

First United Methodist Church celebrates 125 years

Written by Darci Tomky

Since its first meeting July 10, 1887, First United Methodist Church of Holyoke has had a rich history spanning 125 years. The congregation invites the community to celebrate their 125th anniversary with them this Sunday, Nov. 4 at the church at 230 E. Furry St.

Pastor Al Strauss said a 10 a.m. service will feature special music and a message by Skip Strickland, the district superintendent. A catered lunch will follow, and a time capsule will be buried.



First United Methodist Church, on the corner of Furry Street and Phelan Avenue, is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. The brick structure on the left was the original sanctuary built in the 1920s, while the addition of a new sanctuary, on the right, began in the late 1950s.□□

—Enterprise photo

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Construction begins in 1887

According to the first records of Methodist movement in Holyoke, on July 10, 1887, a company of people met at the Carnahan residence on the banks of the Frenchman Creek at the east edge of the new town of Holyoke.

They organized what was known as the Frenchman Valley Circuit of the Methodist Churches, with 40 charter members.

Dr. Merritt was presiding elder of the northern part of Colorado and preached in Holyoke first on Oct. 16, 1887. Rev. J. M. Adair was the first pastor of the Holyoke church.

Beginning in November 1887, a movement began to build a church, and several hundred dollars were raised. April 21, 1888, the cornerstone was laid for the church on the corner of Furry Street and Phelan Avenue, the same location where the current church now stands.

That white frame building served as the church until 1921, when it was torn down and a brick building was erected, directed by John Heginbotham.

In 1954, a new parsonage was dedicated next to the church building.

More construction took place when, in 1957, the congregation voted to build a new sanctuary and remodel the old one. They added on to the west of the old church, completing the sanctuary which is still used today.

March 12, 1961, the new sanctuary was consecrated. The old sanctuary was remodeled and includes the minister's office, secretary's office, Sunday school rooms, nursery and storage space. The basement includes a large fellowship hall, large recreation room, Sunday school room and a well-furnished kitchen.

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Property west of the church was purchased for a parking lot in 1962.

The Holyoke United Methodist Women's Bicentennial project for 1976 was furnishing a historical room, showing some of the original articles of the early church, including the original bell of 1888.

Another recent addition to the church is a prayer room in the basement, added in 1995.

Many changes seen over 125 years

In 1939, the three branches of Methodism—including Methodist Episcopal Church South, Methodist Episcopal Church North and Methodist Protestant—became one big Methodist Church.

Then in 1968, the Methodist churches united with part of the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) churches to become the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Women have been an active part of the church for years, doing funeral dinners, mother/daughter and father/son banquets, Country Store, cookies at Christmas, firemen's banquets, coffee hours and the fair stand.

There have been various small groups throughout the years, an active missions committee and groups for the children and young people.

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Music has also changed over the last century. A Reuter pipe organ fund began in 1947, with the organ installed in 1950. Some will also remember when the church's grand piano, donated by Bessie Gassert, was rolled down the street on a dolly from her house on Morlan Avenue to the church in 1975.

A carillon, heard by the community three times a day, was donated in 1986.

In 2008, multimedia equipment was installed in the sanctuary. An elevator was installed in 1984, and a food pantry was established in 1994.

On May 17, 2009, a special ceremony honored the living members of Methodism for at least 50 years.



A movement for a Methodist Church building began in November 1887, and the cornerstone for this white frame church was laid April 21, 1888 on the corner of Furry Street and Phelan Avenue in Holyoke.

Fair stand brings back memories for many

As early as the 1930s, the “Ladies Aid” operated a food stand at the Phillips County Fairgrounds.

According to an account by Florence Kepler, equipment like a four-burner coal-oil stove, a griddle and some skillets had to be brought over from the church. Water had to be carried from a tap close to the stand.

Coffee was 5¢ per cup, sandwiches 10¢ and pie 10¢, but the best seller was their famous chicken sandwich.

The chickens were dressed and cooked at home, taken to the church kitchen to be boned and creamed, then taken to the stand to be kept hot in large kettles.

Lemonade had to be substituted when they couldn't get pop during WWII, and they discovered quickly that Sloppy Joes could never take the place of a good ol' hamburger.

The stand became an all-church project in 1970, rather than being operated solely by the women.

In 2004, the fair stand was torn down and completely rebuilt.

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