



**OUR COMMON HISTORY
A TIMELINE OF THE FIRST 150
YEARS... AND OUR JOURNEY
CONTINUES**



First Congregational United Church
of Christ
Washington DC
1865 to 2015

OUR COMMON HISTORY – A

TIMELINE

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1. **September 1865:** The National Council of Congregational Churches wanted to establish more congregational churches in areas impacted by emancipation, so some people in Washington who had been anxious to form a congregational church held their first public service.
2. **November 15, 1865:** One hundred four of them covenanted together to be a church. The covenanting council that recognized them comprised representatives from nine churches from Portland, Maine, to Cincinnati, Ohio.

3. **1865:** The church's first Sunday school was organized with 100 members, mostly adults. By 1890 it had 500 members and existed as a separate organization within the church.
4. **1865:** The first minister was D. B. Boynton, who was also Chaplain of the US House of Representatives. More than 2,000 people came each Sunday to hear him, so after worship in three other places, they were able to worship in the House of Representatives.
5. **April 1866:** The Senate introduced a bill to incorporate the church; at that time, there was no other incorporating authority for organizations in the District of Columbia. Andrew Johnson signed the bill into law on January 31, 1867. The church was chartered as a Church and Society, which was a common structure in New England in order to separate a church's business side organizationally from its spiritual side.
6. **February 1866:** The church organized a building committee, which chose the architect Henry Robinson Searle. He was to design a church that could hold 1,500 people (with room for 2,500 when needed) to accommodate the large number of people who were attending and to serve as an auditorium for the city.
7. **November 1866:** The church purchased lots at 10th and G streets from the Van Ness family, land that was a former tobacco and slave plantation. The National Council of Congregational Churches advanced the money for the purchase.
8. **November 1866:** During one of the church's regular concerts, Boynton spoke of the country's and the church's duty to the four million people who had so lately been emancipated. Two other church members, Henry

Brewster and the Rev. Benjamin Morris, echoed his concern and invited 30 other people to a missionary meeting to discuss whether to establish a theological school for the freedmen. By January, the Senate introduced articles of incorporation for the school, which was to be named for General Howard a member of the founding committee and head of the Freedman's Bureau.

9. **June 1866 (? likely 1867):** Excavation began on the new building.
10. **October 1866 (? likely 1867):** The building's cornerstone was laid.
11. **May 5, 1868:** The church held its first service in the new building at 10th and G streets.
12. **April 1869:** Boynton resigned. While the church was abolitionist from the very beginning, Boynton and General Howard differed on whether the church should be integrated. Boynton had preached a sermon urging the segregation of the races, which led to a conflict mediated by an ecclesiastical council of delegates from churches from New England and elsewhere. After a vote in favor of General Howard and his supporters, Boynton resigned and took 100 members with him. Ninety-four members remained, including the original core of founding members.
13. **1869:** The church called Jeremiah Eams Rankin as its minister. Under his leadership, the church paid off most of its debt and made other improvements to the building. The membership increased to over 700 during his ministry. He was famous both as a preacher and as a hymn writer – “God Be with You Till We Meet Again” – which he wrote after the death of his son, is still in the church's hymnal. He also was a strong

supporter of the temperance movement. Rankin later served as the seventh president of Howard University.

14. **1873:** The church purchased its first pipe organ.
15. **1875:** John Bischoff became the church's organist in 1875 and stayed for 34 years. He was blind, but that did not hamper him as a musician. His music program was well known throughout the city; his concert series, which included John Philip Sousa and the Marine Corps Band, was always sold out.
16. **April 1878:** Thomas Edison demonstrated his invention of the phonograph at First Church.
17. **1881:** The Lincoln Memorial Congregational Temple calls its own pastor. Lincoln Temple grew out of the Lincoln Memorial Mission Sunday School, which First Church started in what then was known as "Hell's Bottom" with funding from the American Missionary Association.
18. **1883:** The church commissioned and sponsored its first foreign missionary, Frances Hooper, who went to Japan. (The church's last missionaries were Leeds and Gladys Gulick, who also served in Japan until their retirement in 1964.)
19. **April 1883:** Frederick Douglass delivered his address at First Church on the occasion of the Twenty-first Anniversary of Emancipation in Washington, DC.

20. **1884:** Stephen Newman began as the church's next minister—a position he would hold for more than 20 years. During evening services, he sometimes used a “magic lantern” to illustrate his talks.
21. **1891:** A group of black members of a local Methodist church withdrew and petitioned First Church for help establishing what would become People's Congregational Church. First Church gave substantial funds to help build their first building.
22. **1897:** Several authors gathered to raise money to work for an international copyright law. Authors such as Mark Twain read their works at the church to sold-out audiences.
23. **1903:** The church paid off the last of its debt.
24. **1907:** First Church chose Samuel Woodward as pastor. He was very active in the denomination and in ecumenical circles, and under his leadership the church continued to grow. Electricity also was installed in the church during his tenure.
25. **1907:** Ingram Congregational Church on Capitol Hill was established, again with help from First Church.
26. **1914:** Jay T. Stocking was chosen as the next minister and resigned the following year.
27. **1915(?):** The church selected James Logan Gordon, a self-educated minister known for his preaching, as its next pastor. The church continued to grow, and during his tenure the church engaged in activities to support servicemen and servicewomen who were in Washington because of World

War I. He left a few years later to become the minister of the congregational church in San Francisco.

28. **1920:** The church purchased a new Skinner organ to replace the worn-out one from 1873.
29. **April 1920:** William Jennings Bryan gave a soaring speech that packed First Church celebrating the passing of the 18th Amendment, against the sale of alcohol.
30. **1920:** Jason Noble Pierce began a decade of ministry at First Church. During his years President Calvin Coolidge and Grace Coolidge were members and attended regularly, causing the church to be mobbed. Members had to be issued tickets in order to get a seat on Sunday morning.
31. **1924:** Ruby Smith Stahl started as choir director and soprano soloist and remained in that position until 1945. The church had a choir of 70 members plus paid section leaders.
32. **1925:** Marian Anderson sang a concert at the church at the beginning of her career.
33. **1926:** First Church founded a home for the elderly on Crittenden Street with the support of Grace Coolidge. Three First Church women gave bequests that were designated to found a home for elders. It changed locations several times since then and is still functioning in Silver Spring, but it is no longer connected with either the church or the UCC.

34. **May 1926:** During a large worship service, a piece of balcony ceiling fell near the President's pew. One woman was carried out unconscious, and engineers who inspected the building found it unsafe. The church worshipped in a variety of locations for the next year-and-a-half while steel girders were installed to reinforce the balcony. The repairs cost \$55,000 at a time when the church was trying to convince others in the denomination to rebuild it as a "national church"—an effort that stalled as the Great Depression began.
35. **(?):** Pierce used excerpts from motion pictures to illustrate some of his evening services during the week, carrying on the innovative tradition of using the arts to convey the gospel that Stephen Newman had begun.
36. **1931:** Alien A. Stockdale was elected as pastor. He was known as an effective pastor and preacher, but he managed to antagonize a few members during his brief period as interim pastor. Those members were able to force his resignation in 1935.
37. **1933:** The Twice Monthly club gives church a baptismal font that is now on display on the second floor.
38. **1936:** Howard Stone Anderson was called as pastor.
39. **1937:** The church restored the assistant pastor position and called Walter Borchers.
40. **(?):** World War II impacted First Church as thousands of people came to work in Washington. The Scrooby Club for young adults organized many different activities for visiting servicemen and servicewomen, and the West Parlor became a lounge for military personnel.

41. **1942:** *The First Church Congregationalist* started as the church's first weekly newsletter.
42. **1944:** D-Day finds the church holding six services of prayer and a minister always present.
43. **1945:** The church called Whit Hall as Minister of Music. He and his wife, Genevive, were beloved and effective music leaders for the adult and children's choirs. During most of his tenure there were 50 voices in the choir.
44. **1947:** H.S. Anderson resigned, and Carl Heath Kopf, a well-known Boston minister, was called.
45. **(?):** The Washington area's suburban building boom following World War II extended the boundaries of the parish as members moved to more affordable housing.
46. **(?):** *The First Church Congregationalist* is replaced with the weekly *Gabriel's Horn*.
47. **Spring 1953:** The church buildings were condemned.
48. **November 1953:** The Church and Society received the congregation's approval to place the property for sale; they lowered the asking price the following spring. The church leadership talked about rebuilding elsewhere, and a church planning committee started.
49. **1955:** Grace Church members approached First Church about the possibility of merger as the Congregational Christian Churches and the

Evangelical and Reformed churches prepared to merge in 1957. The discussions fell through when the Grace Church membership did not agree to a merger.

50. **Fall 1956:** The Church and Society received an offer for the property that was substantially lower than the asking price.
51. **November 8, 1956:** The congregation rejected the motion to sell the property and relocate; many within the leadership, who had recommended the sale and moving of the church, withdrew from membership.
52. **November 28, 1956:** The church planning committee was dissolved, and a church building committee was formed instead.
53. **February 1957:** The church hired architect Milton Griggs; later that year, a fundraising campaign started for the new building.
54. **May 1958:** First Church was reincorporated in the District of Columbia, which had not been possible when the church was founded. The old Church and Society structure was abolished along with a lot of the trustees' previous power, and under the new structure (made formal in 1961), the pastor became administrative head of staff, the Council acted as a board of directors, and the church had four policy boards (Christian Education, Diaconate, Missions, Trustees).
55. **July 1, 1958:** Exhausted by the events of recent years and suffering from a recurrence of depression, Carl Heath Kopf disappeared. He was found hanging in the bell tower three days later of an apparent suicide, which precipitated a decline in membership.

56. **June 28, 1959:** The church held its last service in the original building, which then was razed over the summer.
57. **September 13, 1959:** Ground was broken for the "middle church".
58. **Fall 1959:** A search committee recommended to the church that the David G. Colwell be the next pastor. His interest in the civil rights movement and the ecumenical movement were to define his ministry, which began in January 1960.
59. **November 9, 1960:** First Church voted to become part of the United Church of Christ and approved its constitution.
60. **April 16, 1961:** The first worship service took place in the new building, which seated 650 and was air conditioned. A new organ, a Casavant, was purchased and installed.
61. **November 1962:** The church passed a resolution involving the congregation in a program of ministry to the immediate neighborhood, Mission to the Central City, which was the culmination of 14 months of study.
62. **August 28, 1963:** Forty members of First Church participated in the March on Washington.
63. **1964:** After numerous meetings, First Church reaffirmed the principle that it must participate responsibly in the political arena, after the church approved resolutions opposing federal aid to denominational primary and secondary schools and favoring open occupancy in housing in the city

and suburbs. There was a drop in membership related to the church's commitment to civil rights under David Colwell.

64. **1964:** The church considered selling its parsonage in Arlington and relocating it to an integrated neighborhood in Washington, but it did not do so since it was not financially favorable.
65. **1965:** The church paid off its mortgage with the Board of Homeland Ministries with the help of a \$20,500 fundraising drive.
66. **December 1967:** Former pastor Howard Stone Anderson was called following David Colwell's resignation in September.
67. **1969:** Ernest Newborn, the church's first black full-time professional staff member, started as assistant pastor. (One member left as a result.)
68. **Fall 1969:** First Church established a task force to "Study the Nature of our Christian Presence in the Inner City in 1980."
69. **1970:** The church established a conference-call system in order to let people hear the worship service who otherwise were unable to attend. This was discontinued a few years later due to cost.
70. **Summer 1970:** Howard Stone Anderson retired.
71. **September 1, 1970:** Oliver Powell was hired as a consulting minister to lead an intensive self-study process.
72. **1970:** The church sold the parsonage in Arlington for \$54,000.

73. **May 1971:** The task force issued its final report to the congregation. The report's recommendations on "Our Life Together," "Our Worship," "Our Nurture in the Faith," "Our Mission," and "Our Style of Organization" have guided the life of the church since then.
74. **1972:** Bill Moremen was called as "Pastor and Coordinator of Ministries," the title recommended in the Task Force report.
75. **1972:** First Church participated in the dedication of the Martin Luther King Library.
76. **1973:** The church participated in a new seminary project, Inter/Met, founded by Episcopal priest John Fletcher. This "school without walls," which lasted six years, had students learn while working in local churches. Michael Simmons was the first student to work at First Church; Dale Greene, a member, later also enrolled.
77. **June 1973:** First Church became a member of the Downtown Cluster of Congregations.
78. **1973:** Metropolitan Community Church, a LGBT-community congregation, started using the chapel on Sunday afternoons with Council's approval.
79. **Spring 1974:** A First Church resolution to let Metropolitan Community Church use the main sanctuary on Sunday afternoons and use some rooms as a church office failed at an unusually large congregational meeting.

80. **Fall 1974:** First Church voted again and granted Metropolitan Community Church's space-use requests following a full summer of reflection and a three-part series sponsored by the Christian Education Commission on perspectives on homosexuality. Some First Church members left over the matter.
81. **1975:** Ruth Shinn was elected first female moderator.
82. **1976:** The first portion of the Metro system opened, which permanently affected the area nearby. As part of the redevelopment, G Street was closed to traffic between 9th and 10th streets, and a plaza was established with fountains and seating.
83. **1976:** Jean Alexander was called as associate pastor – first clergywoman called to serve at First Church.
84. **1979:** Downtown continued to develop; plans included a new convention center, an expanded Metro system and new businesses.
85. **1979:** The Dinner Program for Homeless Women began its 30-year long mission program serving the homeless in the changing downtown. It offered meals once a week in 1979 and five nights a week in 1980.
86. **1980:** Council created the Inclusive Language Task Force, signifying the church's commitment to inclusive language. In 1985, inclusive language and images of God were the subject of a series of neighborhood clusters and nurture sessions.
87. **1981:** The church moved worship from 10 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in order to let people get to church using the new but limited Metro service.

88. **August 1983:** Bill Moremen left.
89. **1984:** John Mack was called as senior pastor. In 1985, Barbara Gerlach, John's wife, was called as assistant minister, contributing over the years to worship, Christian education and social action. By the time they retired in June 2007, John's ministry was the longest in the church's history.
90. **1985:** First Church created its Social Action and Awareness Commission.
91. **1985:** The church affirmed itself to be a Just Peace Local Church.
92. **1986:** John Mack was appointed consulting supervisor of the director of the Dinner Program for Homeless Women, which also was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
93. **1986:** The front of the sanctuary was renovated, including the removal of the high pulpit. This work began in 1982, when the congregation voted to make structural changes in the chancel to make it more flexible and more consistent with the church's theology.
94. **1987:** The church voted itself as an Open and Affirming Church—the 14th in the United Church of Christ and the first in the Central Atlantic Conference. In 1993, the church brought its experience with O&A to the Potomac Association and the CAC.
95. **1988:** Zacchaeus Kitchen, a breakfast program for men, started operating in the church along with the Dinner Program for Homeless Women.

96. **Summer 1989:** A real estate developer approached John Mack about developing the church site. The Council appointed a committee, which lasted until May 1992, when the congregation disbanded it given the recession and the large amount of downtown office space at the time.
97. **1991:** John Shepherd gave his coming-out sermon. John was the church's music director from 1977 until his death of AIDS in 1993.
98. **1993:** The Industrial Areas Foundation started to organize DC churches. In 1996, the Washington Interfaith Network had its founding meeting with 60 member congregations.
99. **1996 to 2000:** Capital campaigns raised \$200,000 for a new HVAC system and other repairs, repayment of the outstanding mortgage, and the beginning of an organ repair fund. Another \$405,000 in grants from outside improved the facilities for the social service programs by funding a total renovation of the kitchen (including a walk-in refrigerator), improved lighting and acoustics in the Fellowship Hall, and the addition of shower and laundry facilities.
100. **1997 to 1999:** More downtown development affected the church's immediate neighborhood. The MCI Center (now Verizon Center) opened in 1997 at 7th and G streets. (The Downtown Cluster of Congregations, with John Mack as president, had been involved in the planning in 1995.) A Business Improvement District was established with the ability to impose fees on the area's businesses. A new convention center opened by Mt. Vernon Place, and construction began on a new Secret Service building on G Place where the church once had free Sunday parking. G Street reopened in front of the church in 1999.

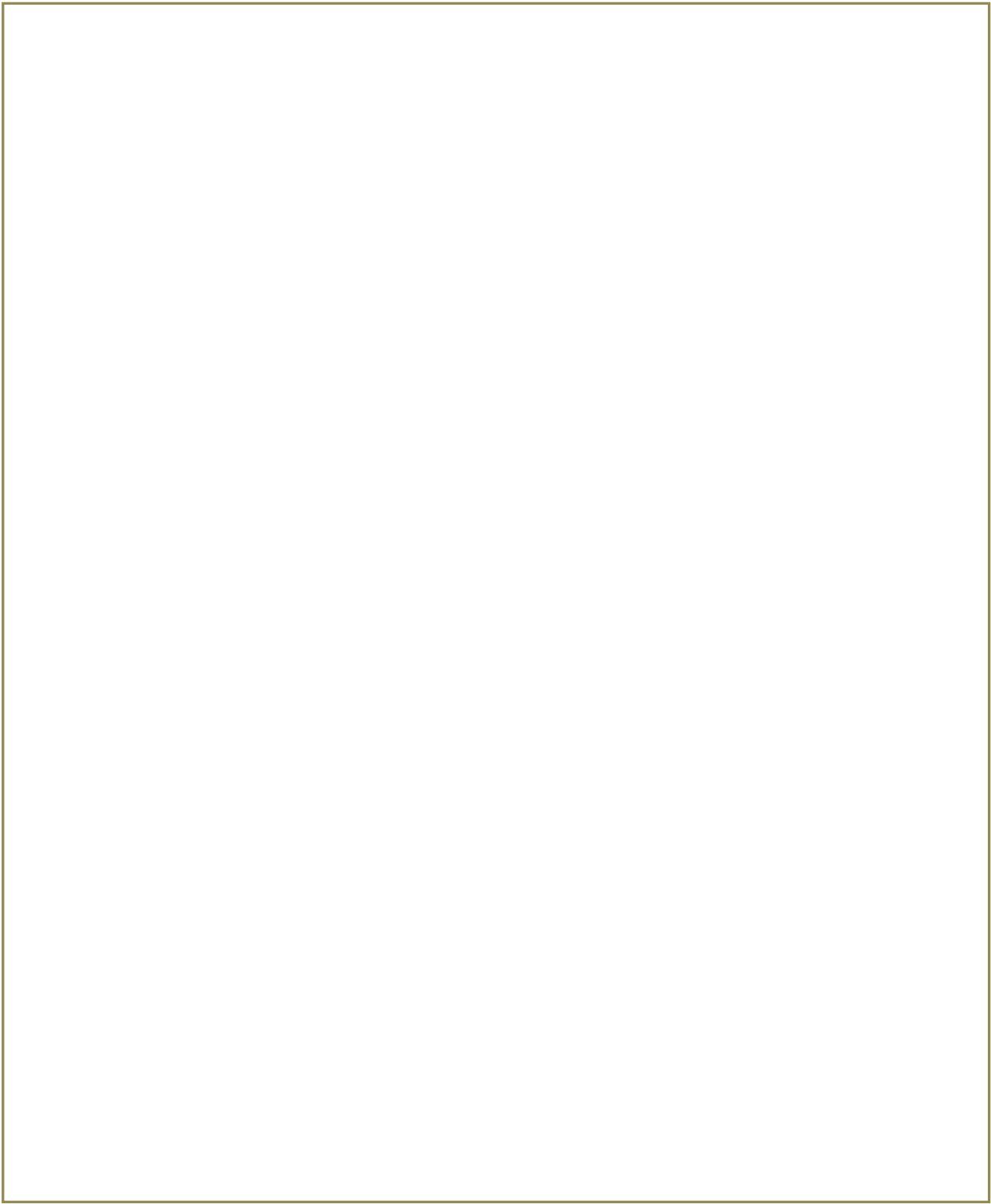
101. **1998 to 1999:** The church completed major improvements to the kitchen and social hall, allowing it to host the new Downtown Service Center, the homeless services arm of the downtown Business Improvement District. In 2000, 18% of clients used some service in addition to a meal.
102. **2000:** The church established a Multiracial and Multicultural task force.
103. **September 11, 2001:** The World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked, and nearly 3,000 people died. First Church responded by seeking to learn more about Islam. The church established relationships with several imams and participated in a variety of interfaith activities. In 2005, PBS aired the documentary *Three Faiths: One God*, which includes some scenes at First Church.
104. **April 2002:** The church hosted Colombia Mobilization, a broad lobbying effort against proposed military aid to Colombia. More than 400 people attended Saturday teach-ins, two evening concerts and an interfaith service. In June, Barbara Gerlach led a 35-person ecumenical delegation to Colombia.
105. **January 2003:** The church formally voted to be a Multiracial and Multicultural church.
106. **Early 2003:** The organ suffered major damage from a leak in the roof. An insurance claim of \$120,000 insurance helped with repairs—the organ was removed in early summer, was restored and was back in operation December 21.

107. **October 2004:** The final staffing task force report was released on pastoral staffing models to support the church's Multiracial and Multicultural status. The report stated that the entire leadership's racial composition is a key factor, as is the depth of the church's commitment; it did not make a recommendation on whether the next pastor needed to be a person of color, which disappointed some.
108. **October 2004:** The congregation authorized a new Site Development Task Force to investigate options for a new church building.
109. **May 2005:** The church decided to engage architectural, development and legal experts to help in the new-church effort. Tod Williams and Billie Tsien were selected as the architects of the church portion of the multi-use building.
110. **September 2006:** The Community Chorus began to link the homeless community with the church community to further the objectives of a multiracial and multicultural worship program. The chorus members received small stipends through 2009, supported by grant funds. Also supported by grant funds, First Church contracted with Ron Hopson, professor of theology and divinity at Howard Divinity School, as adjunct pastor.
111. **November 10, 2006:** The church signed a purchase and sale agreement that called for a 25,000-square-foot church and 10,000 square feet of dedicated social-service space.
112. **January 21, 2007:** The congregation held its last service in the "middle" church building.

113. **2007:** The church received a \$334,000 grant from the city in order for the Dinner Program for Homeless Women to help fill the gap left by the Downtown Services Center's closing. The church provided additional support to the dinner program so it could accompany the congregation to First Trinity Lutheran Church while the new building was constructed.
114. **July 2007:** The church approved a renegotiation of the purchase and sale agreement to change the structure from condominiums to an office building due to the softening of the condominium market.
115. **June 16 and 17, 2007:** First Church held a retirement celebration and service for John Mack and Barbara Gerlach. Seven months later, John died after contracting pneumonia during a trip to Nepal in November.
116. **January 2008:** Demolition began on the church building.
117. **August 2008:** Because financing was harder to come by due to the Great Recession, the church agreed to terms that made it impossible for the Dinner Program to return to 10th and G. The program changed its name to Thrive DC and relocated to St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church in DC's Mount Pleasant neighborhood.
118. **2009:** The Multiracial and Multicultural task force ceased to operate as a discrete group.
119. **May 2009:** The Outreach and Membership Commission was created as a separate entity from the Care of Parish Commission.
120. **November 2009:** The church called Peter Dennebaum as senior pastor; he remained in that position until March 2011.

121. **January 2010:** Construction on the new church building resumed with a new partner, Skanska, which bought the 10,000 square feet of space previously dedicated to social service programming.
122. **June 2010:** The church hired Bonnie Hardy as associate minister for Christian Education. This was the first time since 1999 the church had a staff member dedicated to Christian education and was the result of a CE Task Force report. (That report also recommended hiring two child care providers, who started in 2009.)
123. **February 2011:** The Council's membership grew from seven people to 12 as the result of a bylaw amendment to improve communication and coordination. The changes reduced the number of at-large members from four to two, and seven commissions each began appointing a representative.
124. **February through May 2011:** The Transitional Task Force worked and produced a report to prepare the church for a transitional minister to "effectively guide the congregation into the future" over the next several years.
125. **October 2011:** Sid Fowler started as the church's transitional minister; the church renewed its covenant with him as senior minister in 2013.
126. **December 2011:** A new First Church website launched. Even though the building was not completed, the church conducted its first service in the new church building on Christmas Eve.

127. **January 8, 2012:** First Church returns to 10th and G with a new 25,000-square-foot church, no mortgage and \$3.45 million for its endowment fund.
128. **February 26, 2012:** The church dedicated the new building.
129. **November 2012:** The organ was installed, tuned, and rededicated.
130. **2013:** The church began providing the chapel as a free venue for same-sex weddings.
131. **June 2013:** The church won a Vision Award from the Committee of 100 for the new building.
132. **October 2013:** During the shutdown of the federal government, Ford's Theater staged *The Laramie Project* at the church for two weeks, which was a moving example of the potential of the new church building as a venue for performances.
133. **January 2015:** The church hosted the Interfaith Service for the inauguration of Mayor Muriel Bowser.





FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church

Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss

Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran

Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams

Director of Music Ministry – Leela Koilpillai

Administrative Assistant – Ms. Whitney McColley

Sexton – Ms. Ines Marquez

Members in Discernment – Lynaya Morris, LaTayna Purnell

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