

## THE STORY OF OUR CHURCH

As the Town of Spring Lake grew in the years following World War II, its citizens' needs for spiritual growth suffered for lack of Churches. First, the Presbyterians and Baptists established and built their Churches and obtained a strong foothold in the community. The local Methodists attended these Churches, did not attend Church at all or drove a considerable distance to a Church in Fayetteville. A need for a Methodist Church existed but an idea as to how to establish one had not been born.

During autumn of 1953, two civilian employees at Fort Bragg, George Whittemore, Sr., and Charles Piner, began to discuss among themselves the ever-growing need for a Methodist Church at Spring Lake. Mr. Piner was a member of the Wesley Heights Methodist Church in Fayetteville, and he talked to his minister, Mr. Barney Davidson, about establishing a Methodist Church in Spring Lake. The idea of a Methodist Church for Spring Lake was met with great enthusiasm by the local Methodists, and on the third Sunday of September, 1953, thirty-two people met in the American Legion Hall for their first worship service together. Sunday School classes were started on that same Sunday with a total enrollment of 28 members and four classes under the guidance of Mr. Piner and Mr. Davidson. A Christian young man, possessing an aptness for leadership, Larry Carr, was the new Sunday School's Superintendent. For the next several weeks, these four men, along with other Methodists of this community, worked faithfully together under the supervision of Mr. O. L. Hathaway, the Superintendent of the Fayetteville District of the Methodist Conference of North Carolina. Mr. Piner and Mr. Davidson alternated as preachers for the Church services. However, as the group grew, they realized their need for a full-time minister, and some of its members went to see Bishop Paul Garber in Durham to talk with him about this need. Through the efforts of these Christians, a divinity student at Duke University, Fant Steele, became our first minister. How fortunate this little flock was to obtain this young man of God as their leader. Although he had not finished his studies at Duke and had to commute from here to Durham - a distance of some 60 miles, Mr. Steele and his good wife, Mary, worked fervently with the Methodists of Spring Lake towards the organization of our Church. Mr. Steele came to us in November, 1953, and thereafter, in early January, 1954, our first revival was held by two well-known men of our conference, Tom Collins and Walter Anderson. This revival was quite successful and out of it grew the plans for the formal organization of our Church. Thus, the



great day arrived - January 17, 1954- on this date the dreams, hopes and plans of a handful of faithful people became a reality. The little flock became officially "Spring Lake Methodist Church".

Spring Lake Methodist Church continued to use the American Legion Hall as a meeting place to worship God, but plans were already in the making to obtain a building of our own. The officials of the Church ascertained our needs as to how much land we would need and set about to find a suitable location. The John Sandrock Family owned the land upon which our sanctuary is now situate. It consisted of eight lots, which sold for \$1,000.00 each. The Sandrocks kindly offered to donate five of the lots - this left us with \$3,000.00 to raise in order to purchase the land. The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church donated \$1,500.00 of this amount, leaving \$1,500.00 for our members to raise. This was a lot of money for such a small group of people, but raise it they did; and the negotiations for the purchase were soon complete. Only six months after the formal organization of our Church, in July, 1954, the ground-breaking ceremonies were held where our present Church stands today. Again, the members did not waste any time in setting about to complete the task at hand - the building of a sanctuary. The members of the building committee had faith that a Church could be built and a wonderful modern-day miracle took place. We became the first Church to be built with the help of the "Ten Dollar Club" of the Methodist Church. This organization gave us \$20,000.00 on our building, and the same amount was borrowed from the Fayetteville Building & Loan Association. Of course, even \$40,000.00 could not and did not build our Church. Many members made large donations and numerous money-raising events were held in order that our Church could be completed. The building itself was built by contractors, but in an effort to save money, the members pitched in and did all that they could to help. For instance, the plumbing was installed completely by the members under the direction of Mr. C. A. Mitchell, then the Chairman of the Official Board. Even the minister, Mr. Steele, became an experienced plumber assisting in this work. The beautiful draperies behind the altar prior to the enclosure of the Church front with brick in 1966, the altar clothes and the kneeling cushions were made by Mrs. E. E. Roberts. The original altar clothes, faded with age and sunlight, were replaced in 1968, and the lovely white and gold altar and pulpit clothes now gracing our sanctuary were made and presented to our Church by Mrs. Robert Schroeder. Mrs. Tillie O'Kelley donated the major appliances for the kitchen in order that our women could raise money by serving dinners, and many dollars were made in this manner. The writer could not enumerate all of the good works performed by the people of this Church which permits us to worship in our lovely sanctuary today, but it has been said that our Church was



built with love and that the mortar was mixed with the tears and sweat of those struggling "first few".

A Church had been built - a congregation had been firmly established - a minister obtained - now another need existed. A parsonage for the minister and his family to live in. As the need for a Church had been taken care of, this likewise. In March of 1958, Mr. and Mrs. Steele moved into the Methodist Parsonage at 207 Scarborough Street - a spacious brick two-story home with a full basement. This residence served as the home for our ministers and their families for ten years with only the minimum of care and expense. In 1968 the Official Board at the recommendation of the Board of Trustees allotted funds in our budget to renovate the entire house. This work has been completed, and we feel that this has certainly made our parsonage a more comfortable place for our present minister, Reverend Allen C. Edens, Jr., and his family to live.

There were 41 members present in January, 1954, at the organizational meeting; however, when the Church was completed, the number had increased to 63 members. These 63 members became known as the Charter Members and this Charter is on display in the Fellowship Hall of our Church. One viewing this Charter will see names of members who are gone, but others are still with us. The Chairman of our Board of Trustees, Howard L. Hall, his wife, Maude, a member of the Official Board, their daughter, Mildred Hall Hice, and son, Howard L. Hall, Jr.; Eveann Sharpe, Official Board Member; William V. Mallernee and wife, Virginia, both Official Board Members; Mrs. Tillie O'Kelley; Mrs. Bessie Holman; Mr. Arlis Owen, Sr.; Mrs. Mary Parker; and Mr. W. E. Easterling, Sr. (Mrs. Easterling is now deceased); his sons, W. E. Jr. and Donald E., and their daughter, Mary, are original Charter Members, and they are on our Church Roll today.

Mr. Steele served our Church well for four years and then the Conference saw fit to send him to another Church. Mr. Frederick J. Duplissey succeeded him, and the little Church continued to grow under his leadership and guidance. What beautiful music our choir rendered under the direction of his wife, affectionately called by all who knew her as "Mrs. Dee". Mr. Duplissey stayed with us until 1960, at which time Mr. Edward Whitley came to us. He, his lovely wife, Betty, and their three children, stayed with us only one short year. All who knew them well remember the friendliness and willingness of these two young Christians. Mrs. Whitley, like her predecessor, was an able musician and leader. Many a heart was saddened when they left us at



the end of the conference year. In 1961, the conference sent us another fine Christian minister, Foster L. Jones, who is now deceased, having gone to meet his Lord and Savior in December, 1965. His wife, Stella, like Betty Whitley, was a wonderful Church School Teacher and taught the ODF Class the entire year they were in our Church. We shall always remember their three talented sons, Edward, Russell and David, and the occasions upon which they enriched our worship service with their sacred musical renditions. Speaking of music, the story of our Church would not be complete if mention were not made of Mildred Hall Hice and the many years she served as our organist. Mildred was our Church organist from the age of 12 years with the exception of the years when she was away at college and during the time she was residing away from Spring Lake while her husband was in the military service until May, 1968, when she and her husband and young son, Chris, moved to Wilmington, North Carolina. It was said by all who heard her at the organ that no-one else quite had her touch. Again, the conference moved our minister at the end of one year's duration, but in June, 1962, we were most fortunate to have sent to us "our beloved minister", Russell Caudill. He and his lovely wife, Estelle, were with us for four years years. They never tired of working for the Lord and our Church. He spent endless hours knocking on doors, visiting the sick, the lonely, and anyone in need. He was a good shepherd to his flock and the community evangelist as well. Mrs. Caudill was an accomplished musician, and she doubled as our organist and choir director - performing both quite proficiently. Mr. Caudill, being a man near the age of retirement, and daily performing the tasks of a man much younger, found himself in the hospital with a severe heart attack in the summer of 1964. Three months later our prayers were answered and he was back in the pulpit, and there he remained each Sunday until his retirement in June of 1966. While he was out of the pulpit due to his illness, the pulpit was filled by several chaplains from Fort Bragg and by Dr. Womack from Methodist College.

In June, 1966, representatives of all of the Churches of Spring Lake came to pay homage to Reverend and Mrs. Russell Caudill at a reception held in our Fellowship Hall on the Sunday afternoon before Conference. The four years that they had been with us had been good years not only for our Church but for the community as well. We felt their loss keenly; however, God always takes care of his flock. Thus, he sent us as our minister, Johnny Lewis, a young man most willing to serve. He and his wife, Kay, and two



little sons, Peter John and Jesse Manning, came to us from Cary, North Carolina. Kay, like all of her predecessors, was talented in the field of music, and the congregation always received a special blessing when she sang a message from God for us. The Lewis family left in June, 1967. At that time, the conference, realizing our needs due to our Church being largely military, sent us a newly retired Army Chaplain, Reverend A. C. Edens, Jr., a native North Carolian. Reverend Edens, his wife, Frances, and their two sons, Allen and David, came to us from their last duty assignment in Kansas. The Edens have two daughters, Sandra and Linda. Sandra is married and lives in Georgia and Linda is in college in Kansas. Reverend Edens has worked diligently to build our attendance and to minister to the needs of our members, and we have prospered spiritually under his guidance. Frances, another able musician, directs our choir and is also active in the W. S. C. S., being a local and district officer.

During the fall of 1966, the glass front of the Church was removed and replaced with brick due to the fact that rain had seeped in around the glass and was ruining the floor in front of the sanctuary and had caused the tile to come up and the wood sub-flooring to deteriorate. A contract was obtained to install the brick, but some of the men in the Church replaced the damaged sub-flooring and several women of the Church painted the complete interior with no cost to the Church. The beautification of the sanctuary was completed with the installation of lovely green carpeting in October of 1966.

Many miracles had been wrought since the humble beginning of our Church through our faith in Christ, and on October 21, 1966, the Church mortgage was paid in full and all the Church members rejoiced. A dedication and mortgage burning ceremony was held on January 15, 1967, the 13th Anniversary of our Church, with the Reverend Fant Steele, Reverend Russell Caudill, former ministers; Reverend Barney Davidson, District Superintendent, and Reverend Johnny Lewis, our minister, taking part in the impressive ceremony.

One could not possibly relate the entire story of our Church or mention each member who has contributed to its growth, but Churches only grow through their members and their belief and faith in God. So, let us never forget what our Church is and to whom it belongs. Today, we have 226 members, of this figure 47 families (with a total of 129 members) reside locally; and we trust that our Church will never cease to grow and that we will never cease to love God and our fellowman.

This the 17th day of January, 1969.

Mrs. Howard L. Hall and Mrs. James E. Hager  
SPRING LAKE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
HISTORIANS