

A Brief History of Fawn Lake Church

In the middle of the year 2022, Fawn Lake residents Judith and Wayne Thompson began to sense a call of the Lord to make a change in their church affiliation. Wayne was finishing his ninth year as an elected officer at the Lake of the Woods Church, a local non-denominational church in a neighboring community. A beloved senior pastor, Dr. John Howe, had just retired from that church, and it seemed like an opportune time to explore new ways to serve God's kingdom.

Why doesn't Fawn Lake have a church of its own? Judith and Wayne had been residents of Fawn Lake for 20 years at that point. Over those years countless new neighbors had asked them, "Where do folks go to church around here?" The obvious answer was to point out several churches in the vicinity, but the question was frequently followed up by asking, "But why doesn't Fawn Lake have a church of its own?"

This question influenced the Thompson's thinking, and they wondered if it weren't time to establish a church right here in the community, or at least nearby. Judith and Wayne were intimately familiar with Fawn Lake community organizations like the Men's Christian Fellowship, the Lady's Bible Study, and the monthly Christian fellowship dinners held at the community association building. As a result, they were aware of the existence of a significant core of Christian believers in the community that might be responsive to the idea of starting a new church focused on the worship and fellowship needs specific to the Fawn Lake community.

The Genesis of Fawn Lake Church On Labor Day, September 4, 2022, Judith and Wayne pledged to themselves to plant a church. As a beginning, following extensive prayer, an "exploratory" committee was established to examine the possibility.

The ad hoc exploratory committee began by inviting groups of neighbors to gather for coffee and dessert to discuss the possibility of starting a new church. The response at these meetings was cautious but positive.

The leaders of the exploratory committee were Wayne and Judith Thompson, Bob and Marsha Stumpf, Ron Morris, Charles and Melissa DeLeon, Barbara and Bruce Edwards, and Dan Harris. Dr. Howe served as advisor to the effort. Some organizational meetings were held in October. The idea of a church plant at Fawn Lake was discussed with leaders of the Lake of the Woods Church, who decided they would be unable to help with the project. The exploratory committee resolved to continue without assistance.

Building the Foundation With Christ as the cornerstone, the exploratory committee began building a foundation. It was decided as a first step, to seek incorporation in the

Commonwealth of Virginia. Incorporation status was granted by the State Corporation Commission on December 29, 2022, and shortly thereafter, 501c3 non-profit status was recognized by the state and by the US Treasury Department. The first corporate Board of Directors consisted of Wayne Thompson - Chairman, Bob Stumpf - Vice Chairman, and Ron Morris – Secretary.

In connection with the incorporation application, it was necessary to develop a Constitution and By-Laws for the new church. The Lake of the Woods Church constitution and by-laws were used as a model. The corporate Board of Directors of the new Fawn Lake Church (FLC) was re-fashioned as the church's Board of Elders, and a simple, recognizable church logo was adopted. Responding to the strong leadership of the Holy Spirit, the members of the exploratory committee signed the Constitution on Wednesday, February 8th as the Founders of Fawn Lake Church. The institutional framework was then complete. All that remained was to make it a reality in the lives of a new congregation and fill it with worship and praise.

The Birthday of Fawn Lake Church The first meeting of the nascent church took place on Wednesday, February 15, 2023, at 5:45 pm in the home of Wayne and Judith Thompson. On that evening, twenty-seven attendees stood up and took the FLC New Member Pledge. They were received into membership, and that evening Fawn Lake Church was born.

With Mr. Thompson serving as worship leader, the new congregation continued to worship together every Wednesday evening for the next two and a half months - through all of March and April 2023. These early worship services typically lasted only 45 minutes. Hymns at the services were accompanied by Marilyn Perry playing the keyboard. Audio recordings of Dr. Howe's sermons were used as the message.

Continuing to Evolve Beginning in May the Elders and the Congregation questioned whether it would be useful to begin worshiping on Sunday morning instead of Wednesday evening. The first Sunday worship service was held on May 7, 2023, at 9:30 am. The venue was still the Thompson home, and the music format remained the same. During this time however, the congregation began inviting guest speakers (pulpit supply) to provide the message, rather than continuing with recorded sermons. Sunday home worship continued through all of May and June 2023.

Pastor Search At about this time a Pastor Search Committee was appointed, and a number of candidates were interviewed over the next several months. No candidate was found to be suitable right away, and the search committee continued its work for about two years seeking God's will.

A New Worship Location During that time, FLC worship services were attracting increasing numbers of non-member attendees, and the home worship space was becoming over-crowded. This prompted the Elders to begin seriously seeking another, larger worship venue. The most attractive location identified was the chapel connected to the Laurel Hill Funeral Home, the management of which generously agreed to rent it to FLC every Sunday.

The first worship service at Laurel Hill Chapel was held on Independence Day weekend, July 2, 2023. The message was provided by Dr. Howe's son-in-law, Lt Cdr Mike Evans USN. The Laurel Hill Chapel has remained the FLC worship location from that time to the present – about three years as of this writing.

An Interim Pastor In the late summer of 2023, the Elders became aware that for many people in the community, having a permanent full-time pastor would make FLC much more appealing and attractive to prospective attendees. The exclusive use of pulpit supply preachers was thought to be uncomfortable for the congregation.

On Sunday, September 24th, Dr. Howe, speaking from the pulpit, concluded a sermon at FLC with the suggestion that it would benefit the church if Mr. Thompson were ordained and called as the church's interim pastor, while the search for a full-time pastor was still underway. After an extensive examination process, Mr. Thompson was ordained by the congregation at a Sunday morning worship service on November 5, 2023. On February 18, 2024, the newly-ordained Rev. Thompson began delivering regular sermons at Sunday worship services.

The Search for a Permanent Home In the winter and spring of 2024, FLC leaders began a search for property on which to build a church facility. On April 15 the elders identified an ideal location... a 12-acre parcel of land directly opposite the commercial entrance to Fawn Lake... and they placed an offer of about a quarter million dollars. On May 1 the church received a gift of \$250,000 from an anonymous donor to cover the entire purchase-price of the property. Settlement took place on May 20, 2024. Once again, the Holy Spirit had opened a door.

A local engineering firm was engaged to prepare a site plan for the new property, and the necessary special use permit is currently being sought (as of this writing). The Special Use Permit would allow a church to be built on land originally zoned for agriculture. Some concept sketches of a new building have been prepared but are not final. A building campaign will be initiated as soon as the Special Use Permit is approved.

A Permanent Pastor In the early summer of 2025, the Pastor Search Committee became aware of a potential new candidate for the long-vacant pastor position. After an extensive interview and negotiation process, on August 31, 2025, the Rev. Kerry O'Neill was called by

the Congregation to serve as the first paid pastor of Fawn Lake Church. At that point, Rev. Thompson stepped aside, and Rev. O'Neill began serving on September 1.

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