

History of First United Methodist Church Conway

This is a brief history prepared by Carl Sessions,
Paul Quattlebaum, Greg Martin and others.

Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis Asbury visited Kingston (Conwayborough) numerous times between 1785-1815 prior to the formation of a Methodist congregation in Conway. The first known church site in this area was known as the "Old Camp Ground" two miles west of Conwayborough on the Georgetown Road. In those days, the only road to Georgetown from Conwayborough was present-day Ninth Avenue; and it distinguished the outskirts of town. The Campground Cemetery is still maintained.

Bishop Francis Asbury preached here in Conwayborough at the Episcopal Church which is now the site of Kingston Presbyterian Church.

First United Methodist Church was organized in 1828 by a small group of women in Mrs. Jane Norman's boarding house on Main Street, which was midway between Third and Fourth Avenues (present day Norman Alley). Her garden was where the Trestle Restaurant and adjacent office are located today. "Aunt Jane" placed a small white bowl at the entrance to her dining room to collect funds for a building, and that bowl is still here today in our archives. This makes First UMC Conway the 2nd oldest congregation in Conway. Kingston Presbyterian established was established in 1756. Kingston seems to have disbanded by 1795, for Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury recorded in his journal:

"Thursday, 24 December 1795. We came to Kingston, where I preached in an old Presbyterian meeting house, now repaired for the use of the Methodists. I spent the evening with W. Rogers, formerly of Bristol, where our wants were richly supplied: thus, sometimes we abound and at other times suffer want; and we may balance the one with the other."

First UMC is the oldest continually active congregation in the city.

Between 1828 – 1846, the church would meet in various buildings in town. In 1842, Mary Hillen donated property on Fifth Avenue and Main Street to the church, referred to in some reports as Waccamaw Church or Conwayborough Church, Waccamaw Circuit.

In 1846, the first sanctuary of the then Methodist Episcopal Church was built on the site of the present Hut Building. It was a wooden rectangular building with three large windows on each side

facing Main Street as pictured on our website. Men entered the sanctuary through the door to the left, sitting on the left. Women entered through the door to the right, sitting on the right.

The first church bell that rang in Conway was given by Mrs. Charlotte Norman Congdon; tolling for the first time at her funeral in the Methodist Episcopal Cemetery, adjacent to the wooden sanctuary. The cemetery opened in 1845 and contains 53 graves.

In 1852, the first parsonage was built and was later the site of the F. A. Burroughs residence. It is now the site of South State Bank.

Prior to 1864, the pastors who served here were itinerant. It is recorded that Lewis Scarborough preached here during 1841-1842. A full display of all the pastors who have served at First UMC Conway is on display in the upper level of the Education Building.

In 1875, Burroughs and Collins donated land on the corner of Elm Street 9th Ave. where the 2nd parsonage was built. It was later moved to 1001 Elm Street and is known as the Pinson House. It was used as parsonage until 1916.

The Women's Foreign Missionary Society was organized in 1878, one of the oldest Missionary Societies in South Carolina Methodism.

In 1898, the original wooden church was dismantled and replaced by the second sanctuary. The lumber was sold to Col. D. A. Spivey (great grand-father of present-day member Spivey Hood). The lumber was used to build a residence on Fourth Avenue which today is across from the former Hamp's Hardware parking lot.

The Gothic Style brick sanctuary was built on the original site for the cost of \$3500 with membership of 113. It contains ornamental stain-glass windows of opal glass, the main windows being 15 ft. high. It was dedicated on October 23, 1898. The first marriage in the new sanctuary was Miss Lella Burroughs to Col. Hal Buck. The 2nd sanctuary would serve the congregation until 1910. Today, this Gothic sanctuary is used as small chapel for weddings, funerals, and other events as well as home to the Hut Bible Class. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a United Methodist Historic Site.

The Mission Style sanctuary was completed as the third sanctuary in 1910 at the cost of \$13,000 with membership of 208. Seating capacity was 500 and included a horseshoe shaped balcony. The

first service was held in the new sanctuary on October 9, 1910. Presently, this sanctuary has been converted into the Fellowship Hall. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The church purchased the home of Dr. J. C. Norton on October 20, 1916 located at 509 Laurel Street. It became the third parsonage. Today it remains a private residence.

The Service Class for women was formed in 1917. It is the oldest Sunday School still in existence. Today is known as the Emma Thompson Class having been renamed in her honor in recognition of her generous bequest to the class. It is composed of both men and women.

The Hut Bible Class was formed in 1919 as men from Conway returned from World War I and sought a place for study and discipleship.

In 1938 an educational wing was added to the rear of the 1910 Mission Style sanctuary.

In 1940, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society changed its name to the Women's Society of Christian service.

The church bought the house and lot on the corner of Laurel and Fifth Avenue from the heirs of J. A. Lewis in 1943. This home located on the site of the present sanctuary became the fourth parsonage.

The Education Building was expanded on the west end in 1952.

The fourth parsonage was purchased and dismantled by C. E. Sasser in 1954. The present-day parsonage located on Elm Street was completed in January 1955.

The church membership reached an all-time high of 1,200 members in 1958. A new congregation (Trinity United Methodist Church) was birthed from Conway Methodist Church. At this time, the name was officially changed to First Methodist Church.

The present Georgian-style sanctuary with a seating capacity of 600 and educational building connecting to the 1952 Education wing was completed.

In 1972, the Women's Society of Christian Service and the Wesleyan Guild united as the United Methodist Women. Today the United Methodist Women are known as the United Women of Faith.

The Schantz Pipe Organ was installed in 1973 at a cost of \$58,000 with 1,874 pipes in 34 ranks.

On October 9, 1988, the needlepoint pulpit chair covers and Chancel Rail kneelers were dedicated.

The Family Life Center was complete and consecrated on November 14, 1999. The Jenkins House located on the site of Family Life Center was purchased and moved across the street.

In 2010, renovations to the 1961 sanctuary and education wing were completed.

In 2024, an additional associate pastor was appointed to First UMC Conway by the South Carolina Conference to once again aid in giving birth to another congregation in Carolina Forest.