

HISTORY OF THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Scottsbluff, Nebraska

PREPARED AND NARRATED BY C. D. WILDY
AT THE BICENTENNIAL PROGRAM
AT THE CHURCH ON OCTOBER 12, 1975

THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SCOTTSBLUFF, NEBRASKA WAS ORGANIZED ON NOVEMBER 4, 1901 BUT AS WE ALL KNOW IT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. THERE WERE 17 ORIGINAL MEMBERS REPRESENTING 8 OR 9 FAMILIES. AS THEY WERE FEW IN NUMBER, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS FITTING THAT I GIVE THEIR NAMES AS FOLLOWS:

MR. AND MRS. A. LACKEY	MISS AGNES LACKEY	M. OGLE
MRS. M. GARRISON	MITCHELL LACKEY	PARVIN E. GILBERT
MR. AND MRS. ALBERT WILDY	O. O. GILBERT	ANNA LACKEY
MRS. CLAUDE WESTERVELT	MRS. LAUREL C. CLUCK	MRS. CATHERINE WILLIAMS
AND DAUGHTER RETA AND SON FORREST		

MRS. O. O. GILBERT, ONE OF OUR PRESENT ACTIVE MEMBERS, WAS THE WIFE OF O. O. GILBERT, NOW DECEASED, AND THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW OF MRS. M. GARRISON BOTH OF WHOM I HAVE MENTIONED AS BEING CHARTER MEMBERS. * DURING THE FIRST YEAR OR SO SERVICES WERE HELD IN THE HOMES OF SOME OF THE DIFFERENT MEMBERS X

LATER ON A SMALL CHURCH BUILDING WAS USED ^{AND OWNED} BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND WAS LOCATED ON THE PRESENT SITE OF THE LEAGUE OF ARTS BUILDING ON 1ST AVENUE. FOR SOME REASON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH CEASED TO HAVE SERVICES IN THE BUILDING X I AM SURE THAT YOU WILL REALIZE THAT I WAS ONLY A KID, OR I HOPE THAT YOU WILL, WHEN OUR CHURCH WAS IN ITS FORMATIVE STAGE BUT I DO REMEMBER THAT THERE WERE MANY SACRIFICES ON THE PART OF THE EARLY MEMBERS, TOGETHER WITH SOME UPS AND DOWNS TO KEEP ENOUGH INTEREST AND ENDEAVOR TO RAISE SUFFICIENT FUNDS TO MAINTAIN ITS EXISTENCE. STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM PROSELYTTING

WAS FAIRLY PREVALENT IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CITY. WHENEVER THE NEW TEACHERS ARRIVED FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR OR SOME NEW CLERKS OR NEWCOMERS OF ANY KIND CAME TO TOWN, THERE WAS SORT OF A GRAND RUSH TO SOLICIT THEIR ATTENDANCE AND MEMBERSHIP. I AM OF THE OPINION THAT NEITHER CHURCH WAS FAULTLESS IN THIS ACTIVITY.

AT ONE TIME SOME OF OUR MEMBERS THOUGHT VERY SERIOUSLY OF GIVING UP THE GHOST AND DISBANDING. HOWEVER, THEY FORGED ON AND KEPT THE CHURCH ALIVE. THE SALARIES OF THE MINISTERS WERE ALWAYS SMALL BUT NO PREACHER EVER WENT TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE WITHOUT HAVING HIS SALARY PAID IN FULL.

IN EITHER 1904 OR 1905 THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BECAME ACTIVE AGAIN AND THE METHODISTS WERE REQUESTED TO FIND ANOTHER PLACE TO WORSHIP. AS THERE WAS NO OTHER CHURCH BUILDING AVAILABLE IT BECAME NECESSARY TO RENT A PORTION OF THE ONLY EXISTING SCHOOL HOUSE IN THE CITY LOCATED ON AVENUE A, OR THE PRESENT SITE OF THE CITY HALL. THERE WERE ONLY FOUR ROOMS IN THE BUILDING AND THE HIGH SCHOOL ROOM WAS USED FOR THE PREACHING SERVICES AND SOME OF THE OTHER ROOMS FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES.

IN 1905 THE CHURCH SPONSORED A TENT REVIVAL MEETING ON NORTH BROADWAY. A COLORED LADY, MRS. LUCINDA BECK WAS IN CHARGE OF THE PREACHING AND SHE WAS ASSISTED BY HER DAUGHTER MRS. PEARL EVANS. VERY MUCH INTEREST WAS MANIFESTED AT THESE MEETINGS AND THEY LASTED FOR TWO OR THREE WEEKS. DURING THE MEETINGS SOME WHO HAD NOT BEEN MEMBERS "HIT THE SAWDUST TRAIL" AS BILLY SUNDAY USED TO SAY AND LATER JOINED THE CHURCH AND THEY BECAME EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN CARRYING ON THE CHURCH WORK.

IN FACT SOME OF THE NEWLY ADDED MEMBERS WERE THE NUCLEUS OF A MOVEMENT TO START BUILDING A NEW CHURCH.

AS A RESULT OF THE RENEWED ACTIVITY IN 1906 A BUILDING PROGRAM WAS LAUNCHED AND A NEW CHURCH WAS BUILT AT A COST OF \$7,000.00 AT THE CORNER OF 2ND AVENUE AND EAST 16TH STREET, NOW THE LOCATION OF THE TEXACO FILLING STATION. MRS. CATHERINE WILLIAMS AND MY MOTHER PARTICIPATED IN THE LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE. BECAUSE I HAD BEEN THE JANITOR IN THE PREVIOUS LOCATIONS IT WAS NATURAL THAT I CONTINUE MY DUTIES IN THE NEW CHURCH AT A SALARY OF \$10.00 PER MONTH. A COAL FURNACE HAD BEEN INSTALLED AND IT NEVER WAS ANY GOOD. IT WAS NECESSARY TO START THE FURNACE ON A SATURDAY NIGHT AND I HAD TO GO TO THE CHURCH AT 4 OR 5 O'CLOCK ON SUNDAY MORNINGS AND NURSE THE FURNACE ALONG SO AS TO HAVE IT HALF WAY WARM FOR THE MORNING SERVICES. AS A HIGH SCHOOL KID, I DID NOT RELISH THE EARLY MORNING RISING. IT WAS LATER REPLACED WITH A GAS FURNACE.

FOR SOME UNEXPLAINED REASON AN IMMERSION TANK HAD BEEN PLACED UNDER THE FLOOR IN THE NORTH ROOM. IT WAS USED ONLY TWO OR THREE TIMES AND IT HAD TO BE FILLED BY MEANS OF A PITCHER PUMP AND THAT WAS NO SMALL JOB. I HOPE THAT THOSE WHO WERE IMMERSSED HAD THEIR SOULS SAVED FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

THE NEW CHURCH WAS DEDICATED BY BISHOP HOMER C. STUNTZ AND IT WAS REALLY QUITE A JOYOUS OCCASION. DURING HIS STAY HERE HE WAS ENTERTAINED AT THE HOME OF MR. AND MRS. S. K. WARRICK WHO HAD RECENTLY MOVED TO SCOTTSBLUFF. A LOAN HAD BEEN OBTAINED OF \$3,000.00 FROM A BANKING FIRM IN FT. MORGAN, COLORADO AND THE PAYING OF THIS OBLIGATION TOOK SEVERAL YEARS AS MONEY WAS VERY SCARCE AND AT ONE TIME SOME OF THE MEMBERS WHO HAD SIGNED THE NOTE WERE THREATENED WITH A LAW SUIT.

AN ADDITION TO THE EAST OF THE CHURCH WAS BUILT IN 1920 AT A COST OF ABOUT \$9,000.00 AND THIS OBLIGATION WAS RETIRED QUITE RAPIDLY AS THE GENERAL OVERALL FINANCIAL CONDITION BECAME MUCH BETTER. A PART OF THE ADDITION IS STILL INTACT AND IS BEING USED AS A RENTAL BY THE PRESENT OWNER. THE NEW CHURCH DID

NOT HAVE ELECTRIC LIGHTS AND ILLUMINATION (SUCH AS IT WAS) WAS FURNISHED BY MEANS OF SUSPENDED GAS LAMPS THAT HAD TO HAVE AIR IN THEM SO AS TO PROPERLY FUNCTION. IN THOSE DAYS THERE WERE ALWAYS SUNDAY EVENING SERVICES. SOMETIMES DURING AN EVENING SERVICE THE LIGHT OVER THE PULPIT WOULD BEGIN TO FLICKER AND FLUTTER ABOUT THE TIME THAT THE PREACHER WOULD BE WELL WOUND UP AND WAS ABOUT TO REACH A CLIMAX THE JANITOR (THAT WAS ME) WOULD HAVE TO DRAG OUT A STEP LADDER AND GIVE THE LAMP A SHOT OF AIR.

DURING THE TIME THAT OUR PRESENT CHURCH WAS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 1947 THE OLD CHURCH TOGETHER WITH THE PARSONAGE TO THE NORTH WERE SOLD TO BOB FORREST FOR \$27,500.00. REV. HICKS WAS VERY INSTRUMENTAL IN PROMOTING THIS TRANSACTION. AFTER MR. FORREST MADE THE PURCHASE HE DESIRED POSSESSION AND AS THE NEW CHURCH WAS NOT READY FOR OCCUPANCY WE WERE ONCE MORE FORCED TO FIND ANOTHER PLACE OF WORSHIP. THIS TIME WE MOVED TO THE PRESENT JUNIOR HIGH AUDITORIUM. NATURALLY THE NEXT AND LAST MOVE WAS TO THE CHURCH WE NOW OCCUPY.

HOPING THAT TIME WILL PERMIT, I WILL REMINISCE A LITTLE ON SOME OF THE HAPPENINGS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE OVER A SPAN OF YEARS. TO THE OLD MEMBERS THIS MIGHT BE AS WE SAY "OLD STUFF" BUT DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS THERE HAVE BEEN A LARGE NUMBER OF NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MEMBERSHIP. THE FIRST MINISTER WAS D. C. HOPSON, SINCE 1901, THE CHURCH HAS HAD A TOTAL OF 25 OR 26 MINISTERS. I DO NOT KNOW THE REASON FOR IT, BUT DURING THE FIRST YEAR, THERE WERE THREE DIFFERENT PREACHERS. THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME THAT EACH PREACHER WAS WITH US AVERAGED A LITTLE OVER TWO YEARS. THERE WERE 8 OR 9 MINISTERS WHO WERE HERE ONLY ONE YEAR OR LESS.

THERE ARE SOME WHO MAY REMARK THAT BECAUSE OF THE FREQUENCY OF THE CHANGE OF MINISTERS SOME OF THEM MUST HAVE BEEN POOR OR BAD MINISTERS AS TO THEIR ABILITIES OR WORTHINESS. I QUESTION IF IT IS PROPER THAT THEY SHOULD

BE SO CLASSIFIED. I THINK IT PREFERABLE TO SAY THAT SOME WERE JUST BETTER THAN OTHERS. AS TO YOU REV. BLISS YOU ARE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT AND WE WANT YOU TO STAY THERE AS DURING YOUR TENURE HERE YOU HAVE BEEN OF GREAT SERVICE TO THE CHURCH AND WE HAVE A LOT OF UNFINISHED WORK FOR YOU TO DO.

OUR CHURCH HAS BEEN FAVORED BY HAVING TWO ANNUAL CONFERENCES - ONE IN 1949 AND THE OTHER IN 1965.

THE MINISTER IN CHARGE IN 1907 WHEN THE FIRST CHURCH WAS BUILT WAS REV. E. B. THOMPSON AND IT WAS THROUGH HIS EFFORTS THAT THE CHURCH WAS STARTED AND OF COURSE COMPLETED. IN 1942 REV. L. C. HICKS BECAME OUR PASTOR AND SOON AFTER HIS ARRIVAL HE STARTED TALKING ABOUT BUILDING A NEW CHURCH AND HIS CONTINUED EFFORTS RESULTED IN THE ERECTION OF THE PRESENT STRUCTURE. WHILE I DO NOT WISH TO SINGLE OUT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF ANY ONE PARTICULAR PASTOR, I WILL SAY HOWEVER, THAT IN MY OPINION THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE OWES A DEEP DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO BOTH REV. THOMPSON AND REV. HICKS FOR THEIR VISION AND THE GREAT EFFORTS THAT THEY PUT FORTH IN THE BUILDING OF THE TWO CHURCHES.

DURING THE BUILDING OF THE NEW CHURCH NO SOLICITATIONS WERE MADE OUTSIDE OF THE MEMBERSHIP. HOWEVER, DONATIONS WERE NOT REFUSED AND A NUMBER OF NON-MEMBER FRIENDS GAVE SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS. ONE PARTY OF THE JEWISH FAITH GAVE \$6,000.00.

A MORTGAGE OF \$30,000.00 WAS PLACED ON THE CHURCH PROPERTY PAYABLE \$1,500.00 EVERY SIX MONTHS. MANY TIMES IT WAS DIFFICULT TO GET THESE AMOUNTS TOGETHER AND USUALLY A SOLICITATION LETTER WAS MAILED OR PERSONAL CONTACTS WERE MADE AT EASTER AND CHRISTMAS. WE NEVER DEFAULTED IN MAKING A PAYMENT WHEN IT WAS DUE.

THE CHURCH OWNED THREE PARSONAGES PRIOR TO ACQUIRING THE ONE NOW IN USE. ONE WAS NEXT TO THE OLD CHURCH SITE ON SECOND AVENUE, ONE AT 201 EAST 20TH STREET, AND ONE AT 1507 4TH AVENUE.

I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT PAY TRIBUTE TO OR MENTION THE AMOUNT THAT THE LADIES SOCIETY PAID INTO THE BUILDING FUND. IT WAS OVER \$17,000.00. THOSE LADIES WHO HAVE BEEN AFFILIATED WITH THE CHURCH OVER A LONG PERIOD, SOME OF WHOM MAY BE IN THIS CONGREGATION TODAY, CAN WELL REMEMBER THAT MUCH OF THIS AMOUNT WAS RAISED BY THE SWEAT OF THEIR BROWS SUCH AS SERVING LAMB FEEDERS BANQUETS, HOLDING RUMMAGE SALES, ETC.

THE BUILDING COMMITTEE OF THE NEW CHURCH WAS ORGANIZED IN 1945 OR 1946 AND SOON AFTER A MONEY RAISING CAMPAIGN WAS SET IN MOTION. THE FIRST ESTIMATE OF THE COST WAS ABOUT \$150,000.00 AND THIS WAS TO INCLUDE THE FURNITURE. WHEN THE CONTRACT WAS SIGNED, THERE WAS A CASH BALANCE ON HAND OF \$50,000.00. AS THE BUILDING PROGRESSED, IT WAS SEEN THAT THE COST WOULD BE MUCH MORE THAN THE FIRST ESTIMATE AND SO IT WAS NECESSARY TO KEEP GETTING IN AS MUCH MONEY AS POSSIBLE. AT ONE TIME DURING THE BUILDING PERIOD THE FINANCIAL SITUATION LOOKED QUITE GLOOMY AS THE BUILDING COMMITTEE WAS RUNNING OUT OF MONEY. IT WAS THEN THAT REV. HICKS CONCEIVED THE IDEA OF HAVING A MEETING WITH SOME OF THE MEN WHO WERE MEMBERS AND WHO ALREADY HAD PLEDGED AND PAID QUITE GENEROUSLY. THIS WAS DONE AND IN TWO SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH THE ATTENDANCE BEING FROM 8 TO 10 EACH TIME AND FOLLOWING WELL PREPARED MEALS SERVED BY THE CHURCH LADIES, REV. HICKS LAID THE CARDS ON THE TABLE AND SAID, "GENTLEMEN, WE NEED MORE MONEY IF WE ARE TO KEEP GOING." AS A RESULT DURING THE TWO SESSIONS BETWEEN \$15,000.00 and \$20,000.00 WAS RAISED FROM THOSE PRESENT. AND SO THE WORK CONTINUED.

THE PRESENT CHURCH SITE CONSISTING OF 4 LOTS WAS PURCHASED IN 1941 AT A TAX SALE FOR \$2,925.00. I WAS THE HIGH BIDDER BUT I DID NOT PAY FOR THE LOTS. THERE WERE OTHER LOTS SOLD AT THE SALE AND THROUGH A PRE ARRANGEMENT WITH J. M. CARR HE PAID THE NECESSARY AMOUNT FOR THE CHURCH LOTS AND HE WAS REPAID

LATER. THIS GENEROUS ACT ON THE PART OF MR. CARR WAS VERY MUCH APPRECIATED AND I MIGHT SAY THAT MR. CARR WAS THE GRANDFATHER OF CARR TRUMBULL, NOW AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH.

THE TOTAL COST OF THE CHURCH WAS ABOUT \$235,000.00 WHICH INCLUDED THE FURNITURE. WESLEY HALL CONSISTING OF TWO LOTS AND THE BUILDING WAS PURCHASED IN 1955 FOR \$38,000.00 FROM W. H. OSTENBERG, JR. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES HAS PLACED A VALUE OF \$560,000.00 ON ALL OF THE REAL ESTATE OWNED BY THE CHURCH. THE LARGEST AMOUNT THAT THE CHURCH EVER OWED AT ONE TIME WAS \$64,000.00. I AM SURE ALL OF YOU KNOW THAT THE CHURCH HAS NO OBLIGATIONS OF ANY KIND AT THE PRESENT TIME AND THE FINANCIAL CONDITION IS EXCELLENT.

IN THE VERY FEW REMAINING MINUTES IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE THAT WE GIVE CREDIT TO WHOM CREDIT IS DUE AS TO THE BEAUTIFUL CHURCH AND OTHER PROPERTIES THAT WE NOW OWN AND OCCUPY. FIRST CREDIT SHOULD GO TO THOSE WHO WERE THE PIONEERS AND EARLY ORGANIZERS AND WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FOUNDING AND BEGINNING OF OUR CHURCH.

SECOND TO ALL OF THOSE INCLUDING THE PASTORS WHO CARRIED ON DURING THE FOLLOWING YEARS AND WHOM WE MIGHT SAY KEPT THE SHIP AFLOAT DURING PERIODS WHEN THE GOING WAS NOT EASY. AND THIRD TO THE PRESENT MEMBERS AND PASTOR AND ALL PERSONNEL CONNECTED WITH THE CHURCH WHO ARE CONTINUING IN THE SAME MANNER TO KEEP THE BANNER HIGH. WE HAVE NEVER HAD A SPLIT CHURCH AND LET US HOPE THAT WE NEVER WILL. GROWING FROM A MEMBERSHIP OF 17 TO OVER 1400 SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR ANY CHURCH. SO LET US WORK AND COOPERATE TOGETHER AND AS WE PASS ON THERE WILL BE OTHERS TO TAKE OUR PLACES AND THUS ENABLE THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF SCOTTSBLUFF, NEBRASKA TO MAINTAIN ITS HIGH AND WORTHY STANDING. ALSO WE ARE SURE THAT ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE NEXT 74 OR 75 YEARS WILL SURPASS AND BE MORE FRUITFUL THAN DURING THE YEARS THAT ARE NOW BEHIND US.

I THANK YOU. - *I have been treasurer of the church for over 50 yrs.*