

HISTORY OF THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF HOMESTEAD, FLORIDA

FOREWARD

This account is the result of the recollections of a number of long-time members, and various Church records.

Special recognition is given to Miss Esther Livingston and her previous History -- the source of much of the information -- and to everyone else who helped. To the best of our knowledge, it is accurate; but, memories often being tricky things, there may be errors or omissions. If so, we're sorry.

It is divided into four sections, each describing a specific period.

Mary S. McNeill

MAY 1974

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PART 1

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH

The early pioneers of this area were eager for their community to be a good one. They wanted good, substantial Christian people to be attracted to it, and to become its citizens. To do this, they knew that churches must be established as well as homes and schools.

The Florida East Coast Railroad had laid its tracks as far South as Knight's Key; operating two passenger trains daily to Homestead. Rev. F. L. Glennan, a member of the Mission Board living in Miami and associated with the Methodist Church, decided to ride the train to Homestead to investigate the possibilities for beginning a church. He was very much pleased, when calling in the home of Mr. L. S. Mowry, Sr., to learn that he was a Methodist; and that Mr. Sidney E. Livingston, who was boarding with him while his home at 122 N. W. Third Street was being completed, was also a Methodist. After a most interesting visit, plans were made for Mr. Mowry and Mr. Livingston to canvass the citizens of the area, and notify them that Rev. Glennan would return to Homestead on March 22, 1909 (Palm Sunday) to hold a meeting to organize a church.

The only building in the area in which such a meeting could be held was the one-room school house, built by the free labor of the early civic-minded pioneers, which was used for all community affairs.

Much enthusiasm and interest were shown at the organization meeting, and all those attending became Charter Members: Mr. Sidney E. Livingston, Mrs. Scott Caves, Mr. and Mrs. L. S. Mowry, Sr., their two sons -- Leonard (now Rev. L. S.) and Edward, and their two daughters -- Bernice (the late Mrs. Geo. Campbell) and Eunice (the late Mrs. C. W. Little). These eight members looked toward the future with great courage.

Rev. Glennan came twice a month and conducted services, was entertained in the homes of the members, and then returned to Miami. Since there were not enough members to fill all the offices, Mr. S. E. Livingston and Mr. L. S. Mowry, Sr., were both Stewards and Trustees, and Mr. Mowry was appointed Superintendent of the Sunday School.

In 1913, plans were begun for the erection of a church building. In 1909, Mr. Mowry had given to the church a strip of land 66 feet wide fronting on Mowry Street, and 300 feet long on S. W. First Avenue. After due consideration, it was decided it would be unwise to build on a lot this narrow. So, this property was sold, and the money used to buy a lot, 84 feet by 240 feet, from Mr. J. A. Davis, at the corner of N. W. Second Street and First Avenue.

By this time, more settlers had come into the area and new members joined to help in the progress of the church. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. J. U. Free. Donations and pledges were made, and many citizens contributed hours of labor. Mr. Livingston, being one of the few who knew how to use dynamite, shot the stumps and cleared the land. Mr. Free helped with the carpenter work, especially the roof.

Rev. W. A. Louder was Pastor when the \$4,000.00 frame structure, begun in 1913, was finished and dedicated in 1914. It was complete with belfry and large bell, the gift

of Mr. L. S. Mowry. Allen Carter rang it faithfully every Sunday for morning and evening worship services, and Wednesday nights for prayer meeting, until the building was torn down many years later.

Rev. F. L. Glennan, Missionary Organizer, Rev. W. A. Louder, the first pastor, and those who followed, worked diligently among the many people arriving. Over the next several years, the J. L. Burtons, J. D. Redds, several Williams families, J. C. Wynns, O. R. Browns and H. L. Browns were included in those uniting with the Church. In 1919, J. H. Benson's name was listed as a student for the ministry. In 1920, Homestead was listed as a Charge, and Princeton was part of the Circuit. Before this, Homestead was part of the Silver Palm Charge.

Rev. R. A. Selby was Pastor in 1921, when two additions were made for the Sunday School, costing \$916.00. By 1926, during the pastorate of Rev. John G. Stradley, a Sunday School Annex was needed, and a large frame building was erected on Northwest Second Street just behind the Church, at a cost of \$3,000.00. The Building Committee was composed of these laymen: W. M. Bradley, Chairman, J. L. Burton, E. Z. Crowley, J. E. Davis, S. E. Livingston, J. D. Redd, M. E. Sessler, M. L. Simmons and J. G. Wynn.

Also in 1921, an Adult Missionary Society was organized. Mrs. John Anderson was its first president, and served until Mrs. J. L. Ballard was elected on July 28, 1929.

The Wesley Brotherhood was organized in 1923. Mr. C. A. Field was the first president.

The 1927 Florida Conference donated \$1,000.00 to help repair damage caused by the 1926 hurricane.

Pastors who served this Church were :

1909 - 1914	Rev. F. L. Glennan and Rev. W. A. Louder
1915	Rev. O. C. Severs
1916	Rev. W. G. Fletcher
1917 - 1920	Rev. W. D. Bourne
1921	Rev. R. A. Selby
1922	Rev. J. D. Whitworth (Supply)
1922	Rev. F. T. Ridgeway (Pastor)
1923 - 1926	Rev. John G. Stradley
1927	Rev. J. D. Murray
1928 - 1929	Rev. C. W. McConnell

PART II

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Homestead was a cosmopolitan community, and those citizens belonging to the Northern Methodist branch were organized on June 5, 1914, by the Rev. J. A. Kahl, who had been working in this area for several months.

In the latter part of 1914, the Trustees of the Livingston Mission Fund of Jacksonville offered \$2,500.00 toward the building of a church, provided the local congregation raised \$1,000.00. Plans were made and a Building Committee appointed, with R. A. Morrison as chairman.

When Rev. J. B. Crippen was appointed as Pastor in January, 1915, the project accelerated and plans for the new building were accepted. After many delays, the contract was let to C. W. Noel for \$3,444.00, and in the Fall of 1915 work was begun at the corner of N. W. Fourth Street and First Avenue.

The Sunday School was organized in May 1915, at the time the meeting place was changed from Sistrunk Hall to the school auditorium.

On February 13, 1916, Presiding Bishop Frederick Leete conducted a very impressive dedication service, assisted by Dr. Luther S. Rader (after whom Rader Memorial Methodist Church in Miami is named). Rev. J. B. Crippen was pastor.

After Rev. Crippen's pastorate, several ministers served for short periods. In 1918, the Rev. W. J. Carter, who came from the California Conference to the St. John's River Conference, served two years here and at the Redland Church. He then took a leave of absence and became a citizen of Homestead, later serving as Postmaster. During his pastorate, members of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, voted to unite under one pastor. This was consummated in 1929.

Rev. W. D. Gray was appointed Pastor in 1924. It was then that the two-story stucco home (which was to house our parsonage families until the present one was built in 1951) was erected next door to the Church on N. W. First Avenue. The Board of Home Missions donated \$1,500.00 toward its construction, and it was completed in December, 1924. The Building Committee consisted of E. A. Ennis, E. A. Carter, Mrs. H. H. Ewing, Mrs. Geo. Ransom, and C. A. Hough.

The Rev. Everett L. Pierce became pastor in 1928, and it was during his ministry that the Homestead Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were united.

Pastors who served this congregation:

1914	Rev. J. A. Kahl
1915 - 1916	Rev. J. B. Crippen
1917	Rev. Geo. W. Carlin
1918 - 1919	Rev. W. J. Carter
1920	Dr. Robert Smylie
1921	Dr. C. J. Hammitt
1922	Rev. L. B. C. Moffat
1923	Rev. J. Hoch
1924 - 1927	Rev. W. D. Gray
1928	Rev. Everett L. Pierce

PART III

THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH OF HOMESTEAD

When the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, united early in 1929, Homestead became famous, as this was the first unification of the two great groups which had split over questions of administration and slavery in 1844. It was the first definite step in the movement, which, ten years later, brought the churches back together across the nation. A financial exchange with a church in Hollywood, placed all property in Homestead in the South Methodist Conference. Rev. C. W. McConnell, pastor of the South Methodist group, continued to serve the combined congregation until Annual Conference in June, 1929.

Church services were held in the "White Stone" building at Fourth Street and N. W. First Avenue. Sunday School classes, Daily Vacation Bible School, etc., continued to meet in the South Methodist facilities, since they had more Sunday School classrooms.

In 1931, during the ministry of Rev. A. A. Koestline, the name of the church was officially changed to "Homestead Methodist Church."

In 1937, Irving J. Lyon, Contractor, assisted by many of the men, built a large, two-story CBS Sunday School building adjoining the "White Stone" Church, and the old South Methodist buildings were torn down. Rev. J. J. Richards was Pastor.

Quilting bees, and chicken or turkey dinners, served downtown during Fruit Festival Week, and at the Church at various other times during the year, were favorite sources of extra income during these years.

A special service was held July 13, 1939, commemorating the nationwide unification of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Protestant Church of America. Dr. W. V. Meredith and Dr. R. Z. Tyler were on the program, which was under the direction of Rev. Richards.

September 17, 1940, was the organization meeting of the Woman's Society of Christian Service, which replaced the Woman's Missionary Society. Mrs. B. M. Hindman was elected president. There were 44 charter members.

A Hammond organ was purchased for \$1,558.00 in 1942. It was first used on Thanksgiving Day, and dedicated on the first Sunday in March, 1943. Mr. Baker M. Hindman was organist.

In 1946, E. Willard Norman was recommended for License to Preach; followed by Arthur Brandenburg in 1949, and Lewis Pool in 1950.

The Methodist Men's Club was organized August 4, 1949.

PART IV

OUR NEW CHURCH BUILDING

On July 23, 1945, a Special Conference approved the purchase of property at the corner of N. W. Seventh Street and Krome Avenue for \$3,800.00, and the selling of the South Methodist property on N. W. First Avenue at Second Street. Dr. S. H. Davies was pastor.

Construction of the new church was begun in the Spring of 1949, by Linton Connor, Contractor. Bishop Roy Short presided at the Cornerstone Ceremony on August 12, 1949, and the first service in the new \$125,000.00 edifice was held on Thanksgiving Day, 1949, with Rev. J. E. Jenkins in charge, and preaching the sermon.

A beautiful stained glass window, "Gethsemane," was donated by the S. E. Livingston family in memory of Miss Helen Livingston. Many of the pews and other furnishings were also donated as memorials by various individuals or groups.

The impressive Dedication Service was held November 25, 1951, with Bishop Roy Short, Dr. Don Cooke, District Superintendent, and Mr. George Ransom, representing the local congregation, participating, under the direction of Rev. E. C. Willson, Pastor.

On October 1, 1950, the Junior Church was organized, under the leadership of Miss Antoinette Moye; and in 1951, Mrs. Mary Crosby was appointed the first Church Secretary.

Early in the 1950's a private kindergarten was started with Mrs. C. O. Robertson as teacher. Later, Mr. E. L. Harms assumed supervision, and it was expanded to include Nursery Day School and Kindergarten. Mrs. Ruth Harris and Mrs. Dennis Carpenter were among the first teachers. There have been several changes over the years.

In this same period, the Church became noted for its elaborate outdoor, live Nativity Scene and Christmas Pageant. With a few variations, it has been an important part of the Christmas celebration nearly every year since.

On April 1, 1951, it was voted to sell the property at N. W. First Avenue and Fourth Street for \$16,000.00. At the April 26, 1951, Official Board Meeting, the property at 137 N. W. Tenth Street was selected as the site for a new parsonage. Construction began promptly and it was completed later in 1951. Rev. E. C. Willson was Pastor.

By 1956, more Sunday School rooms were needed; and a new wing was added to the west end of the building, under the supervision of Mr. C. W. Leiby. The Sanctuary was air conditioned at this time, and a short time later, the Social Hall was, also. This was completed during the pastorate of Rev. J. W. Jones.

The Wesleyan Service Guild was organized in 1958, with 20 charter members, and Mrs. D. O. Wolfenbarger as president.

Rev. Med Standley was employed March 22, 1959, as Assistant to the Pastor and Youth Director.

During the late 1950's the Homestead Church sponsored a Mission in Oriente Province, Cuba. Our Church sent money through the Conference for the construction of a church, and paid the salary of its native Pastor until the funds were frozen and such

programs cancelled by the Castro regime. Tentative plans had been made for a group from Homestead to attend their dedication celebration, but they had to be cancelled too.

To commemorate our Golden Anniversary, Homecoming Sunday was held May 3, 1959, with an elaborate program under the direction of Mr. John Fredrick, followed by dinner in the Social Hall and a fellowship hour. Dr. P. M. Boyd, District Superintendent, preached the sermon, and former pastors and/or their families were special guests -- Host Pastor, Rev. Joe W. Jones.

Additional property, facing Krome Avenue, and adjoining the Church, South to N. W. Sixth Street, was purchased in 1961.

In 1963, Mrs. Gladys Webb, Chairman of the Commission on Worship, and Mrs. E. L. Harms organized a group of women to form an Altar Guild. Members were: Mrs. Harms, Chairman, Mrs. Thomas Hodson, Mrs. William Henderson, Mrs. A. E. C. McIntyre, Miss Mary McNeill, Mrs. Charles Otis, Mrs. B. P. Pettus, Mrs. Glenn Stahl, Mrs. John McLean, and Mrs. Ruth Spence. Paraments appropriate to the season were a primary project. Various groups furnished proper materials, and several sets were beautifully hand-made by Mrs. Harms. Among the other duties of this group: arranging to have flowers on the altar and distributed after services, training of acolytes and communion preparation. Rev. Eldon Simmons appointed Mrs. Dan Williams and Mrs. Charles Otis Communion Stewards; a service they continue to render, faithfully and well.

Mrs. B. Page Pettus brought the suggestion for a Chrismon tree. Various Christian symbols were made and beautifully decorated in sparkling white and gold; and the large fir tree, with tiny white lights and distinctive decorations, was first used for Christmas, 1965. It was most impressive and successful, so more symbols were found and made by the Altar Guild ladies, and it remains an outstanding feature of the Christmas season.

Following reorganization as the First United Methodist Church of Homestead, the Altar Guild, on May 13, 1973, voted to serve as the Worship Commission. They are carrying on their former work, and new tasks may be added. From time to time, some members have resigned and new ones have been appointed.

In 1964, under the leadership of Rev. Eldon Simmons, a new Allen organ was purchased for \$11,600.00; and planning for remodeling the choir area was begun. This project, including a different type of ceiling in the sanctuary, was completed in 1965, during the pastorate of Rev. John B. Gill, Jr.

In 1966, also during Rev. Gill's ministry, the adjoining property on N. W. Seventh Street, west to First Avenue, was purchased, and the house thereon is being used as the Youth Building.

After the nationwide consolidation of the Methodist Church and the United Brethren in 1968, various changes in nomenclature and organization were made.

In 1972, The Woman's Society of Christian Service was reorganized as United Methodist Women; with a total membership of approximately 135, presently divided into nine Fellowships. The Wesleyan Service Guild was disbanded.

By the time Rev. T. Newton Wise was appointed Pastor in June, 1970, the need for expansion was becoming ever more evident. After much study, suitable plans for

enlarging the Sanctuary, adding much needed office space and various other improvements were agreed upon in 1972. A "Building For Christ Crusade," under the direction of Rev. Charles Welch, was launched May 12, 1972.

Rev. Wise was in charge of the formal Goundbreaking Ceremony, which was held January 14, 1973. Bishop Joel D. McDavid, who brought the message, and Dr. Harold E. Buell, District Superintendent, were honored guests. Construction began promptly under the direction of Mr. Victor Cribb, Contractor. Thanks to everyone's cooperation, it was possible to use the Sanctuary for every Sunday service, except one, during the entire construction.

After having been used by several other churches, the original large bell has been returned to this Church, and is being incorporated into our expanded facilities.

The Gladys Webb Music Room, a gift from her family, is a most appropriate memorial. Mrs. Webb was especially interested in the musical portions of the worship service, and composed several of the responses used from time to time.

Another noteworthy item is the lovely stained glass rose window in the Sanctuary, donated by Mr. and Mrs. John Fredrick. It was originally in the Countess of Huntingdon Church in England, where John Wesley preached.

These, together with memorial pews and other furnishings; a hand-crafted plaque, using materials from the "old" Sanctuary; and various other gifts, add much to the beauty and worshipful atmosphere of the new one. A beautifully hand-lettered Book of Memorials on display in the Narthex enumerates the various gifts and their donors.

The diligent effort of members and friends, under the able and enthusiastic leadership of Rev. T. Newton Wise, brought this entire project steadily to a successful conclusion. Our greatly enlarged, expertly redesigned and tastefully appointed building was consecrated on April 28, 1974, in a most impressive service under the direction of Rev. Wise. Bishop Joel D. McDavid, Dr. Harold E. Buell, District Superintendent, Mr. Webster Williams, Chairman, Trustees, and Mr. John Whichard, Lay Leader, took part. This was followed by an inspiring sermon by the Bishop.

Bishop and Mrs. McDavid, Dr. and Mrs. Buell, present Pastor and Mrs. T. Newton Wise, former Pastors and/or their families, Mr. and Mrs. Victor DeKonshin, Architect, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Cribb, Contractor, and several others, were special guests at the Fellowship Hour, featuring a delicious buffet lunch -- supervised by the United Methodist Women -- which followed the service.

As in any church, ours has an endless list of "unsung heroes," who, over the years, have given unstintingly of their time and talents in many fields, to serve God and their Church, including:

Mrs. J. D. Redd	pianist for many years
J. G. Wynn	long-time Treasurer
Mrs. Mollie Wingate	faithful member of the congregation
Mrs. Sarah Brown,	teachers of children
Miss Jennie Lobdell	and
Mrs. Joe Davis	young people
Mrs. Mattye Close	young people's choir
Mrs. Ruth Davis	flowers
Mrs. W. B. Mills (Margaret)	music

Mrs. Lula Musselwhite	choir director and soloist
Mrs. H. L. Brandenburg,	soloist and faithful
Mr. David C. Williams,	choir members
Mr. Harvey L. Brown	for many years
Mr. George W. Smith, and	conscientious trustees serving
Mr. Daniel Williams	under many Pastors
Mr. John Whichard	official board
Rev. J. E. Jenkins	untiring efforts during 1949
	building program
Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Harms	anywhere needed
Mr. and Mrs. L. C. Dodd	particularly chimes, radio broadcasts,
	and Woman's Society
Dr. and Mrs. D. O. Wolfenbarger	Church school teachers
Mrs. Carrie Wilcox	Church secretary
Rev. T. N. Wise	Pastor

This is in no way intended to be a complete list, or the only area of their interest. All are, or were, active in many places. Rather, these are just a few of those recalled by the writer. I am certain that everyone who reads this will add, or substitute, the names of many others who have done just as much, or more, for the growth and spiritual development of our Church and community.

Obviously, the faith and foresight of the Founding Members was warranted, as today our Church has:

A membership of 1118, with a staff of five
Chancel, Agape and Sunshine choirs
Sunday School
Junior Church
United Methodist Women
United Methodist Men
Junior High and Senior High United Methodist Youth
Kindergarten and Nursery Day School
Sponsor, Boy Scout Troop No. 682
Property, buildings and equipment -- value nearly \$1,000,000.00

The date for Annual Conference has changed several times over the years, but most of these pastors served from mid-June to the following June. Exceptions are noted, when known.

Other Pastors serving this congregation:

Unification to June, 1929	Rev. C. W. McConnell
June, 1929 to June, 1930	Dr. Livingston Munro
June, 1930 to December, 1931	Rev. L. E. Wright
December, 1931 to June, 1937	Rev. A. A. Koestline
June, 1937 to June, 1941	Rev. J. J. Richards
June, 1941 to June, 1942	Rev. T. A. Ferguson
June, 1942 to June, 1944	Rev. O. Sewell Palmer
June, 1944 to June, 1948	Dr. Sidney H. Davies
June, 1948 to June, 1950	Rev. J. E. Jenkins

June, 1950 to June, 1956	Rev. Edwin C. Willson
1956	Rev. Foster Holt (Associate)
June, 1956 to June, 1960	Rev. Joseph W. Jones
March, 1959	Rev. Med Standley (Assistant)
June, 1960 to June, 1964	Rev. Eldon Simmons
June, 1964 to June, 1967	Rev. John B. Gill, Jr.
	Rev. Harold Sloan (Associate)
June, 1967 to June, 1970	Rev. Harris M. DeWese
June, 1968 to June, 1970	Rev. James R. Roy (Associate)
June, 1970 to date	Rev. T. Newton Wise

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