

# HISTORY

*First Methodist Episcopal Church, South*  
*First Methodist Church*  
*First United Methodist Church*

**Lake Wales, Florida**



First United Methodist Church

## Lake Wales

Prepared for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Observance  
October 13, 1991

Anniversary Committee

Ola Belle Tillman, Chairperson; Martha (Mrs. Marvin) White, Co-Chairperson; Mary Edna (Mrs. Hiram) Todd, Gwen (Mrs. Hudson) Burr, Esther (Mrs. Al) Sullivan, Laura (Mrs. Robert) Boggs, Robert Lassiter, Grady McClendon, Robert C. Boggs.

Committee preparing this History:

Robert C. Boggs, Chairperson; Mary Edna Todd, Robert Lassiter.  
Cover by Jane (Mrs. Michael) Crews

## **In The Beginning 1916-1941**

As the opening words of Genesis reminds us, all things have a beginning – including churches! Several members of the R.N. Jones family, as well as others from those first families, have given us an insight into those beginnings. Lake Wales was a town of 400 people by 1915, with persons from many different states and many faiths. Only the Presbyterians had built a church, so it became the site of worship for all. Yet there were Methodists who yearned for their own tradition.

At the 1915 Florida Annual Conference, the Rev. G.W. Stubbs was appointed to the Frostproof circuit, which included Avon Park and Sebring, with instructions to begin work in Lake Wales. On that understanding, the Conference Mission Board contributed \$500 toward his salary. On February 28, the first service was held in the schoolhouse in Crystal Park. C.L. Johnson was elected Steward and T.J. Parker and W.F. Smith joined him as Trustees.

Rev. George York was appointed to the mission in 1916, but lack of a meeting place meant services were suspended briefly. However, the desire of Methodists for their own house of worship led to a Wednesday night meeting at the home of Robert N. and Myrtle Jones. A large group gathered to hear Rev. York preach, and it was decided to hold regular services on Wednesday nights in the homes of members.

June 8, 1916, a Women's Missionary Society was organized with 13 members. Mrs. C. L. Johnson was elected the first president. Early projects included raising \$46.29 toward the new church, and the purchase of a piano for the new building. The principal money raising project was making a quilt to be auctioned. Anyone desiring could purchase a chance to have the name embroidered on the quilt. The lucky winner was J.S. Whitehurst, who presented it to his bride, and it is still a prized heirloom in their family.

Mrs. C.L. Johnson, the first Steward, had been working and planning for a Church building, and construction began late that summer. Rev. J.L. Criswell, later to serve twice as minister, was at that time on "location" and did the actual building. Sunday, October 8, 1916, was set as the opening day, when not only would the building be occupied for the first time, but the day the church would be formally organized. Dr. Smith Hardin, Presiding Elder of the Orlando District, assisted by Rev. York, conducted the service. The building was turned over to the congregation without debt, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Johnson.

**The church was organized with 40 charter members:**

Mrs. M.R. (Jane) Anderson	Gertrude Jones (McClendon)
Ross Anderson	Helen Jones (Langford)
Mrs. Viola Boone	Mr. Ed Jordan
Ada Bryant	Mrs. Ed Jordan
Mrs. D. D. (Clara) Farnell	E. A. Keller
John Figg	Mrs. E. A. Keller
Mrs. J.M. Harrell	Alphonso Keller
Mrs. Eva S. Howe	Ruby Lightsey
Guy Howe	Dexter Mims
Martha A. Howe	Mr. A.R. Nason
Oscar Howe	Mrs. A. R. Nason
Mr. C. L. Johnson	Hazel Nason
Mrs. C. L. (Belle) Johnson	Mr. T. J. Parker
Robert L. Johnson	Mrs. T. J. Parker
Maude Johnson (J.M. Tillman)	Mr. W. F. Smith
Irene Johnson (Whitehurst)	Mrs. W. F. Smith
Louise Johnson (R. Tillman)	Mrs. Jane L. Terry
Mr. R. N. Jones	Mr. John P. Wetmore
Mrs. R. N. (Myrtle) Jones	Mrs. J. P. (Clara) Wetmore
Morris Jones	L.N. Wilson

Children of Charter members not old enough to be received as members, but who later became active in the early church, include Thalia Johnson (Gooch), B. Alexander Johnson, Ruth Jones, Roy Wetmore, John Wetmore, Juanita Wetmore, Domaris Anderson, Louis Anderson, and Beatrice Howe. The R.E. Lassiter and the Kincaid families joined soon after the charter Sunday.

An interesting “first” happened at that opening service. Elsie Buzzard and Franklin McLeod of Crooked Lake, who had been going together for about five years, were married at the conclusion of the ceremonies!

A Sunday School was launched, with Mr. R. N. Jones, as Superintendent. About 100 of all ages were in attendance that first Sunday. Classes soon developed, with Mr. A.R. Nason teaching the Men’s Bible Class, Mr. T.J. Parker the Young Men’s Class, Mrs. Oscar Howe the Ladies’ Class, Mrs. David Farnell the Young Girls’ Class, and Miss Maude Johnson and Miss Irene Johnson taught the children. The Ladies Class early on took the name “Philathea” but in 1924 changed the name to “Susanna Wesley”. It apparently is the class with the longest continuous history in the Sunday School. It has long been the most active in class meetings, socials, and service projects.

An Epworth League was begun March 20, 1917 by Rev. John Hartsfield, with Maude Johnson as president. The first Bishop to preach in the Church was Bishop Warren A. Candler, who dedicated the Church building. In 1919 Rev. J. L. Criswell performed the first marriage in the church among members of the congregation, as Miss Irene Johnson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Johnson, was married to J. Slaughter Whitehurst.

The parsonage was still in Frostproof, but there was a desire for a resident minister, and again it was Mr. C. L. Johnson who took the lead in building a beautiful parsonage just west of the Church. It was during Rev. J. L. Criswell's second appointment to Lake Wales, in 1921, that the parsonage was completed. Rev. Criswell immediately married, moved into the parsonage, and Lake Wales soon became a "station" Church.

By 1922, the Sunday School had grown to 180 members, 60 young people were in the Epworth League, and 27 ladies in the Missionary Society. Forty members came into the church that year, 20 in 1923, and 64 in 1924. With the great boom of 1925, people poured in from everywhere, Sunday School buildings were built and three prayer meetings were held each week, one at the church, one at Sherman's Mill, and one at Lake of the Hills. With the appointment of Rev. T.L.Z. Barr, the preacher's salary increased to \$3,000! Mrs. Barr, long remembered for her many fancy hats, organized and conducted a junior church for the children. In the late 1920's, probably during the pastorate of Rev. Shelby Wilson, the Wesley Brotherhood was begun.

One of the small Sunday School buildings was built by the Men's Bible Class. Originally they met in the choir room and, so the tale goes, spent the time when everyone else was in opening exercises discussing the previous day's football games. Then about the time others began their lessons, the men would start to sing. Whether it was the loudness or the way they sang is not recorded by our sources, but at any rate so much complaint arose that they built their own building!

Music was always important, and it was in 1927 that Mrs. V.A. (Ruth) Sims became pianist and later organist of the church, continuing to render service until 1972. The Charles Wesley stained glass window in the Sanctuary was dedicated to her and given by the Church membership. Orville Shobe was the first choir director, and for a time Mrs. R.J. Alexander played the violin accompaniment for the services.

Rev. J. Douglas Lewis, who loved children and was superb in working with them, began the Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs in 1931. The Girl Scout leader was Mrs. F.M. O'Byrne, followed by Mrs. Lucy Horrox.

A fond memory of the late 1920's and 1930's was of the Sunday School picnics held each summer. Many happy afternoons were spent at Eagle Lake, between Lake Wales and Winter Haven, with picnicking, swimming in the clear lake, and games on the large, open second level of the pavilion.

Though the "Great Depression" left its mark on First Methodist, the Church and Sunday School continued to grow. Rev. H.F. Tolle, affectionately known as "Father Tolle" to many, served the longest pastorate of these early years, 1931-1937. Mary Love's wedding took place in Lake Wales during her father's pastorate. "Mother" Tolle was quite clever in making her

“squigamasquees”, small animals fashioned from squash, carrots, cucumbers, etc. These were table decorations at the many gatherings of the family and at church covered dish meals.

In 1939, the history of First Methodist and the denomination as a whole took a dramatic turn. In that year, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church merged to form the Methodist Church! With the new church came new organizations. On April 16, 1941, the Women’s Missionary Society became the Women’s Society for Christian Service. Mrs. Ford D. Flagg was the first president.

Back on the farm, hog killing time came in the fall, but the WSCS staged their first one April 16, 1941, and for several years thereafter. Small china pigs had been passed out to be filled with nickels and dimes and were given a place of honor at a table during a covered dish dinner on the church lawn. The “hog killing” involved smashing the glass pigs with a hammer, with more than \$200 shelled out that first year! For two years, glass pigs were used, but it was a bit dangerous with broken glass around, so after that plastic pigs were obtained, safer but not as much fun to watch.

After 25 years, our chapter on “Beginnings” ends with the Pastorate of beloved Rev. A. A. Koestline. “Uncle Al” not only enhanced the youth program, but led the first successful Daily Vacation Bible School, an institution ever since! He once said he was the minister who “organized” the Church, for it was in 1939 that the first electric reed organ was installed. With great foresight, he led in launching a Building Fund for replacing the several individual Sunday School buildings with a new education plant. This became the nucleus of the fund for totally new Church facility on more adequate ground that would be built in 1949.

The report to the 1941 Annual Conference reveals how far the Church had progressed in these first 25 years. There were 409 full members, 240 average attendance in Sunday School with membership of 116 children, 117 youth and 92 adults, Vacation School enrolled 128 children, the Woman’s Society had 108 members, the Preacher’s salary was \$2800, and the total spent was \$18,674!

Dating of ministers who served during this 25 year period is complicated by the fact the Annual Conference shifted from December meetings in 1925 to June meetings in 1926, back to December meetings in 1931, finally returning to June dates in 1935. Here is the list of these first pastors:

Rev. G. W. Stubbs	1915
Rev. G. H. York	1915-16
Rev. John E. Hartsfield	1916-17
Rev. J. L. Criswell	1917-19
Rev. K. Hollister	1919-20
Rev. J. L. Criswell	1920-24
Rev. W.F. Jones	1924-25
Rev. T. L. Z. Barr	Dec 1925-June 1927
Rev. Shelby A. Wilson	1927-30
Rev. J. Douglas Lewis	June 1930-Dec 1931
Rev. H. F. Tolle	Dec 1931-June 1937
Rev. A. A. Koestline	1937-1941

The spirit of the young church is revealed in a poem written by O.L. Shobe for the 18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in October, 1934. The title is:

“The Meeting House in Lake Wales”

The stumps were in the Church lot, And the streets were rutted sand,  
And a Ford or two gave folks their only thrills,  
While the virgin forest still maintained It’s sway on every hand,  
And the natal grasses wrestled on the hills.

The farms were very scattered And the orange groves were few,  
While the roads were merely aimless, hopeless trails,  
When Methodists got busy, (As they almost always do)  
And set out to build a church-house in Lake Wales.

They were very few in number And their cash was mighty slim,  
And its chances of increase were very few,  
But their hearts were full of fervor And their hands were full of vim,  
But ‘twas just enough to put the project through!

There were Parkers, Smiths and Wilsons, Jordans, Nasons, Kellers Howes,  
And of Johnsons and Joneses most a score  
There were Andersons and Wetmores, Lightseys, Giggs, Farnells and Boones,  
Terrys, Bryans, Mims and half a hundred more.

The Sunday School was made up Of one hundred folks, all told,  
With R.N. Jones the “super” over all  
T. J. Parker taught the young men, A. R. Nason taught the old,  
While Maude and Irene taught the kiddies small.

There were railroads in the making, Stores and homes were on the way;  
They were making streets, a city hall and jail.  
But the greatest undertaking Was on that wondrous day,  
When they opened up the church-house in Lake Wales.

Now we have four splendid buildings and a parsonage as well,  
While we’re always adding new ones to the roll,  
And a lively Board of Stewards to provide the where-with-all,  
And a preacher who’s a knock-out, H.F. Tolle.

But there’s a debt of gratitude that we never should forget  
To those pioneers who blazed those early trails.  
Who, with their eyes on Heaven, gave their money and their sweat  
To open up the church-house in Lake Wales!

## **A NEW CHURCH 1941-1956**

Rev. F. J. Patterson was appointed to Lake Wales in June, 1941. He passed away suddenly near the end of this third year as minister, but during that time the building fund had grown to \$29,000, and there were those who were suggesting a totally new church plant rather than further additions at the original location.

With the appointment of Rev. Laurie G. Ray in 1944 at the Centennial anniversary of the Florida Conference, the movement for a new church gained a leader who was developing great skills in helping churches financially. During this pastorate here Dr. Ray devised the "Loyalty Dinner" plan which was to raise vast sums for budgets and buildings across Florida and the Church at large in the years to come.

Melba Bryan Varn tells how one of the campaigns for funds came as World War II was ending but rationing was still in effect. The effort was to continue four evenings, beginning with a supper, then workers going out to solicit support. However, when workers reported in at the close of the third evening, the people had been seen and the goal met so the fourth supper was called off. The next morning, Mrs. Varn timidly asked the butcher if she could cancel the order for that night's meat. "Of course," he replied. "The whole town's been praying for you Methodists to get through so the rest of us can have some meat!"

New property was purchased at the corner of Sessoms and Fifth, across from Crystal Lake Park. By early 1948, \$115,000 was in hand, a successful Building Fund Campaign was concluded, and a new Church building assured. The Building Committee members were E.L. Sherman, Mrs. Rollie Tillman, Frank Scaggs, F.M. O'Byrne, and Dr. R.J. Chady. The church hired Barber & McMurray of Knoxville, Tennessee, then the leading Church architects in the South, and Dean Parmelee of Miami, who was involved in the design of many Florida churches during this period. L.F. Martin Company of Lake Wales was chosen as the builder, with D.N. Cartledge, a faithful church member, supervising the construction.

Ground-breaking ceremonies were held on October 17, 1948, with Bishop Roy H. Short officiating. On March 20, 1949, the corner-stone laying ceremony was held, led by Dr. John G. Stradley, District Superintendent. A bronze box was placed into the cornerstone before it was set into the foundation. This contained a list of subscribers and contributors to the building fund, a Bible, a Methodist Hymnal, a Methodist Discipline, a history of the church, copies of local newspapers, church bulletins and other documents of historical interest.

"Jubilee Week" began January 29, 1950, marking the first service in the new Church that morning. Special services continued each evening during the week, climaxed on February 5 by a basket dinner in the Social Hall and worship service that evening. Total cost of the building furnishings and equipment was \$215,000. Most of the furnishings were memorial gifts. The decision was made that there should be a Book of Memory in which memorials would be listed, rather than designations on each item. Mrs. R.L. Johnson gave the beautiful pedestal in the Narthex to hold the Book of Memory where these gifts are listed.

The church was free of debt and dedicated on April 30, 1950 with Bishop Roy H. Short and C. L. Johnson, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, leading the congregation in the Act of

Dedication. The original Church facilities were sold to the First Christian Church, although the parsonage was retained for another seven years. The electric organ was left with the old building, and a Conn electronic organ installed in the new church.

A lovely, landscaped patio was created between the Church and Fellowship Hall. An outdoor pulpit was located in the exit to the patio from the south transept, and at times outdoor vespers were held in this garden setting. The upkeep of the patio was a project undertaken by Mrs. Vernon (Douglas E.) Cole and long-time custodian John Klaske. When Mr. Klaske passed away, the garden walk-way was dedicated in his memory.

The bell placed in the tower had an interesting history. Mr. R.N. Jones and his son Morris were visiting a cousin in Illinois some years before, and the cousin had bought property for a farm on which was an abandoned church. He had torn down the building, but kept the bell. Mr. Jones and Morris brought it back from Illinois to hang in the original church on Scenic Highway, and it was moved to the new Church.

There were two “first” weddings in the new Church. Mary Edna and Hiram Todd had planned their wedding for the week the new building was completed, but it did not get finished just on schedule. They were married in the new church amid the confusion of the last clean-up. Later, Doris Jean Clark and John L. Webb were the first couple married after “Jubilee Week” on “April Fools Day” 1950.

Other strides than that of building occurred during these years. The Wesleyan Service Guild was formed in 1949 with Mrs. O.L. Shobe as president. The first full-time Director of Education was employed, Mary Evelyn Owens. Other Education Workers have included Ethel Toby Gibson, Sam and Charlotte Lewis (both later becoming ministers in the Annual Conference), Mrs. Marty Glenn, Nan Conner, Rev. Jackie Walker, and Jeff Herman. Recent part-time workers were David Highley and Tommy Drake.

Mrs. Oleene (Long) Griffith was the first full-time Church Secretary. Mrs. Peggy Finch followed her, then Mrs. Helen Haynsworth served from 1962-1985. Due to illness she became part-time secretary and Mrs. Virginia Knitter took over, followed by Mrs. Marty Bear on May 1.

Mrs. Louise Tillman approached Rev. Ray about a Sunday School class for young women. The result was the “Young Matrons Class” with Mrs. Tillman as teacher, a position she held for more than twenty years. Hattie Breedin succeeded her, and the name changed to “The Matrons Class” although there were many voices raised for the name, “The Louise Tillman Class.” Mrs. Tillman would not allow it, but when she moved to North Carolina to be with her children, that became the name of the class. Instead of one teacher, a plan for different teachers for different Sundays was instituted, with Ola Belle Tillman as the lead teacher.

Walter Woolfolk was the teacher of the Men’s Bible Class for some years, but on entering politics felt he should resign. Dr. Irvin D. Stegall, a retired Quaker minister, became the Class teacher in 1947, serving until 1969, when Mrs. Virginia Mims became the teacher, continuing to the present. Enrollment and attendance were high during these years, although by the late 70’s changes began to be evident. More couples were desirous of attending a class together, yet the Men’s Bible class has continued to be a vital force in First Church.

In 1953, during the pastorate of Rev. Clyde Frazier, the need was felt for a young couples' class. Mrs. Cordie Kincaid (now Mrs. Allison Perry) was the first teacher. Ramona Rowland was the class secretary, and continues in that office to the present day. The class met the North Transcept of the Sanctuary and was called the Francis Asbury class. In 1955 it moved to the kitchen and became the "Kitchen Class" with Lucille and Gene Tyler as the lead teachers, with teaching rotating among members. In the late 50's, Mrs. Esther Schaaf became the teacher, and the class experienced rapid growth. It moved to the Chapel for a time, taking the name "Bishop Branscomb Study Group." With completion of the children's building, the class found a home in a much larger room. The name again changed to the Esther Schaaf Class, and Mrs. Schaaf continued as the teacher until her death June 6, 1984. In 1985 Mr. Clint Curtis became the teacher and Mrs. Robert (Jita) Lassiter the president. Within a few years, the class became so large a move into the Fellowship Hall was necessary.

The report to the 1956 Annual Conference revealed 948 full members, with a Sunday School enrollment of 197 children, 93 youth, and 207 adults, and an average attendance of 366. The Women's Society had 195 members, the Preacher's salary had increased to \$6000, and the total giving amounted to \$45,047.

The following ministers served during this period:

Rev. Finley J. Patterson	1941-1944
Rev. Laurie G. Ray	1944-1951
Rev. George C. Powell	1951-1953
Rev. Clyde C. Frazier	1953-1956

## **GREEN STAMPS AND CHILDREN 1956-1973**

Only too often a period of great excitement in a church, such as occurred with the completion of the new Sanctuary, is followed by a period of let-down. By the time Rev. Robert C. Boggs was appointed Pastor in 1956, that period was ending. There was emerging a desire to move in new directions, attempt new things.

The "Green Stamp" episode illustrates this! At a Board meeting discussion centered on how to get more people to attend the Sunday evening services. "Green Stamps" given by merchants were all the rage at that time, and someone noted that every lady in the community would be there if offered Stamps in exchange for Sunday evening attendance. Though the preacher demurred, someone said, "I dare you!" and a Sunday evening was set for the experiment! The story somehow got on national television, and a flood of mail resulted. One small Baptist Church in Texas threatened to sue for stealing their idea, and a crusty old gent from California wrote that we had "desecrated the church and subverted the constitution!" Regretfully, the episode had little or no impact on Sunday evening attendance, but did reveal the Church was having fun and ready to try new things!

One of those new things was the pre-school program. Some mothers, including Martha White, Laura Boggs, Mary Neil Whitmire, and others banded together to begin a weekday pre-school and kindergarten for many church children in the age bracket. Mary Pearl (Hodges) Scott was chairperson of Education and advised the planning committee, chaired by Laura Boggs. Carol Lassiter was the first employed teacher. Families were involved, for every mother was expected to assist at some point, and the education of the mothers proved as helpful as that of the children! Care was taken to remove all weekday materials from sight and set up the rooms differently for Sunday morning, with the result that Sunday School attendance was actually enhanced.

The Methodist Youth Fellowship was very active. Sunday evenings were marked with programs and recreation, and of course eats served by the families of the youth participating. Planning retreats were held at the Leesburg Youth camp for several years during the week after Christmas. Many youth attended summer camps, UN-Washington seminars, and other enrichment programs.

In 1957 the First Christian Church desperately needed the property on which the original parsonage stood. The cost of moving and renovating the lovely old house was prohibitive, so a parsonage was purchased on Hillside Drive. With some additions, it served for years as a comfortable parsonage for the senior minister, and then became the parsonage for the associates or other staff. It was finally sold in 1991.

An incident that best revealed the spirit of the Church involved Rev. W. L. Joyner, who due to health problems was forced to leave his pastorate in Pinellas County soon after the 1957 conference session. His District Superintendent was able to raise money to provide a salary, but the family had nowhere to live. Our church volunteered to supply a house for the year, and after some months of rest, recuperation, and with the prayers and support of the Church, Rev. Joyner's health improved, so that he could assume duties as Associate Pastor. At the next Annual Conference he was able to take a regular appointment. Such was the caring spirit of this Church!

By mid 1959, every wall in the Sunday School area that could be knocked out to create space had been – there were expert wall-knocker-outers in those days! Three classes met in the Fellowship Hall, classes were in the kitchen, choir room, and Sanctuary. The kitchen was completely inadequate for the large meals often served. The need for more and larger rooms for children was the crying need. The time had come again for a Building Committee! The following were elected: Marvin White, Chairman; Hudson Burr, Dr. R.J. Chady, L.F. Fleckenstein, F.M. O’Byrne and E.V. Peters.

Dr. Laurie Ray returned to lead a Building Fund Campaign to underwrite construction of a Children’s Building. F.M. O’Byrne was the General Chairman, and at the “Day of Destiny Banquet” November 12, 1959, over \$100,000 was pledged toward the \$150,000 cost of the project. Dean Parmalee, architect of the Church, was chosen to design a unit that would blend with the existing building. Financing was arranged, and in March of 1961, the ground was broken for the new building. It was appropriate that two daughters of Mr. & Mrs. C.L. Johnson, and the first teachers of children in the Sunday School, Mrs. J.S. Whitehurst and Mrs. J.M. Tillman, turn over the first shovelfuls of dirt to mark the beginning of the new venture. Representatives of all the classes took a turn at the shovel, including the children. Tricia Colbert, Charles Loveless, Gregory White, and other children and youth represented their classes in the ceremony! With Mr. Parmelee in Miami, and the great expense of regular architectural supervision, Mr. Slaughter Whitehurst, then city engineer, assumed the chore of supervision.

With Church membership over the 1,000 mark, it was felt that this was also the time for the selection of a site for a second Methodist Church in the community. E.V. “Ned” Peters was chairman of the site committee. A property located at Fourth Street and Domaris was given for this purpose by F.M. O’Byrne in November, 1959. Later this was sold to interests erecting apartments, and the funds realized invested in the Florida Methodist Foundation. Across the years some has been used to meet various needs, but the principal later repaid. Mr. O’Byrne also hoped to create a trust fund for future missional needs through the gift of some blocks of Keystone stock.

Undesignated memorial funds had accumulated coincident with the need to do something about the cross window in the tower. Conrad Pickel was an outstanding stained glass craftsman who had recently opened a southern studio in Vero Beach, where he liked to spend the winters. His suggestion was to create a crucifixion window – not just a pretty picture, but a symbol of the deeper meaning of new life spring from the Saviour’s death. This window is one of the best single examples of his work in the country.

In 1963 Rev. W.I. Joyner, who had been Associate five years earlier, returned to be the Senior Minister. More parking was urgently needed, and in December 1963, the church voted to purchase from N.L. Edwards’ family the north 140 feet of the three lots facing East Orange Avenue, adjacent to the existing parking area. In July 1965, the church secured property facing Highway 60 from the Wetmore family for use as a second Church site. Two months later this property was involved in a trade for ten acres of property located in the southwest part of Lake Wales, and the Wetmore property became part of the Southgate Shopping Center.

On Ash Wednesday of 1964, a twenty-four hour prayer vigil was held in the Church Sanctuary. Many different persons signed up for 30 minute intervals, but the wee hours of the early morning were left blank, so Rev. Joyner had the privilege of serving during this time.

There had been a rash of church break-ins, and in the dimness of the Sanctuary, the preacher looked up to see a policeman with a drawn gun, who was sure he had found the church burglar!

In June 1966, Rev. David A. Day became the first conference-appointed Associate. The N.L. Edwards home adjacent to the Church property was rented for a parsonage, and later the property was purchased for future parking or other needs. In 1967, Mr. and Mrs. S.K. Carter gave their lovely home on North Wales Drive to the Church for a parsonage for the senior minister. It was a four-bedroom house with attached garage and small apartment.

Through the interest and leadership of Rev Joyner and dedicated lay persons, a second Methodist church was projected in 1966. The Park Methodist Church was launched on Mother's Day, May 14, 1967. Located on the site of the old drive-in-theater, a mobile Sanctuary became the center of Church activity. Its first Pastor was a former member of First Church, Rev. Dean Witten, who also served Alturas. The 1967 Conference Journal reported 13 members, an average attendance at worship of 13, Sunday School enrollment of 18, and \$984 raised for all causes. Statistics for 1968 were almost identical, and the Church was discontinued in 1969. Though for a number of reasons this church did not last, it was an honest attempt by First Church to fulfill its role in church extension.

About this time, problems with the Conn organ were increasing and the music committee investigated replacement with a pipe organ. It was discovered that the organ loft was inadequate for the sort of organ desired and the necessary renovations to the chancel would be costly, so Rogers electronic was purchased.

In 1968, basic organizational changes came with the unifying of two similar denominations: the Methodist Church and the Evangelical-United Brethren Church became the United Methodist Church.

It was also in 1968 that the church experienced its mission work at first hand. Two very lovely girls, "Elvis" and "Rosemary" arrived from Costa Rica, brought to Lake Wales through the efforts of the youth group and others, with the cooperation of Rev. & Mrs. Hubert Floyd, our missionaries in that country. This was the first trip to the United States for each of the girls, who spoke almost no English. For two significant weeks, the church and community opened arms of love and understanding, benefiting both the visitors and the visited!

During a "Week of Spiritual Renewal" in March of 1968, Rev. Dennis DeLacure, pastor of the First Methodist Church in Lake City, was the preacher. He was a former high school student in Lake Wales and member of First Church. During the week, Rev. DeLacure shared the story of the "John Wesley Great Experiment" and the five scripture disciplines that have resulted in a "life that really matters" for so many Christians. This had a profound impact for some years to come on church members.

The Susannah Wesley Class continued to be very active, though the oldest of the classes. In a newspaper article in 1970, this was used as the description of the class: "50 to 125 women of comfortable age!" Mrs. W.W. (Edna) Clark became co-teacher of the class soon after moving to Lake Wales in 1958 or 1959, and was the teacher from 1964-1974. The class grew in numbers and activity under her leadership and that of the capable class presidents of that time. Her sister,

Ruth Strait, followed her and except for some interruptions due to health, during which time Mrs. Lillian B. Moeschler substituted, continued until 1981 when Mrs. Louise Pitt became teacher.

The appointment of Rev. H. Maurice Felton brought to First Church a family much interested in Church music, for Mrs. Felton had been a church organist since she was a teenager. At the time, Michael Crews was the choir director, and both pastor and director were interested in a performance of Handel's "Messiah". Knowing it was too large an enterprise for a single choir, they discussed the possibility of forming a community, non-denominational and interracial group to undertake the effort. From this beginning, the Lake Wales Chorale developed and has continued to add to the religious culture of Lake Wales.

The natural elements punish all structures, including church buildings, and the time had come for redecorating. The original leaded windows especially needed attention. Walter Woolfolk was chairman of Trustees, and that Board recommended the exterior be sand-blasted and spray-paint-sealed, which was done. It was determined that re-leading the existing windows would be very costly, and that this was the time to move into stained-glass, Biblical character windows. Under the leadership of Lee Ezell, the congregation was offered the opportunity to give memorial windows, and in a short time, every window was purchased. The Mueller Stained Glass Studios of Zephyrhills crafted the windows.

A faithful member, Mrs. Virginia Hunter, in failing health, was concerned about the disposition of her property, and asked Rev. Felton to call. As they talked, Rev. Felton felt the need for professional help, and called Mike Crews, who came to the house immediately. Rev. Felton reported it was the first time he had known an attorney who made house calls, but that helpfulness was the essence of Mike Crews! The upshot of their discussions was the gift of two duplexes and a single family dwelling to the Conference for housing for retired ministers, a stained glass window in the Sanctuary in memory of her husband, a valuable vacant lot given the Florida Methodist Children's home, and one-time scholarships for a pre-ministerial student at Florida Southern College and a pre-medical scholarship at Bethune-Cookman College. Rev. Felton wrote that Mrs. Hunter's devotion to Christ and to her Church was exemplified in the thoroughness of her final plans for the Christian use of her possessions.

In 1971 Mrs. Ruth Sims, the first organist, underwent eye surgery, and Mrs. Marvin (Caroline) Reddick, substituted in that position. A year later, Mrs. Sims was made organist emeritus, and Mrs. Reddick became the regular organist.

The report to the 1973 Annual Conference revealed 1078 full members, a total Sunday School enrollment of 832 with an average attendance of 496, United Methodist Women had 216 members, the pastor's salary and travel totaled \$11,000, and the total raised for all causes amounted to \$141,553.

The following ministers served during this period:

Rev. Robert C. Boggs	1956-1963
Rev. W.L. Joyner	1963-1969
Rev. H. Maurice Felton	1969-1973

Conference-appointed Associate Ministers were:

Rev. David A. Day, 1988-1968	Rev. G. Richard Albury, 1968-1973
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## **KEEPING AT IT! 1973-1991**

Rev. Joe H. Smith, who was appointed in 1973, served the longest pastorate of the first seventy-five years. Two sons graduated from High School while here, and both married girls from the congregation. Several “firsts” occurred during his pastorate. Mrs. Chrystelle Allen was the first woman elected as chairman of the Administrative Board. The church bought its first bus, which was a tremendous asset in the youth and adult ministries. It was during this time that Mr. and Mrs. S.K. Carter gave their lovely home on Lakeshore Blvd. to be the parsonage for the Senior Minister’s family. The North Wales parsonage became the Associates’ parsonage and Hillside Drive was used for other staff. The Carters also gave two lovely, valuable lots on North Lakeshore which unfortunately were sold to meet some emergency in 1982.

An interesting story illustrates how Rev. Smith involved people in the work of the church. Norman White and his wife Elaine had returned to Lake Wales to begin his law practice, and found they were not at home in any of the Sunday School classes. They went to Rev. Smith to see if a class their age could be organized. He took them to the second floor, opened a door, and told them that was their classroom, beginning that Sunday. “Who will be in the class?” Norman asked. “I’ll give you a list to contact”. Norman’s next question was, “Who will be the teacher?” The answer: “You will!”

Rev Joe Smith was much loved, not only by Church members but in the community at large. His going away present when he was appointed to Leesburg in 1981 was a large pontoon boat! When Rev. Smith left Leesburg some years later, the boat was given to the United Methodist Youth Camp and has been a great asset in the camping and retreat program.

Over the years, young people have been led to enter full-time, Church vocations. These have included Dennis DeLacure, Robert (Bobby) Johnson, Polly Lassiter Cook, Morris Gaskins, Dean Witten, Charlie Boggs, Kim Joyner, Robert Fejes, and Steve Echols.

Rev. Alfred B. Vaught, 1981-83, enjoyed the Children’s sermon time, and one Sunday morning was talking to the children about Peter and several disciples being fishermen. He pointed out the first Christian symbol was a fish. Then he showed them a medal, featuring the outline of a bass, he had received from “Field and Stream” magazine for a prize-winning fish he had caught. He asked the children, “Where do you suppose I got this?” One little boy promptly replied, “From the Suwannee Swifty Store.”

And it was during Rev. Vaught’s time an incident happened all ministers dread. One Sunday morning as the service began, the air conditioning flipped the first page of his sermon notes into the air and down into the chancel. Rev Vaught thought it best to wait until he went for the offering plates to retrieve it, but when the ushers came forward, one helpful soul reached over and scooped the page up and stuffed it into his pocket. Al’s comment: “Needless to say, my sermon was disjointed!”

About this time, interest arose again in a pipe organ. It came as a result of a trip to a Gator football game by Christine Bryan Waters and Dr. Bill Hardman and their spouses, during which they felt led to spear-head such a project. A committee was formed, and discussions

begun. The result was the purchase of a Frobenius organ from Denmark, a self-contained, tracker organ. This necessitated extensive chancel renovations.

The Rev & Mrs. Bruce Galloway, 1983-86, were both excellent musicians. One special memory was a meeting of the Schaaf class in their home, ending with a time of singing. Caroline Reddick played the piano, Rev. Galloway his electronic organ, and Mrs. Galloway led the singing.

United Methodist Women continued to grow under the leadership of a number of dedicated presidents. Mrs. Melba Bryan Varn for many years handled the kitchen details, and chaired the semi-annual Rummage sales.

Orville Shobe had been the first volunteer choir director, as was reported earlier. Volunteer and part-time directors who followed him included George Issitt, Martha Pritchett, Helen DeLegal, Don Fennel, Mike Crews, Chuck (Charles) Beutel, and Tom Fennell. Mark Boehmer was the first full-time Director of Music, September 1, 1932 to August 31, 1983. He was followed by Woody (Durward) McDonell (Sept 1, 1983 to December 31, 1985) and Jim Massey (January 1, 1986 to October 30, 1987). Part-time Choir Directors who followed were Bob Custer, Dorothy Golden, Madalyn Walton, and Terry Mann.

Under the leadership of Rev. James Ulmer (1986-88) regular Wednesday night church suppers began September 16, 1987. They not only provided fellowship, but meaningful programs and study opportunities. Rev. & Mrs. Ulmer invited groups of Church members to the parsonage on many Sunday evenings, helping those who attended to better know each other.

In the spring of 1988, there was much discussion about the Lakeshore Parsonage. Some felt it was too expensive to maintain and others felt it too ostentatious for the minister. The vote of the Charge Conference gave the Trustees the option of selling Lakeshore and buying a new parsonage; but, to the delight of many members, that option was not taken, and needed maintenance was done on the Lakeshore parsonage.

Rev. John Brackman (1988-91) was very concerned to lead the congregation in becoming more conscious of missions and mission opportunities. The annual "Mission Conferences" were a means to accomplish this. Under the leadership of Mr. & Mrs. Bill Metcalf, several members engaged in volunteer mission work in Mexico. This was a rich and rewarding experience not only for the participants but for the congregation as well.

In the early Spring of 1990, Rev. Brackman and the Council on Ministries appointed a Seventy-fifth Anniversary committee to begin plans for the celebration on October 13, 1991. Ola Belle Tillman was named chairperson, with Martha White as co-chair, Esther Sullivan, Mary Edna Todd, Gwen Burr, Robert Lassiter, Grady McClendon, and Rev. & Mrs. Robert C. Boggs as members.

The feeling of a need for endowment funds to prepare for future eventualities was voiced by the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, and with the encouragement of Rev. Brackman, the Charge Conference of 1990 authorized such a fund and elected trustees to plan for and administer it. Clinton A. Curtis was named chairman, and other members included Mrs. Louise Glisson, Mrs. David (Oleene) Griffith, John Loveless, Mrs. Mark (Maratha Geils) Smith, and Robert C. Boggs.

The following Ministers served during this period:

Rev. Joe H. Smith	1973-1981
Rev. Alfred Vaught	1981-1983
Rev. Bruce Galloway	1983-1986
Rev. James Ulmer	1986-1988
Rev. John Brackman	1988-1991

The only Conference-appointed Associate was: Rev. William S. McLoud 1973-1975

Retired Ministers serving as Associates included: Rev. Oscar Nicholson, Dr. Lewis Head, and Dr. Paul Easter.

The report to the 1991 Annual Conference revealed 1159 full members with an average Sunday attendance of 431 and Sunday School membership of 491, with an average attendance of 252. United Methodist Women reported 221 members, the Senior Minister's salary was \$39,400, and total expenditures stood at \$503,638.

## TOWARD THE FUTURE

Rev. Paul J. Dickinson was appointed at the annual Conference of 1991. During the weeks that followed, the plans for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary continued to develop. Various projects to mark this significant milestone in the life of the church moved forward.

1. The anniversary Christmas cards, featuring the Nativity windows in the Sanctuary and prepared to launch the anniversary year during the Christmas season of 1990, were again made available for sale to the Congregation.
2. A beautiful, permanent plaque inscribed with the names of Charter members was prepared for installation in the Narthex.
3. A water-proof case for the Book of Memory was prepared for the top of the Book of Memory pedestal.
4. A picture gallery of all the ministers who have served First Church was completed.
5. This history of the church was written and printed.
6. An Anniversary Endowment Fund was created and a Foundation to preserve and administer it was proposed.
7. The Memorial Bible and the Altar was replaced by members of the family for whom it was first given.
8. Activities for Anniversary Day, October 13, were planned. Bishop H. Hasbrouck Hughes, Jr. was invited to preach the anniversary sermon.

Any significant anniversary is not just a celebration of the past, however grand that may be. The old saying past is prelude”, is very true. The occasion provides the opportunity to glimpse at what is to be. So this history must not close with a recounting of events gone by, but with a vision of the future that lies ahead, of what we as Lake Wales United Methodists are called to be and do.

Our future lies in rediscovering and implementing our covenant relationships. No less than the Hebrews of old, we must see ourselves as people of the covenant. What is the nature of that covenant, of those relationships?

One part of the covenant is our rededication to our United Methodist denomination. Ours is a rich tradition of piety and good works, of openness and inclusiveness. We are called to salvation in Christ, then to live that salvation life in the relationships of every day. As a local church, we are privileged to follow the structures and procedures of our denomination. A number of problems and controversies in our own congregation could have been avoided had the Church Discipline been faithfully followed.

On the organizational level, covenant involves working together in goal setting and planning. Where are we moving as a church in this particular community? What is our mission, our ministry? How shall we do both long range and short range planning? So often we seem to live for the minute only, and when the emergencies arise, we have made no provision for them!

Far more important than these considerations is our understanding that we have a covenant relationship with one another within our church family. It is all too easy for a church our size to become many separate groups sharing buildings and staff, but not knowing and not reaching out to those beyond our comfortable circle. It is so easy for a church to have many

“kingdoms” within it, each more interested in the concerns and preservation of that little band than in the greater Kingdom of our Lord. Inevitably, we are each at his or her own particular place in spiritual development. The temptation is great to look down on those who have not attained to our insights. We must challenge ourselves to be open to all. We must develop a feeling of community, that we share one another’s joys and sorrows. This will not happen without much concern, caring and planning—without entering consciously into a covenant relationship with all who are a part of this fellowship.

The ultimate covenant, of course, is the covenant relationship between persons and our Father God. On God’s part, the covenant is one of forgiveness, acceptance and love. On our side it is a covenant of submission, obedience, and of faithfulness to all He asks of us. This covenant involves stewardship of life and possessions. It is the relationship on which all other relationships are based.

A great future will depend on articulating the covenant relationship we have to our Father God and to one another. The precious times of covenant renewal can well become the center of our worship and fellowship. May the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016 reveal how faithfully we have entered into our part of the covenant, for we can be sure God will fulfill His part!