

# BE THE HOPE!



The Story of the First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica

By Jerry Brown

Forewards by Rev. Patricia Farris and Rev. Greg Batson

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# Contents

Foreword .....	vi
Chapter 1 .....	1
Chapter 2 .....	5
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4 .....	11
Chapter 5 .....	13
Chapter 6 .....	17
Chapter 7 .....	19
Chapter 8 .....	23
Chapter 9 .....	27
Chapter 10 .....	31
Chapter 11 .....	33
Chapter 12 .....	37
Chapter 13 .....	43
Honoring Associate Pastors .....	50
First UMC Music Department .....	51
First UMC Preschool .....	53
Thanks to Archivists .....	54



# Foreword

We are grateful to First UMC member, Jerry Brown, for bringing his faith, his sense of humor, his love of God and the church, and his professional experience as a writer and journalist, to the writing of *Be the Hope! The Story of the First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica*. And what a story it is—from exceedingly humble and precarious beginnings, through countless challenges and obstacles, to heights of praise and celebration. In the lives of countless “ordinary saints” of extraordinary faith and vision, First UMC continues in witness and service to God and the people of Santa Monica. Our hearts embrace the world and our souls give thanks to God. The words of St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians sends us forth into God’s future yet unfolding: “Now unto God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Rev. Patricia Farris  
(Retired) Senior Minister  
First United Methodist Church

## Foreword to Revised Edition

As part of the celebration of our 150th Anniversary in 2025, it seemed appropriate to update the written history of our church: *Be the Hope! The Story of the First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica*. We are grateful that Jerry Brown agreed to write an additional chapter that covers the period of 1998 – 2025. This is an important chapter for it covers the ministry of our congregation during the COVID-19 pandemic and significant changes in our denomination. We give thanks for the long and rich history of this congregation, and look forward to the future with renewed hope.

Rev. Greg Batson  
Senior Minister



# Chapter I

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*“The church is never a place but always a people; never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The church is you who pray, not where you pray...there is nothing sacred but man; no sanctuary of God but the soul.” – Anonymous*

(These beautiful words were found in the archives of the First United Methodist Church;  
its author’s identity regrettably lost in the mists of time.)

## 1875 – 1885

The determination of the early band of a dozen or so settlers, whose efforts launched First UMC on the road to its present position of prominence, validates the old adage that “great oaks from little acorns grow.” Look at what those first Methodists in Santa Monica had to deal with seen through the eyes of the anonymous scribe quoted above.

- They had no church as such. The only place they could find in which to worship was a small loft above a hardware store owned by a Mr. Brady.
- The location was not designed as a fold suitable for shepherding souls...those eager truth seekers were, nonetheless, its ‘flock.’
- Brady’s loft was no sacred building...as a “believing assembly” they sanctified it.
- It was no sanctuary of God...except in their hearts and souls.

From every perspective, theirs could not have been a more modest or challenging beginning.

Contrast that with what we have today. As we settle into our seats in our beautiful sanctuary each Sabbath, ready to listen to energizing and thought-provoking sermons and a never-ending offering of magnificent music, it behooves us to ponder our church’s ever so lowly birth and struggle nearly a century and a half ago.

**Now...**First UMC boasts a roster that numbers in many the hundreds. We have a place of worship of which we can be proud, with good sight lines, a splendid (and over the years superbly played) organ, acoustics worthy of the instrument, comfortable pew seating, a kitchen and social hall, an office complex and Preschool...all the comforts of home.

**Then...**It took a while before the membership of that fledgling church rose above a dozen. It was often as low as half that. That improvised spiritual home—so very humble—had no organ, no pulpit, no font. The few seats were rickety and surely uncomfortable. The lighting was poor. The air dusty.

In truth, there wasn’t even a Santa Monica at that time. An influx of new residents—sometimes a hundred on one day—hardly a stampede—arrived, some by boat, some by stagecoach or on horseback, a few by rail, and, yes, even some on foot. They were storekeepers (Mr. Brady was one of the early arrivals), farmers, laborers, railway track layers, house builders, tradesmen of every stripe, a few professionals...and, inevitably, entrepreneurs.

Together they represented just about every state in the Union—all 37 of them! (By 1875, California had held statehood status for 25 years.) Many of the newcomers—Methodist or otherwise—may well have been encouraged to relocate by the advice popularized by Horace Greeley, to “...go west young man and grow up with the country.” Those pioneers included that small number of Methodists whose common longing caused them to seek their own parish and their own pastor. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

Reverend John D. Crum, who is believed to have been a circuit rider serving several outlying congregations around Southern California, answered their call. He preached the first sermon on October 15, 1875, in the musty, dimly lit room ‘borrowed’ from Mr. Brady. (The store owner’s religious affiliation is not known to the writer of this history. Suffice it to say, it was his generosity that made it possible for Rev. Crum’s group to establish the town’s first real church.)

Among those who saw future profit here was Sen. John Benjamin Jones (R. Nev.), whose dream it was to make the area Southern California’s principal deep water port. (His reasons were not entirely altruistic: He had investments in shipping and in the developing railroad industry!) Ultimately his plan did not succeed. The more independent-minded railroad shareholders decided that their interests would be better served by locating the harbor in San Pedro, where it is to this day. (Do I hear a Hallelujah?)

There were no neatly laid out streets in Santa Monica in 1875, precious few permanent homes, no hotels. Tents dotted the landscape. The only shopping anybody could do was for such basic necessities as bread, produce and meat, milk and clothing, and, of course, building materials: hence Mr. Brady’s hardware store.

At the time, a \$5 ticket would get residents a seat on a horse-drawn carriage from Santa Monica all the way to Los Angeles. Trains had made an appearance from nearby parts of the country, but the few in service were primarily used for freight and livestock, leaving only a few seats for human passengers.

The Methodist group continued its weekly services in the cramped, somewhat claustrophobic loft for almost three months, leaving only when the demands on Mr. Brady’s hardware business required him to repossess their spiritual haven.

Showing the courage and faith that had buoyed his congregants in those early days, Rev. Crum, in announcing the eviction, promised his people that in just two weeks they would worship in their own church premises.

And he kept his promise.

Our archives contain a historical sketch by yet another unknown author that noted “...subscriptions were obtained. With his own hands he wrought and, true to his word, the second Sunday found the congregation in their own sanctuary.” Small wonder that Rev. Crum reported to the church conference, “We have succeeded in erecting a House of Worship. Our Sabbath School may be considered in growing condition.”

Of the fund-raising effort, Rev. Crum recalled “...Brother R.S. Bassett (a member of the new Presbyterian Church) handed me \$50 and on dedication day gave us \$20 more.” That touching ecumenical gesture must have given Mr. Crum and his followers great encouragement.

The structure, at 6th and Arizona, built with public donations like that one, and a lot of volunteer toil and sweat, served the Methodists for the next seven years and was then physically moved, lock, stock and pulpit, to a site a few blocks farther east. It was enlarged and remained in service for another 13 years.

It would never be more appreciated than it was on that day, January 13, 1876, when Rev. Crum welcomed his parishioners there for the first time. It was still largely unfinished at that stage but it had a virtue that Mr. Brady's loft didn't have—it was all theirs!

## HISTORICAL NOTES

- Not surprisingly, not all of the century-old records available to us contain matching information. Even the given name of our founding pastor is open to question! Some sources identify him as John, others as Joseph. We have gone with the more popular of the two so... John D. Crum it is. In his writings he invariably signed off simply as J.D.

- The new church was first called the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was not renamed the First United Methodist Church until 1928, when it officially merged with Grace Methodist, its counterpart in nearby Venice. The nation's years of economic depression and two world wars delayed the chances of building a single sanctuary for the two congregations. Only when that long-awaited house of worship was built did we incorporate the word "United" into our name.

- It is not certain that the "...go west young man..." quote (see above) was coined by newspaper editor Horace Greeley, although he is generally credited with having popularized it. It is perhaps worth noting that the advice was part of an editorial column by Greeley in 1865, in which he wrote: "Washington is not the place to live in. The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting and the morals are deplorable. Go west, young man...go west and grow up with the country."

## MINISTERS 1875 – 1885

1875-76: 1877-79	John D. Crum
1876	John Wesley Allen
1876	Adam Bland
1876	J.W. Stump
1879	S.K. Russell
1880	(During this year, the minister was provided by the conference on a rotating basis)
1881	Freeman D. Bovard
1882-83	J.B. Howard
1884	L. Janes



*Early Church at Fourth and Arizona*



*The First Church at Fifth and Arizona (December 1875)*

## Romans 8. 18

Introduction,

Notice II The experience of Paul.

1. His sufferings as given in 2 Cor 11. 23-27,

He was competent to judge as to the sufferings of this present life and as to ~~gries~~ <sup>griefs</sup> that should be revealed in us 2 Cor. 12, 2-4. See also Heb

2 The experience of christians in all ages has been the same. And yet they have been enabled to adopt the language of our text. ~~the~~ We know but little in our day about the sufferings to which christians have been subjected. And that we may have an idea I shall <sup>draw</sup> your attention to their sufferings under certain circumstances.

History records ten general persecutions under Roman Emperors. Several of them were distinguished for their fierce opposition and barbaric cruelty to the saints of God. Some were scourged to death, and others were slain by the sword or thrown into the sea. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts

## Chapter 2

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### 1886 – 1895

Not long after the start of First UMC's second decade, a smallpox epidemic in Los Angeles put a damper on the rate of population growth and slowed progress in industry development throughout that great city and the nearby coastal communities. Many anxious months passed before the frightening health hazard abated and signs of area-wide recovery resumed.

Santa Monica's development began anew and reached a point at which the increasingly confident residents voted for incorporation. In the California legislative jargon of the day, it was eligible to incorporate as a "Sixth Class" city, a dismissive sounding designation with which few of us would agree today.

The picturesquely named Shoo Fly Landing, on the south side of town, which Sen. Jones once aspired to use as the staging platform for his hoped for deep water port, was springing to life, albeit it, not exactly as Jones had in mind. Instead of serving the largest freight carriers of the day as originally envisioned, it was becoming increasingly busy catering to a host of smaller fishing fleets and even a few pleasure craft.

The surrounding farmland and the offshore waters began to yield rich harvests, and the railroads were also playing their part in putting Santa Monica on the map. It looked as though the town, despite its growing pains, might, indeed, become the bountiful home the settlers had trekked west to find. (Score one for Horace Greeley!) It even became possible for residents to shop for what might be considered the 'luxury' items of the day. Those admittedly few articles were a far cry from the Nordstrom/Saks Fifth Avenue ware that we think of when we think 'luxury' today, but they were a boon to folks previously denied easy access to silk and satin goods, ready-made dresses, and dressy 'church suits' for men.

The leaders of the Methodist Church still had a few teething problems to overcome—some knottier than others. One of the earliest, and perhaps the oddest, was a demand by the church custodian for 50 cents on top of his weekly wage of \$2 (!) every time he washed the sanctuary windows.

A church committee discussed the stand-off at length. Our archive records suggest that it was settled by the simple expedient of appointing a team of three women to replace the three men who hitherto had been overseeing his work. Whatever the reason, the disgruntled janitor quickly dropped his demand. (Perhaps opting for discretion as the better part of valor!)

Not all of the challenges, though, were so quaint or easily overcome.

One of the most serious, and potentially destructive, was the thorny question of prohibition. Although the Volstead Act that banned the use of alcohol nationwide—the 18th Amendment to the Constitution—was still more than a dozen years away, the sale and consumption of alcohol had already become a contentious hot-button issue in many parts of the country, including Santa Monica.

Angered by the failure of their spiritual leaders to press vigorously for a liquor ban within city limits, about half of the 50 or so Methodist members, now on the roster, left in protest and formed their own Prohibition Congregational Church. It is not known how long this one issue church lasted, but the defection of so many clearly represented a blow to the Methodist movement.

Enter Frederick Hastings Rindge, a wealthy New Englander, a Harvard-educated Methodist...and a devout prohibitionist. Settling in sunny Southern California to escape the cruel winter months of his home state—by order of his doctor—he was a man of great compassion as subsequent events would prove.

First he led a delegation of like-minded foes of alcohol that persuaded the city government to shut down all liquor parlors. At the same time he donated from his own pocket the \$2,500 that the council said would be lost in alcohol license fees. His compassionate side emerged when he immediately advanced a tidy sum of money to assist one of the city's leading liquor dealers, who was driven to the brink of bankruptcy by the new statute.

Meanwhile, the Methodists' 20-feet by 25-feet house of worship had become woefully undersized for weekly services for a roster that had swelled from 50, then to 75, and, now, as most of the booze ban secessionists began to return to the fold, to around 90. Standing room only was the order of the day at Sabbath services. The old place was bursting at the seams. Clearly, an expanded church building was the only answer: How to finance the work was the vexing question.

Again, as he did in the case of the bankruptcy threatened alcohol suppliers, Rindge stepped up to the plate, wallet in hand, willing to assist. He offered to provide the cash to expand the Methodist structure if the congregation would simply guarantee to meet expenses from that time forward. With grateful hearts and amid many 'Hallelujahs,' the congregation accepted.

At the same time, the church's leaders decided that, in order to attract even more followers, the sanctuary that Rev. Crum and his flock built by their own hands seven years before should be relocated to a bigger lot at 4th Street and Arizona, two blocks closer to what was becoming a livelier and ever more populous downtown.

How the process of bodily lifting and transporting, even so small a wooden structure as the First UMC sanctuary was accomplished, or how long the process took, is not obvious from any of the material in our archives. The rather primitive state of the house moving art in the late 1800s apparently was no deterrent to the willing Methodist community.

The entire project, according to archives, indicate that the operation—relocation and expansion—cost Rindge between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

The new house of worship—immediately dubbed 'The Rindge Church'—was dedicated early in 1896. We will write more about that in the next chapter.

#### MINISTERS 1886 – 1895

1886	W.D. Lowder
1886-1888	James S. Kline
1888	F. M. Warrington
1889	Samuel G. Blanchard
1890-1892	Andrew B. Morrison
1892-1897	William Stevenson

## Chapter 3

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### 1896 – 1905

The House that Rindge built, or should we say the House that Rindge's generous donation made possible, was dedicated on March 1, 1896, amid great celebration, not only by the Methodists who would use it, but by civic leaders and members of other churches in the area.

It was, by public acclaim, a handsome structure. One of the enthusiastic observers of the day's festivities labeled it the "grandest building in town." Another, equally impressed, saw it as "without peer in Southern California." Yet another called it... "a magnificent tribute to God himself."

If the words strike the ear as perhaps a trifle over heated, there was no doubt whatsoever that the new house of worship was, indeed, a marvelous and memorable achievement. What few in the awed throng could have predicted was that, in addition to beauty, it had admirable 'staying power.'

Remember that Frederick Rindge's construction gift to his fellow Methodists was either \$15,000 or \$10,000, depending on which of our archived records you choose to accept. Yes, that was a lot of money in 1896 but surely nobody realized that that amount would finance the construction of a sanctuary that would serve its parishioners for the next 57 years!

Not until 1953 did we abandon the place and move into our present home. In fact, it should be noted here that even after we vacated the Rindge Church, it was used for our office space and educational facility for a further 18 months.

Small wonder that Mr. Rindge proclaimed in a letter, read to the dedication crowd by Rev. Dr. William Stevenson:

*"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, for the glory of God and the good of us all and especially to bless those who do not yet know what it is to be saved, I now present this new home of Zion to the trustees of the Santa Monica Methodist Episcopal Church..."*

*"...May it ever be this city's watchman [to] proclaim that there is safety in Christianity and danger out of it. May it ever be free from the pride of life and all ambitions that hinder simplicity of faith in God. May its ministers depend only on the gospel and may its people, knowing their own shortcomings, bear and forbear until all differences are forgotten in the remembrance of God's goodness to them."*

Flowery prose indeed, but clearly a faithful reflection of the sincerity and piety of the writer. He could not have guessed that his act of Christian generosity would keep on giving and that the new sanctuary would continue to serve as the city's 'watchman' for more than five decades.

Our archives do not explain why Mr. Rindge did not deliver his dedication speech in person. It is known that he moved to California for health reasons and might possibly had been indisposed on the big day.

It is also known that he had business interests in Los Angeles at the time of the dedication and may have been tending to matters there. Or, of course, he may simply have disliked public speaking! (He died in 1905. He was just 48.)

Whatever the reason for his non-appearance, the opening of the new facility dovetailed neatly with the early years of a period of stability and growth for the Methodist movement and for Santa Monica itself. With the debut of the Rindge Church, our hitherto standing room only Sabbath attendance advanced by leaps and bounds—keeping pace with the growth in the population of the city, which was approaching 4,000 inhabitants by the mid-1890s. One of the major catalysts for the increase was one which still drives much of Santa Monica’s business activity to this day – tourism.

Pulled by Southern California’s seemingly eternal sunshine and Santa Monica’s magnificent strand of mile upon mile of wide, soft sand beach, pleasure seekers from all over the Southland, and a rapidly growing number of out-of-staters began to flock to the Pacific shore. Some came for a day of picnicking and frolicking in the sand. Others came for a week or even two to bask in the sun and to visit Los Angeles, the nearby mountains and desert, and our neighboring South Bay communities. (Alas, Disneyland and Universal Studios were not on the schedule yet!)

Still others came to sample this young, vibrant, ever more appealing city, with an eye to relocating here. Our records don’t tell us how many soon-to-be inhabitants were included in the influx of visitors in the early part of the 1900s, but it was clearly a significant number. It is also highly likely that many who initially came as sun worshipers opted, upon reflection, to make the move permanent.

Assisting in the growing process was ease of access to our beautiful city. Rail companies, previously predominantly freight carriers, added some passenger berths on services linking Hollywood/Los Angeles with the north end of Santa Monica and, later, they added passenger service to the end of Ocean Park farther south, primarily to cater to the sun and fun seekers.

Inevitably, the demand for accommodations led to the construction of inns and small hotels. Eateries sprang up to satisfy the food needs of the crowds. Gift shops became commonplace. Business opportunities abounded and entrepreneurs, some local, some incomers, rushed to fill the void.

Santa Monica was on the move. And as Santa Monica grew so grew Sabbath attendance at the Methodist Church.

In order to simplify the bookkeeping and offering count each week, Rev. Theophilus Woodward introduced an innovation with which we are all familiar today—the offertory envelope. That was surely a sign that the number of contributors—and their contributions—were rising.

In 1892, Rev. Dr. William Stevenson was named pastor of our church and stayed for four years until he had overseen the inauguration of our new church sanctuary. That strenuous task well done, his reward was to be transferred elsewhere, a move that apparently did not meet with the congregation’s wholehearted approval.

On his departure, Rev. F.G.H. Stevens, became the Santa Monica Methodists’ pastor and began a record of service that was remarkable—probably unique—among ministers to this day. Others—notably our most recent two senior pastors, Rev. Donald Shelby and Rev. Patricia Farris (in her 22nd year, as this is written) have all served us longer.

But the Stevens' CV is remarkable in that he was at the helm in Santa Monica twice, the first time for five years, the second time for a further seven years, with twenty years separating the two assignments. He came here in 1903 and did not leave for good until 1935!

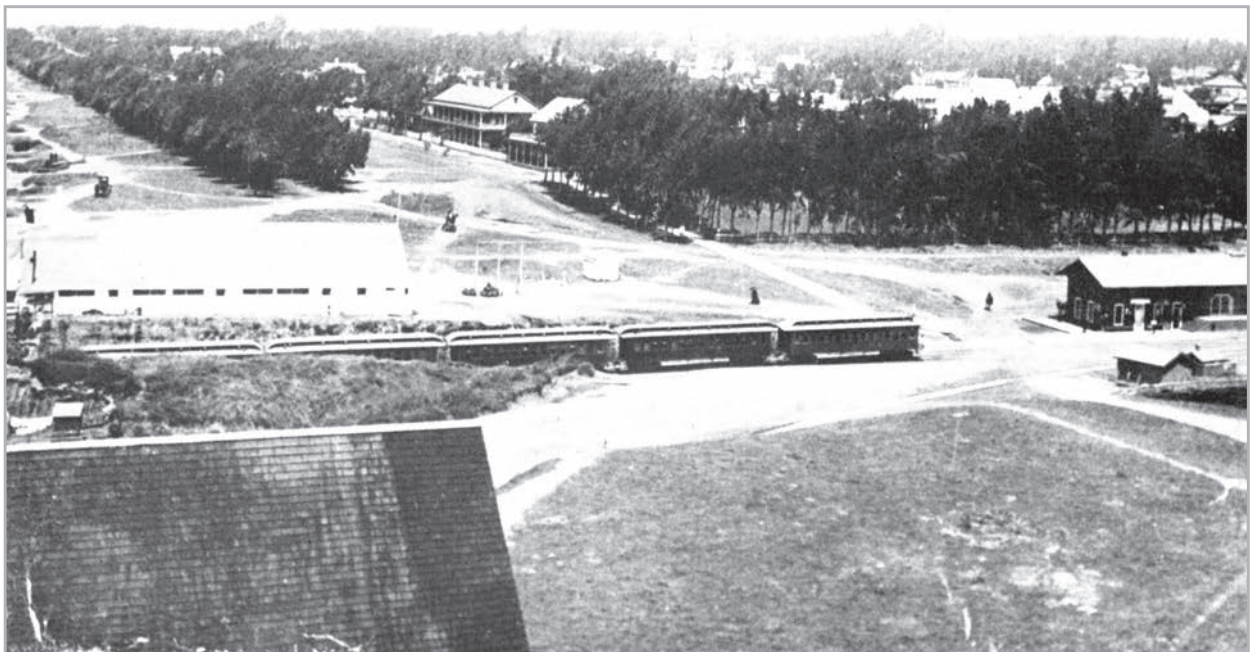
By the end of the decade, the new, expanded Methodist home was up and running, but expansion was still on some people's minds. We'll talk more about that in the next chapter.



*The "Rindge Church," moved from Sixth and Arizona to Fourth and Arizona.*

### MINISTERS 1896 – 1905

1892-1897	William Stevenson
1897-1899	R.C. Westenberg
1899	Clarence True Wilson
1900	Theophilus H. Woodward
1901-1903	James C. Healy
1903-1908	F.G.H. Stevens



*Early Santa Monica with train near location of what is now Olympic Boulevard*

## CHURCH OFFICERS

### TRUSTEES

S. W. Odell, President  
Geo. F. Doty, Vice President  
T. A. Moody, Secretary  
W. M. Palmer, Treasurer.  
J. E. Pittenger.

### STEWARDS

De Los Watenpaugh, Chairman.  
J. E. Pittenger, Fin. Sec. and Treas.

1 Mrs. Adda Pittenger  
2 Mrs. Elizabeth Richmond  
3 J. W. Chaffee 4 W. O. Garner  
5 Mrs. S. J. Death 6 Will Fletcher  
7 Mrs. Lillian Barrow 8 Mrs. T. E. Crain  
9 David Crowley 10 Mrs. Ida Reeves  
11 (absentees) Mrs. Hattie V. Southcott  
(Number indicates the districts)

### SUNDAY SCHOOL

Superintendent—George Hart

### EPWORTH LEAGUE

President—Albert Shetler

### JUNIOR LEAGUE

Supt.—Mrs. Rudolph Swinney

### LADIES' AID

President—Mrs. Mary Wheeler.

### W. F. M. S.

President—Mrs. Clara Odell

### CLASS LEADERS

Rev. S. W. Koontz, Elisha Beckley



## FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SANTA MONICA, CAL.

F. G. H. STEVENS, PASTOR

RESIDENCE - - - 720 FOURTH STREET

PHONE SUNSET 608

Church bulletin circa 1908

# Chapter 4

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## 1906 – 1915

The new sanctuary was completed. The congregation could look forward each Sunday to more spacious seating. They would hear the sermons, the music, and the announcements more clearly thanks to the improved acoustics incorporated into the building and its added insulation from street noises.

Worship life was good in the Methodists' new, expanded, quarters. What more could anyone ask for?

More expansion – that's what!

Almost before all of the paint had dried on the walls, before the bricks and the mortar and the woodwork had properly settled, the church's leaders realized that they had to have more space for education rooms to meet the demand being driven primarily by the younger members of the families taking up residence in Santa Monica. At the same time they saw a need to provide a place for members to socialize, to get to know one another better outside the worship experience.

Such suggestions might make all the sense in the world to us today but, somewhat surprisingly, they were divisive issues in the early 1900s. The proposed educational facilities were not the problem: There was general agreement that they were a must. It was the thought of a social hall that turned some members off. Turned them off, in fact, to the extent that they refused to participate, either by their labor or by their donations, in either project.

Social halls, the few detractors felt, conjured up visions of dance parlors (perish the thought!) and liquor dens (legal or otherwise) and had no call to be affiliated with, or housed on, church grounds. One opponent of the plan summed up by suggesting that it made no sense to educate the young in the ways of the Lord on the one hand, while encouraging them at the same time to socialize with others who might lead them astray on the other.

Current members of First UMC know, of course, that a social hall can be used for stage productions, art displays, lectures, blood drives, a prayer Labyrinth, retirement dinners, and the like—to the benefit of all. (Nowadays, we also know that there's no better way to get close to our fellow Methodists than in the social hall—over coffee and doughnuts!)

The popular pastor, the Rev. F.G.H. Stevens, in his second year of his first term of service to our church, whose energy and foresight were the drive behind the touchy, two-pronged project, would not be denied. Though aware that the social hall aspects of the program might cost him members (it did, but comparatively few) he pressed on...with the prayers and unqualified support of the rest of his flock.

The work was well underway in 1906-07, when a sudden economic downturn in the U.S. put an end to many construction projects nationwide. Undaunted, the Rev. Stevens pleaded with banks to allow this noble plan to continue. They agreed—but the cost was high.

According to our archives, the church went into debt to the tune of \$14,000—the first heavy debt in its history. Heavy? Not by today's standards perhaps but it was quite a burden in the early 1900s. (One cannot help but wonder how much more easily this debt would have been cleared had the anti-social hall faction stayed put...and contributed.) Through it all, the faith of the supporters of the project never wavered. The facilities, housed side by side in one building, opened in February 1908.

Shortly thereafter, to the dismay of some members, the Rev. Stevens was appointed pastor of a church elsewhere. His Santa Monica congregation wanted him back and they got him—twenty years later as we outlined in the last chapter of this history.

His successor, the Rev. Edward Vaughan, was charged by the Conference with not only running the Methodist Episcopal Church, but establishing a second Methodist church in Santa Monica. The city's steady growth dictated that a new facility be created for Methodists in the east end of town.

It began life as a Sunday school housed in a tent on 19th Street and was incorporated by the Conference as the East Santa Monica Methodist Church (later to become the Grace Methodist Church) in January 1910. The plan was for the two to merge at some later date after a single sanctuary big enough for both could be built.

That merger could not take place, at that time. A world war intervened and the plan had to be postponed. For the moment, though, Santa Monica's growth marched on. Its economy was driven by old standbys, farming (lima beans and barley, predominantly) fishing, tourism, and a new source of revenue—film making. As early as 1910, makers of travelogues and many feature films (silent, of course...talkies were still a ways off) had found it to be the ideal location in which to create their grainy celluloid offerings.

Film moguls such as Thomas Ince, one of the most prolific producer/directors of the silent era, were attracted by the city's reliable good weather, its scenery and its sunsets. Ince was known as "The Father of Western Movies," and when you need a sunset for your cowboy hero to ride off into where better to find it than in Santa Monica?

The future looked rosy for the city, and its Methodists entered their fifth decade. All was bright and beautiful. Confidence abounded. Sadly, world affairs, far, far, away from sunny Pacific shores, would contrive to put a brake on that confidence. More about that in the next chapter.



#### MINISTERS 1906 - 1915

1903-1908	F.G.H. Stevens
1908-1910	Edward Vaughan
1910	Charles Wentworth
1911-1914	Wesley K. Beans
1914-1917	Clarence D. Hicks

*The first annual church picnic, 1908*

# Chapter 5

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## 1916 – 1925

Our church's fifth decade opened during one of history's darkest periods. Much of the world was in flames, the conflagration touched off by the assassination of the heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Two pistol shots into the chest of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, on a steamy summer morning in Bosnia, catapulted the world into a nightmare conflict that cost the lives of as many as 17 million—combatants and non-combatants alike—from dozens of countries.

World War I, later dubbed “The war to end all wars” (some people actually believed that!) was essentially a war of alliances. Nations entered the fray in support of those with whom they had mutual defense treaties. One by one they voluntarily took up arms or were reluctantly sucked in until the continent of Europe was ablaze.

There is no need here to recount in detail the story of the bitter four years that ensued. Suffice it to say that the conflict had a demoralizing effect on the entire world, stifling business development and creating fear for the future. The United States was not immune from the effects even though, at first, the fighting and the dying were taking place thousands of miles away on the other side of the Atlantic.

Many Americans wanted the country to stay out of what was primarily a confrontation between European antagonists. Inevitably though, this nation could not remain aloof: In 1917, after its ships were fired upon, the U.S. formally entered the fray.

Here at home, the Methodist Episcopal and Grace Methodist Churches still had a plan to merge. The Conference had years earlier given a tentative green light to their union, on the understanding that a new facility could be built sufficient to house the combined congregations.

But money had to be raised to buy a big enough parcel of land and pay for the construction—and this was no time to be thinking about an investment of such magnitude. Merger plans were reluctantly put on hold and for now, the Methodists were obliged to get on with their lives as best they could; no easy task in those grim years of war. They needed a confidence boost.

Members got it in the shape of their new pastor, the Rev. C.H.M. Sutherland, who realized immediately that rebuilding morale was a priority. For the next five years, his emphasis was on exactly that.

His wholehearted support for activities already in place—the Boy Scouts, for example, the church choir, and Colonial dinners which brought the members together for prayer, conversation and music and dance displays, were well supported.

*(About those Colonial dinners: Food shortages of the day dictated that the meals be kept simple. You want simple? The feast, according to available records, consisted almost exclusively of lima bean loaf and bread and not much*

*else. Fast forward to 1975, when, in honor of the church's 100th anniversary, our church leaders sponsored another "Colonial Dinner,"—a nod of appreciation to those pioneers who went before. Many of the participants dressed in the costume of 1875. This time, though, the attendees reportedly dined on seafood, avocado salad, roast beef and gravy, biscuits, cherry pie and coffee. Quite a menu upgrade don't you think?)*

Mr. Sutherland also organized a well-supported Men's Forum, a civic group that met regularly to discuss local and international affairs, discussions led by inspirational speakers whose remarks were intended to bring hope and strength to listeners.

The new pastor's strongest weapon was his own personality. He was a cheerful, energetic, friendly leader who did everything he could to focus his congregation's attention on the power of prayer and the word of God and away from foxholes and cannon fire.

Rev. Sutherland was a hit with his parishioners from day one, when he arrived to take up his new assignment by automobile—our church's first motorized pastor.

In one of his earliest sermons he told them, "If anybody can worship God, he can do so in Santa Monica: There is so much of beauty here." That was a snap judgment, to be sure, but one that members appreciated, and, preoccupied, as they were, with newspaper reports of the carnage in Europe, perhaps needed to be reminded of.

While he was ministering to his war weary flock, Rev. Sutherland found time to raise a little money to carry out a few minor repairs around the facility. It was nowhere near enough to consummate the hoped for merger, but it was enough to emphasize that the Methodists were not standing still, war or no war.

There was genuine disappointment among parishioners in 1922 when, with peace restored to a recovering world, Rev. Sutherland was assigned elsewhere. In a farewell gesture from the heart, a member sent him a letter at the behest of the congregation:

"You have been preeminently a citizen who represents all that is best in civic life," the parishioner wrote. "Your influence has been felt in all political and civic councils. You have been a friend to all and the list of those who have believed in you and have become your friends has been steadily growing until the regret at your departure is well nigh universal."

The congregation knew that their well loved minister had left big shoes to fill and that it would take a strong man to fill them. They got the man they needed in our 28th pastor, the Rev. E. Frank Gates.

Mr. Gates proved to be every bit as progressive as his predecessor. Under his guidance the church continued its slow but steady advance. Among the indicators of the growing confidence in the future was the creation of two vital staff positions, that of a financial secretary and an education director. Hitherto only the pastor, the choir master and the custodian were paid.

After leading our church for five years, Rev. Gates was reassigned elsewhere, leaving behind a grateful congregation. His name is commemorated in our beautiful Gates Chapel, an extension to our main building, which was donated by his family in 1957. (See Chapter 9.)

But if he could afford to hire a couple of additional staffers while he was here, it was still impossible to assume the 'big' mortgage the Methodist Episcopal and Grace Methodist would need if they were to wed. Interest rates were crippling high and banks were making few loans other than for the replacement of war material and other government-mandated projects.

Consequently, the chances of establishing a single sanctuary for the two Santa Monica churches appeared to fade into little more than a pipe dream, seemingly doomed by the rising high cost of real estate—and inflation. This, it seemed to some, was a fairy tale not destined for a happy ending.

But while disappointed, the two congregations were not quite ready to give up hope. Quietly, amid much prayer, they continued to dream of the day of their union.

Unfortunately for them, yet another of those pesky dark periods in America's history was fast approaching, ready to deal another body blow to merger chances.

More about that in the next chapter.

### MINISTERS 1916 - 1925

1914-1917	Clarence D. Hicks
1917-1922	C.H.M. Sutherland
1922-1927	E. Frank Gates



*Santa Monica's first Amistice Day parade, November 11, 1919, passing the corner of Fourth Street and Arizona Ave., opposite from the steps of First Methodist Church.*

# ORDER OF WORSHIP

Sunday, May 29, 1921

Sunday School, 9:45 a. m.  
Preaching at 11:00 o'clock.

Prelude.  
Doxology (congregation standing).  
Hymn.  
Confession of Faith (standing).  
Prayer.  
Responsive Reading.  
The Gloria Patria.  
Worship in Tithes and Offerings.  
Hymn.  
Sermon.  
Hymn.  
Benediction.

Young People's Praise Service.....4:30  
Junior League .....6:30  
Epworth League .....6:30  
Evening Prayer.....7:00

Preaching at 7:30 p. m.  
Song and Praise Service.  
Prayer.  
Worship in Tithes and Offerings.  
Scripture Reading.  
Sermon.  
Song.  
Benediction.

## THIS WEEK Wednesday

Evening Prayer and Praise Service,  
7:30 o'clock.

## SUNDAY, JUNE 5TH

Children's Day Program at 10:30.  
Jesus took the little children up in  
His arms, put His hands upon them  
and blessed them, and handed them  
to us, saying: take these and love  
them in My Name.

Covet earnestly the best things.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* It is suggested that our Church \*  
\* be called the \*

## HOUSE OF HAPPINESS

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* What do you think of the idea? \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## "HE GIVETH MORE GRACE"

He giveth more grace when thy hopes  
are departing,  
He giveth still more, when the trials  
are sore;  
He giveth thee freely when shadows  
are darkening,  
His measureless grace is thy fathom-  
less store,

"He giveth more grace," let it com-  
fort thee ever,  
His "more" is the measure for thy  
every need.  
He "giveth," O take, then, and hesi-  
tate never!  
His grace, thy fulness of blessing in-  
deed.

—Anna L. Linberg.

Only fear the Lord, and serve Him  
in truth with all your heart: for con-  
sider how great things he hath done  
for you. I Sam. 12:24.

"We are debtors to every man to  
give him the gospel in the same mea-  
sure as we have received it."

—Dr. Bresee.

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* PLEASE \*  
\* show this paper to your friends \*  
\* and invite them to come to \*  
\* church with you. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

# The King's Messenger

Vol. 1

Santa Monica, Calif., May 28, 1921

No. 1

As Moses lifted up the serpent in  
the wilderness, even so must the Son  
of man be lifted up: that whosoever  
believeth in Him should not perish,  
but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He  
gave His only begotten Son, that who-  
soever believeth in Him should not  
perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not His Son into the  
world to condemn the world, but that  
the world through Him might be sav-  
ed.

—Jesus.

## ALTOGETHER—FORWARD!

Brethren, I have been thinking,  
praying and planning because the pas-  
sion of my soul is to help build up the  
Kingdom of our dear Master in East  
Santa Monica by increasing the mem-  
bership of our Church, Sunday School  
and Leagues.

It seems to me that this is the op-  
portune time for us to put forth every  
possible effort for a large increase in  
our work. I am encouraged. A fine  
spirit of love is manifest among our  
people and we are working together  
harmoniously. Brethren, whatever  
our pastor's plans are let us all put  
our shoulders to the wheel and by our  
unity, good cheer, zealous service and  
brotherly love increase the member-  
ship of every department of our  
Church.

Yours for God, W. H. Hey.

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear  
the Lord, and depart from evil.

—Prov. 3:7.

## A CALL TO BATTLE

Beyond question the greatest need  
of the present hour is a Spirit led re-  
vival of genuine New Testament sal-  
vation. Our present duty is to humble  
ourselves in prayer before God for the  
outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon  
us. This is imperative. We must  
have earnest prayer—prevailing pray-  
er for the manifestation of God's  
Spirit in and through us. There must  
come upon us a burden that will move  
us to give ourselves to crying out to  
God in secret as well as in public  
prayer for the salvation of the souls

of men. There must be a deep SOU-  
CARE among us. May the Lord in-  
crease our concern until in the agony  
of our souls we will get to the place  
where we MUST see a deep, and far-  
reaching spiritual awakening and  
turning to God. Yea, to where each  
one of us will feel, I must have a de-  
finite part and do a definite work that  
will win several souls for Christ.

Fervent prayer for a spiritual awak-  
ening always leads to the employment  
of means to secure the desired end.  
Each one of us must apply himself as  
never before to the task of reaching  
men with the gospel message. WE  
MUST GO OUT AFTER SOULS. We  
must bring them into our meetings  
and greet them with the warmth of  
genuine Christian friendship. Then  
let us have good GOSPEL singing,  
real GOSPEL preaching and invite  
them to give their hearts to Christ.  
Shall we do this? By God's help WE  
WILL.

From the First UMC archive room, dated 1921

## Chapter 6

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### 1926 – 1935

With the 1914-1918 European nightmare over, the armaments stowed and the national scars healing, the world slowly returned to normalcy. A renewed confidence swept across the U.S., and folks began to relax and have fun after the grim years of war.

It was time to party!

Our sixth decade dawned during what one historian characterized as “An era of wonderful nonsense.” This was the “Roaring Twenties,” a time of flappers, jazz, Model T Fords, the first ever canned food stuffs, and readily available household appliances.

It was the golden age of sports heroes. Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney ruled the boxing ring...Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazen and Bobby Jones were putting golf on the map. In the Bronx, George Herman (Babe) Ruth, a pudgy, hard-living pitcher turned slugger, was the darling of New York Yankee baseball fans.

Ernest Hemingway, Carl Sandburg, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis were among the U.S. writers elevating the art of prose.

And, in the gray morning mists of May 1927, a bold adventurer lifted a puny monoplane off a makeshift runway at Roosevelt Field on Long Island, and flew into glory. Thirty three and a half hours after takeoff, Charles Augustus Lindbergh, put down at Le Bourget Airport near Paris, and wrote himself indelibly into aviation history—the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic. (His plane, built in San Diego, was called *Spirit of St. Louis* because its construction had been financed by investors in that Missouri city.)

Rev. E. Frank Gates, who had been appointed to our church in 1922, had consolidated the gains made in the years since the cessation of hostilities four years earlier. After the end of the strife, Sabbath attendance at the Methodist Episcopal Church was slowly rising—an encouraging sign that spoke volumes for the hard-working, creative pastor.

He contributed much to the membership growth, according to our archives. Among his many gifts was a knack of imparting the Methodist message to civic groups and to the unaffiliated man in the street without appearing to hector or preach. His easy style attracted newcomers to the flock.

He was followed into our pulpit early in 1928 by another of the same ilk, a man who had served us before, Rev. F.G.H. Stevens who, as mentioned in Chapter 3, returned after a gap of 20 years. A tireless, progressive, pastor, he began earnestly to plan for the much desired merger of the two Santa Monica churches—Grace Methodist and Methodist Episcopal. It was a merger that a few people—those few of the more pessimistic persuasion—had already pretty much written off.

The membership roster at both churches was climbing. Grace Methodist records showed around 200 names (up from just about 60 during WWI) and the Methodist Episcopal upwards of 250. The pressure that this impressive post war growth caused on their houses of worship made a union in a combined home well nigh imperative.

Finally, in 1928, the Conference, which had only provisionally sanctioned the merger of the pair years before, gave the sanction official status. The combined congregations would henceforth be known as First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica.

Rev. Stevens and his Grace Church counterpart, Rev. H.B. Sellers, huddled constantly with member groups, seeking their input. They talked at length with civic leaders. They scoured the city for a piece of real estate on which they might build the required double-wide sanctuary.

And always, two questions dominated their deliberations: “How much will a new church cost and how do we pay for it?” Getting the official go-ahead from the ruling Methodist Conference was the easy part—completing the merger would turn out to be something else again.

The two pastors prayerfully believed that they could make preparations to consummate the marriage. But could they? Sadly, the answer was “no” for reasons that had been looming for some months and ultimately made themselves known—and how! Late in 1929, all across the U.S. the decade-long block party was winding down.

The happy sounding “Roaring Twenties,” were limping to an end—and this “era of wonderful nonsense” led into the nightmare of pain and suffering known as “The Great Depression.”

The two churches were forced to put the plan on hold yet again. Sabbath attendance dropped precipitously in the next few years as parishioners struggled to keep their heads above water...and their families fed.

More about our church in the Depression years in the next chapter.



## MINISTERS 1926 - 1935

1922-1927	E.F. Gates
1925-1927	Lloyd J.B. Taber
1927	Harry W. White
1928-1929	William C. Botkin
1928-1935	F.G.H. Stevens

*The Hard Time Party, October 8, 1935*

# Chapter 7

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## 1936 – 1945

The new decade—our seventh—opened in the middle of an economic depression that had brought the nation to its knees. Gone was the “wonderful nonsense” of the 1920s. The jazz music didn’t sound so good any more. Americans changed their minds about buying that Model T Ford they had dreamed of.

People were scared. The fun that they thought would ever end...had ended!

At the turn of the year 1929-1930, the U.S. Stock Market crashed, the victim, some historians claim, of greed among ‘Big Business’ entrepreneurs and a marked lack of concern for the economic welfare of workers.

Although the public at large was not nearly as vested in stock speculation as it is today...employers were. And as the market collapse took a grim hold through the months, it is estimated that \$40 billion was lost by owner/operators.

In the depression years, upwards of 37,000 companies ceased operations. The failures included at least 5,000 banks—large and small—as well as 32,000 manufacturers of a wide range of products, a number of chain stores, and a multitude of small mom-and-pop businesses of every stripe.

Also shuttered for all time, were companies involved in the burgeoning aviation industry, insurers and professional people—no business segment was immune to the curse.

The number of bankruptcies soared—way beyond the norm. So, alas, did the number of suicides.

Besides having run out of money, the failed organizations had one other thing in common: Every one of them added to America’s unemployment rolls. Men and women, many of them savers in the very banks that could no longer return their money, were left with nothing, no prospects and, it seemed to too many of them, no hope.

Building a home for the Grace and Methodist Episcopal Churches became marginally less important to some people than feeding their families.

Church membership fell throughout the country. By 1936, the U.S. had been in the doldrums for more than half a dozen years. The policies of our 32nd president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected in 1933, had begun to breathe life back into the nation, but still there was a long way to go.

FDR’s recovery program—the New Deal—had begun to put idled Americans back to work, building (or rebuilding) roads, dams, bridges, parks, and other public infrastructure projects, even though the jobs were not always what the people were trained for.

An engineer might find himself digging drainage ditches. Or an experienced high school teacher might be found laboring on a construction site. A trained auto mechanic might be obliged to paint road signs. But if many of the jobs were hardly a perfect match for the skills of those filling them, they came with a regular pay check—sometimes the first the worker had seen in many months.

In 1928, with the nation struggling to reverse its economic free fall, Rev. F. G. H. Stevens arrived to take the reins at our church. He could be excused for wondering what he had done to draw the short straw!

But Rev. Stevens (serving his second term in Santa Monica after a 20 year hiatus) was not one to feel sorry for himself or to shy away from the challenges ahead: He welcomed them. He knew that his first goal must be to keep his parishioners focused on God and His promise of a brighter future.

After an initial severe attendance dip in the early years of the Great Depression, signs of recovery—slow but visible nevertheless—encouraged renewed hope for a single sanctuary for the two newly wedded local churches, at last officially called First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica...accent on the word “United.”

Over the years, the Methodists had picked up small plots of land around town, none big enough to finance the longed for facility, but perhaps enough, if sold, to help provide the seed money to kick start the project. Digging deep into their own depleted resources, the parishioners did their part in creating a small nest egg for the church.

Sabbath attendance began to rise, albeit at a glacial pace, and, in 1935, Rev. Stevens, having shepherded his flock through the worst of the economic crisis and into what everyone hoped would be a complete recovery, found himself reassigned elsewhere after a sterling seven year engagement.

He was followed in that same year by Rev. A. Ray Moore, one of whose first sermons at First UMC was a tribute to the church’s 60th anniversary. Many of the listeners that day wore clothing reminiscent of the 1875 period. It is interesting to note that, in keeping with the celebratory theme, the women in the congregation then sat in the rear pews while their menfolk conducted the service—as would have been the case 60 years before.

(Obviously, the women in those pioneer days hadn’t heard of Women’s Lib!)

Amid the slowly growing confidence, though, by the time Rev. Moore took the helm and started dreaming of a new sanctuary, there were already clear indications of new troubles ahead—some years away but no less dispiriting for that.

In 1933, an Austrian born house painter and would-be architect, was named Chancellor and later President of Germany and the skies darkened all over the world. Adolf Hitler was about to initiate a series of land grabs that would lead to another four years of global carnage.

World War I, which was supposed to end all wars, apparently had not!

Like the bloody conflict that went before it, WWII was initially an all-European affair. With his accession to the leadership, Hitler immediately began to flex his muscles, displaying a voracious appetite for more living space for his people—even if it meant stealing it from somebody else.

After months of appeasement by the continent's other great powers he triggered wholesale hostilities with an attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. Such a brazen assault—after a string of broken promises by the German demagogue—finally left Britain and France with no option: Hitler's legions must be stopped.

Eventually no country in Europe was untouched by the war. The U.S. lined up with the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, et al.) and this country's Pacific fleet was attacked by Germany's Axis partner, Japan, on Dec. 7, 1941. (FDR's "...date that will live in infamy.") The U.S. declared war on Japan and Germany declared war on the U.S.

No further elaboration is needed here. WWII destroyed countless lives and came just as this country was digging out from the years of the Great Depression. It did not, however, succeed in squelching the plan to build our long awaited new sanctuary...about which we will talk more in the next chapter.



*Dr. A. Ray Moore, and his wife Mabel*

### MINISTERS 1936 - 1945

1928-1935	F.G.H. Stevens
1936-1946	A. Ray Moore
1940-1942	Roy P. Tucker
1942-1944	John C. Trever
1945	Donald Fellers



*Sunday morning worship during World War II*



*Youth Fellowship Halloween Party, 1939*



*4th and Arizona, church interior, 1940*



*Ladies of the Church Garden Party, (home of Pearl Howland), 1944*



*6th Grade play, 4th and Arizona, 1945*

# Chapter 8

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## 1946 – 1955

At long last, WWII was over. The once terrifying sound of jackboots in the cobblestoned streets of Europe's historic cities was an echo now. Adolf Hitler—he of the Napoleonic goals and the ego to match—would never get to be monarch of all he surveyed.

The world breathed a sigh of relief, nowhere more so than in Santa Monica, which had sent a generation of its young to fight, many—too many—of whom did not return. Their sacrifice and that of millions of others across the globe had made victory possible.

And when the shock and the horror finally passed, people began again to pick up the pieces of their lives. Now it was time to make plans for the Methodist house of worship that had been sidetracked by two world wars and a crippling national economic depression.

Sidetracked, but never abandoned by those who believed in the concept! Not even the excesses of the Axis Powers and Wall Street could cause that.

In a very real sense, this decade marked the start of what we might call the 'modern' era of our church, physically and spiritually. Two wars and the Great Depression had slowed, but not permanently derailed the plan of Santa Monica's Methodists to join hands in a single sanctuary.

In the years immediately after the end of WWII, the leaders and congregations of the Grace and Methodist Episcopal churches (now officially First United Methodist Church) moved ahead with the most important step in the unification program—finding the land and the financing for the construction of a new church building.

Having capably and caringly shepherded the congregation through the years of global conflict, Rev. A. Ray Moore retired in 1946 to be followed for a two-year term by another fine preacher, Rev. Herbert H. Hooper.

Mr. Hooper continued his predecessor's search for a site for a new sanctuary, winnowing the possibilities to produce a short list—a very short list—of 'maybes.'

It was during our next pastor's term that the Methodists realized that the new facility for which they had so long prayed was finally within their grasp. That pastor was Rev. Dr. Kenneth A. Carlson, a man whose name still resonates with some of our longer term members. He was a remarkable man, whose service to us (1948-1960) many of them still recall simply as 'the Kenny years.'

The writer of this chapter asked a few of the 'veterans' who came into Dr. Carlson's sphere as youngsters (remember, he joined us seven decades ago!) for their impressions of the man. Among their comments: "A lovely, loving person...." "One of the best preachers ever to grace our pulpit." Longtime member, Claudia Flanders characterized him as "A force of nature." It needed a man of that stature to bring the dream to reality.

Rev. Carlson and his associate, Rev. Ed Witman, along with longtime member Roy Naylor, the lay leader for six years during the search period, found and negotiated the purchase of our present location at 11th and Washington.

Almost instantly, an appeal went out to members for funds to help move the project along and almost as instantly, the congregation responded generously. Parishioners dug deep quickly and contributed \$85,000—the minimum required to begin construction. And after the work began they kept on giving—an additional \$20,000 plus, applicable to the final cost of some \$250,000.

On October 5, 1952, the symbolic first spadefuls of dirt were turned over by Messrs Carlson and Witman, Bishop James Baker, Rev. Dr. Frank Gates, our former minister, and a number of civic dignitaries. The ceremony was watched by an estimated 700 people.

(If the festivities were noisy and stopped traffic in the surrounding area, there were no complaints. That day, in Santa Monica, *everybody* was a Methodist!)

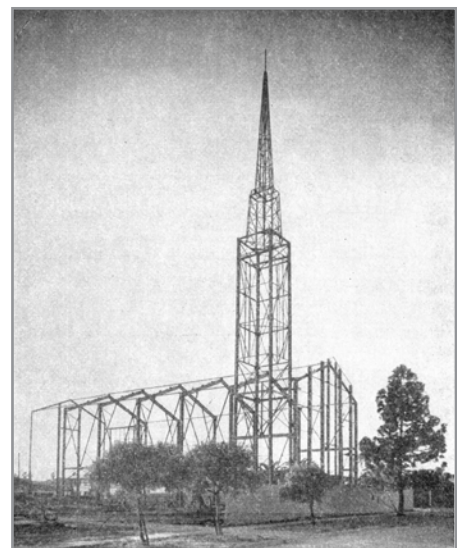
But even before the work was far advanced it ran into a roadblock: In February, 1953, Rev. Carlson was laid low by a heart attack. With its inspiration and its driving force confined to a hospital bed, the dream could have been severely slowed. Not a chance, according to the indefatigable Roy Naylor.

“Rather than the program faltering,” he said in an interview at the time, “this sad event seemed to act as a catalyst for all segments of the church to come together. Tragic days became triumphant days. With Ed Witman and a great band of lay members responding, construction continued on schedule.”

Rev. Carlson was sidelined for eight months. He was fit again when *THE DAY* arrived—November 22, 1953—a day for rejoicing and a day for tears of gratitude for the years spent in worship in the “old” church at 4th and Arizona. It says a great deal about Kenny Carlson that his first sermon upon his return—on the final Sunday in the old church—was entitled “Thanking God for My Heart Attack.” (*More on page 31.*)

To mark the opening of the new 11th and Washington facility the following week, there were five services, all of them well subscribed by a congregation that had now grown to around 2,000. There cannot have been many members who did not attend at least one of those so special services: Some are known to have attended several.

The dynamism and vigor of the church were reflected in a weekly worship turnout that averaged 300 worshipers more than on most Sundays the year before. Between 30 and 40 newcomers were being welcomed each week, and both youth and adult councils were established to support their needs. In the meantime, the structure at 4th and Arizona that had served us so faithfully, continued to serve us as offices for children’s Sunday school, support staff and storage space.



At long last, the new Sanctuary was in operation but all of the physical plant that we take for granted now... the Preschool, the office building, Simkins Hall, the chapel and the rest...was yet to be built. It would be 1955 before the first of these was ready for use.

We will talk more about the rest of that construction program in the next chapter.

## LET GO...AND LET GOD

In his comeback sermon, *Thanking God for My Heart Attack*, mentioned above, Rev. Carlson offered an insight into the human psyche that the writer of this history felt was too inspiring not to be shared with readers... a reminder—and a lesson—from the distant past.

During Mr. Carlson's confinement in a Santa Monica Hospital bed, he was, by his own admission, asking himself the question, "Where did I go wrong?" It seemed to him that he might be ill prepared for the fight back to health. It was then that his cardiologist, Dr. Roy Smith told him, "Kenny, you will have to learn to let go and let God." "Get that," Mr. Carlson told the congregation in his first address after his return to our pulpit. "*Let go and let God*. Suddenly a lot of things I had thought to be important paled into insignificance."

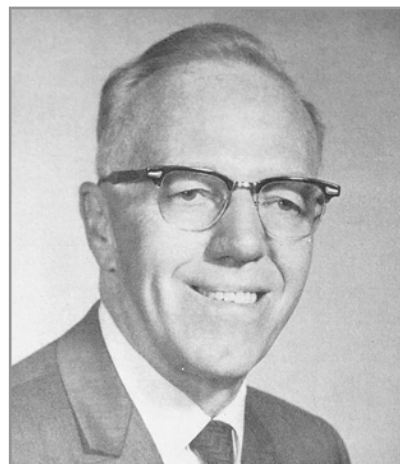
"All that really mattered in the final analysis," he went on, "was my relationship to God and my relationship to my family and friends. That's it." Weeks later, Dr. Smith told a rapidly recovering Carlson, "You're a miracle. It was a Divine Power greater than medicine that did this."

In his anxiously awaited return sermon, Mr. Carlson paid tribute to that 'Divine Power.' "It has done something to my life," he said, "to rediscover that those things about which I have been preaching for 16 years are *real*! Until you and I have made right our relationships with God, family and friends, everything else can wait." "And," he went on, "I am certain that I am privileged to be here today because I was able to Let Go and Let God."

No wonder one longtime First UMC member summed up Rev. Carlson thus: "He was a powerful preacher, was our Kenny!"

### MINISTERS 1946 - 1955

1946	A. Ray Moore
1949- 1955	Ed Witman
1948-1960	Dr. Kenneth A. Carlson



Dr. Kenneth A. Carlson



*Placement of the cornerstone in the narthex, 1953*



*United Methodist women quilting*

## Chapter 9

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### 1956 – 1965

By late 1953, First United Methodist Church was well and truly up and running. The dream of a House of Worship for the combined Grace and Methodist Episcopal congregations had finally come true.

It was a good time to be a Methodist in Santa Monica—at least on Sunday. It was just a teensy bit inconvenient the rest of the week!

For the next two years, while the adult congregants delighted and worshiped in their beautiful new Sabbath surroundings, space constraints dictated that families with young children had to be separated. Sunday school age kids continued to attend classes at the old building on 4th and Arizona while mom and dad worshiped at the new, at 11th and Washington, ten blocks away.

Parishioners who went to the new facility in midweek hoping for a one-on-one meeting with a minister were likely to be disappointed. Our preachers prepared their worship messages and conducted most their business at the old site all week and then delivered their sermons from the pulpit at 11th and Washington on the weekend.

The office staff, likewise, spent weekdays in the old building and then helped supervise Sunday activities at the new. It was by no means a crippling situation, but it was surely burdensome.

The split location comings and goings ended in 1955 (May 22) with the completion of construction of our education building and social hall. The Rev. Kenny Carlson was still the senior pastor, partnered with the Rev. Ed Witman. Both men labored mightily to bring construction of the add-ons to fruition.

But a great deal of the credit for the fund-raising and supervision must go to Rev. Dr. E. Frank Gates, a former pastor of our church (1922-1927). Retired from the ministry by this time, Dr. Gates voluntarily pitched in to help his old charge with an energy that belied the fact that he was an octogenarian. He was instrumental in acquiring the additional land needed for the education/social hall projects and he raised much of the financing needed to see the work through to completion.

In 1957, to honor their patriarch, the Gates family financed the construction of the beautiful chapel that graces the First UMC campus today. The Gates Chapel of Memories has been in constant use for more than six decades for funerals, marriages and a variety of special events.

Sadly, Dr. Gates did not live to see the facility in action. He died three weeks before it was dedicated.

In the issue of the Sentinel following Dr. Gates' passing, Dr. Carlson wrote, "He had the spirit of a Moses, the zeal of a Paul and the trustworthiness of a Lincoln." That was the second time that Mr. Carlson had had to record in the Sentinel the demise of a beloved former pastor.

Just months earlier, our church had lost another good and faithful friend, the Rev. Dr. A. Ray Moore, who had helped it through the bleak years at the end of the Great Depression and the early years of WWII. In marking Dr. Moore's passing, the Rev. Carlson reverted to the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

*"Were a star quenched on high, for ages would its light  
Still downward from the sky shine on our mortal sight  
So when a great man dies for years beyond our ken,  
The light he leaves behind him lies upon the paths of men"*

It was a good time to pause and reflect that none of what we had achieved would have been possible without the selfless lives and labors of the pastors of the past: men exemplified by such as the Revs. Moore, Gates, et al. It behooves us to do so even today, more than 143 years on.

First UMC membership peaked at about 3,000 in the late 1950s. Sabbath attendance often required additional chairs to be strategically placed in the sanctuary and narthex: Even at that there were many standing room only services.

For several years, in an attempt to reach out to as many unaffiliated Santa Monicans as possible who might be persuaded to worship at a nonchurch location, Dr. Carlson rented the Civic Auditorium for Easter services.

A few of his members thought it was an overly ambitious effort. They stopped thinking that way when combined attendance at the two services in the Auditorium hit around 6,000 one Easter Sunday.

It isn't often that a fire in a church pulpit gets a standing ovation. But around that time, we had one!

To be honest, this was no ordinary fire. It was the ritualistic burning of the mortgage, marking the end of the indebtedness of \$865,000 which the church had been forced to assume during its construction spree.

Rev. Carlson held the paid up mortgage, lay leader, Maury Buerge, applied the flame and Perry Widaman, chairman of the church trustees stood happily alongside as the unloved document was consumed in the flames. With such a load off their collective backs, it was no surprise that the symbolic act elicited much applause...and more than a few tears...from those packed into the pews. (Our archives don't tell us if Mr. Widaman was carrying a bucket of water during the ceremony...just in case!)

In 1960, the unthinkable happened. Rev. Dr. Carlson...Kenny...was asked by Methodist Conference officialdom to leave our church for another in Glendale.

The reasons for the proposed reassignment are not entirely clear. It appears from our records to have come in the form of a request rather than as an order. But there can be no question but that it presented Mr. Carlson with an agonizing dilemma. Should he leave a church which he loved and in which he was loved in equal measure, a church that he had done so much to bring to life? In the end, Dr. Carlson made the decision that those who knew him best knew he would make.

Amid tears and expressions of gratitude from his flock, he acceded to his bishop's request and took up his new post in Glendale.

In his place, First UMC got just the kind of dedicated, people friendly minister they needed. He was the Rev. Dr. Daniel D. Walker, who served us for three years and made sure that the church continued its established policies of growth and outreach. He was followed into our pulpit thereafter by another of that ilk, the Rev. Dr. Hayden Sears.

By the mid 1960s, First UMC had prevailed against the odds on numerous occasions over the decades to become a strong voice in Methodist circles. Now approaching its 100th birthday, it was destined for even greater things.



*Rev. Carlson speaking at the ground breaking of the education building.*

## MINISTERS 1956 - 1965

1948 – 1960	Kenneth A. Carlson
1960 – 1963	Daniel D. Walker
1963 - 1965	Hayden S. Sears

## First Methodist Sentinel

Vol. 31 Santa Monica, California, Thursday, March 21, 1957 No. 12

### Gates Chapel of Memories to Be Dedicated at 10:20 Sunday Morning



*Photo by Victor Barnaba*

First Church, Santa Monica, will mark another historic chapter in its long and distinguished history, with the Dedication of the beautiful new *Gates Chapel of Memories* this Sunday at 10:20—between services. The brief ceremony will be out-of-doors, and all Church School Classes beyond the 3rd grade will be dismissed to share in the Dedication.

The Chapel, built at a cost of near \$50,000, is of modern gothic design and completely furnished, including a lovely Kilgen pipe organ. It is the gift of *Dr. and Mrs. E. Frank Gates*, their sons, *Mark and Sam* and families. And it is much to our regret that *Dr. Gates* could not have lived to participate in this wonderful day. The entire membership was greatly saddened by his passing on February 24th. In recognition of *Frank's* distinguished ministry to the church, both as its pastor (1922-27) and active layman, the Board of Trustees has officially named the Chapel the *Gates Chapel of Memories*. It will honor, not only *Dr. Gates*, but also, at his request, "All who have walked and wrought with God in this church."

Participants in the Dedication ceremony, in addition to *Dr. Carlson* and the *Rev. Mr. Witman*, will be: *Fred McNairy* (Chmn. Board of Trustees); *Maurice Buerge* (Lay Leader); *Mrs. E. F. Gates* (representing the *Gates* families), the Caroleer Choir (directed by *Fred Secan* and accompanied by *Luella Engelbrecht*). Special guests will include: *Herbert Goldsworthy* (General Contractor); *Al Davis* (Project Manager); *Orr, Strange and Inslee* (Architects).

A special feature of the Dedication will be the ringing of the CHURCH BELL for the first time by *Mrs. Leah Shetler*, who is the oldest member of the Church, having united here in 1905. The bell, which formerly pealed its churchly tones from the tower of the old 4th and Arizona Church, has now been installed in the present high tower and will centennially relate the old to the new this Sunday.



*Scene from the 1950s*



*More scenes from the groundbreaking of the Education Building*

# Chapter 10

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## 1966 – 1975

It is difficult for some of us to consign this decade, First UMC's tenth, to history. It just seems so recent. Think of the noteworthy events of that period and you may well feel it's almost as though they happened yesterday.

Who among us has forgotten Watergate? Vietnam? The introduction of the world's first supersonic passenger aircraft? Super Bowl I at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (Green Bay Packers 33, Kansas City Chiefs 10...for those who can't recall the final score!) Ronald Reagan became Governor of California, en route to the U.S. Presidency. Muhammad Ali reigned. Nixon went to China. The Sound of Music and Dr. Zhivago each won five Oscars. The Inaugural Special Olympic games took place in Chicago. Bill Gates enrolled at Harvard University. (Wonder how that worked out!) Those busy years are still fresh in the minds of many of us.

So, too, are the First UMC pastorates of the Revs. Dr. Noel LeRoque, who came to us in 1965 and Dr. Paul Woudenberg, who followed him in 1969.

Our church was in vibrant health. Sabbath attendance was on the rise during Dr. LeRoque's tenure: 800-plus for the two services combined was not unusual. The uptrend continued when Dr. Woudenberg inherited our pulpit.

As a short experiment, three Sunday services were offered (the first at 8:45 a.m.) Combined numbers in excess of 900 were recorded but the early bird test run was unsustainable primarily because of the problems of clearing the sanctuary before and after each service.

In 1971, a man died who had given 18 years of his life to First UMC. He was the Rev. Ed Witman, who served as our associate pastor during the church's most exciting times—the years of construction of our present sanctuary who later, after his official retirement as a pastor re-upped for another eight years as our minister of visitation.

In a Sentinel tribute, Dr. Woudenberg wrote of Ed Witman: "He was a courageous minister of Christ, beloved pastor of this congregation and friend of thousands. A saint has walked among us."

The LeRoque/Woudenberg years maintained a steady schedule of 'fun' activities, and introduced us to a variety of brand new ones as well. In no particular order:

Remember Christmases in July? The Bob Baker Marionettes, whose appearances never failed to delight our youngsters? Mother/daughter and father/son evenings? We had special Sunday services honoring couples married for 25 years or more. And we had dinners...Mexican dinners...spaghetti dinners...potluck dinners...Colonial dinners. First UMC members didn't ever need to go hungry: It was doubly enjoyable to eat in the social hall while learning the message of Christ's teachings at the same time.

Motivated, perhaps, to take off the poundage packed on while enjoying those frequent dinners, some members of the congregation organized an exercise class for early morning workouts. The task of supervising (and participating in) the stretch-and-bend sessions fell to the Rev. Chuck Anker, who joined us in 1971, exactly one year before a third preacher, the Rev. Milt Weishaar, joined the team.

(We're betting that Chuck Anker got the exercise gig because he was the youngest of the trio!)

Toward the end of Dr. Woudenberg's tenure, the congregation greeted a series of guest speakers on three successive Lenten dinners. We had no way of knowing it at the time but one of the "guests" would stick around for the next 23 years. He never outlived his welcome.

He was the Rev. Donald J. Shelby, a visitor from St. Mark's United Methodist Church in San Diego, who would return a few months later to take over from the departed Rev. Woudenberg, recently reappointed to the Methodist Church in Carmel. He would grace our pulpit as our senior pastor until 1998. If that 1974 guest appearance was some kind of an audition...I guess you could say he got the part!

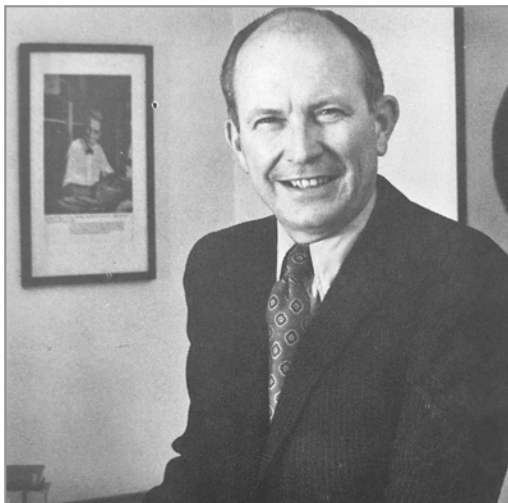
What a propitious time it was for him to take over as our senior pastor. 1975 was our centennial year! It was, in every way, an exciting year to be a First UMC member.

Mr. Shelby quickly established himself as a popular advocate of the "Yes we can..." school, which was just as well, because his tenure with us would include such challenging events as the birth of Upward Bound House (*more in Chapter 12*), a massive refurbishment program of the church buildings, and an earthquake years later that did huge damage to the church property.

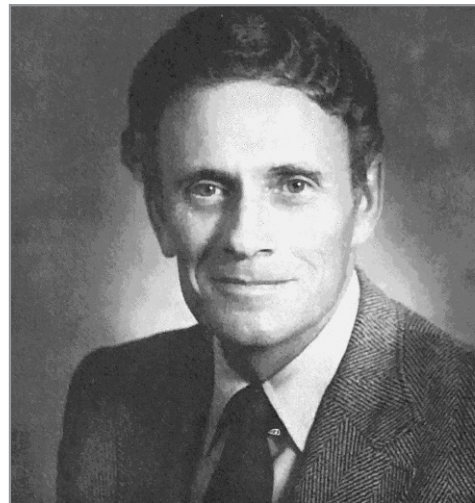
We'll talk more about those last two events later.

Meanwhile, in celebration of our 100th birthday, the church's leaders coined a motto which said so much about our journey...a motto to carry us through into our second century and beyond. It was...

## **Cherish the Past...Rejoice in the Present...Challenge the Future**



*Rev. Paul Woudenberg*



*Rev. Don Shelby*

# Chapter II

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## 1975 – 1998

*(In the interest of clarity, the author of this history has chosen in this chapter to combine the major events of the memorable 23-year pastoral service of Rev. Don Shelby)*

**Cherish the Past...**How could we do otherwise, after a century in which our church prevailed against each and every roadblock placed in its path...100 years in which the Methodists of Santa Monica often seemed beaten down only to rise victorious against the odds. If any 100 year old institution could be said to have a past worth cherishing surely it was ours.

**Rejoice in the Present...**Sabbath attendance was consistently high. We had strong leadership, both ministerial and lay. Our stature in Methodist affairs was growing...locally and nationally. It wasn't hard to rejoice in being a member of First UMC at the start of our centennial year.

**Challenge the Future...**We had prospered despite wars, economic downturns, and sundry other obstacles. Challenges were nothing new to us, didn't scare us. Now it was time to challenge ourselves!

Our first self-imposed task arose, innocently enough, from a conversation and a walk through of the premises by Rev. Shelby and Lay Leader Bob Wilson...just to get a feel for the physical plant and perhaps find places where it might be improved.

It was intended to be one of those "Don't you think that could use a lick of paint..." and "What if we built this up a little..." kind of conversations. But by the time these two friends parted company that day, they had set in motion an ambitious plan for a project that would mean a gigantic challenge for the church...nothing less than a major face lift for the entire First UMC property.

Major? The cost estimate for what became known as the Church Beautiful project was a whopping \$500,000. Some people gulped and argued that that was a lot of money to spend on a building not yet 25 years old.

By and large, though, members recalled that this church had raised gobs of money for worthwhile projects before. And most of them felt that the Church Beautiful effort was just that...a worthwhile project! They...and Messrs. Shelby and Wilson...might have thought twice had they known of the unpleasant discovery that lay in store: a discovery that brought the normal operations of the church to a cruel standstill for many months. (We'll talk more about that later!)

Quickly, a task force was formed to flesh out in detail the embryonic Church Beautiful proposal. The group's mandate was clearly understood from the start, was to create a master plan for nothing less than a total restructuring of much of the property...a master plan for the future.

The group comprised of Rev. Shelby, several lay members, and outside professionals in the fields of architecture and engineering. It took them about a year to formalize their proposal, which was then put to the congregation after which, in May 1977, an appeal went out for funds. It was felt that the half million dollar estimate would be sufficient to cover both Phase 1 (the education, social, office buildings) and Phase 2 (the sanctuary.)

Response to the first pledge drive brought in \$360,000, enough to begin work on Phase 1 in April 1978. But by the time just that one part of the job was finished, inflation and cost overruns had risen to \$550,000 and a second pledge drive was launched! (In the second and, later, a third appeal, some members doubled and even tripled their initial contributions, adding about \$250,000 to the sum required.)

That generosity and other pledges brought in enough to enable us confidently to make a start to the sanctuary overhaul...estimated to be not more than a six month job.

And then it happened! Workers were blindsided by a project threatening find in the lining of some of the sanctuary walls: asbestos! The Church Beautiful effort screeched to a halt.

Routinely and legally installed in new construction for decades in the past, primarily as a sound deadener and insulator, asbestos was by then known to cause cancer in humans exposed to it. And federal law required that every scrap of the threat must be removed before the room could be made fit for human habitation again.

It was a job, of course, that could only be done under strict conditions by highly-trained hazardous materials (Hazmat) specialists. The Hazmat professionals, who worked each day covered from head to toe in white protective clothing, were not only trained to the nth degree, they were courageous, meticulous... and expensive!

For the foreseeable future...more than a year...the sanctuary was closed for repairs, off limits to all, and the Sabbath services were moved to the social hall. Encouragingly, attendance remained high, despite the inconvenience.

We will draw a veil over the details of the months while the work went on. Suffice it to say, that a Church Beautiful Campaign budgeted, initially at \$500,000, eventually cost closer to \$1.6 million! (In the end it took yet another fund-raising effort and a bank loan to settle the tab!)

But what a sanctuary it left us with!

As soon as the loathsome wall lining was removed, the existing elliptical ceiling arches were replaced by the contemporary high arches that we have today. Massive oak trim was used to accent the arch bases...the pews were refinished and upholstered...Italian marble gave the nave and the altar area, what a consulting architect called "an everlasting look"...new carpeting was installed throughout ...lighting and acoustics improvements were a priority...nothing was overlooked.

The comfortable, eye-catching surroundings that we enjoy each Sunday we owe, in large part, to that lengthy Church Beautiful campaign of more than 30 years ago. The future looked rosy. But Mother (Father?) Nature still had an unwelcome surprise...and a test...for Rev. Shelby and associate pastor, Rev. Charles "Chuck" Wiggins, his good friend and former colleague from St. Mark's Methodist in San Diego, who had joined us as Associate Minister in 1976.

The unwelcome surprise came like a bolt from the blue in the early hours of January 17, 1994. It lasted only 30 seconds, a temblor measuring 6.8 on the Richter Scale that caused several deaths and massive damage to physical plants throughout the Los Angeles basin, not to mention fear and trembling in the populace.

Within an hour of the shake, several dozen members of the congregation, including a couple of structural engineers, an architect and other construction specialists—all unbidden and simply concerned for their church—were on the scene to determine what, if any, damage, had been done to the sanctuary and the surrounding facilities. Their findings were disheartening, to say the least.

- A short stretch of the roof line at one end of the sanctuary was open to the sky.
- Deep fissures were found in some walls...especially those in the Education Building.
- Virtually every pane of glass in the complex had been shattered, leaving ankle deep broken glass throughout.
- The brick and plaster walls in the organ bay were heavily damaged.
- Books and papers, pots and pans, dishes, drawers and kitchen utensils were scattered everywhere.

But there was good news, too, according to engineering experts. The sturdy steel frame of the buildings with their reinforced concrete and brick supports had helped protect them from more severe structural damage. It would be safe to continue worship services in the sanctuary...except for the balcony area over which the roof was still thought to be “questionable.”

(One can’t help wondering if “The Church’s One Foundation” was the processional hymn the following Sunday.)

Rev. Shelby found another ray of sunshine in that otherwise bleak day. “We must thank the Lord that this earthquake hit in the early hours of a Monday morning and not during a worship service,” he said while reviewing the damage, “or there certainly would have been multiple injuries and possibly even deaths.”

It took six months to repair the damage at a cost of about \$450,000. The funding came from such diverse sources as UMCOR (\$106,897), our own Methodist Foundation (\$80,000), a small, but deeply appreciated donation from the 200 member Bethlehem United Methodist Church in far-off Jonesville, South Carolina (\$1,268), the First UMC congregation (\$70,000), and the Small Business Administration (\$250,000...a low-interest loan, of course.)

For the next few months, congregants had to pick their way past piles of building materials, tools and scaffolding to get to the pews, and the balcony remained off limits. Small wonder that there were huge sighs of relief, tears of joy, and great celebration when normal service was resumed in July.

Throughout the Northridge ‘quake ordeal, Revs. Shelby and Wiggins proved themselves well equipped, through faith, prayer, cooperation and hard work to lead the congregants of First UMC through any challenge. And to come up with one of their own.

That challenge is what we know now as Upward Bound House, a major outreach idea that first surfaced in 1986 and did not become the glorious fact that it is today until near the end of Rev. Shelby’s second decade of service to this church. In 1998, Rev. Shelby retired and handed over the First UMC baton to a pastor entirely capable of maintaining the church’s growth and community outreach efforts.

She is Rev. Patricia Farris, our first-ever senior pastor from the distaff side whose preaching talents we have been privileged to enjoy for more than two decades. We'll take up the story of her arrival, the growth of Upward Bound House and a number of innovative First UMC programs, in the next chapter...and perhaps learn what challenges she may have in store for us!

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST SENTINEL

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 1008 ELEVENTH STREET, SANTA MONICA, CA 90403

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Serving since 1875

March 21, 1998

## The Rev. Patricia Farris Appointed to Senior Minister Position at FUMC



**Patricia Farris**

California-Pacific Conference Bishop, *Roy I. Sano*, has announced the appointment of San Diego District Superintendent, *the Rev. Patricia Farris*, to the position of Senior Minister at FUMC Santa Monica.

Ms. Farris will succeed *the*

*Rev. Donald Shelby* effective July 1, 1998. Don Shelby's last day in our pulpit will be Sunday, June 14.

Prior to her appointment as District Superintendent in 1995, Ms. Farris served as pastor of United University Church in Los Angeles. She served as pastor of Alondra Park UMC from 1982 until her appointment to United University in 1988.

After earning her B.A. at Carleton College in Minnesota, Ms. Farris graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1977, and served for a time in the Campus Ministry of the University of Delaware. She was ordained a Deacon in 1976 and an Elder in the United Methodist Church in 1980, and has served on local, national and global church committees, boards and delegations.

Ms. Farris is married to *David Bremer*, an Associate Professor and Director of Special Programs at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles.

## Scholarships Available to College Students

### Methodist Foundation

Each year, our college-bound and continuing college students have the opportunity to apply for scholarships administered by the Methodist Foundation.

The Loans and Scholarships Committee wishes to inform students active in the life and ministry of FUMC Santa Monica that applications for the Foundation scholarships will be available in the church office after April 5. Completed applications are due in the church office on May 15.

### Methodist-Affiliated Schools

Students who will be going to Methodist-affiliated colleges or universities should contact Loans and Scholarships Chairperson, *Alex Brideau*, 453-4834, for application information about scholarships available through our local and national Conferences. These applications are due by April 15, so please contact Alex as soon as possible if you are interested.

*From the 1998 Sentinel archives*

# Chapter 12

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## 1998 - 2018

In 1998, Rev. Donald J. Shelby hit the retirement trail and Rev. Patricia Farris donned the mantle of Senior Pastor at First UMC. She came to us well credentialed after a 20-year ministerial career that saw her service churches in Gardena and Los Angeles, later becoming the San Diego District Superintendent before taking up her new position here. Over the years she had earned a reputation as a fine preacher...a reputation that she has confirmed with First UMC in the last two decades-plus.

Our trust in God, she has preached, must embolden us to **Be the Hope**...hope for our community, with all of its vexing needs, hope for world peace, hope for a world free from bigotry and hate. That message...our message...which has become First UMC's unofficial motto...is clearly visible from both outside and inside our church facility. Carried proudly on the pillar alongside the path to Simkins Hall, on the sanctuary wall hangings, and on various pieces of literature disseminated by First UMC, that inspiring motto is a reminder to us all.

Her unwavering support of Upward Bound House (UBH), a two-part construction program to provide transitional housing for homeless families with children (Family Place), and low cost apartments for seniors (Senior Villa), both located on 11th Street directly opposite the church, illustrates vividly just how keenly she felt the need to provide hope for some of Santa Monica's less privileged.

Phoenix, Arizona born, Rev. Farris took over the reins in Santa Monica shortly before ground was broken for the second phase of UBH, the ambitious project first advanced as a missional objective by Rev. Shelby as far back as 1986.

When first proposed, UBH was not without its critics. Some members felt that we would be required to surrender too much valuable land (our old parking lot) on which the facility would be built and/or that we would have to lay out too much money to finance the construction.

*(Note: For the record, apart from a little seed money from the church coffers, Upward Bound House was financed through grants from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of California, the City of Santa Monica, and several banks and private foundations.)*

The two-pronged community effort was approved at a specially called Charge Conference in August, 1990. A handful of members left First UMC in protest, while others stayed put but refused to accept any kind of planning assignment.

Despite the initial pushback, eight years later, by the time Rev. Farris took office, Family Place (Phase 1) was functioning smoothly after a few early wrinkles that had had minimal impact on First UMC's normal activities. Unfortunately, the construction of Senior Villa on the church-owned parking lot would be somewhat more problematic.

For an entire year, while three levels of underground parking were built on the site, congregants were obliged to drop their cars in a lot on the corner of 11th Street and Santa Monica Boulevard and ride one of two shuttle buses that were scheduled to depart to and from the church every few minutes for half an hour before and after services.

Such an arrangement should work well enough...on paper. In practice, it was clearly inconvenient, sometimes not wholly reliable, and too often spelled frustration and ruffled feathers for the churchgoers it was intended to serve.

People who arrived at the shuttle lot too close to scheduled departure might be in time to wave goodbye to the bus as it disappeared onto 11th Street. The departures didn't always go strictly by the timetable. And sometimes a shuttle bus became so heavily laden that it was obliged in the interest of passenger safety to leave some would be riders behind for the moment.

*(Writer's note: Predictably, there was at least one Sunday on which the driver of one of the coaches failed to show up for work at all, thereby putting the to-and-fro schedule of the other bus completely out of whack. Imagine, if you can, the frustration that day of the delayed congregants. I can. I was one of them!)*

Inevitably, the effect of the inconvenience was to turn some people away from First UMC in favor of more easily accessible churches where, one assumes, they remained. We know they didn't all come back to our church. Others, it is probably safe to say, simply stopped going to worship services at any church. All we can say for certain is that our Sabbath attendance suffered.

Those who persevered can now hail the success of Upward Bound House, our ambitious, if initially controversial, community outreach program. The entire project was completed in April 2000...parking lot and all!

Showing her generosity of spirit, Rev. Farris invited Rev. Shelby, the man whose vision started the UBH ball rolling 14 years earlier, to attend the dedication ceremony and to preach that day. A bronze plaque of Mr. Shelby's face now adorns the wall on the approach to the elevator in front of Senior Villa.

The latest available figures are a clear indication of the continuing success of the community outreach venture.

Since its inception, Family Place has served as a stepping stone to eventual self-sufficiency by no fewer than 1,400 families, including 2,600 children. And Senior Villa is the home to 90 residents occupying the facility's 60 one-bedroom apartments. These are impressive numbers, indeed.

What a pity finding a parking spot for parishioners was not Rev. Farris' only challenge. There were others, more subtle perhaps, but every bit as real with which she has tussled ever since.

The problem that confronted her was not of the financial or bricks-and-mortar variety. We had no major debt. She had the confidence of strong lay leadership. Over all, First UMC was healthy.

But...there's always a 'but' isn't there... statistics showed that the public's worship habits were changing. To one degree or another, in virtually all denominations, all across the country churches, faced the same problem...and still do: Dwindling attendance.

Sabbath participation has become, for some, a twice a month experience, or less...even among those who consider themselves to be 'regular' churchgoers. Nobody can say definitively why that is happening, but there are clearly multiple factors and just as many theories.

Some observers feel that, in the growing number of families in which both mom and dad work all week, the temptation to rest on the Sabbath has become all but irresistible. Others suggest that it is becoming ever more difficult for parents with active young children to make room for weekly worship due to the time demands of the athletic interests of their youngsters.

Some parents are finding their Sundays held hostage by their kids' soccer and baseball and basketball and other sports activities, which at one time took place primarily on Saturdays, but which now have become Sabbath affairs, as well. Consequently, game schedules frequently conflict with the posted worship hours and if you've ever tried to tell a pre-teen or a teen (*especially* a teen!) to put his cleats back in the closet because Sundays are church days, then you know how that goes!

First UMC has no magic bullet against the trend, which has continued to manifest itself over the last 10 or 15 years. We have to some extent, *arrested* the trend but not completely reversed it.

How do we regrow the attendance rolls?

One answer, according to Rev. Farris, is to be flexible, to innovate in order to better respond to the community's changing needs and to offer as many varied opportunities for families and individuals to worship.

Two relatively recent additions to the already extensive First UMC calendar—simple church and Messy Church—are proving to be at least modestly successful, and may be taken here as just a small example of how to begin to (re)build a following.

Rev. Farris and her associate for the last ten years, Rev. Robert English (best known in Santa Monica as Pastor Robert and recently relocated to a new charge in Cincinnati), devised the new programs during their weekly "brainstorming" sessions. As pastor for New and Emerging Ministries, Rev. English oversaw the operation of both.

- **simple church** is just that...a low-key worship service in our Gates Chapel on Sunday evening heavy on audience involvement, on prayer, on hymn singing, and on moments of reflection. The message, in the soothing poetry of The Bible, is sometimes read aloud from the pew by a member of the congregation. Sometimes, a parishioner will offer his or her own inspirational account of his or her faith journey. In format, simple church is unlike the conventional Sunday morning worship service. But it offers those who may not be able to attend early in the day, an opportunity to participate in the life of First UMC nevertheless. Some members choose to take part in both services. And there are welcome signs that some have introduced their friends to the experience.
- **Messy Church**...is kind of hard to describe. It has to be seen to be believed! It is a family service in Simkins Hall and the Chapel, probably best summed up in the words of Pastor Robert, who said, "So what if the kids get paint on their hands as long as they're having fun?" Messy Church is a time for families to listen to stories of God's love while enjoying games, music, arts and crafts, making and flying paper airplanes. And finger painting (hence Pastor Robert's "So what...?")

Helping to foster the growth of such "new" programs as these is Tricia Guerrero, our Pastoral Associate for Family Ministries. The title says it all..."Family" Ministries. As such Tricia is deeply involved with our

youngsters. Watch her in action in her pre-Sunday school services address to the children at Sabbath service. Sometimes it becomes more of a two-way exchange (often hilarious) than an address and Tricia's joy in these young people shines through! Her charge is to keep their young minds involved and she does that through her work on Sunday school programs, through Messy Church and anything else that even hints at enticing children and their parents into the First UMC flock.

These two innovations will not, in and of themselves, reverse the trend toward declining Sunday morning attendance. But Rev. Farris sees them as the latest baby steps in helping promote growth, especially among Messy Church participants, many of whom are enrolled in our Preschool. "Parents see their small children enjoying the Messy Church experience and invite their friends and neighbors with small children to join in," she noted. "There are signs that it's working...and that some of the newcomers start to attend church services as well."

Rev. Farris takes comfort in the fact that First UMC does not suffer as much membership erosion as some others. "We're holding our own," she said. "We're matching pretty much what is happening in most other churches and doing better than many of them."

In the meantime, anybody genuinely interested in being involved in a church experience would do well to study First UMC's jam-packed catalog of activities.

To go into great detail of every opportunity for worship and service that First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica offers its members would require a history book twice as long as this one. There does not appear to be much missing.

In absolutely no particular order here are thumbnail sketches of just some of the congregational efforts that help keep First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica ticking over and in the forefront of churches throughout our area.

Highly skilled and motivated *Finance and Investments Committees* attempt to use our money to the best effect.

An active and ever willing *United Methodist Women* group stands by always ready to help out in organizing fund raising events, the income from which is available to the church for specific purposes. The benches outside the sanctuary and Simkins Hall, for example, were financed by UMW which also recognizes graduating high schoolers with a luncheon and a small scholarship donation each year.

*Men's Breakfast and Bible Study*...every Tuesday at 7 a.m. a group of bleary-eyed early risers meet in the Fireside Room to break bread and to study and discuss a preselected passage from The Bible. The popular event was chaired until his relocation by Rev. English. The study group is now in the hands of our new pastoral associate, Nathan Oney. (On several occasions when Pastor Robert was unavailable, the sessions were very capably moderated by David Bremer, who comes by his interest in First UMC very naturally: He is Rev. Farris' husband...and a tenor in our chancel choir.)

A team of *Trustees*, many of them with engineering, architectural, or construction backgrounds, is always on hand to do smallish jobs around the First UMC campus, and to supervise the big jobs that require specialized skills beyond their competence. (A notable recent example was the repair and re-facing of our church steeple supervised by our member, Anson Nordby, who was sometimes seen way, way up there making certain the work was being done properly.)

The *Prayer Quilt Ministry*, a corps of needle-talented First UMCers, in operation since 2003, transform squares of cloth into the most elegant and colorful quilts, threaded with strings and presented upon completion to those in special need of prayer. The congregation is invited to tie knots in the strings, and to pray for the intended beneficiary in hopes that he or she will find comfort in the knowledge that somebody remembers...and cares. (*Writer's note: As a former recipient I can vouch for the fact that the solace afforded by such quilts is very real.*)

The *Missions Council's* mandate is to support First UMC's wide-ranging missional efforts both locally and globally. The Third World Hand Arts Fair, for example, brings into our Simkins Hall every year, a supply of handcrafted items from developing countries. All of the proceeds from our purchases go to benefit the creators of these beautiful pieces. The council also promotes an Alternative Christmas Fair in aid of such diverse causes as Habitat for Humanity, "Actions of the Heart," a Central Asia Mission, the UCLA Wesley Foundation, and many more.

The *Health Ministry Council* works with the church staff on programs designed to promote physical, spiritual and mental well-being and healing among First UMC members through blood pressure readings, flu clinics, CPR training and more. Critical to that effort is our Congregation Care Associate, Anne Premer. Anne's role is to ensure that those who are unable to attend church services because of illness or injury or simply because of advancing age do not "fall through the cracks," as she puts it. Her program...often, but not always, tailored to the needs of the elderly...features home or hospital visits, in-home communion services to shut-ins, advice on healthy aging and on assisted living organizations. "We want to make it clear to everybody," she says, "that, even if they're prevented by age or illness or other personal circumstances from attending Sunday services, they are nevertheless a part of the life of First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica. We do what we can to take as much of the life of the church to them."

The *Music Program* and the *Preschool*...two vital aspects of First UMC's life are highlighted separately in this book (pages 45 and 47). Those programs mentioned above are part of a dizzying list of opportunities for congregational participation. There are many more.

*Habitat for Humanity...Loans and Scholarships Committee...the Haiti Mission...Summer Science Camps...*we could go on...and on...and on. But we won't. We use the few examples above to illustrate a point: Virtually all of those efforts are managed by lay people, operating with the minimum of involvement of the clergy. "Their activities are a source of pride to me," Rev. Farris said. "It used to be that there would be some committee meeting just about every week which required the attendance and the oversight of one of the pastors. Not anymore. The members themselves now are planning and implementing programs, sometimes without a great deal of input from us."

Rev. Farris gratefully acknowledges the contributions made to the church's well-being by a lean and motivated office staff under the watchful eye of Christina Eddy, our energetic and astute Business Administrator, a CPA and an MBA (from Notre Dame De Namur) who has served in her 30-year work career in a wide variety of senior financial management roles and who is now displaying her money magic on behalf of our church.

Rev. Farris is also grateful for the continuing service of all of two retirees, Rev. Larry Young and Rev. Dorothy Bimber Worley, both of whom are ever willing to pitch in help arrange special events, to preach, to counsel, sometimes to travel long distances on behalf of First UMC when demand overcomes the reach of the clergy roster.

Speaking at a previous annual Church Conference, Rev. Farris “borrowed” the words of a contemporary Franciscan blessing, which speaks so eloquently to her faith and her leadership. Here we excerpt from that benediction:

*“May God bless us with a restless discomfort with easy answers....*

*May God bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people...*

*May God bless us with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation or the loss of all that they cherish, so that we may reach out and comfort them...*

*and may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really CAN make a difference in this world so that we are able to do what others claim cannot be done.”*

First UMC has proved over the course of its 143-year history that its members *do* have a restless discomfort with easy answers. We are angered by injustice, oppression and exploitation of people. We *do* have tears to shed for the oppressed and the hungry. Now may God make us foolish enough to believe that we really *can* make a difference in this world.

Then, and only then, can we fully embrace Rev. Farris’ oft-preached exhortation to...

# Be the Hope



# Chapter 13

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## 2018 - 2025

The period leading up to our 150th anniversary, might aptly be called “the Covid years.” Our church, already fighting to reverse a steady decline in worship service attendance (*See previous chapter*) found itself facing a new, and distinctly 21st century, challenge—Covid 19.

We all remember its terrifying impact on the nation, don’t we? An airborne virus, relentless and no respecter of person, like a ravaging beast it terrorized residents throughout Southern California and indeed, the entire country. Overnight, the disease, which killed indiscriminately and whose origin is still open to debate, changed our lives forever.

Masking became the order of the day along with such preventive measures as crowd-size restrictions, quarantines, stay-at-home advisories, followed by mandatory lockdowns and curfews in some places. And who can forget the selfless efforts of thousands of overworked, exhausted Covid-fighting first responders and hospital personnel? The hitherto unknown virus hit hard...and it hit everywhere...in businesses, schools, factories and farms, in restaurants, theaters and sports stadia from Southern California to the northern shores of Maine, from Florida to the Pacific Northwest states.

*Houses of Worship—just like ours—were in no way exempt from the pain.*

In the 15 decades since Rev. J.D. Crum delivered his first sermon to a handful of believers in the loft of a hardware store, this church had been tested (but never bested) by a wide variety of threats. It survived the effects of two world wars, a couple of recessions, assorted earthquakes, asbestos lurking in the sanctuary walls and, more recently, the horror of weeks of uncontrollable wildfires around our area. There surely were times over the years when First UMC members must have wondered “What’s next? A plague of locusts?”

The locusts never came: Covid did, and we discovered, as did the rest of the world, that this was a different kind of opponent. After everything Santa Monica’s oldest church had survived in its proud history, it was forced to defend itself from a merciless, invisible invader seemingly bent on bringing it down. The effects of the virus threatened to be more lasting than those of all of the challenges that First UMC had beaten back in the past. For long, frightening years there seemed to be no way to escape its malignant grip. Try as we might, this challenge could not be fended off as some others had been.

In wartime, the nation first identified the enemy and planned how best to overcome. In times of economic recession, sufferers hunkered down and prayed until better days returned. Earthquake damage was always assessed and repaired. Toxic asbestos hidden in the sanctuary walls was (with great difficulty) removed. And, although the memories and the memorabilia of home and family are irreplaceable, wildfire ravaged homes can...and will...be rebuilt.

But Covid did not allow for such happy endings. The scourge, first detected here sometime in 2019, was officially recognized by the World Health Organization as a pandemic the following year. Its arrival knocked church attendance for a loop. And it gave birth to a form of worship new to First UMC.

On the premise that if the congregation couldn't go to church, the church would go to the congregation... online by way of Livestream and social media. The switch from in-person to online services was accomplished in just seven days.

Our sanctuary was closed as a safety measure for eighteen long Covid-weary months (March 22, 2020 until September 12, 2021) while a Livestream service was transmitted each week. During those months, health authorities mandated that not more than seven people "essential to the creation of the online product" be allowed in the sanctuary...and only for the minimum time required to perform their allotted tasks. It was a harrowing, surreal time for the participants.

Rev. Patricia Farris recorded her sermon each week...on *Saturday morning*...to an empty sanctuary...the music was heard by only a handful of technicians...the prayers, like everything else...were pre-recorded. Then the whole package was connected together for transmission on the Sabbath.

The successful transition to the world of Livestream worship was made a little easier by the fact that the church already had some of the required equipment in place, fortuitously purchased to begin exploring the online world for Mid-Week Recitals and worship, without awareness of the ordeal to come. Rev. Farris noted that we were blessed to have a team of talented staff and volunteers, led by uber-techie Adam Guerrero, to quickly effect the turnaround from in-person to online services. Guerrero and his tech-savvy team still are much involved in the Livestream service preparation each week, appearing on Facebook, the website and our First UMC app!

Eventually, as the efforts of the country's best medical/scientific brains and pharmaceutical companies, appeared to have reached at least a stand-off with Covid (though its mutations continued occasionally to bedevil pockets of the country...and do to this day) the sanctuary was reopened for its intended use. The return to post-Covid "normalcy" meant returning to a modified kind of service – a very modified kind of service—with a slate of safety measures still in place. And the crowds were slow to respond.

Simply put, people were afraid. They stayed away out of fear of being infected, afraid to mingle even with familiar and beloved pew mates on Sunday. Some showed themselves to be too shook up to leave their homes for any purpose...afraid to do their own shopping...afraid to perform everyday outdoor tasks lest they encounter other people. (In the bleakest days of the pandemic "other people" translated in some minds simply into "possible carriers.")

Our church also worked hard to make sure to care for and nurture our congregation during this challenging time as well as reaching out to new people, engaging all ages in new ways. Staff, church members, and the children's ministry created cards and videos to support and encourage medical workers, first responders, teachers, and our families. We discovered opportunities to serve and be in mission, plus started new groups even while we were offering creative worship opportunities.

Some excellent examples are the Zoom Coffee Hour which often had 15-20 people online, with a weekly topic for discussion anywhere from "your favorite coffee cup" to "how you first came to this church."

Committee Meetings moved to Zoom and to this day, it continues to be a helpful option and way for us to be in community and ministry together regularly. Listening Hearts Women's Group was started in October 2020 by Tricia Guerrero with a Zoom meeting every other week. Now the group meets both online, in person at a coffee shop, as well as occasional backyard get-togethers. Ministries like the Midweek Recital and Men's Bible Study shifted online and have never gone back! Their reach expanded during the time and allows for those not in Santa Monica to continue to connect.

Our children and youth were similarly thought of with care and dedication. Family Ministry Groups, including Messy Church, shifted to Zoom and continued to meet regularly. Jamie Jones and the Sunday School teachers planned weekly online Sunday School lessons for kids ranging from toddler through elementary that were popular and well attended. Jamie also provided a weekly book reading with her dog, Jack that was deeply enjoyed by not just our children members. Tricia, Adam and the Youth Counselors met weekly with the youth group on Zoom and utilized new apps and games to engage the youth in ways that helped them share and reflect on their experiences.

Our church also saw creativity in our ministries finding ways to serve the community. When masks were required, the Prayer Quilt Ministry members began sewing beautiful masks at home which they freely gave away to anyone who needed one. A walking group was formed that met every Sunday morning in the church courtyard, providing an hour of exercise and a chance for fellowship while following guidelines. Staff reached out via telephone to every past and present member, and also continued to provide Pastoral Care by supporting our homebound seniors and those who were particularly vulnerable by matching them with volunteers who helped with grocery shopping, errands, and regular check-ins.

We were tasked with thinking of many of our traditions in new and different ways. At the beginning of what was called "Shelter in Place," we were in Lent with Holy Week coming upon us. Since we couldn't gather, staff created an online Easter worship in the sanctuary as well as a special video in place of our annual sunrise service—with participation from families, youth, and our young adults who were spread across the U.S. We also were able to have new groups help to lead worship, such as when Open Space young adults designed and led the Maundy Thursday worship service in 2021. In summer of 2021, we offered an outdoor service called Worship on the Lawn held on the Courtyard, which ended up being a valued bridge as we looked toward reopening.

After the reopening, masks were required for everybody in attendance. At the same time congregants were requested not to sing aloud although it was suggested that they might safely hum the music provided they didn't uncover their mouths! (Some of our hymns sounded a little odd during that period!)

At various times during the evolution to the new online environment, First UMC worshipers were required to sit six feet away from their nearest pew neighbors. (Couples were allowed to sit together, of course.) For a while, every second row of pews was declared off-limits for still greater separation. That wasn't enough for some members. Many were reluctant to exchange words with friends and neighbors, even from six feet away and in another row.

At long last, after many months, the nightmare that some feared would never end, did. Memories of it never will. By the time Rev. Farris, our longest serving pastor, took retirement in 2024, Covid had pretty much released its grip on the throat of the population. If there was any "up" side to the Covid experience, she found it in Livestreaming.

“I always felt that worship was very much an in-person activity,” she said. “I didn’t give enough thought to the number of people who cannot, for whatever reason, get to church each week. Livestreaming made me realize that we could reach out to them in their own living rooms. It’s not perfect, but it’s much better than not reaching them at all.”

The First UMC Preschool also had to navigate the Covid experience. Led by Preschool Director Dee Menzies and Assistant Director Dane Rold, the Preschool only had three months of closure during Covid. Working together, the teachers, administration and custodial team were able to make sure families felt safe and supported. Their dedication to continuing a quality education with a supportive community has made it possible for the Preschool to celebrate its 77th year this year.

The successor of Rev. Patricia Farris as Senior Minister was Rev. Greg Batson. A new face...but no stranger, he. It was his second spell at this church which he served as an associate pastor between 2000 and 2004. Now, after twenty years in Southern California churches from Burbank to La Mesa, he hailed the appointment as “a homecoming.”

“I figure my career has come full circle,” he said. “It’s as if I’ve come home.”

His arrival brought an additional benefit to First UMC, specifically to our much-admired choir and music department. His wife, Tania, is a professionally-trained soprano with a voice range that allows her also to sing alto. And Mrs. Batson did more than add her vocal talents to the choir. Almost as soon as she arrived in Santa Monica, she joined Rev. Keri Olsen Paget in leading a women’s overnight retreat, a feature of First UMC’s Spiritual Formation Council’s expanding ministry—the kind of participation that she expects to repeat in the future.

Soon after he took over the reins at First UMC, Rev. Batson signed a shared usage agreement which allows the congregation of Palisades Community UMC, who lost their own church to the 2025 fires, to use our Gates Chapel for their weekly services. The Palisadians, sometimes numbering up to 50, begin their Sabbath worship at 11 a.m., just as the host members are enjoying coffee and donuts on the lawn. The Gates Chapel group begins its time of fellowship at noon.

Rev. Batson knew that, inevitably, there would be occasional timing conflicts. But if the two congregations sometimes overlapped, the opportunities for new friendships grew proportionately.

Our new pastor believes he inherited a team to help our church to reach growth and community outreach goals befitting the stature of First UMC. The reasons for his confidence are many.

His team includes Music Director Dr. James Smith and his wife Barbara, the lead soprano for the church choir. They fortuitously shared an anniversary this year with First UMC – their 60th...the church’s 150th.. Also supporting the music ministry is talented Ty Woodward on the organ. Ministry support includes Rev. Keri Olsen Paget, Deacon Associate of Spiritual Foundation, and the industrious Tricia Guerrero, our Pastoral Associate, alongside. Members with health concerns need only reach out to Anne Premer, our Congregation Care Associate, for loving counsel. In the wings, always willing to “pitch in” when needed, are Revs. Larry Young and Dorothy Worley, retirees from the ministry serving for many years with their unwavering support. The church is on solid financial ground, under the diligent oversight of Business Administrator, Christina Eddy. The administration’s commitment and longevity are remarkable by Tina Gage, Sarah Rold, and David Penson, each serving over 10 years and were instrumental during COVID. Membership is holding steady and

the Upward Bound and Senior Housing programs are running smoothly. Rev. Batson believes the church's office staff is the equal of any in the Conference, and better than most.

Rev. Batson steps into our pulpit following a painful rift in the Methodist Church movement worldwide...one that forced a division over the question of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. On one side were the ruling hierarchies and congregations of some United Methodist outlets, (primarily in the southern USA, in Africa and in parts of Asia) whose exclusion policies sought to deny LGBTQ+ people the right to seek ordination and membership. First UMC chose to advocate for the pro-inclusion side.

"It was a question of the philosophy of more conservative churches clashing with that of more progressive churches such as ours." he said.

Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, President of the Council of Bishops, called the settlement of the dispute "a Kairos moment...a catalyst for change." Kairos, she said, refers to..."God's time"...and a season in which "...God's purposes are fulfilled."

*Full disclosure: The writer of this history initially did not recognize the word "Kairos." Thanks to Bishop Smith Malone (and a little help from Google) he now recognizes it as absolutely appropriate to characterize First UMC's position on LGBTQ+ in the global United Methodist movement.*

Now, as First UMC of Santa Monica embarks on a new chapter in its impressive history, with a new hand at the helm and a strong infrastructure in place, this is, indeed...

## God's time...a time for His purposes to be fulfilled.



*Easter Services*



*Tricia Guerrero leading Messy Church*



*Blessing of the Animals has been an annual tradition for over 12 years*



*The 2018 Haiti Mission Work Team with local pastors*



*A community pop-up library was built in 2016 in front of the Education Building, and was blessed by Rev. Patricia Farris and Rev. Robert English*



*Summerfest*



*The Prayer Quilt Ministry working on a Saturday morning in Room 300*



*The Amadeus Handbells*



*Sunday School*



*Christmas Eve Candlelight service*



*United Methodist Youth Fellowship*

## During Covid...



March 22, 2020 - First online only worship



Church Charge Conference via Zoom

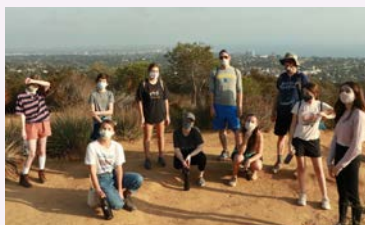
## ...and after Covid!



Participating with our Mission Partners



Adam Guerrero and David Penson working the sound and video boards



The Youth met for hikes



The week-long Messy Camp summer program attracted coverage from NPR in 2024.



Our First UMC Labyrinth docents guide visitors once a month



Red Cross Blood Drive hosted by First UMC



Open Space Young Adult group, and friends



Rev. Greg Batson's first Sunday in worship; with his family



The All Community Theater folks led a coffee hour sing-a-long



United Women in Faith



Women's spiritual retreat in Silverado Canyon



Lenten walking group



Kids Night Out is always a big hit!



Youth Service Project '25



Messy Church continues monthly gatherings for all ages



Annual Scholarship Sunday

## Honoring Associate Pastors

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Over the years, First UMC has been served by a multitude of senior pastors whose contributions to its growth and outreach has given them a deserved place of honor in its history. From Rev. John Delap Crum, our first, in 1875, to Rev. Patricia Farris, the most recent to carry the responsibility, now in her 21st year with us, they have led this congregation's fights to overcome the problems of global wars, natural disasters, economic downturns, homelessness and hunger, challenges of every stripe.

Many of them have found their way into the pages of this book. We gratefully honor them all.

But many of their associates—their seconds in command, as it were—have labored in virtual anonymity. Our archives—dating back, remember, almost 150 years—are largely silent on the identities and the roles played by our associate pastors.

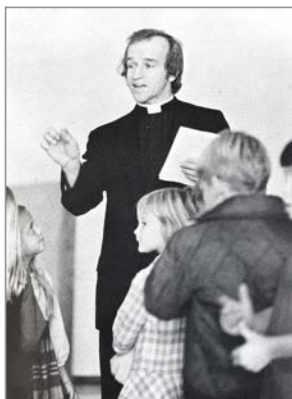
And yet their contributions to our progress have been manifest. It is almost certain that, in the early days, there was no associate pastor designation. Just was certain, though, is that in recent decades, there has been.

In the last few decades, for instance, Kenny Carlson had Ed Witman by his side and Paul Woudenberg leaned heavily on the support of Chuck Anker. Don Shelby had his Chuck Wiggins, and Patricia Farris enjoyed for ten years the support of recently reappointed Robert English.

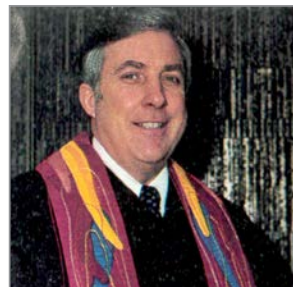
Since our archives do not readily identify the associates of the pre-1950s, let those few mentioned above serve as recipients of the gratitude that we offer to all who have filled the associate pastor chairs on our behalf throughout our history.



*Ed Witman and  
Rev. Kenneth Carlson*



*Chuck Anker*



*Chuck Wiggins*



*Rev. Robert English*

# First UMC Music Department

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First UMC has achieved an enviable status among its peers for a variety of reasons...its sheer longevity, for instance, and for the excellence of its preachers, who in recent history have included such undeniable talents as Dr. Kenneth Carlson, Dr. Paul Woudenberg, Rev. Donald Shelby and the current longtime occupant of our pulpit, Rev. Patricia Farris.

First UMC is likewise admired for its imposing physical plant: its grand and acoustically fine sanctuary...its inviting Gates Chapel...its newly renovated spire and its spacious social hall and office complex. It is also envied for its highly regarded, always wait listed, Preschool.

Besides all of that, one of the aspects of life at this church that strikes regular worshipers and visitors alike most forcefully, is its music program, which, week after week, goes a long, long way to enhance the worship experience for us all, beginning with the uplifting choral anthems, the offertory hymns, solos by wonderfully talented choir members and more.

In Sabbath services and in concerts, we've been treated to everything from *The Magnificat* (Gerald Finzi) to Negro spirituals... from good old Wesleyan hymns to full orchestral concerts... *Requiem* (Maurice Durufle)... the world premiere of *Songs of the Slave* (Kirke Mechem)...weekly free lunchtime recitals by prominent musicians January through May...immensely popular Christmas concerts ...and a lot more besides.

The man who pulls this mouth-watering musical smorgasbord together is our director of music, Dr. James E. Smith, a familiar figure to all in the First UMC congregation. Familiar? He should be: Jim has been doing it for 54 years! (When asked by Rev. Dr. Noel Leroque during Jim's interview in 1965, how long he would be prepared to commit to this church, Jim said, "At least three years...until I finish my doctorate." Well, he finished his doctorate at USC but we got lucky: by that time the church had become so much a part of his life that he has stayed on the job!)

Backed by a fine chancel choir whose section leaders include his soprano wife, Barbara, First UMC's music man has gone on creating lavish programs for organ and choir and sometimes choir and full orchestra. He invites other choirs to join ours in special concerts, and guest instrumentalists (harpists, oboists, guitarists, brass ensembles) to join with our Sunday singers' voices when the occasion demands.

It is not overlooked by Dr. Smith that a large part of the success of our program is organ music and the hugely talented organists we have been fortunate to attract. In his First UMC career, Dr. Smith has worked with some of the best, among them Frank Carter, Charles Echols, and, more recently, Tom Harmon, Catharine Crozier, Christoph Bull and the present occupant of the organ seat, Ty Woodward, to name but a few.

It has also been realized at First UMC that the appreciation and nurturing of music starts at an early age.

For many years, longtime choir member Patty Eskridge doubled as director of our active children's music programs...both the youth choir, whose frequent performances at Sunday services have always been well

received, and the children's choir enjoyed by the youngest members of our congregation. The latter program has been led over the years by Mrs. Eskridge and, later, by a number of First UMC members, most recently Janet Searfoss.

We are fortunate also to be able to enjoy the talents of the Amadeus Hand Bell Choir directed by Mary Crawford. And several times a year our sanctuary echoes to the sounds of the Mark Twain Ringers, a group of Los Angeles area school kids who make their handbells sing in delightful unison, with our fellow First UMC member, Ron Theile wielding the baton.

While it goes without saying that the directors of those groups mentioned are members of our church, volunteering their time to heighten the enjoyment of the worship experience for all of us, the performances of such ensembles are invariably finalized in consultation with Dr. Jim Smith.

For more than half a century we have been treated to a veritable musical feast prepared under the watchful eye of our longtime Music Director, who promised us three years and is still going strong after 54. All of us, church music aficionados and those less well-versed in the genre, owe Jim and our chancel choir, a sincere vote of thanks.



*Family portrait of Jim, Barbara, Robin and Wendi Smith, in 1966*



*Dr. Jim Smith conducting the annual Christmas Concert*



*The 2018 Spring Concert*



*Jim and Barbara in 2025, with Rev. Batson, celebrating their 60th year at First UMC*

# First United Methodist Church of Santa Monica Preschool

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The most exciting thing to happen to First UMC's Preschool in 2017 was achieving the imprimatur of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The accreditation is hard-earned: its standards are high!

Our preschool has been under the most intense scrutiny by the association's experts for a full eighteen months. Its quality has been widely known in the local community for many years. Founded in 1948, the brainchild of a parishioner, Ruth Zimmerman, it continues day after day to burnish its reputation for excellence.

The school is not simply a playground experience for pupils. (Although there is some playing involved...as anybody who has looked to the right while climbing the ramp to the church offices can attest!) No: it is much more.

Under the former leadership of its Director, Batsheva Spector, and a team of dedicated and experienced teachers, our preschool's standards are set high. Its commitment is nothing less than:

- To treat all children of God as deserving of unconditional respect, patience and love...regardless of faith or religious practices.
- To make the school a happy, vibrant, fun, energetic and joyful place.
- To promote and safeguard the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of all.
- To foster a positive, peaceful environment, free from judgment and intolerance.
- To explore, embrace and celebrate our individuality and our differences.
- To treat all with care, cooperation and creativity.

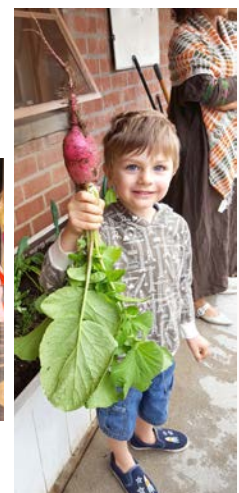
The facility now has a pupil roster of 120...and a longish waiting list. Some parents, impressed by their kids' progress, have themselves become members of the church. (*Note: The writer of this history is one of those!*) Past Director Spector and her staff achieved NAEYC accreditation, and now Dee Menzies, current preschool director (2019-) and her staff continue in the excellence of upholding NAEYC rigorous standards. It's a safe bet that they will spare no effort to ensure that our Preschool will maintain the standards which won it the ranking.



*Early Preschool picture*



*Celebrating 70 years  
in the community*



## Thanks to Archivists

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In compiling the pages of this history, we have relied on, and excerpted freely from, the written accounts and remembrances of many members of this church. We owe a debt of gratitude to such stalwares as Bob Wilson, M.C. “Stritt” Strittmatter, Mary Friedrichsen, Valerie Freshwater, Susan Travis, and others.

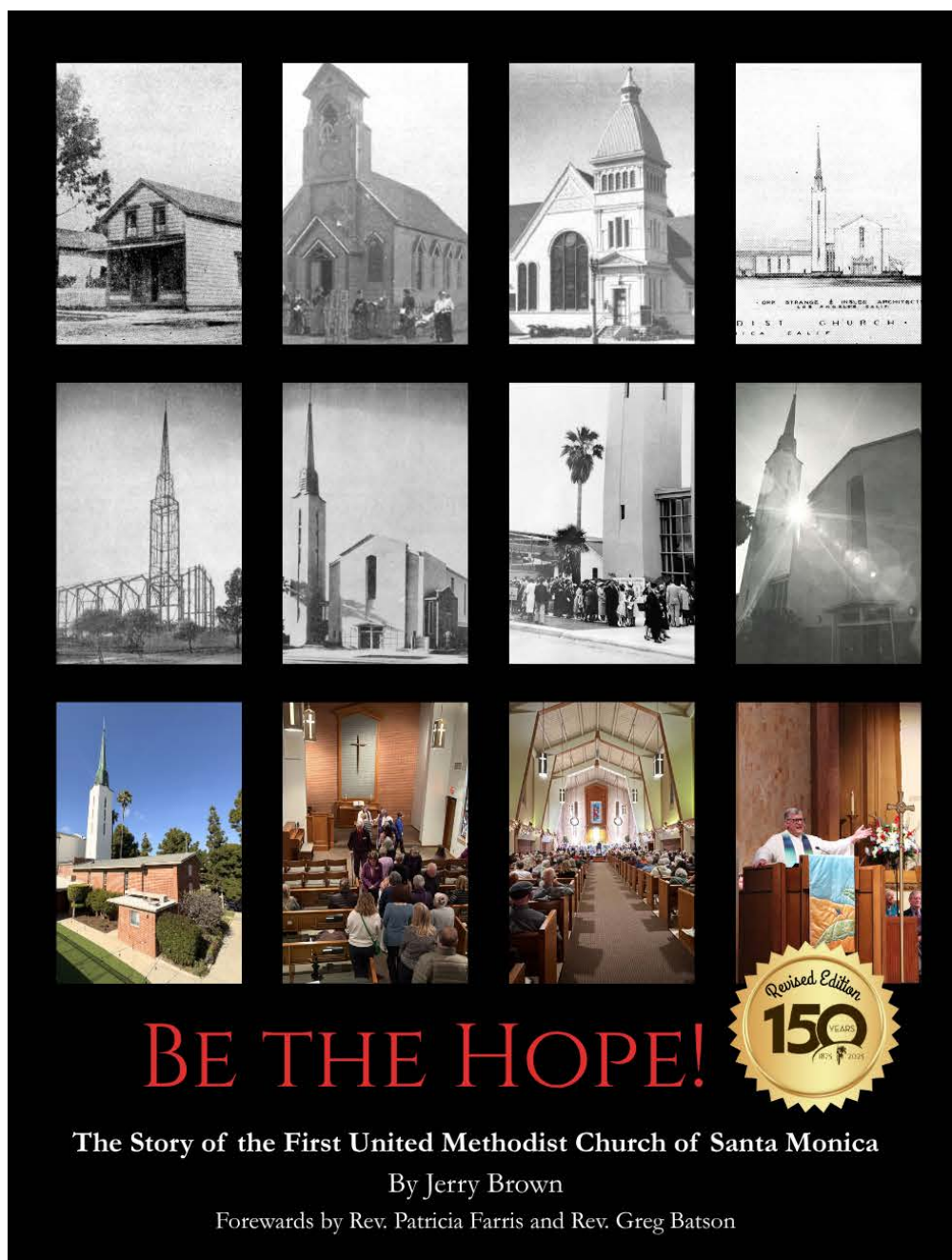
Special mention should be made of our former, longtime chief archivist, Ralph Hedges, who left behind a wealth of historical data.

Our current archivist committee has been of inestimable value in locating much of the more recent information incorporated in this publication. To all we give our sincere thanks.



*A peak into the Historical Records room*





**On the cover:** First UMC through the years: (top row left to right), Early Church at Fourth and Arizona; The First Church at Fifth and Arizona (December 1875); The “Rindge Church”; Detail of the architectural rendering of the proposed 11th and Washington facility; (middle row): The church tower and building framework begin, 1953 (photo by Victor Barnaba); First United Methodist Church is complete, 1953 (photo by Victor Barnaba); Scene from the 1950’s; During the Church Centennial, 1972 (photo by Allan Walker); (bottom row, all 2025) First UMC Chapel/Courtyard; Inside the Chapel; Inside the Sanctuary; Rev. Greg Batson at the pulpit (photo by Emily Payne).

