

METHODIST CHURCH CELEBRATES 100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

In 1909, the residents of Anahuac decided that it was time to build a church building for the town. Prior to that, church services were occasionally held in the Civic Center which also served as a school and town hall. Since the town was still small, it could only support one church and it was proposed to be a Union Church. Bids for the construction of the church were taken on May 10, 1909 and the contract was awarded to Clark and Brooks. The building was completed with donations of money and labor and \$400.00 worth of lumber that was charged with the Moor and Goodman lumber yard in Galveston. The first trustees were Anson Miller, Bryan Sterling and L.R. Miller and the church was built on property donated by W.D. Willcox.

At first, various denominations held services in the church. However, the offerings were only sufficient to cover the upkeep. Moor and Goodman soon demanded their money and the Board of Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church South agreed to pay the \$400.00 debt. The Trustees had to agree to name the church "The Methodist Episcopal Church South". Although there was some criticism for deeding away Union Church Property, the Anahuac Methodist Church was created in early 1911 with charter members Mabel Stephenson, F.O. Roberts and Mr. and Mrs. L.R. Miller. In spite of the criticism, the Methodist and Baptist congregations continued to cooperate and they conducted alternating services until 1921 when the Baptist obtained their own facility.

The Methodist Congregation received preachers from the Winnie-Stowell Charge once a month until 1914. At that time, the Rev. J.F. Wallace was placed in charge of the Anahuac Methodist Church. Although he was shared with other congregations, his permanent residence was in Anahuac. In order to accommodate the resident preacher, a contract to construct a Methodist Parsonage was let in October 1914. The contract was awarded to A.F. Meitzen, a local contractor who had recently constructed the Courthouse. He was known as a good builder and his work withstood the test of the 1915 Storm which destroyed a good portion of the west side of town.

In the 1920's, the church continued to grow and membership had grown to ninety six in 1924. Since the Church had a Parsonage, the Pastor, Rev. B.O. Powers was assigned as the full time Pastor for Anahuac Methodist Church at that time and they no longer had to share their Pastor.

The early 1930's brought prosperity to the area with the discovery of oil in Hankamer and Monroe City. Although this brought tremendous wealth to the County, there was little initial impact on the Church. However, by 1937, the Church had grown to 145 members and under the direction of Rev. J.E. McGaughy, a building program was started. The oil field had brought an influx of new permanent residents and the Church was now overcrowded. The preacher and his family had to share the Parsonage on Sunday mornings for Sunday School Classes. The building program saw the addition of a new Parsonage in 1942. The old Parsonage was converted to Sunday School classes to accommodate the continued growth.

By the end of WW II in 1945, the church had grown to 200 members and Rev. Leslie LeGrand was assigned as Pastor. It was now apparent that a new church building was needed. In addition to being a capable preacher, Rev. LeGrand was also quite persuasive as well and he soon began to build enthusiasm for a new Church. The vision was for a much larger building that would seat 225 in the sanctuary and an additional 100 seats available for larger crowds. The building would be fireproof and follow plans developed by Emory C. White, a noted Houston Architect.

The new Church was expected to cost \$100,000. To raise that amount of money would take tremendous sacrifice and a great deal of faith. Pledges were taken and various fund raisers were initiated. Memorials were offered and one could purchase a window, a pew or anything else of a permanent nature. Plaques recognizing these purchases are displayed in the Church today. Different classes sponsored fundraising projects and one class operated a hamburger booth at the Trinity Valley Exposition in Liberty for several years. A \$30,000 low interest loan was made from an estate, secured by the signatures of several men of the Church. Men also hauled material with their trucks to reduce the delivery cost. The centerpiece of the Church is the large stained glass window depicting Jesus the Shepherd and the Lost Sheep. Formal opening services and dedication of the new First Methodist Church of Anahuac were conducted in August, 1949 under the direction of Rev. Vernon Cornelius, Pastor. A Special Message was brought by Rev. Leslie LeGrand who had initiated the construction of the new Church but was now the Pastor in Crockett. The first baby to be baptized in the new Church was Sam Hill, III, an owner of Hill's Grocery and still an active member of the Church.

The 1950's and 1960's brought continued growth with the new building. The education wings of the Church began to fill and a strong youth program was in full swing. In the early 1970's under the direction of Rev. Ferd Dawson, a new building program was developed. This program resulted in the construction of the Youth Fellowship Hall adjacent to the Church and a new Parsonage located south of Anahuac on property donated by Dr. T.L. Fahring in 1972. The Parsonage is a modern 1 ½ story brick home built by Tilson Homes of Houston.

In the 1980's and 1990's, the Church continued to grow and was still an active member of the community. The Church sponsored the Senior Citizen Project and was a founding partner in the Mid-Chambers County Christian Caring Center, both of which continue to operate today. The Sanctuary was remodeled and later under the direction of Bro. Everett McCollum, Pastor, a complete renovation of the educational wings of the Church was conducted. The Youth Fellowship Hall was also enlarged to accommodate larger crowds. It is now known as the Methodist Center and is widely used by various community organizations for meetings and other activities. A major funding source for these renovation projects was the creation of the Christmas Bazaar, which was known and attended by all of Southeast Texas. The Bazaar contained craft items of all kinds, most of which were crafted by members of the Church and their friends.

The 21st Century has brought some interesting challenges to the Church. The building suffered damages from Hurricanes Katrina and Ike. Damages from Katrina required a new roof and repairs within the Church. Hurricane Ike brought additional damages but the damage to the surrounding communities was much greater. The Church was able to provide housing and meals for volunteer workers that came from churches as far away as Minnesota. The Church and the communities continue to recover from these events.

Today, the Anahuac First United Methodist Church continues to be strong and active in the community. Everyone is invited to attend as we embark on the next 100 years in the life of Anahuac First United Methodist Church.

Submitted by Pudge Willcox (revised for web 2013)

Sources:

Brief History of the Methodist Church; L.R. Miller, 1950

The Story of the Anahuac Methodist Church 1910 – 1950; Bob Schultz

The Anahuac Progress, various issues