

The Church Fire, Ash Wednesday, 1976

It was 9:00 p.m. March 3, 1976 when Judy Wise, wife of our minister, the Rev. Denny Wise, called to tell us that our beloved Mt. Zion UMC was on fire. Immediately we drove out to see the beloved structure surrounded by fire trucks and fire fighters desperately spraying water on the structure. Initially the fire was under the church, coming through the ventilators. But within an hour, the sanctuary and entire building was consumed. I remember holding young Patrick Wise in my arms while helplessly staring at the flames as his parents tried to keep debris from the parsonage.

Our church parsonage was new with a carport just added. After the church was considered a loss, the dedicated fire fighters concentrated on saving the parsonage and were able to do so.

The next morning there remained only parts of the railing on the red brick steps and crumbled ashes of what had been. The same steps where rested, on previous Sunday mornings, Mr. Orville Woodhouse's and Mr. Bernard Junior Evans' tobacco pipes. The little church where my grandmother, Lovie S. Woodhouse, had encouraged all her grandchildren to go on Sunday mornings was nothing but a memory. The rooms where Tommy and I held Sunday School classes, the beautiful altar where we had stood to be wed the day after Ash Wednesday in 1971, the piano, organ, kitchen... all gone.

Members met the next Sunday at the old Grandy Fire Station (later Radio Shack now across from the new Grandy Fire Station). Along with Tommy and I were his mother, Inez Grandy; Margaret Dowdy; Gladys Simpson; Ralph, Norma, & Randy Barco; Wendall & Elizabeth Barco; Bernard & Marvaneen Evans; Chris & Aline Aydlett; Orville, Ola, & Becky Woodhouse; the Rev. Denny Wise with Judy and Patrick, and others whom gathered to pray and determine our next steps. The old church bell in the tower and some old iron forged nails were the only items recovered. Many of the nails were fashioned into remembrance crosses.

Easter morning a sunrise service was held on the red brick steps that remained. Tommy and I borrowed homing pigeons from a friend in Elizabeth City. The birds were released to fly home during the emotionally moving service.

We were invited by all local churches to worship with them and most members elected to attend Hebron or Sharon United Methodist Churches. Eventually the people of Mt. Zion decided to rebuild a new church with the help of many including Duke Endowment, the fortitude of our members, and by God's amazing grace.

The first **Board of Trustees** for building the new church were: Orville Woodhouse, Bernard Evans, Jr., Bob Turner, Eldon Grandy, Tommy Grandy, and Ralph Barco