

The Story of New Beginnings UMC 1997-2013
Boiling Springs, South Carolina

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.

The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Cor. 5:17 NIV

Stephen A. Graham

Acknowledgements

I am a relatively new member of New Beginnings, having joined with my wife Marcia in 2012. For this reason I have no first hand knowledge of the church's history before that time. So in researching and writing the story of New Beginnings, I relied heavily on personal recollections of individuals and on church documents that have been preserved.

The largest collection of documents I used, including Sunday bulletins, newsletters, minutes of Church Council meetings, and correspondence, were assembled and stored by Johnnie Ownbey. She served for many years as church historian of New Beginnings. I owe Johnnie an enormous debt of gratitude. Without her conscientious compilation of photographs and documents, there would be few sources available from the early years of the church.

I am also indebted to Dr. Philip Stone, the archivist for the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. He graciously provided an electronic copy of the conference file for New Beginnings.

Moreover, Lisa Diestler, the extremely competent and efficient New Beginnings staff member responsible for communications, membership and senior adults, gave me digital copies of bulletins and newsletters since 2002 and council meeting minutes since 2004.

I also thank the pastors of New Beginnings, including, in chronological order, Allen Senn, Ken Owens, Thomas Smith, Bobby Gilbert and Terry Fleming. Without their leadership there would be no New Beginnings United Methodist Church. I am especially indebted to Ken Owens, the founding pastor. In response to my request for information, Ken provided a lively and inspiring account of the first ten years of the church. He concluded his e-mail, "This has been a real fun exercise for me. Thanks for letting me remember."

The laity, of course, are just as important for any congregation as the clergy. Each person whose name appears in this history has his or her own story about how God touched their lives at New Beginnings. They told me their stories in person or I read their stories in the documents I researched. I am grateful for all of them.

At the end of this history (pp. 42-43) there is an Appendix containing two tables. These tables consist of membership data reported by New Beginnings to the South Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church between 2005 and 2013.

Finally, I would like to share my own story about how New Beginnings changed my life. Before our move from Indianapolis to Boiling Springs in late August, 2012, Marcia and I had, over the years, visited New Beginnings numerous times with Monea (Marcia's sister) and her husband Steve Hines who themselves joined New Beginnings in its preschool-era around 2002. Our connection to New Beginnings was already strong through relatives who never met a United Methodist church -- from Spartanburg to Gastonia to Camden and then back again -- they didn't love and who poured themselves into this church's life stream. In short, we knew a whole lot of faces and names, sampled a whole lot of church calendar happenings, events, functions, activities, programs, church dinners, choir practices, Stephen ministry training sessions, pre-service prayer groups, Sunday school classes, Angel Tree gift-wrappings, Companions gatherings.... We even ate delicious lasagna at Linda and Sherm Griebno's house. What a treat. While not a given for us, neither was it a head-scratcher when it came time to choose a church home to belong to for the retirement chapter in our lives. Bum, bum, bum, New Beginnings, here we come. You get the idea I'm sure.

It may be cliché to say so, but God's timing and God's planning is everything. Perhaps you may know, but I spent most of 2014 in the hospital and rehab. I am still overwhelmed when I remember the prayers, visits, cards and phone calls I received from members of the church during these critical months.

In particular, I will never forget the visits and prayers of Pastor Terry who came to my bedside almost every other day. I do not know the names of all those who prayed for me, but I do know that I owe them, quite literally, my life. Their stories and the stories of many others who have been a part of New Beginnings United Methodist Church through the years deserve to be told. I am deeply grateful that I am able to record their stories in this history. In the words of the inscription on the cornerstone of the Kidlink building, To God be the glory.

The history of any congregation of the Christian church begins when a group of believers join together to become and make disciples of Jesus Christ. In this sense church history is simply the collective story of individual Christians who, prompted by the Holy Spirit, seek to reaffirm for themselves and extend to others the transforming power of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Early Years

On January 5, 1997 Rev. Allen Senn, a retired United Methodist pastor, met with a group of lay persons to discuss the possibility of organizing a new United Methodist church in the Boiling Springs community. This group, which became the start-up leaders for New Beginnings UMC, developed a vision of how a new congregation could meet community needs.

In the months following this initial meeting, the Spartanburg District New Church Development Task Force gave its support to a new United Methodist church in the Boiling Springs/Parris Bridge area. The Task Force completed a preliminary study and Rev. Senn agreed to lead the formation of a new congregation. On May 9, 1997 Spartanburg District Superintendent, A. Clark Jenkins, reported these developments to Bishop McCleskey and asked for permission to proceed with the project.

On July 27, 1997 the United Methodist Church of the Covenant, the Methodist church closest to the area of the proposed congregation, held a worship service to dedicate the new church as an official United Methodist fellowship.

With the impetus of this new status, Rev. Senn became the founding pastor of the new congregation and gave the church its name. He along with other members of the start-up team prepared a brochure announcing New Beginnings UMC as a United Methodist Mission at 140 Belleview Dr. in Boiling Springs, a residence adapted for worship services. Sunday evening

worship services, the brochure stated, would begin November 2, 1997 and small groups would begin meeting during the week in February 1998 in the homes of six different church members.

Sign-in sheets for these services indicate that attendance grew steadily from less than 20 in late 1997 to over 60 by May 1998. In an article in the April 1998 issue of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*, Rev. Senn expressed hope that the 1998 meeting of the United Methodist Annual Conference would appoint a full-time pastor to the new mission in Boiling Springs.

The 1998 Annual Conference did appoint a pastor for New Beginnings, Rev. Ken Owens, who had previously served South Carolina United Methodist Churches in the Fairfax Charge and at Harleyville and Lebanon-Columbia. He served New Beginnings for the next ten years.

Owens has a remarkable but probably not coincidental relationship to his predecessor. Rev. Senn was Owens' pastor when Owens as a teenager began attending church. Owens refers to Senn as his "father in the faith." And he is fond of saying, "Senn led me to Christ."

Shortly after Owens was appointed as pastor of New Beginnings, the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* published an article on July 11, 1998 entitled, "New Beginnings Opens Its Doors to Prospective Members." The article stated that at that time services were held at an office building owned by a church member, Professional Computer Software Services, Inc. The building at 140 Belleview Dr. where earlier services were held was the new pastor's office.

Shortly after Rev. Owens was appointed to New Beginnings, the church left Belleview Dr. and rented an office for its pastor in a building known as Ken's Mailing Center on Highway 9. The office was so small, Owens recalls, that it contained only his desk and chair and one folding chair for guests. When a guest arrived, he or she had to come all the way into the pastor's office for Ken to close the door and open the folding chair.

The July 1998 *Herald-Journal* article also explained that the New Beginnings mission was the first start-up congregation for the South Carolina Conference since 1991. The conference provided financial support for such churches, including the pastor's salary. In addition, because the conference also subsidized the purchase of land for new churches, on August 12, 1998 New Beginnings submitted an application to the conference for funds to buy land to build a new church.

Shortly after New Beginnings applied for funds to buy land, it announced that November 1, 1998 was the target date to begin holding Sunday morning services instead of Sunday evening worship services. To prepare for this change, an August 30, 1998 business meeting of the church received a report from its Public Relations Team. The team had a budget of \$6000 to publicize New Beginnings United Methodist Mission (NBUMM) and encourage attendance at its services.

In September 1998 NBUMM made temporary arrangements with Forest Lawn Mortuary in Boiling Springs to use its chapel for Sunday services. Flyers were distributed throughout the Boiling Springs area announcing that services in this new venue would begin November 1, 1998.

The use of a funeral home for worship services, Pastor Ken remembers, was not his first choice for the new congregation. In fact, when Forest Lawn was the only place that offered the use of its facilities to New Beginnings, Owens initially declined. He told God, "I'm not starting a church in a funeral home." However, Rev. Owens continues, "When you say things like that to God, God has a way of showing you who's boss." Not only was a funeral home the first venue for New Beginnings. When the church outgrew Forest Lawn, the congregation, as we will see, moved to a larger funeral home.

On September 2, 1998 the new mission church received word that the Conference Committee on Congregational Development approved its application for funds to buy land for construction of a church building. The

conference committee also referred the New Beginnings application to the Conference Joint Funding Committee.

Subsequently, Pastor Owens and several lay members of New Beginnings met with the joint funding committee. On September 24, 1998 the committee informed the church that it approved a \$125,000 grant for property to construct a church building.

November 1998 was a pivotal month in the history of NBUMC. November 2, 1998, was the Monday after New Beginnings' first morning worship service. On that day Rev. Owens reported in a letter to church members and friends that 166 people attended the service and gave an offering of \$2761.25. Also in November that year Rev. Owens published the first edition of a monthly newsletter, *The Rainbow*.

A long-time member of New Beginnings, Delaine Griswold, along with her husband Phil, were among those who attended the congregation's first morning worship service on November 1, 1998. She recalls her first contact with the church earlier in the year when she and her husband were new residents of Boiling Springs and were looking for a church home.

After Pastor Ken was appointed to New Beginnings, his wife Susan contacted Delaine, who is a real estate agent, and asked for her help in locating a home in the Boiling Springs area. Delaine explains what happened as a result of this business contact.

Susan invited us to come to their [New Beginnings] first "official" service ... on the first Sunday in November [1998]. When we got there that Sunday, we encountered a group of about 50 people who were also first timers along with a core group of about 12 who had "started" the new church. We had to "set up" the sanctuary with choir books, folding chairs for a choir, and hand out bulletins and such. We were expected to jump right in to help and we did. It actually made us feel that we belonged. It was fun and it took no time to learn everyone's name and to feel like a big family.

Looking back on this experience, Delaine feels certain that “GOD led Susan to us and us to New Beginnings church.”

The Griswolds were not the only ones who attended the first Sunday morning worship service as a result of providential circumstances. Glenda Krause recalls that she was looking for a new church home when Cathy Blair, another long-time member, put a flyer in her mailbox about the November 1, 1998 service at Forest Lawn. Glenda responded to the flyer and attended the November 1 service. “One of the songs they sang,” Glenda recalls, “was Victory in Jesus which is my Very Favorite song and I took that as a sign from God that this was where I should be.”

Glenda’s husband, Del Krause, a retired engineer and insurance adjuster who was out town on business in November 1998, began worshipping at New Beginnings a month or so later. In Glenda’s words, Del “said if I was happy there he could be and would be too.”

Contributing to the intimate family atmosphere of New Beginnings in the early years was the practice of members taking a small loaf of fresh bread to first-time visitors on Sunday afternoon. Later in the week the pastor and lay members made follow up calls on the visitors.

Sometimes visitors became members through unusual circumstances. Jim Miller says that he joined New Beginnings because of a typographical error. In 2000 Jim and his wife Sue and their children moved from New Jersey to the Boiling Springs area. They visited the church a number of times. In early 2003 Sue talked with Pastor Ken and told him she wanted to join. However, the bulletin for the Sunday Sue was to join informed the congregation that Sue *and* Jim were both going to join. When Ken discovered the mistake just before worship on the Sunday Sue was to take her membership vows, he asked Jim if he wanted to join too. Jim agreed to join also and he and Sue became members on the same day.

What was probably a typographical error was the cause of another most unusual bulletin announcement. One Sunday when Ken was not preaching, he invited a guest pastor to fill the pulpit. The bulletin for that

Sunday welcomed the guest pastor and his wife and gave brief biographical sketches of the couple. The wife of the pastor, according to the bulletin, had attended Furman University on a *football* scholarship.

At the end of November 1998 Pastor Owens wrote a memo to the congregation proposing a six months' budget (December 31, 1998 – May 30, 1999) of \$29,963.30. Much of the funding for the budget came from sources outside the congregation. Cokesbury, the United Methodist publishing house, provided 12 months of Sunday School materials. Other United Methodist churches in the Spartanburg district helped support housing for the pastor. Moreover, the South Carolina UM Conference paid 100% of the pastor's salary for 1999. Thereafter, the Conference paid less of the pastor's salary each year while the church paid more until in 2003 NBUMC provided 100% of his salary. Finally, once a land site for church construction was identified, the Conference would supplement New Beginnings' \$125,000 grant with a loan that the church would repay at 6% interest.

Buying Land and Building a Church

Financial resources, of course, are only one part of establishing and expanding a new church. More important are the people who will use these resources to fulfill the indispensable goal of growing disciples of Jesus Christ. For this purpose in June 1998 Pastor Owens drafted a document entitled, *New Beginnings Beginnings: A Start-Up Plan for Organizing a New United Methodist Congregation in the Boiling Springs Area*. The plan was used to establish committees and ministry teams for missions, worship, facilities and property, outreach and advertising, education, fellowship and youth and children's ministries.

The beginning of *New Beginnings*, Owens emphasized, was not merely the product of human effort and ingenuity.

This is a very special calling that we are being allowed to share in. We are participants in a birthing process. It will be exciting and scary, and often unpredictable. There will be great highs and lows. But, if we hold tight to the vision that God reveals to us, if we are patient and creative, then we will be able to accomplish these new and amazing things. We will witness – we will be instruments in – one of God’s miracles.

By December 17, 1998 New Beginnings had located property on Rainbow Lake Road in Boiling Springs as its best prospect for land to build a church. On this date Owens sent a memo to his District Superintendent, Clark Jenkins, and other Spartanburg District officials explaining two offers the church received from Max Trout. Both offers were for \$21,000 per acre at the same site on Rainbow Lake Road – one for 7 acres, the other for 10 acres.

The price of \$21,000 per acre, however, was, as Pastor Owens recalls, “way too high” for the members of New Beginnings. So the church “just didn’t do anything.” Then, after Trout’s offer expired, WalMart announced its purchase of a much larger parcel of land on the opposite side of Rainbow Lake Road for \$69,712 per acre.

Following the WalMart announcement, New Beginnings decided that Mr. Trout’s offer was actually a providential bargain. Church representatives contacted Trout again and he agreed to sell at the original price. Once again the Holy Spirit had intervened. In fact, on the sales contract that Trout and New Beginnings later signed, he acknowledged that he was in effect making a substantial gift to New Beginnings. A hand written note on the contract reads, “The extension of this agreement on 1.13.99 is based upon the belief that the value of the property now exceeds the offering price and a donation to the church is indicated.”

Before the land purchase was consummated, however, New Beginnings had to decide whether to accept Trout’s generous offer. In another December 17 memo Rev. Owens wrote to the New Beginnings Land and Facilities Committee about the offer. The first decision the church must

make, Owens wrote, was whether God was leading New Beginnings to purchase the Rainbow Lake property. He said the consensus of the church was that God was leading the congregation to accept Mr. Trout's offer. However, the people of the church, Owens said, were divided about whether to buy seven or ten acres. For this reason a congregational vote was scheduled on January 3, 1999.

Ballots were prepared with three options – not to purchase any property, purchase only seven acres or purchase ten acres. Another issue was who could vote on these options. Since there was no formal membership list for New Beginnings at that time, it was decided that anyone at the meeting at least 13 years old “who, with good conscience, feels that they will be a long time participant in New Beginnings” could vote. A simple majority of votes was necessary to purchase seven acres, but a three-fourths majority of those voting was necessary to purchase ten acres.

A final complication in the congregational vote on buying the Rainbow Lake property was the weather. There was an ice storm on the weekend of January 3, 1999 causing water damage to the church office and reducing attendance at the January 3 worship service. So the church did not vote until the next Sunday, January 10. On January 17, the Sunday after the rescheduled vote, the bulletin announced that the church had voted unanimously to accept Trout's offer of ten acres.

To draw public attention to the future home of New Beginnings on Rainbow Lake Road, the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* announced on January 30, 1999 that there would be a sign unveiling the next day, Sunday, January 31.

Another significant milestone in the history of New Beginnings was February 7, 1999 when Sunday School classes began meeting. It turned out to be a most unusual Sunday, to say the least.

At that time the church was meeting at Forest Lawn Mortuary. Earlier in the week there was a non-Christian (Buddhist or Hindu) funeral in the mortuary that lasted until Sunday evening. Pastor Ken recalls that when the

members of New Beginnings arrived on Sunday morning, the parking lot was already full and a BBQ grill was set up on the side of the building.

Periodically during worship and Sunday School someone involved with the funeral would ring a deep-toned bell. It was, Owens concludes, "a pretty strange day."

Despite these circumstances February 7, 1999 marked the beginning of an ambitious Sunday School program for the church. Seventeen members agreed to serve as leaders and teachers of four Sunday School classes as well as of the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Sunday School classes included 3-year-olds to kindergarten, grades 1 through 5, grades 6 through 12 and adults.

For as long as the church met at Forest Lawn space was at a premium. During the Sunday School hour adult classes met in a small area on one side of the chapel. For children and youth classes the church had a big fun carpet. These classes met wherever there was space for the carpet. If the mortuary was not having a funeral, there were lots of places for children and youth throughout the building. But if there was a casket in one of the viewing rooms, then all the classes were crammed into the chapel.

An additional problem with holding worship services in temporary facilities was that New Beginnings could not leave worship materials at the funeral home. Every Sunday a trailer loaded with a cross, altar, lectern, Bibles, hymnbooks etc. brought these items to the funeral home. After Sunday services worship materials were loaded back into the trailer for the next week. It was reminiscent of the tabernacle that Israel used during its years in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt.

Although New Beginnings could not have official members as a United Methodist congregation until it received a charter, its unofficial membership list on March 14, 1999 included 72 full members, one retired clergy member (Will Rogers), 17 children and six youth in a confirmation class for a total of 106 members.

The April 1999 issue of *The Rainbow* announced that May 23, 1999 would be charter Sunday. On that day New Beginnings could receive official members of the United Methodist Church.

May 23 was also Pentecost Sunday, the day observed throughout the Christian world as the birthday of the church. Pentecost marks the day the Holy Spirit fell on the Christian believers in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension into heaven. On that day Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit was fulfilled and the Christian church was born. For this reason Pentecost 1999 was doubly significant for New Beginnings as the day when it celebrated both its spiritual and its institutional birthday as a United Methodist congregation.

During the May 23, 1999 worship service Pastor Ken recognized the presence of Bishop and Mrs. McCleskey and the Spartanburg District Superintendent, the Rev. Clark Jenkins and his wife. Then Rev. Owens announced, "Today we have come celebrating what God has done here, is doing here, and plans to do here." However, the establishment of a United Methodist church in Boiling Springs, he emphasized, was not merely the result of countless hours of effort by himself and a small but rapidly growing group of deeply committed laypersons.

In addition to the pastor and laypersons of the church, an essential part of God's plan for New Beginnings was the "gifts, support and encouragement" of many other individuals and groups. Rev. Owens thanked various United Methodist institutions; Mr. and Mrs. Max Trout, who sold the Rainbow Lake Road property to the church; and 20 upstate United Methodist churches that contributed money or property to New Beginnings.

The combined monetary value of this support, Rev. Owens estimated, was nearly one-half million dollars. The South Carolina United Methodist Annual Conference and United Methodist churches contributed more than \$191,000, while individuals and businesses gave between \$260,000 and \$300,000.

After the worship service on May 23, 1999, the charter members took their membership vows. The District Superintendent then called the

Constituting Church Conference of New Beginnings to order and presided over its proceedings.

The first order of business was for the Constituting Church Conference to receive and accept the report of the Committee on Nominations and its list of church officers.

Then Rev. Jenkins brought two resolutions to the church conference. The first resolution authorized the newly elected trustees “to incorporate” New Beginnings “in accordance with local law and the provisions of the United Methodist *Discipline*.”

The second resolution provided that once the church was incorporated, possession of the ten acres of land that was purchased on Rainbow Lake Road and responsibility for the mortgage on the property would pass from the Board of Trustees of the Spartanburg District of the United Methodist Church to the trustees of New Beginnings.

The Constituting Church Conference accepted both of these resolutions.

In May 1999 *The Rainbow* informed the congregation that Bishop McCleskey would be present at the chartering service. After the service the charter members would take their vows and then a church conference would elect church officers. Then there would be a fellowship meal at Rainbow Lake Pavilion, a facility that became a favorite venue for important church events. Finally, on May 24, 1999 at Annual Conference Rev. Owens and the church’s lay delegate would go to the platform to receive New Beginnings’ official charter.

Once the church purchased property on Rainbow Lake Road, it hired an architect, Marshall F. Clarke, to prepare a Preliminary Site Development Study. On April 27, 1999 Clarke wrote to Rev. Owens with the results of the preliminary study. This study prompted extensive discussion about the church’s first building on the new property. In late 1999 members completed surveys about the kind of building that was needed for various areas of ministry.

On February 13, 2000 the Church Council voted to approve a Long Range Planning Report from the Vision Committee for New Beginnings' first building. According to the *Discipline* New Beginnings could not elect a building committee until it completed a long range planning report.

Two weeks later on February 27 a church-wide conference authorized by District Superintendent Jenkins and chaired by Rev. Owens voted 55 to 2 to adopt the long range planning report. Finally, the conference approved a twelve-member building committee.

The next step in constructing a church building, Owens explained to the church council, was to hire an architect and authorize the Building Committee to spend money from the building fund to pay the architect. The church council approved these proposals by a vote of 14 to one at a special meeting on June 11, 2000.

The architect selected by the Building Committee to prepare a preliminary design for the master plan and first unit building was Barry Agnew. When he submitted a preliminary plan to New Beginnings, Agnew estimated the cost of its first building to be \$750,000.

To encourage more input and support from the congregation, six focus groups completed questionnaires at a church-wide meeting with the architect on June 25, 2000. The questionnaires covered six areas of church responsibility

- buildings, utilities and general maintenance
- worship and music
- education and age level ministries
- fellowship and missions
- administration, offices and staff
- future programs and ministries.

In response to the results of the questionnaires, Barry Agnew developed a preliminary site master plan and a preliminary first unit plan. The master plan included a future sanctuary attached to the first unit

building and a future family life center as a separate facility. A church conference held on July 30 voted 54 to 0 to approve both the master plan and the first unit plan.

Two weeks later on August 13, 2000 the church council approved the Building Committee's selection of Cely Construction for New Beginnings' first building. To help with the cost of construction, the church received a \$75,000 grant from the South Carolina United Methodist Conference Council on Ministries.

Another source of funding for the church building was the sale of Christ United Methodist Church, a church in Boiling Springs that had closed and whose property was sold by the South Carolina Annual Conference. The proceeds of this sale, as explained in an exchange of letters between District Superintendent Clark Jenkins and Rev. Owens dated February 14 and March 15, 2000, were given to New Beginnings for "building construction only." The amount the church received was \$140,000.

The next step was an official decision to hire Cely. The Church Council made this decision on November 26 on the basis of Cely's cost proposal of \$693,746 for the church's first building. Then the Spartanburg District of the United Methodist Church approved the council's decision.

Finally, on December 10, 2000 a church-wide meeting ratified by unanimous vote the selection of Cely Construction to build the first unit according to the architect's plans. The building included a multi-purpose room for worship services and other activities, a kitchen, smaller rooms for Sunday school and other group meetings and office space for staff and volunteers.

December 17 was announced as the day of a groundbreaking ceremony for the new building. However, because of bad weather (rain, sleet and snow), the ceremony was held at Eggers Funeral Home across the street from the church's Rainbow Lake Road property.

With the construction of its first building, attendance at New Beginnings Sunday worship services increased, averaging over 100 each

week. The March 4, 2001 bulletin announced that because of limited space at Forest Lawn Mortuary, Sunday services would move to the chapel at Eggers Funeral Home beginning on March 11. Moreover, Lathrop Mosley, a seminary student, was hired for a part-time position, Director of Children and Youth Ministries. And Elaine Steading, a member of the congregation, volunteered as Children's Coordinator.

Two thousand and one was an especially difficult year for Rev. Owens and for the congregation of New Beginnings. Rev. Owens' wife, Susan A. Owens, who was also an ordained United Methodist minister, died on April 20, 2001. The May 2001 issue of *The Rainbow* announced that Richard Sharp, a retired United Methodist pastor who worshiped at New Beginnings, along with his wife Esta, would temporarily take over pastoral duties for Rev. Owens.

Pastor Ken states that he still carries "lots of wounds" from the death of Susan. He writes, "To this day, I really do not like to do confirmation, because I had to confirm my own daughter, Megan, about two weeks after her mother's funeral."

Rev. Owens, however, later remarried and the celebration of his marriage to Kathy Spakes on December 27, 2002 was the first occasion for a good friend and coworker of Kathy to visit New Beginnings. Doris Powell remembers how her friendship with Kathy led her to join the church.

Ken had invited Kathy to go with him and a group for a hike. Kathy told Doris about the invitation. In response to the invitation, Kathy, according to Doris, "laughed and said she couldn't date a pastor. She did. Time went by and she laughed and said she couldn't marry a pastor." Doris told Kathy that if she couldn't marry a pastor, who could? Doris concludes the story of how she came to New Beginnings.

The wedding [of Ken and Kathy] was a beautiful beginning. I started coming on a regular basis. In the last 13+ years the relationships built in small groups, Sunday School, fundraisers, and service have changed my life. I give thanks to

God for all who have joined me in my faith walk here at New Beginnings.

May 2001 was a month of good news for the church. Construction of its first building was virtually complete. On May 6 the Church Council voted to accept an inscription for the cornerstone of the building – “To God Be the Glory.” On May 20 after the worship service there was a walk-through of the building for the congregation.

The July 2001 issue of *The Rainbow* announced plans for the Sunday that would mark both the last worship service at Eggers Funeral Home and the first worship service in New Beginnings’ own building. Pastor Owens wrote in his monthly column for the newsletter that the service would begin at the funeral home chapel. Then in mid-service the congregation would pick up all worship materials and walk across the street to the new building.

In anticipation of the completion of its first building, the Church Council on July 15 approved general policies for the use of the building and specific policies for weddings and wedding receptions.

The date for New Beginnings’ first worship service in its new building was later set for September 23, 2001. On the day before this first service the church hosted an open house in its new building for the Boiling Springs community with free activities for children and a free lunch.

Sunday September 23, 2001 when the church moved to its first building across from Eggers Funeral Home was, Pastor Owens remembers, “a once in a lifetime day.” The worship service began as usual at Eggers. Then in mid-service everyone present picked up all the worship materials and, with the assistance of sheriff’s deputies who stopped traffic on Rainbow Lake Road, paraded to the new facility. “When I got to the doors of the new building,” Owens says,

I looked back and the line reached all the way back to Eggers. Then, I walked in and the building was so very quiet and empty. But, behind me I saw all these people, and you knew this was a special moment.

When the congregation arrived in the new building, they put all the worship materials in place in the sanctuary and completed the service. After the service the congregation enjoyed a covered dish fellowship meal.

In order to finance construction of its building, New Beginnings obtained a \$600,000 loan from Summit National Bank. The church made monthly interest payments on the loan beginning in November 2001. The principal of the loan was due at maturity on July 17, 2002.

Pastor Ken shares an interesting anecdote about the new building shortly after it was completed. Some of the shingles on the roof were a little different color from the other shingles, a difference that was only visible when the sun hit the roof at just the right angle. The reason for the difference was that the shingles came from different dye lots. The contractor offered to replace the shingles or leave them and give the church a \$10,000 discount on the overall cost of construction. The church decided to leave the shingles and accept the discount. If anyone noticed the difference in the color of the shingles, Owens says, "we'd just say, 'That's odd. Let's pray about it, and wait a little while and see what happens.'"

The final official action for New Beginnings' first building was a consecration service on December 2, 2001 led by Bishop McCleskey. At the same time a cross and flame made of Brazilian cherry was given to the church in honor of Rev. Will and Agnes Rogers, retired United Methodist missionaries to Brazil, who worshiped at New Beginnings. Photos of clergy and laity leading the consecration service were featured in the January 2002 issue of *Vision for Ministry* published by the Office of Congregational Development for the South Carolina United Methodist Conference.

A New Church in a New Millennium

In early 2002 the church reflected on its mission and on God's purpose for New Beginnings in the first years of the new millennium. Larry

Campsen, the Chair of the Building Committee, wrote an article in the January 2002 issue of *The Rainbow*, thanking the congregation, the members of the Building Committee, Rev. Owens and “everyone” for their cooperation and assistance in helping construct the church’s first building.

As I have stated before, the people are the church, the building is just a tool that God has provided for us to do His work. Now that we have completed the building’s construction, we can begin to use it for the tool that it is: begin to explore what God has in store for us, to see where He leads us and to continue to reach out to those who need to know about God’s love. After all, that’s what I think we are all about, telling people how, with God’s help, they too can have a New Beginning.

The construction of New Beginning’s first building was significant for Larry Campsen in another way because he and his wife Donna were the first members of the church to be married in the new building on May 9, 2003.

Comparing attendance, membership and offerings for 2000 with attendance, membership and offerings for 2001 confirms the growing success of New Beginnings in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Rev. Owens reported the following numbers in the February 2002 *Rainbow*.

Year	2000	2001
Avg. Worship Attendance	94	134
Avg. Weekly Offerings	\$1800.44	\$1963.94

Worship attendance refers to attendance at Sunday worship services. The weekly offerings were for the operating budget of the church.

In the same issue of *The Rainbow* Pastor Owens emphasized the church’s new building as an important factor in increasing attendance and offerings. In fact, comparing the average weekly offerings for 2001 --

\$1963.94 -- with the average weekly offerings since the church moved into the new building on September 23, 2001 -- \$2468.84 -- reveals an even larger increase in the operating budget giving over a shorter period of time.

In early 2002 as New Beginnings celebrated achievements in its physical plant and financial resources, it also reexamined its spiritual vision. The Visioning Committee distributed a survey as an insert in the March 17, 2002 bulletin asking the congregation to rank order five issues in terms of their importance for the future direction of the church. These issues were

- Parking
- Acquiring a bus
- Sunday School space
- Reducing church's debt
- Discipling new members

In another bulletin insert on March 17 Cathy Blair, the Lay Leader, expressed the frustration of the Visioning Committee in defining the vision of New Beginnings. She wrote

And then it hit me!! We need to be praying unceasingly for wisdom and guidance, asking God to give us his direction for New Beginnings. I know we all pray for our church, but I think we need to pray more and more specifically.

As attendance at Sunday worship continued to increase in 2002, the church council formed a subcommittee to study the possibility of a second Sunday worship service. On September 22 the council, after considering the recommendations of the subcommittee, decided to have a first service at 8:30 am, Sunday School from 9:30 until 10:15 and a second worship service at 10:30 am. November 3, 2002 was the first Sunday for two services at New Beginnings. The addition of a second service was featured in an advertisement in the November 1, 2002 issue of the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*.

Increased church attendance was also reflected in the need for more facilities for children and youth. The November 10, 2002 meeting of the Church Council approved two additions to the master plan – playground space and a sports field that would cost New Beginnings a total of \$3255.

Another milestone for the church was announced in the Pastor's Report at the annual Church Conference (Charge Conference) and printed in the November 2002 issue of *The Rainbow*. Looking forward, Rev. Owens wrote, January 1, 2003 will mark "a major transition in the history of New Beginnings UMC." In the new year, the pastor explained, the church would for the first time assume full responsibility for the pastor's salary.

In his newsletter article Rev. Owens reminded the congregation that since its inception New Beginnings had received approximately \$470,000 from various United Methodist sources plus free training and ministry services from retired clergy. Finally, Pastor Owens wrote that as of November 2002 the church had 175 full members.

With the church's financial independence, however, came the responsibility of not only supporting its operating budget but also paying off a substantial debt on its new building. For this reason beginning in 2002, New Beginnings held a fall festival. In 2003 the second annual fall festival raised over \$14,000. The 2004 festival, renamed Apple Annie Days, raised almost as much, \$13,008.

Another on-going fundraiser was the sale of bricks for \$100 each bearing the name of the donor. The bricks were laid on the ground of a prayer garden behind the new building. Finally, during 2003 the congregation responded to a \$10,000 challenge grant from a member of the church by giving a total of \$68,623.09 to the building fund, an amount that exceeded the \$40,000 goal by more than \$20,000.

An additional responsibility assumed by New Beginnings was the result of the money it received in 2000 from the sale of Christ United Methodist Church in Boiling Springs (see p. 17 above). Along with the \$140,000 New Beginnings received was ownership of two cemeteries that

belonged to Christ UMC. On February 23, 2003 the Church Council approved a plan for the cemeteries proposed by Rev. Owens, including the cost of cleaning up the property, the establishment of a perpetual care fund and provision for future burials.

Finally, on March 2, 2004 New Beginnings held a church-wide vote on an offer from the Ellenburg family to sell seven acres of land adjoining the church's existing property on Rainbow Lake Road. The seven acres were appraised at \$62,000. After the Church Council discussed the proposed sale for several months, New Beginnings offered and the Ellenburgs accepted \$50,000 for the land. The church-wide vote was 78% in favor of the purchase. As a result of this transaction New Beginnings owned a total of 17 acres of valuable real estate in Boiling Springs.

Growing Pains

Although the creation of a second Sunday service accommodated the growing number of worshippers, it did not meet the need for more Sunday School space. In fact, at its June 24, 2003 meeting the Church Council considered the lack of space for Sunday School to be "our most pressing need." Nearly a month later on August 17 the council received estimates of \$65,000 -- \$75,000 for portable classrooms.

The issue of Sunday School space, however, does not reappear in the minutes of Church Council meetings until August 22, 2004. There was discussion of appointing a building committee at the meeting but no action was taken on buying or building additional classrooms, probably because the cost was prohibitive.

It was not until December 13, 2004 that the Church Council approved the purchase of a modular classroom building for an estimated \$21,000. Next, a church-wide conference on January 23, 2005 voted 81 to 0 to support the council's action. But the process of authorizing the new classrooms was

not complete until, with the permission of the District Superintendent, a Charge Conference on February 16, 2005 voted 11 to 1 to proceed with construction of the new building. Members of New Beginnings supplied most of the labor for the building, and the portable classrooms were complete in the summer of 2005.

Following the precedent he established in the November 2002 *Rainbow*, Pastor Owens published his annual Pastor's Report in the November 2003 issue of *The Rainbow*. In part because of the addition of a second Sunday service, Owens wrote, the average attendance at Sunday services for 2003 was 216. Moreover, during 2003, 53 people became new members of New Beginnings, 23 of whom were received into the congregation by profession of faith.

Finally, Rev. Owens stated in his 2003 Pastor's Report that the church had adopted a mission statement – "The mission of New Beginnings United Methodist Church is to win people and make disciples for Jesus Christ." The challenge for the church, Owens concluded, was education in the meaning and application of this mission through small groups.

The mission statement quoted above was later refined and expanded as follows

To seek, win, and make disciples for Jesus Christ – How?
 through inspiring WORSHIP
 through bold EVANGELISM
 through sacrificial SERVICE and MISSION
 through practical and Scriptural EDUCATION
 through inclusive and encouraging FELLOWSHIP
 [June 12, 2005 Announcements]

In 2004 New Beginnings celebrated its fifth anniversary. The church sponsored an open house for the community on Saturday, May 22 and held one outdoor service on Sunday, May 23 followed by a covered dish fellowship meal.

At the church council meeting on May 16, 2004 Pastor Owens presented goals for the next year, including an increase of 100 in average Sunday worship attendance, doubling the number participating in events for children and youth, establishing a college and career ministry and raising \$50,000 for new construction. The council also adopted a Safe Sanctuaries Program with background checks for all staff and volunteers working with children.

With respect to personnel issues, the church council on December 13, 2004 approved a recommendation from the Staff Parish Committee for \$5600 to hire a part-time financial administrator and for \$55,000 to hire a director of discipleship.

The Director of Discipleship was a position created because of the need for new staff and because of the obvious call of Bobby Gilbert to full-time service at New Beginnings. Pastor Ken recalls that hiring him was “a pretty strange story.” Gilbert was not only an active member of the church but also chair of the Staff Parish Relationship Committee (SPRC) that was responsible for hiring all church staff. Nevertheless, Owens worked out an arrangement with the District Superintendent so that Gilbert resigned from the committee and was then selected to fill the new position of Director of Discipleship.

On March 25, 2005 the council approved a motion to combine administrative and accounting positions into one job and to remove the restriction on church members being hired as staff. This was undoubtedly because Gilbert was a church member and because Kim Snipes, another church member, was hired as Administrative Lead in 2005.

As New Beginnings continued to grow in 2005, Rev. Owens introduced to the church council on June 12 the idea of a contemporary service on Sunday morning in addition to the two traditional services. At the same meeting Bobby Gilbert explained Upward Soccer, a national evangelical Christian sports program. The council voted to accept the program at New Beginnings.

The September 12, 2005 church council meeting reflects ministry activities for the larger community as well as for its own members. Assistance for the victims of Hurricane Katrina included a house donated by Doug Campsen for use by the Salvation Army and plans for work groups from New Beginnings going to the Gulf coast in the fall. Julie Lane, an active volunteer for children's activities, introduced a new name for the children's program, Kidlink, linking kids to Christ. Finally, Bobby Gilbert reported that 135 children and youth were participating in Upward Soccer.

For several years Upward Soccer was an important church ministry, requiring hard work from many volunteers. Then in 2010 support for the program waned. New Beginnings contacted Upward international headquarters, located in Spartanburg, explaining that its continued participation was doubtful. Upward staff promptly offered assistance by presenting its program once again to potential church volunteers. Jane and Bud Wofford, two active and indefatigably energetic members of New Beginnings, explain what happened next.

In the November 14, 2010 issue of the newsletter Jane writes,

Bud and I decided to go and do what we could. I'll have to say the experience changed my life. ... This past Saturday we had our awards ceremony here at NBUMC. If you happened to ride by, I'm sure you wondered where in the world did all of those people come [from]. This year we had 191 kids sign up to play. ... This ministry did "whatever it takes" to make sure that no child was turned away. ... On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday the [soccer] fields were full of kids and their families making memories. ... Yes, the games were fun, but more than that, these were times when children could hear and see God's word in action. ... I am so grateful that God tugged at my heart this year and allowed me to be part of this great event.

In 2005 Pastor Owens proposed that beginning January 15, 2006 a third Sunday service of praise and worship be held between the two existing

services. In the October 2005 issue of *The Rainbow*, Owens explained that a major reason for adding a third Sunday worship service was the fact that worship attendance had leveled off. Previous increases in attendance, he continued, were linked with the size and use of worship facilities. When New Beginnings moved from Floyd's Mortuary to Eggers Funeral Home, when it constructed its first building and when the church added a second service, more and more people worshiped on Sunday at New Beginnings.

Responding to the pastor's initiative and Church Council approval, on January 15, 2006 the church established a new schedule for Sunday worship – a foundation service was held at 8:15am; at 9:30am there was a contemporary worship and celebration service; and there was a blended service at 11am.

Comparing average worship attendance in 2005 with average worship attendance in 2006, as reported in the weekly Bulletin, confirms Owens' prediction about the impact of a third Sunday service. In 2005 when there were only two services at New Beginnings, total attendance averaged approximately 210. But in 2006 with the addition of a third worship service, total attendance averaged approximately 300.

A Second Building and a New Pastor

With this increase in Sunday worship attendance there was growing awareness of the need for new physical facilities. The June 12, 2006 meeting of the Church Council received a report from the Building Committee on the possibility of a new multi-purpose building. Acting on a motion from Pastor Ken, the council approved the election of a four-person study committee for the proposed building. The committee was scheduled to meet with the Spartanburg District Building Committee and the District Superintendent later in the month.

In 2006 there was also an expansion of church staff with Julie Lane as the Director of Children's Ministry. A gifted and inspiring teacher and leader, Miss Julie for several years shared some of her most humorous and fascinating experiences with children at New Beginnings in a *Rainbow* column entitled, Goldfish Moments.

The newsletter column, named after the snack children enjoy, includes two responses to Mrs. Lane's efforts to explain that Jesus lives in our hearts. Ben Hill concluded that we should swallow Jesus to get him into our hearts. Katie Caldwell wanted to send a written invitation to Jesus to visit her home. Katie's mother said an invitation would be unnecessary since Jesus already lives in our hearts. Immediately Katie pulled up her shirt to see for herself where Jesus lived.

Another story Julie tells involved six-year-old Jonathan Rush. Jonathan's mother, Cathy Rush, was helping Julie in the kitchen. When Jonathan saw Cathy in the kitchen, he exclaimed, "Mom, get out of the kitchen; you're a momma, not a preacher!" In his mind mothers are apparently not preachers and only preachers are allowed in any part of a church, including the kitchen. The truth, of course, is that parents, especially mothers, are often the most important spiritual influence in the lives of their children.

Finally, about the time the church began its capital funds campaign for a new building, Nathan Hill asked how God gets the money people give to the church. After hearing Miss Julie's explanation that God makes us responsible for spending money for his purposes, Nathan had a better idea. Build a wooden box with a cross on top and put all the people's money inside. When God needed money, he could reach down into the box and get it.

By early 2007 New Beginnings had hired an architect, David Langley, who met with various groups in the church about the need for a new building. Thereafter, Doug Campsen, the Chair of the Building Committee, reported to the March 26 Church Council meeting that the committee was developing preliminary plans for the new facility.

Even before the Church Council took official action to propose a new building, there was widespread discussion in the congregation about the physical and spiritual state of New Beginnings. In the midst of this discussion Pastor Ken, in the summer of 2006, announced that the church would participate in the Natural Church Development (NCD) Program.

The NCD Program is a one-year plan of evaluation and improvement for church ministries. It is based on Jesus' parable of the growing seed as recorded in Mark 4:26-29. This parable, like many others, helps explain the kingdom of God. While teaching the crowds from a boat on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus said,

A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.

Just as grain grows naturally from seed, even though the man who plants it does not know exactly how it grows, so spiritual seed, when it is nourished, becomes fruitful in the kingdom of God. In the same way a church, which is part of the body of Christ, becomes fruitful when it plants good spiritual seed that is carefully cultivated and nourished.

The NCD Program helps congregations assess their overall ministry in terms of eight quality characteristics that are necessary for a spiritually healthy church. In order to complete this assessment for New Beginnings, thirty church members who were generally representative of the entire congregation in terms of age, sex, socio-economic status etc. completed surveys that evaluated the relative strength of each of the eight characteristics in the church's ministry.

The theory of NCD is that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link. So the quality characteristic with the lowest score on congregational surveys is the weakest spiritual link and the one that needs the most improvement. When the weakest characteristic is addressed and improves, the seven other

characteristics, as well as the spiritual health of the church as a whole, will also improve.

The results of the NCD survey at New Beginnings revealed that its highest quality characteristic was empowering leadership, followed closely by functional structures. The characteristic with the lowest score, however, was holistic small groups. These findings are consistent with Owens' earlier assessment in 2003 (see p. 25 above) that the challenge for the church was the need for small groups to define the meaning and application of its mission statement. (See also the Appendix pp. 43-44 below.)

Although New Beginnings faced the challenge of developing more small groups for existing members, it continued to add new members. Just as the Holy Spirit brought Delaine Griswold and Glenda Krause to the congregation in 1998 (see pp. 8-9 above), God brought Amanda and Steve Eplee to the church in 2006.

Phoebe Gilbert, the wife of Bobby Gilbert, first invited Amanda to New Beginnings. Amanda's mother is a CNA who sits with older people. One of her mother's clients was Phoebe's grandmother. Once when Phoebe visited Granny Burger, as her grandmother was called, Amanda was filling in for her mother as Granny's sitter. In this way Phoebe met Amanda and invited her to the church.

What Phoebe probably did not know at the time was that Amanda's family life was in crisis. Her husband Steve and their sons were no longer attending church with Amanda. Moreover, Steve and Amanda's marriage was in jeopardy. Finally, at the end of Sunday worship at the church she attended, Amanda went to the altar begging God for forgiveness and seeking his direction. God told her, as she recalls, that she would have to find another church if she wanted to grow in him.

Following God's direction, Amanda and Steve visited several churches, including New Beginnings, over a period of several months. When they compared the churches they visited, they concluded, in Amanda's words, that

“we could feel the Holy Spirit at New Beginnings more than at any of the other churches. We came seeking the LORD and He was there.”

Echoing the views of all who know them at the church, Phoebe writes that the Eplee family “simply became a wonderful addition to our church family. Steve and Amanda brightened my Sunday mornings for years; always a hug, quick smile, and encouraging words.”

At about the same time that the church was reflecting on the quality of its spiritual characteristics through the NCD survey, Pastor Ken announced that he and Kathy, his second wife, were selling their home because it was too large for their needs. This announcement meant that New Beginnings had to decide whether to purchase a parsonage or give its pastor a housing allowance.

Before the church voted on a parsonage or housing allowance, however, two members, Ron and Kay Gilmer, sold their home in Boiling Springs to New Beginnings for approximately \$40,000 less than its market value. This is how the church acquired the property on Bentley Court for use as a parsonage.

In the meantime the Building Committee continued its work and the architect, David Langley, met with the Church Council on June 25, 2007. He explained that according to the plans he developed with the committee, the current building would be used primarily for children’s ministry. Moreover, the Discipleship Building would remain unchanged as a modular classroom building. Finally, the new building would have gym/worship space, music space, new offices, educational space and a larger kitchen. The estimated cost was \$2,483,500. The council gave a unanimous vote of confidence for these plans.

Shortly after the June 2007 council meeting the church had an opportunity to purchase virtually new restaurant equipment worth an estimated \$60,000 for \$21,000. On July 18 the Church Council unanimously approved purchase of this equipment for the new building.

In 2007, which was Rev. Owens' last full year as pastor of New Beginnings, attendance at Sunday worship services continued to increase. Using the numbers reported in the weekly bulletins, a random sample of 22 Sundays throughout the year reveals that an average of 355 persons worshiped at the church each week.

The February 2007 issue of *The Rainbow* announced an ambitious mission project for the year. The goal was to raise \$50,000 for the staffing, remodeling and use of a recently purchased apartment building at the Epworth Children's Home in Columbia, SC. The building would be used as transitional housing for residents 18 years old or older who because of their age could no longer stay at Epworth but were not yet ready to live independently.

The Epworth project included not only monetary support but also labor to help renovate the Epworth apartments. In April 2007 the first team of volunteers from New Beginnings traveled to Columbia to complete some of the work that needed to be done. By October 2007 Pastor Ken was able to report that with the proceeds of the recent Apple Annie Days festival, the church had exceeded its \$50,000 goal for Epworth Children's Home.

The funds raised for Epworth were not only the largest single mission project undertaken in the history of New Beginnings. The church also gave, according to the April 2008 issue of *The Rainbow*, the largest amount of any United Methodist Church in South Carolina to Epworth Children's Home in 2007, and it gave the largest amount per member of any Methodist Church in the state for the same year.

Although the Epworth project was New Beginnings' largest single mission project, it was by no means its only mission project. In the early years the congregation was exceptionally generous in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ by giving to those with the greatest needs. One example is the Little Red Wagon. By putting in-kind as well as monetary donations in a little red wagon in the narthex on one Sunday each month, the church assisted the Spartanburg Children's Shelter; Mason Manor, a senior adult

subsidized living facility; Greater Spartanburg Ministries; a collection of winter clothing for local shelters and outreach ministries; cans of soup for Souper Bowl Sunday; medical supplies for Haiti; and school supplies.

More recently New Beginnings has assisted Divine Holistic Ministries, a mission project in Uganda East Africa. On February 19, 2012 the newsletter reported that the Church Council voted to support the mission through an orphan sponsorship campaign. Nita Russell and her daughter Faith spearheaded the project and in 2015 visited the mission and returned with a detailed and exciting video report.

Rev. Thomas Smith, Pastor Owens' successor at New Beginnings, gives perhaps the best expression of the spiritual significance of mission projects. In an article for the February 12, 2012 issue of *Sharing Space*, entitled, What Jesus Really Looks Like, Smith shared his observation of a mobile food pantry organized by the church.

Volunteers packed bags of nonperishable groceries that a food bank delivered to the church. Then volunteers distributed the bags to recipients who drove through the church parking lot. Pastor Thomas wrote, "I saw Jesus today – really. ... I saw Jesus in the faces of the people of New Beginnings UMC and in the faces of the people who received food. I saw the body of Christ being the body of Christ."

At the end of 2007 Owens announced in *The Rainbow* that plans for a new building were still under discussion. Moreover, he emphasized that the plans were not just an expansion of the physical plant, but a change in the "culture" of New Beginnings.

Changes in leadership of the church accompanied changes in the physical and spiritual state of the church. At the September 9, 2007 meeting of the Church Council it was announced that Bobby Gilbert, the Director of Discipleship, would be leaving New Beginnings to attend seminary. His departure left a large gap in the ministry of the church.

In 2008 another change in leadership occurred when the pastor, Ken Owens, left New Beginnings to accept an appointment at another United

Methodist church. In his monthly column for the May 2008 issue of *The Rainbow*, Owens explained that he “anticipated” the new appointment and in fact “recommended” it to the District Superintendent. The fact that the quality and quantity of the church’s members and ministry were “very good,” Ken wrote, created “an opportunity for a healthy transition of leadership.” In terms of the future of New Beginnings, he concluded that the church faced major decisions in staffing and in buildings.

With respect to membership, Rev. Owens reported to the January 28, 2008 meeting of the Church Council that New Beginnings ministered to about 700 people. This number included 344 full members, 156 children and youth, 108 constituent members (nonmembers for whom the church has “pastoral responsibility” according to *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*) and 100 attendees. These numbers reflect challenges for the professional staff of the church and for the physical space needed for ministry.

As Pastor Owens reflected on his years at New Beginnings, he wrote,

New Beginnings has always had a personality that gets things done. So what if the icy weather keeps us off the property when we want to break ground, or we don’t have enough space, or the staff was small?... We always felt that if God was calling us to do something, then it must be possible. So with creativity and stubbornness, we’d push forward.

In 2008, as New Beginnings prepared to welcome its new pastor, Rev. Thomas W. Smith, the biggest obstacle to construction of another badly needed building was the amount of money it still owed on its first building. Prospective lenders were not concerned about the amount of equity the church had for another loan. But they were concerned about the size of its debt.

In the August 2008 issue of *The Rainbow* shortly after Rev. Smith became pastor of the church, he wrote in his monthly column, Tidbits from

Thomas, echoing the words from his predecessor quoted above, that the “history of New Beginnings” was “a history of God’s blessing in the face of insurmountable obstacles.” Looking forward, he exhorted the congregation to confront and overcome the challenges it faced. “We can do this. God can do this. Let’s get started.”

At the end of 2008 Pastor Smith announced six ministry goals for 2009. These goals reflect his assessment of the most important issues for the church.

1. New staff person, deacon or person “comparably credentialed” to work in Christian education with emphasis on youth ministry
2. Continue plans for family life center
3. Follow-up on Natural Church Development process
4. New areas of community engagement for New Beginnings like Upstate Family Resources Center
5. Increasing electronic communication and marketing
6. Task force to audit full and constituent members for more accurate numbers

In order to address the second goal listed above, Smith realized that fundraisers like Apple Annie Days and church dinners and rummage sales would not significantly reduce the large debt that New Beginnings continued to repay on its first building. For this reason he researched church capital campaign consultants and with the support of the District Superintendent contacted Alan Wildes of the Generis Company.

Pastor Smith introduced Wildes to the September 8, 2008 meeting of the Church Council. Wildes answered questions from the council about the success of his efforts as a consultant for church fundraising. The council then voted unanimously to hire Generis as a capital campaign consultant.

The capital funds campaign organized by Generis was known as Together Toward Tomorrow or T3. The goal of the campaign was to obtain three-year financial commitments from the congregation of New Beginnings

for the construction of a new multi-purpose building that would be called the Ministry and Mission Center.

In the fall of 2008 there was another opportunity for New Beginnings to reduce its debt. The minutes of the October 13, 2008 meeting of the Church Council reported an earlier meeting that Doug Campsen, the Chair of the Building Committee, and Rev. Smith had with the Boiling Springs Park Committee.

The park committee wanted to buy 3.6 acres of land at the rear of the church's property. The Church Council voted unanimously to form a committee to determine the market value of the property and to negotiate with potential buyers on behalf of the church. The minimum acceptable bid for buyers was \$168,000. Shortly thereafter, Pastor Thomas reported in the December 2008 issue of *The Rainbow* that the annual Charge Conference approved the Church Council decision to sell church property.

In the end, however, New Beginnings and the park committee could not agree on a price. The 3.6 acres remain the property of the church.

The Second Decade

As Rev. Smith neared the end of his first year at New Beginnings, he assessed the character of the church as reflected in its past. He wrote in the March 2009 issue of *The Rainbow*,

I truly believe that God has been and is at work in and through New Beginnings. The story of our first ten years has been the story of God doing incredible things. ... God's hand has been on New Beginnings in a powerful, wonderful way. God has been faithful to us.

Then Pastor Thomas anticipated the future.

If we enter the next phase of our church's life together with the same faithfulness, God will provide new avenues of ministry and take us to new heights in our life with Him.

In the same 2009 newsletter Rev. Smith announced that March 15, 2009 would be Celebration Sunday, marking both the tenth anniversary of New Beginnings and an opportunity for members to make financial commitments to the new Mission and Ministry Center. The bulletin for the March 15 worship service indicates that both Rev. Allen Senn and Rev. Ken Owens as well as Bobby Gilbert, who was then a student at Asbury Theological Seminary, were present for this special occasion.

Echoing the stories told above about what attracted new members to New Beginnings, Pat and Judy Coleman share the sequence of events that led them to join the church. In 2012 Pat retired from the Air Force and he and Judy settled in Tipp City, Ohio and joined nearby Ginghamburg United Methodist Church. Shortly thereafter Pat was diagnosed with kidney cancer.

The timing of these two events, Pat believes, was not coincidental. He needed the spiritual support of his church family during the medical ordeal of surgery and rehabilitation. Later in 2012 the Colemans moved to Boiling Springs and visited several churches in the area. In 2013 at the invitation of a neighbor they visited a worship service at New Beginnings. The Colemans were enthusiastic about the newly appointed pastor, Terry Fleming. He is, Pat and Judy agree, an excellent teacher and minister. Moreover, they believe New Beginnings is the "place we need to be." The church has allowed them to "come closer to the goal of being closer to God."

With the growth of New Beginnings in terms of both members and activities, the monthly newsletter became a weekly newsletter with a new name, *Sharing Space*. One of the first announcements in *Sharing Space* appeared in the April 2 issue, reporting that pledges for the Mission and Ministry Center totaled \$784,578.

In early May 2010 construction of the new building began. Prior to groundbreaking Pastor Thomas emphasized the purpose of the Mission and Ministry Center. Writing in the April 11 issue of *Sharing Space*, he said,

Before the first bulldozer shows up, we will take time to ensure that we are building on the right foundation. We are not building so that we will have more space. We are building to join God in his work of making disciples of his Son.

The *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* gave front-page lead story coverage to the groundbreaking in its Sunday April 11, 2010 edition. The headline read, "Let the celebrations begin!"

The congregation's first Sunday in the new facility was June 26, 2011. In anticipation of this special event, Rev. Smith wrote in *Sharing Space*,

This Sunday we gather in thanksgiving and celebration for the truly wonderful and powerful things God has done through us and among us. So much has happened in the life of our church since we began working toward our Mission and Ministry Center. Through all the joys and trials, God has been faithful. And now we come to give Him thanks [and] to celebrate His goodness. I have seen God bless New Beginnings UMC in ways that I could never imagine.

The order of worship in the bulletin for June 26, 2011 included consecration of the new building and of the pulpit, baptismal font and altar. The District Superintendent, Rev. Paul Harmon, and Rev. Allen and Rosa Senn attended the service. The total attendance for worship was 476 according to the July 3, 2011 issue of *Sharing Space*.

Shortly after New Beginnings moved into the Mission and Ministry Center, the minutes of the July 25 Church Council meeting reported important personnel changes. The SPRC announced that Bobby Gilbert, who was completing his work at Asbury Theological Seminary, was hired as

Pastoral Associate. The same committee also announced the resignation of Matt Giles who for nearly eight years served as accompanist, choir director and worship leader.

In the years since moving into the new building, New Beginnings has continued to support many existing programs and activities like Troop 413 of the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts that was established in 2009. The number 413 has spiritual significance, reflecting the Christian sponsorship of the troop. It refers to Philippians 4:13 NIV, "I can do all this through him [Christ] who gives me strength."

Other programs that continue to be a vital part of the church's ministry are Upward Soccer and addiction recovery groups. In addition a number of youth and adults participate each year in the Salkehatchee Summer Service that provides home repair for individuals and families throughout South Carolina who live in substandard housing. Finally, trained volunteers in the Stephen Ministry offer Christian care to individuals facing a crisis or challenge such as divorce, grief, loss of employment, hospitalization, relocation or loneliness.

Finally, since the construction of the Mission and Ministry building, the church has added new programs like flood buckets for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to respond to human needs during natural disasters; Heifer International to encourage sustainable forms of animal husbandry in developing nations; and Backpacks for Kids, a program sponsored by the Upstate Family Resource Center (UFRC) to fill backpacks with school supplies and other items for children in need.

In 2013 both Pastor Thomas and Pastoral Associate Bobby Gilbert were appointed to other United Methodist churches in the South Carolina Annual Conference. In his last article in *Sharing Space* on June 9, 2013 Rev. Smith wrote that in spite of

ups and downs, good times and bad ... we have helped people profess their faith in Jesus and we have been Christ's hands and feet as we care for those

in need. I have been blessed to be a part of the work God is doing in and through New Beginnings UMC. I am confident that God has big things in store for New Beginnings and I am grateful to have been a part of her unfolding story.

Pastor Bobby, who was called to the ministry while he was a lay member of New Beginnings, wrote his final article in *Sharing Space* one week later on June 16, 2013.

What joy I feel in my soul to have served in various capacities within New Beginnings since 1998. Once again it is time for me and my family to move on as God continues to place us in just the precise place for His work.

New Beginnings has been the only church that I have called home in my adult life.

Thank you so much for sharing your lives with us. Our shared journey over this time will remain in my heart. May God continue to bless you all.

Conclusion

In 2013 the South Carolina Annual Conference of the UMC appointed Rev. Terry Fleming as Senior Pastor of New Beginnings. Under his leadership church membership continues to grow and now numbers 627. Pastor Terry was reappointed in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In 2014 the church hired Sarah Moseley as Youth Director and Carla Fleming, Terry's wife, as Choir Director. In addition, Richey Blackwood is Director of the Praise Team and Joy Garner is Director of Children's Ministries. Moreover, the Staff Parish Relations Committee reorganized administrative positions within the church office. Lisa Diestler is now responsible for communications, membership and senior adult ministries. Finally, with the retirement of Joe Barnett as

Building Steward after 7 years of service, Dustin Madala holds that indispensable job at New Beginnings.

These changes in human resources conclude this history of New Beginnings United Methodist Church. Reflection on the sequence of events that resulted in the conception and birth of the church and its continued forward thrust, despite both expected and unanticipated stumbling blocks, attests to God's unmistakable providence. The enthusiasm, energetic hard work and dedication of the start-up team, on the part of clergy and laity alike, were instruments of grace used by the Holy Spirit to establish this worshiping congregation in Boiling Springs, SC.

The growth of membership and expansion of programs and activities in the early years of the church reveal, once again, the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In addition, buying land and constructing the first building would have been impossible without God's inspiration and faithful direction.

There were many obstacles, of course, along the path to the achievement of these goals. The creation of a second and then a third Sunday worship service as well as the addition of the discipleship building in the modular units required adjustments and resolution of differences among church members. This was also true of the planning, financing and construction of the new mission and ministry center.

Nevertheless, in spite of stubborn roadblocks, New Beginnings has been steadfast in its mission of proclaiming the gospel in order to bring all people to faith in Jesus Christ and to develop and encourage disciples for the work of his kingdom. Remaining faithful to these twin goals of sharing the Gospel and growing disciples of Jesus Christ will, in years to come, strengthen the witness of the church and continue to bring more and more individuals into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ to God's eternal glory and to our good.

Appendix

The membership statistics in the tables below are taken from the Report of the Statistician in the *Conference Journals* that can be found on the website for the South Carolina United Methodist Church (umcsc.org). At the end of each year every United Methodist congregation in South Carolina reports financial and membership data to the Annual Conference. These statistics appear in the *Conference Journal* for the following year. For example, the data reported for 2015 will appear in the *2016 Conference Journal*.

Table 1 NBUMC Membership Data 2005-2008

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Professing Members	259	290	341	386
Avg. Attendance in Worship	215	301	349	347
Children in Small Group Ministries	41	129	131	155
Youth in Small Group Ministries	27	39	88	78
Young Adults in Small Group Ministries				
Other Adults in Small Group Ministries	91 (total adults)	102 (total adults)	121 (total adults)	172 (total adults)
Total in Small Group Ministries	190 (including leaders)	335 (including leaders)	383 (including leaders)	460 (including leaders)

Table 2 NBUMC Membership Data for 2009-2013

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Professing Members	429	462	505	555	587
Avg. Attendance in Worship	330	351	363	367	364
Children in Small Group Ministries	69	105	115	120	136
Youth in Small Group Ministries	36	31	50	60	63
Young Adults in Small Group Ministries	37	7	80	12	17
Other Adults in Small Group Ministries	163	186	102	200	217
Total in Small Group Ministries	305	329	347	392	433