

FAITH JOURNEYS

AVONDALE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

VOLUME 3

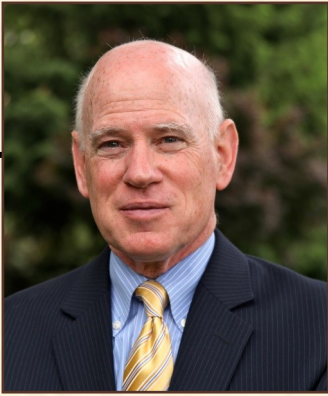


God's Story.

What makes our garden **sacred**?
It is sacred not because of its beauty or design,
but is made sacred **by the stories**
God tells through it...

AVONDALE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2821 Park Road, Charlotte, N.C. 28209 704-333-6194



“Our faith stories remind us that we belong to God and it is God who directs our journey. We believe that one day we will return to God and the journey will be complete.”

Dear Members of Avondale,

I talk a lot. This comes as no surprise to most. It may come as a surprise to some that I enjoy times of silence. I need silence within my life, the kind of silence which allows me to hear my heart. Not the beating and throbbing of the muscle, but the silence of the heart which has become a conscious awareness from a brain that is never silent. When my heart is light and filled with joy, I find myself listening to the chimes within the Sacred Garden and I thank God for the grace which so fills my life. When my heart is heavy with issues of ministry which have settled in deeply, I find myself walking in the garden listening, seeking to remove from my heart that which drains joy and energy. My time spent in the Garden is not regular nor is it disciplined, but it is defined as holy and a part of my prayer life. It is here that I, in this location, desire to be more attentive to God’s will and here, from the silence I hear, that I discern God’s will.



Where do *you* go to remember the central theme of God’s grace given to you as gift? Where do *you* go when the winter of the heart takes over? What space becomes holy in regards to hearing a spiritual voice other than your own? Where do you “take off your shoes” in order to trust God again? You and I are eager to love God and strain our ears to hear a divine voice. When we fail to hear anything, when we fail to see anything, we are told to have the faith. The Sacred Garden makes us attentive to hearing God in silence. The Garden becomes the ears of faith and we are reminded that the great confirmation of God is often heard in the absence of God. This is mystery, divine mystery.

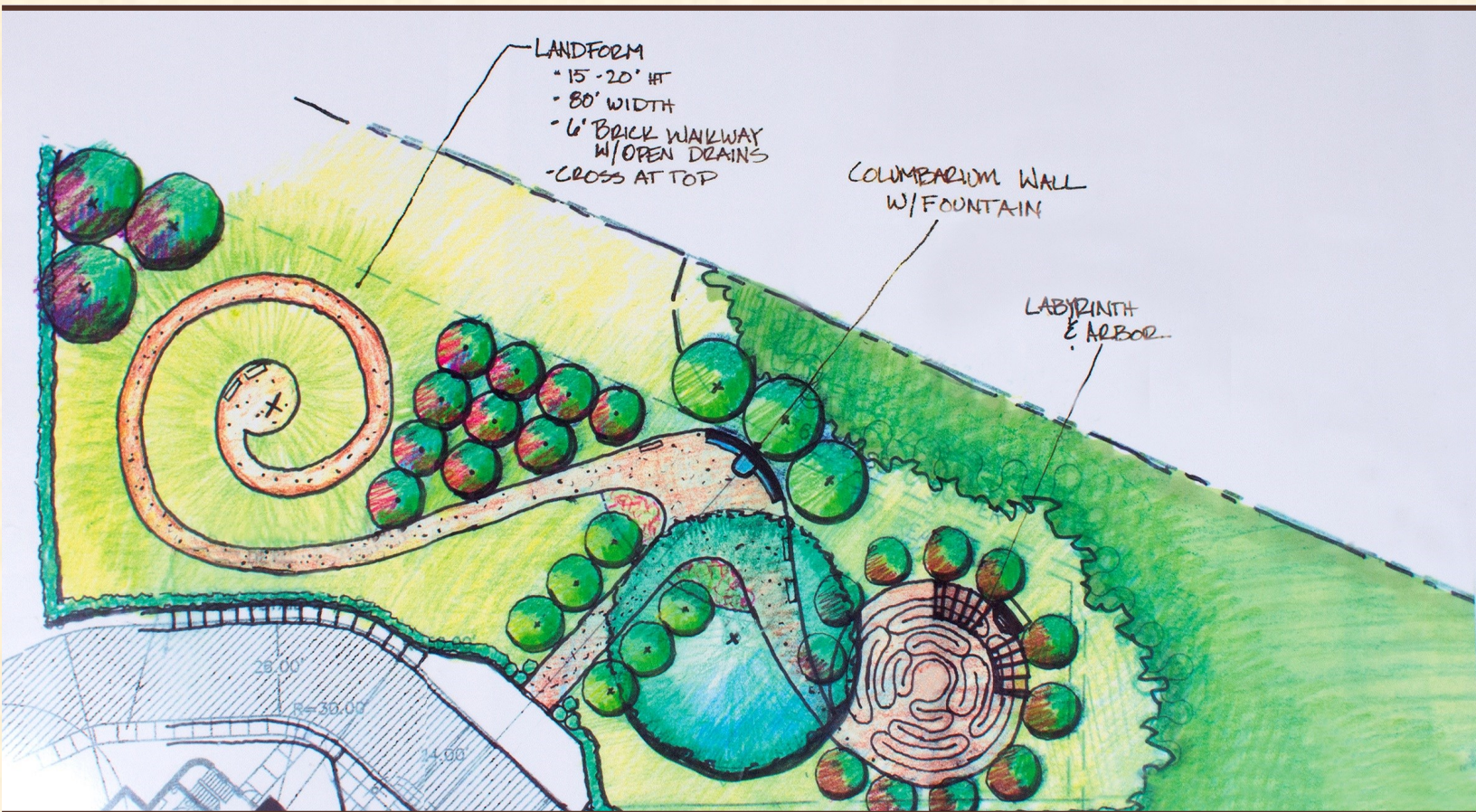
It is a blessing, a divine gift of grace, to have the Sacred Garden as part of Avondale. I commend to you the Garden as if discovering it for the first time. Walk and pray. Read the names on the plaques and look at the dates. Listen to the chimes and may their sound resonate with the promised presence of the Holy Spirit. Think and thank God for those who had a vision to believe and build something which they could not see. As quiet as the Garden may be, may the sounds of silence instill within you a sense of God’s companionship.

John Earl

Senior Pastor

OPPORTUNITY GIVEN

by Hannah Stockwell



Avondale's Sacred Garden came into being neither by chance or things "falling into place." Rather, the leading of Spirit brought this serene, holy retreat. Opportunity was given, and our faithful response led to the creation of a Sacred Space.

Avondale has been fortunate to have opportunity to expand our physical footprint. And so it was when we purchased nearly 2.5 acres and a large house at 2741 Park Road from Mr. and Mrs. Will Miller in May of 1997. For a time, the house hosted Sunday School classes, retreats, and a youth center.

At this same time, several in the church were exploring Spiritual Formation through study, conversation and prayer. Reverend Bob Haden of the Haden Institute met with church members introducing the labyrinth concept. Most were unaware of the practice of labyrinth walking, but were intrigued.

In August of 1998, in a special meeting, the Board of Elders received Mrs. Martha A. Meunier, an Avondale

member, and her son Mr. Robert A. (Drew) Meyer III. Mrs. Meunier graciously gave Avondale \$100,000 for the creation of sacred space. Her gift was intended as a memorial for her parents and her brother – somehow knowing that through God's grace, "tears can turn into dancing."

We believed we were being led to create something unique, tranquil and beautiful.

A Spiritual Life Task Force was formed including Martha Meunier, Ted Todd, Jan Parler, Dollie Sitton, John Magee, Hannah Stockwell, Fran McCoy and Dr. John Earl. They had responsibility for concept and design working in conjunction with the Family Life Center Building Committee. As work began, Mrs. Meunier's gift was held in an account until construction began, earning in excess of \$300 per month during planning.

When the Spiritual Life Task Force met in September of 1998, a vision was established: The Sacred Garden



Martha Meunier

would be a place of peace and healing; it would be simple and integrated into its surroundings; it would be

composed of natural materials. The space was to affirm remembrance of the Saints Triumphant and recognize “familyhood.” Children would feel welcome. The space would have its own sound and movement.

When the house was razed, building materials were salvaged, auctioned off or repurposed. The land was cleared and made smooth, creating a “sacred space.”

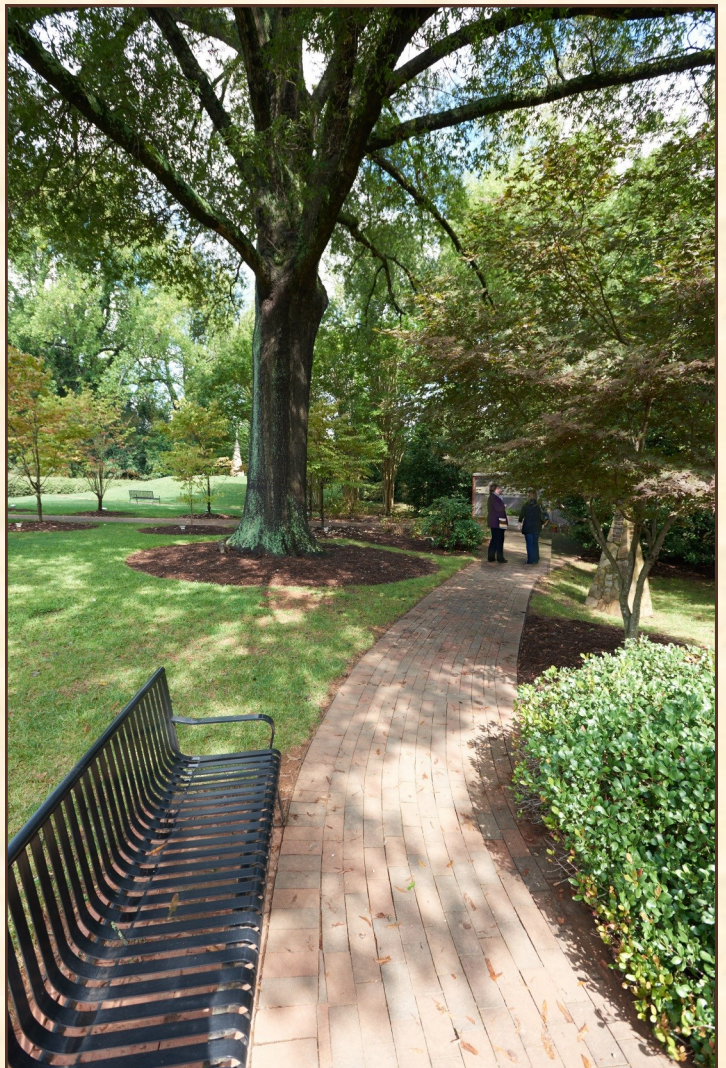
Mrs. Blair Farris, a landscape architect, designed a garden including a labyrinth, a columbarium and moving water. She actually created 3 plans that eventually would be combined into one.

For several years, there had been a desire to have a columbarium on the church property but the appropriate space had not been found. With development of a sacred space, a quiet, respectful and beautiful setting could be provided. The Spiritual Life Task Force researched extensively, but no design satisfied the committee. Ours had to be unique. Finally, as guided by the spirit, Mr. John Bean of Dimensional Concepts became our able advisor, and even made a contribution in honor of his mother, Mrs. Lorena Bean, a member of Avondale.

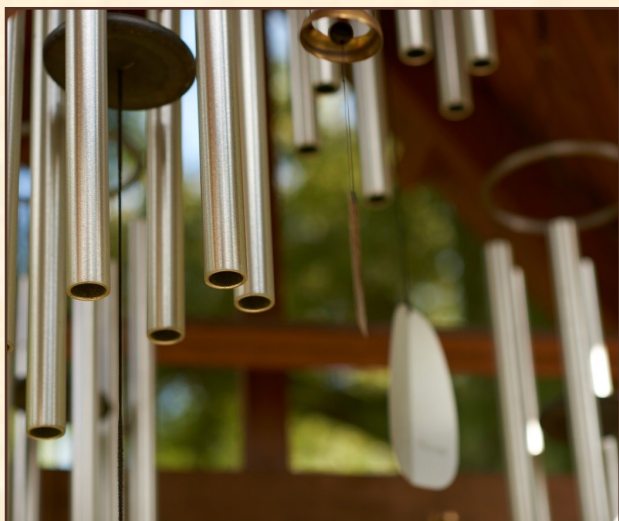
Mrs. Hazel Horton, also an Avondale member, donated the Celtic cross installed at the top of the spiral walkway. Stone monoliths, echoing the design of the base of the Celtic Cross, were constructed for holding memorial plaques. Mr. Ted Todd advised on plantings to dress the garden with Dogwoods along the entry walkway; Japanese Maples around the labyrinth and

Crape Myrtles about the base of the mound. We are ever mindful of the beauty and value of the giant Oak tree in the center of the garden that gives shade and rustles in the breezes.

From idea to the completion, Avondale members responded to the Spirit in creating our sacred space. We felt a longing and an urge to move toward making a place that would be special for us. But as it often happens, we underestimated the wisdom of the Spirit in using that space. It now serves not only the Avondale Church family, our neighborhood, and our city, but indeed those who have traveled a long road to arrive in that sacred space to find rest and peace.



DRAWN BY THE SOFT TIMBRE OF CHIMES *by Nadja Sefcik-Earl*



Everywhere I have lived, I have found a place I can stop and pray and reflect on God's many blessings. When I was growing up, in my backyard I would sit and ponder while looking at Massanutten Peak. In West Virginia, in my early adult years, I would pause on my way home from work and be filled with a vista of magnificent mountain peaks.

Moving to Charlotte, I searched for a place that brought that same peace and meaning to my life. It was not until the Sacred Garden was built that I found that reflective place that could soothe my spirit. I love walking to the top of the hill to gaze across the uptown skyline. As friends began to be remembered in the Columbarium and plaques, and the Katie Stout memorial chimes were added, my reflective time became more meaningful. The chimes, with their soft timbre, heard across the church grounds, drew me to the garden even more often to pray.

In March 2015, unwelcomed changes came to my life with the untimely passing of Munro, who was a brother and because of the large age difference, a bit like a son to me. I was enveloped in sadness. Despite the meaningful memorial service and the outpouring of love from others, there seemed to be no peace to his passing. There were questions concerning the cause, and how and why this could happen,

and his memorial service brought no closure. Then while celebrating Pentecost in the Sacred Garden, the winds of the Spirit blew through me. God, working through my church family, enveloped me with Christian love. The memorial chimes with Munro's name, now hang with other chimes and plaques that honor faithful Christians. In my eyes, my brother has a well-deserved resting place with his fellow Christians.

Since Pentecost, I stop by the Sacred Garden more often. I don't climb the hill to meditate and pray. The garden has metamorphosed into a more meaningful place to me. I stand at the tower by my brother's chime. I thank God for my brother and mother and how they shaped my life. I pray I can live in a manner to positively influence lives. I pray for the families of other Christians memorialized here, that point the way to everlasting life. I thank God for my church family and their love and gift of the Sacred Garden as my brother's resting place. I pray for others I see when I visit the garden and hope it will be a solace to them and others who will come in the future for meditation, prayers and the quieting of a restless soul.



Nadja with brother, Munro Sefcik.

OUTDOOR SANCTUARY *by Dave Comstock*

During design of the Family Life Center, architect Steven Overcash drew a line. Through the center of the proposed building, the line connected the current columbarium. The Sacred Garden was created in my mind that day. A simple line linked our present with our future.

The Family Life Center was placed on an angle to join Avondale to the neighborhood. It would provide a gathering space, recreation and a home base for work camps. And on the far side in the shaded recesses of our property a new, outdoor sanctuary was created.

Like many, I appreciate this garden sanctuary, but do not spend enough time walking the labyrinth. Nor enough time climbing the hill or visiting friends remembered within the plaques or monuments. When I do these things, the experience is magical.

I remember Easter sunrise service. It's cold, and folding chairs are on the labyrinth path facing the city. We're tucked away in the trees, and a bagpiper plays on the hill. A flute to the left of the arbor's wooden cross.

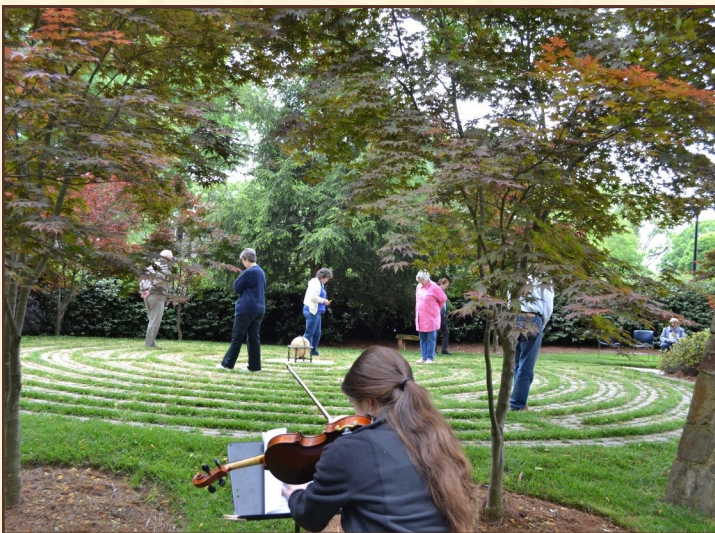
I remember communion tables lining the fountain walkway. I remember Maundy Thursday with a



somber meal before the harsh reality of the following day's cross. A cellist is on the hill: "*Were you there when they crucified my Lord.*" We realize hope from a God who loves us enough to sacrifice His Son, here in our garden.

The labyrinth is a gift to all who labor and are heavy laden. It is a place of renewal, where burdens may be placed. One step follows another until the world is only your footsteps on a path that expands faith.

A few years ago I wrote a labyrinth guide for Holy Week. I wrote the walk as a journey where we carry our sins to the labyrinth center to experience Christ's love, then retrace our steps, leaving the path born to a new life. I watched a few dozen people walk before the Maundy Thursday service. Some quickly, some needed a steadying hand. Some children joined by parents, some alone, each journey was different, yet each path the same.



It was beautiful and inspiring to watch.

We are creators and stewards of this space. I hold dear the work of God's people, tending the garden. Chuck cleaning the fountain, Avondale's carpenters building the Chime Tower, our worship family nurturing God's creation.

My greatest joy is hearing the chimes; it is the wind

speaking with the spirit of God's children, all of God's children speaking back to the wind with a chime distinct or chorded. Standing beneath, I see the faces of lives lived and love continuing to live on a wind that will blow through eternity.

Years before, I shared a meditation with the choir and I recall this when I visit the Sacred Garden.

Meditation:

We remember the day lost to rain, but forget the glorious week of sunshine.

We remember the swing and the miss, but forget the feel of the ball on the sweet spot of the bat.

We remember the sting of the slap,
but forget the hand on the shoulder pulling us close.

Years of smiles are lost to days of tears.

Even our great joys are lost to the patina of time.

There is Christ in the center
Saying "Blessed are they..."
– they are the meek,
the humble,
those that serve,
those that sacrifice for His sake.
Those whose joys are simple in the love of God.

And blessed are we when our minds focus on our joys –
On the Love that is our God in human form.

He called them from their boats
They immediately jumped to follow Him
Splashes – to ripples – to waves
Joining the waves of the sea
Each wave washing the shore
Each wave leaving something of itself behind,
taking something of the shore with it.

Our lives –
joys, tears, but with Christ, more joys in our memory,
memories of those that we love,
the little bit of ourselves that we give to them,
that little bit of them that becomes part of us.



THE WATERS OF FAITHFULNESS

by Christopher Lee

One of the great statements on the concept and action of faithfulness was delivered by Dr. Seuss in his work, "Horton Hatches The Egg...I meant what I said and I said what I meant." This statement comes to mind considering John Bean's work and faithful stewardship in maintaining the water feature of the Columbarium in our Sacred



John Bean at the Garden fountain.

Garden. Every Tuesday, I witness a simple act of faithfulness from my office in the Family Life Center. A silver Dodge Durango backs into the Sacred Garden, Mr. Bean gets out, does his work and after about an hour, the Dodge Durango pulls out. John completes this task based on his promise to Dr. Earl after the passing of his mother, Lorena Bean, a former member of Avondale. "My mom always loved the Sacred Garden, it was her favorite space on Avondale's campus," John said. When asked if he would be willing to take care of the water feature, John said these words that he lives out every Tuesday, "I will take care of this feature in remembrance of my mom." He was asked by Dr. Earl, "How much would you charge us to take care of the fountain?" Mr. Bean's response was simple, yet, profound, "Don't worry about that, I will do it as long as I can physically do it."

John Bean was the founder and owner of Dimensional Concepts, a company that built and sustained water features at Carolina's Medical Center (Charlotte and Monroe), South Park Mall, and many of the water features located in Uptown. He sold the business when the economy tanked, but still maintains numerous water features in the city. John and his wife, Monie, are graduates of Appalachian State University, and members of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church, though they regularly attend Mulberry Baptist Church.

As a paid clergy-person, one of the most remarkable things I observe and witness in ministry is the work that members and volunteers do, behind the scenes that no one sees. Not everyone is aware that John services the water feature once a week, every week. After speaking with John in the time that I've known him, it is clear that accolades and acknowledgement are not all that important to him. What is important to him is keeping a promise he made years ago. My father once told me that it is easy to do the right thing when everyone is looking at you, the true test of character happens in what you do when no one is looking.

Every summer, youth and college groups come from all across the country to serve in Charlotte as part of our CONNECT workcamp ministry. At the end of each camp, we give each group an evaluation form to let us know what they liked best and how we can improve the experience for future groups. Without fail, every group comments that the Sacred Garden is the location that made their devotions and times of prayer truly special. When I see groups sitting and standing near the Columbarium in prayer and devotion, I am reminded of the gracious and weekly faithful act of John Bean. John's faithfulness to his task of servicing our water feature reminds me, in a way, of the significance of water in a Reformed understating of its symbolism of God's faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ. It is in the waters of our baptism that we are claimed and loved by God; this is a faithful love, which never lets us go. The next time you visit the Sacred Garden, pause by the Columbarium; as you hear the running water, be reminded of God's faithfulness to us.

SACRED GARDEN: DELIBERATE DESIGN

by Stacey Longshore

The Sacred Garden is more than a cross on a hill, a labyrinth, a Columbarium, a collection of wind chimes, sidewalks, randomly scattered benches, and some plants. A well-designed garden is not merely a collection of plants and items; it is more than the sum of its parts. The design does much more than create rooms and organize components; it influences moods, evokes emotions, and impacts its users.

Stand at the entry – at the gap in the hedge aligned with the entrance to the Family Life Center. The parallel rows of Dogwood trees direct your eyes to the fountain on the Columbarium wall ahead. The Columbarium is the physical reminder of family and friends now living a life eternal. The sound of water pulls you through the arbor and into the Sacred Garden. The recirculating water is symbolic in countless ways....tears, cleansing, life-giving, renewing.

What does your holy space look like? A place that makes you feel enclosed, covered, protected? Where you tune out distractions from the outside world and delve into your thoughts and prayers? A place where you focus inward as you look down at the intricate paver path ahead? Enclosed by the tall hedge, shaded by the large Oak tree, and framed with the gently curving arbor holding a cross nearby. This space is designed to be quiet, calm, peaceful and introspective.

Do you seek a holy space to draw you out of your thoughts? A place that is designed to be expansive...to direct your body and soul outward and upward? The wide, sweeping path up the hill allows your eyes to notice the beauty of nature that surrounds as you progress upward to the cross that always awaits.

There are benches throughout the Sacred Garden. A bench tucked under the canopy of the organized grid of Crape Myrtles where you can hear the water feature of the adjacent Columbarium. Designed to be sheltering, private, and soothing; to rest and be still. Benches for intimate conversations. Do you look for a place to be seen? A bench in the grass along the path invites interaction with others on their strolls through the garden. The benches in open areas are designed to encourage conversation and fellowship.



This garden is a space where children safely run and play; where meetings and events occur; where earthly bodies are laid to eternal rest. Most of us are oblivious to the fact that this Sacred Garden is nurturing Avondale's community in so many ways. As it was deliberately designed to do.

Go. Re-visit the haven behind the hedge. Many times. Explore each of the spaces within it. As you do, pay attention to your inner self. Allow yourself to be open to the ways God is present in this truly Sacred Garden.

IN MEMORY OF ALL GOD'S CHILDREN *by Rena White*

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3: 8



As you walk the grounds of Avondale and the wind is blowing, you hear the beautiful ringing of chimes. The Sacred Garden's chime tower was constructed in 2010 and is dedicated to the memory of all God's children. This magnificent structure was created by individuals in our church family who lovingly and joyfully gave their time and talents to create a visual and audible reminder of God's precious children that have gone before us.

Following the loss of Katie Stout, daughter of Tom and Marian Stout, the congregation expressed a desire to create something on the grounds in her memory. Many options were considered including an addition to the Sacred Garden specifically to honor children. Dr. Earl began to consider ways in

which to honor the Stout family's dear Katie at Avondale. Inspiration for the chime tower came after Dr. John Earl attended a memorial service in Matthews, N.C. He arrived early and walked through a section of the cemetery dedicated specifically to children. He could not help but notice the ringing of dozens of wind chimes hung in the trees surrounding the area in which small children were laid to rest. Dr. Earl shared the idea with the Stouts who saw it as a perfect way to remember their daughter. "I was excited. I was reminded by a close friend that the last gift Katie had made for me was a wind chime for Mother's Day," said Marian. Dr. Earl began to research chime tower structures and soon discovered a beautiful, large tower at St. Olaf College in Minnesota.

He asked the school if Avondale could build a replica of the structure on church grounds. With only a picture of the tower in hand, he approached several individuals in the congregation asking, "Wouldn't this be a great addition to our garden?" And he knew just who to approach to make the vision a reality. A team of four individuals, Jerry Lawson, Shea Chambers, Zach Chambers and Joe Zuyus, came together and began the journey of planning and constructing the tower. Many contributed to the vision, financial support, planning and building of this inspirational structure; indeed it would not exist without the support of the entire congregation. However, these four, using their God given gifts and talents, led the way to make the chime tower a reality. Zach said it best, "We all had different skills and we had the right balance to create this masterpiece. The right four people came together at the right time."

Shea Chambers was instrumental in creating the plans for how the tower would be constructed. "We talked about it, we looked at how it was built and then scaled it down to fit our space. It is considered an accessory building on commercial property and had to be approved by the county. It was a learning process for me," Shea explains. Shea shares that Jerry "agonized" over details of the framework to

ensure it would be built with materials best suited for the structure. It is clear that much planning, consideration and thought went into construction before the first piece of lumber was purchased. Zach explains, "We took time to think about it, we wanted to create a legacy for Katie. That project was the most inspiring, elaborate thing I have ever built."

Joe explains, "It turned out to be amazingly difficult. There were so many cuts and angles. What a lot of people don't know is that it was actually built on the ground and then disassembled and rebuilt on the beams that support it." Joe goes on to explain the structure is specifically designed to allow the wind to flow through it so that the chimes ring regardless of wind direction. "We wanted to make it perfect. I think it is one of the most beautiful things at the church," Joe shares.

Zach, Joe and Jerry put hundreds of man hours into construction. And Jerry emphasizes the complexity of the structure stating, "It was not an easy feat, it was a very complicated piece with a lot of cuts. It was a lot of work, but it was a joy."

In talking to these individuals, it became clear the building of the chime tower left a lasting impression for each on a spiritual, emotional and personal level. "Knowing who it was built for affected how it was built. We all had children of similar ages and the Stouts were on our minds the whole time," shared Zach. Shea agreed: "I was really proud to be a part of it because it was something I could do to honor Katie, to create something lasting, to be a place of

remembrance for her family." Joe and Jerry share how the experience led to the development of closer relationships with each other, and Jerry talks about how much he appreciates the enjoyment of the structure after completion. "This is unusual in my business." Jerry also noticed, as the tower was being constructed, the Sacred Garden was visited often during the day by church members as well as individuals in the community. The chime tower is a wonderful addition to a sacred space enjoyed by many. It is clear in speaking with these individuals, that each has tremendous appreciation for the hard work that went into creating the tower and takes great satisfaction in the finished product.

However, it is the Stout family that has an overwhelming feeling of appreciation, admiration and gratitude for their church family through the chime tower. Marian explained it perfectly, "It is a beautiful and tremendous reminder of Katie, but it also represents a gift to our church family who were so amazing and supportive during

our grief." Tom agreed, adding, "I think of gifts, giving and generosity." He emphasized the gifts of Avondale members that were used to create the structure, "It is really a work of art. The design and craftsmanship are amazing." He expressed his gratitude for his church family for their generosity, not only of financial gifts, but gifts of time and talents that were lovingly given to allow the vision to become a reality. Their daughter, Sarah Jane, provided a unique perspective that clearly emphasized the sense of community she feels at Avondale: "I like how there are multiple people represented, it's like another community there." She adds, "I like to hear it when the doors are open and during a prayer, it's like everyone is there when you are praying. It's like we are all a family."

Sarah Jane, you are absolutely correct, we are ALL God's children, including those on Earth and those in Heaven. The chime tower is a glorious reminder that through faith, we will be reunited as family in eternity.





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 Charlotte, N.C. 28209

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Faith Journeys is published by Avondale Presbyterian Church. Additional copies are available in the church office. The Communications Ministry Team oversees the development and production of this magazine. We all have faith stories and know of intriguing ones. To share your own or one you think others should know about through Faith Journeys, contact Caroline Starnes at caroline@avondalepresbychurch.org or 704-333-6194. We would also love to hear from you if you'd like to write for Faith Journeys. First printing December, 2015.

Contributors to this Edition:



Dave Comstock, a long-time, devoted member of the Sanctuary Choir, writes weekly devotions to begin each rehearsal. He and wife, Mary, have been members for 26 years. Dave, father to adult children Matt and Hannah, is an engineer and Duke graduate. He has also served as an Elder.



Nadja Sefcik-Earl came to Avondale with husband John, in 1987. She is the director of our bell choirs and plays the flute at both worship services. Nadja's love for teaching and sports led her to a career as director of several swim programs in Charlotte. She is mother to adult children Mackenzie and John Thomas.



Hannah Stockwell, whose parents were Avondale charter members, grew up at Avondale as a child. After she and her husband, Henry, lived in the Panama Canal area for 30 years, they reunited with Avondale in 1997. She is an Elder and Labyrinth facilitator. Hannah has two daughters and four grandchildren.



Stacey Longshore has her degree in Landscape Architecture from Clemson University and designs for a local company. She and her two young children, Celeste and Langston came to Avondale in 2012. She enjoys traveling the world and participated in Avondale's first Haiti Mission Trip in the fall of 2012.



Rena White has been a member of Avondale for 20 years. She is mother to twin daughters, Grace and Caroline, who are actively involved in the youth group at Avondale. Rena has served in many roles at Avondale over the years including Ministry Team Leader and Elder. Her community of faith at Avondale has brought her much love, support and laughter.



Reverend Christopher Lee is the Associate Pastor at Avondale. Chris enjoys spending time with the most important and beautiful people in his life, his wife Brandy, and daughter Erin, and anxiously awaits the arrival of his second daughter. He also loves food, shoes, sports and Lowe's.

With gratitude, we acknowledge Photographers, Mike Carroll & Laura Meier and Editors, Brandy Lee & Jennifer Matz