

Congratulations to Covenant Springfield UMC on 100 years of faithful service to the community! Perhaps, more importantly, continue to influence and impact the world around you for the next 100 years as well. As I move through my 56th year of pastoring a church, the things I learned as one of your pastors continue to both influence and even sometimes amuse me. I was appointed to Covenant in 1972 as Minister of Outreach along with Bill Garret who was to be minister of Education. Our senior pastor was Ed Cathers, a fine man and a pastor of the old school. In our first weeks, Ed introduced us to his preferred procedure. We had 3 services at the time and every pastor was expected to be in every service. Each of us was expected to wear a clergy collar (something of a change for both Bill and I). Our response was to purchase a green clergy shirt (me) and an orange one (Bill). Flanking Ed in his standard black shirt, one of us on either side, I imagine we presented a Halloween aspect. We were also expected to walk, side by side, in step. Interesting. It was, you might say, a learning experience. It did have its amusing moments. One of Covenant's strengths at the time, and I assume it's still true, was innovative worship and community events. One such event, open to the community and held in Fellowship Hall, was the presenting of "Jesus Christ, Superstar" by a traveling professional group. If you have ever seen the show or movie, you might remember Mary Magdalene, wearing an alluring red dress, singing "I Don't Know How to Love Him". Purely coincidentally (of course), the young lady sang the song sitting in Pastor Cathers' lap (clergy shirt and all), stroking his head. A memorable moment, one of many. As I have moved around over the years, innovative worship has taken many forms, with various churches touting this or that, video clips, character actors, etc. I'm always amused because what is considered so "now" today was being done by Covenant in the 70's. I remember a service celebrating world peace with video of JFK and nuclear submarine missile launches projected onto a huge weather balloon. On a more fun note, Bill and I did a dialogue sermon as Peanuts characters (I was Charlie Brown). On a youth retreat we dealt with the topic of Christianity vs. Satanism (a popular topic at the time). I was asked to present, complete with videos, the allures of Satanism. Pastor Cathers was followed by Dale Owens, who opened my eyes to the broader workings of the conference. Dale headed up the building of the conference office at Valley Forge, so a constant stream of movers and shakers went through Covenant. He instituted the idea of a yearly 3-day retreat for the pastors at which we shared successes and failures and planned for the year ahead. We also did, under his leadership, a weekly accounting, on paper, of how we spent our time, people visited, communions delivered, etc. A practice I still adhere to today.

Covenant had as well an enormous impact on the community, through its school, its programs in the community, the training it offered and the dedicated members who carried it out.

Much of our outreach was to the city of Chester, not only with food and clothing, but with after school learning opportunities.

A remarkable lady by the name of Ethel D'Angelo was a key figure. I was sent to Chicago for a month to be trained in a new approach to community involvement. Age precludes me from remembering the name of the organization, but it was interdenominational, worldwide and, for many of its members almost monastic. In major cities across the world, dedicated members would purchase a home and live and raise their children communally. That became a center for involving local churches in outreach via food, teaching, and perhaps most interestingly, in creating change through impact in the institutions of local government. These "homes" became a meeting place weekly for local church volunteers who gathered for prayer and planning on how to address the needs of their communities. Covenant was a part of that!

I've already gone on longer than I intended, and could continue, but suffice to say that Covenant had a tremendous impact on me as it did on so many others. My prayers are for your success in the challenges of this changing world in the years ahead!

– C. Michael Roney

