

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF PILOT MOUNTAIN

### A Brief History

A handful of people believing in Methodism and meeting in a school is a long way back from over 300 members worshipping today in the beautiful structure of First United Methodist Church of Pilot Mountain.

The local church's roots go back even further to pre-Civil War days when Father James Needham rode his horse from hamlet to hamlet in the shadows of the Sauratown and Blue Ridge Mountains, ministering to the religious needs of settlers.

In the late 1880's another Methodist circuit rider, Hardin L. Adkins, had a more direct impact on Pilot Mountain. He was serving congregations including New Hope, Little Yadkin, and Chestnut Grove. Pilot Mountain did not have one.

A man of vision, Adkins realized the needs for better educational opportunities for young people over the entire area. He led a group who appealed to Trinity College, now Duke University, for funds to build a school and selected the little community of Pilot Mountain as its site.

In 1900, Trinity Academy opened its doors to eager young people who traveled for miles and miles, often boarding in local homes.

The Academy building provided a meeting place, and visiting Methodist ministers would hold services there. About 1897, a small Methodist congregation was established under the leadership of the Reverend T. H. Pegram.

Among the charter members were Mrs. R. E. L. Flippin, Mr. and Mrs. John

Green, Mr. Buck Cox, Mr. and Mrs. Wiley Wrike, Mrs. Nancy Gordon and Mrs. Martha Green.

According to a history written by Melba Yount Simmons in 1984, Father Needham visited the Academy and preached the last sermon of his life on March 12, 1899. He was 99 years old.

The small congregation undertook to build its own white frame church building in 1899, under leadership of the Reverend J. P. Rogers and completed it in 1900 when Reverend A. J. Coburn was pastor. Adkins, the Academy instigator, returned to preach the dedicatory sermon.

This small, graceful building, located on Stephens Street where the former Methodist parsonage stood, was home for the Methodists for some 48 years.

Through the years the women of the church played an important part. In 1901, the Women's Home Missionary Society was organized with Mrs. Flippin as the first president. In 1940, when the Methodist Episcopal, the Methodist Protestant, and the Methodist Episcopal Church South, merged into one Methodist Church, the women's organization became the Women's Society of Christian Service. The WSCS in Pilot Mountain had 41 charter members with Mrs. C. W. Patterson as president.

In 1946, under leadership of the Reverend Courtney B. Ross, a young adult group was organized. Mrs. O. W. Smith was the first president. These enthusiastic men and women joined the older members of the congregation in raising funds for a new church building to replace the outmoded, inadequate frame structure.

After the Gordon family home near the corner of Key and Marion Streets

burned, the family gave the land toward a site for the new church. Other adjacent properties were subsequently acquired.

In 1947, the Annual Conference sent to Pilot Mountain a man with expertise in building churches, the Reverend L. P. Barnett. On May 22, 1949, the new modern brick structure of modified Gothic design was dedicated "to the Glory of God and the Service of Man" by Bishop Costen J. Harrell.

Before the Reverend Barnett left in 1953, the congregation had also constructed and dedicated a new parsonage.

Prior to the 1980's the longest pastorate was served over 8 years by the Reverend Henry I. Ridenhour, in the 1960's. He is especially remembered for his work with youth of the church and the entire community.

In 1971, a handsome steeple was added to the church.

Another group of young adults became very active during the pastorate of the Reverend Jody Seymour and has continued under the leadership of Reverend Jim Boles. Reverend Boles, a native of nearby Pinnacle, came to our church in June 1983. During his 13 years of dedicated service there were many positive changes. The church was extensively renovated in 1985, including the addition of a large parking lot and landscaping. A pipe organ was installed and hand bell choirs were begun. The youth program was expanded dramatically. Led by Reverend Boles, over 70 members completed the Disciples Bible study program, a year at a time in groups of about 12. In 1992, a charge conference dedicated the church to building a Family Life Center by the year 2002. Adjacent property was acquired and the membership is proceeding toward a goal of 1999 completion in time for the centennial celebration. In 1993, the parsonage

was moved to the former home of Ruth Ridenhour on Golf Course Road as a result of her donation and the congregation's purchase of the property. The former parsonage was sold. As Reverend Boles leaves in June 1996, the congregation is growing and enthusiastically participating in church programs.

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