

The Church Is Divided

The tragedy of the Civil War, which divided the nation as well as families, also split the Elizabethton Methodist Church. The northern part of the congregation remained on First Street, and the southern Methodists moved to the Presbyterian Church until 1888 when they built their own brick church on Second Street. In 1913 the northern Methodists erected a large brick church on F street, which became known as Singletary Memorial. Twenty-three years later (1936) "Singletary" was dropped from the name, and the church was called Memorial Methodist Church.

The southern congregation continued to meet on Second Street in the present St. Thomas Episcopal Church building, until 1924, although the inadequacies of the building were becoming critical and church members had been talking for some time about building a new church. We are indebted to Mrs. B. R. Taylor, mother of Patsy Goddard and Virginia Laws, for a detailed account of the actual start of the new church on E Street, which is now our First United Methodist Church. She wrote that in 1924 at a Women's Missionary Society meeting held at the home of Dr. and Mrs. John O. Wood, the speaker, president of Sullins College in Bristol, suggested that it was time to build a new church. The women invited him to speak to the entire congregation the following Sunday night, and everyone became "enthused and lifted up," writes Mrs. Taylor. She relates being so excited herself, that she slept little and prayed much all night after the meeting! The next morning she went to see Mrs. Alice Dungan, and the two started out to seek the first subscriptions from some of the Methodist businessmen. On the way, they were joined by their young pastor, Reverend Clarence Taylor. They met with hoped-for success; Mrs. Dungan's son, Sexton, promised that he and his brother, Frank, owners of Standard Grocery, would match any subscriptions they could get. Mr. Halley Austin, brother of David Austin's father, interrupted supervision of his construction crew, to write a check for \$750.00 with the promise of \$250 more in a few days. It was the first actual money given toward the new building! Eventually Edens & Crumley Construction Company was given the contract, and Mr. Joe Crumley, a member of the church personally supervised the construction. Rev. J. R. King, a minister experienced with church building programs, was appointed pastor in the fall of 1926.

Groundbreaking was held on September 14, 1926. Less than a year later, August 12, 1927, the 1500-pound Georgia marble nameplate, "First Methodist Episcopal Church, South" was laid just above the front entrance. The building was nearing completion. The beautiful stained-glass windows are a treasure of the church. They were given as memorials, by church families, and each bears a nameplate. The front window, above the altar, "*Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane*," was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Crumley. The window in the prayer room was given by the Brick Layers Union, who laid the brick of the building. The name of the church was changed in 1936 to Central Methodist Church.

A Reuniting of the South and North

The northern and southern Methodist churches began to take steps toward merging as early as the summer of 1939, when they met together for Sunday evening services. Then followed a combined church-workers conference, and a 1940 Daily Vacation Bible School. Combined Sunday evening services continued until final merging in the fall of 1944, under the new name, "First Methodist Church." The combined membership was 950.