

Rev. Susan Reisinger served the church as interim pastor from June 10, 2007 through August 30 of 2009. She led the church through a mission study, a spiritual discernment process which provided the congregation with an opportunity for self-reflection. Following the study, the church was led to the Rev. Wendi L. Werner as its next pastor. Rev. Werner was ordained in the PC(USA) in 2006, having completed her Master of Divinity at Drew Theological School. Prior to Dayton, she had served in large, multi-staff congregations in educational ministries in north-central New Jersey and more locally at the First Presbyterian Church at Dutch Neck in Princeton Junction as Associate Pastor. Rev. Werner offered her candidacy sermon in August of 2009 that included a memorable children's message which left many with happy, teary eyes. The congregation unquestionably knew she belonged at the Dayton Church. She was installed during an afternoon service in October of 2009, where the Rev. Dr. David A. Davis of Nassau Presbyterian Church offered the sermon. The church was excited to welcome Rev. Werner's entire family into its life, including her husband Noel (Director of Music at Nassau Church), and Sophie and Emily who were ages 6 and 2 when she began.

During Rev. Werner's tenure, the church undertook approximately 1 million dollars in building expansion, restoration and renovation, without accruing debt. Major projects are described in paragraphs that follow. These projects were made possible through the financial generosity of the congregation, including saints of the church no longer living who contributed to the church through planned, legacy giving. Smaller, but significant projects included the increase of lighting in the sanctuary with installation of new chandeliers which can be mechanically raised and lowered, installation of a commercial grade oven and gas range (made possible with a gift from Harold Errickson), installation of new commercial grade tile flooring in the kitchen, an upgrade of electricity in the kitchen, replacement of all furnaces in the church building and Christian education building, new roofing over fellowship hall, new roofing over the sanctuary building, new fencing around the rear perimeter of the property and a host of other minor projects.

During the early portion of Rev. Werner's time as pastor, there was a significant shift in long term lay leadership. After serving for a period that spanned over 20 years, Jane Duchak stepped down as church secretary and Ruth Velez stepped away from her position as church treasurer. Carolyn Bryant, who spent over 32 years in service as clerk of Session, retired from the position. In recognition of all her efforts on the congregation's behalf, the Session voted to recognize Elder Bryant as "clerk emeritus" in 2015. While each person was greatly missed in these roles, the transition provided opportunities for new leadership, new models,

policies, practices and methodologies. The church transitioned in its communication, moving from a mailed monthly newsletter to a revamped website and e-newsletter format. The church began to have a presence on social media.

A Board of Deacons had been part of the church's history from 1869 through the early 1950's, when the congregation stopped ordaining and installing deacons. The church reactivated a Board of Deacons in 2010, striving to recognize that some among them were called by God to the office as defined by the polity of the PC(USA). The new board was charged with the caring ministries of the church. Working in conjunction with the pastor, the deacons ministered to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who were in distress within and beyond the community of faith. Deacons became a visible presence at both weddings and funerals, doing hospital visitation, organizing meals as needed, along with a multitude of additional efforts. They were notably present during "services of wholeness and healing" led by Rev. Werner, where time was made during worship for individuals to come forward for anointing and the laying on of hands.

After witnessing a woman being carried up the narthex stairs in a wheelchair in order to attend funeral services of a friend, Rev. Werner re-started conversations about the possibility of an accessibility project in 2012. These conversations were not new, having begun in 1995 with interest in both building accessibility and the potential of building expansion during Rev. Dr. Nelson's tenure. In 2013, the Session opted for a concentrated focus on accessibility with the inclusion of a small addition to serve as a fully accessible lobby area, designed to communicate welcome. Taking inspiration from plans initially drawn up by George Knigge, the church eventually contracted with architect Bill Doran and Hobar Construction Company for the project which included the installation of a three stop Garaventa lift and the construction of two fully accessible bathrooms located in both the lobby and fellowship hall. Elder Keith Watlington served as project manager on the church's behalf. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on September 29, 2013 in which the completion of the project was celebrated with great fanfare including welcome of the touring choir of Princeton Theological Seminary and its chapel leadership. The event coincided with the dedication of a beautiful Steinway baby grand piano that was gifted to the church for our sanctuary. The church's upright sanctuary piano was donated to Crossroads Middle School North.

Under Rev. Werner's leadership the congregation has lived out its commitment to welcoming all God's children through ever widening circles of ministry.

Hospitality has been a core value, evidenced in the weekly fellowship hour following Sunday worship which the pastor worked to re-establish. Following the completion of the accessibility project, the Session further widened the circle of inclusivity by working towards a public declaration of welcome. In 2013, a statement of full inclusion was formally adopted and the church began to outwardly identify as open and affirming.

Following a period with no active mission-oriented committee, the Session re-established its outreach commitment. Under the leadership of Elder Leslie Lanphear, the Mission Committee re-organized itself around Matthew 25, shifting to a different focus each year with efforts to alleviate hunger, provide clothing, give comfort to those in jail, etc. Core outreach efforts grounded in hospitality became established including the Clothing Closet, an effort that gathered gently used and new clothing for redistribution at no cost; and the Open Kitchen, which provided a meal with multiple entrée options on the last Saturday of each month at no cost. In its first 3 years, the Open Kitchen was serving an average of 50 people each month. The Open Kitchen has since grown to serving an average of 200 boxed meals per month. The church also gives away hygiene products through the Open Kitchen program, helping uphold the dignity and well-being of our guests. In recognition of these expanding circles of ministry that kept hospitality at its heart, the church adopted its central vision as the place where the welcome is wide.

Noting that in the church's long history, there has been an argument every couple of generations about whether the manse should be preserved or torn down – the congregation decided to re-invest in the manse property in 2015. Once again, Bill Doran provided architectural plans and Sodano Contracting was hired to do the construction. Elder Matt Verney acted as project manager. The project began in earnest at the end of December 2015. The entire structure was re-insulated, insulated in the rear of the building for the first time, and re-sided. A large section of roof overhang unique to the manse was reconstructed. An existing deck was demolished to make room for a kitchen addition and porch. The half bath on the first floor was expanded to a full bath. A large coat closet was added along with a walk-in pantry. The back room was gutted and refitted with new walls and lighting. Although navigating a construction project mid-winter brought many challenges, there was running water on the first floor of the manse by Holy Week of 2016. Through her tenure, Rev. Werner utilized the manse as an extension of the church, hosting meetings, the annual Christmas party, and gathering there with people as needed.

Rev. Werner organized five Vacation Bible School programs from 2012 through 2016. With backdrops artfully designed by George Knigge, children learned about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus by exploring Mt. Everest, moving around castles and examining the depths of the oceans. Dramatic backdrops allowed them to cross mountain bridges, sit regally in a medieval castle and walk with sea creatures that depicted the presence of Jesus throughout all creation.

The church celebrated its 150th year in 2019 with a variety of events including a gala, special anniversary service that welcomed back Rev. Dr. Kathy Nelson to the pulpit, a series of special events and even the development of t-shirts and a commemorative Christmas ornament.

While the church had once closed for 2 weeks in 1917 due to the “Great Influenza Epidemic,” 2020 marked a historic and unprecedented time of church building closure during a long, national pandemic season. The building remained closed to public worship from March of 2020 through June of 2021. While churches all around moved to pre-recorded worship services uploaded for later viewing, Rev. Werner ensured worship was always livestreamed from our sanctuary over Zoom and YouTube. As she hit the ground running in this new format, Rev. Werner’s daughter Sophie was drafted into managing the technology. Sophie mapped out visibility boundary lines, ran screensharing so that the slides and videos Rev. Werner developed could be seen. Sophie monitored the chat, edited an Easter alleluia video, created two stop-motion animations for children’s messages and facilitated breakout rooms. Eventually, the whole of the Werner family assisted in worship, with Noel providing accompaniment, and Emily leading an online Sunday School class. Hymn leadership eventually moved to members of the choir, whom Noel and the pastor would meet with to pre-record.

From April through the summer of 2020, the church bell was rung by Emily for 3 minutes every evening at 7:00pm. It was rung in memory of all those who had lost the battle with COVID-19, all those who were struggling and as a reminder that the storm we found ourselves in would eventually pass. Those in our community, including the mayor, were grateful for its music and its reminders.

In an attempt to foster a sense of further connection, Rev. Werner wrote and/or facilitated, filmed and edited dozens of other videos to use in worship, most with members of our church family. These videos included hymns, prayers for our nation, other special prayers, two virtual choir pieces, children’s messages and even a Christmas Eve pageant. Weekly online prayer meetings were held, along with online Bible study. Through the long pandemic period, Rev. Werner held the

beloved space in trust for the congregation. In 2020 and 2021, several outdoor worship services were held on the back lawn of the manse, following social distancing protocols (utilizing a “pool noodle of distance”). These services followed a hybrid format, with Rev. Werner running ethernet cables from the manse router to the backyard to facilitate livestreaming.

The sanctuary re-opened in June of 2021. Two air purifiers were purchased and placed in the front and rear of the room, and every other pew was taped off to ensure social distancing. Little by little social distancing protocols faded, with the last being put to rest in 2022. Some practices never returned. Prior to the pandemic season, the passing of the peace during worship had everyone on their feet and moving across the room to shake hands and/or embrace. Since the pandemic, people remain in place, waving to one another across the pews.

In 2026, the church adopted the renovation of Fellowship Hall as a priority project. Work began in late April of that year and included removing the old and worn drop ceiling, grid and lighting, the installation of drywall over the plaster walls, the installation of decorative box molding on the lower half of the walls, installation of a new drop ceiling with decorative tiles, installation of recessed lighting, improved electric, refinishing of the existing hardwood floor and painting. New chairs were purchased to increase comfort and flexibility of space. A large, flat screen television was installed to help facilitate ministry needs of the church. Rev. Werner partnered with elder Jill Thompson, who took on the role of project manager, to see it through to completion. The renovation project was financed with support from a dedicated gift from church members.

In recognition that South Brunswick is truly a diverse community of communities, Rev. Werner was an active participant in the South Brunswick Area Interfaith Clergy Association, participating regularly in its development of programs, being a guest speaker at two events for the Islamic Center and helping facilitate the annual interfaith Thanksgiving service. She also served for several years as an elected member of the township’s Human Relations Committee.

Rev. Werner brought the Dayton Church into the west-central collective, a group of 7 area Presbyterian Churches (Hightstown, Kingston, Trinity, Grace, Dutch Neck, Cranbury & Dayton) who joined together for joint officer training events, worship, study and mutual support.

Additional highlights of during Rev. Werner’s 2009-2026 tenure included the sponsorship of Boy Scout Troop 108, her supervision of ten Master of Divinity

candidates who completed their field education requirement at the Dayton Church by serving as a student pastors; the introduction of an annual officer's dinner. She lived out service to the wider church by being active in the presbytery including serving as moderator of the former New Brunswick Presbytery in 2016 and as the first elected moderator of the Coastlands Presbytery. Rev. Werner was part of the state wide team that brought the reimagining of presbytery boundaries to life, moving our state from 7 to 4. She served as adjunct faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary, teaching a class designed to help students in the ordination process prepare to take the worship ordination exam. Rev. Werner made herself available to countless families within the community searching for a pastor to officiate at funerals, memorial services and committals of their loved ones. Trained during her time at Dayton in transitional ministry, family systems, conflict resolution and mediation, Rev. Werner worked with several churches seeking resolution during periods of strife.

After an abundance of prayer and a long process of discernment, Rev. Werner announced her decision to close the chapter as pastor of the Dayton Church and to prepare for a new one. In her letter to the congregation she wrote: *It's a decision that's been steeped in tears, immense gratitude for all our shared life has held, and a deep desire to be faithful to what I believe to be the call of God in the life of the Dayton Church, and my own. Serving here has been and will always be the biggest privilege of my ordained ministry...It is truly a hard thing to let you go. But I prepare to do so with deep gratitude for you all - for your faith, generosity and commitment to the gospel, which has shaped me profoundly. And, I am deeply grateful for the ways in which you have loved my family. You have been the village that created joyful space for Sophie and Emily to grow, and then step out into the world in the certain knowledge that they are beloved children of God.*

Rev. Werner's final Sunday in the pulpit as pastor was June 28.