

Trinity Presbyterian Church of Decatur Voice: 404-284-4704

Decatur

Mailing Address: PO Box 986

Decatur, GA

30031-0986

Street Address: 1706 Candler
Road

Staff - Volunteer Positions:

Talford, John - Pastor

Cunningham, Florence - Clerk of Session

Thornton, Autherine - Christian Education

Dees, Donna - Youth Ministry Staff

Fowler, Angela - Youth Ministry Staff

Brown, Nancy - Children's Ministry



Church Receives Thanks

DeKalb County Commissioner Brince H. Manning III reads a proclamation praising Trinity Presbyterian Church of DeKalb. With him, left, are Rev. John E. Talford, center, and Daniel E. Meyers, chairman of the Trinity anniversary committee.

Old Church That 'Kept Pace' Is Honored In DeKalb County

A DeKalb County church that has provided special help for youngsters and the homeless has received special recognition from DeKalb County government.

The county commission here asked DeKalb Countians recently to consider March 27 as Trinity Presbyterian Church Day in the county.

Commission Chairman Manuel Maloof made the declaration and thanked members for "their excellent contribution to the community."

Trinity Presbyterian Church was organized in 1942 on Herring Street in Decatur as a mission Sunday School of Decatur Presbyterian Church.

Since that time, the church has continued serving the black community in Decatur as a mission arm of Decatur Presbyterian and the Georgia-Carolina Presbytery.

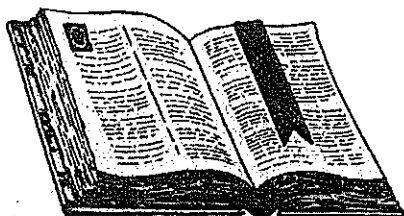
According to Mr. Maloof, "Since its move to Candler Road on Palm Sunday in 1974, Trinity has kept pace with the changing needs of the community."

In his resolution, he cited Trinity's "discovery learning" young program, which he says "is beneficial in educating DeKalb County's youngsters to meet the challenges of a modern society."

Trinity has also opened up its facilities to give homeless indigents a place to sleep at night.

"Under the leadership of The Rev. John E. Talford, Trinity remains one of the central focuses for the south DeKalb community and one of the most prized churches of Atlanta Presbytery," said Mr. Maloof.

*A History of Trinity Presbyterian Church,
Decatur GA
1938 - 2012*



*"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask
for the ancient paths, ask where the
good way is, and walk in it, and you will
find rest for your souls."*

Proud members
of the PCUSA

Jeremiah 6:16

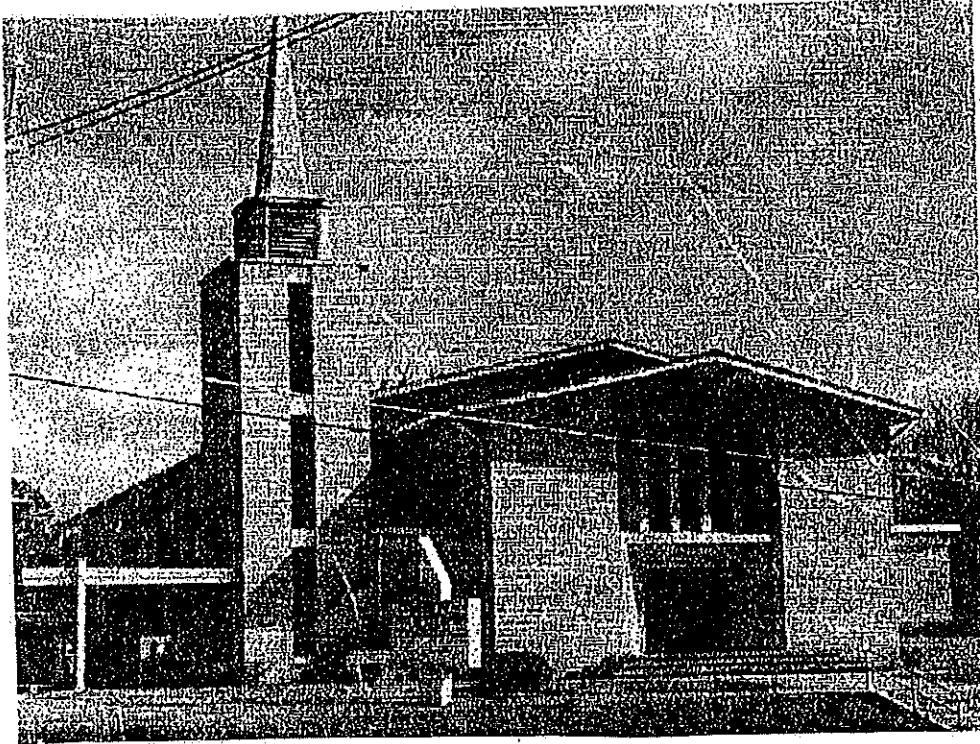


*Dedicated to the youth of Trinity.
May you find pride and courage in
the knowledge of your culture and
heritage.*

*The Early Years:
Robbins Street to Candler Road*

Trinity Presbyterian Church

A Historical Perspective



Introduction

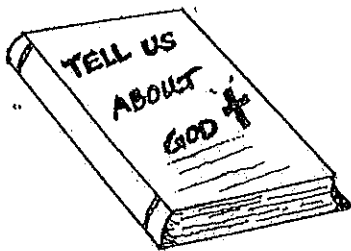
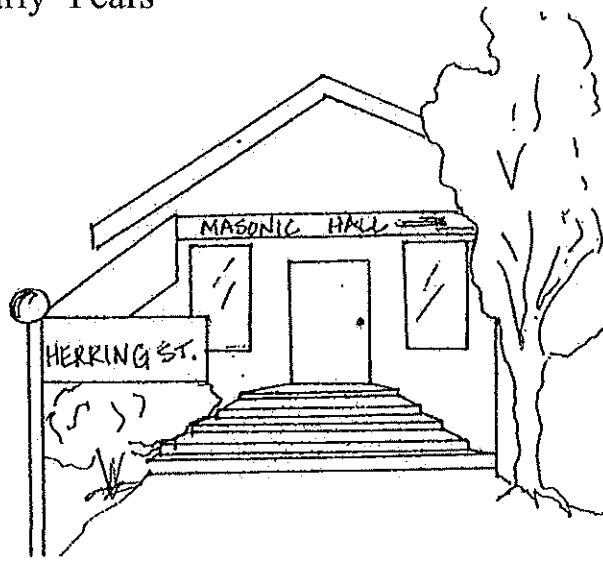
One has only to listen to the older members of Trinity, who were around at the earliest beginning of the church, to realize the rich heritage it has. In the absence of a formal written history of the church, the committee chaired by Ms. Mary Frances Armor, has called upon the available members who were there in the beginning, to recount their remembrances of the long ago startup activities that evolved into what we know today as Trinity Presbyterian Church. We have relied heavily on the oral history as related to us by Mary Frances and Marie Armour, Sadie Sims, Helene Mills, Mary Johnson, Thomas Brooks, Inez P. Newberry and others. All of the sources has provided invaluable information to make this compilation possible.

This document identifies and establishes a time line for the various phases of development of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Decatur, GA. It also attempts to capture the essence and spirit of the people who were instrumental in following through on a vision that began with a mission Sunday school class and lead to a fully chartered Presbyterian Church.

As wecelebrate the mission of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Decatur Georgia, we remain cognizant of all of those who have gone before us. We acknowledge our indebtedness to them with humble gratitude.

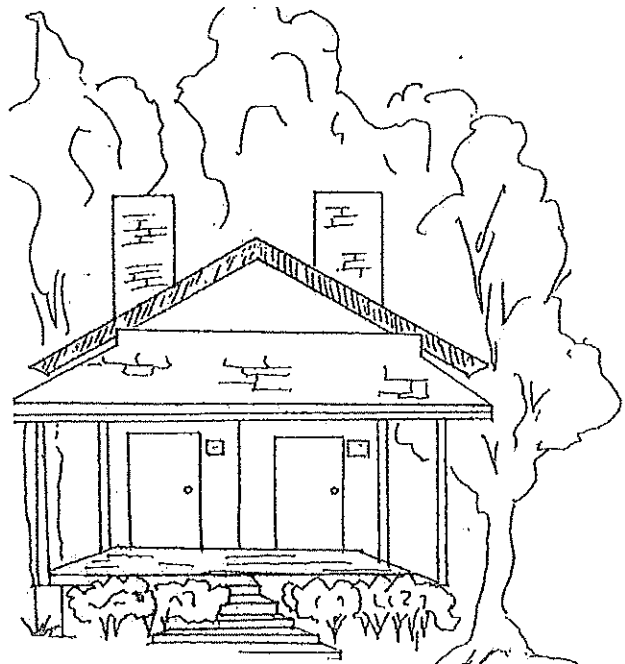
The Early Years

The oral history of Trinity as reflected by the memories of its present members, Mary Francis and Marie Armour began in September of 1938. Their earliest remembrance is of a student from Agnes Scott College coming to their home on Herring Street and inviting the neighborhood children to attend Sunday school which met at 3:00 p.m. at The Masonic Hall on Herring Street. Transportation was provided to and from the Sunday school for the children.



Deacon Jones from the Decatur Presbyterian Church along with Mr. Walker and students from Columbia Theological Seminary and Agnes Scott College were in charge of the Sunday school. For most of the children, it was their first introduction to "Tell Us About God", a children's bible, which they enjoyed very much. A kindergarten was also conducted at the Hall, taught by the late Mrs. Isabelle Wilson.

With the arrival of Urban Renewal in 1940, the Sunday school was relocated to a six--room double tenant house at 196 Oliver Street under the direction of Mrs. Lena Mae Lowe as superintendent along with Mr. Lou Scott Lowe and others. The enrollment was about 20 children. The kindergarten was also housed at this site. It was at this location that Mrs. Zelma Scott and Mrs. Sadie Sims took over the helm from Mrs. Isabelle Wilson in conducting the kindergarten.



There had been a Presbyterian Church (USA) in Decatur on the former Herring Street at the corner of Oliver Street. This church was in the process of relocating and became Radcliffe Presbyterian Church. Many of the teachers of the Sunday school, the deceased Schylo Howard's mother and others decided to look into the possibility of organizing a Negro Presbyterian Church.

In 1940 at a time when segregation of blacks and whites was the law of the South, Rev. Edward Earl Newberry was asked by the Georgia/Carolina Synod. (the black Presbyterian governing body for this region), to come to Decatur and inquire of the people in the community as to their desires for a Presbyterian Church. The results of a survey taken by Rev. Newberry showed that the people in the Decatur community were desirous of a Presbyterian Church in the Beacon Hill community.

As the result of the survey taken by Rev. Newberry, the Decatur Presbyterian Mission Church was informally organized in 1941 with Rev. Newberry as its minister. Among the charter members were Mrs. Lela Lowe, Mrs. Mamie Flint, Miss Sadie Lowe (Sims), Miss Zelma Lowe Scott, and Miss Isabel Wilson. Included among the early members who joined the mission church, were Leroy Scott, Patricia Lowe, Juanita Lowe, Robert Lowe, Helene Strickland Mills, Mrs. Lola Mells and her daughter.

Because of the confusion caused by their similar name with the Decatur Presbyterian Church (White), the Decatur Presbyterian Mission Church (Negro) needed to change its name. After much preparation, planning and meeting, a name for the church was decided upon. The name chosen was **Trinity**.

Trinity Presbyterian Church was formally organized in April 1944 by a commission from the Georgia/Carolina Presbytery. The first minister to serve as stated supply minister was the Reverend Earl Edward Newberry. Mr. Plato Henderson and the late Mr. Berry Hardeman were elected as elders of the new organization. Mr. James A. Lowe, Sr. was elected as a deacon. After that time, additional elders and deacons were added. The first charter members to join at that time were Mr. Thomas Brooks, then ten years old on profession of faith, the late Mrs. Laura Mells and Mrs. Betty Rose Anderson Brazeal, on reaffirmation of faith.

Although, now a formally organized Presbyterian Church, Trinity continued to be housed in the six-room house at 196 Oliver Street, The congregation was continuing to grow. Among the members joining at this time were Hazel Moore and Oliver Tucker, who later became Superintendent of the Sunday school. With the Sunday school beginning to change from 3 o'clock in the afternoon to morning meetings, the students from Agnes Scott and Columbia Seminary gradually discontinued their involvement.

According to the accounts of Mrs. Inez P. Newberry, wife of Rev. Newberry, during the period from 1950-1957, " Children were numerous, family ties were strong, and there was evidence of continued growth in the church.

A Clothing Closet was opened at Trinity. A community Presbyterian Church jointly operated it with other community agencies. The recipients of the clothing express their gratitude for the support from the church and community members.

The Herring Street school was opened for Bible School on a two-week cycle. The Bible school was sponsored by Trinity Presbyterian Church. Mr. Charles Oayton the school principal volunteered and taught the Junior and Senior class of children.

Year round Sunday school met at 3:00 p.m. with assistance from Columbia Theological Seminary and Agnes Scott College along with the young adults from Trinity. Story hour was also held on Saturday afternoon at 1:30 pm, for children of primary school age.

During this period, a Stillman College student did her fieldwork at Trinity one summer. She was widely known as "Deacon Jones" and was loved by all.

Mrs. Mamie P. Rouse, Mrs. Mells, Mrs. Rachel Brown, Mrs. Fannie Lee Brooks, Mrs. Collie Fowler, and Mrs. Sadie Sims were only a few of the women who carried on the Women's Work of the Church. Mrs. Aurelia Dvariste, a church wide field representative served as a mentor for the group, keeping it organized and moving forward. This group was instrumental in presenting a name for a position for the Georgia/Carolina Presbytery. As a result, Mrs. Inez P. Newberry served as Presbyterial President for one term. She also accompanied a group of young people to their first Youth Conference at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

As Urban Renewal continued to cause the expansion of downtown Decatur, the East Side of Oliver St. was incorporated as part of downtown Decatur. The land on which the house serving as a church stood was being required by the city. This forced Trinity to seek a new location for the church. Fortunately, the property at 266 Robin Street was available because of the relocation of the owners.

266 Robin Street



In 1957, the property at 266 Robin Street was purchased and a Church was built on it. In addition it was decided to move the house that was in use as a church to the new location as well. According to Mrs. Newberry, "moving a building was unheard of in the community at that time. So this prospect created a great deal of excitement for both the children and adults. Once the building was relocated on the property behind the site for the new church, it was stripped and refurbished for a Manse (Presbyterian term for ministers dwelling). The Manse was occupied by Rev. Newberry, his wife Inez, and their three children Edward Bernard, Brenda Yvonne, and Beucenia Drucella.

After completion of the Manse, the new church was constructed on Robin Street. The church included the Sanctuary and an Educational Building jointly. The educational

area was a two-story unit housing the minister's study, a workroom, several classrooms, an auditorium, lounge, and a small kitchen.

During the transitional period, worship services were held in the Allen Wilson Terrace Federal Housing Project's Social Hall. The Manse and new church were dedicated on the same Sunday, October 20, 1957. The entire community shared this experience. On that day, the church was filled to capacity.

Many ministerial students from Columbia Seminary worked along with the church and the newly organized Session. Among those students were Minister Anderson and Minister Lonnie Priest to name a few.

The Reverend E. E. Newberry led the congregation from 1950 through 1957. Shortly after the dedication he received and accepted an invitation to pastor a new congregation in Charlotte North Carolina. With Trinity firmly established, he felt moved to tackle a more challenging project beginning January 1, 1958 at South Tryon Presbyterian Church, Charlotte NC. Reverend Newberry's pastorate culminated at Trinity on December 30, 1957.

In 1958, the Reverend Jonathan R Robinson was installed as stated supply of Trinity Presbyterian Church.



Many of the families at the present day church joined during this period. Among them was Mrs. Mary Grier Johnson who became a member in 1958, All of her children attended and graduated from the Trinity Kindergarten.

The ten-year period of time from 1958 to 1968 was marked by many changes in the lives of the people in the community. The Civil Rights movement was in full bloom. Neighborhoods were changing both socially and politically. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had a significant impact on the activities of many of the black churches in the area.

It was during this period that Trinity was accepted in the Atlanta Presbytery in 1963. The formerly all white synod became the governing body for the church.

Although Rev. J. Robinson was appointed the stated supply for Trinity, it was not a permanent position. There were a series of ministers who served as interim pastors at Trinity during this ten-year period. Among them were Rev. Robert Jones, Rev. Prince, Rev. Sizemore and Rev. Paul Anderson. Trinity also served during this time as a church where ministerial students from Columbia Theological Seminary could preach their trial sermons.

In April 1968, Trinity called its first pastor, the Reverend John E. Talford. The church was at a point of being dissolved, and had a membership of approximately 88. Under the dynamic leadership of Rev. Talford the church began to grow. Among the accomplishments achieved under his leadership was the complete renovation of the church including new

pews, carpet and musical instruments.

There was also a spiritual renovation that began to take place at this time. The church became the center of the community. It provided a place for community meeting and activities of interest to the community at large. Rev. Talford promoted a program of cultural enrichment and community service for the youth of the church and served as a liaison for the Housing Authority for Swanton Heights. Trinity attracted new members from the housing projects surrounding it including Gateway, and Swanton Heights.

Trinity was the meeting place for the NAACP during the turbulent times of Civil Rights activism and desegregation. Rev. Talford also served as the president of the Dekalb County NAACP during this period. The push for voter registration was also a key focus of this branch. In 1970, the church was instrumental in effecting a smooth integration of schools in Decatur.

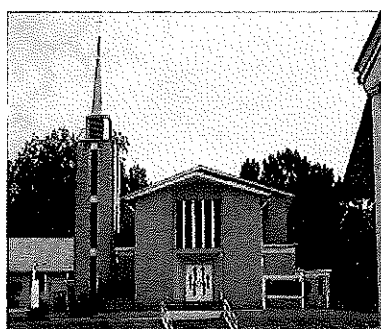


Trinity Pre-Kindergarten Class

The Kindergarten was active during this period. Ms. Mary Francis Armour and Mrs. Helene Mills were actively involved. There was also a nursery for pre-kindergarten age children under the leadership of Mrs. Eula Youngblood. Later Mrs. Susie Myrick and Mrs. Mary Hall served as teachers for the kindergarten. Trinity became a seven-day a-week church.

Trinity's growth in membership from 103 to 293 and white flight from the inner city to the suburbs combined to provide an opportunity for the church to obtain a new building as reported by the Atlanta Constitution. The Atlanta area Presbyterians voted in favor of heavily subsidizing the predominantly black Decatur Trinity Presbyterian church in the purchase of the formerly all-white Alexander Memorial Presbyterian Church which disbanded December 31, 1973. After working out the details of the transaction with the Presbytery, Rev. John Talford and the congregation were able to move to the new sanctuary at 1706 Candler Road on Palm Sunday, the first Sunday in April, 1974.

1706 Candler Road



The move to Candler Road was a joyous occasion for the Trinity congregation. A caravan was formed at the Robin Street Church. Accompanied by escorts from the Dekalb and Decatur police, Rev. Talford and the elders led the parade to the new church. Giving honor to God and praising his magnificence, the sanctuary was dedicated for the continuing mission of praise and glorification of the word of God the father and Jesus Christ the Son.

Upon arrival at the new location, Rev. Talford and his congregation embarked on an extensive evangelistic and recruitment campaign in the Candler Road area. There was a continuation of the social service programs of the church which included a Day-care center and a free breakfast and lunch service. It was the goal of the church to triple its membership and to become self sufficient in six years. Because of the transitional nature of the community, Trinity's recruitment efforts included blacks, whites and other ethnic groups located in the community. Thus, during the earlier years on Candler, the church served an integrated congregation.

The Atlanta Presbytery presented the George McGovern Award to Trinity in 19- for being one of the fastest growing small churches in the presbytery. At this time Trinity's membership had increased to 478 members.

Trinity has continued its efforts to be a community-centered church. Rev. Talford's efforts to maintain a strong youth program was instrumental in the institution of an inner city camping program at Camp Calvin. This provided the opportunity for the youth ministry to schedule weeklong retreats for leadership training and other church related activities.

Among the socially relevant programs of the church were a Summer Vacation Bible School for neighborhood children, an Anti-drug program to try to change attitudes and provide hope for recovering addicts, a program of assistance to Senior citizens coordinated with the Candler Road Development Association to help local residents keep their homes, as well as working with the Dekalb Coalition on Fine Arts to help students develop an appreciation of Fine Arts and their Cultural Heritage.

Trinity has served as a center for the Scouting program in this area, both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Under the leadership of Mrs. Connie Coggins, the Girl Scouts served as many as 400 girls. There was also a very active troop of Boy Scouts lead by Mr. Howard Dobbs which served a range of 40-60 boys at one time. The Trinity Fellowship Hall has served as a meeting place for the Kiwanis and the Optimist Clubs and also as an official polling place for local State and National elections.

The Jamaican Ministry began in 1984 . Trinity adopted a sister church, Somerton Presbyterian Church in Somerton, Jamaica. The ministry sought to address the spiritual, economical and some health needs of the people of Jamaica through its involvement with nine different churches and communities. Each year, the Congregation of Trinity would collect items such as sewing machines, fabric, sewing notions, clothing, recreational, toys and equipment, and materials for arts and crafts. Bibles were also collected and distributed. During the month of June, a delegation of persons including Rev. Talford, members of the congregation and community, several local dentist and nurses along with other volunteers would journey to Jamaica where they conducted a week long revival and provided a variety of of other services to the people at Somerton, St. Paul's Church, Montego Bay, Goodwill Place Church, Farm Heights Presbyterian Church, Friendship Church, the Hampden Community, Mt. Zion Church, Dumperies and !delphia. Visitors to Trinity from Jamaica and written correspondence from some of those served attest to the tremendous impact that the evangelism of Rev. Talford and Trinity had on their lives.

Rev. John E. Talford served as the pastor of Trinity until the year of his death in December of 2006. Rev Cecelya A. Taylor was asked to serve as Temporary Supply Pastor. She took leadership of Trinity in January_2007. She joined the congregation in launching a dynamic campaign to revitalize Trinity which had been impacted by the changing demographics and dynamics of the church community. These factors have led to a significant decrease in the membership and attendance of the church.

During her tenure, several additions to the church's increasing community involvement efforts were initiated. A Community Technology Center was established and operated at the church. A program for recovering addicts called the Ripples Ministry led by Rev. Machion Garrison III was held in the Education Building. Trinity became more actively involved in establishing cooperative working relationships with other Presbyterian churches. The Community Technology Center provided Free classes in computer skills and served a wide range of participants. In collaboration with the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, the church used the 'Holy Cow' Church Assessment Tool to establish its mission, energize the Congregation, and create its Vision for the future.

At the present time the church is alive and doing well. Trinity has entered the new millennium with a revitalized Youth Music program. Our young people show strong evidence of leading the church ever forward in glorifying the God we serve.

Committee on the Updated History of Trinity Presbyterian Church-Decatur

Committee Chairman-Mr. Kenneth Whitehurst

Members: Ms. Mary Francis Armour
Mrs. Tommie Johnson
Mrs. Jean Randolph
Mr. Jesse Sims

The Committee gratefully acknowledges the previous work on the history of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Decatur GA as completed by Ms. Mary Francis Armour, Ms. Marie Amour, Mr. Thomas Brooks, Ms. Selima Carr, Ms. Mary Johnson, Ms. Tommie Johnson, and (the late) Rev. John E. Talford.

Completed: October 10, 2012.

Additional History of Trinity Presbyterian Church of Decatur GA

2013 – 2026

In 2026, Trinity Presbyterian Church of Decatur continues to worship as a constituent congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 2013, under the leadership of Rev. Cecelya A. Taylor, the Church continued at 1706 Candler Road, Decatur GA and attempted to establish a shelter for homeless men in the old church building that was formerly Alexander Memorial Presbyterian Church on the campus. The project was designed based on the Clifton Sanctuary Ministries shelter for men that was established by Clifton Presbyterian Church of Atlanta prior to its dissolution. The project was discontinued following zoning issues. A strong choir program under the leadership of Minister Shawn A. Cotton supported the adult choir, the young adult choir, and the youth choir. At the same time, Min. Cotton, completed his Masters of Divinity and Masters of Arts in Church Music at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) and was later joined by Ms. Tamara Stewart as choir director and Ms. Terica Johnson as pianist for a lively and successful music program.

After completion of the D. Min. at Columbia Theological Seminary, Rev. Dr. Cecelya A. Taylor continued as Contract Pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church and hosted seminary interns Eric Thomas, Nancy Kinzer, Denise McLeod, Jill Joyner, and Bruce Janzen from ITC and Columbia Seminaries until 2017 when she stepped down and moved into the minister-at-large category of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. On July 1, 2017, Rev. Dr. Arthur Reynolds, a retired Presbyterian minister from Grace Presbyterian Church in Baltimore MD, became the Temporary Stated Contract Pastor and Moderator of Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church.

In June 2018, upon request of the Session and Session of Trinity, the Operations Ministry Team of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta voted unanimously for Trinity to sell their property to Oakhurst Medical Center. Operations approved the proceeds from the sale to be distributed as follows:

- Any fees incurred by the Presbytery in the shepherding of this transaction would be reimbursed,
- The loan with the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP) would be satisfied and closed,

- A 10% administrative fee will be retained by the presbytery (this is typical for presbytery property transactions and covers the presbytery's "time and effort" in this transaction), and
- A Sustainability Plan outlining how the proceeds would be spent and how they would contribute to the ministry, mission, and future sustainability of Trinity will be presented and approved by the Operations Committee.

Having met the above conditions, Trinity Presbyterian Church of Decatur received proceeds of the sale and celebrated their last service at the Candler Rd. property on May 19, 2019. For health reasons, Rev. Arthur Reynolds Contract Call Pastor submitted a letter of resignation effective July 10, 2019. Rev. Dr. Lonnie Oliver assumed moderator duties.

Trinity relocated in May 2019 to Decatur Presbyterian Church (founding church) under a program called "nesting," held 3 pm services in the sanctuary, and later 11 am services in the Scott Chapel. Decatur provided full access for worship and church related programs.

Following a series of guest ministers, Trinity called Rev. Brady Radford as the full-time Designated Pastor at Trinity Presbyterian with a contract for 3 years from the agreed upon start date of September 1, 2019. Under the leadership of Rev. Radford, the property committee of Trinity continued to search for a church property to purchase or land to buy and build. Meanwhile, the congregation relocated and continued to "nest" with Emory Presbyterian Church in its fellowship hall. Trinity long had joint activities with Emory PC including Lent services, and the new location provided for office space for the pastor. Rev. Radford served Trinity through August 31, 2022, Sept. 1 – Dec. 31, 2022, and Jan. 1 – Apr. 30, 2023.

The worship committee invited different ministers to lead worship including Rev. Dr. David Bowie, retired Presbyterian minister, until the Pastor Search Committee recommended Rev. Xavier J. Coombs, an ordained Baptist minister and graduate of the ITC with the MDiv and MA in Christian Education, as the next Contract Pastor of Trinity. He began leadership on October 1, 2023 and the Presbytery appointed Presbyterian ministers to moderate the Session including Rev. Tully Fletcher IV of Decatur Presbyterian Church, Rev. Andy Acton of Emory Presbyterian Church, Rev. Yolanda Thompson, minister-at-large of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, and Rev. Jasmine Evans of North Avenue Presbyterian Church. Rev. Coombs served until August 2025. Currently, a pastor search committee assisted by a care team of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta is seeking a new pastor and leader.