

I. Early History

A Church Family is Born

According to all of the available records, Middleburg United Methodist Church (formerly the Black Creek Methodist Church), situated at Middleburg, Florida in Clay County about 25 miles southwest of Jacksonville, was organized in the early 1800s.

The exact year the church began meeting will probably never be known. The original church register was lost when fire destroyed the parsonage in the 1890's. The church register in use in 1947 gives a list of the early members that was copied from memory by the church officials soon after the fire. It fixes the founding in 1823, though some of the oldest settlers say that they were told by their ancestors of an organized group of Methodists who, prior to that time, met regularly each Sabbath and at midweek for the worship of God.

The register shows entries of members received, both by vows and by transfer, in 1823. The earliest recording is the name of Mary E. Branning. It is assumed that the fledgling church in that year became a part of a circuit that included St. Augustine, Jacksonville (then Cowford), Fernandina, Alachua, Newnansville, and Palatka. This circuit was first served by J. N. Glenn as pastor; later by his successor, John L. Jerry, whose name appears on the register as receiving members; and still later by Isaac Boring.

In the diary of Isaac Boring are some entries of his having preached at various times at Black Creek. Boring's diary also records that he spent the night at the home of Mr. Samuel Garey, who, it is understood, was the owner and operator of Gary's Ferry across Black Creek, which bounds Middleburg on the north. The earliest recording of his preaching at Black Creek is July 26, 1828.

The community of Middleburg, according to the Jacksonville Historical Society Annual and the *Clay County Times* issue of December 17, 1926, is credited with being the second oldest town in Florida. Records show that it was settled by planters who received their lands by grants directly from the King of Spain. The eastern part of the section was granted to Mount Mullen and the western part to the Brannings and the Budingtons,

all prior to 1800; and a grant in the immediate vicinity to John W. Fontaine in 1816.

It is an established fact that George M. Branning and Osias Budington were some of the earliest settlers and that both of them had a vital part in the organization of the Methodist Church. Their names, together with Elijah Blitch, Andrew I. Phillips and John Summerlin, are given in the records as the first trustees.

For several years the little church seems to have struggled along faithfully, meeting in the homes of settlers on Sunday mornings and evenings and on some evenings in the middle of the week for worship and prayer. Later, the congregation met in a small schoolhouse on the rear of the property where the church now stands. Indications are that this was the meeting place just prior to the purchase of the property and construction of the present Historic Chapel.

The property was purchased in three parcels; the first by deed from John Schuefler on May 13, 1847; the second by deed from W. R. Long and F. W. Budington on October 17, 1927; and the third by deed from Fred T. Nooney on November 21, 1927.

The 1847 Chapel

There is a divided opinion as to the date of the beginning and completion of the Historic Chapel. According to statements credited to Mrs. Martha Ann Chalker shortly before her death in 1936 ("Grandma" Chalker as she was lovingly known in the community) it was not completed until early in 1852, and many adhere to this date because of their confidence in her memory and the fact that she was living at the time of construction.

Other old settlers claim that information from other sources definitely establishes that the church was ready to build when the first part of the property was acquired in May 1847, and that construction was begun immediately thereafter and completed that same year. Some mention is made of this in papers kept with the deeds by the trustees; however, this claim cannot otherwise be confirmed. There is a feeling, however, that it would hardly take six years to complete the type of building which was erected.

The Jacksonville Historical Annual of 1933-34 states that the lumber for the church was donated by George Branning and that the labor was performed by slaves owned by Branning and Osias Budington. Direct descendants of Charles Frederick Barthlow, Sr., have provided information that he was one of the overseers on the construction of the sanctuary. The structure is of wide clapboards on the exterior and wide random width tongue and grooved ceiling on the inside, all painted white. Nails were wrought by hand at the forge. The pews are of mahogany. All of the lumber was dressed by hand and even today shows the markings of the drawknife very plainly. An odd comment in the Annual is that in fabricating the pews, which are of the built-in type of construction so popular in those days, a wide aisle was left down the center in order to keep the men and women wide apart and on their respective sides of the church. Another interesting feature is that the two back pews were reserved for the use of the black slaves so that they, too, might have the privilege of joining in the common worship of the Great God of all humankind.

The bell which hangs in the modest tower was cast in 1852 and purchased in New York by George Branning. Some years later it was brought to Middleburg by steamship (for Middleburg in those days was a larger port than

Jacksonville) and donated to the church. After being installed in the tower, its first official note to the community was the tolling of the death of Robert Richard Reed Branning, the 20-year-old son of the donor. The younger Branning died February 20, 1860 and was buried in the little cemetery in the rear of the church.

The Chapel Today

The Historic Chapel is in a splendid state of repair and has been neatly kept inside and out over the years. It has remained in constant use since the first Sunday worship right after its completion. The simple white structure is situated among giant, moss-draped oaks with a background of camellias, hawthorne, azaleas, yellow jasmine, age-old cedars and holly. This sanctuary has served God and His people well, and continues to be of great benefit to the community where it has blessed those in need regardless of creed.

The silver-toned bell continues to invite people to worship each Sabbath. Rich in tradition, yet blessed in its simplicity, the historic sanctuary stands as a monument to Methodism and the dedication of pioneer stock who built the church for their generation and successive generations to worship God.

II. The Little Church Grows

Since this history was originally written several changes have taken place in the church property. Additional land has been acquired from the expansion of cemetery facilities through the generosity of Messrs. F. W. Budington and W. R. Long who deeded a parcel of land immediately to the right of the original property, as faced from the front, and running back approximately 400 feet or the same depth as the original property. Additional adjacent properties have been secured over the years to provide space for future expansion, additions, new building, green space, and parking.

In 1954, a Hammond spinet electric organ was purchased to replace the reed organ that was bought by the Woman's Missionary Society in 1929. This achievement was under the direction of Mrs. E. E. Barthlow and made possible by contributions and subscriptions from the congregation with Mrs. F. W. Budington and Dr. F. A. Copp as underwriters.

There have been quite a number of memorials added by individuals and the Woman's Society of Christian Service [editor's note: now called United Methodist Women]. There are two bronze vases in memory of Matthew H. and Emily B. Taratus; two bronze collection plates, one in memory of Miss Ella Long, presented by the Woman's Society and one in memory of James A. Prevatt, presented by his children; two bronze candleholders, one presented by the Church School in memory of James A. Prevatt and the other presented by the Woman's Society in memory of his wife, Mary E. Prevatt. Mr. and Mrs. S. R. Dunaway in memory of James A. and Mary E. Prevatt presented the communion table, Mrs. Dunaway's parents were members of the church for over 60 years. A pulpit Bible was presented to the church on Christmas 1951, by Ralph Ramis and Pauline Rebecca Bell, children of Mr. and Mrs. Wiley Bell of Jacksonville, friends of the Ray's. Rev. Ray arranged to have pulpit chairs and flower stands custom made by a friend. He also refinished the old pulpit, making a very beautiful altar in keeping with its surroundings. Rev. Ray personally designed, constructed, and installed the cross that once hung in the pulpit window (this has been replaced by the stained-glass window). A most generous bequest from Dr. F. A. Copp, Mr. and Mrs. Frosard Budington, Mrs. Pearl A. Lee, Mrs.

Lula Oliver, and Mrs. Juanita Downing made possible the annex to the sanctuary which was originally composed of a choir room, pastor's study, utility closet, book case and powder room. This area presently houses the History Room. A complete air conditioning and heating system was installed in the church. A change in light fixtures in the church was also made.

1960's Progress

Since the death of Mrs. Edith Ward Ray on February 15, 1961 and of Brother Ray on March 25, 1961, the church planned to establish a park on part of the new annex as a memorial to Rev. and Mrs. Ray.

Upon the death of Rev. and Mrs. Ray, the Florida Conference appointed Rev. Tom C. Geyer to succeed Rev. Ray as pastor of the Middleburg Methodist Church on circuit with the Doctor's Inlet Methodist Church. Under his able and dedicated leadership, the little church continued to grow both materially and spiritually.

Rev. Geyer served this parish until June 1963, when Rev. Frank E. Edwards was appointed by the Florida Conference. He and his wife, Jane, came to us directly from school and ably serviced us in addition to the Asbury Church (formerly Doctor's Inlet). During their sojourn with us a son, Daniel Elon, was born in May 1964. This was a distinct thrill for the church as no one could remember a baby being born to the parsonage family during their ministry to this church. Later we learned there was indeed a baby boy, John Wesley, born at the parsonage in 1914 to Mr. and Mrs. D. D. Dieffenwierth. This parsonage burned in 1923. Again on January 20, 1984, a son was born to the pastor and his wife, Rev. Larry and Lenora Shields, who lived in the parsonage on Butler Street.

A new manger scene was designed and completed by Mr. and Mrs. Robert White in time for its first showing at Christmas 1965. It has been refurbished and repainted several times over the years, with the most recent rendition created in 1996 by a group led by Tracey Jones and Scott McLendon. Mrs. White gave a large painting entitled "At the Door of the Fold" in memory of her father, Thomas M. Finnie; also, another large painting entitled "Come Unto

Me" was given in honor of her mother Mrs. May Finnie.

Rev. Edwards remained as pastor of this church until 1966, when he was appointed as full-time pastor of the Asbury Methodist Church in Orange Park.

Rev. Alfred A. Watkins, a retired minister from the Missouri Conference and then living in Penney Farms with his wife, Lonnelle, was appointed as our minister. In the few short months he proved to be a most effective and loving minister.

From August 1966 to April 1970, there were many improvements and changes. A flowing well was put down on the east side of the front yard of the church. A small frame house was built over the pump and well of the same architecture as the sanctuary and was fronted by the church bulletin board. This structure has since been removed and the well, though still in use, is directly under the floor of the Fellowship Sanctuary.

The Crusaders Class, made up of middle-aged and older adults of the church school, was very active during the late 60's. They accomplished various projects for the church and church school. This class held monthly night meetings in homes of the members and a devotional and social time was held as well as a business meeting.

During this time, new paraments were provided for the pulpit, new drapes for the pulpit window, and new carpet and kneeling pads were added. An upright piano was placed in the sanctuary. Carl Pfoutz, one of the lay leaders, hand-lettered a motto, "Come and Worship, Go and Witness" (Charles Newnham, author) which still hangs over the front entrance of the sanctuary.

New Methodist Hymnals entitled "The Book of Hymns" were purchased in 1968. Many memorials were made to relatives and friends. Each hymnal carried a note of donor on the inside front cover. The Woman's Society of Christian Service made a memorial to Mrs. G. A. Chalker.

Marvin Olin served as pastor from June 1968 to June 1969, at which time we were fortunate to have the Conference return Rev. Alfred Watkins, his wife Lonnelle and his sister-in-law, Miss Anna Pope, to serve as they so ably did.

The 1970's

In June 1970, the Rev. Thomas E. Vincett, Sr., part-time lay pastor, was assigned to the Middleburg charge. He gave his first sermon on Sunday, June 14, 1970.

The Rev. McCoy Gibbs was speaker for the worship service on Homecoming Sunday, May 2, 1971. In June 1971, the Rev. Vincett was reappointed to our church. During the year, new choir robes and a minister's robe were purchased. The acolytes received new robes as well.

On Sunday, November 28, 1971, King James Version pew Bibles were dedicated. Mr. and Mrs. James M. White of Green Cove Springs, FL presented these Bibles to the church in loving memory of their mothers, Mrs. Mattie Bickerstaff Rutledge of Russell County, Alabama and Mrs. Cordie Shea White of Accomac County, Virginia.

In June 1972, the Rev. Vincett was again assigned as our pastor and, with community growth, the attendance began to show an increase. On Homecoming Sunday, May 7, 1972, the Rev. T. D. Ryan, Jr., was speaker for our 149th anniversary celebration. Our church adopted a program to discharge the mortgage on the parsonage by the 150th anniversary . . . "Debt-free in '73."

In June 1973, the Rev. Vincett was assigned to the church on a full-time basis. The growth in attendance continued and the dedicated membership continued to give ample evidence of its love for God's work in the community.

During the year 1974, the wooden steps at the front entrance of the sanctuary were replaced with brick steps. Rev. Vincett began conducting an early morning worship service at 8:45 AM.

On November 24, 1976, our beloved pastor, Thomas Vincett, was called to his heavenly home. The community and our congregation were stunned and the great loss was heavy on every heart. The Rev. Alfred E. Watkins again filled our pulpit on Sunday and filled our spiritual needs in our hearts and our homes until the Rev. Larry W. Green was appointed by the Florida Conference in June 1977. Pastor Green resigned in October 1977. Several ministers served Middleburg over the next several months and in March 1978 the Florida Conference sent us the Rev. Henry D. Cribb, Sr., a bachelor from

McIntosh, Florida. The following February, "Hank" and Genelda Thomas were married in our sanctuary and the parsonage again had a "First Lady".

During this time, the Publicity Committee was active in posting signs along the highway and at strategic points in the community giving directions for locating our sanctuary. This committee also installed a public address system in the sanctuary with a connecting speaker to the Budington Educational Building.

Many memorials were made to the church during this period, including a number of monetary contributions to the Building Fund in lieu of flowers for funerals. Some of the tangible memorials were the Christian Flag, the United States Flag, an electric typewriter, brass baptismal bowl, reupholstered altar kneeling pads, new chancel drapes behind the pulpit, and pew Bibles.

On Sunday, December 10, 1978, our church decorated its first Chrismon Tree. This became an annual celebration with individuals making ornaments to be placed on the tree at a special service when an explanation of their meaning is given. Then dozens of tiny white electric lights are turned on to illuminate the tree. All Chrismons are symbols of Christianity and are made in either white or gold or in a combination of these two colors.

At this time, the church's first color pictorial directory was made possible through the efforts of Mrs. Barbara Hull.

The 1980's

During the summer of 1980, the Chapel was extensively refurbished, including window pane repairs, pews refinished, old paint sandblasted; and floors, interior and exterior walls, roof, and steeple repainted. The congregation was very proud of this "new look" and hoped it would prolong the life of this "... simple but always neatly kept white structure situated amidst giant, moss-festooned oaks..."

Another giant step for our church was the funding in the 1981 budget for a part-time youth director to serve the needs of our young people. This ministry was considered vital to the future of the church as its future lies in the hands, hearts, and minds of our youth.

During the next five years, we experienced many changes in our church. The church sponsored the blood mobile at intervals and obtained a blood bank allotment for our church. The church choir, in cooperation with other Methodist churches, continued to have the Fifth Sunday Night Sing-A-Long.

In June 1981, a new minister was assigned to our church; Rev. Larry Shields, a bachelor, coming from Jasper, Florida.

During this time, the church began sponsoring Brownie and Girl Scout troops. Over the years, Girl Scout, Brownie, Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops have become an integral and valued part of the ministry of Middleburg United Methodist Church to the community.

On April 17, 1982, Rev. Shields married Lenora Ann Mehaffey at the Ortega Methodist Church.

In 1982 pew cushions were made by long-time member Irene Frisbee for the church pews. Additional bookracks for the church pews were built by Mr. Jack Davis with the Crusaders' Class sponsoring the cost of materials.

Mrs. Shields' parents, the Mehaffeyes, presented to the church a pair of brass candle lighters and a white minister's robe and stole.

During the 1980's Lenten Soup Suppers were held on Wednesday nights during the Lenten Season.

During 1983, the church had a booth at the Clay Festival held in Orange Park. Also, in 1983, the church gave permission for a parent co-op nursery school to open in the Budington Building. This pre-school co-op operated for several years.

A short-term Volunteers In Mission program to St. Vincents Island was approved, sending two men from our church for two weeks at a cost of \$1,100 per person. An anonymous donor paid for one of the two to go. The church voted to send Rev. Shields and James Geiger. The purpose was to help, together with other churches, to build a church there.

On July 18, 1984, Joe Barth and John Lempke were selected to go to the Dominican Republic to help repair a boys school. Six under-privileged children from Alaska were sponsored by the church for summer camp.

The First Coast Baptist Church, a mission of the Baptist General Conference of Arlington Heights, Illinois, under home missionary Bob Hart, began meeting in the Historic Chapel on Sunday, November 4, 1984.

Rev. Larry Shields was transferred to Albright United Methodist Church of St. Petersburg and was replaced by Rev. Brinton (Britt) Minshall who spoke for the first time on Sunday, June 16, 1985. He came with his wife Kelly, from Philadelphia, Pa.

In August the church purchased a 1976 Ford, 66-passenger bus for \$6,500. At the August 1985 Administrative Council meeting Mrs. Doris Bell reported on the progress of the library, which was being moved from the Budington Educational Building to the back room of the sanctuary. Mr. and Mrs. Al Johnston donated all the shelves. A need was expressed for a window air-conditioner, good reading lights and a couple of easy chairs. A fund was started for these items.

Mary Frisbee began a wonderful "mail-out ministry", sending bulletins and notes to new visitors and to those who have moved away and to the elderly. She continues this ministry into the new millennium.

In August 1985, a new outreach ministry was begun. Rev. Minshall compiled a packet containing six items: the "Quotations of Jesus Christ", a map, brochure, letter of welcome, list of all churches in the area with their times of worship with the Middleburg United Methodist Church at the top of the list, and a Salvation Booklet from Wesley Press. These packets were taken to new residents of Middleburg by visitation volunteers.

Due to greatly increased activity a second telephone line was installed and Prayer-and-Share Service was begun on Wednesday nights. Beginning with 24 persons, by the end of 1985, the Wednesday attendance was over 50. Sunday morning attendance began going over 200 on a regular basis.

A Mission Rally was held in November 1985, with Rev. Paul Haines, a former Korean missionary. A new directory of the church was prepared to reflect the increased membership.

A new church goal was established: "Reaching out to others in the name of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The fall confirmation class of 12 youth was confirmed on Sunday, December 1. Over 230 persons were present as was Channel 17 TV station. The event was widely covered by the media because Bishop John Snyder of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Augustine assisted in the ceremony with our Rev. Minshall. This was the first time in history that the Roman Catholic Bishop participated in a protestant confirmation. The event was reported over the BBC network in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

In 1986, "The Happening" was established. This program was designed to appeal to young people. It was held on Wednesday afternoons following school and meshed with the regular Wednesday night supper and church service.

A Christian Youth Crusaders program (CYC) for ages 3 years through sixth grade was conducted in the spring of 1986 and was repeated in the fall. This program was held on Sunday evenings and continued for the next 6 years.

The Jacksonville Symphony String Ensemble performed "The Seven Last Words of Christ" during a special Good Friday service.

During the year 1986, the church's facilities were shared with others including a cooperative day school, Brownie and Girls Scout troops, Presbyterian Vacation Bible School and Alcoholics Anonymous.

The church hosted the first Black Creek Camp Meeting at Middleburg High School, conducted Vacation Bible School during August, and organized weekly day trips for children and youth. The church served bar-b-que dinners at a booth at the Fourth of July Celebration, raising more than \$400.

A new split-rail fence was constructed across the main courtyard. An additional 24 chairs were purchased for the fellowship hall. For economy, a used 15-passenger van was purchased for small groups' travel when use of the church bus would be uneconomical.

At the October 1986 Administrative Council meeting, Rev. Minshall reported that the Tucker family donated two cemetery lots to the church that

are located in the Holly Hill Cemetery on Old Jennings Road. These were accepted.

In June 1987, Pastor Britt Minshall left the Middleburg church after serving here for two years for a new appointment in Miami. The Rev. Larry Loveday and his family came to us from the Altoona and Paisley United Methodist Churches after serving those two charges for eleven years.

The church continued participation in the community in many ways in 1987: Brownies, Scouts and Alcoholics Anonymous met in our buildings. A church float was entered in the Fourth of July Parade. The church participated in the 200th Anniversary of Our Constitution. And, in October, the church hosted a community All-Saints Eve party for the children and the young-at-heart of the community.

During 1988 the church continued a slower but steady growth under the leadership of Rev. Larry Loveday. Children's Church for children ages 6 and under was begun again in February 1988, and the band and choir continued to expand and flourish. The Trustees were very busy most of the summer installing a sprinkler system in the church yard and a storage room in the Fellowship Hall breezeway.

During August 1988, a fish fry and flea market raised \$474 and the United Methodist Youth Fellowship held a 30-hour famine, during which the teenagers fasted from solid foods and, through sponsors, raised \$300.

In October, the Historic Middleburg Festival and Winter Bazaar were held in conjunction with one another. The United Methodist Men had a pancake breakfast in the morning and a bar-b-que in the afternoon. The youth sold hot dogs. A combined contribution of \$2,213 went to the general fund.

The church sponsored five Brownie and Girl Scout troops during 1988, and Weight Watchers met in our fellowship hall. In addition, the church sponsored ladies aerobic classes several times a week.

During 1989, the church body pledged \$1200 worth of food to the Middleburg Food Bank.

A Building Needs Committee that had looked into the need of a new educational building reported that while they recognized the need for larger

facilities, they were recommending that building planning be suspended until a more consistent pattern of support was established. They further recommended that repairs be made to the Budington Building in the interim.

Papers of Incorporation were finalized with the State of Florida in July 1989. These were required by the federal Internal Revenue Service to maintain the church's non-profit status.

The Early 1990's

During 1990, the congregation learned that the District was considering selling the Florida Annual Conference's nearby Lake Asbury Retreat Center (LARC) in order to use the money to upgrade facilities at Leesburg. We were very relieved to learn that Annual Conference decided not to sell LARC, but to study the matter for one year. Our church and other area Methodist churches began to use LARC and to make improvements. The District United Methodist Men's meeting was held there and our church sponsored a Praise Party and other functions there.

The Vacation Bible School enjoyed a steady growth year after year and an excellent reputation in the community. Bible School receives excellent support and special thanks go to the dedicated church member moms and dads who volunteer to head up the summer program each year. In 1990, 75 children attended Bible School and there were 22 adults and helpers. Numbers have remained steady through the 1990's and into the new millenium, primarily because physical space has limited the number of children which could be accommodated.

In 1990, the Trustees applied to the State of Florida National Historic Society for a matching funds grant of \$3500 for repairs to the Historic Chapel. The grant was denied, and so repairs to the sanctuary have continued mainly through many hours of volunteer work by dedicated members of the church and several special financial gifts.

Dr. Marvin Aranove, pastor of a Messianic Jewish Temple in West Palm Beach, preached a revival in November 1990.

Middleburg United Methodist Church was one of fifteen district churches that paid 100% of their Connectional Giving (apportionments) during 1990.

In early 1991, a special conference was called for February because Conference Connectional Giving had dropped.

In May the homecoming speaker was Jerry Fox, a past member of our church. With patriotism at a high because of the recent Persian Gulf Crisis, the fellowship hall where the homecoming service was conducted was decorated with American flags. A total of 261 people attended Homecoming in 1991.

In June 1991 Rev. Loveday and his family were transferred to a Methodist church in the Orlando area. Rev. Thomas Otto and Mrs. Anna Otto came to us from Jasper, Florida, where he had served two years.

A financial campaign was held in 1991 to obtain seed money for a much-needed new educational building. The campaign was headed by Financial Chairman Larry Clevenger and was called Miracle Sunday. \$13,463.13 was brought to the altar in cash, along with items to be sold such as an automobile and two time-share condominium weeks. Maintenance on the sanctuary and Budington buildings continued throughout the year.

Acolyte training was begun for children ages 6 years through 6th grade to assist at worship services. These training sessions continue to be held about twice a year.

The congregation continued to help fund the Middleburg Food Bank with a special offering taken once each month at Sunday services. The Sunday evening Christian Life Crusaders (CLC) children's program continued under the supervision of sixteen dedicated adult volunteers.

A second Sunday morning service at 8:30 a.m. was begun again in October 1991 and both morning worship services were moved to the historic sanctuary.

In October 1991, the church's activities in conjunction with the Historic Middleburg Festival netted \$1,302.59.

For several years our choir combined with the Middleburg Presbyterian Church choir to present a Christmas Cantata. The children presented a wonderful Christmas play, and once again church members supported the Russo Prison Ministry's

Angel Tree Ministry, which provides Christmas gifts for children of prison inmates.

During 1992, the Miracle Sunday Fund was designated to go to the Educational Building Fund. Bequests by Mrs. Anna L. Pope and Mrs. Wilna J. Budd totaling \$6,000 were designated to be spent on building maintenance, and a bronze memorial plaque was ordered to memorialize these bequests.

A three-night revival, "A Festival of Faith", was conducted in September of 1992; led by Evangelist Rev. Arnold Prater. It was inspiring and well attended, and included a 19-1/4 hour marathon reading of the New Testament. In November, a community-wide Thanksgiving Service was held in our fellowship hall with Rev. Mark Sellers, pastor of Boundless Love Church, bringing the message.

For several years, the Middleburg United Methodist Church supported Delbert Groves and his family as missionaries in Zaire. Two of our own men, Rev. Thomas Otto and Earle Theus, went to Mexico as volunteers in a mission program to build a medical clinic for the Tarahumara Indians in Pittoreal, Mexico, in October 1992.

The church responded to the hurricane disaster in South Florida. Jim and Esther Gilmore volunteered their vehicle and delivered \$650 and 7-1/2 tons of food, water, roofing paper and other supplies which had been collected by the Jacksonville District at Murray Hill Methodist Church in Jacksonville to the Silver Palm United Methodist Church in Homestead, Florida. The church supported the United Methodist Children's Home in Enterprise, Florida, with a \$1,000 donation in 1992.

Mrs. Minnie Riles Guidry, a former church member now living in Chalmette, Louisiana, donated a wall hanging of the Lord's Prayer. It was hung in the choir room.

The 1993 budget was set at \$126,472. Photos for a new pictorial directory were taken in February. Repairs to the Historic Chapel included interior painting, repair of the front porch and supports, and anchoring of the bell tower which had begun to lean away from the building.

A very active telephone "prayer chain" continued its work of intercessory prayer for those who were in physical or emotional need.

At Lake Asbury Retreat Center (LARC), ground was broken on September 19, 1993 for a multi-purpose meeting hall with a kitchen and sleeping accommodations for 48 persons. Middleburg United Methodist furnished the refreshments for the occasion. The new building has greatly enhanced LARC's popularity as a retreat and camp for the Northeast Florida area.

In 1993, a new outreach program, "Rainbows for All God's Children" was brought to the northeast Florida area through Middleburg United Methodist Church and spearheaded by Robert Whiteley after he read about it in *Guideposts* magazine. This program included weekly peer-support-based meetings with adult facilitators for children dealing with the loss of a loved one through divorce or death.

The church again supported the Middleburg Volunteer Fire Department's Christmas Dinner for Senior Citizens with a cash donation. During 1993,

new signs were painted and posted on Blanding Boulevard directing people to Middleburg United Methodist Church. Through special donations, 200 new Methodist Hymnals were purchased and dedicated. We again hosted the community Thanksgiving Service and participated in the annual Fourth of July celebrations and the Historic Middleburg Festival.

In 1993, the church continued its community support by hosting in our buildings weekly meetings of six Girl Scout troops, one Boy Scout Troop, one Cub Scout den, one 4-H group, a support group for abused women and "Rainbows for All God's Children."

God is indeed at work in this place where many faithfully love and serve Christ's Church because they love Him even more. The Middleburg United Methodist Church Family anticipates greater "glories" in the days ahead!