

Freedom Tour, May 7, 2017

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Photos by, Jeanne Garrison and Bill May

The Cumberland County Freedom Tours employ research, partnership building, and guided bus tours to engage local communities in investigating & reflecting upon “Freedom Seekers, Free People of Color and Communities of Faith.”

A project goal is to inspire conversations about race and local history and to raise public awareness of fugitives and the Underground Railroad and Cumberland County’s 18th and 19th century Lenape, African American and Mixed Race Communities.

To date, there have been four Freedom Tours in the Springtown/Greenwich area. On May 7th, 2017, the first East of Bridgeton Freedom tour took place, focusing on historic churches and graveyards in Bridgeton, Fairfield, Fordville and Gouldtown.

At a time when the country is struggling with racial unrest and distrust of government, people are searching for ways to overcome stratification and heal rifts within and between communities. The Freedom Tours are designed to bring people of different races, backgrounds, and communities together to undergo a shared learning experience designed to bring out our common humanity.

During the freedom tour stop, Pastor Roy E, Bundy, Cynthia Mosley, and Mary Sanders shared the history of St. John United Methodist Church, the only Native American United Methodist Church in New Jersey and one of five in the Northeast Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church.

The story began by telling the story of the founding from a schism in 1841 and continued through the new partnerships which have reunified St. John with the church from which it split.

Rev. Reuben Cuff gathered a group of worshipers of color and left the Old Stone Church in Fairton, but a few short years later, in 1841, a group of Lenapes, the Pierce brothers, left Rev. Cuff’s church, called Trinity.

History says it most likely was a result of racial prejudice as more blacks began to join the church. They formed St. John Church and soon joined the Methodist Conference, but were required to remain in the Delaware Conference, part of the old segregated church.

St. John grew to be a vibrant church which was a meeting place for Tribal government activities and social events as well as a center of Tribal family worship. Society began to see that segregation was not acceptable and in 1966 the church doors were opened not only to Native Americans but to a diverse group of members.

It remains so today with a smaller membership but with no less love for Creator and the earth He has given us to care for. St. John offers vacation bible school, a feeding program, Bible study, an active Usher Board, and a women's ministry to name a few activities. Most recently we have recognized the need to partner with churches within our community.

It warms the hearts of our elders to see the partnerships with Trinity AME, the church from whom we split 175 years ago. We have joined together to start a monthly produce giveaway and to cooperate with a community vacation bible school and an afterschool program.

We joined the history of the two churches during the May 7th Freedom Tour and gained new freedom to move forward together in our shared community.



Rev. Roy Bundy speaks to participants of May 7th Freedom Tour



Cynthia Mosley distributes prayer ties to attendees



Mayor Kelly addressing the Freedom Tour at St. John's UM Church in Fordville



Lisa Stewart Garrison addressing the Freedom Tour at the Broad Street Church in Bridgeton



Buzz Carney addressing the group as we drove through the Nanticoke Lenape Tribal Grounds