



□ *Editor's note: Mary Luhrs provided the historical information for this story.*

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

On Oct. 7 members of Imperial United Methodist Church will gather to celebrate 125 years of existence and service. The public is invited to share in the celebration.

In 1886 the Imperial United Methodist Church was begun with \$100 as a mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The church held a quarterly conference in June 1887 with Elder Porter C. (Angel Face) Johnson of Indianola presiding. It was the settlers who called him Angel Face.

Also in 1887 the Imperial Mission of the Evangelical Church was established to serve the German speaking settlers in the area.

Neither congregation owned a building, so services were held where space was available.

The first M.E. church building came about in an unlikely manner. In 1898 the Klondike Gospel Band was organized in New York City, with the purpose of taking the Word of God to the gold miners in Alaska.

Band members decided to strengthen themselves for the mission by walking across country to San Francisco.

However, the Spanish-American War broke out and the band disbanded upon reaching Imperial.

One band member, Frederick C. Baylis, was persuaded to remain in Chase County and minister to the settlers. He raised money to purchase a building that had been abandoned by members of The Church of Christ.

The building stood at the corner of 12th and Broadway Streets, where Capitol Liquor now stands. The Methodist Church property was at the corner of 8th and Broadway.

So, the building was moved, becoming stuck in mud along the way. The Chase County Tribune reported "J.T. Johnson and the Bonner boys have just completed papering and decorating inside the (new) M.E. Church. Better go to church once and see."

By 1928 the church had outgrown the building. Construction of a new structure began in late November at a cost of \$30,000.

The next year the stock market crashed, followed by the Depression and drought of the 1930s. Funds for the half-built church evaporated.

The completion of the building and ensuing debt overshadowed the work of the church until 1943. Pastor Christopher A. Arnison, with the help of Lay Leader Melvin Carter, raised \$8,700 to complete payment of the church mortgage.

Meanwhile, the Evangelicals had built their church diagonally across the intersection from the Methodists, eventually raising a larger building.

Worldwide, in 1969 the Evangelical United Brethern and Methodist Episcopal Church formally became the United Methodist Church.

In Imperial, worship was held in the Methodist Church and educational and group activities were held across the street in the E.U.B. building.

By the 1990s the two buildings were no longer adequate for the continuing ministries of the congregation. A new church was built, with a lot of volunteer labor, at the corner of East 5th and Holland Streets.

The new debt-free building was dedicated and consecrated on Nov. 22, 1992 by Bishop Joel Martinez and Pastor Karl Lent.

This year a new lay ministry has been organized to serve the congregation, with Pastor Valera Hedenberk.

The church's mission is to make Followers of Christ. As Pastor Hedenberk said recently, "Know Christ. Make Christ Known."

Celebration

Former pastors and interns have been invited to attend the church service Sunday at 9:30 a.m. A potluck dinner will follow the service.

Following that, the visitors will be introduced and will speak about their service at Imperial United Methodist Church.

In addition, displays of the church's history will be set up in the narthax.

Concert

The public is invited to hear pianist Jim Hendricks, Professor of Music at Chicago State University, at 2 p.m. in the sanctuary.

Hendricks' arrangements of traditional Gospel and contemporary Christian music are characterized by unmatched technical ability and passion.

Hendricks is also known for his recordings of classic tunes which he has arranged in the styles of Rachmaninoff, Liszt, Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson.

For more information call (308) 882-5127.