

Bethany Christian Church

A History

The place where Bethany Christian Church is located was not originally known as Arapahoe, but was called "The Crossroads". The Crossroads was the center of the community and was situated at the intersection of present day Highway 306 and "Neuse Road". The first church building at the crossroads was a small one-room log structure called the "Union Meeting House", located on the *southeast corner* the intersection and built just prior to 1840. The building was also used for a schoolhouse.

Bethany Christian Church can trace its beginnings to Thomas Campbell who influenced Henry Smith's conversion to the Disciples of Christ movement. In 1840, Henry Smith established a Disciples congregation in the Union Meeting House and named it Bethany Christian Church. By 1844, Bethany had grown to 63 members who met four times a year. Henry Smith served as minister until his death in 1857. During the Civil War, there was a four year period without a minister.

Dr. John Wash, a physician, served as Bethany's preaching minister from 1867 until 1879. A series of itinerate ministers also preached and visited at Bethany on a quarterly basis until monthly meetings were held in the early 1900's. Around 1880, a forest fire swept through the area burning many buildings including the old log Meeting House. The Disciples went across the road to the *southwest corner* of the crossing and built a new Church, a one room frame building. The pews were separated down the center by a partition with the women on the right and the men on the left. For Communion, they had a single porcelain cup filled with homemade wine and bread baked by Mary Scott Bennett.

In June 19, 1886, the Crossroads community renamed itself as Arapahoe in order to have a post office, the name "Crossroads" having been used by another community.

In the summer of 1911, J. J. Walker, who was a ministerial student at Atlantic Christian College, held revival services at Bethany. They were so successful that the congregation was convinced that their house of worship was entirely too small. Members of the congregation felt the need to erect a larger building. In 1912, John Waters began to serve the congregation and served it through various intervals for the next 47 years. Early in his ministry, a new building was erected and dedicated August 31, 1913, with an estimated 800 people attending from around 9 counties. The building cost \$3,500 with only \$875 remaining to be paid at the time of

completion. That amount was raised the same day. The building was built on the site of the old log meeting house on the *southeast corner* of the crossroads.

In 1916, Bethany began meeting twice monthly. In January, 1919, Bethany built its first parsonage. In 1920, with a membership of 300, 9 rooms were added to the church. Ella Lee gave the first organ to the church on June 21, 1937; the second organ was given in 1959 by John and Cassie Cowell. In 1948, John and Cassie Cowell donated 25 acres of land to establish "Camp Caroline". The Don Lee family donated land for the Methodist camp, "Camp Don Lee", named for its benefactor. In 1950, a new parsonage was built. In 1951, Bethany was the largest church in Pamlico County with around 400 members. Due to widening of NC Highway 306, Bethany had to be moved; the state paid for moving the church building. In March, 1955, the church building was relocated across the road to the *southwest corner* of the intersection and three large classrooms, a kitchen, a brick facade, and fellowship hall were added. Sanctuary renovation was completed in February, 1966. A new baptistery was part of the renovation. It was given in memory of three young women members of Bethany who lost their lives. They were Ester Ingle Barker, Charlotte Kennel Blackwood, and Elizabeth Faye Brinson.

In 1957, Dolly Ensley, Neva McCotter, Ruth Rawls, Elizabeth Brinson and Cassie Cowell became the first women asked to be board members of Bethany Christian Church. In 1962, Thelma Bennett and Naomi Cahoon became board members. At that time, Bethany had four women's circle groups. Neva McCotter became the first Board Chair in 1982.

In 1985, Merritt Watson became Minister of Bethany and began publishing the Church's first newsletter, "The Bethany Beacon". In 1986, women became church elders. In 1987, the average Church attendance was 115; average Sunday School attendance was 88. February, 1988 the old Belangia store building was dedicated as "Bethany Hall" and provided office, conference, library, youth areas. New stained glass windows were donated by various families in 1990. Also, in 1990 Roger Bennett was hired as Director of the "Bell Choir". An early worship service, with contemporary music, was started in 1999. The pavilion, given by Lea Banks, was completed in June and it was dedicated on Homecoming Sunday in October, 2002.

On June 25, 2007, the building which had served as the place of worship for Bethany Christian Church burned to the ground. While a new church was being *built at the same site*, Bethany held services at Camp Caroline, the Arapahoe Methodist Church and at the Arapahoe Free Will

Baptist Church. Through the generous donations of other churches, many communities, church members, prisoners who rested under the Bethany pavilion while performing community service, and many, many others, the new Bethany Christian Church was built debt free. The rebuilding committee did an outstanding job with the new church dedicated on April 26, 2009. Also, in 2009, Sarah Spalding was hired as Choir Director. In 2013, church music was expanded with the assistance of Simon Spalding and the third-Sunday Gospel group.

Now, we are in the "Transformational Phase". In 2012, we began a journey of transformation. About 24 members of our congregation participated in a course led by Dr. Richard Hamm on "Recreating the Church; Leadership for the Post Modern Age". The work continues.

For a more detailed history of Bethany Christian Church, please refer to Neva McCotter's 15 volume history of Bethany and Merritt Watson's history of Bethany.