



Ashland Place

United Methodist Church 1942-2017

75th Anniversary Notes

The Sanctuary with its basement and the Education Building served the members adequately for twenty years. Then in the early 1970s, church leaders realized that additional space for education was a critical need.

As more young families joined the church, nursery space was inadequate. Sunday school space for growing attendance was needed. Every available space, including the pastor's office, was in use for classes.

The Education Building space was accommodating much more than classes. Church offices occupied four rooms on the first floor and a large room on the second floor was used for choir practice. Meanwhile, Mothers' Day Out was thriving and a pre-school was desired. A building committee was established with George Ward as chairman. Other members elected by the March 21, 1977 charge conference were Frank Hicks, James Ladner, Sr., Bruce Knodel, and Walter Underwood. Later in March, Lawrence Allen, Jim Hurd, Bruce Knodel, George Ward, and Dr. Leo Brannon met and discussed plans to interview and choose the architect for the new project. Ed Baumhauer was chosen as architect.

To meet the needs for children's ministries, the committee determined that the offices and choir room should be moved from the education building. The Sanctuary and Education Building were separate structures then. The building committee saw the opportunity to join the two structures by filling in the corner between them with three floors – a basement addition for a fellowship hall and new restrooms and a bridal room and classrooms, first floor for offices, a library, and a small parlor, a second floor for more classrooms and choir, with the basement kitchen remaining in place.

In the following months, plans were received and reviewed. During the January 26, 1978 charge conference, the new building plans were approved with slight modifications as moved and seconded by some of the members, including Carlton Garner, Charles Street, Travis Bedsole, and Richard Crowther.

A capital fund drive ensued. The campaign goal was for \$250,000 for the capital fund and the 1978 operating budget. L.W. Brown accepted chairmanship of that stewardship campaign with Dr. Conrad Pierce serving as co-chairman. The church also borrowed from the Merchants National Bank of Mobile. In an interesting letter to Dr. Brannon in May of 1979, the lender stated, "As we indicated in our original commitment to you last year, we strived to provide the church with the very best rate possible on the restoration and construction loan. As you are aware, the prime lending rate is now 11 ¾% and rates have increased substantially over the past year. With this increase in mind we find it necessary to increase the rate on the church borrowing to 9%....." Recall that those years were a period of rapid inflation. Interest rates continued to increase as the Fed stepped in during the Fall of 1979 to tighten credit and take other measures to bring inflation under control.

For architectural balance a bell tower to serve as a stairwell at the south end and to provide a place for a church bell became part of the plans. For years, the church bell called all within hearing to worship. Also, the carillon given by the Hope family rang with hymns at regular intervals and could be heard throughout the neighborhood. As reported in a previous installment of these *Notes*, the carillon system is now beyond repair and needs to be replaced.

As recalled in notes by Mary and L.W. Brown, there were some technical and structural issues that had to be resolved in order to complete the construction project. For example, there were elevation problems. The floor area in the new basement space was lower than the floor level in the basement of the Sanctuary. There were also problems associated with the subterranean plumbing requirements. According to the Browns, "Many hours of consultation went into the study of these problems. George Ward gave unstintingly of his time. Through his work experience with International Paper Company he was able to discuss our problems with many people. He assured himself that we had made the best decision based on all the advice given to solve the problem, namely to join the two buildings and provide the most usable space at a figure the church could

live with." Joe Martin was chosen as contractor and was known for excellent performance.

Ground breaking took place June 2, 1978. On August 3, 1979, the building committee accepted the job as substantially complete and authorized final payment to the contractor. Consecration was set for September 23, 1979. Bishop Dr. Carl Sanders and D.S. Rev. Lester Spencer participated.

In a letter to the building committee, dated July 16, 1980, Dr. Brannon announced August 10 as the date for the laying of the cornerstone. The service included:

Opening scriptures (Psalms 124:8 and 127:1a)

Statement of Purpose by George Ward: "Dearly Beloved, we are assembled to lay the cornerstone of a new house for the worship of Almighty God. Therefore, let us faithfully and devoutly seek His blessing on this our undertaking."

Prayer by Walter Underwood, Board of Trustees chairman: "Almighty and everlasting God, who are ever exalted and yet always near: Grant that we may worthily offer unto thee, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, this foundation which is laid for the building of a temple and sanctuary where Thy glory shall be manifest among us, and where all people shall come to call upon Thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The Lesson by L.W. Brown: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grown into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2: 19-22)

The Scripture readings by Dr. T. Leo Brannon:

Isaiah 23:16

I Chronicles 23:10

I Chronicles 23:20

I Corinthians 3:10a

I Corinthians 3:11

The Laying of the Cornerstone by Dr. T. Leo Brannon and Charles Dann, chairman of the administrative board.

Statements of praise and response by the people followed.

Prayer of Dedication: "Almighty God, on whom we build all our hopes for this life and that which is to come: Visit we beseech thee, with Thy loving kindness this place, whereon we lay the foundation of a house to the praise and honor of Thy Holy Name. Accept the act by which we lay this cornerstone. Bless those whose offerings enable us to build this house of worship. Graciously guard and direct this house of worship. Graciously guard and direct those who labor in erecting it. May the walls of this building rise in security and in beauty; and may the hearts of these Thy people be fitly joined together into a living temple, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus being the chief Cornerstone. Amen."

Sealed in the cornerstone are the contents of the 1939 cornerstone and the 1979 cornerstone. On August 18, 1978, the Mobile Press reported that the original cornerstone was opened to allow for construction work. Most of the books, papers and pictures in a metal box inside the cornerstone were badly damaged because of water leakage over the years. According to Dr. Brannon at the time, the cornerstone's contents were "representative of all Mobile" in 1939.



1978 Mobile Press clipping featuring former APUMC Pastor, Dr. T. Leo Brannon

Table of contents of 1939:

- Bible presented in memory of Peter Martin and in honor of Emily Martin
- "Did You Know?" - a brief history
- 1939 doctrine and discipline of the Methodist Church
- 1922 doctrine and discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church
- Church bulletin
- St. Francis Street church hymnal
- Presbyterian hymnbook
- Telegram of congratulations from Rabbi Alfred Moses of Spring Hill Avenue Temple
- Handwritten note by Walter and Bessie Bellingrath
- Map of Mobile drawn in 1937 by John R. Peavy of City of Mobile, whose widow was an Ashland Place member at the time of the laying of the new cornerstone in 1978.
- Hymns of Faith, First Baptist Church of Mobile
- December 21, 1939 Christian Advocate, Birmingham
- December 29, 1939 Christian Advocate, Nashville
- December 22, 1939 Christian Advocate, Nashville
- Mobile Press Register, Sunday, December 31, 1939/ gold lettered copy of editorial congratulation the St. Francis Street congregation
- Daily Times, Saturday, December 30, 1939
- Photo of Maj. W.J. Hearin, grandfather of then Mobile Press Register publisher William J. Hearin. Major Hearin had been a lay leader in the history of St. Francis Street Methodist Church. He was chairman of the building committee that built the church in 1896, replacing the original structure dated around 1842.
- Two small daily devotionals
- List of officers and leaders of St. Francis Street Church, 1939

Table of contents of 1979:

- Dr. T. Leo Brannon in 1975 newspaper clipping of church donating old pipe organ to Searcy Hospital; service of dedication of new pipe organ
- 1977 Administrative Board meeting requesting Charge Conference for building purposes on March 3. Authorization for charge to elect building committee, March 11. Minutes of that Charge Conference containing building committee members.
- 1978 approval of building project by District Superintendent, February 17.
- Authorization for Charge Conference to formalize building plans by District Superintendent, April 20.
- Ground-breaking ceremony – May 28 – service and picture dipping of opening of old cornerstone.
- Minutes of first meeting of building committee, March 27, 1977.
- Progress reports of the building committee.
- Long-range planning committee meeting minutes of July 12, 1979 regarding utilization of Thames and McConnell property acquired.
- Letter to congregation from pastor following Hurricane Frederic, September 19, 1979.
- Service of Consecration of new building with Bishop Sanders, September 23, 1979.
- Church budgets for 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1980.
- Administrative board officers and members for 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1980.
- New church pictorial directory.
- *Doing the Faith* by Dr. T. Leo Brannon.

In a later meeting, the new basement fellowship hall was named T. Leo Brannon Hall in honor of and gratitude for Dr. Brannon's dedication and leadership in accomplishing this significant phase in the expansion of this church.

Next....the last two building projects.

Jane Finley
Memorial Chairman

Next Committee Meeting:

The APUMC anniversary group will meet Thursday, September 14, 2017 at 11:45 a.m.

'Good As Gold' Cookbook Update:

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! You have been so generous in sending in recipes that we have more than the new section of *Good As Gold* will hold. So, we don't need any more, but appreciate your effort in trying to help make this project a success. We are in editing mode now. This is getting very exciting! I hope we will be able to start taking book orders soon.

Jane

Invitation:

Become a "friend" of the 75th anniversary on our Facebook page. Join the group and invite others into the group to help spread the word. You will not want to miss the discussion going on in the group! Join and share your own APUMC experiences and anecdotes.



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