

BROOKSIDE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UCC

A Brief History

(2007)¹

Purpose of the Church: *The purpose of this church shall be to worship God, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the sacraments; to realize Christian community and unity within this church and the Church Universal; to render loving service toward humanity; and to strive for righteousness, justice, and peace.*

Bylaws of Brookside Congregational Church, UCC

The Early Years – The Franklin Street Church

(1844-1960)

During the summer of 1844, the young city of Manchester was a town dominated by the Amoskeag Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company. The red brick mills which at one time housed the largest textile mill in the world can still be seen today, lining the eastern banks of the Merrimack River. Instead of the noise of the looms manned by more than 17,000 employees, these buildings are now home to a variety of businesses, as well as providing the Manchester campus of the University of New Hampshire. At their peak, the mills hummed incessantly, the workers streaming in and out according to the system of bells designating change of shift.

The ever-accelerating textile business of the 19th century resulted in the growth of the company's side of town, causing ill-feelings between the newer settlers, primarily Scot-Irish and French-Canadian immigrants, and the established residents of Manchester. The First Congregational Church of Amoskeag, later the First Congregational Church of Manchester, grew as did the mills. Soon, the First Congregational found that the parish couldn't handle the influx of new residents from the east side of the river, and the Second Congregational Society was formed. They had no formal sanctuary and only 20 members, but in the best New England tradition, a lot of determination. Later, the Second Congregational Society would officially become the Franklin Street Society, and ultimately the Brookside Congregational Church of today.

The first services for the fledgling parish were held in the Town House, or City Hall, on the first Sunday of June 1844. The books were kept open that entire first year so anyone joining would be a charter member with the result that forty people were recorded as founding members. The first minister, the Rev. Henry Dexter, was called to the fledgling flock in November 1844. Rev. Dexter, a brand-new graduate of Andover Seminary, probably didn't realize that he was

¹ Adapted by the Search Committee from *Brookside Congregational Church UCC Faith Moving Forward* by Martha Middleton (1992) and *The History of Brookside Congregational Church United Church of Christ 1844 – 1994* by Priscilla Moquin (1994).

starting a tradition as the Second Congregational Society continued throughout its long history to call upon ministers who were short on experience but long on enthusiasm and promise.

The Town House burned down in August of that year and the congregation met in different locations until the rebuilding was completed in 1845. Although they continued to meet in the City Hall, the congregation wanted a church home of their own and in April 1847 the cornerstone was laid at last for their own building. The land was donated by the Amoskeag Company at the corner of Franklin and Market Streets, the site of the former firehouse. By December of the same year, the Second Congregational Society was finally ensconced in their own structure.

The predominantly brick building faced on Franklin Street and had a maximum seating capacity of 1,050 people. The pews, in the tradition of the time, had doors in order to better retain warmth during the cold winters. Heated bricks, or braziers glowing with burning coals, were taken inside the pew to heat the parishioners seated there. Finances were a problem for the fairly new church, and in order to raise money, an auction was held with the highest bidders winning their choice of pews. One parishioner, Judge Isaac Smith, had so many children in his family that he was forced to bid on two pews in order to seat them all. At the time of the dedication of the new structure, the congregation assumed the name of the Franklin Street Church. However, the original designation of Second Congregational Society was kept until 1860, and the separation of the Church from the Society maintained until 1939. The Society controlled the financial portion of the church because it was believed at the time that the temporal church business should be kept separate from the spiritual.

The years passed and the dark clouds of the Civil War encroached even on Manchester. The New Hampshire Congregational Conference had taken an official stance against slavery, a view endorsed by the local congregations. However, the minister at the Franklin Street Church at that time was the Rev. William H. Fenn who had been called in 1858. A native of Charleston, South Carolina, he warned his parishioners that the conflict over slavery would not be easily won, contrary to the popular opinion that the war would be over in a matter of weeks. Rev. Fenn predicted the strife between North and South would be long and drawn out. He knew how stubbornly his southern brethren would fight to preserve their way of life.

Several church members had very strong opinions about the war and worked actively for Lincoln and the Northern cause. In addition, the Women's Sewing Circle did its part by making items for the boxes sent to soldiers at the front. The members sewed cotton and flannel shirts handkerchiefs, sheets, towels, and bandages. Other items, such as wine, cider, jams, and soap, were donated and included with the boxes. When news of Lincoln's assassination reached Manchester, memorial services for the fallen President were held at a packed Franklin Street Church.

The inside of the church changed little in the first decades. Services were held both in the morning and the afternoon on Sunday, in addition to the prayer meetings held Sunday evenings. Communion was served six times a year at the afternoon service. A devotional

meeting was held on Thursdays, and the Sunday School teachers met every Saturday to go over the next day's lessons. Monthly "concerts of prayer" were also well-attended. Most of the parishioners lived within walking distance of the church and in the society of 19th century America, the church was the focal point of social activities. Members of the church were strictly watched and could be excommunicated for such activities as working on Sunday, using profane language, stealing, and lying. In 1866, the membership of the church was about 100 people.

Under the pastorate of William Jewett Tucker, who later went on to become president of Dartmouth College, all adult members of the congregation had the right to vote on church matters, including the female parishioners, an extremely liberal policy for an American church in 1875. Rev. Tucker was also concerned about the welfare of the young women working at the mills. The Franklin Street Church had acquired a reputation for exclusiveness, like many other churches of similar intellectual and social standing in Manchester. According to Rev. Tucker *...this reputation entirely belied its (Franklin Street Church) spirit. All that was needed was a fit method of exercising its hospitality.* Therefore, Rev. Tucker persuaded the women of the church to open one of the lower level rooms to the mill girls as a meeting place. It was equipped with books, magazines, games, and writing materials. It became the forerunner of the Manchester YWCA, which continues the tradition of giving young women who might be far from home and family, a safe place to socialize.

In the 1870's, the church was remodeled, including the addition of a spire, an organ loft and a furnace. The original white pews with their doors were removed and black walnut pews installed, increasing the seating capacity to 1,250. Upon completion of the remodeling in 1878 Governor Frederick Smyth, who was also a member of the Franklin Street Church, presented to the church a set of chimes consisting of nine bells, which were housed in the new steeple. These chimes were played at important events during the church year, such as Easter and Christmas, as well as on the passing of local and national leaders. During World War II, the chimes were played at war bond rallies and used as air raid tests. The chimes are still played every Sunday at Brookside, as well as periodically throughout the year.

Franklin Street Church membership expanded to the point that an offshoot, the South Main Street Church, was created in 1881 just as Franklin had been generated from First Congregational decades before. It was also during the late 1880's that the custom of giving Bibles to youngsters on Children's Day was established, with the only requirement being that the child had to have been baptized seven years beforehand. The Franklin Street Church continued its trend of numerous social activities with concerts, picnics, businessmen's classes and a young men's club. The Sewing Circle changed its name to the Ladies' Benevolent Association because its function had become more and more community oriented instead of just meeting to sew and socialize.

Reflecting the general mood of the early 1920's, membership at the Franklin Street Church declined. Following World War I and its horrors, many people became disenchanted and questioned the value of religion. The popular attitude was to live only for the moment, or at most the day, instead of dealing with matters of the spirit. However, under the leadership

of Rev. John Phillips in the latter part of the decade, membership once again blossomed. It was during this era that the Women's Union was organized, which still is a part of Brookside's social life.

In 1930, the cornerstone was laid for the Blood Memorial Parish House, donated by Mrs. Emma Blood French and Mr. Frank P. Carpenter. Although the building was to contain bowling alleys, minister's study, auditorium with stage, classrooms, and more, the heart of the building was the Chapel. The stained glass windows, designed by Charles J. Connick, depict the four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The central window of St. Michael is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Carpenter's grandson, Frank Carpenter Manning, who died at the age of 15. The Chapel was later moved intact to Elm Street, and is still an integral part of Brookside today.

It was during the 1930's that the Social Service Club was formed for those women unable to attend the daytime meetings of the Women's Union. The two groups merged in 1991 to become simply the Women's Union. Although the current Adult Fellowship of Brookside is open to all adults, whether married or single, its forerunner, the Pleasant Evening Group, was formed for young married couples to meet periodically for "supper and sociability." The radio ministry has continued since the first broadcast in 1932 of Sunday services, during which time the congregation was asked to help out by "...joining wholeheartedly in singing of the hymns." Many church members had the Depression park on their doorstep when the city's primary employer, the Amoskeag Mill, closed after 99 years of operation.

Up to this time, the Franklin Street Church was totally separate from the Second Congregational Society. It was believed by the exclusively male Society, which managed the finances of the church, that the spiritual work of the church should not be merged with the business role of the Society. However, at the Annual Meeting of 1939, following months of study by committees, it was decided to eliminate the Society and that the new official name should be the Franklin Street Congregational Church of Manchester, NH. The Society was replaced by a Board of Trustees made up of the pastor, treasurer, and representatives from the church membership at large. The Trustees would control the formerly separate funds held by the Church and the Society, and have complete management of all business affairs. It is this system that is still in use at Brookside today.

World War II came and the Franklin Street Church once again became active in sending boxes to soldiers and sailors at the front. In addition, the Rev. Martin L. Goslin had the entire congregation involved in mailing letters and booklet to those in the military. In honor of those who served their country, the Deacons donated the altar cross, which is flanked by a Book of Remembrance containing the names of those in the service.

The Board of Deaconesses was set up in 1952. The duties of the deaconesses were to clean up after communion, to keep the communion linens and silver in good order, and call on shut ins. The deaconesses served communion for the first time in 1979 and the Board of Deacons and Deaconesses merged in 1981 giving the men and women equal responsibilities.

By the mid-1950's, the original building on Franklin Street was weakening and major renovations were needed to make it safe. A decision had to be made either to fund expensive and extensive alterations or build a new church on another site. Mrs. Mary Manning, daughter of Manchester philanthropist Frank Carpenter and longtime active member of the church, heard of the dilemma and offered her 10-acre estate on North Elm Street known as "The Brook " to the church if the congregation of Franklin Street Church wanted to build and relocate there.

Many questions were raised regarding the move--could the money be raised? Would the members be happy in new surroundings? What about transportation for members no longer within walking distance? What would happen to the Chapel? The quandary was resolved at a special meeting held in June 1957 when the congregation voted to accept Mrs. Manning's offer. The first phase was to build a sanctuary, primarily constructed of brick like the Franklin Street structure, adapt the existing house and barn on the property to educational use, connect them to the sanctuary, and create a parking lot. The actual ground-breaking was held a little more than one year after the special meeting.

The congregation agreed that the Chapel should not be left behind, so it was carefully dismantled piece by piece, numbered, and reassembled at the new site. The only difference between the two is that the center aisle is now nine inches narrower. It is still a popular location for weddings, special services, and lectures.

The weathervane was also carefully transferred from Franklin to Elm Street and placed on top of the new steeple, which had been assembled on the ground, and then raised into place by a large crane in June 1959. The organ was also moved to the new location, but because of the intricacy of the instrument, it took several weeks to accomplish. In addition, the chimes were relocated, and carefully housed in the new steeple.

When the congregation was at last able to relocate in the spring of 1960, volunteers assembled with station wagons and trucks on a Saturday in March to move what was left to Elm Street. The next day, the volunteers attended a brief worship service in their work clothes at Franklin Street, picked up the remaining hymnals, and walked to the new church. There the Brookside History service was concluded and the new location named Brookside. The first complete service held at Brookside was on Palm Sunday, April 3, 1960. The property on Franklin Street was sold and the sanctuary demolished to make room for a parking lot.

The Brookside Years (1960 – Present)

Following the move to North Elm Street, Brookside began to use its new space for community outreach. The Brookside Nursery School opened as a program of the Board of Christian Education in 1960. Soon thereafter, a separate Board of Directors was formed to provide stable administration for the program. The Thrift Shop began in a single room above the flower room

in 1961 and has moved to ever larger quarters as its outreach to the community has expanded. Brookside's involvement with refugee resettlement issues in Manchester began in 1962 when one of seventeen Cuban refugees to be relocated in Manchester was sponsored by Brookside.

After several years of thoughtful discussion and debate, Brookside Congregational Church voted to join the United Church of Christ in 1962. The decade of the 1960s also saw a number of important board and governance changes: a lay moderator was elected—previously the pastor had served as moderator; and the first woman was elected to the Board of Trustees in 1967.

New fellowship groups were established following the move to Brookside. The Women's Coordinating Board was formed in 1963 with the goal of strengthening understanding between women. After a several-year hiatus, a men's club was reorganized in 1965. The group was affectionately referred to as the "MOB" (Men of Brookside). This group developed a strong interfaith relationship with Temple Adath Yeshurun, attending the annual Brotherhood Dinners of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

With the pastoral call of the Reverend Dr. David B. Shirley in 1968, Brookside began a period of significant pastoral stability. Rev. Shirley served as pastor until his retirement in 1977. In 1974, Brookside expanded its interfaith involvement with the first annual interfaith Thanksgiving Service involving St. Catherine's Catholic Church, Brookside, and Temple Adath Yeshurun. The place of worship and the preaching responsibilities were rotated among the various congregations.

The Reverend Dr. Kenneth C. Brookes was called to Brookside in 1978 and served until 1989. During this period, Brookside celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Smyth Chimes in 1978. In addition, the music program was enhanced with the first Music Sunday in 1983, the arrival of Bruce Adami as Director of Music in 1985 and the rededication of the Chapel organ in 1986 following several years of refurbishment. A number of beloved worship traditions were initiated during the 1980s including the Agape Meal, Cherub Choir participation in the Christmas Eve Service, and the Epiphany Play.

Additional groups were added to the list of social service entities using the Brookside facility. Pastoral Counseling Services (PCS) started in an upper room at Brookside. By 1981 they had outgrown that space and moved to the second floor of the Manning House. PCS has continued to expand its mission and services and now also utilizes space in the cottage formerly occupied by the resident sexton. The Greater Manchester YMCA used the building and grounds for summer day camp programs and after school programs.

Prior to 1980, the congregation had been providing groceries for distribution by the pastor to those in need. As the need increased, the church established a food closet to provide food to those seeking assistance from the church and began the tradition of providing holiday food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas. In 1982, the church expanded its international outreach through the sponsorship of two children through an international relief organization. In 1984,

Brookside again became part of a community refugee resettlement initiative by sponsoring the resettlement of a Cambodian family.

As the result of a generous gift in 1987, construction was undertaken to significantly reconfigure the chancel area of the Sanctuary which was originally styled after the Franklin Street building with a center pulpit. During this renovation, the central pulpit was moved to one side and a raised platform was constructed which changed the focal point of the chancel from the pulpit to the communion table and enabled the choir to feel more involved with the worship service.

Following a period of interim ministry in 1989, the Reverend William Donoghue was called to Brookside in 1990 after a ten-year pastorate in Mason, New Hampshire. Rev. Donoghue served until his resignation for health reasons in 2006. He was the second-longest serving pastor in the history of the church. To Brookside, he brought his gifts as a preacher and storyteller, his experience both as a pastor and a navy medical corpsman in Vietnam, and his commitment to community involvement and outreach.

In the period from 1990 – 1994 several significant improvements were made to the church to ensure that worship at Brookside was accessible to all. In 1990 the sound and hearing impaired system in the Sanctuary was updated and large print Bibles and worship bulletins were provided. In 1992 the long-time dream of making the facility handicapped accessible was realized with the installation of the elevator and outside ramp and the renovation of the fellowship hall restrooms.

Also in this period, Brookside expanded its commitment to assist the hungry and the homeless. Brookside began the relationship with New Horizons Soup Kitchen and Shelter that continues to this day. In 1991, the church participated in the first annual interfaith Religious Response to Hunger in which area churches cooperatively collected food for New Horizons. Brookside members volunteer to serve the evening meal at New Horizons one day per month and assist at the centralized food pantry. The direct distribution of food from the church food pantry was replaced by the monthly “Loaves and Fishes” donation of non-perishable food to the New Horizons food pantry and the provision of food vouchers to Child Health Services for distribution to those in need. In 1991, the church established a partnership with Habitat for Humanity which continued until 1998. The church’s commitment to housing continued through support to Families in Transition.

1992 and 1993 saw a significant growth in the lay ministry of the church as a result of the “Call to Care” training for lay visitors. Trained visitors visit with church members and friends unable to attend worship at Brookside. In addition, the church established visitation ministries to provide religious services or study at several local nursing homes, the Veterans Administration Hospital and the New Hampshire State Prison for Women.

In 1994 Brookside celebrated its Sesquicentennial. It was a year of reflection, reconnection and celebration during which the memories of long – term members were recorded on videotape

and in *Chronicle* articles, historical records were shared, and the *History of Brookside Congregational Church United Church of Christ, 1844 – 1994* was written by Church Historian Priscilla Moquin. An anniversary church pictorial directory was issued and a time capsule was interred to be exhumed in 2044. The celebration culminated with an anniversary banquet attended by more than two hundred members and friends and a special worship service on November 4, 1994.

The worship life at Brookside has been enriched by innovation and change in the music program including the adoption and use of the New Century Hymnal in addition to the Pilgrim Hymnal, greater involvement by the cherub and junior choirs in the worship service, and experimentation with a wider range of worship music. The first two phases of the organ restoration project were completed in 1999 and were made possible by the dedicated fundraising of the Music Committee and several generous bequests. The restoration of the organ has greatly improved the sound and versatility of this magnificent instrument which was moved to Brookside from the Franklin Street Church.

Worship and educational traditions have continued to evolve at Brookside. The Board of Christian Education reviews the church school curriculum in an ongoing effort to enrich the church school experience for the children. The number of young members who teach church school classes has significantly increased. The Board involves the children in various outreach projects including fundraising for Heifer Project, making cards for the holiday food baskets and writing letters to our partner church in Zimbabwe. Members of the confirmation class have assumed responsibility for the conduct of several worship services. Under the guidance of the Diaconate, traditional Lenten services have expanded to include Lenten study opportunities and a simple meal. An earlier Christmas Eve service was added to accommodate families with young children. The Diaconate and lay volunteers have continued to provide visitation and religious services at local nursing homes and to members unable to attend worship.

The board and committee life of the church has benefited from the increased participation of youth members who bring energy and different perspectives to their service. Many church boards include at least one high school member. Participation in senior and junior high school youth groups has remained strong and includes fellowship and outreach activities. Beginning in 2000, youth group members have participated in spring vacation mission trips. Parents and members of the congregation have provided financial support and served as chaperones.

The integration of the work of all boards and committees is ensured by the collaborative efforts of the Standing and Steering Committees and has been further improved by the annual “All Board and Committee Meeting” to address issues of significant interest and to undertake long term planning. This collaborative planning work is most clearly reflected in the strategic planning completed in 1992 (Faith Moving Forward) and 2003 (Dreaming Dreams for Brookside).

In addition to participating in worship and board and committee work, the congregation seeks opportunities to be together for study, fellowship, and service. Such opportunities have

continued to expand and include both long – standing traditional activities (the monthly meeting and programs of the Women’s Union, the Christmas Fair, the Progressive Dinner and the interfaith Thanksgiving service) and new activities including Homecoming in September, the Musical Feast, the Easter Breakfast, the Teacher Appreciation Brunch, and special family craft activities for Advent and Lent.

Prayer and spiritual study groups and retreats have increased and evolved as church leadership continues to experiment with different offerings and schedules to make such opportunities more widely available. Congregation – wide participation in outreach activities includes the collection of food for and assembly of holiday food baskets, the monthly “Loaves and Fishes” collection of food for New Horizons, and the participation of “Team Brookside” in the annual New Horizons Walk Against Hunger.

Brookside has continued to expand its outreach within the community and globally. The Brookside facility plays an important part in the church’s community outreach. The Thrift Shop is a critical link to myriad social service agencies in the Greater Manchester area providing used clothing and household goods to those in need. The proceeds of this effort support local charities and the Brookside budget. Brookside is the home of the Brookside Child Development Center, a part-day Head Start program serving 36 children aged three to five years old from a variety of cultural, social and economic backgrounds. The BCDC operates in the space previously utilized by the Brookside Nursery School which ceased operation in 1997. Brookside is also the main location of Pastoral Counseling Services which provides thousands of hours of counseling services to members of the Greater Manchester Community. In 1998 Brookside became a site for the Parish Nurse program that provides important medical care to members of our community. Also in 1998 St. John of Suceava Romanian Orthodox Church began using the Chapel and the Manning House for its weekly Sunday services and fellowship hour. In 2005, the church’s long history of involvement with Manchester’s immigrant/refugee community expanded with the development of a community garden. With the assistance of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service, a portion of the Brookside grounds is used for a community vegetable garden that is tended by members of the Manchester immigrant community to provide fresh produce for their families.

Brookside has been involved in global ministry through its long-term participation in the National UCC Conference “Our Churches’ Wider Mission” special offerings, our sponsorship of several children through Compassion International, and support to Partners in Health. In 1995 Brookside’s commitment to a wider global mission greatly expanded when the congregation, after a year of study by a small group of members, voted to establish a global partnership with a church from the United Church of Christ Zimbabwe. In late 1996 Brookside was partnered with the Sakubva Church in Mutare, Zimbabwe. In the ten years of our partnership with Sakubva Church we have learned much about Zimbabwe, received visitors from UCCZ and several Brookside members have visited Sakubva Church. We communicate by mail and monthly telephone calls, share worship life and prayers and assist each other in mutual mission activities, including expanding efforts to feed the growing number of AIDS orphans in Mutare.

A final word on community mission and outreach relates to the direct involvement of the Brookside pastor in community activities as a representative of the Brookside congregation. During his Brookside pastorate Rev. Donoghue participated in various community activities and boards including the Manchester Clergy Association, Pastoral Counseling Services, and groups providing support and services to returning veterans. He also served as a member of the Optima Board of Trustees during a period of the consolidation and then dissolution of significant aspects of the health services network in Greater Manchester.

Since its move to Brookside in 1960, the church has experienced great pastoral and staff stability while seeking ways to effectively respond to societal changes and church needs. In this period Brookside has been led by four called pastors and has been blessed with the long-term service of dedicated staff and volunteers in the music ministry, church office administration, facilities care and Christian education. Also during this period Brookside has reconfigured its staffing patterns at all levels in response to changing program needs, technological innovation and financial priorities. During the majority of the Brookside years, the church's senior pastor was supported by a part-time or full-time associate pastor. With the resignation of part-time associate pastor Rev. Deborah Knowlton in 1999, it was decided that the structure of a full-time pastor and part-time Christian Education Director would best meet the church's needs. The church office staff has also been restructured to include two part-time rather than full-time staff. Finally, the long-time practice of employing a full-time resident sexton ended in 1999 and the Board of Trustees restructured the facilities and maintenance work by utilizing part-time staff and contracted cleaning services.

Brookside Congregational Church United Church of Christ has stood the test of time because of the active involvement of its people in the church and the community. Today we are an active congregation made up of people of different ages, backgrounds, and experiences. Brookside has not remained static, but is ever changing to meet the diverse needs of the people it serves. The tradition of caring for the spiritual and temporal needs of the congregation and the local and global community will continue as Brookside undertakes and completes this period of pastoral transition. Circumstances and faces have changed, but the purpose of Brookside remains constant. We extend an enthusiastic welcome to any who desire to join us as Christ's faithful people in mission.