

Southern Pines United Methodist Church



A History

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The 1950's: A Growing Need

The Bicentennial Year of Methodism in the United States provides an appropriate time to review the history of our own church in this community. Southern Pines and its close vicinity was without a Methodist Church thirty years ago.

In the early 1950's, a growing need for a Methodist Church in this community was becoming more and more apparent. Too many Methodists were uneasy without their own church. Many of them attended other churches, some went to a Methodist church in other towns, some were without a church home at all, and some had never moved their memberships from distant cities. Gradually it became apparent that there were enough unchurched Methodists in the immediate area to warrant establishment of a local church. These concerned people contacted the Conference Headquarters in Raleigh and explained their need.

Response to this request came in the form of a committee on church extension from the Fayetteville District who visited Southern Pines. Without fanfare, they purchased land in a residential district of the town for a church building, and they bought a house for the parsonage.

The First Service

Reverend E. E. Whitley and his family moved into the parsonage at 435 N. Ashe Street on the first of June, 1954. He was the pastor of Southern Pines Methodist Church, a church not yet in existence. There was a telephone campaign, publicity in the *Pilot*, and friendly calls resulting in the first service on June 13, 1954 at the community hall on S. May Street. (*That building has since been razed and apartments built on the site.*) Eleven people worshiped at the first service: the Rev. E. E. Whitley, his wife Betty and their sons Greg and Barry, Mrs. Joseph S. Hiatt, Jr. and sons Joseph III and Robert, Mr. and Mrs. P. J. Russell, and Mrs. James Springer and her daughter Sally.

A Small But Determined Congregation

These few people persisted throughout that hot summer. Church services were held every Sunday with attendance varying from eight to twenty. There were some who became discouraged, feeling that the project would not succeed, and that Southern Pines would never have a Methodist Church. It was then that the Reverend Tom Collins was called from Raleigh to hold revival services. This Executive Secretary of the Board of Missions and Church Extension was here a week, and it was during this time the hopes of the tiny congregation were raised and the feeling grew that "if we stick to it, we will

win". The District Superintendent, Reverend O. L. Hathaway, procured a piano, hymnals were borrowed from Page Memorial Church in Aberdeen, and services were continued, somewhat shakily as shown by the collections during this period.

June 13, 1954	\$ 3.33	July 11, 1954	\$13.30
June 20, 1954	\$10.74	July 18, 1954	\$18.24
June 27, 1954	\$ 9.40	July 25, 1954	\$10.20
July 4, 1954	\$15.10	Aug. 1, 1954	\$ 5.82

Three months after the initial meeting, *Charter Sunday* was celebrated on September 12, 1954 at the Civic Center on Ashe Street. Services were held at this location for three years until the church moved into the new building on Midland Road. Fifty-two persons joined that day, ten by profession of faith, forty-two by letter of transfer, and six were baptized. One hundred and five persons attended the Charter Day Service. The Reverend O. L. Hathaway, Fayetteville District Superintendent, presided over the Quarterly Conference, and officers and committees were elected. The congregation and visitors then enjoyed a picnic lunch at the Southern Pines Country Club. It was a day of accomplishment and great rejoicing!

All those joining the church from Charter Sunday until the North Carolina Conference met in October were considered Charter members. On October 31, 1954, the end of Rev. Whitley's tenure, the membership numbered eighty-two, which increased to one hundred eleven by May, 1955. The Sunday School increased in May to eighty-four and in December, 1955 to one hundred fifteen.

The Building of United Methodist Church

The Rev. Robert L. Bame was assigned to the Southern Pines Methodist Church by the N.C. Conference and began his ministry in our church in November, 1954. Under his direction, the new building program was launched and successfully completed.

The lot purchased by the Fayetteville District Board of Missions and Church Extension as a building site was located on the corner of N. May Street and E. Maine Avenue. The congregation decided that this site was not adequate for their future church. In April, 1955, a four and a half acre tract of land on Midland Road was purchased by the generosity of Dr. and Mrs. J. S. Hiatt, Jr. and is the present location of the church.

Paul Van Camp was Chairman of the Building Committee which worked closely with J. A. Lowdermilk, Chairman of the church's Official Board and the Rev. Bame. A scale model of the church was made by Thomas T. Hayes, local architect, who was commissioned to design the building.

At the *Loyalty Day Observance*, held at Southern Pines Country Club picnic area, a check for \$17,000 was presented to Southern Pines Methodist Church. That was our share of the March call of the \$10 Club, a conference-wide method of raising funds to assist new congregations in building their churches.

On September 11, 1955, construction of the church began with a *Groundbreaking Service* at the new site on Midland Road. Bishop W. W. Peele (*retired*) of Laurinburg spoke and lead the groundbreaking pledge and prayer. The Pastor, the Rev. Robert L. Bame, gave the call to worship and presided. Others taking part in the service were the Rev. O. L. Hathaway, Fayetteville District Superintendent; the Rev. Tom A. Collins of Raleigh, Executive Secretary, Conference Board of Missions; and the following officers of the new local church: E. Earl Hubbard, Chairman of the Official Board; Frank Roberts, Chairman of the Trustees; Mrs. J. S. Hiatt, Jr. WSCS President; Captain Henry Jones, Church School Superintendent.

A choir of about ten members was organized and met regularly at the parsonage. Later a junior choir was also organized and met weekly. A Methodist Youth Fellowship of about thirteen members conducted regular Sunday evening meetings.

Meanwhile, the study and worship of God was carried on in various locations throughout Southern Pines. The kindergarten assembled at the parsonage on N. Ashe Street. The primary grades met in the basement of the civic building, and the adults upstairs. The juniors gathered in an Airground School bus parked outside the civic building every Sunday morning. Prayer meetings were held in private homes on Wednesday evenings.

The Woman's Society of Christian Service, organized September 13, 1954, initially had twenty-four members. The women of our church were constantly working to meet the needs of all kinds, arranging flowers for services, obtaining furniture for the parsonage, raising money by holding bazaars, chicken suppers, Brunswick stews, bake sales, pansy plant sales — even a hat sale!

The Methodist Men were chartered in May, 1955, when twenty-six members heard Nelson Gibson, Fayetteville District Lay Leader give the main address. Supper was prepared by the women of the church who usually thus pampered the men.

The Completion of the Church Building

The first worship of God in the present-day sanctuary was on December 2, 1956, with the *Formal Opening Service* on January 6, 1957. The \$115,000 building was made possible through giving by members of the congregation, donations from friends, the \$17,000 gift previously

mentioned and, of course, a mortgage. In the months that followed many individuals and church groups provided furnishings for the sanctuary and the educational building. The congregation then numbered one hundred ninety.

The new church had no pews, however, so folding chairs were used, with scraping and clatter whenever the congregation rose during services. After a few years a canvass to buy pews met with success.

Four years later in the fall of 1961, after months of planning, the construction of a new parsonage was begun. This was made possible through the sale of property donated by Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Hines, Jr., through a gift from the Fayetteville District Board of Missions and Church Extension, and through the sale of the former parsonage on N. Ashe Street. Mr. John Mercer Reeves donated the lot at the corner of Midland Road and Clematis Road.

There was built an eight-room, two-bath parsonage for approximately \$26,500. The first occupants in May, 1962, were Rev. Robert C. Mooney and his family.

Even though we were a mission church, we found it very difficult to meet our financial obligations. At the end of each year during the first few years of our church, Mr. J. M. Reeves would quietly meet with our Pastor and Financial Chairman, inquire what our indebtedness was, and write a check for the amount needed. Without the gifts of this most generous benefactor, our church would not have thrived as it did. Mr. Reeves is no longer living, but his lovely widow continues to support the church. Our Fellowship Hall is named Reeves Hall in grateful memory of Mr. Reeves.

Changes Within the Walls

The original church building has not been altered externally, but many changes have taken place within the walls. Three of the four originally large classrooms in the basement have been sub-divided into smaller Sunday School classrooms for additional space. The downstairs bathrooms and a storage room have been added. The original "Ladies Parlor" has been made into an executive suite containing the church secretary's office, the pastor's study and a conference room. The biggest project was the renovation of the first floor classrooms into a Fellowship Hall for our church. This was accomplished during the ministry of Rev. John Paschal and was made possible by Mrs. J. M. Reeves as a memorial to her husband.

Then in 1981, Mrs. Robert C. Purvis paid off the final indebtedness of our church, enabling us to burn our mortgage and be debt-free for the first time. A *Service of Dedication* for the Southern Pines United Methodist Church was held on March 28, 1982. Our resident Bishop, Bishop William R. Cannon was the preacher for the dedication

service and led in the dedication. The Sanford District Superintendent, Rev. J. Thomas Smith, and the pastor, Rev. W. Edward Privette were liturgists for the service. Former pastors of the church and retired ministers present assisted in offering prayers of dedication.

Following the Rev. Bame (1954-1959) the congregation welcomed the following pastors who guided the worship of the church: the Rev. Robert C. Mooney, Jr. (1959-1963); the Rev. A. L. Thompson (1963-1968); the Rev. Herman S. Winberry (1968-1970); the Rev. Vergil E. Queen (1970-1974); the Rev. John S. Paschal (1974-1979); the Rev. C. Franklin Grill (1979-1981); and the Rev. W. Edward Privette since June, 1981.

In 1983, a Long Range Planning Committee reported to our Charge Conference on the needs for additional space in our church facility. A Building Committee was elected as follows: Chairman, Mr. Larry W. Newsome, Mr. Stephen N. Martin, Mrs. J. S. Hiatt, Jr., Mr. Dewey S. Mims, Jr., Mrs. Leonard C. McDonald, Mr. W. Daniel Pate, Mr. Byron W. Fellows, and Mrs. W. Earl Hicks. An architect has been selected, and we are presently raising funds for this expected addition to our present facility.

The latest chapter of our church is being written even now. Under the leadership of the Rev. W. Edward Privette the church has increased in every department, and we have not only grown in numbers but in our spiritual influence in the community. Our membership now is 640 members, the largest ever. We do not know what the future holds, but it is certainly bright with promise.

It has been a rare privilege to participate in a venture as far-reaching and rewarding — this opportunity of giving of ourselves and our means to the creation and support of something so great and enduring.

"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthews 16:18)

