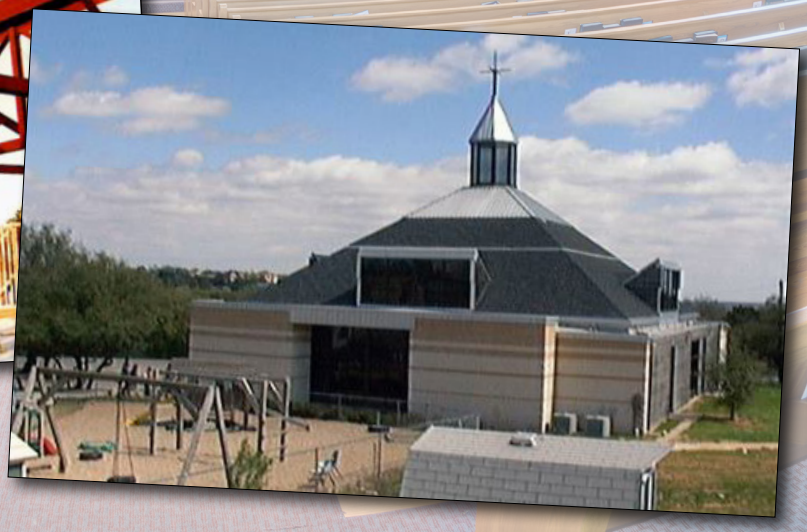
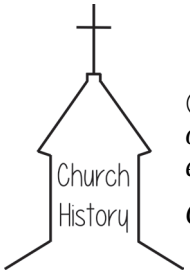
Remembrances

• *Our History as Told by Our Members* •

Oak Hill United Methodist Church

1979-2019





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Cover photo by Dave Wilson

oak hill
united methodist church

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We were born in a bar, and our formative years were shaped by a young maverick pastor named John Flowers. This "ecclesiastical DNA" continues to shape us to this day. We take ministry seriously but not ourselves. It's amazing; we give each new member a key to the buildings so they can be in ministry here! In some churches this would be unthinkable.

It's this desire to keep the main thing the main thing is what has helped Oak Hill grow and flourish. And what is the main thing? The main thing is making disciples of Jesus Christ. Over the past 40 years our pastors have confirmed more than 575 youth and baptized more than 812 persons. Thousands of persons have come through our doors. Some have lingered; others put down roots. Many have gone out to do ministry in our neighborhood, city, and beyond.

There are more names than I could mention that have left their footprints on our campus as well as in the mission field around Austin and around the world. So many faces come to mind, yet I hesitate to try to name them because the list is too long. I'd hate to leave someone out.

Nevertheless, you'll read some of their stories in this memory book. Read and remember these reflections of the past. Consider how far we've come to the present. Dream about where God will take us into the future. The best is yet to be.

Senior Pastor
2019

Charter Members

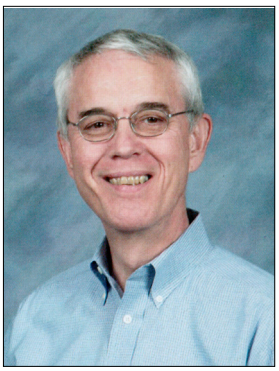
David Ahrendt
Kay Ahrendt
Philip Baker
Brian Baker
Stacy Baker
Stephanie Baker
Eddie Barho
Rae Barho
Bruce E. Barrett, II
Glenna Barrett
Paula Barrett
Douglas Beal
Karen Beal
Linda Bullock
Ronnie Bullock
Dinah Burgin
Lisa Burgin
Parker Burgin
Todd Burgin
June Cantrell
Lon Cantrell
Constance Carter
Robert Carter
Velma DeLeon
Mark Downs
Rosa Downs
Jimmy Dunks
Lisa Dunks
Martha Dunks
Eileen Gibson
James Gibson
Shane Gibson
Theresa Gibson
Linda Gissell
Michael Gissell
Charles Hopingardner
Wilda Hopingardner
Albert Jones
Margaret Jones
Mark Jones
Richard Jones
Annette Knight
Edwin Knight, III
Lori Knight
Luellen Knight
Kelly Knott
Carla Miller
Theodore Miller
Charlie Peters
Deborah Peters
Evelyn Peters
John Peters
Kenneth Peters
Michael Peters
Darnell Porter
Floyd Potter Jr.
Floyd Potter III
Joan Potter
Jack Rollins
Maurine Rollins
Jon Schneider
Jon Allen Schneider
Theodore Schneider
Venila Schneider
Gerald Schroeder
Jessica Schroeder
Shelby Schroeder
Winona Schroeder
Hazel Studdard
Lester Studdard
Harold Walker
Marilyn Walker
Karen Wallace
Lanny Watson
Mary Watson
Elizabeth White
Richard White
Diane Willenberg
Michael Willenberg

Jimmy Dunks

Bruce Barrett
1979

John Flowers
1980-1995

Barbara Ruth
1995-2004



John Reynolds
2005-2008

Jim Roberts
2008-

Senior Pastors

Karen Vannoy
1992-1995

John Wright
1995-2005

Will Rice
2003-2005

Val Sansing
2005-2008

Pam Sheffield
2008-2017

Stella Burkhalter
2011-2014

Katy Fitzgold
2014-

Associate Pastors

The Silver Dollar

"For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them." Matthew 18:20

It was a typical morning for the handful of members at Oak Hill United Methodist Church. Services were being held at the Silver Dollar South. The cleaning crew was just finishing up as the first few cars arrived to take over occupancy and to transform a small section of the dance hall into a facsimile of a church worship area. The chairs were rearranged and the trunks of the cars were emptied of hymnals, a cross, a large Bible, a toy organ, banners to cover some of the beer signs, and other church paraphernalia. This Sunday was special in that the first child born into the church (Barbara Ahrendt) was to be baptized.

As the Ahrendt family went up to the temporary altar, it was noticed that there was no water in the baptismal font. The font was quietly removed from the table and carried behind the nearest bar for water. However, there was no standard water faucet; there was only this large dispenser with lots of buttons on top for selecting your liquid of choice. Lighting was so poor that you could barely see if the liquid was colored or clear. The first two buttons were dark and dark, but the third was clear as "water". The font was filled and returned just in time.

After the service while things were being rearranged back to the way they were, it was noticed that the water in the baptismal font had lots of small bubbles in it. The dispenser was then checked under better lighting and sure enough, Oak Hill UMC had the first person to be baptized with club soda.

— Jimmy Dunks

Most traditions and customs have a story associated with their origins. One of our traditions at OHUMC is giving every person a key to the church at the time they join the church. This key is not a symbolic key but is an actual working key to the church. When Oak Hill UMC began in 1979, there was no building, no hymnals, no altar, or other things associated with a normal church. Our first priority was to locate a place to hold Sunday morning services. Our first consistent place to call "home" was a large western dance hall (bar) called the Silver Dollar South and later named the Double Eagle. Being a dance hall had some advantages as well as its share of obstacles.

One major disadvantage was that we could not have a key to the building. Someone had to be there before the cleaning crew finished and left on Sunday morning. There was a short time period that we could transform the dance hall into a place of worship. All early arrivers had to help, including first-time visitors. As the members arrived, the trunks of their cars were emptied of borrowed hymnals, banners, and many other amenities to be used on Sunday morning. After the service the reverse procedures were followed. When we shut the door from the outside, we could not re-enter, no exceptions (purse and car keys included).

One week, the dance hall was closed on Saturday night, so the cleaning crew did not show up on Sunday morning. We had no key to the building. What did we do? We held a tailgate service in the parking lot. It was said after that incident that when we get our own building, everyone would have a key.

— Jimmy Dunks

1979

In the beginning, Oak Hill United Methodist Church met at the Silver Dollar South, a full-fledged dance hall. Later, the Silver Dollar became the Double Eagle. This was our home for several years. Our rent was $200.00 a month. On Sunday mornings this place was clean as a whistle and the smell of beer was almost nonexistent.

The Silver Dollar's song books were not suitable for our church services so we had to purchase song books. There were two big boxes that appeared to weigh nearly 100 pounds each. Members volunteered to carry these boxes in their car trunk for a month each. When your month came, you would right off notice a reduction of miles per gallon on your gasoline purchases due to the extra weight in your car trunk.

— Joe Gathright

1979

In the beginning while we worshipped in the dance hall we served Communion in a similar manner as we do now; however, it was set up a little different. A long table from the seating area of the Double Eagle was set right in the middle of the dance floor. It was covered with a white cloth and the vestments were on the table. The congregation would circle around the communion table and the pastor and an assistant would pass around the inside of the circle serving the elements. As we grew the circle got larger.

— Joe Gathright

1979

As summer approached, when we were a small group meeting in the Silver Dollar, we decided that it was best to have one large Sunday school class with a different family leading the class each Sunday. We found curriculum that worked well for this scenario. This way the children as well as the adults were involved in leading and participating in the class. It was a great solution for a small group.

— Rae Barho

First confirmation at Oak Hill UMC.

The Mercy River Boys play during worship.

The Building

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." — Matthew 16:18

1980

As the first building on our current church property was nearing completion, we went into the Sanctuary (current Fellowship Hall) and wrote Scripture and our names on the concrete floor.

— Rae Barho

While the first building, which is now the Fellowship Hall, was under construction there was a meeting of members, prior to the laying of tile. This would be in the early 1980s. All members brought brushes and paint and each family picked a spot and painted any message they wanted on the concrete floor. There were many messages by the people who lost two fingers on their right hand and were proud of holding this right hand high in the air and saying something like "Go Horns." There were other areas that said something like "Gig 'em, Aggies." Way off in one corner, I remember seeing something that said, "Woo Pig Sooie." All these saying must have been painted by cattle raisers, fishermen who like to gig frogs, and pig farmers!

— Joe Gathright

1981

When we were almost ready to move into the building that is now our fellowship hall, the congregation was invited to write something on the cement before the tile was installed. All who wanted to participate came on an afternoon with their permanent markers ready to write and draw a thought before it would be covered up by the flooring. I wrote, "There is a sweet, sweet spirit in this place." Guess what? There is still a sweet, sweet spirit in this place.

— Kathy Gathright

The Fellowship Hall started out as the Sanctuary and was almost complete. John Flowers called me on a Sunday afternoon to ask if I could help "wire" up four speakers that would be covered with sheetrock on Monday. Back then electrical supply stores were not open on Sundays. I found some doorbell wire in my stash of stuff left over from building our house in Oak Hill. As far as I know, that wire is still hooked up to the speakers in the Fellowship Hall.

— Eddie Barho

Church Building–What's Next?

1994

After the completion of the new Sanctuary in 1994, the church as a body began to ask the question — what's next? A Futures Committee was formed to begin the process of gathering input from the church body on some, at first, very basic questions. I believe Mike Wolfe was the chairman of the Futures Committee and other members included Marsha Hughes, Amy Kadlecek, Sharon Douglass, Eddie Armstrong, and Phil Carpenter. The first question the group asked was—do we want to grow? This question proved to be more difficult to answer than it would seem. There were a significant number of members who liked OHUMC just like it was and didn't seem to embrace the idea of growing in size and membership. In the end, however, the consensus formed by the church membership was that our mission was to bring into the fold as many new disciples as possible.

Decision to Grow

Once the church membership reached a consensus to grow, it became painfully obvious that the physical plant would need to be expanded. The Futures Committee went to work formulating short-term and long-range plans for expansion. The planning effort included looking at what future buildings would be needed in order to accomplish our goal of attracting new disciples. The committee examined the need for children and adult education space, a new family life center and other options. The committee solicited feedback from the church body via surveys and other means. The feedback overwhelming showed that in addition to the music programs, the lifeblood of OHUMC was manifested in small group gatherings—primarily adult Sunday School classes. With meeting space already at a premium, the decision was made to move forward with planning for a new adult education building.

Adult Education Space

The committee began to look at different concepts for placing an education building on our 6-acre campus and it didn't take the committee long to realize that a building would not fit on our property. This was about the point in the process where I, with my engineering and land development background, was recruited in an advisory role to help the committee navigate through city of Austin development ordinances and other site-related issues. The committee, once again with input from the congregation, explored every conceivable option in an attempt to resolve the issue of not having enough available land. Options evaluated even included selling our property and buildings and picking up and moving to an entirely new location. In order to effectively weigh all of our options,

the committee decided to not only look at the immediate need of more education space, but also to do some long-range planning.

Master Plan

Prior to commencing the long-range planning effort, the committee interviewed five architectural firms in hopes of finding someone to design the new education building. All of the firms interviewed had extensive church experience. However, one firm stood out from the others—the firm now known as McKinney-York Architects, led by principals Heather McKinney and Al York. The building design was placed on hold, but the idea of developing a campus master plan was such a daunting task that the committee decided to hire McKinney to help lead the way. That proved to be one of the best decisions the church made throughout the entire process.

Land Purchase

As luck (or divine intervention) would have it, 12 acres of land was for sale immediately adjacent to our property to the east. The land was once owned by the United Methodist Church Austin District, but was later sold. So here we are, needing to buy back land that the Church once owned. How's that for irony—or maybe there's another word for it. Anyway, we did our due diligence, and it was determined that, based on having grandfathered status, we could ultimately build out the master planned campus in compliance with prior city of Austin development ordinances. The ordinances in place at the time would have severely limited the amount of "impervious cover" (buildings, parking lots, etc.) had we not been granted the grandfathered entitlement. So with a letter from the city of Austin documenting our entitlement in hand, we made the $400,000 land deal. Here's when things got really squirrelly.

The 1997 Texas Legislature

Shortly after we purchased the additional land, the 1997 Texas Legislature convened and, during the session, House Bill 1704, as it became known, the previous legislation establishing our vested rights, was inadvertently repealed. The repealing language was attached to another bill that was passed by both houses. How that happens, I'll never know, but apparently, it's not all that uncommon. Anyway, immediately after the repealing legislation was passed, senators and representatives began contacting cities asking them not to take any action before the legislature had a chance to reverse course and
1997 correct the mistake. Almost overnight, the city of Austin passed an interim ordinance, taking full advantage of the lawmaker's oversight, which forced developers and others wanting to build to have to comply with current development ordinances. The interim ordinance enacted by the city of Austin gave churches and other non-profits three years to obtain building permits for every building that they would ever want to build—a totally unreasonable and unattainable mandate for churches like OHUMC, given the ever-evolving nature of church building programs.

Going to the Capitol

The church was at an impasse—not really knowing how or if to move forward. The

committee determined that in order to escape from this state of limbo, we needed professional help. We hired Henry Gilmore, one of the best real estate attorneys in Austin. Henry told us that local developers were already positioning themselves to have H.B. 1704 reinstated in the 1999 session and that legislators would want to hear our story. Keep in mind that there's a long history of animosity between the State Legislature and the city of Austin. Henry arranged for Pastor Barbara Ruth and me to meet with a lobbyist who in turn arranged for one-on-one meetings with key members of both houses. Pastor Barbara Ruth and I testified before both Senate and House committees, telling our story of how the city essentially reneged on our deal. Legislators ate it up and when the bill was debated on the House floor, representatives retold our story—more divine intervention—as the saying goes, "God works in mysterious ways." The legislation passed and our vested rights were re-established—for the most part. Against the intent of the new legislation, the city still tried to limit our impervious cover. Ultimately, we hired another real estate attorney (more legal fees) to negotiate a development agreement which allowed us to move forward.

Finally Building Something

The Futures Committee became the Building Committee for the new adult education building. McKinney-York hung with us through everything and they were engaged to be our architect on the new education building. In the meantime, our Sanctuary was nearly overflowing, so we tasked McKinney-York to take a look at how we might increase seating capacity. We also needed to increase our Narthex space and provide a gathering space outside of the Sanctuary. McKinney-York came up with a plan to take out a wall on the south side of the Sanctuary for additional seating area. We also placed seating in what was the existing Narthex and constructed a new Narthex, bathrooms and outdoor plaza. We tied the new education building and fellowship hall to the newly expanded Sanctuary with covered walkways and provided much needed additional parking. Along the way, we re-designed the education building to include rehearsal space for the music program. The building committee wanted to make every effort we could within the budget to also provide the children with additional Sunday School classroom space. We were able to locate a portable office building and modify it to bring it into code compliance for education space. This building was placed into service as a temporary solution to what was hoped to be a short-term problem. The "temporary building" as it came to be known, has been repurposed any number of times over the years and is still being used today as storage, even after construction of the new children's education building.

Other Challenges

At one point, the entire project was in danger of being derailed because we could not acquire an easement. We needed an easement in order to abandon our septic system and extend a wastewater line to connect to the city's sewer system. Our first attempt was with the owner of the neighboring apartment complex. Let's just say that he was not very Christian-like in his dealings with us and leave it at that. We switched gears and decided to re-design the line to pass through the back of a residential neighborhood. We only needed an easement across the back of one lot that had a house under construction. The homeowner initially objected, assuring us that his concerns did not involve money. In the

end, of course, it was about the money and with the help of some pro bono lawyer work from one of our members (and $3,000) we were finally able to acquire the easement.

Paying for It and Paying It Forward

To pay for it all, we did something that had never been attempted before in the history of OHUMC—we conducted a professionally managed capital funds campaign. We ended up raising enough money to finance the new improvements as well as pay off the debt on the land and new Sanctuary. We had a professional campaign manager, but it would have never been successful without a lot of hard work by many members of the church family. We now have a master plan for the campus moving forward that includes a family life center and ultimately a larger Sanctuary. The second phase of the master plan has been implemented with construction of the new children's education building.

None of this would have been possible without the leadership of our pastors, Barbara Ruth and John Wright, countless late nights put in by the building committee and the willingness of the congregation to step up financially.

— Kevin Kadlecek

1986

OHUMC has always had to be very creative and resourceful. One of my fondest memories was in 1986, as the Hazel Studdard Educational Building was being completed. We were so excited to actually have Sunday School rooms, not to mention administrative offices. When the time came for the building to be moved into, we discovered that we were two Sunday School classrooms short of having enough. What to do, what to do, what to do? Being the creative persons we were (are), Charlie Brown kindly offered his motor home to be parked at the top of the parking lot directly across from the bridge. The fifth and sixth graders LOVED it. It also gave Charlie a place to "house" his motor home.

— Marsha Hughes

The Cross

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." — Mark 8:34

The big cross in the Sanctuary was made by current member Don Neumann, who is also in the choir. The little cross in the center of it on the crossbars was put there when Don repaired the cross after it fell off the wall during a service when John Flowers was preaching. Years later, Don made the altar table we now have, using the small crosses in the design to match the big cross on the wall.

— Gail Beckley

1995

When the new Sanctuary was completed, Don Neumann crafted the beautiful large cross now hanging on the wall at the back of the altar area. When it was complete, the contractor, in the throes of completing the building, installed the cross without the needed consultation with Don. At the first service, as Pastor John Flowers progressed into the scheduled service the cross slowly leaned, toppling down beside him and across the altar area. Pastor John is rumored to have said, "What did I say?"

It may behoove the senior pastor at any future Sanctuary completion to have a careful inspection of all the furniture and furnishings before beginning the first service.

— Carl Moore

1995

It was a sunny, warm Sunday in May—May 14, 1995, to be exact. The ritual of the service and sermon was nearly over. There was a combination of excitement and nervousness in the air because we were soon to have a change of pastors. The Rev. John Flowers had been with us for nearly 15 years and was about to be transferred with Associate Pastor Karen Vannoy to Travis Park UMC in San Antonio. To me, even they seemed a bit nervous.

There had been the baptism of a small child, Jennifer, daughter of Charles and Deborah Peters, earlier in the service. This family had been members of the church since Charter Sunday on May 6, 1979. Their older child had been baptized in the Silver Dollar South by Rev. Flowers and they were anxious to have him baptize this new baby before he left us. The whole family stood at the altar at the foot of our beautiful cross, as we all watched.

We were nearing the end of the service. Most of the sermon had been given when, all of a sudden, the cross began to pull away from the wall. It seemed to me that it didn't want to come down, but it gradually pulled away. For some reason, it leaned toward the right,

which meant that it didn't fall directly on the communion table, so there was little damage to the table. It did land close to where the Pastors and the Peters family had been standing during the baptism. Part of the rail was slightly damaged, but it could be repaired with no problem, we were told. The cross was definitely damaged.

As we sat there watching it fall, it seemed to me that it was groaning as it slowly pulled away. There wasn't much noise from the congregation. I looked at the faces of the people. They were in shock, too startled to let out any more than a gasp as they watched in awe. Immediately, the thought crossed my mind as I saw their faces that it seemed as if we were watching a horror movie. All were spellbound.

Pastors John and Karen stood in shock, too. They walked around the cross, stepped over it, silently inspecting it. John shouted, "Will someone please cut the electricity? There is sparking here." Then he said one of my favorites of his sayings, "My Daddy always said, '"Let's don't ignore the elephant in the living room' — let's sing the last hymn and close the service." We did, and then we all seemed to be in a daze as we left, never knowing what the sermon closing would have been.

The cross had been created and built by Don Neumann, member of Oak Hill UMC, who had 30 years experience in design and construction of museum exhibits. It was to hang on the wall over the altar.

In retrospect, all I could think was that the Sanctuary was seldom occupied through the weekdays. We were there four hours at most, on Sunday morning. I had noticed that the cross lighting had been left on through the week and wondered if we were wasting electricity, but I was told it didn't use that much energy and it was nice to have it burning as a good reminder when folks walked by. I had to agree. What if that cross had fallen any other time? With the electrical errors, we likely would have lost the building. God was truly taking care of Oak Hill UMC that day! And we now turn out the lights when the building is empty.

Since Don Neumann knows much about the building and construction of the cross, I asked him to write his story regarding the fall of the cross. Below is his account of the day.

— Margaret Jones

My wife, Kit, was on the committee for the current Sanctuary and members of the committee decided they wanted a large cross for the back wall of the chancel area. I volunteered to build that cross. In the process of measuring the space, I talked to the contractor who was working on the interior walls. When I told him why I was measuring, he offered to give me some of the redwood being used for the walls. The other prominent wood in the church is oak. So for the cost of materials, I built the cross which is designed with lights fitted into the back of it.

About six weeks after the cross was installed, John Flowers was preaching his last sermon before moving to San Antonio. About five minutes before the end of the sermon, the cross slowly detached from the wall, fell on top of the small altar table, shattering the glass, and hit one of the communion rails. The main damage to the cross was to the 15 foot redwood

board. Anything else could have been easily replaced but not the clear heart redwood, which was a special order. The board was repaired and looked fine, but was not strong enough on its own. The small oak cross, on top of the large one, spans the broken parts and holds it all together.

I determined that the cross detached from the wall due to insufficient mounting for the amount of weight. There was no problem with electrical wiring and no danger of fire. When the cross was repaired strong mounts were used to ensure stability.

Several years later, Pastor Val Sansing wanted to replace the altar table with a larger table. The cost of a new table was significant, so I volunteered to build a new table, and the family of Mary Jo Armstrong funded the project. The table is made of redwood left from the cross and oak to match the cross and other furnishings.

— Don Neumann

History

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." — Romans 15:4

1987

The Regenerates Sunday School class began when Pastor John Flowers asked Carl Moore and Chuck Feuerbacher to lead a class for empty nesters. The class has met in many places, including the Dunks' living room and the Pinnacle Building. We now find our home in Rooms 101-102 of the Adult Education Building. The class was built on the premise that we would take turns leading the lessons, that we would encourage discussion and that we would respect each other's opinions even when they differ strongly from ours. These basic ideas continue to this day in the class.

— Rae Barho

1987

Part of the saga of OHUMC is inherent in the history of the Regenerates Adult Sunday School class that has met at the old unheated octagon building, the board room of the building now on the ACC campus and in the room on the first floor, south end of the Adult Education Building.

Pastor John Flowers called for a meeting of all and any who were or might become interested in a new Sunday School class. The organization meeting was at Pastor John's house with refreshments to be furnished by Pastor John. It was evident he had no idea of the large response he would receive.

One result of the meeting was the creation of a new adult class to meet each Sunday. There was not a new space available to meet in, so the old octagon building was utilized, and the format was developed at the first meeting. It was decided on a discussion-type learning format with many subjects to be determined by the class.

The class has inspired and developed much of the church leadership; it extends a welcome hand to all adults who enter the church doors and who wish to enter into the sincere fellowship of a friendly body that works to expand their knowledge of the loving ways that Christ enters into our conscious lives.

— Carl Moore

1990

OHUMC has been involved with Austin Habitat for Humanity (AHFH) for at least the past 25 years or so. I (Jerry Morford) started attending OHUMC in 1995 and began volunteering with AHFH through OHUMC within one or two years of that time. The church was providing a volunteer group on the second Saturday of each month, but I am not aware of how long the church had been doing that. One gentleman had been leading the group and raising funds during that time. I believe his last name was Black, although he was still involved with the church when I arrived and provided some advice at times. A younger gentleman had taken over the group when I got involved. He subsequently left for divinity school in 1997 or 1998, at which time I volunteered to lead the group. At that time, we had a regular group of between five and 10 people, sometimes more, at the second Saturday workday. I'm not sure when, but at some point I asked Margaret Jones if she could arrange to have lunches provided to our crew workdays each month. We soon began providing lunches for the entire site work group, anywhere from 20-30 people. That caught on and people started looking forwarded to OHUMC's lunches. It was a lot of work for Margaret and her group, but AHFH started taking an interest in getting other groups to provide lunches on a rotating basis. They figured out that by feeding the volunteers and keeping them on the site, they would be less likely to "desert" if they had to leave the site for lunch. AHFH has been very involved in providing lunches to the volunteer groups ever since, and OHUMC was instrumental in getting this mission going.

Our youth group was periodically involved with a number of builds during this time. They provided excellent labor and learned a bit about what it takes to build a house. Unfortunately, AHFH started severely limiting youth involvement due to liability concerns. They limited site work to those 16 years and older, which greatly reduced the opportunity for our youth to be involved.

OHUMC was very involved (and still is) with the semiannual Methodist Builds, probably starting around 2005. We would have a fundraising effort in the fall through Christmas every other year and build the house with other Methodist churches in the spring. We would start by selling a square foot of floor space from an actual floor plan of a Habitat house. I actually got this idea from Mr. Black, mentioned above, who did this during his tenure as leader of the group. We would follow that with donations through Gifts of Caring at Christmas, and then have a pancake breakfast at Applebee's in January or February. Our goal for the fundraising was a minimum of $5,000 toward each Methodist Build, and we raised upwards of $8,000 for a few of the builds. We also participated in a number of Austin-area Ecumenical Builds where a number of churches of various denominations were involved in the intervening years between the Methodist Builds. So, we provided funding and volunteer labor annually for about four years until we decided we could no longer do fundraising for an annual build (the church started doing other local, out of area, and international missions). During my tenure of raising funds for the builds, we probably raised upwards of $30-40,000 and assisted with building seven or eight Methodist and Ecumenical Builds. As noted above, we are still involved with the semiannual Methodist Builds. Ernie Rebuck took over leadership of the group from me in 2014 and is continuing the OHUMC support of AHFH.

— Jerry Morford

1991

In 1991, I asked the members of the Young at Heart Dinner group if they would help me with a reading program at Oak Hill Elementary kindergarten where I was teaching. Five people offered to come to the school to read to the kindergarten students. Ross Baldwin generously told me he would support the program and fund our needs.

Project Young at Heart is an outreach of our church. Many members of the congregation have volunteered to read to the students, some have contributed materials and others have supported the project by telling others about it. If it hadn't been for those first volunteers, we would not have been celebrating our 25th year of reading aloud to the children at Oak Hill Elementary kindergarten.

Project Young at Heart combines the experience and caring of volunteer adults with the enthusiasm of young children to help them become successful readers. Reading aloud is a major step children take toward the love of reading. It provides that connection between adult and child to make reading a joyful experience. It shows how important school-community-church relations are.

I am thankful that the list of volunteers from our congregation is a long one. I believe God has provided mightily for our reading program. When I communicate with the volunteers, I sign the notes and emails with the words "you are loved." Each Tuesday is our day to go out into the world. What a great outreach opportunity it is to volunteer to read.

— Kathy Gathright

In the Beginning:

1979

They gathered in the living room of Martha and Jimmy Dunks for the first time on February 12, 1979; 16 of them. There was no money in the church treasury (actually there wasn't a treasury), no land, no building, and no pastor—only the 16 persons and their faith. Many things have changed since that first planning meeting in 1979, but faith is still the engine that drives this congregation of the Oak Hill United Methodist Church in Southwest Austin, now with a membership approaching 1,500. The first worship service was held February 25, 1979, in the Travis Country Subdivision Recreation Center. Founding Pastor Bruce E. Barrett, a retired Air Force chaplain, began a discipline of Sunday worship that has been interrupted only once, by an ice storm, since that first February service.

This congregation of believers, members like to tell you, was actually "born in a bar," and that's a true story! The most available and affordable meeting hall in the Oak Hill area in those early days was a dance hall called the Silver Dollar South (later renamed the Double Eagle). A recently ordained, 20-something pastor named John Flowers was appointed to lead this new church, and according to the older members, Flowers was custom-made for a church "born in a bar." There are plenty of stories still told about this young pastor from Houston, some of which are true, and all of which are laced with humor and grace. Pastor John Flowers led the faithful membership of Oak Hill UMC for more than 17 years. During that time, the church grew in membership, purchased land,

built buildings, hired staff, and created strong programs for adults, youth, and children. In 1992, the now-experienced Pastor John Flowers, along with his wife, Associate Pastor Karen Vannoy, left to lead Travis Park United Methodist Church in downtown San
1992 Antonio.

A Place of Consistently Strong and Faithful Leadership:

After Pastors Flowers and Vannoy left for San Antonio, a second husband and wife team was appointed to Oak Hill United Methodist Church, Senior Pastor Barbara Ruth and Associate Pastor John Wright. Under their leadership, Oak Hill UMC continued to grow in membership, and the church experienced a more traditional, but no less effective, approach to ministry. This pastoral team was instrumental in adding our Adult Education Building to the campus and oversaw the expansion and reroofing of the present Sanctuary. With this growth in membership, a second associate pastor position was created at OHUMC. Will Rice was the first to fill that position. Pastor Barbara Ruth went on to serve as district superintendent of the Corpus Christi District while Pastor John Wright was appointed senior pastor of a Corpus Christi congregation. "John the Third," aka Pastor John Reynolds, took the reins of the church in June 2005, along with Associate Pastor Val Sansing, a former member of the church. Together, they
2005 continued the tradition of strong leadership and faithful commitment to the mission of Oak Hill UMC. "Pathways," a contemporary worship service, was added as an alternative worship experience in 2005. In 2008, Pastors Jim Roberts and Pam Sheffield received appointments to make their way to Oak Hill United Methodist Church. Since their appointment, the church has, most notably, added a Children's Education Building and expanded its mission and outreach programs locally and across the globe. Stella Burkhalter, another member of OHUMC, joined the administrative team as a second associate pastor in 2010. She was instrumental in growing the Pathways worship service and will be remembered for her energetic and "out-of-the-box" ministry ideas. One example was her "The Church Has Left the Building" Easter Sunday service. After Pastor Stella's departure in 2014, Pastor Katy Fitzhugh was welcomed by the church and has made her mark continuing the Pathways responsibilities, supervising Youth Ministries staff, and working to grow an already-active mission and outreach ministry at the church. In August 2017 Pastor Laura Smith Adam was added to the staff as minister of pastoral care, visiting with the hospitalized, the homebound, and nursing home or assisted-living residents.

A Place to Discover and Answer the Call to Ordained Ministry:

The following members of Oak Hill United Methodist Church have gone on to attend seminary; many are still working in ministry:

- Jean Blevins Rearden
- Tom Gibbons
- Dea Eggleston
- Ryan Jenson
- Robbie Rhodes

- Joyce Kelly
- Leighanne Brechin
- Mark Brechin
- George Lumpkin
- Dave Wiant
- Val Sansing
- Elizabeth Wright
- Stella Burkhalter
- Will Rice
- Katie Muzos
- Katie Coleman

A Place for Missionaries:

Locally: Interfaith Hospitality Network, Habitat for Humanity, Austin Resource Center for the Homeless, Burke Home for Boys, Go Days, Prison Ministry
Globally: Imagine No Malaria, Haiti, Sierra Leone

A Place for Christian Education and Spiritual Growth (From Preschool to Adult):
Preschool, Sunday School, Christian Education Series, Bible Studies

— Lisa Jackson

The "loose" women just evolved. There is no history. One story about the beginning of the group happened at a Young at Heart dinner, before I moved here. John Peters offered to buy dinner for all the "loose women."

I attended the Adult Bible Class (now the Friendship Bible Class) in early 1998. After Sunday School, Ann Knight invited me to breakfast. And, thereafter, for several years, Ann, Betty Bednarz, and I had breakfast after church services. Our little threesome grew as other "unattached women" were introduced. Margaret Jones either calls or emails me to meet first-time "unattached" women at the information desk. They are invited to sit with us and then go to lunch.

I can't call our group an organization; there is no organization. We don't have scheduled meetings, collect an offering, elect officers, or have programs. Though we are not an officially sanctioned church group, we do have a specific mission. Our mission is to welcome women who are alone and to make them feel included, a part of a group. We are just a group of unattached women (therefore, "loose") who enjoy each other's company for friendship and fellowship. This group provides both social and spiritual opportunities for those of us who are not a part of a couple.

Our collective mission is service to our church. We are active participants in many of Oak Hill UMC's missions: Sunday School classes, Wednesday Bible study, Mary Martha Circle, the Hugs Project, Dorcas Quilters, Communion preparation, ushering, choir, filing name tags, working the information desk, greeting, ordering the Easter and Christmas flowers,

the literary group, volunteering in the church office, and Young at Heart.

We have always had such good times laughing together, eating together, playing together, and praying together. We celebrated holidays together with covered dish diners and cards, dominoes, or a movie. We had a birthday group that met every three months, and instead of exchanging gifts, we made a donation to the church mission of the birthday girl's choice. Some of us continue to attend plays, movies, and play cards and dominoes.

So, if you are "unattached" and would like to be a part of the "Loose Women of Oak Hill UMC," you'll find most of us in the third pew from the altar every Sunday morning at 11:15. Come join us!

— Charlotte Bennett

The "Loose Women" of Oak Hill UMC.

Missions

"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples." Psalm 96:3

Some people see the word "mission" and immediately think of far-off lands with primitive living conditions. Others think of a mission as a goal, like "My mission in life is to (fill in the blank)." When I see the word "mission", I think of community, fellowship, laughter, work, and LOTS of good food (we are Methodists, after all).

I have had the privilege of being part of several "mission" programs through OHUMC. Some have been nearby, like Habitat for Humanity or ARCH, and others have required travel, like Beaumont or Orange. At each of them I gave my all, feeling worn out when the work was done for the day. But each and every time, I left filled with so much more than I could ever give. I have known some great communities, the most accepting fellowship, joyous laughter, satisfying work, the best food, and amazing Christian love! For these opportunities and so much more, I praise God and thank Him for leading me to OHUMC.

— Colleen Meyer

My involvement in OHUMC has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. The friends we have made are the arms of Christ that we feel around us through all of life's ups and downs. My favorite memories are of the mission trips that we have gone on. Once we arrived to a home in Port Arthur that appeared to be completely beyond any repairs. We were shocked to find a pier-and-beam home that had been vacated for over a year. It was full of soggy, broken-down furniture, clothing, bedding, trash, and mold, and was occupied by rodents and birds. As our group walked around dazed and overwhelmed, we all agreed it would be better to set the place on fire and start over. We didn't see anything worth saving. How would we ever be able to help these people in one short weekend? Our eagerness had quickly turned to despair as we realized the job was impossible. Then the owner gathered us all outside and asked that we circle up and hold hands. I will never forget the prayer as she shouted out, "Lord, deliver us from this chaos and help these saints who have traveled so far find a way to get your work done." That prayer turned us around, and I am proud to report that it was nothing short of a miracle that we were able to get that home to a point that was safe and secure for that family of four to occupy.

— Bethany McMillan

2006

Thanksgiving. Workplaces closed, mass quantities of food consumed, and God's children paused to count blessings. What's not to love? In September 2005, Hurricane Rita, slammed ashore in Southeast Texas changing forever the lives of residents along the Gulf Coast with more than $11 million in damages. One year later, a group of 16 Oak Hill UMC members set out for Orange to participate in the ongoing recovery process. Many of us had little or no construction experience. We went anyway, confident that God would work through willing hearts to make up for skills deficiencies. For three

days we worked—removing water-soaked walls, ripping up rotten floors, pulling nasty toilets, soiled clothing, ruined household goods. We hammered and sawed, huffed and puffed until the structure that had once been a family's home was reduced to a skeleton. It was backbreaking, filthy, mold-infested work. Yet amazing things happen when trust is placed in God. We accomplished a goal we didn't think we could reach and had the time of our lives. We grumbled and laughed, stretching ourselves in ways we would not have imagined, for the benefit of a family we would likely never see again. And, along the way, we were reminded anew what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus. What a humbling honor. On the last night—with the grime washed away—we celebrated the conclusion of our work and our weekend with a Thanksgiving meal complete with turkey, dressing, vegetables, and pies. The homeowners joined us in the feast we prepared. We celebrated God's bounty and our blessings as His children. It was a Thanksgiving none of us will ever forget.

— Vicki Matustik

In 2010 the United Methodist Church started a pilot project in Austin called "Imagine No Malaria." Its goal was to eradicate malaria in Sierra Leone, a tiny country on the western coast of Africa. Each church was given an amount to raise of $100 per average worship attendee. For Oak Hill this meant $60,000.

As pastor I should have had more faith. I doubted we could do it. Lynda Rife and her fundraising team proved me wrong. In the end we raised over $120,000, the most of any church in the world. Our efforts were reported throughout our Methodist communications, and we were even mentioned on the floor of the United Nations.

Because of our accomplishments, I was allowed to travel to Sierra Leone to review the situation firsthand. There I found a beautiful country filled with amazing, warmhearted people. I witnessed poverty that would stagger the average American. On the positive side, I saw nets being distributed to families to cover their beds at night to keep the malaria-carrying mosquitoes at bay. It was a wonderful trip.

One of the highlights was meeting Bob and Carol Stoner, two Hoosiers who had been visiting Sierra Leone for many years. They had been working at the "Kissy Eye Clinic" in the city of Freetown. This United Methodist facility also housed a hospital, school, and church.

2011

In 2011 a team made up of Anita and Travis Barton, Karen and Hayley Pickett, Chris Jackson, JoAnn McGill, and I joined Bob and Carol on a mission trip to Africa. We worked with the locals building a wall to protect the hospital from trespassers, visited local churches, and built relationships with our new friends in Africa.

One of the highlights of the trip was the fact that all the women in our group were allowed to deliver a baby in the hospital. Amazing! Bob, Travis, Chris, and I were not asked to do this, and for the most part we were happy not to be.

The following year another team went back to the Kissy Hospital. This time their mission

was to build a walk way and ramp, so that disabled patients could actually make their way into the hospital. A simple, yet needed project.

Unfortunately, an Ebola outbreak hit western Africa, and Oak Hill has not sent a team since. I hope we will go back some time. As one of your pastors here, I'm so proud of all the mission work we do, locally, nationally, and worldwide.

— Pastor Jim Roberts

Just to start off, I was gripped by the invasive nature of poverty. Filth is in the streets, gutters, and outside the walls of the Kissy Complex in Sierra Leone. It is all about survival for these people.

We toured the worksite and the compound including a hospital, church, school, physical therapy clinic, and eye clinic. We watched the children line up for school and say their pledge of allegiance and sing their national anthem. Not every child goes to school, because it is not free.

We worked on chiseling the wall and preparing to make additions to the wall. We chopped down bushes and trees around the compound so that the workers would have room to work.

Throughout the day the children would come up and give us hugs and ask us to be their friend. By the way, when someone asks how you are they say: "How the body?" You say, "Body fine."

I delivered a baby on Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2011. It was a girl, and she was named JoAnn. She was beautiful, and she had a 3-year-old brother who was just as cute. Karen and Hayley Pickett and Anita Barton also delivered babies, and it was an amazing experience for them as well. The next day we prayed over a woman who had just lost the second child of twins; she did not make it to the hospital in time. The baby died of malaria. After everyone left, I went over and expressed my sorrow and told her that I had never lost a child, but my daughter, who was adopting a baby from Ethiopia, lost a child three weeks before they were to pick him up. I told her I knew how much it tore her apart, and to please know God will take care of you and heal the sorrow you have experienced. I hope it helped, and she seemed to calm down. I felt like God gave me the words needed. That was an experience I will not forget. I had experienced the miracle of birth and the sorrow of death within two days of each other.

2011

We worked on bending rebar and mixing concrete. One of our goals was to begin the wall and put a section of the wall into the river that was filthy and full of debris. It could have been such a beautiful area with the stream, but there is no sanitation system there in Freetown.

Chris Jackson was the go-to person to find generators, computers, and printers. The perfect guy, he went all over Freetown to bargain with the street vendors.

We did most of our tasks as a group, which is wonderful, but also there were times when

we broke off into smaller groups to share, visit other sites, and go to the internet café. I believe I have never shared so much. By this time, relationships had deepened within our team and our new African friends.

Thanksgiving Day came (as we celebrate it over in America) and we ate chicken, rice, etc., just like we did the rest of the time. I reflect back on my time there and realize that Americans want and get so much, but they still want more—never satisfied. People over in Freetown are so happy and content and full of joy with what they have. Of course, they know no different.

The children are absolutely amazing. They have the biggest smiles, and their eyes shine all the time. There was a 7-year-old boy who captured my heart, and I could have brought him home with me.

We also went to Bo, Sierra Leone, and it was much cleaner and more laid back than Freetown. It was good to see another part of the country. Freetown is the capital of the country, and many people fled to Freetown to escape the rebels.

We attended a prominent church in the inner city. The church service lasted over two-and-one -half hours. It really felt Methodist with things like the passing of the peace. It was a powerful service. The people there are very strong in their faith.

Chris Jackson, Carol Stoner, and I worked in the Well Baby Clinic one day. It was very disorganized, and we wished we could be there for a couple of weeks to get things done (the way we think it should be to work well).

Mothers can pay 2,000 Leones (approximately $10) so their babies will have health care until the age of 5. Not everyone can afford this, so some children go without any health care.

We went during the dry season, but one day it must have rained two inches in about an hour.

On our last day there, the hospital staff threw a party for us. It was very nice and emotional for all.

What everyone received from going to Sierra Leone was not the same. What I brought back I will never forget. I think of my friends over there often, and I pray for them every night. This was my very first mission trip, and I went to give of myself. What I received in return, I will never forget.

— JoAnn McGill

Oak Hill United Methodist Church has been my church for many years, and during that time I have tried out many different ways of helping, both within the church and with outreach. Some of the things I found I was not any good at or didn't like doing. Others, I liked doing, and I was good at them. Some things I have tried have been crisis meal coordinator, office volunteer, junior high Sunday School teacher, finance committee member, Montopolis Friendship Center volunteer, pet portrait artist for missions, and

mission trip member. I have been blessed by doing every one of these jobs, both by knowing that I am helping, and by the friendships formed with other workers. There is a special joy in knowing you are sharing God's love with complete strangers on the mission trips. And I have felt the love from my Oak Hill church family, especially in my grief when my husband Phil Brandt died, and five years later at the churchwide celebration when I married Malcolm Brown. In my Sunday School class, Seven Class, we have each been telling our stories, and we all come from very different places, but we are also glad to have found this welcoming church, where everyone is a minister.

— Cindy Brown

Mission to Mexico

Ministries

"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples." Psalm 96:3

Deaf Ministry

2012

The presence of a deaf visitor named Caroline Koo in 2012 prompted church leaders to explore the need for deaf services within the United Methodist Church. What they found is that there are currently no United Methodist churches in Austin offering such services. The church felt compelled to support efforts to reach this part of our community by hiring interpreters, one being Jennifer Bryce. Jennifer is an advanced certified interpreter and teacher of the deaf. She explains, "Because OHUMC strives to serve all of God's children and wants to open its doors to everyone, they have worked hard to find a team of qualified interpreters."

As a result of this effort, Caroline has become a member of OHUMC. "I am so proud of OHUMC and feel blessed to be part of their community," Caroline says, "Oak Hill United Methodist Church is a testimony to the United Methodist Church's "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors." Not only do I have equal access to sermons and Sunday school, but also I enjoy learning and growing under UMC's guidance. I am now able to appreciate being a fourth-generation UMC member as a direct descendant of Bishop Kaung with relatives who are very active in UMC worldwide."

Following the guidance of Caroline and Jennifer, OHUMC has embraced this ministry for the deaf. The church is using advanced certified interpreters to make the 10 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. worship services accessible for deaf visitors and members. In addition, interpreters are also available for Sunday school and special events upon request. "We are delighted to begin this new relationship with Austin's deaf community," Pastor Jim Roberts said, "Our church has a long tradition of warmth, openness, and fun blended with vital ministry and mission. We are honored and blessed to welcome our deaf friends to Oak Hill UMC."

The picture below is from the 2014 Jurisdictional Deaf Ministry Conference, which Oak Hill UMC hosted.

Music Ministry

With today's vibrant music ministry, including adult, youth, and children's choirs, praise bands, ensembles, and handbell choir, it's difficult to imagine it all started when Oak Hill UMC met at the Silver Dollar South, with only a handful of people in a choir, accompanied by a small keyboard with a sticking key.

The music program would be forever changed after a visit to the newly formed church one Sunday morning by Eve Lockhart and Mary Beth Gartner. It was noticed that they "sang with gusto." Promptly after the service, Eve and Mary Beth were invited to join the choir. Eve was enthusiastic, and Mary Beth agreed to attend a rehearsal, but not join the choir. When they arrived at the Hopingardners' home for choir rehearsal that week, they learned that the newly hired choir director never showed up. Being musicians, Eve and Mary Beth stepped right in, with Mary Beth on the piano and Eve directing the choir.

And that was the beginning of Mary Beth Gartner's tenure as music director at Oak Hill, where she served until her retirement in 2007. Mary Beth built the music program into the outstanding music program it continues to be today, in part because of her fine taste in music and largely because of her outstanding recruiting. Throughout her years as music director, she was always inviting church newcomers to join the choir. When they were starting out, the choir rehearsed in members' homes or at the Baldwin Beauty School on Highway 71 in Oak Hill. After rehearsal, choir members often walked around the surrounding neighborhoods inviting people to church, followed by social time.

As the choir grew, the small keyboard was replaced with an out-of-tune grand piano —full of cigarette burns—on the stage of the saloon. After a while, a member, Karen Beal Hobbs, donated her home organ, and it was stored in a small closet at the Silver Dollar (whose name had changed to the Double Eagle Saloon).

When a church campus was acquired and the first multipurpose building—now the Fellowship Hall—was built, an organ was installed on Christmas Eve. Several members had to sign a bank note to purchase the organ. Susan Jacobs was the first organist. The first major work the choir performed was Handel's "Messiah," and it was a disaster! Performed on a Sunday afternoon, there were more people in the choir than the congregation; the organist fell ill and could not play at the last minute, and Mary Beth had to direct the choir while she accompanied them on the piano. Since that first disaster, the Chancel Choir has been known for its excellence for many years. They even made two trips to Washington, D.C., to perform at the White House Christmas Open House, invited by President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush.

When the current Sanctuary was built in 1994, a larger organ was installed. And dinner theater became a way for the choir to have fun and raise funds for special projects, like purchasing the organ or supporting youth programs. At this time, a three-octave set of Malmark handbells was purchased. Soon after, a fourth octave of handbells was added, as well as a three-octave set of hand chimes. The Hillside Ringers adult handbell choir and a women's handbell choir were formed, and a youth handbell group met after school once a week.

Not long after moving into the new Sanctuary, the congregation realized that the Sanctuary needed to be expanded. After the expansion, there was another campaign to purchase a new organ. The organ, still in our Sanctuary today, has many electronic features which the Allen Organ representative, Tony Delacroce, knew how to use to their fullest. Tony became our church organist after Isako Johnson, who had served in that role for more than 10 years, moved to New Braunfels.

As the church grew, and there were more music ministry needs, Mary Beth had a need for an assistant music director, and Jon Nelson served in that role. Barbara Mittanck also served as a music assistant. Basil Jackson served as youth choir director, Greg Graham served as middle school choir director, and Kim Graham served as children's choir director. Sonja Vandivier was piano accompanist for the youth and children's choirs; Cathy Ingersoll was piano accompanist for the middle school choir. Jon Nelson began praise band ministry; Greg Graham was later appointed worship leader for the Pathways worship service and continued in that role until 2018. Handbell choirs took a hiatus during the building of the Adult Education Building, since there was no space for rehearsal. Cathy Ingersoll restarted the Hillside Ringers when the Adult Education Building opened in 2001, and she continues in that ministry today.

Later, Jon Nelson became director of a combined middle and high school youth choir, called Crossfire; Cathy Ingersoll took over the children's choir, and Suzanne Steves took on the "cherub" choir. During these years, the youth choir would go on summer tours with a bus full of youth.

Mary Beth retired, and Rick DeJonge was appointed music director, serving for three years. Rick had incredible energy and used his talents as a musician, composer, and arranger in worship and special programs. In addition to arranging music with orchestrations to accompany the choir, he wrote musical productions—two "movie night" productions, with choral ensembles singing to movie clips, and an original Christmas musical production. Rick was involved in all aspects of music ministry—he not only directed vocal choirs, but often he would play piano for worship services, fill in on drums with the praise band, lead the youth choir and youth praise band rehearsals, or ring handbells with the handbell choir. During this time, Tony Delacroce moved, and a new organist, Lenore Alford, an organist with a doctorate in Organ Performance from the University of Texas, was hired.

When Wednesday night programs began at Oak Hill, Cathy and Suzanne started new programs for children—Kingdom Kids for second graders through sixth graders, and Kingdom Cubs for 4-year olds through first graders. The program focused on Bible lessons, learning about music, learning songs to sing in worship, drama activities, and game time. The groups also put together Christmas musicals annually and a spring production biannually.

Rick DeJonge moved to Nashville in 2010, and Dr. Suzanne Pence, an associate professor at the University of Texas, was appointed director of music. Kendra Lipman was hired as assistant director of music, and Hyojin Song served as organist until July 2013. Diana Hopkins served as the assistant director of music with HeeJung Min as organist. Sonja

Vandivier continued to serve as piano accompanist through 2015. Currently, Sheryl Stack and Cathy Ingersoll serve as organist and piano accompanist, respectively, and University of Texas graduate Kati Cox is the assistant director of music and leads the children's and youth choirs.

Dr. Pence has made her mark on the music program with fine choral productions and excellent vocal direction. Her excellence in vocal direction is appreciated by the singers she directs and the congregation who listens to their music. In addition to the Chancel Choir, Dr. Pence leads some smaller ensembles including the Good News Singers, the Men's Chorus, and Women's Chorus. While the Oak Hill UMC congregation has many fine instrumentalists, Dr. Pence has also brought in musicians from the University of Texas to perform for Sunday morning worship. The Hillside Ringers handbell ensemble, under the direction of Cathy Ingersoll, is known for playing a variety of styles of music for worship, including many original pieces and arrangements.

— Cathy Ingersoll

2007

The picture below is from January 2007 when Mary Beth retired. The Chancel Choir surprised her with a guest conductor, Joseph Martin, who we commissioned to write a song for Mary Beth. He directed the choir that Sunday morning. A copy of the song is posted in the choir room.

— Jon Nelson

Stephen Ministry

1998

Stephen Ministers care for people facing tough times through confidential, one-to-one Christian care. They provide the emotional and spiritual care needed when someone is faced with a crisis or difficulty such as grief, spiritual needs, health issues, relationship problems, job situations, or other life challenges. The Stephen Ministry at Oak Hill United Methodist Church began in 1998. After money was raised in a huge garage sale for our membership in Stephen Ministry, Pastor Barbara Ruth, Diane Miles, and Ron Hejtmanek went to San Antonio to receive training as Stephen Leaders. On their return, they asked those interested in participating in the ministry to fill out applications. There were 23 persons in the first class of Stephen Ministers at Oak Hill UMC. Since then, 75 Stephen Ministers have been trained at our church. We now approach our 22nd year of Stephen Ministry at Oak Hill UMC. Stephen Ministry has served many who needed care, both members of the church and others in the community. At this writing, we have 16 Stephen Ministers serving actively.

— Rae Barho

United Methodist Men Ministry

1990

Somewhere around the end of 1989 or early in 1990, my first UMM meeting was hosted by a great Christian man named Skipper Lay at Trudy's restaurant. In those days it was next to the Optimists Little League field on Hwy 290W. The gathering was a modest affair that included food (ordered from the menu), fellowship, and a devotional presented by our host. I had only been a member of OHUMC a few weeks when I attended this event, but I was made to feel absolutely at home and comfortable by the men present.

Shortly after that meeting, I remember talking with Larry Hassell and maybe some others about cooking breakfast ourselves (i.e., Larry cooking) and having the meeting at the church on the last Saturday of the month. So we set it up, and it has been that way (with a few exceptions) for the past almost 30 years.

As many Oak Hill members and friends are aware, the UMM sponsors a golf tournament every year. John Flowers first organized the event. It was originally a relatively small outing compared to what we currently have, with maybe 20 or 30 players. I remember playing several of the early tournaments at Willie's place (aka Pedernales Golf Club) in Spicewood a couple or three times, one of which was on the same day that either Ross or Ryan Graham was born. After Dr. Flowers left we named the tournament the UMM Scramble and then later the "Pete" Vasquez Memorial Tournament, in honor of our late brother, Pete Vasquez. In addition to Willie's place, tournament venues have included Jimmy Clay, Roy Kizer, Lions Municipal, Bluebonnet Hills on Decker Lane, Blackhawk in Pflugerville, and Plum Creek in Kyle. This tournament has been rained out only once in its history, and that was October 2015. Golf tournament revenue has been designated for numerous Eagle Scout projects, the OHUMC building fund, the OHUMC general fund, OHUMC mission trips, Wednesday night dinners, and the Angel Tree Ministry. Revenue from this event has been the primary source for over almost all the years we've had the

tournament.

The UMM Retreat has become an annual “never miss” event on the UMM calendar, having been initiated by John (John I) Flowers back in the early ’90s. John (John II) Wright picked up the organizing and leadership duties during his tenure as associate pastor and was followed by Pastor John (John III) Reynolds. Somewhere around the early part of this century, Steve Reese assumed charge of organizing the UMM Retreat and has since become the “UMM Retreat Leader for Life.” For the past 10 years or so, the UMM Retreat has made its home at 7A ranch in Wimberley by the somewhat muddy waters of the sometimes mighty Blanco River. We do not have group hugs, and we do not have “break-out” sessions. We do have witnessing, great food, lots of laughter, and spirited singing.

The Easter sunrise service has been a UMM tradition since the John Flowers days. The members of UMM have organized and led this service every year since the early ’90s, providing a “first light” worship experience on Easter morning in the oak grove across the parking lot from Fellowship Hall. Many of our UMM members have shared a message at this service, which includes Holy Communion and music.

Around early to mid-June, on Annual Conference Sunday when all the pastors are out of town, UMM members have taken on the responsibility for planning, organizing, and leading worship at all three of our Sunday services. Just as is done for Easter sunrise, a UMM member witnesses to the congregation through the sharing of a message, while other UMM members participate in other elements of the service such as the opening prayer, call to worship, children’s message, and benediction. This is another tradition that began early in the life of our church and has continued to be an “automatic” annual UMM event.

Presidents of the Oak Hill UMM (that I can remember) include Richard Reeves, Dale Muenzler, Jim Cox, Don Roets (four times), Chet Miles, Jim Maunder, Mark Sullivan, Mike Etie, Brad McMahon, Richard Wuest, Skipper Lay, and Derek Jackovich. There have been others, and I apologize for not recognizing/remembering you.

— Brad McMahon

OUR DEAR OAK HILL UNITED METHODIST MEN

What can we say about our Methodist Men
They're United, they're strong, they're without a sin
Sin might be pushin' it, so let's start again
Oak Hill has the best UMM there has been
Dedication, good leadership, no need to ponder
They've already got that, by the name of Jim Maunder
Willing and ready they come when they're ask
Working it out, no matter the task
Planting a bush here, trimming the grass there
They certainly have done more than their share
At many a choir reception, they have cheerfully served punch
Whipped up our lock-in breakfast, helped with a church lunch
Let's not forget pork tenderloin or chicken cordon bleu
For our mothers and daughters, just to name a few
Where the king of gourmet is Chef Larry Hassell
Overseeing his knights at his cuisine cooking castle
But they're more to us than a hot cooked meal
We're proud of these men at the church of Oak Hill
They're fathers, they're sons, employees too
But they've made a commitment to a bond that's true
For some have carved their faith a little deeper
By taking a journey through the Promise Keepers
Or a Walk to Emmaus has happened for others
Where they've shared their lives with their Christian brothers
But whether it's fellowship, food or friends
Their cooperative efforts reaches out like the wind
Sending a message of caring, may they be blessed
for their sharing abroad
For they are more than Oak Hill United Methodist Men, they're men of the faith, men of God.

Oak Hill United Methodist Women

Written by: Carol Hampton Maffuccio

United Methodist Women Ministry

1979

During our early years of meeting in the Silver Dollar South, our pastor, John Flowers, often mentioned that we should form a group of the United Methodist Women (UMW). We, the women, considered ourselves too busy to think about that. Many of us had children, some of us were working, and we all felt we needed to be involved in the forming of the church itself.

One day several of the women in the church got a call from Rev. Flowers that he had made arrangements with two ladies who were very involved in the Austin District of the UMW. If I remember correctly, it was the president of the district UMW and the president of the UMW at First UMC in Austin. He even went so far as to say it would be at the home of Hazel Studdard on a certain date. Because she was waiting for us to come, he apparently had prearranged this meeting. Hazel certainly was a very organized person as well as being so sweet that we all loved her and couldn't say "no" about a meeting in her home.

As he suggested that we meet together, he reminded us that the United Methodist Discipline said "we MAY have a United Methodist Men's group, but it said that we MUST have an organized United Methodist Women." Oh, yes, in keeping with the United Methodist way of doing things, he told us it would be potluck snacks and desserts.

The day came and we all gathered with our food, ready to meet these ladies from the Austin UMW hierarchy. Both visiting women were armed with a lot of information so that we would become the "perfect" UMW. Since, by this time, we were all friends and happy to be together, we thought it would be nice to have meetings and decided to have some on a regular basis. However, we did not think it was a good idea to be "organized" with a connection to the district UMW and conference UMW.

Then, as we began to have the monthly meetings, we soon decided that we really did need to be an organized UMW, connecting us to the national UMW. In 1982 we were officially awarded a "certificate of organization." Ila Knapheide volunteered to be our president. She soon found that she needed to move to Houston and resigned. Brenda Carrington, who had been our vice president, became our new president and held that position for several years.

Hazel Studdard was elected our first treasurer. At that time, there was a rule that the treasurer could only hold that position for a limited amount of years. We all were disappointed that she couldn't continue; she was too. By the time we could give her a break and then elect her again, she had become very sick with cancer. Sadly, she did not live much longer, and we lost one of our first UMW members. Jane Sharp became our second treasurer, and Kellye Graham took the position for several years (by this time there were no rules about the time).

Eventually, Joan Potter became the president, in spite of her poor health. We met in whatever space happened to be empty—Fellowship Hall, the Narthex (now the foyer of Fellowship Hall), the library (which was the original pastor's and secretary's office). We met monthly, taking turns at presenting a topic from the annual UMW program book that

the ladies had left with us. I acted as the vice president and loved it because at that time the national UMW expected the vice presidents to be the program directors. I could search for events to plan.

We had lock-ins for several years, and then we organized the mother/daughter banquets to be held near Mother's Day, with variations, such as fashion shows, in years to come. They all were always well attended, but after several years we ran out of original ideas and no one wanted to be chair.

After a time, some of the younger women wanted to have their own meetings. Margaret Byron became their chair, and they named themselves the Friendship Circle. The original group then gave themselves the name of the Mary-Martha Circle. The Friendship Circle changed their name to the name of another woman in the Bible. Some of the original members, besides the ones mentioned, were Oma Davis, Jan Flowers, Lib Hawthorne, Grace Groce, Beverly Mayse, Jo Straus (who introduced us to RADA Cutlery), Liz Armstrong (once president), Beth Parke (another president), Marilyn Elkin, and Jeannie Koizumi.

About the same time the first group formed, some felt it very important to have a Bible study. After some discussion, Jeannie Koizumi said that she would lead it if I would keep them organized. She did lead several very interesting studies. Then the time came when she and her family moved out of the area. Mary Watson took on the job of leading at that time. She stayed for several years.

Sometimes we'd think the group was ready to fade away, but there would always be a few new women who wanted to join. We never had to give up. In 2016 we had more than 30 members. Women came and went, but the personality of the group always stayed the same. They now are called the Wednesday Morning Study Group, and I believe it is the oldest ongoing study group at Oak Hill UMC.

At the time UMW was formed, the first outreach mission was a boy's camp near Dripping Springs known as "Darden Hills." Brenda had been there and met the founder, Charles Campise. The boys of all ages who lived there had no air conditioning or heat in their bunk house. So they soon began to camp out. That first Christmas (one year after we moved into our new church) we thought it would be a good mission. After checking sizes, we took each boy a pair of jeans, a few small items of clothing, some toys, and a television for them to watch together in the only room where they could gather for everything but to sleep.

Those boys were so happy with our gifts that we never could stop helping. Now we still give Christmas gifts, but thanks to the idea of a former member, Betsi Johnson, they are taken a birthday cake and sent a Walmart gift card each year. Prior to their lives at the camp, these boys were abused in many ways, which is why they are at what we now call Burke Foundation (Burke was the name of Mr. Campise's's in-laws, who gave the property so the first boys could live there). They are placed there as they are being prepared for foster homes. They come and go, according to their needs, but the women are always ready to help them. The Wednesday Morning Study Group handles the birthdays as well as some Christmas gifts. Mary Martha takes Christmas gifts of all kinds—clothing, toys etc. People

throughout the congregation have helped by sponsoring these boys.

Other ministries the women have had over the years have included:

- a collection of pop tops from soda cans for the McDonald House;
- recycled Christian literature for the women's prison in Del Valle;
- prepared meals given to Casa Marianella;
- children's and women's clothing for Posada Esperanza;
- clothing and school supplies for Burke Foundation;
- clothing for Montopolis Friendship Center;
- women's personal bags prepared by Sarah Circle for homeless women;
- manna bags prepared by Sarah Circle for many years—now Chloe Circle has adopted this mission; and
- children's socks collected on a "sock tree" and given to Salvation Army.

Jo Straus introduced us to RADA Cutlery. We all enjoyed buying it for ourselves and selling it to the church and friends. It has been an ideal fundraiser for our mission work.

We held many rummage sales—outside and in Fellowship Hall—over the years. The profit for the last one was about $7,000, but the women felt the work had become too difficult, and it had also become more difficult to use Fellowship Hall for the space. One of the most outstanding rummage sales was chaired by Judy Schooley and Glenda Rogers. The profit was given to Oak Hill UMC to begin a Stephen Ministry.

Meals were prepared many times for the Habitat to Humanity workers. Children living at a mission in Sudan were helped financially by the Wednesday Morning Study Group.

In 1988 we decided that the church kitchen needed to be expanded. The UMW financed the cost, and the UMM did the labor. It was expanded so that a large stove could be used for cooking and baking. It was also restructured so that the doors were placed in different spaces and took in the space of the original nursery. Grace Groce was one of the women that worked hard to coordinate everything.

Women who have been presidents of the Oak Hill UMC UMW are: Ila Knapheide, Joan Potter, Margaret Jones, Cheri Graham, Connie Stewart, Kathi Spruiell, Liz Armstrong, Beth Parke, Roxanne Thurman, Camille Raycraft, and Julie O'Donnell.

Diana Goodloe founded the UMW Book Club in 2003. It has introduced many of the members to the books selected by the national UMW.

There has been an annual UMW retreat at 7A Ranch in Wimberley.

At present, these are the groups of women in the UMW at Oak Hill:

- Mary-Martha Circle;
- Lydia Circle;
- Chloe Circle;
- Dorcas Circle;
- Wednesday Morning Study Group;

- UMW Book Club; and
- Hugs Project (neck coolers for our military men and women).

— Margaret Jones

Preschool Ministry

Oak Hill United Methodist Church Preschool opened its doors in the fall of 1987. Several mothers of the church wanted to create a quality Christian education program for their young children. With seed money donated by the church, they were given one year to see how they could make this happen. The first class at OHUMC Preschool had 12 students and two teachers.

We have grown over the past 30 years. We now enroll approximately 120 children per year. We have 11 classes and employ seven teachers, nine assistant teachers, a music teacher, librarian, administrative/curriculum assistant director, and a full-time director. We are a full ministry of the church, led by the Preschool Ministries Team. The Preschool Ministries Team is made up of parents with children who are currently enrolled in the Preschool, church members, pastors, and the director.

Timeline

September 1987—opened with one class of 12 students/two teachers

September 2009—had six classes/six teachers; also had a part-time music teacher

January 2012—moved into the new Children's Building

September 2012—expanded the number of classes and teachers to nine classes/18 teachers; also added a part-time librarian

September 2013—added the Kid's Day Out program to the preschool

September 2017—had 11 classes/18 teachers; we serve 118 children

Sept. 23, 2017—celebrated our 30th anniversary

— Jennifer Barkis

Emmaus Ministry

In the spring of 1986 the pastor of Oak Hill UMC identified six church members to go with him on a Walk to Emmaus—a spiritual renewal weekend. Pastor John Flowers, Joe Gathright, and George Kennebeck, along with two other church members (I don't
1986 remember their names), attended. Scott Broberg signed up to attend but had a family emergency and attended a later walk. The walk was #36 and took place at Mount Wesley, Kerrville, in August 1986. Kathy Gathright and Jan Kennebeck were the first women to attend and went on a walk in April 1987, also at Mount Wesley. A concerted effort was

made to get as many members of Oak Hill UMC as possible to attend a walk. In the early days the "pilgrim's" sponsor was expected to serve them breakfast in bed Sunday morning, which required the sponsor to spend Saturday night in Kerrville. As a result, I spent six weekends in a row at Mount Wesley.

The Emmaus community had monthly reunions for the Austin community at local churches, and they were well attended. It was decided to divide Austin into a North and South Emmaus community. Jan Kennebeck was elected to be the first leader of the South. She was the leader of a walk and was part of more than 20 walks. At one time, Oak Hill UMC had more than 300 members who had attended a Walk to Emmaus.

— George Kennebeck

Youth Ministry

2004

The youth choir tour of 2004 took the choir to Victoria, Rockport, and Corpus Christi. The choir consisted of 25 youth. The theme of the trip was "Yes, I Believe!"

— Jon Nelson

2006

One of the wonderful ways in which God has been at work at OHUMC is through the Youth Music Ministry. There have been many spirit-filled musical events over the years, thanks to such people as Mary Beth Gartner, the Brobergs, the Jacksons, and many faithful parents. I had the great blessing to participate in two choir tours, where we visited retirement and assisted-living centers. And truly, the greatest memory was watching the youth interact with elderly persons with love and kindness. On the fun side, one of the many highlights was the "Rock My Soul" Youth Choir tour to White Sands, New Mexico, where the youth of the Crossfire Choir formed a human "†-Fire" on the side of a sand dune. Yes, it was captured on film *(see photo)*, and it's a treasure. Another highlight of the Youth Music Ministry was OHUMC hosting the Southwest Texas Conference Youth Choir Rally in 2006. Guest clinician was Joseph Martin. A huge success! What a glorious gift to God to have 300 youth in our Sanctuary on Sunday morning praising Him in music.

— Jon Nelson

When I was in UMYF during middle school, I remember one Sunday night in particular. We were all standing in a big circle in Fellowship Hall, as we usually did for the lesson or activity. A youth sponsor talked about the Bible and how we should use it and not just keep it on a shelf to look nice. She held up a Bible that was held together by tape and said something like, "See this one? It's been put to good use." This teaching really struck a chord with me. It was not too long after that time that I was confirmed in the church and received my own Bible. I began to mark in it—various Scripture verses while on a mission trip to Honduras, an entire chapter during a Bible study in college—and I continue today. As a lay leader says at the 11:15 a.m. service, my Bible is a "working Bible."

— Katie Muzos

Special Services

The year was 2012, and I was team leader for a Prayer and Discernment Team that met with Pastor Jim at times to pray for whatever he asked of us. We also led prayer vigils at the church. As Lent approached that year, Pastor Jim asked the team to lead the congregation in special Lenten services on Wednesday nights following the fellowship dinners. The services were 30 minutes and included a Lenten message led by one of the team members, followed by Holy Communion served by one of our pastors. The services were very well attended those six weeks of Lent.

Afterward, Pastor Jim approached me and said he thought it would be wonderful if we could have Holy Communion once a week all year long, instead of the traditional UMC way of only once a month. He had a dream of what this Wednesday night service would look like—a simple order of worship to include prayer, music, a personal witness, and Holy Communion. He asked that I, along with the Prayer and Discernment Team, bring this dream into reality. What was to make this service especially unique is that he felt very strongly that he wanted it to be led exclusively by OHUMC church members, except for Holy Communion. His vision included church members giving a personal testimony, prefaced with Scripture, sharing a God story from their personal lives. And the service must be kept to a strict time limit, after dinner, before choir practice at 7 p.m.

2012

The team came up with ideas, a logo, and the order of worship. When trying to figure out a name for this service, it was Scott Broberg who suggested, "Re-Charge." It's a mid-week service to re-charge our spiritual batteries. Sometimes the week is very long between Sundays, and a mid-week re-charge is just what we need. And so Re-Charge was born. Our first weekly service was in September 2012.

In researching what other UMC churches do, we found that very few churches have a mid-week service. And no other church has a service which is organized and led by its lay members—just one more thing that makes OHUMC and its pastors the very special and unique church that it is. In the recent past Pastor Jim confessed to me that his dream of this service was not new to his time at OHUMC. He had tried to pull this dream into reality at two of his previous churches, but it never got off the ground due to lack of volunteer support.

Re-Charge celebrated its sixth birthday in 2018. Nearly 120 different people from the OHUMC family have given a personal witness. Some of these people have even witnessed at more than one service through the years. These messages are powerful. Because each of us is unique, and each of us has our unique relationship with Christ, the messages have been as unique as the person who shares it. In this small, intimate setting, the speaker has sometimes shared an experience in their lives that they have never shared out loud. They later confessed that, as hard as it was, sharing their story brought healing to them. More than once, I have listened to people who I've known for years, yet I'm hearing about a part of their life and their walk with Christ of which I had no idea. It has been a very special way to get to know our church family better by hearing their stories.

— Scott Broberg

Humor

"Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy." Psalm 126:2a

The Rev. John Wright used to have a habit of coming to church and working during the night when no one was there. Well, one morning he said to me, "Gail, we have the skinniest long-legged dogs that hang around here at night, and those condors in the cupola are so loud." I said, "No, John, those are coyotes (we did have a group of them around here at that time), and Jimmy Dunks says the birds are turkey vultures (which we still have)." Everyone in the office got a good laugh.

— Gail Beckley

I remember a Christmas party at a space in the shopping center near what was then Baldwin's Beauty School. Everyone brought a white elephant gift to play Chinese Christmas. We drew numbers to play. I unwrapped a Mason jar with old fishing line and lures all tangled inside. On the outside of the jar was a tastefully placed dirt dauber nest. Believe it or not, that was THE item of the night and was stolen several times.

— Rae Barho

1981

Shortly after joining our church in 1981 I was asked to make the coffee. At that time I was not a coffee drinker, but no matter—what could go wrong? You just put water in the percolator, coffee in the basket, put on the lid, and turn on the switch. Everything went fine for the first couple of weeks, and then one Sunday people started complaining about an awful taste in the coffee. I did not know that the bar sink not only supplied plain tap water, but also highly chlorinated water for washing beer mugs. The coffee was recalled and I was not asked to make the coffee again.

— Curtis Jarrell

Many years ago, Oak Hill UMC members would go to a nursing home one Sunday morning a month to have a church service. It's hard for me to remember all who participated in this. I would usually ride with Margaret Jones. Amy and Kaitlyn Kadlecek

were often there with Amy playing the piano. There were other times when Sharren Hassell played the piano. We would set up a small altar on a rolling bed tray—an open Bible and candelabra and candles. We sang hymns, and even those residents with dementia would respond and sing along. Someone from the church would give a short message, and we would pray and sing some more. A funny note to this activity: We would often see a male resident digging through the ash cans outside the building. He would find a cigarette butt or two. Then later as we were having the church service, he would do a little Fred Astaire move across the room and lean in and light his cigarette on one of the candles on the altar. He was quite debonair about this, but it was always a shock to the little ladies sitting on the front row.

— Rae Barho

I heard that when George Lumpkin visited OHUMC the first time, he was in a "show me" mood and sat toward the rear of the Sanctuary (in what is now Fellowship Hall). The congregation had met at the dance hall farther east on Hwy 290 and had become accustomed to bringing in the needed furnishings, hymnals, Bibles, etc., to have a worship service.

When the service in the new Sanctuary began, some of the portable facilities used at the dance hall continued to be used in the new Sanctuary. One such item was the pulpit, which had been assembled and disassembled at each service.

The portable pulpit was hastily assembled the day George Lumpkin attended the service, and Pastor John Flowers draped forward over the pulpit as was his custom. The pulpit had not had all of its needed tightening, and it collapsed—sending Pastor John into the first, mostly unpopulated rows. George Lumpkin is reported to have exclaimed, "This is my kind of church." He joined OHUMC. George Lumpkin later became the first OHUMC member to be ordained.

— Carl Moore

One of my favorite things about Oak Hill is that it is a church that loves to laugh. In a regular Sunday service you'll smile at least once. We've on more than one occasion done the "Hokey Pokey" and the "Chicken Dance" and, of course, George Kennebeck has a joke for anybody who will listen. Jim Roberts is always good for a line or two. We made fun of Rick DeJonge on a regular basis, and not just because he's a Notre Dame fan. Also who hasn't chuckled at John Wright's traffic plan on Communion Sundays? So I hope you enjoy this humorous pearl.

It comes as no surprise to those of us who live here that Austin is weird. As a matter of fact we like to Keep Austin Weird. We expected some differences when we moved here but not quite like this. On our first Sunday here, the pastors, Barbara Ruth and John Wright, thanked the church for "allowing" them to go on vacation "together." Well there was nothing in the bulletin that said the ministers with different last names are actually "husband and wife." So who knew? I looked at Jerome and said, "Boy, Austin is more

liberal than I thought." Later, finding out the Ruth/Wright connection made it all clear, but then we began to find out about Oak Hill's rich heritage. At Adam's wedding, a friend came to me and asked, "Why is John Wayne in the men's restroom?" I laughed and said, "Because that's where he belongs!" Soon after that first Sunday we figured out that we belong at Oak Hill, too.

— Glenda McCombs

2000

In 2000, we were newlyweds living in an apartment in South Austin and were shopping for churches. A friend of Chad's invited us to attend an Easter sunrise service with him at a little church he went to every now and then when he had time to make the drive. It took an eternity to get there, but the lovely little spot under the trees with the pretty flowered cross made the drive seem like less of a chore. It wasn't until we stood to take Communion that I realized we could never, NEVER return to this church. Had I lived in the area longer and known about oak pollen in the spring, Chad and I may not have chosen to wear our nicest clothes that day: his white linen wedding pants and my white summer wedding dress. Our rear ends were completely green as we walked up to Pastor John with our backsides glowing toward everyone. I thanked the Lord as we left (as quickly as possible) that the church was far enough away that I wouldn't have to show my face there ever again. But alas, I've been showing it for 19 years. Must not have been as embarrassing as I'd thought.

— Aggie and Chad McAlester

I remember once being an usher when we held worship in what is now Fellowship Hall. When it was time to take up the offering we could not find the offering plates; everything was at a standstill. I ran into the kitchen, which was adjacent to our place of worship, and quickly began opening cabinets—plates fell, some broke (it was not a quiet situation)—and we came out of the kitchen with a Tupperware bowl, Pyrex pie container, metal pie pan, and a dinner plate ready to take up the offering. The congregation, after the long wait and hearing all the noise, could no longer contain themselves and burst into a roar of laughter. We took the offering, and worship continued in Oak Hill fashion.

— Don Roets

We all know Don Roets, and we know that his hair isn't distributed evenly. One time years ago, when Oak Hill UMC had family Halloween parties, he came dressed with his jacket on backwards. And, on the back of his head (in the bald spot) was drawn a face with two eyes, nose, and mouth. He was cute.

— Margaret Jones

1982

In the early '80s, Oak Hill UMC formed a softball team to play other local churches. Some of those who played on the team were John Flowers, Rusty Wallace, Tommy Schmidt, Danny Kelly, George Lumpkin, Jim Stegall, Don McMeans, Gerald Schroeder, Skipper Sharp, Johnny Slagell, and me. The team won many of its games. We then moved on to join

a city of Austin softball league, where once again we were a winning team.

One time we thought sure the game would be called off because the wind was blowing so hard, but we went to the field anyway. We did play, and during the game when a ball was hit to the outfield and one of the outfielders called to catch it, the ball ended up being caught by an infielder because the wind blew it back into the infield. Final score: Oak Hill UMC wins, 1-0—an unusual score for a slow pitch softball game.

— Eddie Barho

1983

When John Flowers was our pastor, we had a group that would make cold visits to prospective members. Pastor John would go on Sunday afternoon to visit people who had attended worship service for the first time. The following week, members of the visitation group would meet at the church for dinner prepared by Charlotte Carter (and then later, Rae Barho). After dinner Pastor John would assign teams of two to visit one or two homes without calling first. One evening Jan Flowers and I worked as a team. One of the names we were given was a single man. We went to his address and a man talking on the phone answered the door. He let us into the foyer and signaled for us to wait. Then as we stood in the dark hallway, he continued his phone conversation for five or 10 minutes. He finally returned, and we explained who we were there to see. He stated that was his roommate, and he was not home but was at Dallas. Then he offered to take us to Dallas if we could wait a few minutes. We finally figured out that the man was at the Dallas night club, and the roommate figured out that we were from the church and that Jan was the pastor's wife. Jan and I enjoyed reporting on this visit to the group when we returned to the church.

— Rae Barho

Inspirations

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16

Our family is always looking for signs of God's love and presence. We have often found signs, which are more than miracles, here at Oak Hill. One Sunday after church, a dove appeared in front of our car. As we approached "touching distance," the creature remained reassuringly still, reminding us of God's peace. Another spring Sunday, John Wright preached about resurrection. In receiving communion, a burst of warm sunlight suddenly flooded the altar, unquestionably assuring me of life after death. Once, after an ice cream social, the scrawniest, sickest-looking kitty appeared. We couldn't resist rescuing "Hayley," who gave us more than 10 years of constant reminders of how God, through our church, cares for us. However, the reflection of God's love in the eyes of our members continues to be the sign that I most anticipate each Sunday, and I'm often overwhelmed and never disappointed.

— Ron Hejtmanek

When my daughter, Kriste Pousland, her husband, Brad, and three grandchildren moved to Austin, there was nothing for me to do, except once again, turn to the Lord in prayer, asking for his guidance and care. As they sought to settle into their new life away from family and friends in their native land of Jericho, Vermont, it took a bit of time searching about the Austin area before they discovered Oak Hill United Methodist Church. But once they did, it became their home away from home. It was the place where they connected with their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and found nourishment to feed their hearts, minds, and souls.

For this I am most thankful and praise God for once again teaching me to trust in His word, that He will lead, guide and direct the path of all who seek Him.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and He will direct your path. Prov. 3:5

— Ellie Martin
(winter Texan from Vermont)

1998

In 1998, on our last Sunday in our old church, First United Methodist of La Marque, Frank Bales came over and sat down on the pew in front of us. He had heard we were moving to Austin and took the time to ask us to visit Oak Hill UMC. Frank had visited Oak Hill often because his son Matt is a member. He said there was a great youth program for Adam and Mark, then ages 15 and 8. Upon hearing where that church was located, we told him we would visit, as it was only about five miles from where we would be living. Our lives have never quite been the same because of that invitation. I'm not sure that without Frank taking the time to invite us to what is now his church as well, we would have ever made our way over to Oak Hill to visit. Of course, we continued to see this man from time

to time when he'd visit his son. You can imagine our joy when years later he decided to move to Austin, and it is no surprise that he is now a part of our Oak Hill congregation. The McCombs family will forever be grateful to Frank Bales for taking time to tell us about Oak Hill UMC. You never know how far Oak Hill's outreach can go or who God will use to bring you to this place.

— Glenda & Jerome McCombs and Family

How many sermons have you heard in your lifetime? I grew up going to church, took a break during college and picked back up when I graduated. That's a lot of sermons! Some I snoozed through, some went over my head, but some stuck. One such sermon was shared by John Flowers. The title was probably something catchy like, "You're a Liar!" He talked about how people commonly say "How are you?" when they say hello, and we habitually answer, "Fine." We are usually better than "fine" or worse than "fine," yet we still respond "Fine." He urged us to think about our answer and also to think about how we would respond if someone answered us honestly when we asked the question.

Since then I often think about my response (although I have to admit that I still lie sometimes!) and I also try to listen carefully to the response when I ask the question in case someone actually gives me an honest answer.

— Holly Smith

The Mostly Gospel Blues Band filled the Stonebridge Nursing Home dining hall. At least 50 fine, old-friend residents walked down on canes and walkers, rolled themselves, or asked to be rolled in to listen to us. The place rocked with old gospel and big band swing music that, because of playing at nursing homes, we had gotten durn good at. As we sang "It had to be moonglow, way up in the blue, it had to be moonglow, that brought me to you," I saw elderly women with their eyes closed, smiling, heads moving to the music, some singing along, deep in excellent memory of whoever that person was they loved completely for so long. "All of me, why not take all of me, can't you see, I'm no good without you" got hands clapping. People who worked there came in to listen. Family visitors came in to listen.

It may have been the most fun moment I have ever spent, and that's saying a lot, because I have plenty of fun moments to measure it by.

Generally, we play for an hour, and then spend 30 minutes talking to people. Missing are the fine old ones that we have gotten to know for four years or more who are gone now. An incredible favorite of mine, who I always looked forward to seeing, was named Lilly, and a tough, old Air Force guy who reminded me so much of Ray named Penn. We tell each other, "It's a good thing we know these people are still OK," or the sadness would become overwhelming. But it's not sad. It's just that last phase, that last magic place.

Driving home yesterday, high as a kite, still singing in the car, I realized nursing home halls must be very close in proximity to wherever God is. And family member spirits roam

those halls, looking after, looking on, and waiting for spouses, daughters, sons, old friends. My big old Eastland bass thumps like a heartbeat, saying, "Yes, yes, yes, this is what I was made for."

— Laura Telford

Several members of our congregation did more than read what the Bible had to say about poverty. They decided to start a ministry to assist the needs of the homeless in Oak Hill. To brand the ministry, they needed a name. That is how I got involved. My son, Jamey, struggled with drug addiction and schizophrenia for many years. At the end of his life, he felt more comfortable sleeping at the Salvation Army than spending the night with his family. I can't tell you how many times we tried to get Jamey to make different choices and how I always believed he would return home. He didn't; he died of a drug overdose in May 2006. I was honored that they wanted to do something for the people like Jamey.

Under the active leadership of Renae Cotton and her band of 20, we began hosting the homeless in our Children's Building. We provided showers, laundry facilities, food, internet access, telephones, and our famous "manna bags." We also provided one-on-one conversations and advice. Generosity abounded, and the project raised money without really asking. One generous couple donated a state-of-the-art washer/dryer. The team learned that getting out of poverty isn't easy. We experienced the chaos that seems to swirl around those who find themselves homeless.

By fall we had seen a shift in the needs and numbers of the homeless in our area. After careful deliberations, we decided to research new ways to work with other social service agencies. We are still a band of people striving to serve the poor. We treat them as if they were someone's son or daughter because, in fact, that is exactly what they are.

— Wally Vog

I don't know about the wisdom part, but God dropped a pearl in my lap when I picked up the Habitat for Humanity program at OHUMC. I finished my Air Force career in 1984 and moved to Oak Hill, where we soon found OHUMC. I had worked in scouting since 1984, having been a den leader assistant to my wife, a pack leader, a Webelos leader and a scoutmaster at two Air Force bases. Both of my sons made Eagle Scout, and by 1996 I was looking for something else to do for the community. I started working periodically with the OHUMC Habitat for Humanity work crew. At some point I decided to commit at least one Saturday a month to Habitat for Humanity and haven't missed many Saturdays over the years. Later, I took over leadership of the group. I love helping those in need help themselves and see the great pride they have in their new homes. God has blessed me with this mission, and I have not tired of it. Thank you, Oak Hill UMC, for giving me this opportunity to do God's work as you have many others over the past 30 years.

— Jerry Morford

In 1998, as I was contemplating retirement, OHUMC announced the recruitment of its first Stephen Ministers. This was a deciding factor in my decision to retire. I submitted

1998

my application to be a Stephen Minister, was interviewed, accepted and trained for that ministry. That was 21 years ago. I have been a part of that program ever since and was trained to be a Stephen Leader in 2006. I thought this one-on-one Christian ministry would give me the opportunity to walk with persons experiencing a crisis in their life—to help others. And it has, but I have found that it has helped me in ways I never imagined. I almost feel guilty for what I receive from this amazing ministry. The people I care for will always be a part of my heart, and the Stephen Ministers that I serve with are some of the most amazing Christians I have ever known. Oak Hill UMC is blessed to be participating in Stephen Ministry, as am I.

— Rae Barho

Tom and Nanci Gibbons were an inspiration in many ways, but mostly in how many children they could take into their hearts and home. I always thought that if they could get four kids up, fed, dressed, and to church on time, we could get our three to church on time. Then it was their six, and our four. Our fourth one's mother took her away; afterward we never had more than our three for more than a few weeks, but the Gibbons ended with 11 children, nine of whom were adopted. They are the only family that we have known to have three 13-year-olds. What lives they have led—and the stories they can, but will not tell!

— Josephine Jarrell

Setting Our Course Through Visioning

Joel 2:28—"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on the people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions."

In the fall 2003, Senior Pastor Barbara Ruth invited me to attend a two-day retreat to develop a vision for Oak Hill UMC. I believe I was selected because Wally and I volunteered

2003

with youth. The group was very diverse, representing all areas of the life of this faith community. We had original members of the church, including Jimmy Dunks. We had representatives from the choir, the children's program, Stephen Ministries, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Women. We had Hannah Hammack, a youth member. We had pastors: our own pastors Barbara Ruth, John Wright, and Will Rice, as well as a future pastor, Stella Burkhalter, and James Amerson, pastor from East Austin Methodist Church. We even had a community outreach person from Seton Southwest. We met on Friday afternoon and then all day Saturday at the Seton Southwest training room.

Tom Leyden was our valiant leader, a man of amazing gifts and graces. He was masterful at working with such a diverse group and in walking us through the process. He skillfully led us through the wilderness, demonstrating amazing patience and wisdom. Tom started and ended every session with prayer—in fact, we spent quite a bit of time in prayer. That time allowed us to listen for God's guidance and to center on what is important. At the end of those two days, we had our vision statement, and along with it, six statements of belief, 10 parameters, and seven strategic objectives. Everyone in that room felt good about the work that together we had accomplished.

I don't have the meeting agenda, but I remember that we developed the parameters rather quickly. Tom called these the "we will" statements, the nonnegotiables. Some of these statements were aspirational such as "We will respect diversity of beliefs and opinions" and "We will proclaim that God's grace is freely given and we will not stand in its way." Others were based on our history. There were lots of stories and discussions regarding "We will support the mission and ministries of the United Methodist Church by always paying our apportionments." Apparently, we had painfully been forced to skip that part in the early history of our church. There were a few folks like me who didn't even know what apportionments were, so that was an entirely different discussion. We also must have had some issues with previously approved site plans, so "We will honor approved OHUMC plans" also made it in the parameters.

The Statement of Beliefs also led to interesting discussions. Will Rice and John Wright were active participants in these discussions. I remember one person had thought to bring a copy of the Methodist Book of Discipline and faithfully checked it every time a subject came up. With four current pastors and one who soon would become one, the theology discussions were lively and enlightening. Some of these statements were easy to agree on, such as "Life and all creation is a gift from God" and "We are never alone because God seeks a loving relationship with us." We discussed unconditional love—and sin—and decided to focus on God's love, ending up with "Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's unconditional love." I remember discussions around other statements, such as "Without exception, the Church is open and available to all." We added the words "without exception" after much conversation because there were voices adamantly insisting that "all meant all." I look back on those discussions and am proud of the people who worked to set our foundation.

The vision statement took the most time. As we crafted this vital statement, we often were called back to make certain that our thoughts were reflected in the parameters and statement of beliefs. The vision started with the easy part—"Oak Hill UMC where everyone

is a minister." Barbara Ruth and John Wright said that a lot in their sermons, and we unanimously embraced that all are called to ministry. We turned then to our belief statements to write the next portion: "welcomes and encourages all to experience and embody God's unconditional love revealed in Jesus Christ." I think the first time through, we left Jesus out. (Even among Christians, it happens too often, doesn't it?) Our team had to determine the right place in the statement to include Jesus Christ, and then asked ourselves what were we supposed to do with that unconditional love. We came up with "serving so that the world becomes what God desires."

I remember lots of debates on wording in every part of that statement. Everyone was passionate yet loving; still it was a struggle with such a diverse group to come to consensus. Hannah, our youth member, challenged us often to do better and asked questions about our motives. I found myself applying the skills I learned in mediation classes as Tom sent me to the back of the room, to the front of the room, even out of the room to resolve issues within the smaller work groups. Will Rice, our young pastor, was a regular in the small groups sent to the back of the room to get something resolved. I am not sure how the seven objectives developed, but I think they came about in the back of the room working one word at a time. I looked up once and saw Tom in the corner praying for us. He was the glue and guide for us all.

At conclusion of the retreat, we were exhausted but delighted that the vision statement, parameters, statement of beliefs, and strategic objectives were adopted at the December 2003 Charge Conference. I am sure there was a round of applause and a prayer of celebration, but I don't recall.

For the first three or four years following, we used the vision, parameters, beliefs, and strategic objectives to make decisions in our church. We reported at Charge Conference each year. We had our vision statement printed on posters that were mounted in each of our buildings. Over time, the posters faded and we fell away from these statements. They were part of our history, but were they part of our current church life? Recently, we took another look at what was created back in 2003. This body of work has truly set a great foundation for our church, and it has become an integral part of Oak Hill's DNA. We honored our site plan in the development of the Children's Building, and have always paid our apportionments since that time. It helped us move forward with creating our welcoming statement in 2016. Perhaps it is time to re-examine and update those strategic objectives.

To write this article, I looked through my church file folder on my computer. Even though Wally and I had been attending Oak Hill since 1996, the first document I found was from fall 2003. Soon after that retreat, I found myself serving as vice chair of the Church Council followed by service on a host of committees. Be careful if someone asks you to attend a two-day retreat to set a vision—it will change your life. The best part was I met lots of new people who have been an important in my life since, including Roger Durden, Tom Leyden, Jimmy Dunks, Katie Bond, and Vicki Matustik. I'm not sure what happened in those two days back in 2003, but the world shifted—for me and likely for the others

who were in attendance. It was a privilege to serve, and I am blessed to this day by the experience.

—Lynda Rife

Finance Committee

My story is a resurrection story, since my new life in ministry was born out of death. In 2001 I suffered the sudden loss of my brother, quickly followed by the loss of my mother-in-law, and then my mother. My father had Alzheimer's and my husband had a dangerous heart procedure done during that time. Although I did not see it as a death at the time, I had to let my career and professional identity die in order to raise my young children in the way in which I felt called. Oak Hill UMC carried me through it all. I had almost no family in Austin to lean on except my church family, and they were wonderful.

2001

During this difficult season, deep faith questions emerged. My pastors and my church were there to guide me. I took Disciple Class and went on a Walk to Emmaus. I served in church leadership in missions and communications. I was in Sunday school, Bible study, and children's ministries. When my husband pressed me to go back to work, my previous life seemed so shallow compared to the abundant life I was experiencing in church.

In March 2006 I attended a devotional writing workshop and had two devotionals chosen for publication in the Upper Room, I was asked to speak at an Emmaus gathering, and I took it upon myself to lead a memorial for my mother-in-law as we finally scattered her ashes. On the drive home from our little family ceremony, my husband commented that I should consider seminary. I will never let him forget it was his idea! I couldn't stop thinking about it, and finally a few weeks later after evening vespers during the women's retreat at 7A Ranch in Wimberley, I said it out loud to Pastor Val Sansing and it became real. I started seminary and began the ordination process, with discernment help from my OHUMC buddies and pastors along the way.

One of my favorite things at Oak Hill UMC was the annual talent show. There have always been so many gifted people at the church, including some who are really, really funny. The show always had the best masters of ceremony. One year no one stepped up to emcee, so I volunteered. I created a character named Chita Rodriguez, an over-the-top Mexican talk show host based on some of the colorful women I knew growing up in Laredo. I raided Donna Broberg's costume collection and found a blingy top and accessories to go with my stretch pants and stilettos. I put on about 50 pounds of makeup, including lots of mascara. As I told the audience, the goal is to make it look like two tarantulas died in your eyes. I attended rehearsal to watch the acts and make up jokes with Paul Ingersoll's two cents thrown in, and I was so excited to be silly, but when the night arrived, I got nervous. How could I act like a clown in the Sanctuary? What if my wise cracks between acts hurt someone's feelings? What if my thick accent and jokes came across as racist? Could I really wear stretch pants in church? I touched up my ensemble in the pastors' robing room and I prayed. I sincerely wanted to make the show as fun for others as it had always been for me and to make them feel more connected to church people like it had done for me. Talent shows encourage people to use their gifts, so I dared to wish this could somehow be spiritually uplifting because I know God works through the least likely channels.

It went pretty well. I got to embarrass Pastor John Reynolds and referred to him as "the priest," because I'm used to people in my hometown not being able to figure out Methodist clergy (let alone women clergy!).

For years after that, people called me Chita (or ChiChi, or some other variation) and laughed with me about that night. Later, when I was assigned to be a pastor at Oak Hill, I wondered how anyone would ever accept me in that role after the Chita adventure, but surprisingly, everyone not only accepted me but embraced and encouraged me in my new role.

What a church—it's truly a place where people know that laughter and play are central to the heart of God and people are never afraid to be silly. When I left to go to Covenant UMC, the most consistent advice I got at Oak Hill was, "Don't stop being you!" It's awesome to be loved like that!

— Rev. Stella Burkhalter
Pastor, Covenant UMC

My call to ministry was one that came through a series of people over the course of about a year as I was finishing up with college. And, it took a while for me to understand what was happening because I wasn't even considering pastoral ministry as part of my career plans. It wasn't something on my radar.

The Rev. Barbara Ruth and the Rev. John Wright were serving at Oak Hill UMC at that time, and I think that Barbara Ruth was keying in on my interest in the church. I had remained active in the church throughout college, I had joined a Christian fraternity on campus, and I had even jumped at the chance to be a part of a task force that was investigating the idea of a contemporary service. But, I was still caught off guard when Barbara Ruth handed me a copy of *Christian as Minister*, a book that's a first step in the

exploration process for ministerial candidates.

To be honest, I wasn't even really aware of the significance of the book she was handing me. I wasn't an avid reader at the time, and the book wasn't what you'd call light reading. In fact, the first time I started to read it, I was asleep two pages in and woke up to find that I had drooled all over it. And after that exciting experience, I didn't crack the book again for a year, so I finally decided to replace the drooled-on copy with a new one and to return it to Barbara Ruth.

It was around that same time that I was graduating with a finance degree and starting to look for job opportunities in banking. I went on an interview, but came away from it just feeling like my heart wasn't in it. When sharing about the experience with my mom, our conversation took a quick turn as she asked if I had ever considered going to seminary. Again, I found myself caught off guard, and all I could think of at the time was that you go to seminary to become a pastor, and pastors preach sermons in front of a lot of people, and I was terrified of public speaking, so there was no chance of that happening. I told her so and decided to keep my focus on my next interview.

Well, God can be pretty persistent, especially when we fail to clue in, and a month later I found myself having a similar conversation—this time with my boss at the law firm I was working at as a file clerk. She knew I was looking for career opportunities in banking, but I had been working there long enough that she was also aware of my involvement in the church. When she sat me down and asked me if I had thought about seminary, I shut that down real quick. I already had my reasons why that wouldn't work lined up from my previous conversation, but this time I couldn't seem to fully shake loose of the idea.

I left work that day baffled by the similarity of the two instances and their close proximity to one another, and I finally figured that I should probably stop long enough to consider what was happening in all of this. I spent a few days praying over the possibility that God was leading me in a direction that was different than the one I was choosing for myself, and finally came to terms with the fact that I might be receiving a call to ministry. The idea of public speaking still had me on edge, but I decided that, if this was what God wanted for me, God could figure that one out.

I decided it was time to run the idea by my parents, and I was surprised that they were receptive to the idea. That gave me a little more confidence, and about a week later I was sharing with John what had happened after our Disciple Bible Study. And, I told him that I thought I might need to borrow Barbara Ruth's book again. Within the month, I was applying to seminary, and I let God take it from there.

Oak Hill UMC was where I fell in love with the church. My family and I started coming to the church toward the end of my freshman year in high school, and I was invited to find a home there as part of the youth group. Basil and Lisa Jackson welcomed me into the youth choir and ministry, and Rachel Wright convinced me to get plugged into youth Sunday School, as well.

Before long, I was also making my way over to the Brobergs' house for Bible study, and joining in on the summer choir trips. For each of these experiences and people, I am

incredibly thankful. It's because of these experiences as a youth, the opportunities for leadership that were extended to me as a young adult, and the love and support of such an encouraging congregation, that I was able to receive my call to pastoral ministry. Thank you for showing me what it means to be a part of the body of Christ.

— Rev. Ryan Jenson
Pastor, First UMC, Victoria

A Tribute to Dorothy McBee

Millionaire pie, volcano cake
Sound like something Dorothy might bake?

Recipes beyond what you'd find in a book
Dorothy McBee is that kind of cook

The Crisis Meal ministry has been given a lift
Because she has shared her creative gift

But she's also a cook that knows how to clean
She tackles the church kitchen like a "cleanin' machine"

Hang onto your lunch tho, she might throw it out
Just ask the church secretary if you have any doubt

Her recipes for the chili and stew supper outdid the mundane
Why she even helped chair the event with Margaret Drain

Chairman of two craft bazaars that have been a success
Donating her time and talent, her efforts, no less

Let's not forget the banners that decorate the church walls
Like her latest "Celebrate" banner in the Fellowship Hall

She belongs to a circle, not just one but two
A long-time Mary-Martha member, quilting with Dorcas, that's new

And she and Martha Dunks can give you several tips
For planning Mary-Martha annual circle trips

Cross-stitch and needle work, she's mastered the art
Creating pieces that come from the heart

Sundays, you'll find Dorothy and Ken in a front pew
Unless the Cowboys have a game starting too

The Wednesday morning Bible study is just one way
She worships and serves during the day

So when God reels in the people from His daily fishin'
Dorothy gracefully embraces His call to mission.

Carol Hampton Maffuccio

Sweet Memories

"I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder."
1 Peter 1:13

During the early days, when only one building was on our present site (Fellowship Hall), we would all dream about someday having a permanent Sanctuary—one that would have pews that could not be moved easily. Early in the morning I would get in my old truck and watch the sun rise over the location of our present Sanctuary. I would offer a prayer that someday God would help us get there. Not that a church building is absolutely necessary for one to worship, but it can surely add a lot of comfort (when the roof doesn't leak). So that's my story, and I am sticking to it. I helped in the design and building of our current Sanctuary, but God is responsible for the rain that came down on the outside and the INSIDE.

— Doug Beckley

When I began to come to Oak Hill United Methodist Church, I was intimidated by the size of the congregation. I had grown up in a small town (5,000 population), was in a graduating class of 31, and then had attended a small college in Abilene, McMurry College. I wondered how I would ever get to know people and also get people to know me. A brilliant solution to this problem seemed to be to enter the talent show, but what could be my talent? I heard a song being performed in which the entire song was sung in a "chicken voice," clucking. I dressed up like a chicken, with yellow gloves on my feet and a chicken mask, and I even scattered candy corn about the stage for realistic effect. My effort succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. For years afterward, people would say to me, "You're the Chicken Lady!" In the years since, I have learned that both my grandson Forrest and I are accepted at OHUMC, with all our quirkiness. Everybody is Somebody at OHUMC!

— Cindy Brandt

1993

My family and I joined OHUMC in 1993, when my children were 2 and 5. Hard to believe they're now 21 and 18! We followed Chet and Wendy Miles to the church, and we're all still there. I was one of the original members of the Christian Fellowship Class, the brainchild of John Flowers and Karen Vannoy. Several of us are still in that class, along with many new folks along the way. To say I love this church would be an understatement. I have seen the face of God in the faces of so many OHUMC members, whether they were singing in the choir, preaching, doing mission work, or volunteering in the office. I was especially blessed to have my church family supporting me through two brain surgeries. Prayers, rides, meals, money, cards, visits—they did it all. For the past 14 months I was the church secretary, which was truly a God thing! The position became available at a time when I was in dire need of a job. It got a little hectic at times, but I could not have been anywhere better. I can't imagine my life without OHUMC—surely the presence of the Lord is in this place!

— Cindy Burgess

For many years, this church has been an anchor in my life. Oh, the stories I could tell. Instead, I will share words of wisdom that I have learned from the people with whom I have crossed paths:

A friend who lost her husband at a young age: "Those times when I stop believing in God, I believe in the people who believe in God."

Two of our preschool children were overheard talking after their chapel time with the pastor. One asked, "Who was that? Was that God?" The other replied, "That was the man upstairs, but he's not God."

An Emmaus friend: "You can change the world around you by changing the world within you."

From one of my favorite people: "While raising your children, God gives you only a few golden BBs; be very careful how you spend those golden BBs."

As a young mother enthused about serving, I volunteered to lead anything and everything. I guess I thought if it was to be done, I was the one for the job. One of my favorite pastors tactfully said, "If you always do everything, you will never give someone else the opportunity to know what it is like and experience it." "Thank you." Enough said.

— Margaret Byron

We took our membership classes with Pastor John Reynolds, and later that summer we went on vacation in England and Ireland. We got back from vacation and Pastor John had been on vacation visiting family in Iowa. In his sermon he was relating how different people bring "different" things to a pot luck, and one he had encountered in Iowa was gooseberry pie. On asking if anyone knew what a gooseberry looked like, not many raised their hands, but I did. One of my favorite bushes in my grandmother's garden was a great gooseberry bush. The pinkish ones are the best as they're sun kissed and are very sweet—the green ones, sour!

Well, my story had to be related to Pastor John—on landing in England and getting sorted we walked into town, and what did I see in the Greengrocer's? You guessed it, a beautiful basket of gooseberries! Well, we had to go in right away and get some! When Pastor John was leaving, I gave him some gooseberry preserves. I don't know if Pastor John likes gooseberries, but it was one of those things that connected us.

We continue to get connected through Bible study and Sunday School, and not a day goes by that I don't thank God for leading us to Oak Hill UMC.

— Audrey Chestney

When we moved from San Antonio to Oak Hill in 1993, we visited several area Methodist churches. It was OHUMC where we found the welcome and warmth we were looking for. On John Flowers' first visit to our house he was "smartly" dressed in a tee

shirt, athletic shorts, and dirty tennis shoes He was making this "call" on his way to play softball, but he was insistent that OHUMC be our church home. What an introduction to our new pastor.

1993

When our son, Brent, and his fiancée, Paula, were looking for a church to hold their wedding, we suggested OHUMC. They met with John (I). He did his normal counseling bit, but before the wedding could be scheduled, John and Karen were reassigned to San Antonio. Brent and Paula had to go through counseling again with John Wright. After the first session, Paula reported that John (II) was just like her former Baptist ministers. This was a good sign, and the first marriage performed by John Wright at OHUMC must have been effective because the couple is still together.

Jim Roberts and Pam Sheffield joined our congregation in June 2008. Shortly after they arrived our family was faced with Priscilla being diagnosed with breast cancer followed closely by the unexpected death of our 3-month-old grandson, Cash Hunter. Jim and Pam were there for us every step we took through the "valley of the shadow of death." Our pastors and this congregation have always been the perfect example of "agape" love. How gracious God has been to provide precious pastors to meet the needs of our congregation for 30 years.

— Chuck and Priscilla Feuerbacher

OHUMC has been an integral part of my life for almost 30 years. I attended when John Flowers was a new young pastor with incredible energy. His vision made us want to help the church grow and serve the community.

For me, there have been many tears, much laughter, and lots of hugs and words of encouragement. My family has had three funerals and three weddings here. The congregation was more than comforting. They shared in our pain and in our happiness.

As I sit in the congregation on Sunday mornings and hear the beautiful music from the choir, I am reminded of how lucky I was to be a part of that. It is undoubtedly the best church choir in the conference. I thank God that he has allowed me to be a part of this wonderful church.

— Mary Beth Gartner

Visiting Oak Hill UMC and watching the confirmation youth usher during worship in the current Fellowship Hall … hearing about the fun at the youth choir rally in Corpus Christi … a campout with the youth … hosting the youth choir rally boys from San Angelo in our home … Austin District youth dances … Shrove Tuesday pancake suppers…Clown Ministry … new sponsor recruiting (some of my best friends now) … Mary Beth turning over the youth director position to new people … 30 youth from OHUMC participating in Neighbor-to-Neighbor in San Marcos … a great mission trip to Oklahoma City … fond recollections of Travis Mitchell … the unauthorized demolition of abandoned property on the OHUMC campus by a few youth … Enchanted Rock … a superb choir trip to Nashville, Tennessee … youth pushing each other into trees … another great choir trip to Estes Park,

Colorado ... those pesky, late-fee dimes ... fond recollection of Chris Hejtmanek ...pink flamingos ... youth friendship that bloomed into love ... a program on experiencing life with physical challenges ... fond recollections of Ron Flowers ... a fantastic choir trip to Port Aransas ... scavenger hunts ... OHUMC hosts youth choir rally at Northwest Hills UMC ... the Zilker musicals and swimming ... early morning 6th grade kidnapping and then church service ... the district events at Splashtown ... a trip to Fiesta Texas ... the mystery trip to Corpus Christi ... great youth-sponsored Halloween carnivals ... a hole being made in the wall in the Fellowship Hall ... visits to other religions, including Scientology ... youth upset about the war ... a trip to Gruene ... the Mardi Gras parade ... Neighbor-to-Neighbor in Austin ... the youth providing dinner for the African Children's Choir ... OHUMC hosting the youth choir rally at Oak Hill ... youth graduates coming back and helping serve as sponsors ... What a great program!

— Kellye Graham

Greg and I were living in the Oak Hill area in 1988. One evening we had a "disagreement," and I went for a drive. I drove around for quite a while and pulled into a church parking lot and saw that it was a Methodist church. I had gone to the local Methodist church off and on when I was younger, but had not been to church since we had moved to Austin in 1985 to go to UT. I thought ,"OK. Maybe this is a sign from God and we need to check this place out."

The next Sunday Greg came with me. He wasn't dragging his feet exactly, but I think there may have been a few skid marks on the floor. It was a nice service held in the Fellowship Hall. The pastor was young and exciting. The music was very good. And the people were friendly, especially Mary Beth Gartner, who has a built-in "tenor radar." She cleared several rows of people to get to Greg and invite us to come to choir after the service.

The next weekend I was out of town. When I heard Greg had gone to church by himself, I was shocked! He said, "I don't know about this church. They had some strange dancing and bell ringing going on." I found out later that it was the All Saints service.

In spite of the strange atmosphere, or because of it, we kept coming to the little Methodist church in the oak trees. We've been members for 21 years and love our BIG church family.

— Kim and Greg Graham

When we joined OHUMC in 1983, we didn't know that this church would become such an important part of our lives. When our son, Matthew, drowned and later our son, Chris, died of a heart arrhythmia, we couldn't have made it through those dark days if our church family hadn't been with us every step of the way. The church came to our rescue when we were "blessed" with the birth of our twins, Rusty and Randy.

We celebrated with our church family the marriage of our daughter, Erin, to Brian Althaus, whom she met at youth group. Their children, Preston and Emerson, have been baptized here; we look forward to Addison's baptism. I recently lost my job, which had required me to work Sundays. The silver lining is that I've been able to return to my church family, which I've grown to love and appreciate with all my heart.

— Bev Hejtmanek

One of the greatest pleasures and blessings I have received from our church has been the honor of starting and facilitating the Open Door Adult Sunday School Class. What a wonderful addition the class participants have been to the church in fulfilling the role of Christ's ambassadors. Not only has each person's participation in class discussions added to our faith journey, but the missions and outreach participation of each member within the church and within our communities has been a testament to our strength as Christians. I cannot list all of the wonderful services that have been provided by this group, but some include mission trips to areas ravaged by hurricanes (some are great at tearing out old, smelly toilets!), CROP Walks, Interfaith Hospitality Network, committee members, and more.

— David McMillan

Coming from California to Austin after 32 years of being a military wife, it was quite a change to civilian life. Our first encounter was coming to OHUMC. As a little girl I used to sing at our church ("oh come, come to church in the corner," etc.), and I do live just around the corner, and to think that I have fulfilled that long-ago song that I love to sing. Our second encounter, and this was what Pete and I were sold on to becoming members of OHUMC, was when Pastor John Flowers came to visit us on the day when we first went to church (first came the bread). He welcomed us, and we got to know him and he us. We have been blessed ever since. Blessings to all who are celebrating this blessed time.

— Emily Vasquez

1979

Oak Hill UMC had been in the "dance hall" for a short time when we decided to visit the church. Our family had been attending a very large church in central Austin. Our entire family—Joe, Miles, Kenneth, and I—were invited by Martha and Jimmy Dunks to worship with this congregation. We did visit, and visit, and finally decided to join. It was a huge step for me because of my Baptist background! The guys were ready to join, but I was reluctant. When I said it was time, we became members of this church. It actually was smaller than the Sunday school class at our prior church. It was such a great decision for us. We began a wonderful journey of faith and fellowship that continues until this day. I know that no matter where we meet, or what the circumstances are, that God will lead us and that we will grow and thrive.

— Kathy Gathright

When we returned to Austin in 1992 after living in Redmond, Washington, we began searching for a new church home close to our new neighborhood. Steve and I had decided that it would be best to join a church that our kids were drawn to. OHUMC got the unanimous vote. We joined in 1994, just before Pastors John Flowers and Karen Vannoy left, and what a wonderful 25 years it has been!

In our previous churches, we had never heard of "Walk to Emmaus." Shortly after becoming members at OHUMC, we were, one by one, sponsored on Walks or Chrysalis—unforgettable steps in our Christian journey.

1992

There have been so many opportunities at OHUMC to further our growth in Christ, from Interfaith Hospitality Network, Neighbor to Neighbor, mission trips, retreats, Bible studies, and Habitat for Humanity. The Taize service that was offered on the third Thursday of the month was such a blessing—singing songs that draw us into Christ, meditating, and sharing in the celebration of the Lord's Supper together. Our youngest grandson was baptized at OHUMC.

It seems we have come full circle here. We feel very blessed and are so grateful to our dedicated clergy, staff, and volunteers who have made all of this possible for our family, and for the foresight of the founding members. Thank you doesn't seem enough, but thank you!

— Anne Muzos

1996

I had attended Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church when the boys were small, but as often happens with divorce the church no longer seemed like home. We slowly stopped going to church. We drifted for about a year. Then Wally and I had decided to get married, and we bought a house in Oak Hill. One of my goals was to get back into church. Wally would only go to a church where he could wear shorts. Alex was looking for donuts. Zach didn't want to get up too early or for church to last too long. Oak Hill UMC had it all. Wally wore his shorts to church, and no one frowned at him. Back in 1996, we had donuts between services. There were three services, and we chose the middle one which met Zach's criteria.

We spent the next five years coming to the middle service. Zach attended mission activities with the youth group but really didn't want to get too involved. When Alex started 6th grade, I started working with the youth group where I met Pastor Barbara Ruth. Not long after I was on a church visioning team, and within the year I was Church Council Vice Chair.

Wally still wears his shorts to the church, and he still rarely sees frowns. Zach and Alex, now in their 20s, are attending church on their own.

Oak Hill UMC has made us grow both as individuals and a family. It has supported us during difficult times. It has challenged us to grown spiritually in amazing ways. And our best friends are here—they are the people that will come and paint a house purple, make manna bags in the park, give hugs, show up at hospitals, and most important, laugh with us. Happy Birthday!

— Linda Rife

1998

I moved to Austin in 1998 and came to Oak Hill because my daughter had found a wonderful preschool and liked the church, so I came to visit. Everyone was so friendly! Every Sunday different people talked to me, invited me to Sunday School or Bible study, and went out of their way to make me feel welcomed, but I wasn't going to get involved. Little did I know—it started when I was asked to help usher because they were short-handed one Sunday morning. Then someone was needed to help with crisis meals, to

make calls and be sure those in need had food, so I decided that wasn't too much to do, and I could do that for just a little while. I visited a few Sunday School classes, and before I knew it, I was coming for that too. It was just too good not to be there, and besides, the people were such fun, and we had so much in common.

Then one Sunday there was commissioning for Stephen Ministers. I felt a little tug toward that, but ignored it until the second time the call came and I knew it was where I was supposed to be. Disciple classes, Bible study, Faith Partners came along, and then SPRC. Little did I know where the path would take me or the wonderful and challenging experiences I would have at Oak Hill. The blessings have been many, and I am so grateful to be a part of this wonderful, caring congregation.

— Sue Payne

Soon after we moved into our new church (the current Fellowship Hall), the United Methodist Women began to think they needed a special mission. Brenda Carrington was our president at that time. She said I know a place that really does need our help. It is a home for neglected and abused boys. They sleep outside in tents and depend on donations. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Campise, with much help, were the organizers. She said the boys had no TV and very few clothes. The women collected enough money to buy one television set for the boys to share, and we each bought jeans, shoes, etc., for clothing for each boy. When asked what they wanted for Christmas, at that time, the answer was always "jeans or shoes."

The UMW still helps these boys each year for Christmas, as well as taking them each a birthday cake. When one boy was taken his cake, and the candles were lit, he blew them out and was heard to say, "There. I finally got a birthday cake".

— Margaret Jones

The first wedding that I witnessed at 7815 Highway 290W was the marriage of Skipper Lay and Ellis Pace. Since we had no building, we gathered and stood in the tall grass as they spoke their vows, with the Rev. John Flowers officiating. It was late in the day, but still pretty hot so they ended it as soon as possible. The next day we were feeling ticks and chiggers on our bodies. The next wedding was soon after the first building was completed, and it was that of Steve Bickerstaff and Charlotte Carter. It was very nice and I remember it as being very musical. This wedding was inside, a comfortable temperature, and no insects!

— Margaret Jones

Once a month we would meet at the church where Charlotte Carter would cook a meal to serve each of us. She was a great cook, and we loved it. Pastor Flowers would have a list of all the new folks who had visited our church during the month. We were divided in groups of two and assigned to visit one or two of the new families. What an interesting experience it was for all. We all came back to the church, where we had some dessert and

told of our experiences—some good and some unexpected. Some of the people lived in a scattered fashion in the country (before Circle C). And, don't forget, this was before the GPS was invented.

— Margaret Jones

1992

It was the time of Maundy Thursday. We still had no building for activities during weekdays. I'm not sure what the other churches did, but we women went to the pastor to ask about where in the world we United Methodists could share that experience with each other. It didn't take him long to come back to say he found accommodations in the upstairs of the Old Rock Building, one of the oldest landmarks in Oak Hill, built with the help of many residents of the area by Mr. Patton. At that time it was unoccupied and looked like it was in its last days.

We climbed the steps of that old building to set up some tables for our first celebration of the Last Supper together. Then we rushed home to begin cooking our meal. I'm not sure what others brought, but I know I made several loaves of pita bread to lay on the tables for use of the Communion bread as well as dinner. Someone had grape juice, and, being United Methodists, we surely had to have other various dishes of food for our supper.

In typical John Flowers style, he had to rush off for a softball game with a few of the male members as we ate. He was back, however, to lead us through the ritual of the Last Supper. We did truly have our service in the Upper Room. It was a very heartwarming experience. I remember seeing some of our first members that evening, many who are now in what Pastor John called "The Church Eternal."

— Margaret Jones

During worship service in the dance hall, we would sit in our chairs, looking at the signs, as we now look at our beautiful banners. It was somewhat disturbing to me to see signs that advertised un-Christian events. Grace Groce and Darnell Porter began making banners to cover those signs. One sign that interested me was the one that listed the coming events for the week that went something like this:

Mon. 7 PM—Bingo $2 per card
Tues. 8 PM—Dancing, etc.

The one that intrigued me most was George Strait—a $3 cover charge! I would sit there and think, "I wonder who is George Strait?" It surely didn't take long for me to figure that out. Soon, we were paying $30 per ticket to attend his shows in the Frank Irwin Center.

— Margaret Jones

Soon after we began our Sunday morning worship services in the dance hall, a very small office in the L. O. Jackson building was rented for the pastor to use as his office. It was a small strip mall at 6301 Hwy. 290W. The building is long-gone, because the new highway covers that area. It was approximately across from the Pizza Garden.

1996

We still didn't have a place to have the many meetings that United Methodists have that are not on Sunday mornings. Then Sunday morning there was a visitor (soon to be a member), Mr. Ross Baldwin, who had recently opened a business in Oak Hill—Baldwin's Beauty School. He made an offer to us to use his school for any of our evening meetings. He said all we'd have to do was come during the day to let him know we'd like to use the building and pick up the key, at no cost!

It wasn't unusual at a Church Council meeting to see one committee sitting under a dryer and another committee in front of a mirror where hair was normally set—or blow-dried. There was a large classroom in the back where we could all gather for Charge Conference, potlucks, and other group meetings. Many decisions for the church were made in this place. What a generous man Mr. Baldwin was to Oak Hill UMC!

During the time we held worship services at the dance hall, we could also hold Sunday afternoon events in that room. We arrived and the janitors left. When we left the building and shut the door it was automatically locked, and we could not enter again until the next Sunday.

Since there were several new churches in Oak Hill that met in temporary locations, we would all gather at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church—the one church that already had accommodations for large groups and was available to all. Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church met at Oak Hill Elementary School. St. Catherine's of Sienna met in the theater at Westgate. Abiding Love Lutheran had a very small building that has enlarged quite a bit since those early days.

On Christmas Eve that first year, we gathered at the Oak Hill Elementary School with the Presbyterians. The Reverend John Flowers baptized the new baby of David and Mary Nancarrow.

— Margaret Jones

To celebrate those early Easter sunrise services, we met outside at the Forest Oaks Cemetery. Each of our Oak Hill pastors led us through different sections of the service. Pastor Flowers called the children to come for the children's sermon one of those first years. All gathered on their knees around him. He said something like, "Today is Easter Sunday. Who can tell me what happened that first Easter Sunday?" The children just sat! He asked them again, and one little girl—Meris, daughter of Lanny and Mary Watson—jumped up, raised her hand, and said, "I know, I know! That was when Jesus was recycled!"

— Margaret Jones

Credits

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