

Asbury United Methodist Church: A History

The Early Years

God called this congregation of Methodists together in 1867. A group of seven Christians gathered in the Livermore home of T. H. Tooker to worship. They were Mr. and Mrs. John Manzer (Tooker's son-in-law), Mr. B.F. Branan, Mr. and Mrs. A.A. Overacker and Mr. Scott.

At that time Livermore was a small town of about 400 people whose primary livelihood came from crops of grain and fruit. Domestic animals were raised for their own use. Wild animals and game were abundant. The countryside was in a virgin state. Even as late as 1873, there was not a fence or a bridge in the valley and roads were mere trails.



In 1868 Independent Hall became the Methodists' meeting place and for two years the church was on the Lafayette Circuit. The Presbyterians and Methodists met together in the rented hall over a saloon, having a Methodist service one Sunday and a Presbyterian service the next. In 1874 the Presbyterians erected their own church, leaving the hall to the Methodists. (According to some sources, the Methodists used the Presbyterian Church two Sundays of the month for a while.)

A New Church Building

In 1870 William Martin Mendenhall donated a large lot on Third and I for the church building and parsonage. In 1873 Rev. Eli A. Winning, who had moved into the valley because of poor health, started preaching to the Livermore congregation. The following year he received a regular appointment to Livermore.

The years that followed were difficult ones for the church and it was semi-abandoned from 1877 to 1882. In 1882 Livermore was served by the San Ramon and Pleasanton pastor, who had also moved to this area because of poor health. On August 14, 1883, under the leadership of Rev. Winning, who returned to Livermore, the church chose the name Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. Despite much opposition, the small group proceeded with plans to build a church. After back taxes of \$5.00 had been paid to clear the land deed, the church advertised in the newspaper on September 4, 1883, for construction bids. The contract was awarded to Charles W. Bradshaw for \$357.00 on September 25, 1883. The lumber from Santa Clara Valley Mill and Lumber Co. cost \$675.35.

The church was dedicated on January 13, 1884 by Rev. F. F. Jewell of Howard Street in San Francisco. The Board of Trustees was composed of E. B. French, J. M. Jones, Charles Bales, Martin Mendenhall, and Dr. B. C. Bellamy. The total cost of the church was about \$3,100, \$500 of which was furnished partly as a gift and partly as a loan by the Church Extension Society. On the day of dedication \$1,386 had been donated.



A New Parsonage

On May 3, 1884, the question of a parsonage was first considered, and on September 17, 1885 the church voted to build a parsonage. The building of a house soon followed and all indebtedness was cleared in 1890.

In the January 10, 1889 issue of the Livermore Echo, there appeared an announcement of meetings being held to unite the Methodists and Presbyterians into a Union Church. This effort obviously failed.

The church and property have been described as very pretty during 1911-12. With no water meter, there was a lovely green lawn edged with a white picket fence. The church grew slowly, and in the 1920's one-half block of land was sold in order to build some Sunday School rooms and a social hall. There was a small white house on Third Street next to the church that was also sold. The original church and the added rooms served the congregation for 77 years.



The 1930s

During this period and through the 1930s and 40s many money-making activities were sponsored by the Ladies Aid, later called the Woman's Society of Christian Service (WSCS). They held numerous church dinners, including a regular Election Day dinner, to which all the town came. During rodeos they sold hot dogs out the window of the

social hall. With this money they largely maintained and furnished the church. Once their “floor covering savings” had to be used to pay the minister’s salary.

Again in the year 1937-38, a vote was taken as to whether the Methodist and Presbyterian churches should be united. It was decided they should remain separate churches. The average church attendance at this time was 15 to 18 people.

About this time, the streets of Livermore were paved and sidewalks built. There had been a wooden sidewalk in front of the downtown stores since 1930. The population of Livermore was about 3,000 then.

The 1940s and 1950s

During World War II the church grew considerably. There were 29 in the choir. Following 1952, when Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory acquired the Naval Air Training facility and Sandia National Laboratory acquired the land across East Avenue, the town began to grow rapidly and the church grew with it.

The original parsonage was used until 1954. It was too drafty to be used any longer as a parsonage and a new one was purchased on Harvard Way. The former parsonage was then used for additional Sunday School rooms.



In June of 1955 when Rev. Don Fellers, his wife Polly and their children moved to Livermore (population 10,000), there was no smog and only two lanes of traffic on Highway 50 (580). Dublin had a store, service station, hotel and few houses. Bill Wolcott taught the adults, Lena Wykle directed the youth choir, Alva Woolridge guided the retirees, Dr. Ina Gourley was an office volunteer, Allen Bishop played the organ in his stocking feet and Nancy Faraudo planned Vacation Church School. New people were moving in and the church was growing, so a second worship service was begun.

We’re Moving!

In 1956 the congregation voted to move to a new site where a larger facility could be built. A site on Nielsen Lane of approximately eight acres was purchased with the plan to build there. But the church was unable to secure reasonable access to this site. When a property on East Avenue, which more nearly met the needs of the church, was put on the market, the congregation voted to acquire it. In June 1961 the 100 by 200 foot downtown site was sold for \$40,000 and the new 10-acre site on East Avenue was bought for \$35,000. (The church no longer owns the property on Nielsen Lane.) The

original church building, no longer a commissioned Church, was demolished and the property was sold for commercial purposes.

In just 30 days the land was cleared, the old house on the new site remodeled for temporary use, a metal building (Fellowship Hall, originally called the Butler Building) erected, and supplies moved from downtown. That's when they found in the basement old bulletins, hymnals and the longhandled, wooden collection box used in years past.

Paul Evans supervised erection of the metal building where worship services were first held. George and Bill Greeno graded the driveway and parking area and everyone worked to accomplish the move. Fran Maher, Cliff Patrick (who broke his arm) and Virgil Frame took the bell down from the tower. Jerry Bireley, as chairman, led and guided step by step.

Mabel Nelson felt she would never live to worship in the new Chapel, but she turned the first shovel of dirt for the new building and later worshipped there.

Asbury Is Growing!

As the first part of the master plan, the new chapel and educational wing with 7,000 square feet were completed at a cost of \$105,000. The unique structure has an exterior which resembles Noah's Ark of the Old Testament with the emphasis on Law. The interior represents the New Testament with the Church, like a ship, carrying the Cross to those in need. Bishop Harvey Tippet dedicated the new building in 1963.

In the 1966-67 church year the membership was 480, the Sunday School enrollment 550, with an average church attendance of 260 through the winter months. Ground was broken on July 23, 1967 for an educational building to connect with the sanctuary. The new addition contained four classrooms as well as mechanical and restroom facilities.



Asbury Is 100 Years Old!

1967 celebrated Asbury's Centennial. A big feast was held in the Presbyterian Church hall. Several church members performed skits and musical numbers that night. All depicting the church through the years.

With a new chapel, Asbury continued to grow. A new parsonage was purchased at 4263 Pomona Way in 1970. In 1973, Alex Farlie moved the chapel's north wall out creating

the “garden” section. The sliding glass doors look out to our Memory Garden, created in memory of Asbury’s youth and children who have passed on.

Rev. John Emerson, who served Asbury from 1970 to 1974, recalled the early 70’s: “There was always quality music under the leadership of G. Allen Schell; good contemporary folk music from the guitar accompanied Folk Choir organized by Allan Van Lehn; worship experiences out on the lawn, including Easter with helium filled balloons; and Maunday Thursday ‘in the catacombs.’”

Rev. Norman Callaway, who served Asbury from 1975 to 1980, also remembered special moments with children: “creating a Hong Kong apartment to Barbara Allred’s specifications in the sanctuary; and once, needing the right pitch for a song saying to Allen Schell “Give me a ‘D’” and every child present shouted back ‘D!’”

New Buildings

In 1973 the garden area north of the sanctuary was redone and expanded to accommodate more people at services. In 1979 a modular building was located to the south and east of the church to serve as conference room, Sunday School rooms and offices for the church staff.

In 1978 the Administration building was added. It provides office space, a conference room and a classroom. The old office became the Sunday School office and the minister’s office became the library and serves as day care space and a classroom. Rev. Jerry Carter served as the pastor in 1981 and 1982. Rev. Jack Timmons served as Associate Pastor in 1982 and 1983.

From 1982-84, a Facilities Committee, under the leadership of Elmond Holbrook, led Asbury in a major refurbishing project, including an upgrading of nursery rooms, remodeling of the chapel, interior and exterior painting throughout the church and landscaping additions. Rev. Dick Ernst became our Senior Pastor in 1983 and served for nine years until 1992. He was ably assisted by several Associate Pastors during this time. Rev. Pam Abbey served from 1984 to 1985. Donna Fado-Ivery served from 1986 to 1987. Rev. Chuck Johnstone served from 1988 to 1992.

Asbury’s New Sanctuary

In the winter of 1985, crowded classroom conditions led to a yearlong study of Asbury’s future building needs. A congregational decision was made in 1986 to move forward on the construction of two classroom buildings and a new sanctuary. A Building Committee, chaired by Dick Crawford, began meeting in early 1987. Nearly five years of dedicated effort by members of the Building Committee, sacrificial giving by the congregation, and the volunteer work of scores of persons, led by Paul Benson, culminated in construction of the upper elementary and youth classroom buildings and remodeling of the lower elementary building in 1989.



Ground was broken on May 5, 1991, for the new sanctuary with seating for 372. The cost of the project was \$1.3 million. Paul Benson again led the volunteer labor for much of the construction. The architect was James Ream and the professional construction company was Oliver & Co. Formal consecration of the new sanctuary took place June 21, 1992. This consecration was done before construction was final in order to allow Rev. Dick Ernst the joy of seeing it “complete” after the

long hours he spent helping to shepherd the Building Committee.

New Fellowship Hall

Before and during the construction of our new sanctuary it was very evident that Asbury also needed a new fellowship hall. Thus shortly after the completion of our new sanctuary a study was conducted to study the feasibility and cost of improving and enlarging our current fellowship hall. The results of this study was that while feasible the cost was too much given the large incurred debt for the new sanctuary. In 1998 a committee was again convened to study the feasibility of a new fellowship hall. A congregational survey performed by a team from our conference concluded that while a new fellowship hall was desirable the current debt was too large for the project at this time. The services of the architectural firm of Davidson and Seals were retained to help with the study and develop a site plan. The result of this study was that the location of a new fellowship hall should be in the same location of our existing fellowship hall. After several years elapsed a Building Committee, chaired by Glenn Pomykal, began meeting in early 2008. With the previous architectural study and the sacrificial giving by the congregation, construction of the new fellowship hall was initiated.

Ground was broken on March 8, 2010, for the new fellowship hall with a main hall size with sufficient seating space for 150 at a sit-down dinner, a fully equipped commercial kitchen and additional restrooms. The cost of the project was \$2.65 million. The architect was John Seals and the professional construction company was McNealy Construction Co. Formal consecration of the new fellowship hall took place January 11, 2011.

The Present

In July 1992 Rev. Ron Dunn became Sr. Pastor with Linda Stransky as an Associate in 1993 and 1994 and in 1998 Rev. Dan Sturdivant became Associate, serving through 2000. On July 1, 2001, Rev. Carl Thomas became our Senior Pastor and on July 1, 2002, Rev. Michelle Kirby became our Associate.

On July 1, 2003, Rev. Chuck Johnstone became our Senior Pastor, serving 11 years to 2014. Sue King was Associate from 2003 to 2005. Rev. Dr. Kim Risedorph was appointed to Asbury from 2009-2018. Pastors Chuck and Kim served as Co-Pastors through 2014. Chelsea Constant began as Associate Pastor July 1, 2014, and was ordained by the United Methodist Church in June 2017. Rev. Kathy La-Point Collup was appointed to Asbury in July, 2018.

From a worshipping group of 7 in 1867 to our current membership of 475 in 2013, Asbury has been blessed with a faithful, dedicated and gracious congregation.

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