

Appendix C: History of Hartford Presbyterian Church in Hartford, ME

A Short Narrative of the History of the Hartford Community Church 1955-2020

The Rev. Carl H. Geores, Jr.

The history of the Hartford Community Church must begin with a story about the Reverend Carl Geores, who arrived in Maine as a recently minted graduate of Princeton Seminary, ordained at the Mariaville, NY Presbyterian Church in his hometown. Before Princeton, he had served three and a half years in the Marine Corps during World War II and after his service he attended Union College from which he graduated in three years. In 1951 Rev. Geores was interviewed by Dr. J. Earl Jackman, (Administer of the Department of Sunday School Mission) and told about an opportunity for a young minister in rural Maine. He was informed of a recent request from the Rev. William Burger, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Newburyport, for a minister who would be instrumental in organizing a church in the small town of Leeds, Maine.

Rev. Geores learned that over 100 people in Leeds had presented a petition to the Interdenominational Commission seeking help to start a church in their rural community. Rev. Geores agreed to become a "Sunday School Missionary" to an area with a scattered population and to provide pastoral services whenever and wherever needed. Rev. Geores had never been to Maine nor had he ever heard of Leeds, but he and his wife, Melva, were ready to begin their work as part of Christ's ministry.

On June 13, 1952, Rev. Geores arrived in Maine, soon followed by Melva and their three children (ages 4, 1 ½, and a seven-week old infant). Their thirty-three-year ministry in western Maine was initially made possible by the Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Department of Sunday School Missions.

Leeds had two old, unused church buildings that were in very poor condition and would need major repairs; undaunted Carl and Melva soon started pastoral work by calling on Leeds' residents. They initiated a vacation church

school, regular worship services in one of the old buildings, firewood cutting fests and, of course, church suppers. The Leeds Community Church (LCC) was formally organized on January 3, 1953 and became part of the Mission at the Eastward (MATE).

Early beginning of the Hartford Community Church

Carl extended his ministry to the nearby towns of Hartford, North Turner and Wales. On September 28, 1953 the members of the Wales Union Church invited Carl to become their pastor. Wales, another small community of 450 people, had not had a formally organized church since 1900. Carl agreed to their terms of call: his salary was to be whatever each Sunday's offering total may be minus \$1.00.

In the early 1950's, Hartford was a town with a large land area that had experienced a gradual population decline from around 1,300 residents in the 1850's to around 400. The two largest lakes in the town were in the earliest stages of development; there were a few farms, quite a bit of lumbering and a few commuters to the paper mills in Jay, Livermore Falls and Rumford. There was no post office, no stores, no significant town center, no churches and two one-room school houses that were closed in the 1970's during a period of school consolidation. There was, however, a very old church building that was owned by the Hartford Historical Society.

Carl started his ministry in Hartford by organizing a youth group and a church school that met in the Hartford Town Hall in 1952. He initiated Wednesday evening services in the Town Hall and, as more people began to attend, it was clear that a ministry was wanted and needed in the town. On May 18, 1955, with seventeen committed charter members, the Presbytery of Newburyport formally recognized the Hartford Community Church (HCC). It was then incorporated in the State of Maine in 1962. The seventeen charter members were:

Harland Berry	Harold Gammon
Albert Bickford	Janet Kimball
Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Bickford	Merle A. Kimball
Miss Winifred Bickford	Mrs. Charlotte Libby
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bragg	Arthur Mahoney
Colby Davis	Mr. and Mrs. Carl Mahoney
June Davis	Sandra Mahoney

The Yoking

With Carl now pastor at Leeds, Hartford and Wales, a cooperative parish was formed in 1973. Now with all three churches “yoked” and sharing the responsibility of supporting the pastor and his family, the combined Parish became self-supporting (Leeds 49%, Wales 36% Hartford 15%.) This was a relationship that required Rev. Georges to put approximately 25,000 miles on his car every year and to keep him constantly “on the go”. Only a man with his extraordinary, inexhaustible energy, devotion and inspiration could have succeeded so well in this ministry.

For many years there was an unorganized congregation at the North Turner Union Church that shared a minister with the Livermore Methodist Church. The North Turner Union Church was formally organized in 1958, and continued their relationship with the Methodist Church, and chose to remain independent of the three-church parish. The North Turner church did, however, become part of the Mission at the Eastward.

The church building, acquisition and improvements

For its first few years the insipient, struggling church in Hartford held services in the Hartford Town Hall, but in the summers, services were held in the old church building that was owned by the Hartford Historical Society. In 1968 the Historical Society deeded the old, historically significant, but under-utilized church building with about 1/2 acre of land to the Hartford Community Church.

The building was constructed with rough-cut boards in 1830 on what is now called Gurney Hill to serve a Free Baptist congregation. In 1848, the Baptist congregation was disbanded and the building remained unused; then in 1858 the “meeting house” was moved about five miles by oxen over roads that no longer exist to its present location at 387 Church Street. At its new location, it served a Methodist congregation until 1941. Legend has it that on July 3, 1892 a “cyclone” struck the building during a service, lifting the roof off the church and setting it down beside a pasture fence where horses were tethered. No parishioners were seriously injured. Unfortunately, the topic of the Sunday’s Sermon is not known.

The Hartford Community Church now had a physical home, however, the foundation was in poor condition, the building had no heating system, no running water, no electricity, no insulation, no storm windows, and no toilet facilities. It was simply a 45 ft. by 36 ft. building with large windows, hard wooden pews, an old out-of-tune piano, a few antique chairs and a simple pedestal-pulpit on a raised stage. The congregation had much work to do to bring the building into the 20th Century. This “modernization” work began in earnest in 1975 when Bernard Adams was employed to put in a sturdy cinder-block foundation and grade the land around the building to provide a small parking lot. This parking lot was later expanded in 1990 when Sam MacGregor, a summer resident and major landowner in Hartford, donated approximately three acres of woodland adjacent to the one-half acre church property. (A proviso in the deed to the parking lot addition stipulated that the donated land “shall revert to his heirs ... if the land is no longer used for charitable purposes”.) Many volunteered to renovate the church’s interior, the walls were insulated, storm windows installed and painted, electric wiring and lights were installed, the ceiling was repaired and the old piano tuned.

Over the years many more improvements were made while, for the most part, retaining the historical integrity of the structure. In 1983, a wood stove and chimney was installed, an old but functional pump organ was obtained in 1984, the wood stove was replaced by a forced hot air heating system and a used but functional oil-burning furnace in 1987. (Wayne Whittemore replaced this furnace

with a new, more efficient one in 2018.) A well was drilled, basic plumbing installed when a small restroom was constructed in the back of the building. In 1990 under the supervision of Albert Adams and the help of teenagers from the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Buffalo NY, an addition was completed on the side of the original building. This provided a meeting/Sunday schoolroom and a well-supplied kitchen with an adjacent lavatory. A suitable septic system was installed on the land in the back of the expanded building. In the late 1990's another room was added with the guidance of Dave Kraske using the labor of the annual Youth Work Group from Buffalo, NY and lumber obtained from a dismantled chicken barn. Finally, in 2009 Morrill and Arlene Nason donated the funds to hire Pete Theriault to build a large storage room onto the end of the second addition.

By 2004, it was clear that the Sanctuary floor had deteriorate to the point that the floorboards were sagging and had a definite springy feel to them. So in the summer of 2004 a group of men from the congregation removed all the pews, deconstructed the floor and replaced it with strong particleboard with a top layer of pre-finished tongue-and-groove oak boards. The interior walls of the Sanctuary were repainted, as were the pews. New wainscot was installed on all four walls and the trim was refurbished. When the pews were returned to their proper places and secured to the floor, new carpeting was installed in the aisles. The appearance of the church was renewed - bright, and welcoming.

A few watermarks had started to appear in the ceiling and it was obvious that a new roof was needed. Pete Theriault was hired in 2016 to put up a metal-sheathing roof and to build a new roof over the three additions. The portion of the roof over the additions was constructed in a way to encourage snow to more easily slide off; no longer would a church elder need to shovel and pull snow off the roof of the Sunday school room each winter. Finally in 2018, to address deteriorating wooden clapboards, new vinyl siding was put on the entire structure.

The old pulpit was stripped and re-stained by Bob Austin who also built the baptismal font, which holds a silver chalice that Rev. Georges gave to the church in the 1950's. The chalice was given to him by the Rev. David Knight, Field Representative of the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA; a Chaplain had used it in World War II. Rev. Knight also gave Rev. Georges the communion service that was used by the church. Chip Palmer donated a used and better-sounding piano in 2018.

With all of this said, a church is not simply a building; to have a worshiping church, good people are needed and Hartford was blessed with dedicated men and women who willingly shared their skills and gave of their time to do the real work of a church through service and Christian love in their community.

Growth of church membership and worship services

Church membership and attendance at worship services increased in the 1960's and remained more or less steady during the 70's, 80's and 90's. A choir of 6 or 7 parishioners was formed under the leadership of Marj Kraske and they even wore robes (donated by another church) on special occasions. Until the early 2000's they sang Christmas carols at various nursing home and assisted living facilities in Canton and the Auburn/Lewiston area. They practiced once a week and sang every Sunday except in the summer and on Communion Sundays. If the service went too long the pastor would have to rush off to conduct a second service at Leeds.

HCC had a very active Sunday school from its very beginning. The level of participation would wax and wane over the years but Jerry and Darlene Marstaller persisted and had the young people over to their home. Christmas Candlelight services were started in 1987 and in one of the Christmas pageants Seth Marstaller was the Baby Jesus. Rev. Georges initiated Vacation Bible School early in the formation of HCC and it persisted under the leadership of Arlene Nason and usually had an enrollment between 18 to 25 children. In 2015, enrollments dropped too low to continue. In 2000, Arlene Nason initiated an annual "Tea Party" for young girls, with their mothers, and/or grandmothers at the church.

As the parties become more popular they were held at the Town Hall. Each “Tea Party” had a different theme and attendance grew to include 35 girls and 10 workers. The last Tea Party was held in the Town Hall in 2016.

In 1992 the Parish (HCC, LCC, and Wales) had their first Ash Wednesday Service, which were held at Hartford. Attendance was usually modest and the last such service was in 2017.

Every year since the early days of the formation of the three-church Parish, the Hartford Church hosted an Easter Sunrise Service in the Sanctuary, which was followed by a bountiful breakfast in the Hartford Town Hall to which all the town’s people were invited. This service-celebration was a chance for good fellowship with other residents of the Town of Hartford, and one of the few times when many members of the three churches would gather for worship. The last Parish Easter Sunrise Service was held in 2016.

Wales leaves the tri-church parish

The tri-church parish ended in 1990 when the Wales Union Church chose to join with the Wayne Methodist church. This left Hartford and Leeds with the full responsibility for the pastor’s compensation and support of the Manse in Leeds. The two churches reached a financial agreement with Wales over their portion of ownership of the Manse. Hartford now had to cover 25% of the bi-church parish; this was later increase to approximately 30% for the pastor’s compensation and 50% for administrative expenses in the parish office located in the Leeds church building. The two churches remained “yoked” yet were independent, although they shared the services of the same pastor, and they continued to keep their own identity.

In 1987 the Hartford Church members signed a nomination form for Rev. Geores to be considered for a Jefferson Award. Joyfully (to everyone but Rev. Geores himself) he was selected and received the honor during a televised broadcast.

After Carl Geores retired in 1988, his successor, Karl Gustafson, wanted to purchase his own home so the joint-parish session decided to rent the Manse. After a few years the former manse had deteriorated badly through neglect so the elders decided to sell the property on the open market. After the sale, the proceeds were divided equitably between the two churches with \$48,375 to Leeds and \$16,125 to Hartford.

Activities in the towns of Canton, Sumner, Hartford, Buckfield

Partly as a fund-raiser and partly as a community activity HCC held an annual Harvest (Turkey) Dinner for several years; first in the Hartford Town Hall, and later, in the hopes of attracting a larger crowd, in the Masonic Hall in Buckfield. The Women's Group sponsored a "Spring Fling" craft show and a Fall Christmas Fair in the Hartford Town Hall for many years. These activities were always well-attended and earned income for the church through the sale of table space used by the crafters. For most of the 1990's and up to 2018, the church held a massive yard sale on Route 4 in North Turner every other year. It was often a good fund-raiser, but required a great deal of effort. When the quality of the donated items decreased, the money raised decreased, and it seemed that the effort of the dedicated, aging workers was not commensurate with the income generated so there was less interest in participating.

Activities and commitments

Starting in the early 1980's the Hartford Church sponsored a used clothing "store" where good, clean used clothes could be purchased at a very minimal cost. This excellent program required the work of many members of the church and ran under the leadership of Beulah Brown and other members of the Women's Group for many years. In its later years Lori Swan became the "proprietor" and made sure the clothes were clean while keeping the "store" organized. The Clothing Center was housed in the nearby one-room, 1898 Union Schoolhouse that was made available at no cost by the Hartford Historical Society and more recently, rented from the Town of Hartford for \$1 a year. When insurance coverage became a problem in 2018, the Clothing Center was moved from the Union School building to the under-utilized Sunday school room in the

Hartford Church building. Good clothes were freely available to those who may have been burned out of their homes or were needy in other ways. Starting in the late 1980's Jerry and Darlene Marstaller, through a connection with the Presbyterian churches in Rahway and Chatham, NJ began an effort to collect high-quality used clothing for the church's Clothing Center. In the fall members of the church would snip fir-tree branches and assemble by hand beautiful Christmas wreaths. Hundreds of wreaths were made this way. Jerry and Darlene Marstaller would then take a full-sized pickup truck load of wreaths to Rahway and Chatham and exchange the wreaths for a truckload of slightly-used, high-quality clothing that the good folks of Rahway and Chatham had collected. These churches then sold the wreaths to their congregants as a service to offer affordable wreaths. This was a great boon for the clothing center but for a variety of reasons (lower financial return, decreased interest in assembling well over a hundred wreaths, the burden and expense of a long drive, etc.) the program was discontinued in 2010. However "wreath making" continued on a much smaller scale for several more years and the Clothing Center in Hartford continued, although it was much more dependent on local donations. Its utilization by town residents declined to the point where the effort to keep the Center open was not commensurate with the low level of utilization. The Clothing Center closed in September 2020.

The Hartford Church was a fully participating member of Mission at the Eastward (MATE), although their participation declined in the around 2010. The church gave financial support to MATE every year, sent delegates to their quarterly meetings, occasionally provided members for the governing board, and some Hartford Church members served terms as treasurer. HCC also supported Camp at the Eastward (CATE) by "adopting" a cabin. Every year in the early summer, until recently, volunteers from HCC would make the drive to Starks, ME to help fix up the camp after the ravages of a Maine winter, for the summer camping season. HCC had particular responsibility for Cabin#7, which was (I modestly note) the best-maintained cabin at the camp. Tom Hamilton was CATE's "Nature Guy" for several years and Judy Hamilton helped organize and supervise the ropes course and the Zip-line.

The Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) with offices located in Leeds serves several community needs among which is repairing homes in a thirteen-town area. RCAM was started partially through the efforts of Carl Geores and several churches in the area (including Hartford, Leeds and Wales). Over the years several church members have served in important positions on the board of directors and helped with home-maintenance programs. The Hartford Church always allotted some of their annual budget to RCAM.

It was through RCAM that HCC formed a relationship with the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Buffalo, NY (previously mentioned). Every summer since the 1970's a group of ten to twenty teenagers and four or five adults from Buffalo came to Hartford to rehab homes, collect and split firewood, help to insulate homes, paint homes, do simple construction such as build or repair decks and many other low-skill tasks. Albert Adams started the annual Buffalo Work Group tradition; Dave Kraske and then Ron Darling replaced him. They had to work very hard identifying appropriate projects, gathering all the material and overseeing multiple job sights to make sure the teenagers were working safely. Their tasks varied but for a week, the teens got their hands dirty and did good work. For several years they "camped" at the East Sumner church, for a few years they spent their nights in the Hartford Church building but finding our building too small, they most recently have used the Buckfield Community Church facility because it has much more room and a larger, better-equipped kitchen. In order to reciprocate and to give some Hartford teenagers an experience in a large city, Ron Darling initiated the Maine Bison Work Group in 2009. This was a group of six teenagers and three adults who traveled to Buffalo to do a week of inner-city, home rehabilitation work in Buffalo. This excellent program grew to include 27 teenagers and three adults in 2016. The last group to go to Buffalo was in 2017.

Hartford has helped to support the Portland Sudanese Fellowship and always contributed part of their budget to most PC(USA)'s special requests for funding. For many years HCC distributed about ten food baskets to some Hartford residents at Thanksgiving and occasionally offered emergency financial assistance through their Deacons' Fund. Each year they sent delegates to the

quarterly meeting of the Presbytery of Northern New England (PNNE). Several members served on PNNE committees such as Committee on Ministry, Leadership Commission, Commission on the Preparation for Ministry, Administrative Commissions for the churches in Kennebunk, Starks and North Turner.

The decision to close

In 2017 the Rev. Steve Hastings announced that he had received a call to the Congregational Church (UCC) in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. This was a blow to many in both churches of the Hartford-Leeds Parish. Unfortunately as the process of searching for a new pastor started, it became apparent that their visions for the future diverged. In 2017 Hartford's ties with the Leeds Community church were severed partly because the shared support for Rev. Hastings held us together, partly because of a disagreement about how to fill the now-vacant pulpit and partly because there was a general feeling among many in the congregations that it was time for the two churches to go their separate ways.

For two years Hartford and Leeds were served by Pulpit Supply pastors and visiting speakers whose schedules were arranged by Judy Hamilton. The membership of HCC continued to decrease, the average age of the congregation increased although attendance at Sunday services generally held constant. This trend became apparent over the last five years while it was becoming harder to keep up with the things that a church should do. The church had cut back on the church's activities and attendance at Sunday services was usually between 12 and 15, but there were fewer people willing and/or able to participate beyond attending services. The average age of the congregants had been increasing for many years and no younger people had shown an interest in joining the church. The effort to find a part-time pastor was frustratingly unproductive. After many meetings and much discussion, on February 9, 2020 the congregation voted by secret ballot to ask PNNE to close the church at the end of September 2020. After 65 years of service the Hartford Community Church closed its doors.

Pastors and periods of service to the Hartford Community Church

Carl H. Georges, Jr. Stated Supply 1955-1970, Installed 1970-1988

H. Daniel Lewis, Assistant Pastor 1983
Nancy Ives, Co-pastor, Interim 1987 -1989
E. Charles Markman, Interim 1989
Karl Gustafson, Installed 1991- 2003
Stu Cameron, Interim 2003 -2004
Beth Herrinton-Hodge, Interim 2004 – 2007
Steve Rowe – Pulpit Supply 2007
George Hardy, Interim 2007
Lisa Bradford, Associate Pastor 2007-2010
Diane Hoppe - Hugo, Interim 2008-2008
Steve Hastings, Installed – 2008 -2017
Various Pulpit Supply Pastors and speakers 2017 - 2020

This narrative was written by Thomas R. Hamilton (Clerk of Session) with the help of Elders Jerry Marstaller, Morrill Nason, Judy Hamilton and Marj Kraske.
Narrative of the history of the Hartford Community Church 1952.doc9/23/20

Appendix D: Draft Budget