

# A HISTORY OF LAVONIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

One acre of property was purchased, and deeds were signed for the Lavonia Methodist Episcopal Church, South on May 14, 1879. John H. Jones, T.J. Bowman, and J.H. Grogan were paid the sum of \$5.00 and Lot #3 at the corner of West Main and Baker Streets was transferred to the Trustees” for the sole and exclusive use of church and religious purposes”. According to Franklin County Courthouse records, this was “one of the earliest purchases recorded” in Lavonia. The property purchase was preceded by a Sunday School which held its meetings under a brush arbor where the old-Line Community Schoolhouse later stood. This is now known as the Line Community Center. Although historical records state the church was organized in 1880 it is thought that the church was actually organized by 1878.

Later, Sunday School services and first church services were held in the upper story of the J. H. Vickery store, a brick building located at the corner of West Main and Depot Streets. This is the area where the church booth is located during the Lavonia spring and fall festivals. Mr. & Mrs. G.W. Sewell, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Joe Blackwell, Mrs. T.F. Allison, Mr. & Mrs. W.O. Sayer, Mr. & Mrs. S.J. Walters, John W. Sewell, George Cannady, Ben Ledbetter, Ollie Ledbetter, Miss Fannie Ledbetter and Miss Lizzie Ledbetter are listed as charter members of the church. Rev. J.H. Parks was the first pastor; the first Presiding Elder, now known as District Superintendent, was Rev. W.P. Lovejoy.

The property acquired in 1879 became the site of the first church building. Erected in 1883, it was a small, one story, white wooden structure which faced east toward the railroad. The Building Committee was C.W. Sewell, T.J. Blackwell, Ollie Ledbetter, and W.O. Sayer. This building was demolished in 1907 and work was begun on a second, larger brick structure. The building committee was C.A. Addington, J.F. Tabor, T.H. Roberts, C.P. Ray, and Dr. S.B. Yow. A.J. Grubbs was the builder. The new building was completed ten years later.

The first parsonage was built around 1886 on the corner of Baker and Jones streets. (It is interesting to note that this property was sold in 1910 and the house stood until repurchased from Rebie Haley Crittenden in 1985. That property is currently a part of the paved parking lot.) A second parsonage was built in 1910, and was located on West Main Street, next to the church. Occupied until 1963, it was converted into Sunday School classrooms for a time, then later demolished. In February 1962 land for a new parsonage was purchased on Bowman Street. The new parsonage was completed in 1963 and is the present home of the pastor.

On December 28, 1946 the second church building was destroyed by fire. Immediate plans were made to rebuild; services were held in the Presbyterian Church. After worshiping with them for two years the present sanctuary was occupied in 1949. This time the church was built facing north toward Baker Street. In 1950 a Sunday School wing was added. The Fellowship Hall, which included kitchen facilities, was finished in 1953. Bishop Arthur J. Moore led the dedication service in 1957. Additional lots have been acquired by gift and by purchase to make up the present property.

In 1971 a community basketball court and playground were dedicated as the Morgan & Vaughn Park. An Educational Building was begun behind the church in 1974, on the site of the 1910 parsonage. Completed in 1975, it originally housed the nursery and classes for the children and youth. Not wanting this building to stand idle during the week, the church started a kindergarten for three and four-year old's. The Alpha Center opened its doors on January 5, 1981. This was the first church-sponsored kindergarten in Franklin County; it continues today, in its 34<sup>th</sup> year, carrying forward its original slogan, "Alpha Center – For a Better Beginning".

On November 14, 2004 a ground-breaking ceremony was held by Rev. Ben B. Lewis for the construction of a family life center, which would replace the old Fellowship Hall. A Consecration service was held on October 23, 2005 by Rev. Lewis, followed by the dedication service on November 15, 2009 by Rev. Randall M. Massengill. The old fellowship hall was remodeled to create additional Sunday School classrooms, a choir room, and a new rear entrance to the church and the family life center. In 2012 the property at 12915 Jones Street, across from the family life center, was purchased for future growth. The church now has 280 members. New Fellowship Hall was dedicated on November 15, 2009 by Rev. Randall M. Massengill.

At various periods the Lavonia United Methodist Church was on a circuit with the following churches: Post Oak, New Salem, Providence "Hart", Providence

“Habersham”, Salem, Marvin, Confidence, W. Bowersville, Carroll’s, and Fair View. It became a station church in 1957 but later returned to circuit status with Providence United Methodist Church. In June, 1978 Providence and Lavonia became station charges.

Several church members have entered the ministry. They are Hoke Sewell, J. B. Stephenson, Barrett Smith, David Agnew, and Darby Cannon, III (who served as Professor of Religion at Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey).

While statistics, dates, and facts are important to our Christian heritage, ultimately it is the people, congregations and pastors, who create and become the history of a church. On August 3, 1980, our church celebrated its Centennial Sunday with a pageant depicting the history of the church. The following excerpt from this service summarizes our history:

*“The Lavonia United Methodist church stands today as a living witness to the lives and labors of countless individuals who have shared their efforts to make it what it is. Under the guidance and inspiration of God it has endured the imperfections of the past and has delivered to this generation, intact, a clear expression of the ministry of Jesus Christ. We are here today to acknowledge and to express our gratitude for the past century, of its influence among many whom we know – but also among a great multitude who went before us and who are forgotten now, save in the mind of God.*”

*“As we attempt to familiarize ourselves with a portion of what has happened here in bygone time, we must remind ourselves that much of what is good and right and true that has made its way to us comes as a testimony from those whose acts and deeds we cannot recall and whose names and faces we cannot remember.*”

*“We light a candle for those who laid the foundation of a spiritual house and who strengthened the walls through deeds of love and kindness. They have wrought a mighty work!”*

# LAVONIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PASTORS

1879	I.G. Parks	1933-37	Sewell H. Dixon
1880	William Norman	1937-42	A.P. Watkins
1881-82	A.W. Quillian	1942-46	A.T. Hind
1882-84	W.T. Norman	1946-49	J.R. Phillips
1884-85	A.D. Echols	1949-53	J.F. Rollins
1885-86	W.A. Cooper	1953-55	Howard B. Simms
1886-87	F.P. Lankford	1955-57	E.W. Dunagan
1887-90	W.C. Cantrell	1957-59	James E. Styles
1890-92	W.D. Hamby	1959-62	Willie Berkner
1892-95	F.D. Cantrell	1962-66	R.R. Baker
1895-98	W.A. Simmons	1966-67	Harvey T. Boyd
1898-01	S.H. Dimon	1967-70	Dan Maxey
1901-04	John T. Lowe	1970-74	John Moler
1904-08	John F. Yarborough	1974-78	Harold Lyda
1908-11	Walter Millican	1978-82	Harold Lawrence
1911-13	Walter King	1982-86	Emory Cartrett
1913-17	M.B. Sams	1986-88	Roy Major
1917-19	C.A. Norton	1988-90	Augustus L. Cole
1919-23	J.C. Adams	1990-94	Raymond H. Camp
1923-26	C.D. Read	1994-01	Shelia Bookout
1926-27	W.A. Woodruff	2001-06	Ben Lewis
1927-29	W.W. Cash	2006-09	Tom McElroy
1929-31	J.H. Couch	2009- 16	Randall Massengill
1931-33	L.P. Webb	2016-18	John Dallas
		2018-19	Lacey Bowcock
		2019	Interim- Brent White
		2019-	Hugh E. Hendrickson

## ALPHA CENTER

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Lavonia United Methodist Church made a significant commitment to its community by starting a kindergarten for three and four-year-old's. The first church-sponsored kindergarten in Franklin County was named the Alpha Center. Non-profit and non-denominational, the school was housed in the church's newly constructed Educational building.

The idea for the preschool was taken forward by the church pastor, Rev. Harold Lawrence. He saw a need for a preschool program because at the time there was only one daycare facility in the area. Ms. Dair Smith, Director of the Children's Division of the church Sunday School, was a driving force in starting the center. A retired teacher who began her career at 18, Miss Dair, as she was called, believed children needed to be prepared for kindergarten and interaction with others. She was named Director of the new school.

When the school opened, Miss Dair's husband Loy had just retired as the county school superintendent. While Miss Dair was busy educating the preschoolers, and managing the school's budget, Loy was building all of the playground equipment or constructing cabinets and furniture for the school. He also used his woodworking skills to create building blocks and games for the children. Neither of the Smiths took any pay for their hard work. According to their daughter, Joyce Hamilton, "They didn't do it for the money. They did it for the church and the community."

Today the good works of the Alpha Center continue under the direction of Natalie Umbehant. A two-year-old class was added in 2014. The school accommodates a maximum of 24 students.

## YOUTH

In 2014-15 the top floor of the Educational building was remodeled for the youth of the church. It features a small kitchen, a 26 x 40 youth room, a game room and a Sunday School room.