

In 1842 Ebenezer United Methodist Church was founded. Our church was first named Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church. Meetings were held in private homes by Methodist missionaries. The church's historical record recalls, "They inspired others by pouring out their hearts to God. These men were on fire for God and under the leadership of Alexander Guthrie." These missionaries established our Methodist church in an area known as Pleasant Hill. (Descendants of Alexander Guthrie – Paul, Mark, and Betty Ayars – are still members of Ebenezer.)

In 1824 the first Ebenezer was built out of stone and had a gallery. The church measured 28' x 24'. Circuit-riding pastors preached on every fourth Sunday, but the members held prayer meetings, class meetings, and Sunday school lessons weekly. In 1855 the Methodist Conference met in Wilmington and the Bishop wanted to close Ebenezer because there was only six members. The Bishop, persuaded by Joseph Guthrie (Alexander Guthrie's son), decided to keep the church open if the members could raise \$25. Rev. B.F. Price was pastor but had to leave because of his health and the church struggled for several years. For 35 years, the stone building grew to 60 members and the pastors were supplied from the Newark, Christiana, and Hockessin circuits.

On March 29, 1858, a new pastor arrived from the Philadelphia Conference, the Rev. James Brindle. Revivals were held with capacity crowds in attendance until the floor of the church gave way and the building was pronounced unsafe. A new building had to be built. In 1859 a one-story frame building measuring 35' x 50' was built at a cost of \$2500. Stones from the old church were used as the foundation for the new one.

In 1887 the Harvest Home was started by the Good Templars Lodge and was to be a temperance rally. However, this became more of a family outing with speakers and singing and more emphasis on fun and the family than on temperance. Festivities include serving lunch and supper, a baseball game in the afternoon and a special program in the evening. The Harvest Home became one of the most important events of the year for the church.

In 1897 during the ministry of Rev. W.T. Hammond, Ebenezer was made a separate appointment by the Conference, and a parsonage was built at a cost of \$1200.

Building upon the Foundation

In the last section on Ebenezer's history, we ended in 1897. The historical record to 1923. Sixteen ministers served during this time. Rev. G.T. Gehman was transferred

to Ebenezer in September 1923 and immediately saw the need for improvements in the church building. Extensive work included a new carpet, “re-decoration” of the walls, new pews, pulpit furniture, choir chairs, curtains, hymn number boards, and light fixtures. The old windows were replaced with new memorial windows and the basement was remodeled for classrooms and a new kitchen. The 100th anniversary was held on July 6, 1924. Money for the improvements came from the contributions from the anniversary, which totaled \$5,334.15. New hymnals were purchased in 1928, and the official board voted to connect the church with the new electric line for \$245. Wallpaper, paint, new rugs, and electrical fixtures were installed. Later in 1928, the sheds and an old barn were removed, and a new garage was built. Further renovations were made during 1929-30, making the living room larger by taking out a partition between two smaller rooms. A dining room suite was also purchased.

Rev. Oliver J. Collins became minister in May 1928. During his tenure, he developed a Young People’s Organization, and they took a very active role in strengthening Ebenezer. In 1930 Sidney B. Bradley was appointed pastor. A new reed organ was installed, and additional improvements were made to the parsonage and sanctuary during Bradley’s appointment.

Daily Vacation Bible School was organized during the leadership of Rev. T.O.M. Wills who became pastor in April 1932. The Bible school was very successful due to Mrs. Wills’ musical and dramatic talent. She inspired younger and older members alike. She directed many religious pageants and wrote and directed the pageant, “Ebenezer Through the Years.” Wills worked tirelessly researching the history of Ebenezer for her pageant in November 1938, Rev. Wills withdrew from the Delaware conference and joined the fellowship of Springfield, Illinois.

From 1938 to 1941, L.V. Pratt was minister. The Woman’s Society of Christian Service was formed in 1939. The Ebenezer’s Young People’s Society was famous for its plays in the 1930’s.

The following are highlights that took place during the next ten year at Ebenezer:

- 1941 – George W. Goodley, Jr. was minister from 1941-42. This was during World War II, a trying time for the church. The Women’s Society held prayer services for those in the Armed Forces.
- 1942 – Rev. Goodley left Ebenezer and entered the Chaplaincy of the armed forces on April 17, 1942. (He returned as Minister of Visitation and Pastor

Emeritus until his death in 1999.) Ebenezer officers and members rededicated themselves to the work of the church. Special emphasis was placed upon individual responsibility in the affairs of the church. Under the tutelage of music director Julia Jackson, Dorothy Hollingsworth (Hitchens) became Ebenezer's organist, a position she would fill for 52 years.

- 1944 – The Women's Society of Christian Service was revived, and the Young People's Society changed its name to Methodist Young Adult Fellowship. March 5 was "Improvements Day," and the sanctuary, exterior of the church and parsonage were painted. Three members of Ebenezer were killed in the war: Sgt. Harold Kirk, Private James R. Wilson, and Private Herbert Knotts. Each had a star placed on our Service Flag. Harvest Home Sunday was held on September 20 and with an offering of \$575. Lindsey Greenplate was Sunday School Superintendent and under his leadership an attendance objective was set for 100 people. Fifteen teachers joined. WSCS had 62 members. Also, during 1944 repairs were made to the parsonage at a cost of \$239. Evening services were held every other week with good attendance and 100 new songbooks were purchased for use during these services. At the 120th anniversary the offering taken in was approximately \$200. Crusade for Christ offerings and/or pledges amounted to \$1,093.
- In 1946, a new Wicks Pipe Organ was purchased which included pipes bought from Kingswood Church.
- 1947 – The Trustees reorganized and voted on a system of retiring three of their members each year. By February 9, the only indebtedness for Ebenezer was \$150 for the church organ. Special services were held during the year to help build church interest and loyalty and in some cases helped the church financially. Rural Life Sunday was held on May 25 with members of White Oak and Corner Ketch 4-H Clubs conducting the services. Harvest Home Sunday was held on September 21. The MYF sponsored the movie "The King of Kings" and the church was filled.
- 1948 – The conference Endowment Fund Day was held on February 15 with guest speaker Rev. Lester Windsor conference treasurer. The offering was \$106 toward the goal of \$275. WSCS Ebenezer Fellowship and the MYF donated money toward the purchase of chairs for the church. The special services for the year. Harvest Home and Homecoming were well attended in this 124th year of Ebenezer. Lester Loder, pastor, felt Ebenezer had progressed along the lines of spiritual growth and development.

- 1949 - The 125th anniversary of Ebenezer and the first year of the great “Methodist Advance for Christ and His Church.” Rev. Lester Loder wrote, “Proud of our heritage, grateful for it, but dedicated to making our inheritance the foundation upon which we shall build for today and tomorrow, workers together with Him.” The MYF sold birthday calendars to members and friends and collected \$46. Memorial plates with the picture of the church were also sold.

Ebenezer’s Heritage

Ebenezer continued to grow in 1950 as the Lord’s faithful “had grown spiritually and were increasing responsibilities in spiritual life.” Sunday school and MYF attendance had grown, and missionary work became an important focus with the children’s Sunday school.

Several events were sponsored by the MYF: New Year’s Eve Watchnight, Easter Sunrise Services, Methodist Camp Fund. A wire recorder was purchased for the shut-ins to take weekly church services to their homes. A successful Vacation Bible School was held with 50 children in attendance.

A new organization was formed at Ebenezer called the Ebenezer Fellowship/ This group was made up of those young people who had graduated from MYF. In addition to the purpose of fellowship, this group took on projects that were beneficial to the church. They removed old trees from in front of the church and replaced them with yew from \$21. They also raised money with bake sales and selling vanilla.

In 1951 outside speakers were brought in and special WSCS services were held which greatly increased interest in mission work. A parent-teachers meeting was held by the church Board of Education to acquaint parents with the church school programs and to suggest ways of getting parents and teachers to carry out the lessons of the various classes. Vacation Bible School attendance was 55.

Attendance in worship services was growing steadily in 1952 and additional people were added to the church school staff. The finance committee set up a budget that helped the financial “askings” in the church and on the conference level.

Several improvements to the church and parsonage were completed. The parsonage heating system was converted from coal to oil and a new roof was put on the church. The men of the church doing the work kept the cost to a

minimum. The improvement debt was \$1100. Other improvements to the church were painting and new curtains for the stage and windows. Main support beams that had been eaten by termites were replaced under the sanctuary. The parsonage got a face-lift with new wallpaper and an “automatic spin-drying washer.” The church school added a nursery class.

Events for 1952 included Ebenezer Jubilee, MYF banquet with Senator J. Allen Frear as guest speaker, a three-act play “A Ready-Made Family,” a Truth or Consequences show sponsored by the MYF, the WSCS held a missionary worship service with Miss Marian Carliss speaking on Japan and a clothing drive for Korea.

In 1953 Ebenezer had made advances toward greater community service. And every member’s canvas had been made for the first time and church loyalty Sunday was stressed. The church school added a new class in the Intermediate Department. The junior choir was organized, and the children’s division sent \$24 to the Methodist mission in Borneo.

The church laymen undertook several repairs to the church and garage. They also cleared the land that was purchased (formerly the Frank Whiteman property). The addition of this made it possible for the expansion of the church and church school.

Several special events were held Minister’s tea and reception, pie social, Jubilee in the summer, chicken and oyster supper, Halloween parties for the youth choir and MYF, and play present by the MYF called “Here Comes Charlie.” Suppers were served to the Evangelical group and the ladies of Ebenezer served a ministerial luncheon to the district ministers.

Beginning in May 1954 Ebenezer was first able to have a full-time minister, Rev. Edwin J. Horney, who had been part-time pastor since 1949. The membership and Evangelism Commission began visitation of the church members. To promote church attendance there was a crusade during Lent, and Loyalty Sunday was observed.

The church laymen cleared the land around the church and orchard. The outside of the church was painted, and a new parking lot was completed. The heating system of the church was changed from coal to oil and the side porch of the parsonage was enclosed.

Still under the direction of Rev. Horney in 1955, Ebenezer continued its community service. Special events of the WSCS included visitation of shut-ins at the Emily Bissell Sanitarium, a pie social, and attending the World Day of Prayer with the United Church Women of Newark. The laymen of the church and nylon carpet was put down the aisles and at the pulpit. A concrete walk was poured from the church to the new parking lot. The laymen also landscaped around the church.

A new pastor came on board in 1956, Rev. Willard Robinson (who was the speaker during church services for the 175th). Vacation Bible School ran for two weeks in June with an attendance of 78 (including eight teachers). A mission study course was conducted on the subject of Southeast Asia. Two boxes containing hospital gown and bandages were sent to Nepal.

The Methodist Men's Group was formed, and the charter issued of May 14, 1956.

The church was insulated, and an electric typewriter was purchased for the church office. The Ebenezer Kindergarten Associated completed its first year. The church reached its budget for the year and was able to pay \$1000 on the church mortgage.

Attendance continued to grow in 1957 and an average of \$200 in offering was taken in during each church service. The Commission of Finance kept members informed by sending out letters with the proposed budget and explaining the financial system. Several improvements were made to the church to make more space for the Sunday school classes and a church office. A steam table for the church was purchased.

In 1958 there was much emphasis on the teaching ministry with continued visitations by the Commission on Membership and Evangelism. Vacation Bible School had an attendance of 79, including teachers.

The Commission on Finance worked well under the leadership of Melvin Dempsey. A Building Study Committee was formed to help look toward the church's future growth. A new floor was laid downstairs of the church. A new Hamilton piano was purchased for the church and a new mimeograph machine was purchased for the church office.

The music program in 1959 was quite strong under the direction of Mrs. W. Floyd Jackson. Church services were well attended. Financially, the church was

in better shape in 1959 than the previous year due to a \$9,000 gift from Mr. & Mrs. Howard Thomas Walmsley. This donation allowed the church to pay off the mortgage on the church house and put \$4200 in the building fund. Due to the population explosion of the area, Ebenezer was beginning to feel the need for expansion.

Ebenezer committees and groups were quite busy in 1960. WSCS events included the annual pie social, reception for ministers, covered dish suppers, and auction sale and Mrs. W.R. Davis spoke on city missions. The Commission of Education formed a junior MYF. The Building Committee was elected at the fourth quarterly conference. The following members were chosen Mr. Daniel Harris, Chairman; Mr. Carl Nelson, Sr.; Mr. Richard Burke; Mr. Paul Alexander; Mrs. Lindsay Greenplate; Mrs. Ferris Dempsy; Mrs. Alexander Jarrell; Mr. Ralph Endriss; Mr. Ralph Whiteman; Mr. Paul Nelson, Mrs. Kinsey Whiteman; Mr. Robert Major; Mr. Darrel Neidigh; Mr. Leonard Nelson, Sr. Building Fund Treasurer; Bobby Woodworth, MYF president; and Rev. Willard Robinson, pastor.

The Building Committee recommended building additional church school space as soon as possible and making future plans for a new sanctuary. During the pastoral tenure of Rev. Charles Davis, the Education Building (cost \$110,000) was consecrated in 1964.

The new sanctuary construction began on August 17, 1975, and was completed in 13 months. The new sanctuary included a new Allen organ. The sanctuary seats 290 people and an additional 80 people can be seated in the Narthex if needed. Built at the same time were a new Fellowship Hall and kitchen, located under the sanctuary and Narthex. The congregation gave \$150,000 toward construction and took on a \$320,000 mortgage. Consecration of the new sanctuary was held on September 12, 1976. Ebenezer's pastor, Rev. Robert Helms, and District Superintendent Rev. Edwin S. Thomas led the services. They began in the old church sanctuary and then led a processional to the new one. More than 500 people attended the consecration services.

Continued growth spurred further new construction. Again, the people of the church (young and old) contributed much labor, and in 1993, under new leadership of the Rev. Robert Starrett, the Christian Life Center was opened. This enabled the church staff and lay leadership to enhance such programs as Sunday school, music, pre-school, children, youth and adult ministries, and

community outreach. It was also under the leadership of Rev. Starrett that Ebenezer hired a full-time Youth Leader and a full-time Director of Music.

Due to the cost of upkeep the Trustees decided to teach down the old church. In the summer of 1998, the church was dismantled. The stained-glass windows were taken out for future use (rededicated on Anniversary Sunday, Oct. 24, 1999) and items from the church building were sold. An expansion of the current parking lot replaced the church.

To meet the needs of Ebenezer's growing congregation, many programs are offered for members of all ages, including Disciple Bible Courses, Stephen Ministry, an expanded music program to include choirs for all ages and two bell choirs. Community outreach programs are an integral part of our church with many of the members taking part in Neighborhood House, programs for the homeless at Homeward Bound, Sojourner's Place, and Hope Dining Room, Prison Ministry, and the Pike Creek Coalition of Churches.

175th Anniversary

Sunday, October 24, 1999, was a glorious day for Ebenezer United Methodist Church! We not only celebrated the church being established for 175 years, but we are celebrating our members who kept the faith and have continued serving God at the church on the hill.

Rev. Dr. Willard Robinson, pastor at Ebenezer from 1956-1961, preached at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. worship services. Both services were well attended with 228 people at the 8:30 service and 269 at the 11 o'clock service. The 27 members who have belonged to Ebenezer for 50 or more years were recognized. Each was presented with a wooden cross strung on gold threads. A member, who wishes to remain anonymous, had the crosses made from the redwood beam from the old church. In the midst of our joy, we also remembered Carolyn Starrett and Dick Gilkey, who went to be with the Lord this week.

The beautiful stained-glass windows taken from the old church were dedicated and now hang in the sanctuary. The congregation sang "Ebenezer: Stone of Help", a hymn written by our music director, Kerry Dietz for the 175th anniversary.

After the church service, the congregation gathered outside by the cemetery for a service of recognition of the historical marker from the State of Delaware.

Joining the ceremony was Tom Summers, coordinator of public programming, Delaware Public Archives 1999 (NC-104).

The celebration continued at 5 p.m. in the Christian Life Center with a sit-down dinner and program about Ebenezer. Jay Greene and Jessica Spears presented the chronological history of Ebenezer and what was happening around the world at the same time (researched by Fadra Towers and compiled by Carl Jones). Popular music from various eras was provided by Jay Webb and the Banjo Dusters, Dot Hitchens (who was organist for 50 years at Ebenezer), and Kerry Dietz, music director.

Former ministries were recognized with the attendance of Rev. Dr. Willard Robinson, pastor 1956-1961; Charles Davis, pastor 1961-1966; Florence Helms, widow of Robert Helms, pastor, 1966-1978; William Dore, pastor, 1978-1986; Michelle Moore, associate pastor, 1995-1997; and Dan Gedman, associate pastor, 1995-1997. Also recognized was Rev. Mae Etta Moore, who got her call from the Lord while attending Ebenezer from 1997-1980. Each person told of their experiences at Ebenezer, including stories about the old parsonage. The evening concluded with the singing of “Ebenezer: Stone of Help” and the presentation of an anniversary cake.

Ebenezer through the present

Ebenezer is getting ready to celebrate another milestone. It's getting ready to celebrate its 200th anniversary as the church on the hill. Ebenezer has gone through many changes over the years. The church has installed a new sound system, computer system, and big screens so the services can be recorded and are now live streamed. This was a major step forward for Ebenezer. The live streaming service did not happen right away, but it is in full swing now. The Christian Life Center also got a new sound system for when programs are held in there.

In 2009, a major renovation took place. This included the sanctuary, Goodley-Helms Hall, Sunday school classrooms and offices. Our current organ was also installed at that time.

In between 1999 to the present, we have ministers come and go. Rev. Ray Graham, served from 1999 to 2007. Rev. Ted Day, served from 2007 to 2015. Rev. Richard Vance, served from 2015 to 2016. Rev. Mary Browne, serving from 2016 to present.

May 2018, Kerry Dietz, Minister of Worship & Music, retired. After serving Ebenezer faithfully for 25 years. He directed both C to Shining C and Good Chime bell choir, Children and Chancel choir. Kerry also held music classes for the preschool that was downstairs. Kerry also directs Wilmington Handbell Ensemble that is a combination of church bell choirs, and they go to different locations to play a concert for Christmas and in the Spring.

Ebenezer had an old sign that you needed two to three people just to change the message on the sign, which was on both sides. It was a challenge to get enough people to help. The trustees met and agreed to get a new electric. A new electric sign was installed, and now the sign can be changed anytime of the day. We can display messages about a church event, a scripture reading, or remembering someone during memorial service.

In 2020, Ebenezer Preschool closed its doors after 55 years of devoted service to the church and community. In 2020, Ebenezer was hard nationwide. A pandemic shut down the nation. We had still held church, but it was through live stream. This was a first for Ebenezer. This was very different, but we made the best of it. Pastor Browne, Minister of Worship and Music, and the Media team made it work. For the first couple of months there were only about five people allowed. Pastor Browne did a wonderful job in keeping the church going through the pandemic and saw that everyone remained true to their spiritual journey.

Ebenezer needed a new sidewalk that went from the parking lot to the church. Every time that it rained, or it snowed the sidewalk was always slippery when it was wet. So, the trustees committee came together to come up with a date and time when this was going to be done. The new heated sidewalks were installed in 2023.

The kitchen has just recently got a new oven to replace the old one that was there. The UMC women were very happy about getting this new oven. There have been other changes in the kitchen that have helped make things easier.

Ebenezer is making small changes to keep up with the changing times. We just had the hallway carpet removed, and a new floor replaced. The church is in the mist of changing over to solar panels for power. We at Ebenezer are going to try to do our best to go green.

Ebenezer is an amazing church, that God has guided us to be a beacon of light on top of this hill for 200 years. Let's keep this light shining for another 200 years as God's leaders and followers spreading the gospel.