

Historic Churches of Pennington Borough

Open House

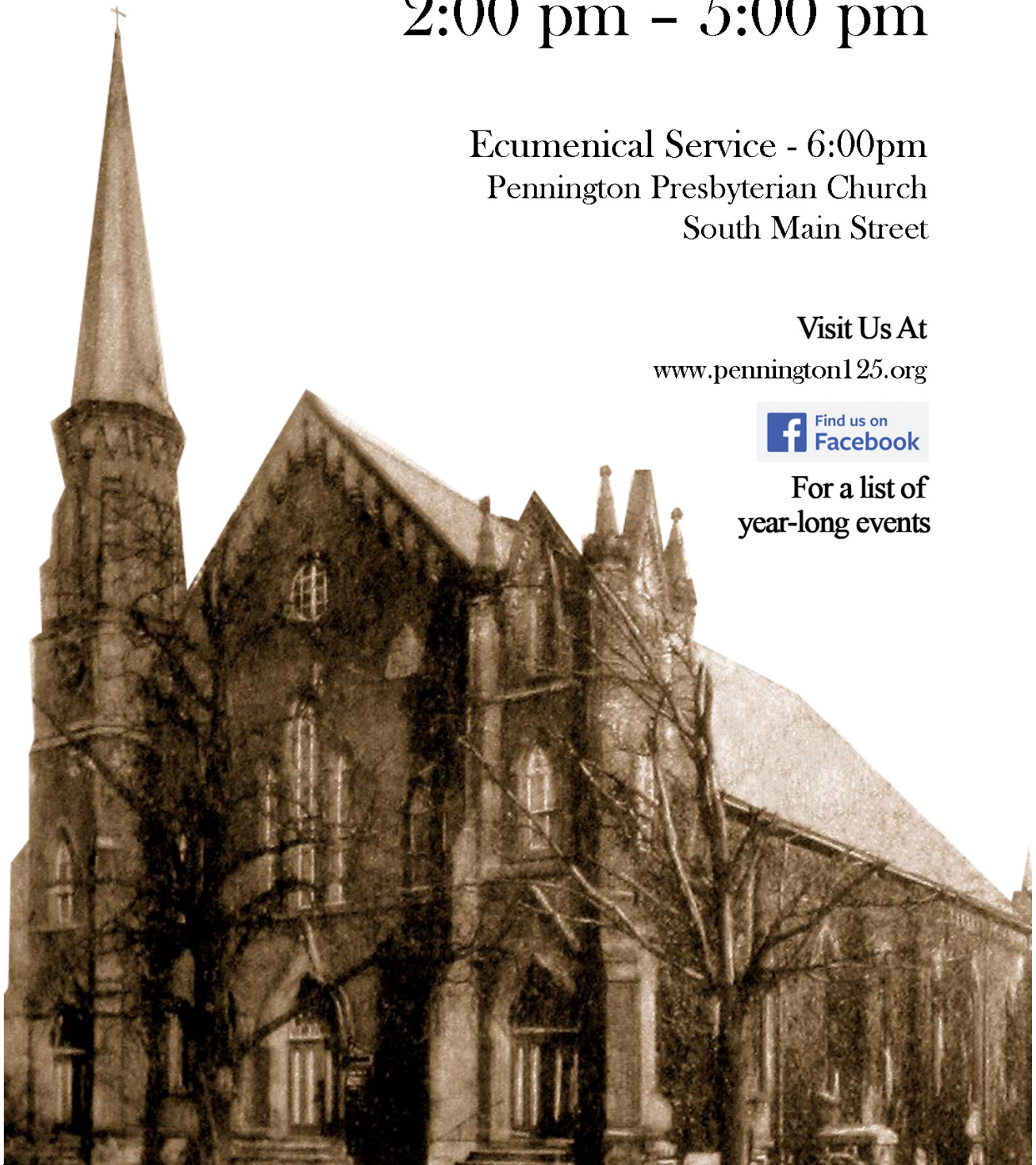
Sunday, April 26th
2:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Ecumenical Service - 6:00pm
Pennington Presbyterian Church
South Main Street

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For a list of
year-long events



The History of St. James Church

The history of St. James is a story of continuous physical change as well as the constancy with which this faith community has shared their Christian values.

The first Catholics in the area were Irish immigrants who arrived shortly after the Civil War. In 1895, this tiny community of five families became St. James Mission when Fr. Francis Keuper began celebrating Mass monthly in private homes on Dublin Road. By 1898, lay trustees were named and plans were made for the construction of a church.

In 1899, with funds in hand and the property on Eglantine Avenue acquired, the excavation for the cellar was begun, hand dug by volunteers. By 1902, three masses per month were being celebrated in the new church and the parish continued to grow and prosper.

On June 18, 1943, St. James was canonically designated a parish by Bishop William Griffin and Fr. Francis Zgliczynski was appointed the first resident pastor. St. George's in Washington Crossing became our mission. Later, Our Lady of Good Council in West Trenton became our second mission.

By 1965, the parish had grown to over 400 families and the original church could no longer accommodate all the parishioners for Sunday Mass. Plans were drawn up for the Auxiliary Building. The design of this building provided for a large physical space for Mass, six religious education classrooms, and the potential for having a Catholic School.

In 1969, after 25 years as pastor, Fr. Frank was transferred to St. Hedwig's parish in Trenton. Fr. Thomas Ryan was named pastor. The old rectory and Parish Center were sold and the current rectory on Delaware Avenue was purchased.

Eventually, the gym was no longer a large enough to hold Mass. The new church was built and dedicated by Bishop Reiss on October 24, 1987.



C1910 - Courtesy of Hopewell Valley Historic Society

Today, St. James has grown to 1500 families, some of whom are descendants of the men who dug the foundations of the “little Church”. Our parish is blessed with more than 75 ministries including Liturgy, Religious Education, Adult Faith Formation and



Present Day

Parish Life. We have an active social justice ministry that reaches out to others beyond our parish borders.

Throughout our history, as our physical structure continues to expand, we remain “domus ecclesia”-the Home of the Church. We recognize all of the parishioners over the years who have made St. James “Church” and it is our privilege and joy to maintain it.

Saint Matthew’s Episcopal Church

Parish History

In 1921, a small group of communicants began holding worship services in Pennington, N.J. The Rt. Rev. Paul Matthews, Bishop of New Jersey, founded and commissioned a mission church in 1925. Locations for the mission changed a few times in Pennington through 1926.



In 1926, William P. Howe donated the lot at 300 South Main Street to the congregation, and a small wooden church was built. By 1945, St. Matthew’s (named in honor of Bishop Matthews and of course, St. Matthew) was made a chapel of St. James Episcopal Church in Trenton. Pastoral oversight was assigned to Rev. Gerald R. Minchin. Later in 1945, the Bishop appointed Henry C. Beck as deacon. When Deacon Beck was elevated to the priesthood, he took a post elsewhere. The chapel was then put under the leadership of The Rev. William Ernest Tilley and followed by The Rev. Ware King. Needed expansions were undertaken in 1952, including a parish hall, kitchen and sacristy.

A service of rededication was conducted on February 10, 1955. With further growth of the congregation, a need for expansion saw the purchase of the house on an

adjacent property that became the Rectory. St. Matthew's was commissioned as a parish on April 9, 1957 with its first official Rector, the Rev. Edwin Tucker.

During his tenure, more building took place at St. Matthew's to accommodate the many parish activities, especially Sunday school classes for the church youth. In 1959, Rev. Tucker moved on and was replaced by Rev. Allan Pendergraft through 1960. From 1960 to 1968, the Rev. Arthur S. Musson served as Rector and St. Matthew's saw strong and steady growth. This blossoming of the parish necessitated another expansion of church facilities. Workers razed the wooden chapel and replaced it with our present brick structure. The new building was dedicated in April, 1967.

From 1968 to 1975, a new Rector, the Rev. Edward Sykes, presided over St. Matthew's liturgical renewal and its current approaches in style of worship. Rev. Sykes advocated for the ordination of women and sponsored the Rev. Virginia Sheay. After her ordination, the Rev. Sheay served as assistant to St. Matthew's from 1974 to 1983. The year 1976 ushered in a new Rector and yet more growth. Under the leadership of the Rev. John (Jack) Belmont, St. Matthew's experienced continued expansion on several fronts. For example, the Little Leisure Nursery School program, started in 1971, experienced dynamic growth. The Rectory was renovated in the early 1980s. In 1997, the church launched a capital fundraising campaign, which ultimately raised nearly \$1 million. The volunteer-led campaign generated hundreds of contributions for an enlarged kitchen and parish hall, new Sunday school classrooms, new office space, a library and a sizeable multi-purpose meeting room. St. Matthew's celebrated the new construction with a dedication on March 5, 2000.

Several part-time priests assisted Father Belmont between 1983 and 2000, including The Rev. Joanne Epply-Schmidt and The Rev. Mark Frasier. In 2003, The Rev. Emily Griffin began serving alongside Father Belmont. Pastor Emily worked to expand successful education opportunities for parish youth and adults. Shortly before Father Belmont's retirement, Pastor Emily left St. Matthew's to continue her ministry in McLean, Va.



Present Day

Father Belmont retired in June 2013. In honor of our longest-serving Rector, St. Matthew's named the parish hall

"Belmont Hall". The Rev. Margaret "Peggy" Rice Hodgkins served as St. Matthew's Interim Rector through January 2015. We are currently in time of transition awaiting a new Rector.

Pennington United Methodist Church

Our History

Our church was built in 1847, when the preacher rode horseback every Sunday to minister to its 300 or so members.

Originally the church was located in Hopewell Township. The “new” building cost \$6000 and its minister received an annual salary of \$400. By 1880,

membership was growing and the church was thriving. The minister’s salary was now \$1000 a year with an extra \$50 for keeping his horse!



C1891 Courtesy of Hopewell Valley Historic Society

LOOK AROUND. The inner sanctuary is a long rectangle, graced with an abundance of hand-crafted wood and masonry. The ceiling is high, drawing attention to the heavens. Sit in one of the many magnificent oak pews with velvet cushions. The focus of the room is the simple gold cross hanging above the pulpit. • Look up! The towering tongue-and-groove hardwood ceiling replaced the original masonry that collapsed from its weight not long after the church was built. Originally, oil-lamp chandeliers lighted the church.

- Look at the galleries, which gracefully line the upper room and add more seating. The church sanctuary can hold as many as 300 persons; it is used for weekly church services, weddings, baptisms and funerals. All are welcome.

- Look at the many colorful windows: These magnificent stained glass windows are as old as the building and authentically adapted from various European cathedrals. Each window contains an emblem that represents spiritual themes such as Hope, the 10 Commandment Tablets, the Cross & Crown, Bible, the Holy Spirit, etc. Panels at the bottom of each window name various donors. When the sun hits these stain glass windows, they shine like jewels of diamonds, sapphires and rubies on the congregation sitting within. At night the lighted windows act as a radiant beacon in the darkness, inviting all who pass by to come in and rest.

- The front of the church, or the chancel, has been replaced several times and the communion railing added. There is a pulpit to the left for the minister, a lectern to the right for whoever reads Scripture, and seating on both sides for the choir. There is also a splendid organ whose range of sound varies from brass to winds to strings.



Methodists love to sing and music is an integral part of our faith. In 1761, our founder, John Wesley said when singing hymns, “Sing lustily and with a good courage.”

- The exterior of the church front is brownstone, probably quarried from a local stone company in West Trenton.

The graceful spire above the slate roof contains a bell that was used to call members to worship. During WW II the bell was also rung as an air raid warning.

Visit our church! As you step inside, you will hear our church bell ring, just as it did 260 years ago. You will find a warm welcome as our doors, our hearts, and our minds, are open to all.

Bethel A.M.E Church

Our History

Bethel AME Church founded in 1816, originally built in 1847, and rebuilt in 1876, holds the proud distinction as the third oldest organized church in Pennington and the oldest established church of African descent. For 31 years they held their services in their respective homes with the Rev. Elijah Hammitt serving as the first pastor. The grounds were purchased by Jonathan Bunn, a sympathetic friend of the first members. Rev. Hammit remained as pastor until the church was nearly cleared of debt. He was succeeded in 1863 by Rev. Archibald Campbell who later became a bishop in the AME Church. In 1865 the church was used as a Day Care for children of color under the direction of Civil War veteran William Boyer. In 1867 the church



was enlarged and in 1950 the current edifice was built within the old church walls. Bethel also has original offering plates, dating from the 1800's among its most cherished artifacts

Over the years nearly 30 pastors have served and made vast contributions to the spiritual, social and economic development of the Pennington community. Among those distinguished pastors includes I.W.A. Roundtree who was a graduate of Oxford University in England and served twice as pastor. The Rev. Dr. Tom Hills served the longest pastorate, having served 17 years between 1992 and 2009. Under his leadership a new addition was added which included a ramp for the access of physically impaired members and two additional bathrooms. The Rev. Bertha Williams followed Dr. Hills, serving as the first female pastor in Bethel's history. In June of 2013 The Rev. Gregory S. Smith was assigned to Bethel. Due to significant changes in the African American Community, Bethel's membership had decreased. Under Rev. Smith's leadership the church has seen a resurgence of young people. The church reestablished youth Sunday school, Junior church, a youth choir and now has a youth and teen praise dance ministry. There are additional plans to organize an evangelism team. Rev. Smith has also been instrumental in reestablishing a connection with Pennington's Ecumenical and civic community, serving as co-chair



of Pennington's 125 Ecumenical Service. Bethel continues to work progressively as a longstanding and vital force within the Pennington community. Instilling the AME church's motto "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit our Comforter and Humankind our Family". Bethel's personal motto from Genesis 28:19 "Bethel- The place where Dreams are made"!

Present Day

The First Baptist Church

Our History

The First Baptist Church of Pennington, New Jersey was established in 1902. The members met for service and fellowship in a private home on South Main Street. The present building was dedicated on July 17, 1904 under the leadership of the late Edward D. Crawley who served as the founding pastor.



C1910 Courtesy of Hopewell Valley Historic Society

The original structure, built in 1857, served as the public school of Pennington Borough for 40 years. It was abandoned as a school, moved to the south side of the street and in 1898 housed a men's athletic organization. In 1904, that organization sold the building and the land to the First Baptist Church. The property was subdivided. The individual lots were sold and homes for its membership were constructed on those lots.

First Baptist Church has been blessed with tremendous pastors who cheerfully labored with its membership. We remember the first pastor Reverend Crawley, also, Reverend Fimmer, Reverend L. O. Jones, Reverend J. H. Nelson, Reverend Hawks, Reverend Washington, Reverend Hightower, Reverend Lewis, Reverend C. A. Jones, Reverend Cain, Reverend Smith, & Reverend Griffith. These men served First Baptist with distinction.

Reverend Malik K. McKinley, Sr. was installed on March 16, 2014. Under Pastor McKinley's direction First Baptist is rekindling important relationships. In March of 2015 we witnessed the rebirth of the 5th Sunday Union; a gathering of the African American churches in Hopewell Valley and 2014 marked a reconnection to the Pennington Ecumenical Community. We are grateful for the strides Rev. McKinley has made in helping us to reconnect with our community.

With a strong sense of community and a commitment to the spread of The Gospel, The First Baptist Church of Pennington continues to grow in spirit and fellowship.

IT'S A SIGN! THE SIGN OF THE CROSS TO BE PRECISE...The framework structure for this building was built in the form of a cross as if the architect knew the purpose it would ultimately serve.

OUR LITTLE CORNER OF GOD’S GARDEN...Crawley Avenue that runs along the west side of the building and meets up with Academy Avenue at the corner was named after our first pastor, Rev. Edward D. Crawley.



Present Day

PICTURES PAINT A THOUSAND WORDS...Please take a look at the pictorial history we’ve displayed for you. It is one of the few places that chronicles the strong presence African Americans have had in this community.

Pennington Presbyterian Church

A Brief History

Early Beginnings...In May 1709, the newly-created Presbytery of Philadelphia recorded that the people of Maidenhead and Hopewell (present-day Lawrenceville and the area of Trenton, Ewing, Pennington, and Hopewell) had expressed their interest in calling a “minister.” In the early years, these farming families worshiped in homes and barns, in the Pennytown schoolhouse, and the Presbyterian meeting house at Maidenhead.



©1899 Courtesy of Hopewell Valley Historic Society

Finally, about 1724, the first church meeting house was built just south of the present building in what today is the cemetery. Measuring 30 by 34 feet, it had a heavy frame of squared timbers hewn from sweet gum trees and was covered on the roof and walls by cedar shingles.

The Revolution...The Pennington area Presbyterians became involved in the Revolutionary War as it marched its way through town. In December 1776, Lord Cornwallis and his troops were quartered in local inns, houses, barns, schools, and even the church meeting house. According to local tradition, soldiers exercised their

horses by jumping them over the cemetery wall. The pews were hacked with axes, the marble top of the communion table was split by a hard blow.

Fire and Reconstruction...On Sunday, January 25, 1874, as members of the congregation arrived home after worship, the church bell pealed insistently. Before most of the congregation could return, the 1847 Gothic church building had burned to the ground. The fire gutted the building and the tall steeple toppled into the rubble. Shaken but undaunted, the church's leaders sought pledges to rebuild the church. Just one year later, all the necessary funds had been subscribed. That red brick church, the present building, was built in 1875 with one story and a 130 foot steeple with a bell.

Recent History ...By 1927, the needs of the church required classroom space and Titus Hall, honoring long term organist and educator, Charles Titus, was built. The sanctuary was remodeled and the memorial stained glass windows were added the same year. By 1951, the enrollment of the Sunday school had so greatly increased that eight new classrooms were constructed by the voluntary labor of 65 members of the Men's Bible Class. This addition was named Magner Hall in honor of Rev. A. Kenneth Magner, minister from 1923 – 1959.

In 1964, a much needed education wing and social hall were added and the sanctuary was refurbished again. Two additional classrooms were added to the education wing

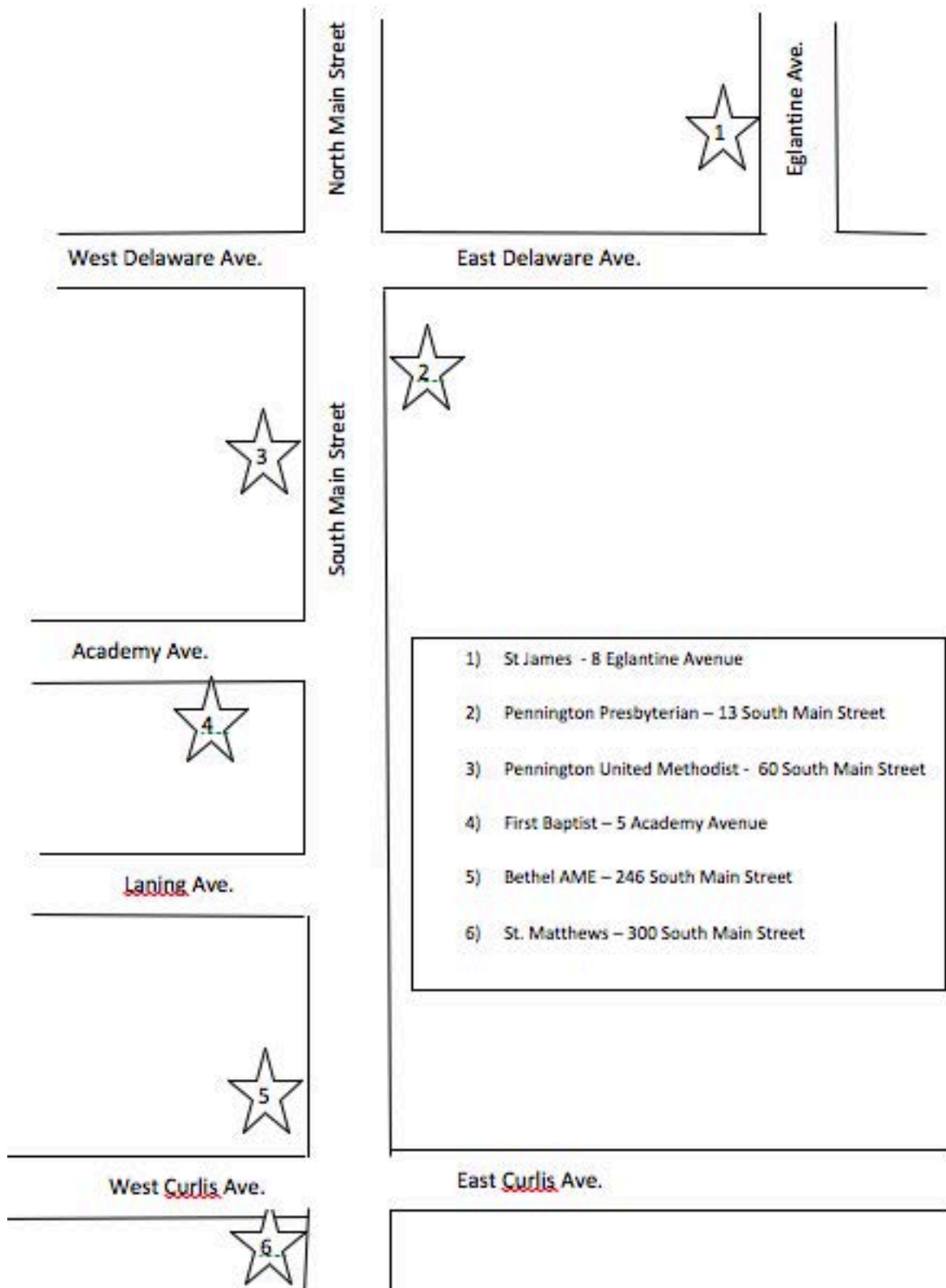


Present Day

to accommodate the thriving Pennington Presbyterian Nursery School. In 2000, Magner Hall was replaced with modern offices, classrooms, and meeting rooms. Titus Hall and the sanctuary balcony were remodeled and the Church was made handicapped accessible with the addition of an elevator. In 2009, Pennington Presbyterian Church celebrated its tercentennial (1709-2009).

Church Tour of Pennington

Map



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Celebration of Pennington's Incorporation***

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