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***Celebrating
120 Years***

1881 - 2001

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CELEBRATING

***First United Methodist Church
Port Neches, Texas***

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On September 9, 2001, members of First United Methodist Church celebrate 120 years of faith through worship, special recognition of fifty-year members, a pictorial review of the past, and a fellowship luncheon.

There is little known of the history of Methodism in Port Neches prior to 1880 except that Circuit Rider ministers served the community then known as Grigsby's Bluff. Circuit riders came occasionally to preach, stayed in the homes where services were held, then moved on to other communities.

Hazardous conditions were evidenced by the death of one minister, Rev. J. C. Kee, who drowned in the Neches River, and Rev. W. H. Crawford's report of having become lost in a dense fog between Grigsby's Bluff and Taylor's Bayou.

On September 6, 1881, Rev. W. H. Crawford organized the first local church in the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Gentz. Rev. R. W. Thompson was the presiding elder. There were sixteen members from the families of Keith, Smith, Gentz, Beaumont, Remley, Sampson, Cline, Lee, Nelson, and Merriman. Rev. Crawford traveled 200 miles each month to serve Sabine Pass and Terry Missions, which included Orange, Jefferson and Hardin Counties.

Circuit riders continued to hold services in homes until 1885, when a house that stood about the 500 block of Port Neches Avenue was damaged while it was being moved by wagon. Mrs. Margaret Ann Keith purchased the house for \$100 and offered it to be used as a school and a church. For the next nine years the community had a school, Sunday School, and church, where the men sat on one side and the women on the other, worshipping by the light of coal oil lamps.

In 1894, Mr. Bud Smith offered the congregation an acre of land in the center of what is now Port Neches, Texas. The building which was erected on this site served as both church and school until 1911, when Mrs. C. A. Baird gave land for a school and ended the church building's dual role.

Church services were held only once a month, since the minister served Sabine Pass, Deweyville, Port Neches, and Nederland. By 1916, Rev. J. L. Red was holding services twice a month.

Later, when Mr. Smith sold 50 acres of land, including that on which the church stood, to a Mrs. Baxter of Orange, the congregation was faced with a possible need to relocate. Mrs. Baxter sold the acre that held the church building to Dr. William Haizlip of Nederland, who then sold it to the church.

Faced with an agreement to pay their preacher \$125 a year and the additional \$150 indebtedness for the land, the members feared they might lose their church building. Mr. Con Wagner paid off the entire amount and later canceled the debt, giving clear title to the property to the Methodist congregation.

Membership grew rapidly, and in 1919, Mrs. Lola Staffen and Anna Block called a meeting to discuss building a new church. With Mr. W. T. Block presiding, the group pledged \$700. The Texas Company donated an additional \$500. Mr. Bunch was the contractor on the new building; A. C. Bigelow, the architect and Eugene Block, the carpenter. Mr. A. C. Mullins was chairman of the Building Committee, Secretary and Treasurer. Since there was no bank, Mr. Mullins put the building fund money in a heavy sack and tied it high in the thick branches of a chinaberry tree in his yard. The building was constructed on the corner of Main and Nall Streets with a mortgage of \$3,600.

In 1920 Rev. W. E. Hassler was appointed as the first full-time minister for the Methodist Church in Port Neches. During Rev. Hassler's ministry, the first Vacation Bible School in the Texas conference was held in Port Neches. The membership more than doubled, and the Sunday School had 250 enrolled. The first parsonage was built in 1921 at a cost of \$1,800.

In 1948 the old church property was sold. The old church was moved to the new location on Nall Street, and in 1949 construction started on the new church which cost about \$100,000. It was finished in 1950 with a mortgage of \$30,000. Mr. W. T. Block and Mr. Keith were trustees. Mr. Mullins, Mr. Bunch, and Mrs. Wallace Morgan were stewards.

Rev. L. A. Reavis was appointed as pastor in 1950, and under his leadership a beautiful new parsonage was constructed in 1953-54 at a cost of \$28,500.

Rev. F. D. Dawson was appointed as minister in 1954, and under his leadership the mortgage was paid off on the Sanctuary Building. In 1961, the church was completely air conditioned at a cost of \$36,000. Also in 1961, a new wing which contained Fellowship Hall, a parlor, kitchen and other rooms, and an educational building were added through a \$300,000 bond sale that also paid the debt on the parsonage and the air conditioning.

In 1999 an enlarged outer vestibule and canopy were constructed at the main entrance to the sanctuary, and canopies were constructed over the Nall Street Fellowship Hall entrance and Eugene Street sanctuary entrance. A new church sign was erected in 2001.

(compiled from various historical records)

Chronological List of Ministers

1881	Rev. W. H. Crawford	1917	Rev. J. L. Red
1882	Rev. Thomas Wilson	1919-20	Rev. J. C. Marshall
1883	Rev. J. T. Browning	1920-25	Rev. W. E. Hassler
(?) 1884	Rev. Sprowl	1925-27	Rev. T. C. Sharp
(?) 1885	Rev. Wilson	1927-29	Rev. L. F. Brothers
(?) 1886	Rev. Henderson	1929-32	Rev. R. E. Connell
1887	Rev. W. W. Hopper	1932-33	Rev. T. J. Beck
1892	Rev. Thomas Watson	1933-36	Rev. Harry Rankin
1893	Rev. John W. Jasper	1936-37	Rev. Milton S. Jordan
1894	Rev. John L. Williams	1937-38	Rev. S. P. Wright
1895	Rev. W. P. Kimball	1938-41	Rev. F. Claude Adams
1896	Rev. J. M. Bremer	1941-50	Rev. W. E. Hassler
1897	Rev. J. D. Dorsey	1950-55	Rev. L. A. Reavis
1898	Rev. K. P. Barton	1955-64	Rev. Ferd Dawson
1900	Rev. J. F. Wagnon	1964-65	Rev. Byron L. Lovelady
1902	Rev. B. C. Anderson	1965-69	Rev. T. Walter Moore
1903	Rev. J. C. Kee	1969-72	Rev. Roland T. Scales
1904	Rev. JW. M. Sherrill	1972-78	Rev. Earl S. Yokley
no date	Rev. J. Montgomery	1978-80	Rev. Tom Holcomb
no date	Rev. Bradley	1979-84	Rev. Gary Leinhart (Assoc.)
no date	Rev. Godbey	1980-88	Rev. James Frazier
1908	Mr. Milton	1984-85	Rev. Enid Sheppard (Assoc.)
1910	Mr. Long	1988-93	Rev. Verlon Feller
1911	Mr. Riley	1993-97	Rev. Marvin Agnew
1912	Mr. Bradley	1997-99	Rev. Herb Stallknecht
1913-15	Rev. J. C. Stewart	1999-2001	Rev. Michael Toland
1916	Rev. M. F. Wells		

Chronological Record of Events

1904	The first Epworth League and Missionary Society were established by Rev. W. M. Sherrill.
1920's	The first Boy Scout Troop was formed by Rev. W. E. Hassler, who served as the first scoutmaster.
1920's	A Youth group was formed by Rev. W. E. Hassler.
1927	The Belle Bennett Class was organized by Mrs. Etta Garrett and Mrs. John (Amy) Collins.
1931	The Wesley Class was organized in the parsonage by Mrs. Wesley McKee. Mrs. Guy (Lucille) Daniels served as teacher from 1931 to 1951.
1935	Present Scout Troop #51 was organized. This troop is the oldest in its district.
1938	A Young Women's Missionary Society was formed with twelve charter members.
1941	The Missionary Society changed its name to Women's Society of Christian Service.
1946	The Fidelis Class was organized by Mrs. S. C. Montgomery as a youth class. By 1950, it consisted mainly of young married couples.
1947	A Cub Scout Pack was organized by Rev. W. E. Hassler.
1949	The W. S. C. S. purchased a Hammond organ for the sanctuary in honor of Rev. and Mrs. W. E. Hassler.
1950	The Wesleyan Service Guild was formed with Mrs. J. R. Hennon as president.
1950	The window (The Good Shepherd) and front doors of the sanctuary were donated by the Wesley Class and dedicated to Mrs. Guy (Lucille) Daniels.
1954	The new parsonage was completed.
1958	The Upper Room Class was organized by Kenneth and Maggie Ruth Sanders, Thayer and Nancy Sharp, Becky Hester, Barbara and Glenn Smith, and Tom and Lucille Cooper. Dr. Houston F. Byrd was their first teacher.
1971	The Board of Ministries was formed.
1975	David Davidson organized a College & Career Class in the mid-to-late 1970's. It eventually became a young couples class called the "Undertakers" Class. The name was later changed to "Asbury" Class in the early 1980's.
1977	"Little" Church started on September 18.
1980	The pipe organ was installed in the Sanctuary.
1982	The wood carving behind the Chancel was donated by Ted and Katie Lott.
1984	The Promises Group of United Methodist Women was organized.
1991	The Discovery Sunday School Class was organized with Linda Matts as teacher.
1999	The enlarged outer vestibule and canopy were constructed at the main entrance to the sanctuary, and canopies were constructed over the Nall Street Fellowship Hall entrance and Eugene Street sanctuary entrance.
2001	A new church sign was erected.