

## HISTORY OF GOOD SHEPHERD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Good Shepherd has a vast and interesting history with roots that go deep into two communities where people of the Reformed faith wished to worship God and to seek the call of Jesus Christ to serve. These congregations of Palmerton and Slatedale decided in 2019 to merge their resources and energies together on the recommendation of their two Transition Teams. The Transition Teams included: Susan Bankes, Lester Bass, Sheri Fallon, Darlene Nothstein, and Jennifer Sommers from First United Church of Christ, Palmerton, along with their Conference Coach Rev. Heather Kurtz; and Susie Blose, Dylan Coffin, Bob Koons, Kerry Loch, Debbie Silfies, Eddie Smith, and Pastor James Robison from Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, Slatedale, along with their Conference Coach Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates. Meeting on December 17, 2018 these two teams discussed the possibility of a merger and decided to have a joint worship service on February 3, 2019. Following this service, both Transition Teams recommended to their respective governing bodies to merge. On March 17, 2019, the members of First voted 27 to 3 to move forward with the merger, and on April 7, 2019, the members of Good Shepherd voted 69 to 0 in favor of the merger. At this time the Council from old First and the Consistory from old Good Shepherd joined as one with a meeting on April 8, 2019. Members of this Joint Consistory/Council included Elders: Conrad Biege, Susie Blose, Chris Kegel, Kerry Loch, Richard Nothstein, Pam Puskas, Chad Sommers, Tammy White; and Deacons: Lester Bass, Judy Bollinger, Carissa Fallon, Sheri Fallon, James George, Eric Hantz, Robert "Bob" Koons, David Kuremsky, Darlene Nothstein, Jonell Rinker, Tammy Schaeffer, Cameron Shields, Edward "Eddie" Smith. The Transition Teams came together to form the Merger Team which addressed the concerns of the merger such as creating a vision and mission statement, recommending a new form of governance, handling the legalities of incorporation, personnel and financial matters, and creating a satisfactory means for membership retention into the new faith community. As a newly merged congregation, ministry outreach increased to include both sides of Blue Mountain and encompassed Lehigh, Northampton, Carbon, and the southern tip of Monroe Counties.

On May 12, 2019, the congregation had a pulpit exchange between Ashley Werkheiser, pulpit supply at old First, and James Robison, pastor at the new Good Shepherd. On May 26, 2019, a service of remembrance and healing was held at First as worship in their sanctuary at 457 Delaware Avenue came to a close. The following Sunday, June 2, 2019, the first worship service as one unified congregation was celebrated and the Sunday after, June 9, 2019 the unified congregation communed together for the first time for Pentecost. Thus, combined a legacy of two Pennsylvania congregations: Good Shepherd, which began 131 years earlier in 1888 with the creation of St. Paul's Lutheran and Reformed Union Church at Slatedale; and First Reformed Church at Palmerton, which began 109 years earlier on August 31, 1910.

In the mid-1800s, many of the residents at Slatedale were members of either Heidelberg Union Church or Friedens Union Church. Union churches normally consisted of German settlers who were adherents to either the German Lutheran or German Reformed faith traditions and because of their common language and heritage would unite to construct one building while maintaining

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two separate congregations. The Slatedale residents formed a Sunday school on Brown Street and members of the German Reformed congregation greatly appreciated the convenience of having Rev. Levi K. Derr preach at the Lehigh Furnace and Slatedale public schools on regular intervals from 1871 to 1880, while maintaining his normal duties as pastor of Friedens Church and St. John's Church, Slatington. In 1888, the residents of Slatedale formally organized a mission church consisting of both denominations with the original members including: Rev. J.S. Renninger, a Lutheran pastor; H.W. Blose, William B. Krause, William Steele, Wilson Rex, Peter Ferber, J.H. Snyder, and Henry Kern. Rev. Nevin W. Helffrich became pastor of the Reformed congregation that year though his name does not appear among the original organizers. Over the next ninety-six years, the congregation at Slatedale went through three name changes: St. Paul's Reformed Church 1888-1903; Holy Trinity Reformed/Evangelical & Reformed/United Church of Christ, 1903-1984; and Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, 1984-2019. Fifteen years after originally organizing, the congregation was officially reorganized on May 28, 1903 under the new name of Holy Trinity making a break from their past financial woes and focusing on their renewed sense of spirit and a stronger sense of commitment to the ministry of Christ in the community allowing them to move forward as a congregation. The congregation was able to complete their building project and on July 21, 1904 a service of dedication was held for the completed 40x70-foot brick church at a cost of \$6,400. On May 24, 1931, Rev. Robert J. Urffer was ordained and installed as pastor of the Friedens-Neffs-Slatedale Charge and began the longest pastorate in the history of the Slatedale congregation, a total of twenty-seven years. With Rev. Urffer's arrival, the congregation ceased having services conducted in German. The next important event in the life of the congregation after Rev. Urffer's official retirement from the congregation at Slatedale on June 15, 1958 was the arrival of Rev. James L. Knappenberger who began as a student pastor on January 1, 1976. On June 12, 1977, a week after his ordination, the congregation at Slatedale called Rev. Knappenberger as the church's first full-time pastor and weekly services began soon after. The congregation was incorporated on November 16, 1978 through the efforts of James Mack, Clifford Smith, Rosann Friebolin, Charles Thomas, and Deanna Kern. Through this incorporation the church committed itself to providing worship of Almighty God and was organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and scientific purposes. In July of 1983 the Lutheran and United Church of Christ congregations agreed to the dissolution of the union which took effect in March of 1984. In this dissolution, the United Church of Christ congregation received a settlement of \$10,000 plus ownership of Fellowship Park, which they sold in 1986 for \$15,250. On November 4, 1984, the congregation at Holy Trinity adopted a new constitution, voted to change their name to Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, and began searching for a place to relocate and build a new sanctuary.

On May 6, 1985 the congregation approved the purchase of the present campus (8.1 acres) located about 3 miles west of Lehigh Gap facing Blue Mountain on Mountain Road, known then as the Harry Rex Farm, for \$29,500 from George Husack and Blue Mountain Investments. This was based on a recommendation of the property search committee: Rev. James Knappenberger, George Bowers, Elwood German, Jeff Coffin, and Fred Allerton. On October 20, 1985 a service of

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groundbreaking service was held for the first phase of a three-phase building project. Richard Smith chaired the executive building committee consisting of Fred and Suzanne Allerton, Bobby and Madeline Balliet, JoAnne Bauer, David Bilheimer, Jeff Coffin, Clark DeLong, Brian Haas, Lee Haas, Deanna Kern, John Kisthardt, James and Pam Knappenberger, Kerry Loch, and Shirley Wagner. A project executive committee was also established to create a capital funds campaign to raise money for the new building consisting of John Kisthardt, chairperson; Madeline Balliet, David Bilheimer, Paul Hewitt, Kerry Loch, Marie Rex, Marilyn Smith, and Shirley Wagner. A contractor by the name of Serfass Construction Company, Inc. of Allentown was hired to build the church. The church was designed by architects Fred and Suzanne Allerton who were both members of the congregation. The first worship service in the new sanctuary was conducted on December 7, 1986. The congregation was incorporated on January 17, 1985 and adopted a logo, a figure representing Jesus Christ holding a lamb, which encapsulated the ideals of the congregation - working, worshipping, and growing together in the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd. On the morning of April 26, 1987, the furnishings of the building were dedicated at a special service. That afternoon the organ was dedicated at another special service with Michael Fister presiding at the organ and Pamela S. Knappenberger presiding at the piano. A Youth Rally was organized for May 2, featuring keynote speaker the Reverend Eleanor Allen, Assistant Conference Minister for Penn Northeast Conference. The new building was dedicated on May 3, 1987 with the Reverend Earl Marks delivering the main address entitled, "*The Building Has Just Begun.*"

Because Good Shepherd received a bequest of \$180,000 from the estate of Cora Husack, the congregation voted in November 1998 to pay off the balance of the existing mortgage against the sanctuary. It was also decided to move ahead with the next two phases of the original building project. A building committee consisting of Lee Haas, chairperson; Madeline Balliet, Clark DeLong, Ron Frederick, Dale Knittle, Kerry Loch, Barry Silfies, David Silfies and Rev. James Robison was appointed by the Consistory. Plans for the second and third phases of the building project were drawn up by architect Joseph Reda. The finance committee chosen to recommend a banking institution for securing a mortgage consisted of Gina Brown, Michele Hunsicker, Dean Knittle, Barbara Kremposky and Darwin Minnich. Citizens Bank of Slatington was recommended and chosen. The total cost for construction was \$422,928 with \$140,000 being funded by the church from the Cora Husack Estate leaving the church to borrow \$283,000 from the bank. At a meeting following church services on March 7, 1999 the congregation voted 79 to 4 in favor of the building project. C&C Construction under Michael Cassidy's supervision was chosen as the contractor for the building project with Joseph Reda acting as the liaison on the behalf of Good Shepherd. A celebration was held on April 11, 1999 with Madeline Balliet and Richard Smith burning the mortgage for the sanctuary followed by the ground breaking by Ron Frederick, Lee Haas, Barbara DeLong and the children of Good Shepherd. Furnishings for the new building project came from memorials and gifts and were dedicated with the new Christian Education Wing, Kitchen, and Fellowship Hall on Ascension Day, Thursday, June 1, 2000.

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Meanwhile, the congregation of First Church in Palmerton was making an impact on their community. Officially beginning on August 31, 1910, residents of Palmerton who wanted to meet the spiritual needs of the people of the Reformed faith held a meeting on that date in the Union Chapel, located in the one hundred block of Lehigh Avenue. The Rev. Charles E. Schaeffer, D.D., General Secretary of the Board of Home Missions, presided at this meeting and appointed a committee of organization. This committee petitioned the East Pennsylvania Classis of the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church for admission as the First Reformed Congregation of Palmerton, Carbon County, PA. The following is a direct quote from the above mentioned petition: “We, therefore, whose names are hereunto subjoined, agree to enter unto such organization as Charter Members, the Congregation to be known as First Reformed Congregation of Palmerton, Carbon County, PA ~ Mrs. F.A. Seip, F.W. Deibert, Mrs. L.E. Deibert, Mrs. Henry Diehl, Earle H. Snyder, William Heckman, Charles R. Mohr, Mrs. Charles Mohr, Miss Mattie Anewalt, John S. Butz, Mrs. J.S. Butz, H.J. Santee, Mrs. Earle H. Snyder, Mrs. John Hauser, E.E. Creitz, Mrs. E.E. Creitz, George B. Snyder, Mrs. George B. Snyder, H.A. George, Effie M. Peters, Norma E. Peters, F.A. Seip, Mrs. Morgan A. Peters, Mrs. Harry R. Pettit, Mrs. Emma Pettit, Eva Pettit, Francis D. Serfass, E.P. Fritzinger, Mary Fritzinger, Harold C. Hersh, M.D., Charles A. Smith, Mrs. Charles A. Smith, Robert John Peters, Norman Warneke, David W. Gould, Stuart W. Eckert, Mrs. Louisa Eckert and Charles C. Zimmerman.”

The first services were conducted by Dr. Charles E. Schaeffer in the United Evangelical Church, now used by the Russian Orthodox congregation, on Church Street, Palmerton. The next services were held in Snyder Hall, which was later Snyder Hotel. This building was torn down and is now the location of Spillane’s Store. The pastorate of Rev. Morgan Peters began on January 1, 1911 and he was elected as the regular pastor on February 5, 1911. The Sunday School was organized by Rev. Peters on January 15, 1911 in Snyder Hall with an enrollment of forty-six members, and E.E. Creitz was elected as the first superintendent. Services continued in Snyder Hall until the summer of 1911, when it was found necessary to seek a new place for worship since membership continued to increase. As near as can be determined, the congregation began worshipping at the Neighborhood House on Sunday, August 6, 1911. Encouraged by the response of members and friends, the congregation deemed it advisable to begin plans for the future and a building committee was appointed.

At a meeting of the Consistory on June 16, 1911, action was taken to purchase the lot at 457 Delaware Avenue. At the same time the adjoining lot was donated by the Palmer Land Company. Plans were immediately made for the building of a church and the cornerstone was laid on Sunday, January 7, 1912. Dedication of that building took place on June 2, 1912. With the continued growth that the church experienced, it was found necessary to make an addition to the church. This was always known as the “annex” and it was dedicated on June 10, 1917. The church became debt free with the burning of the mortgage on November 17, 1929. The mortgage had been for \$7,000 which was borrowed from the Home Mission Board of the Reformed Church at 2% interest. For a number of years, the Board allowed the payment of interest only. During the years from the

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founding, the congregation was under the care of the Mission Board and received some financial help in supplementing the Pastor's salary, a major landmark, for the Church was to become independent of the Mission Board on September 1, 1932.

After becoming self-supporting, the congregation showed steady growth and the members looked to the future. They continued to improve the physical condition of the church and it was at this time that the first pipe organ was purchased. In 1938 another important move was taken in the purchase of the first parsonage. Prior to this time the pastors rented a home. This first parsonage was located at 454 Franklin Avenue. The debt incurred through this purchase was soon cleared, and at that time the congregation's sights became focused on a new sanctuary. Through the efforts of all the organizations of the church, a Building Fund was established and by 1951 that fund amounted to \$36,000. Early in 1951 the opportunity to purchase a more suitable home for a parsonage was presented and in June of 1951 the congregation approved the purchase of the home at 434 Franklin Avenue with the parsonage at 454 Franklin Avenue being sold.

August 8, 1954 was an historic date for the congregation at First Church as they celebrated the groundbreaking for the Educational Building followed by the cornerstone laying on October 10, 1954. The building was completed at a cost of \$240,000 and was dedicated on September 18, 1955 and the debt paid by November of 1959 with the mortgage burning taking place on January 27, 1960. This was not the end of the labor for the Congregation. The original sanctuary no longer met the needs of the congregation. After much study and consideration, plans were adopted for a new building. A fund-raising campaign was instituted and by April of 1963 demolition of the old sanctuary began. Charles O. Yale, Inc. of Palmerton was awarded the contract to construct the new sanctuary which was designed by Buchar Associates of York, PA. On September 22, 1963 twin cornerstones were laid with Rev. Longsdorf preaching a sermon entitled, "A Living Church" describing a living church as an organization with a sense of conviction in what members believe and confess, a sense of direction, knowing where it is going like a mighty army, and a sense of fellowship; existing to give guidance to people. One is the cornerstone from the original sanctuary. The new sanctuary was constructed at a cost of \$151,000 with a seating capacity of 250. The edifice as it is now seen was dedicated on May 17, 1964. The mortgage for the sanctuary was burned on January 24, 1971.

Over the years, the members of both congregations made sacrifices and donated money, time, and talent to raise the funds to construct their houses of worship. Countless sandwiches, picnics, and other fund raisers by the Willing Workers, the Ladies' and Men's Bible Classes, and many others helped to pay off the mortgages for the buildings that over the years have served many community organizations who needed a place to meet.

The congregations at Palmerton and Slatedale went through two denominational changes, the first being on June 26, 1934 when the Reformed Church merged with the Evangelical Church to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church; and then on June 25, 1957 when the Evangelical and

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Reformed Church merged with the Congregational Christian Church to become the United Church of Christ.

Both congregations had members answer God’s call to authorized ministry, two from Holy Trinity: Rev. Russell L.J. Heintzelman, ordained June 22, 1958; and Rev. Lamar H. Handwerk, ordained May 12, 1974; and four from First: Rev. Russel R.G. Berger, ordained October 28, 1945; Rev. Robert Barroll, ordained March 11, 1956; Rev. Winfield Engler, ordained June 2, 1957; and Rev. Larry Smith, ordained June 14, 1970. In addition to those ordained into Christian ministry, two individuals have served as authorized ministers with lay ministerial standing: William “Biff” Hayes of First; and Brian Haas of Good Shepherd.

Now as the future unfolds with these two congregations united as one, may their achievements attained in the past be the spark for future accomplishments. And may this congregation be as committed tomorrow as they are today to the work of Christ ~ creating a place where all are welcome to worship God; finding creative ways of compassionate and caring service; and growing together in Christian discipleship.

**Pastors of First Church**

Morgan A. Peters	1911-1915
J. George Kerschner	1915-1922
Harry S. Keim	1922-1925
William O. Wolford	1926-1930
Sidney S. Smith	1930-1932
Clarence E. Whetstone	1932-1938
Wilbert R. Lesser	1938-1944
William T. Longsdorf	1944-1959
Howard R. Whitebred	1960-1965
Frederick A. Wenner	1966-1971
Gerald C. Solt	1972-1976
C. Lamar Derk	1976-1983
Warren E. Bates	1984-1986
Ronald T. Haney	1988-1992
John W. Davies	1992-1996
David A. Williams	2003-2006
Martin E. Nuscher	2012-2018

**Pastors of St. Paul’s Church**

Nevin W. Helffrich	1888-1902
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**Pastors of Holy Trinity Church**

Augustus Piscator	1903-1909
James O. Oswald	1910-1927
George W. Lutz	1928-1929
Robert J. Urffer	1929-1958
Merle U. Fox	1960-1962
Chester H. Haas	1963-1968
Milton A. May	1969-1970
Charles D. Rockel	1970-1973
Emmett L. Wentzell	1973-1975
James L. Knappenberger	1976-1984

**Pastors of Good Shepherd Church**

James L. Knappenberger	1984-1990
Willard S. Rabert, Jr.	1992-1997
James D. Robison, Jr.	1998-2019

**Pastors of Good Shepherd United Church of Christ**

James D. Robison, Jr.	2019-present
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## PASTORS OF GOOD SHEPHERD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**Reverend James D. Robison, Jr.**

**October 1, 1998 - present**

James Daryl Robison, Jr. was born on August 21, 1961 at Lewisburg Evangelical Hospital, Lewisburg, PA to James and Patricia (Koch) Robison. James graduated from Warrior Run High School, Turbotville, PA in 1979. In 1983, James earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education/Comprehensive Social Studies from Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA. After graduating from college, James taught school for one year at Landmark School North in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA working with students with dyslexia. James returned to his hometown and taught ninth, tenth and eleventh grade history at Warrior Run High School until he entered Lancaster Theological Seminary in 1995. James served as interim pastor at St. Paul's Dubs, Hanover, PA and St. Luke's, Lancaster, PA while a student in seminary and was a consultant for the Parish Resource Center in Lancaster, PA. James was called to Good Shepherd following a trial sermon on August 30, 1998 and began his pastorate on October 1, 1998. James was ordained on October 31, 1998 at his home church, Trinity United Church of Christ, Watsontown, PA and was installed on January 24, 1999 at Good Shepherd.

During James' pastorate, plans for the second and third phases of the building project were finalized with architect Joe Reda preparing the blue prints on behalf of the congregation; groundbreaking for the construction of the Christian Education Wing and Fellowship Hall took place in 2000; and dedication of the additions and furnishings in 2001; paving the blacktop in 2004; dedication of the Meditation Garden in 2006; and compiling the Church Records of Good Shepherd (1984-2009) into one typed document as well as organizing and typing the records for Holy Trinity from 1959 to 1984 filling in the gaps caused by frequently changing interims and supply pastors during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reverend Robison has served as convener of Blue Mountain Area Mission Council since September 1999; president of Guardianship Support Agency, Inc. since July 2004; and chairperson of Northern Lehigh Connections from August 2002 until August 2004. Reverend Robison served as a delegate to General Synod in 2001 at Kansas City, MO, in 2003 at Minneapolis, MN, and in 2019 at Milwaukee, WI.

Pastor James' hope for the future of Good Shepherd is for a deepening sense of faith in Jesus Christ as the congregation embraces a larger call to the commitment of Christian ministry and service not only in Slatedale but throughout the world, opening the doors wide to all God's children who seek to find God more fully in Christ.