Church History

In 2011, Fort Monroe's Chapel of the Centurion was the Army's oldest wooden structure in continuous use for religious services. The Chapel was named after the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, who was brought to Christianity by Peter. The Chapel would not have been built without the efforts of 1st Lt. Julian McAllister who in June 22, 1855 was the only survivor of an explosion in the mixing room of the laboratory in the arsenal at the fort. It was McAllister's thankfulness for God's sparing his life that would result in the construction of The Chapel of the Centurion.

The Chapel of the Centurion is a modified version of the Gothic revivalist architect, Richard Upjohn, whose 1952 book: Upjohn's Rural Architecture published standardized plans for a chapel, rectory, school, and other buildings. Upjohn originally estimated the small mission church in his pattern book to cost about $3,000. Through the personal efforts of Lieutenant McAllister and his Commander, Captain Alexander B. Dyer, $6,000.00 was donated for the construction of the chapel – an enlarged version of the Upjohn prototype, without the bell tower. The builders of The Chapel anticipated the future growth of the congregation and consequently constructed a chapel five bays long rather than the four-bay church Upjohn's plan suggested. This extension increased the seating capacity of the church to 200-225. As the only religious structure within the fort walls, The Chapel of the Centurion was constructed in 1857 and consecrated May 3, 1858 by Bishop John Johns of St. John's Episcopal Church (Hampton).

The Chapel of the Centurion, as dedicated, was far different from the building now familiar to the thousands who have visited it at Fort Monroe. As completed, The Chapel was originally painted dark green with red trim. This color combination lasted until the advent of Army Field Forces' Headquarters in 1948, a forerunner of the Continental Army Command. It was at this time the "newcomers", the Army Field Forces, outraged the remaining Coast Artillery population by painting their beloved chapel its present white. The old-timers referred to it unhappily as the "chicken-coop".

In 1888, a Moller organ was installed into an organ loft located above the nave entry. A fire occurred in the chapel on 27 April 1933, during the funeral of a sergeant who had earlier told the Post Chaplain, "If I went to church— the chapel would burn up." The casket had been brought into the chapel when fire was noticed burning at the top of the roof above the organ. The funeral service resumed after the fire was extinguished and subsequently, the loft was repaired and extended two feet further over the congregation and the railing replaced. A rebuilt Moeller organ was designed, built, and dedicated in February 1983. The electro-pneumatic organ contains 13 ranks (sets of pipes) for a total of 845 individual pipes. The pipes are constructed of metal, an alloy of tin and lead, and of wood. The exposed casework and organ console are made of oak.

The Chapel is noteworthy for its stained-glass memorial windows, dating from the 1880's. Three of these are attributed to Louis Comfort Tiffany and his Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company in New York City. The placement of stained-glass windows in the nave and narthex

were designed and dedicated in 1958. In 1976, the Narthex stained-glass windows were the last to be installed in the Chapel.

In April 1968, a major restoration commenced to raise the building allowing a brick foundation to be built and a heating and air conditioning system to be installed. The needle point cushions were completed during 1973-77. The present pews are the fourth set to be used in the chapel. The pews which replaced the original pine benches in 1880 were removed in 1966. The oak pews installed in 1981 are crafted after the ones installed in 1880.
As a decision of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process in 2005 the US Army announced that Fort Monroe would be closed in 2011 and the Army would close the Chapel of the Centurion. At that time, an Episcopal and two Protestant congregations worshipped at the Chapel. The two Protestant congregations were later consolidated into a single congregation. Over the following several years, majorities of each of these congregations decided they wished to continue worshiping at the Chapel if possible. Working together, and with the officials of the Fort Monroe Authority, these congregations were able to establish the organization, Chapel of the Centurion, Inc., and the process for this to happen.
On May 22, 2011, the US Army held a Chapel Decommissioning Service, followed by the last official US Army religious service scheduled for August 28, 2011. This final service was cancelled due to the arrival of Hurricane Irene.

On September 4, 2011 (Labor Day Weekend), The Chapel of the Centurion re-opened its doors – as a civilian church – with services by both the Episcopal and the Protestant congregations. During the first six months, our Protestant Congregation went through the process of selecting a pastor. We invited several interested pastors to speak at our services. Finally, a selection committee interviewed interested pastors and unanimously selected Reverend Lucious B. Morton, a member of our congregation.
Reverend Morton was installed as the first civilian Pastor of the Protestant Congregation of the historic Chapel of the Centurion on March 25, 2012. At a congregation meeting in May, 2012, we adopted the name of Interdenominational Congregation, as being more descriptive of our constituency.

We began to develop our plans of operation and a constitution for our congregation in 2013. Eventually we decided to pursue status as a separate church and approved our constitution for Centurion Interdenominational Church in April 2015.
Per this constitution, our Church is guided by a Council headed by our Pastor assisted by a Chairperson from each of the following Ministries: Administration, Altar, Christian Education, Historian, Hospitality, Membership, Outreach, Pastoral, Readers Ushers and Greeters (RUG), Technology, Visitation, and Worship Arts. In addition, the Prayer Ministry was established in 2019. The men and women of these Ministries have been invaluable in performing the duties and responsibilities of the Church and helping to meet the needs of the community.
A Board of Trustees provides oversight of the financial and physical property of our Church.
The membership continues to sponsor and support a number of programs that benefit those in need or provide a forum for social interaction. Movie Night is held periodically, and it has proven to be popular with the membership as a time to enjoy a faith-based movie along with

food and fellowship. The Church also provides Back Packs filled with school supplies for preschool, elementary, and high school students in our Church and community. Scholarships are also available to our college students annually.
Our Outreach Ministry provides monthly donations to local non-profit organizations as well as missionary support to faith based ministries, and helps to make Christmas brighter for children through the Samaritan's Purse Operation Shoe Box program. Special events such as Appreciation Day, Christmas Cantata, Easter Sunrise Service, and Men and Women's Ministries have been exciting and very rewarding.

In March 12, 2020, we, along with the rest of the world experienced an unfortunate turn of events which prevented us from attending church services. The transmission of the CONORAVIRUS pandemic raged throughout the country causing the Center for Disease Control, under presidential authority, to order a complete shutdown of all business activities (except mission essential business and first responders) including church services, and implemented mask wearing and maintaining six feet distance to slow the spread of the virus until development and deployment of a vaccine. But, when God closes one door, he opens another, and to that end, Pastor Morton sprang into action and began posting Sunday services online using YouTube technology as a method to continue preaching the word of God to the church family. Zoom technology was later introduced as a platform for Sunday services as well as weekly Bible Study, Council Meetings, Church meetings and Christmas eve Candlelight Service. As time progressed, visitors worshipped with us signing in weekly on a continual basis. Today as we experience the lifting of restrictions and the deployment of the vaccine, we are thankful that God has allowed us to worship once again, in our historic sanctuary.

We thank God for His blessings as we approach celebrating our 10th Church Anniversary this year. We praise Him for allowing us to gather in person to celebrate this monumental milestone.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!