



SUNDAY, AUGUST XX, 2020 MORNING MESSAGE

TRANSITIONAL PASTOR TED LAND

BRADENTON, FLORIDA

Greetings in Christ Jesus!

I want to continue the story I began last week about the two churches that I served as a deacon. Little Brick Presbyterian Church ceased to exist when it was merged with Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery of Knoxville “renamed” the combined congregations as the New Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. History reveals that Fifth Avenue was itself the result of a merger between 3rd Presbyterian Church and Central Presbyterian Church. Little Brick had absorbed the membership of Houston Street Presbyterian Church a few years before merging with Fifth Avenue.

Does this sound more like banks in the last few years? I actually do business with four different financial institutions, and three of them have changed their names recently. One just merged with another. The other two expanded their base of operation, and a new “footprint” required a new name.

Well, the New Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church didn't keep that name, nor that location, for very long. A proven new church development pastor was called, property in the suburbs was purchased, a building was erected, and the church was re-named New Covenant Presbyterian Church. Not all of the members of the New Fifth Avenue Church made the move to the suburbs. Some found other churches closer to where they were living. That is one of the things that happens when a church relocates.

It was hard for the folks at Little Brick to give up their beloved sanctuary, with the beautiful stained glass windows. It was even hard to give up the "Annex", which had been "The Little Gray Mission" of First Presbyterian Church. The last time I drove by, the property was well-maintained by the Greater Ebenezer Baptist Church, which purchased it more than fifty years ago.

The Fifth Avenue building stood vacant for years. It was on a triangle shaped lot at a major intersection near downtown Knoxville. Parking was inadequate for the church, and most businesses didn't want it. A community theater group leased it for a while. The sainted glass windows were covered with plywood. I think someone finally stole them. The pipe organ was sold to another church. The bricks continued to melt, molder, erode. One of my brothers found a brick from the building lying on the sidewalk where it had fallen. He decided to take it home, clean it up, and keep it as a souvenir. He put it in a bucket of water to soak, and forgot about it for a week or so. When he went back, he had a bucket of red clay mud: the brick had dissolved. Finally, one of the nearby businesses bought the property to be used as a parking lot, and razed the building where so many had worshipped, where weddings and funerals and baptisms had been held for generations.

What about New Covenant Presbyterian Church? For more than forty-five years, people have worshipped in that new facility. Our son, Kris, was baptized there. Two of my three brothers married there. I baptized my twin niece and nephew there. My mother served as an elder there. Two of my brothers served as Deacons. But, sadly, that neighborhood has changed, and that church is in decline, and will probably close in a few short years.

Congregations have life cycles, like all living things. They are organisms, with a pulse, and breath, and energy. Sometimes they renew themselves. Sometimes they wither, and weaken, and die.

But the Church invisible, the church triumphant, the church as the Body of Christ in the world, never fails.

Your Transitional Pastor,

Ted Land