

► **First United Methodist Church of Hendersonville History**

In 1793 Methodism came to western North Carolina when Samuel Edney migrated from eastern North Carolina and began to preach. He was a close friend of Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, who was the leader of Methodism in the United States. Bishop Asbury visited Edney and held services in his home in Edneyville. Methodism began to flourish in Henderson County, and in 1841 the Hendersonville Circuit was formed, with 416 white and 36 black members.

When Judge Mitchell King of Flat Rock gave land in 1833 to found the town of Hendersonville, he designated one-half acre at Church Street and Fourth Avenue for a Methodist church. However, the Methodists never built there. In 1852 they sold the property and purchased the present site because they wanted their church built on one of the highest hills in town. An imposing structure was built with a steeple holding a mellow-toned bell that could be heard for miles calling worshipers to church. The same bell that summoned worshipers so long ago stands outside the sanctuary today as a symbol of the church's enduring ministry.

The original church had one aisle in the center; men sat on the left and ladies on the right, with a gallery in the back for black members. The Holy Bible rested on a red velvet cushion in the front, and on each side of the pulpit were short pews where the "stewards" sat—the Amen corner. It was called the Hendersonville Methodist Episcopal Church until 1861 when it became known as the Hendersonville Methodist Episcopal Church South. By 1890 membership had increased and plans were made for a new, larger building which was finished in 1896, with a tall steeple holding the bell. No hymnals were provided; members brought their own. They soon added a small organ, even though some older "brethren" thought they shouldn't have musical instruments in the church. Participation in world missions was important to the congregation, and beginning in 1900 they fully supported a pastor in Japan and then in 1907 they sent a missionary to Korea. The first pipe organ was installed in 1912.

Membership continued to grow. Plans were begun for our present sanctuary in 1921. Ground was broken in 1924 and the graveyard on the lower side had to be moved. Some graves were not moved and are still located beneath the church. The Sanctuary Building was completed in 1925 at a cost of \$142,000, including all furnishings and equipment.

Despite the hard times of the depression the church supported one of its members as a missionary to Borneo in 1933. It was difficult to meet the payments for the new church, but in the late 30's the mortgage was reduced and finally burned in 1943. In 1939 the northern and southern branches of the church, plus the Methodist Protestant Church, united and became the Methodist Church. Then in 1968 it joined the Evangelical United Brethren, and we became the Hendersonville First United Methodist Church.

There was such growth in the church after World War II that in 1955-57 the educational wing and the Brunson Memorial Chapel were added. Also the Opportunity Group began at First Methodist and eventually evolved into Opportunity House. Their legacy to us is the handsome mural in the Roy Johnson Classroom.

Step One

By the late 1960's the original portion of the building was in need of major repairs. A renovation of the sanctuary was completed at this time and the Houston Organ was donated.

As part of multi-year strategic planning efforts including “priority needs and space planning workshops” with the entire congregation, additional land was purchased in 1992 and, with approval by the church membership, ground was broken in 1998 for the new Christian Life Center. The overall project also involved major renovations of the main sanctuary and its roof, as well as all of the existing facilities and rooms. An initial 1997 to 2000 capital fund-raising campaign, *Walking in Love...Building in Faith*, enabled the church to begin the entire \$4.76 million project including the Christian Life Center, a facility that is the focus of church activities today.

Subsequent capital campaigns (addressed to paying-down the mortgage): *Walking in Love...The Second Mile* (2000 to 2003) and *Sharing the Vision...Fulfilling the Dream* (2003 to 2006), plus a 2006 CHALLENGE effort, have brought us very close to paying off the mortgage during 2006. In 2003, as one of the major contributions to the campaigns, the Christian Life Center was established as a memorial by the Dan Barber family estate and is now known as the Barber Christian Life Center.

During the formal capital campaigns, additional facilities programs were also supported. Included was an initial gift from the Drager Estate providing a significant portion of the funds needed to start the Meditation and Memorial Garden construction. Also thanks to dedicated behind-the-scenes fund-raising, the church was able to make the needed down-payment to purchase the Fifth-Avenue apartments which are directly adjacent to our church's southern driveway entrance and our children's playground.

The renovations and expansions have greatly expanded our church's ability to serve God and embrace our congregation. As First United Methodist Church continues to look toward the future, the many dedicated and growing ministries of our church enable us to reach out and support the needs of our congregation, our community, our nation and the world.