

Stories of Northside: A People of Faith

INTERVIEWEE: **FREDERICK "SKIP" REESE JR.**



Imagine if we had the ability to transport back in time and witness the inception of a story. Maybe you're in a dimly lit room watching C. S. Lewis dip his pen into the inkwell on his desk right before he scrawls the first few words of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Maybe you're tailing Mark the Evangelist up

the high street to his residence, where, upon entering, he gathers his notes and written accounts, stacks them pell-mell on a rough-hewn table, and begins to pen the first Gospel.

How glorious would it be to witness history being made? Or is the excitement simply built

upon the precondition that their stories have impacted our lives? If that's true, then that means there's an element of faithfulness to storytelling. For example, in 2021, *The Lord of the Rings* has a fandom rivaled by few others, but did 1937-Tolkien know just how popular his published works would be? Probably not, but he

wrote them anyway. C. S. Lewis wrote anyway, and Mark wrote anyway, despite Jesus' ascension happening decades earlier. Why? Because they were faithful—faithful to the stories inside of them, faithful to write them down so they could endure and impact others as it had them.

Northside's story was penned in a similar fashion, as if the 23 founding members, whose signatures adorn the deed to the Chapel, were faithful to the story inside of them—a story they knew was worth writing down in 1950. Did they know Northside would still exist today with a membership roster that numbers in the thousands? Probably not, but they were faithful anyway.

Time travel may be science fiction, but we can still witness the inception of Northside's story through the eyes of a member who was there when they first broke ground: Frederick "Skip" Reese Jr. This won't be his story; rather, it's our story told through his experience.

"Fortunately, I've had a chance to see the church in virtually all of its stages of development. I was about 8 years old when the church first started. I remember being present when the ground was broken for the Chapel. At that time, we were still meeting at Northside High School. My brother and sister were baptized right underneath the basketball hoop in the school gym. »



"Get this shot," commanded Admiral Stokes. With Rev. Colaw was John Ogden, Lay Leader.



Smiling and hospitable Frances Freeman with Helen Martini, Frances Ferguson serving Bob Black and Claude Wills.



Respass Chatfield



W.S.C.S. and Wesleyan Service Guild Tea, January 12, 1958, church parlor. Mrs. L. C. Harmon, W.S.C.S. President & Mrs. James F. Cox, WSG President

"My parents were charter members, and my father was on the committee for Boy Scout Troop 298, which is still active today. I use him as an example because people were active. There weren't many staff positions. We had one preacher, and much of the bookkeeping was done by volunteers. We had a couple people who were always at the front door when the church was open, and they knew everybody by name. If one of them didn't know your name, they would ask you and find out. If a congregant saw a place where something needed to be done, they did it. That was the norm. The Methodist Church has and always has had a method to its organization, but the organization in our case, besides the pastor and a few other people, were members of the church.

"The commitment was more than, 'Hey, that's a great idea.' It was a real community effort to bring Northside into existence. Like every group, there were people who were natural leaders and volunteers, but there were enough of them that nothing fell on one person's shoulders. You had people who were able to organize a baseball team and teach a Sunday school class—people who brought Wednesday Night Dinner and the church picnic into existence, back when the latter took place at Atlantic Steel's field. We even had people skilled and willing to take on administrative positions.

"It certainly gives a feeling of history and loyalty, not just being a part of this congregation, but being a part of it while Northside United Methodist church was still Northside Methodist Church. From all the different Sunday schools where you get to meet new folks and fellowship, to now measuring membership in the thousands. It's surreal.

"A hallmark of our church has always been active participation by members. Our staff is a whole lot bigger than ever before, but we still got a lot of doers. Take the kids working in MAP, for instance. That program has brought a lot of young people together and helped them realize that the church is more than just what goes on in the building.

"The idea that the church isn't just what goes on in the building or on the premises, is powerful. You don't have to go overseas or into other states to find needs. Some of that work is being done here. I really like seeing the church involved in the larger community because it's not all about these four walls. We welcome them in, but we also go out. Northside's existence was brought on by a desire and vision to impact this community. It was our hope that people would recognize that there are Christians who care, and that maybe there's something in Christianity for them."

Our 23 founding members probably didn't sit on the

Northside High School gym bleachers on that brisk November morning in 1950 and dreamily envision the Watson Faith & Arts Center. But it is safe to say they brought Northside into existence because they wanted to create a place for everyone—a place to come worship, fellowship, and be equipped to go out and serve others. They were faithful to the story inside of them, one that yearned to be brought to life so that it could capture the hearts of others in turn, for generations to come.

Our story, however, isn't finished; it's still being penned. We, as a congregation, are still creating. It is now our turn to be faithful. What kind of future do we want to bring into existence for Northside? How do we ensure the story we write today will be worth telling tomorrow? We go to God in prayer—the same God who brought our story to life through the prayers of others. And then, we write. We write as if our story has no end. We write to impact others because we ourselves have felt the impact of this church on our lives. We write to remain faithful—faithful to the story that was passed to us, faithful to one day pass it to those who come after us. ☸

To find out how you can volunteer and be part of Northside's ever-continuing story, contact Jeff Rogers at JeffR@NorthsideUMC.org.



Northside Sanctuary



Hard-working Bob Black



Greeting Winnie Klien (L) and Karleen Donnelly (Back) were Hazel Smith and Frances John Cross