

Anniversary Reminiscences

Era 1: Beginnings (1910s–1920s)

First Church began with the needs of the community in mind. Enough people were living in Squantum (or vacationing there in the summer) that there were children who needed Sunday School. A group of moms approached Rev. Thomas Davison of the Atlantic Memorial Church to help them start a Sunday School. A 24'x40' tent was erected in the summer of 1910 on land that Nelson and Carlson Realtors had set aside for a church at the corner of Huckins and Standish (where the fire station now stands). In the fall of 1911, attendance was strong enough that Mr. Carlson offered the Richards house (where the church building currently sits) for worship. During the winter of 1913, fire ravaged the Richards house, and the Sunday School was forced to meet in the carriage house (barn). It was time to build a new church building!

The plan was to build a meeting house for a “union church.” At the time, two different groups were meeting in homes for worship and Sunday School—one group in Swedish and the other in English. Could they share the same building? They decided they could. Since the foundations were sound, the young church opted to build on the site of the Richards house, and recycle as much as they could. But where would the money come from? As it turned out, important contributions were made by Mr. Nelson, Mr. Carlson, and...Mr. C.A. Richards' daughter! She seems to have been moved by this church's tenacity and heart, for when a lumber bill came due, instead of paying the half she had promised, she opted to pay it all! The Congregational Church Union of Boston which provided matching funds for all donations and helped pay Rev. Davison's salary. Without a doubt though, the key was the way any number of craftsmen donated their time and labor to constructing the church.

In her History of the First Church of Squantum, Annie Frazer writes:

“Can you picture the enthusiasm of the day? Out of the ruins of an old New England house had risen a beautiful church. A belfry had been added and a bell installed. It was a beautiful day, September 20, 1914. Over the platform glowed the rose window in memorial of Mr. Calvin Richards, and the sun streaming in through [it,] casting colored shadows over all... On the platform stood the pulpit and to the left...was a little reed organ. What a wonderful day in the history of Squantum when the church was completed... Then followed the dedication service by Mr. Davison with the response by the Congregation... Everyone left the church feeling that it was good to have been there.” Rev. Davison (who pastored First Church in addition to his own congregation) said: “Squantum is without a hall of any kind, and its social activities have been stunted for this reason. The fact that the Community Hall is separated from the church proper and its religious work, will tend to make [the] Community Hall available for...the best interests of Squantum.”

Era 2: 1920s–1940s

Squantum was growing and so was the church. The congregation was thinking about moving its usual afternoon or evening worship service to the morning, and a full-time pastor was going to be necessary. In September 1923, Rev. Davison resigned to focus on serving Atlantic Memorial Church, stating “that no matter how consecrated a minister may be, that no man could do justice when supplying any field outside of his main work.” A series of young pastors helped First Church to grow. During this period, part of Squantum continued to be strongly Swedish, and many of these people enriched First Church with their hard work and faithful souls. At a time when there was some general prejudice against Swedes in society, the church continued to be a place of welcome for everyone, regardless of denomination. After World War II, the community swelled with people and activities...and so did the church, until it was bursting at the seams. To accommodate all the groups, activities and people, the church built a major addition that flipped the sanctuary around, and added class rooms, meeting spaces and offices. First Church was ready for the next era.

Era 3: 1950s–1960s

The First Church of Squantum was one of the hubs for life in Squantum. Several women’s fellowships—including Ladies Aid, Evening Aid and Friendship Circle—joined the Burrows Men’s Class and later the Sumner Men’s Group. Youth groups were important to the church too. Early on this was called Christian Endeavor, but later would become the mainstays of the Junior and Senior Pilgrim Fellowships. The Church fielded girls and boys basketball teams for the church league and often captured the championship, as our trophies can attest! Singing groups that had always been popular really bloomed with boys choirs, men’s and women’s choirs, and children’s choir. In 1959, the church reached its high water mark of 477 active members with two morning worship services on Sunday, plus a service they called “the mariner service” at 7:30 in the evening. World missions were a real concern for the people of First Church, and they supported many efforts abroad.

Era 4: 1970s–1980s

Beginning late in the 1960s and continuing through the 1980s, many churches around the country saw steady declines in membership and attendance. The First Church of Squantum was no stranger to this trend. Many churches wanted to continue to do all the things they loved, but this sometimes made it harder to adapt to the changing society. In 1978, the church called Dr. Gene Langevin, who brought tremendous energy and ability to the pastorate. He came out of the Baptist tradition and was known for his teaching skills in Bible study. He also felt called to minister to disadvantaged and at-risk youth and tried to share this passion with the church. The church saw some resurgence, particularly in children’s and youth ministries.

Era 5: 1990s–2000s

Dr. Langevin's ministry at First Church ended in 1993. The congregation sought God's renewal, and found Rev. Sue Moenius, a ready source of encouragement. Following on her heels was Rev. Bill Hamilton, who brought his creative vision to the scene, for a time serving both First Church and Atlantic Memorial Church—First Church's "mother" church. First Church however, was glad to have Bill's full concentration. Rev. David Wood was called in 2002. He labored in the vineyard for four years, bringing earnest ministry and effective visitation to the congregation. The church found Rev. Michael Robertson and called him in 2006. Mike brought great energy and a passion for helping the church gain viability. During this period, the church ordained three women into the ministry—Revs. Clara Sparks, Joy Matos and Emily Robertson. Clara became our chaplain, Joy taught Bible Studies and is now Interim Minister at First Congregational Church in Hanson, and Emmy eventually became Co-Pastor here at First Church. During Mike's time at the church, new children's ministries were planted, new partnerships with the community were grown, and a new generation of members began finding First Church. Everywhere you went, you would find the message, "Love Kindness" and the church tried to live it. When the Star of the Sea was closed by the diocese, First Church welcomed the Friends of the Star of the Sea to share their worship space. The church was again poised for a new era.