

## **St. John United Church** **A Short History**

**St. John United Church (SJU)** was born during the creation of Columbia, Maryland which was founded to be a unique community that encouraged people from different ethnic, racial, religious and economic backgrounds to live and work together. Columbia founder James Rouse consulted with local and national religious leaders on how to develop Christian faith as “the most effective force” in people’s lives. That led the National Council of Churches to designate Columbia as a “pilot area” to test a new form of ecumenical ministry that would be cooperatively planned.

In May 1966, The Columbia Cooperative Ministry (CCM) was established to nurture ecumenical corporation and sponsor activities such as religious education seminars. CCM also support the Columbia Religious Facilities Corporation and the Columbia Interfaith Planning Council, which coordinated construction of religious facilities for all faiths in the new town.

In the beginning, the small number of worshippers in the new community led the Methodist and Presbyterian pastors to alternate Sunday services. This arrangement worked well and, on June 22, 1969, the growing congregation was chartered as the St. John United Methodist-Presbyterian Church (also known as “SJU”), a union church of the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Services were held in Slayton House in Wilde Lake Village. The congregation was characterized by a spirit of adventure, innovation, and experimentation. The minister was Rev. Barclay Brown, a dynamic leader, committed to innovation and expanding the ecumenical spirit. The congregation was committed to a search for spiritual identity.

In keeping with the interfaith worship concept envisioned by James Rouse, SJU moved into its current home in the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center when it opened in 1970 where it shared space with Roman Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran congregations. Mr. Rouse and his wife, Patty, often worshipped at SJU.

SJU’s legal name was changed to St. John United Church, Inc. in June, 2006.

Several pastors have served the church over the years, alternating between Methodist and Presbyterian affiliations per the union agreement between the denominations:

<b><u>Minister</u></b>	<b><u>Year Installed</u></b>	<b><u>Denomination Affiliation</u></b>
Rev. Barclay Brown	1969	Methodist
Rev. Dick Ittner	1975	Presbyterian
Rev. Lon Chesnutt	1978	Methodist
Rev. Herb Swanson	1986	Presbyterian interim
Rev. Barbara Young	1989	Presbyterian
Re. John Warren	1998	Methodist
Rev. R. Whitfield (“Whitty”) Bass	2000	Presbyterian interim

Rev. R. Whitfield (“Whitty”) Bass	2001	Presbyterian
Rev. Mary Ka Kanahan	2013	Methodist

Mission outreach has been an important part of SJU’s history, through a variety of ministries and community outreach. For nearly 40 years, SJU participated annually in the Appalachian Service Project which took high school students and adult volunteers on a week-long mission trip to help families in need of home repairs. The project was a year-round effort, involving work skill and sensitivity training and practice, local work projects throughout the year, and assembly and sales of Christmas wreathes to fund the summer work trip.

SJU is a founding member of People Acting Together in Howard (PATH), part of the Maryland-Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and an affiliate of Metro IAF. PATH is a multi-racial, multi-faith, non-partisan community organization dedicated to bringing the world as it is a little closer to the world as it should be. Some of our victories include safeguards at the statewide level for people living in mobile home parks, creating a youth jobs program in Howard County dedicated to improving the Chesapeake Watershed, affordable housing in downtown Columbia, being a key member of the coalition to create the Maryland Dream Act, and various improvements to our public schools.

In February 2019, we entered into a formal partnership with Bryant Woods, our local elementary school, to support students and staff in a variety of ways including volunteering/participating in special events and celebrations, providing school supplies and winter clothing, and assisting families in need during the holidays with food and gifts.

The church continues working to form partnerships with local community groups and organizations to support and serve local needs as a valued member of the community.

SJU celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2019 with an outdoor picnic on the plaza in June, a worship service and catered reception in October, and a cultural extravaganza also in October as well as a commemorative SJU Cookbook and a commemorative Christmas ornament.

Our second 50-year chapter began with the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020. Faced with restrictions on in-person gatherings and the need to protect the vulnerable among us, we quickly transitioned and adapted to virtual worship and meetings using Zoom Meetings. As the pandemic ensued through several surges in 2020 and 2021, masks, social distancing, and sanitation were our most immediate protections. When vaccines became increasingly available in 2021, we were able to gradually return to in-person worship and switch from Zoom to livestreamed worship for those unable or unwilling to worship in person, extending our reach into the community.