event when they elected Edith Bayer and Flo Cross to life memberships.

January 1, 1972, marked an important change for the church in another way. On that date Potomac Presbytery united with Washington City Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. to form the National Capital Union Presbytery. The Laurel Church, along with all of the churches in this new presbytery, now belonged to both denominations. For the 'Presbyterian Church at Laurel ' this event meant that the church returned to membership in the denomination which had founded it and from which it had withdrawn just over a century previously.

Other, less happy, trends also emerged during 1972. First of all, the church introduced programs in sex education into the adult Sunday School and as a special evening course. Given the climate of opinion in the congregation, these programs inevitably gave some members more reasons for dissatisfaction. Secondly, Jean Coleman, previously a nominal member of the church, experienced a deep personal conversion to fundamentalism, and in September 1972, she began teaching a class on 'The Presence of God' in Sunday School. Coleman would soon put herself at the center of yet another controversy.

The congregation's membership continued to express its displeasure with Harris in early 1973 by restricting their financial giving. The budget for 1973 dropped below \$50,000 to a level just above that of the 1966 budget. In the meantime, attendance at worship continued to dwindle, and members continued to drop away. Matters reached such a state that the Session formed a 'Reconciliation Task Force' to try to open lines of communication with those inactive members who had been active until recently.

In late March 1973, the church's officers participated in a retreat led by a member of the presbytery's staff, and at that meeting the participants engaged in an intense airing of the issues, which so concerned so many members. Many of the feelings, which people had expressed only haphazardly if at all, broke to the surface. Out of the maze of particular concerns about preaching, worship, and administration, came one clear message: the majority of the members wanted Harris to change the ways in which he dealt with them.

The March meeting came too late. Harris tried to respond to some of the criticisms leveled against him by attending a course in clinical counseling, by attending a seminar on church administration, by setting up a sermon feed-back and preparation group, and by returning to a more traditional format for worship. None of these attempts to deal with the crisis facing his ministry could repair his relationship with the majority of the congregation. Too much had already transpired for Harris to win back the trust of the majority of the church, and he became prey for every dissatisfaction. The conservative element identified him with contemporary

worship, moving the arrangement of the sanctuary around, and 'liberal' programs such as therapy and sex education groups. The liberals, on the other hand, felt that Harris did not go far enough in seeking to make the church innovative and relevant.

Tension reached a peak in June 1973, when the Session and Harris held a lengthy discussion concerning their relationship. The Session concluded its deliberations with a conditional vote of confidence in which the majority voted its 'complete support for Dr. Harris pending [the] outcome of the November canvass.' If giving increased, in other words, and the congregation showed some signs of coming out of its depressed condition, the Session would then support Harris.

Other events contributed to a sense of decline and disarray, including, most especially, a theological controversy. In her Sunday School class, Jean Coleman began teaching dispensationalism, an ultra-fundamentalist doctrine, as accepted Presbyterian doctrine. Among other doctrines, dispensationalism teaches that the so-called 'main line' churches have strayed from Christ's teachings and, therefore, cannot be trusted. Harris felt and said that Coleman's teaching was divisive and that she should not teach dispensationalism as Presbyterian doctrine, which it is not.

Coleman resigned as a Sunday School teacher, her husband resigned as a deacon, they left the church, and, eventually, they established a church of their own. Harris, meanwhile, stated his views at a special meeting of the Session. The Session supported him, and its minutes for June 19, 1973, state that, 'The Session holds that any subject dealing with some aspect of Christian life may be taught, but that no viewpoint or interpretation may be advocated as the one true and divine word.' The Session held another special meeting at the end of June with members of a prayer group Coleman had led to discuss its actions.

The deep feelings in the church in 1973 tended to obscure the positive, creative accomplishments of the congregation in that year. The adult education program, particularly in Sunday School, continued to provide a variety of courses, often of a high quality. The church held a number of unusual special events including, for example, hosting a reporter who had covered President Nixon's historic trip to China. During the summer, the Laurel Presbyterian Church and St. Mark's Methodist Church, a black congregation, sponsored a joint evening vacation Bible school. Over 100 attended the Women of the Church's May mother-daughter banquet. Nevertheless, the church's negative atmosphere kept it from enjoying these accomplishments and otherwise dominated nearly everything that happened. In November 1973, for example, the Session considered purchasing an additional two acres of land adjoining the church's property. At a meeting of the Session, presbytery representatives stated bluntly that the congregation simply could not consider such a step until after it repaired its relationship with its pastor. The Session agreed.

On December 3, 1973, The Rev. Ed White, of the presbytery, moderated an open meeting of Session attended by a large number of members. Some forty individuals made statements to the Session concerning the state of the church and its relationship with Harris. The Session heard read an additional fourteen statements sent by people who did not attend the meeting. Having heard these statements, the Session went into a closed meeting. After further discussion, the Session entertained a motion to recommend that the church retain Harris with full confidence. That motion lost by a vote of six to three. Harris and the Session then agreed that Harris should seek another call, and the Session stated that in the meantime it would work with him for the common good of the church. The Session, in short, held to its vote earlier in the year that its confidence in Harris depended upon the financial condition of the church at the end of the year. Church statistics for 1973, compared to those for 1972, showed a 19 per cent drop in total income, an 18 per cent drop in number of financial pledges, and a 17 per cent drop in the total amount pledged

Unfortunately, the vote of the Session and its agreement did not resolve the tense situation existing within the church. First of all, Harris felt that he could not simply quit or take the first job which came along. He owed it to his family and his vocation to seek a decent call, and finding such a call would take some time. Secondly, in the early months of 1974 a group of Harris supporters coalesced around a petition presented to the

Session in April. Signed by 57 members and two regular attenders, the petition called upon the Session to rescind its vote of December. The petition blamed the decline in church giving and attendance in the Laurel Church on national trends. It pointed out that the Session itself approved those programs which later caused dissatisfaction. It observed that many of the 'dissidents' had already left the church so that anti-Harris people would play little part in the future of the church, even if Harris left. It charged that the anti-Harris faction ignored the fact that Harris had done all that the Session asked in making changes. The petition also stated that the divisions in the church went deeper than differences over Harris, that if Harris left the church would have trouble finding a replacement, and that without a pastor the church would find itself in an even worse condition.

This petition demonstrated that, in the midst of tension, the makeup of the church had shifted. As members either left entirely or declined to take an active part in the church, supporters of Harris, many of whom joined the church during his ministry, came to the fore. For the first time since the majority of the Session so inexplicably sought to oust Anderson fifty years earlier, the church split into identifiable factions over its pastor. The emergence of a Harris faction came too late, however, to prevent his leaving or change the general climate of mistrust in the church. Indeed, the presence of factions added to the tension and further fueled hard feelings. The situation of the church was beyond reason and negotiation. In any event, when the Session convened in May to consider the petition, a motion to withdraw its vote of no-confidence in Harris lost by the identical vote of six to three. One anti-Harris elder then resigned from the Session, and, in early June, three others followed his example.

Even as the church split into factions, some members still tried to establish new programs in it. In March 1974, some forty members organized four fellowship groups, called Christian Sharing Groups, which sought to provide mutual support for the members of each group and to deepen their Christian experience in particular facets of the Christian life. A number of members also took part in a psychodrama class. And, in spite of the tensions in the church, the Family Fellowship managed to attract 120 people to its March dinner. On the other hand, the Women of the Church had only three active circles in the Spring of 1974, a loss of two from five years earlier.

In September 1974, the reconstituted Session heard read letters from four couples in the church. Those letters collectively reflected a sense of futility and a deep feeling that LPC had lost its sense of community love and fellowship. One couple withdrew from the church entirely, while the other three withdrew their financial pledges. Then, rather suddenly, Harris ended the immediate crisis over his pastoral leadership when, on October 13, he asked the Session to call a congregational meeting to accept his resignation as of October 31, 1974, so that he could accept a call to be an associate pastor in a church in Georgia.

More than a decade later, the Laurel Church had yet to come to grips with the meaning of this difficult period in its history. The events of the period emphasized once again how much the church depended upon its pastors and how unsettling controversy with and about a pastor was to the church. The tension and division of the Harris ministry also revealed that the church had to collectively like the personality of its pastor. If it did not, then it would not respond to whatever particular skills a pastor might bring to the church. In a vague but potent way, the church expected its pastor to typify its cultural definition of good manners and pleasant demeanor. If events of the early seventies are any evidence, the church viewed its pastor not simply as a person doing a job but, rather, as a living symbol of what they expected of and wanted from a satisfying interpersonal relationship.

The period 1969 to 1974 gave further credibility to the impression that national events and moods also play a subliminal yet consequential part in the history of the Laurel Presbyterian Church. Pastors such as Bird, Clayman, Ritchie, and even Nicols in the nineteenth century embodied in their programs and their styles of ministry important aspects of the eras in which they lived. In that light, national events in the early seventies contributed to the difficulties Harris and the Laurel Church experienced in their relationship with each other. From 1972 onwards, the Watergate Scandal infected the nation with a sense of mistrust in leadership as more and more Americans decided that President Nixon had, in fact, betrayed them in a manner that went beyond

partisan politics. As the membership of the Laurel Church wrestled with its own leadership problem, its members read daily about Watergate and the 'cancer in the presidency.' In the days before December 5, 1973, when the Session first voted its lack of confidence in Harris, the national headlines carried stories telling Americans that a bipartisan majority of the House Judiciary Committee was ready to recommend impeachment of the President. Watergate dominated the news until Richard Nixon finally resigned the presidency in August 1974, only two months before Harris also resigned. While the parallels between Watergate and Harris' ministry should not be pushed too far and local events did not simply slavishly repeat national ones, Watergate must have reinforced the sense of mistrust alive in the congregation.

With the resignation of Harris, the presbytery moved to repair the damage of the past. It did not allow the church to form a pastoral nominating committee, and through the Executive Presbyter, the Rev. Ed White, it recommended that the church accept the Rev. Tom Murphy as its interim pastor. The Session accepted that recommendation, and Murphy began his part-time ministry at the Laurel Church in December 1974. The church, at first, felt some uncertainty about Murphy because of his liberal image and his 'hippie' associations, developed during his previous street ministry; but Murphy's personality and his experience working with groups in conflict quickly overcame the initial reservations of most. Murphy spoke the words of acceptance and healing which the church needed desperately to hear.

Over the next ten months, the church engaged in a number of traditional social events which emphasized simple fellowship. At the same time, the Session and the Deaconate formulated new church policies and put the machinery of the church back into working order. The church continued to hold contemporary worship services and to conduct a fairly large adult Sunday School program, but these activities lost much of the liberal identity they had during the Ritchie-Harris years. It appeared, in fact, that the church might have dropped social action or involvement entirely had it not been for Murphy's deep personal commitment to address issues of human suffering. Under his leadership, the church for the first time heard a great deal about hunger, held meetings on human hunger, and established a Hunger Committee. In May 1975, that committee sponsored a 24 hour fast period which included a variety of activities at the church building.

The initial period of healing culminated in presbytery's decision in September 1975, to allow the Laurel Church to set up a pastoral nominating committee and initiate the process of finding a new pastor. The church, meanwhile, continued to evaluate various aspects of its program and make changes in its programs and policies. In some ways, the church began to exhibit a drift not only away from a liberal agenda but also towards a strongly conservative agenda. In February 1975, the Session had allowed one member to hold a seminar on baptism by the Holy Spirit, which included speaking in tongues, at the church building. By the Fall of 1975, the adult Sunday School classes reflected more traditionalist interests. The decision taken in May 1976, to introduce the David C. Cook Sunday School Curriculum, identifiably conservative in content, into the church further demonstrated the conservative shift. The September 1976 *Presbyter* contained a full page description of conservative and fundamentalist Bible study and fellowship groups in Laurel in response to the feeling of some members that they wanted more Christian fellowship and Bible study than the church offered.

A quiet tug of wills developed, meanwhile, between Murphy and some elements in the church. In March 1976, for example, Murphy rearranged the sanctuary into a three-sided arrangement. In that month's *Presbyter*, Murphy felt constrained to note that some would not like the new arrangement and that, 'There is an unfortunate pattern at LPC, for those who don't like something to grumble about it to each other, but not to talk to me about it.' In this and other such events, the congregation demonstrated its need not to go on experimenting, and it also demonstrated that its level of trust in pastoral leadership remained fragile. Murphy had the wisdom not to push some of his more experimental ideas, such as one-on-one shared confessions during worship.

Throughout 1976, the Pastoral Nominating Committee carried out the process of finding a new pastor. In January, it completed a 'Church Profile Study' which reflected in a balanced manner the state of the church at that time. Much of that study described a rather typical medium-sized Presbyterian Church with a full range of activities including a particularly good choir. Two major themes emerge from the study, First of all, it observes

that the church was, as it had always been, a markedly friendly church, and its distinctly friendly personality attracted new members. Secondly, however, the life of the church had not yet at that time returned to normal. A large number of divorces upset the church. Disaffected members continued to demonstrate apathy and to express alienation from the church. For all of this, the church deeply appreciated the role Murphy played in healing some of the wounds of the past. Many wanted him to become pastor, and his departure in January 1977 was greeted with a generally shared sense of loss and sadness.

As the months of 1976 passed, the church lived in a time between a hard past and an unknown future. Murphy detected in the members of the church a reluctance to get too involved or invest too much in the church. They were waiting to evaluate the next pastor.

Chapter VII: Concluding

At the time of this writing, some nine years have passed since John Sonnenday assumed his pastoral duties in Laurel in February 1977. These nine years are still too close to the present to allow more than a brief resume of their main points. A fuller historical evaluation of them will have to wait for the passage of time.

For nearly six of those years Sonnenday served the church in a quietly difficult pastorate that improved with the passing of the years. At one level, the church continued to do most of the things it had always done, but underneath its activities and worship lay a number of problems, which stemmed chiefly from the difficult Harris years. As Sonnenday himself and other members remember it, much of the church's membership seemed to have lost direction and purpose while a small group of conservative members, including some ultra-fundamentalists, appeared bent upon leading the church towards a more evangelical station. Although a minority in the congregation, this group had taken a leadership role in the dispirited congregation, and they and Sonnenday soon came into conflict as he resisted what he believed to be their attempts to move the church rightward. Although it witnessed some long and tense meetings over matters of policy and program, the church at large simply did not participate in, or totally understand, the theological duel between Sonnenday and the conservative faction. It took some four years for this tension over theological differences to dissipate as slowly, one by one, the more vocal conservatives left the church and went elsewhere to worship.

The church had for several years already lived with a trend in which both the very liberal and the very conservative left to find churches more to their liking elsewhere. The majority of the church simply did not support demonstrative theologies on either side. During Sonnenday's ministry, the church, in a sense, returned to the days before Ritchie when it accepted diverse theological positions as long as the holders of those positions did not push them on others. Particularly in the late seventies and early eighties, the church wanted and valued an outward harmony compatible with its self-image as a caring, friendly community.

While the church at large did not want theological disputation, it did want a pastor who could befriend it. In that context, it took several years for Sonnenday and the church to learn how to relax in the presence of each other. Cultural differences again played a part in the relationship of the church to its pastor. Sonnenday was a Northerner, and he had just served a parish in Upstate New York. He felt uncomfortable with the 'Southern' atmosphere in the congregation, which seemed to require a lot of outward displays of affection. The church too felt uncomfortable in the presence of a pastor who seemed to them reserved and formal. With Sonnenday, as with Harris, the Laurel Church displayed a distinctive border state culture. The church felt inherently uncomfortable with both the reserved Northerner and the outgoing Southerner, even as each of those men felt that in Laurel they came to, perhaps even went beyond, the outermost limits of their own regional culture.

However members felt about Sonnenday's personal reserve in his first years at Laurel, the years from 1977 to 1980 marked a period when the church continued to mend itself. Sonnenday conducted worship, carried out his pastoral duties, and administered the church in a workman-like fashion that allowed the church to regain its balance. Under his leadership, the church concerned itself with the processes of its own organization. Sonnenday's own meticulous administrative style also encouraged the church's lay leadership to carry out their responsibilities competently. In December 1980, the church thoroughly surprised its pastor with a generous gift, one that symbolized for both pastor and church a growing sense of appreciation one for the other. The church's feeling that it could care for its pastor helped it gain a greater sense of self-confidence, and Sonnenday and the church established a positive cycle of growing understanding of each other. The addition of a modest number of new members attracted by Sonnenday's ministry further strengthened his relationship to the church.

Sonnenday left Laurel in December 1982, and, at a superficial level at least, the church seemed to have recovered from the strains, positive and negative, of the previous two decades. Indeed, in some important ways the church of 1982 resembled more the church of 1964 than it did the church of 1969 or 1974 or 1977. Most of those attracted by the person and program of Stuart Ritchie or those who sought a more evangelical emphasis in the church were now gone. The size of the church, the mix of long-time members and new members, the closeness of people within the church to each other all called to mind the 'old' LPC of the early sixties. A residue of liberal concern appeared occasionally in the *Presbyter* in the form of requests to participate in community action groups or provide assistance to needy people and in pastoral letters concerning important issues. The church also opened its facilities to more outside uses than it did previously. Yet, in actual fact, the church appeared to have withdrawn from intense community involvement. Long gone were the days of hectic creativity and involvement of the Ritchie years. The church no longer experimented with different forms of worship. By 1980, the age of turmoil when the church reacted to so many different forces, events, and ideas had ended for the church, even as for the nation.

The Rev. Norman Stanhope filled in as interim pastor after Sonnenday left. Generally well liked, Stanhope's brief tenure witnessed the emergence of another issue, an issue which emphasized both the extent and the limitations of one of the fundamental changes in the life of the church in the sixties and seventies. A segment of the Pastoral Nominating Committee wanted the church to seriously consider extending a pastoral call to a woman. The 'PNC' itself had signed a statement, required by presbytery, that it would give full consideration to women and minority applicants.

By the early eighties, women had gained full access to and participation in every facet of the life of the church to such an extent that the Women of the Church organization no longer functioned as a church within the church. Indeed, attendance at WOC declined, partly because a larger percentage of its potential members worked full-time and partly because women could serve the church directly in all of its various organizations, committees, and activities. The idea of a woman pastor, however, met resistance. Some resisted the very idea, but others shied away from the possible controversy such a call might create. Many in the church were looking for something else in a pastor than potential controversy, and the recent past still haunted the church. While the Pastoral Nominating Committee and the church avoided a major crisis, it became apparent that the final step in admitting women to full and equal life and leadership in the church could not happen in the quiet way that women gained full lay participation. Once again LPC displayed its border state character as it combined both elements of South, more generally resistant to the idea of women pastors, and North, generally more open to that idea.

The incipient controversy over the gender of its next pastor did not prevent the Pastoral Nominating Committee from nominating a pastor. In April 1984, the presbytery installed the Rev. Frank D. Hayes. In his first two years, Hayes displayed a combination of skills, concerns, and personality well suited to encourage the church to rediscover a sense of purpose and direction. Hayes almost instinctively demonstrated the balance between closeness and distance that the church sought in its pastor. The church, down to a membership of 230, began to grow numerically and financially.

In this way too, the church appeared to have come full circle and returned to where it was in 1964. Hayes embodied for the church important aspects of 'the age' in much the same way as had Ritchie in 1964. The sixties and seventies had carried the church and the whole country to heights of greatness and depths of turmoil, and in the eighties the church and the nation approached the issues of the day a little more circumspectly, perhaps even more patiently, in spite of the bombast of special interest groups. Thus, in the mid-eighties the church seemed once again to be following its own course while, at the same time, headed in the direction of its whole society.

The history of 'The Presbyterian Church at Laurel' reveals a number of significant themes, which provide a framework for the church's reflection upon itself and its ministries. In terms of its life within itself, one of the important themes emerging from its past is that LPC has retained a certain closeness to the Laurel,

Maryland, of the past. Many of its members still look to the church to provide their primary social relationships and a sense of living in an identifiable social community. LPC, in other words, provides a feeling of rootedness, which, nostalgically, late twentieth-century Americans associate with the small town life of earlier eras.

Even the geographical mobility of its membership duplicates the church's demographic character at the turn of the century. That is to say, both Laurel and LPC have long been wedged between Baltimore and Washington. Fifty years ago and more, members of the church caught an early train into Baltimore or took the street car down to 'DC' to put in a day's work. It has retained, in the same manner, a sense of sitting at the cultural boundaries between South and North. It is a place where people of those two cultures meet each other and accommodate themselves to a church community that both resembles and differs from what they grew up with at 'home.' One calls to mind the statement of one former member, raised a Northern Presbyterian, who joined the church in the forties: that it was six months before he realized he was attending a Southern Presbyterian church. This mixing of cultures allows members to learn to know individuals from other cultural regions of the nation as individuals. That same mixing of cultures, however, also results, at times, in missed communications and misunderstanding.

One cannot say, however, that the church has simply remained the same as it was in the twenties or the forties. It has not. Yet, the dynamic of change itself seems to arise more from trends in the culture of the nation rather than from within the church itself. The experience of women in LPC most clearly demonstrates the principle that sociocultural trends are the engines of change in the church. Until the late sixties or early seventies, women experienced life in LPC in a way fundamentally different from men. On the one hand, they used the church as a primary outlet for their need for a life outside of their home. They used the church as a place to exercise management, organizational, and entrepreneurial skills that they otherwise had little opportunity to develop. On the other hand, the church confined their exercise of leadership within carefully defined boundaries.

The role of women in LPC has changed because the role of women is changing in American society. And, because the church was a Southern Presbyterian Church, the emergence of women from behind the walls of their 'place' in the church came about somewhat more slowly. Society began to change first. In a sense, then, even when the church experiences fundamental changes, such as in the role of women, it still exhibits historical patterns which have not changed. One of the most potent of these unchanging trends is that fundamental changes in the church's life do not originate in the church.

The church's relationship to its pastor is one pattern that has not changed since the church began hiring pastors. Once again, the nature of the church's relationship depends, in part, upon the general social trends in the nation. Pastors, in their leadership skills and style, often reflect the times they and the church lived through together. More precisely, the organizational and spiritual health, as well as the program, of the congregation at any given time depends upon the relationship of the church to its pastor. The church defines the boundaries of that relationship through its expectations of how it wants the pastor to relate to it. The pastor moves within those boundaries, then, to fine tune the relationship by guiding the program of the church. As long as the pastor does not violate the church's need for a satisfying pastoral relationship, the latitude for action by the pastor is fairly broad.

The church appears, then, to change significantly from pastorate to pastorate, as each pastor brings a different personality, set of skills, and set of interests to the church. The changes are more apparent than real. In fact, a set of 'core concerns' persists throughout every pastorate. These 'core concerns,' represent the fundamental commitments of the church, and they are expressed through a set of 'core activities,' which involve significant numbers of members investing significant amounts of church resources over extended periods of time. Historically, the Laurel Presbyterian Church has three core concerns: worship, Christian education, and fellowship. Core concerns do not appear to change over time, and LPC, in the 1980s, remains deeply committed to its three core concerns. It seems unlikely that the church will drop any one of them in the foreseeable future.

The core activities with which the church embodies these core concerns include maintenance of an adequate facility, administration and stewardship, the Sunday School and youth activities, worship services and the choir, and fellowship events and programs. Core activities do change over time. Until recently, for example, a women's organization has always existed as a strong, ongoing element in church program. Now, however, the traditional women's program is fading away. Since the middle fifties, by the same token, the church's choir has emerged as a core activity expressing the church's core commitment to worship. It should be noted that the choir did not become a core activity until more than forty years after the church established its first permanent choir.

There is evidence, however, that a new core concern may be struggling to emerge as a fourth fundamental dimension in the life of the church. Until the sixties, ministry to and engagement in the Laurel community was not a core commitment of the church. The historian can point to particular programs, such as the Sunday School at times in the nineteenth century, or periods, such as those of Baker and Bird, when the church performed ministries directed at the community. What the historian cannot point to is a pattern of such activities that would reveal a core concern for meeting human need outside of the church. The congregation, for the most part, isolated itself from Laurel.

Since the mid-sixties, however, the church has more frequently engaged in particular activities designed to meet human need or reach out to people in Laurel. Over the last two decades, it has wrestled, from time to time, with the questions of where and how it can directly and locally minister to people in need. The church has established a series of committees and groups charged with such ministries. It is possible, then, that a new core concern is struggling to emerge.

One would expect, given the model of Christ himself, that a clearly defined commitment to ministering to human need, spiritual and physical, in the church's own community would emerge as a fully developed core concern expressed in a set of core activities. LPC members point out that the church has, in fact, become more open to the Laurel community. As evidence, they point to a number of outside groups which use the church building. They also cite the community activities, originally encouraged by the church, of a number of members. Yet, they also admit that the church has not yet defined concretely what community involvement means for it. It is not sure precisely what needs exist in its community which it can and should meet. Some members, in fact, argue that it is not even clear in which 'community' LPC, with its scattered membership, belongs.

As a result, the church has not established a set of outreach core activities involving significant numbers of individuals and amounts of resources over an extended period of time. Those community outreach and ministry activities conducted by the church have been dependent upon the personal interests of one or another of the pastors or of particular lay leaders. Unlike the Sunday School, worship, or fellowship programs, these activities have been sporadic and of relatively brief duration. The church, then, appears to be caught between the vision of a fourth core concern, first articulated some twenty years ago, and the powerful currents of a much longer past which focuses the attention of the church more narrowly on its own inner life. Whether or not the church will incorporate as a core concern and as a set of core activities the meeting of significant human need outside of its own organizational structures remains uncertain.

LPC has shown, over a period of nearly thirteen decades, a remarkable consistency in its expressions of its understanding of the Christian message. It has always placed worship at the center of its life. It has always invested deep concern in educating its children into the Christian faith. It has always valued the experience of a shared fellowship within its membership. It expects that its officers, particularly the pastor, will sustain and promote these core concerns. Its major internal crises have involved differences over worship, Christian education, or fellowship.

In other ways as well, the church has changed little over the years. It continues to depend upon its pastors for the quality of its program. It continues to be a highly mobile church and to display certain characteristics of a border state congregation. The most significant changes in its life have been the result of

social and demographic changes beyond its control. It continues to be a place where members give a great deal of time, effort, concern, and money to sustain its life. In short, for all of the vast social changes that have taken place in American society, in Laurel and its environs, and in the church itself, LPC continues to behave much as it always has behaved. The question its history poses, consequently, is this: is it not time for 'the Presbyterian Church at Laurel ' to take stock of the drifting decades? Faithfulness to the church's original calling in Christ would seem to urge reflection upon how those decades have both sustained and limited the witness of the Laurel Presbyterian Church to the self-giving love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The amount and quality of historical records available for the study of the Laurel Presbyterian Church depends upon the period studied. For the period 1860 to 1879 the record consists almost entirely of the minutes of the presbyteries to which the church belonged. While useful, those minutes give little insight into the daily life of the church. The original minutes of the Session for this period have disappeared. In 1904, George Earle, Clerk of Session, attempted to locate those minutes, and his inquiries showed that the minutes prior to 1879 had long been missing even then. The records of the various presbyteries do indicate that those minutes did exist and were now and again presented for approval by the presbyteries.

For the period 1879 to 1900, the minutes of the Session provide the primary record of the church's history supplemented by presbytery records. The minutes of Session are inadequate partly because Session met infrequently in this era and partly because they focus quite narrowly on the administrative affairs of the church. The period 1900 to 1917, particularly before 1910, has the richest documentation for any period down to the near present, thanks almost entirely to the efforts of Elder George Earle, who displayed a continuing concern to keep clear and full records of the history of the church. He created two new sets of records in addition to the minutes of Session, namely the minutes of the Board of Trustees and the minutes of the Congregation.

For the period 1911 to 1953, the minutes of Session are for long periods sketchy and provide little insight into the life of the church. At the same time, the minutes of Potomac Presbytery tended over the years to provide less and less direct information on the life of particular local churches. The effective living memory of older members does reach back to the early 1920s in a few instances, but those memories only become useful in the 1930s as these members became active in the church as adults. Oral history interviews do begin to uncover significant amounts of information when they reach the late 1940s and early 1950s. For the period 1953 to the present, as is to be expected, more records of various sorts exist than for any other period. The minutes of the Session tend to be more full. The files of the church contain many more records of other types going back into the 1960s. Oral sources are broad and richly informative.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Higher Judicatories Related to LPC. 1860-1986

American Presbyterian Church Government

American Presbyterians developed three levels of church government, often termed 'judicatories,' above the level of the local church. Each PRESBYTERY is made up of representatives from the SESSIONS, local governing boards, of each church plus all of the clergy belonging to the presbytery. Presbyterian clergy are not members of local churches. They belong to presbyteries. Presbyteries take the place of bishops and exercise direct authority over the churches. SYNODS, composed of delegates from a number of presbyteries, form an intermediate level of church government. The GENERAL ASSEMBLY, also composed of delegates from the presbyteries, supervises the life of the whole church, establishes general policy, and acts as the court of final appeal for the church.

American Presbyterian Denominational History

In 1706, colonial Presbyterians formed the first higher judicatory, known simply as 'the Presbytery,' in American Presbyterian history. Eventually, Presbyterians formed several other presbyteries, which joined to form a single Synod. Theological divisions caused the Synod to split into two independent synods, which were reunited in 1758. After the American Revolution, in 1788, Presbyterians established the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (PCUSA). In 1837, one wing of the PCUSA, more traditionally Calvinistic, succeeded in ousting another group from the denomination. The first group became known as the OLD SCHOOL faction, and the second group was called the NEW SCHOOL faction. Each group retained the official name of PCUSA. Maryland churches remained almost entirely in the Old School denomination.

In 1857, the relatively small number of New School Presbyterians in the South withdrew from the staunchly anti-slavery New School denomination and formed the 'UNITED SYNOD.' When the Civil War broke out, the Old School Presbyterians in the South formed the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA (PCCSA). The United Synod joined with the PCCSA in 1864, and after the Civil War the PCCSA changed its name to the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (PCUS), often called the 'Southern Presbyterian Church.' Eventually the Synods of Missouri and Kentucky, along with the Presbytery of Patapsco in Maryland, left the PCUSA and joined the PCUS.

In 1869, the northern Old School and New School denominations reunited and continued to be called the PCUSA. The next major change among the Presbyterian denominations did not take place until 1958 when the PCUSA united with another branch of Presbyterianism, the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA, to form the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (PCUSA). The decades-long dialogue regarding reunion of the Northern and Southern branches of Presbyterianism finally led, in 1983, to the formation of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA).

Denominations Related to the Laurel Presbyterian Church

1860-1867	PCUSA (Old School)
1867-1868	Patapsco Presbytery (Independent)
1867-1972	PCUS

1972-1983 PCUS and UPCUSA
 1983-present PC(USA)

Presbyteries Related to the Laurel Presbyterian Church

1860-1867 Baltimore (PCUSA)
 1867-1868 Patapsco (Independent)
 1868-1877 Chesapeake (PCUS)
 1877-1912 Maryland (PCUS)
 1912-1971 Potomac (PCUS)
 1972-1983 National Capital Union (PCUS and UPCUSA)
 1983-present National Capital (PC(USA))

Appendix B: Pastors and Stated Supplies. 1860-1986

Apr	1863	DR. JAMES G. HAMMER appointed Stated Supply.
	1868	JOHN B. ROSS listed as Stated Supply.
May	1870	W.W. REESE installed as FIRST pastor.
Nov	1871	Reese resigned.
Dec	1872	H.E.C. BASKERVILLE installed as SECOND pastor
May	1874	Baskerville's relationship dissolved by presbytery.
Jun	1874	JAMES NICOLS Installed as THIRD pastor.
Dec	1895	Nicols died in office.
May	1896	G. WILBUR SHIPLEY installed as FOURTH pastor.
Sep	1899	Shiplely resigned.
Oct	1901	ADOLPH E. BAKER Installed as FIFTH pastor.
Dec	1904	Baker resigned.
Jun	1905	ANDREW R. BIRD assumed duties as SIXTH pastor.
Jan	1910	Bird resigned.
Apr	1911	WALTER W. EDGE Installed as SEVENTH pastor.
Oct	1912	Edge resigned.
Mar	1913	HENRY C. BIRD assumed duties as Stated Supply.
Oct	1914	RAYMOND S. HITTINGER installed as EIGHTH pastor.
Dec	1916	Hittinger resigned.
Apr	1917	HENRY C. BIRD again assumed duties as Stated Supply
Jun	1919	Bird resigned.
Sep	1920	THEODORE B. ANDERSON assumed duties as NINTH pastor.
Jun	1924	Anderson 's pastoral relationship dissolved.
Oct	1924	L.H. EIKEL Installed as TENTH pastor.
Nov	1926	Eikel resigned.

Feb	1927	W.L. SMITH Installed as ELEVENTH pastor.
Oct	1928	Smith resigned.
Oct	1928	LEWIS R. WATSON assumed duties as Stated Supply.
Apr	1932	ADOLPH E. BAKER assumed duties as Stated Supply.
Oct	1943	Baker died shortly after resigning.
Sep	1945	JOSEPH H. CUDLIPP assumed duties as Stated Supply.
	1952	Cudlipp resigned.
Jun	1953	JOHN W. ECKERSON installed as TWELFTH pastor.
Mar	1956	Eckerson resigned.
Dec	1956	GEORGE N. CLAYMAN assumed duties as THIRTEENTH pastor.
Jan	1965	Clayman resigned.
Jul	1965	STUART A. RITCHIE installed as FOURTEENTH pastor.
May	1969	Ritchie resigned.
Sep	1969	ALBERT G. HARRIS installed as FIFTEENTH pastor.
Oct	1974	Harris resigned.
Feb	1971	JOHN SONNENDAY Installed as SIXTEENTH pastor.
Dec	1982	Sonnenday resigned.
Apr	1984	FRANK D. HAYES installed as SEVENTEENTH pastor.

Appendix C: Demographic Table

Comparing Changes in Population for the Tenth Electoral District of Prince George's County, The City of Laurel, and in the membership of the Laurel Presbyterian Church. 1880-1980.						
Year	10th District		Laurel		L.P.C.	
	Pop.	% Change	Pop.	% Change	Members	% Change
1880	1,714		1,206		32	
1890	2,523	+ 47%	1,984	+ 65%	43	+ 34%
1900	2,633	+ 4%	2,019	+ 2%	41	- 5%
1910	2,978	+ 13%	2,415	+ 20%	92*	+ 124%
1920	2,868	- 4%	2,239	- 7%	60	- 35%
1930	3,151	+ 10%	2,532	+ 13%	42	- 30%
1940	3,691	+ 17%	2,823	+ 11%	49	+ 17%
1950	6,023	+ 63%	4,482	+ 59%	125	+ 155%
1960	11,204	+ 86%	8,503	+ 90%	210	+ 68%
1970	31,579	+ 182%	10,525	+ 24%	396	+ 89%
1980	38,638	+ 22%	12,103	+ 15%	294	- 26%

[*] LPC data for 1909.

Sources: U.S. Census Data and Sessional Records of the Laurel Presbyterian Church