

Chapter II.
The Church in General during Three Pastorates

Robert A. Hunt, March 1931 – May 1941
Oscar Ethan Allison, May 1941 – June 1952
Albert F. Bramble, June 1952 – [*June 1962*]



Robert A. Hunt

When Dr. Gordon was assigned to the Pittsburg church and left Lawrence in March 1931 the new minister in First Church was Dr. Robert A. Hunt. He had been a member on trial in the St. Louis Conference in 1907 and 1908 at Tipton and had become a full member in Neosho, where he preached during the next two years. After serving a short time in an Indian Mission in Okmulgee, Oklahoma he returned to St. Louis and had charge of three churches there, followed by an associate pastorate at the Grand Avenue Church in Kansas City. He then served Grace Church, Wichita, in the Southwestern Kansas Conference and churches in Dallas, Texas and Enid, Oklahoma in the Oklahoma Conference before coming to Lawrence.

As Dr. Hunt stayed in Lawrence till the spring of 1941, his ministry of a little more than ten years was the longest in this church up to that time. These were very busy years, partly because of activities and developments in the various organizations themselves, and partly because of great changes brought about by two magnificent gifts and one far-reaching reorganization of Methodism.

Let us glance first at internal affairs. The morning services went on much as before, but there was much experimentation with regard to the evening service. It included debates, student forums; a series of plays called Homespun Fireside Dramas, musical programs and addresses by speakers from away. The mid-week meetings consisted of a series of discussions, each lasting through several weeks, on such subjects as the History of the Bible. A school for ushers was arranged in 1930. Our church entertained the Annual Conference in 1933. The Brotherhood was reorganized in 1936. The work at Haskell continued, and Dr. Hunt went out almost every Thursday evening to conduct a meeting for the Indian students. There was a Haskell and a high school Epworth League. Work for University students was advancing rapidly. The Wesley Foundation was co-operating with similar establishments in other churches and in 1934 Dr. E. F. Price, our student work director, became dean of the School of Religion, a position which he continued to hold for twelve years. In 1939-1940 a committee headed by Miss Florence Snow carried out a landscaping project around the church.



Sanctuary above Jan. 2, 1938 and Easter Pageant below - 1938



In December 1935 Dr. Hunt launched a mimeographed newspaper called The Methodist Monthly Messenger. It was sponsored by Mrs. H. B. Latimer's Business Women's Class of the Sunday School. The editor was Mrs. Davis, the church secretary. It did not last many months but contained a great deal of information about activities of the church. The interest in missions continued. Eloise Smith represented the Women's Foreign Missionary Society till her marriage in 1937. Frank Smith, who visited Lawrence and talked in the church in 1936, was supported by three churches in three towns: St. Joseph, Missouri, Hutchinson, Kansas, and Lawrence First.

Two new organizations for women were added in this period to those already functioning. Mrs. Hunt discovered in the church a number of young women with small children who found it difficult to attend afternoon meetings of women's societies. She was instrumental in having these women form a group called the Harmony Circle, which seems to have been much like a Ladies' Aid except that it was for this special age group. The other society, which Mrs. Hunt organized, was the Wesleyan Service Guild of which more will be said later.

In November 1934 the church celebrated its eightieth anniversary. The Sunday services stressed the anniversary theme with talks by several persons on phases of church work. The chief address in the evening was given by the former minister, Dr. Hislop. Monday was "fellowship night" with remarks by several speakers from out of town. Tuesday evening there was a banquet at which R. R. McFarland was toastmaster. The talks were about the past and future of this church. A memento room was opened for those present to visit, and some letters were read from former ministers and members.

It was stated above that two gifts came to the church in this period. The first of these was referenced before; and, we already know that Mrs. Fannie Ecke died on August 9, 1926, leaving a large amount of property, which would eventually come to the church. This happened by degrees in 1936. The Ecke home at 805 Tennessee Street was sold in the spring. The third floor of the large building had already been used a few times in the previous year for Wesley Foundation and a Brotherhood meeting. Mrs. Ecke's mother died in the fall of 1936 and her brother had already passed away. The property came into the possession of the church on November 4, 1936. Both floors of the smaller building on Massachusetts Street were rented and still are. The first floor of the large corner building commonly called the Ecke Building, was and is occupied by the Safeway Market. The second floor was made up of office space; part of which was rented at the time the church received the building. The third floor, consisting mostly of one large hall, had already been used a few times as we have seen, and was of immediate use for Boy Scout work and other activities. It is impossible to go into detail. It is obvious that while this property added to the available floor space and also to the income of the church, it also involved a large additional burden of administration.

The other gift, which soon followed the acquisition of the Ecke property, was a new organ. It was announced late in 1937, but was then anonymous. In order to accept this gift it was necessary to remodel the church; and plans for the changes were published in local papers in December. The contract was let to Mr. John Constant. Mr. Schwahn,

the manager, offered the use of the Granada Theater for the services during the months when the church could not be occupied. On Sunday evening January 2, 1938 an informal supper and vesper service marked the last use of the church before it was closed for several months. Mrs. Emma Welch, who was then president of the Ladies' Aid Society, presided during the program of music, and lighted a candle for each of the twelve organizations of the church. She read a history of the Pipe Organ Society prepared by Mrs. Engel, and others gave reminiscences of the old organ, which had been installed in 1904. After brief talks by Dr. Hunt and Mr. Van Bruner, chairman of the Board of Trustees, the group went to the sanctuary and had pictures taken as they sat or stood in the organ gallery. Over a period of more than three months work went on in the church, some of it, such as cleaning and varnishing, being done by some of the members of the congregation. The big west window was bricked up and a rose window substituted; the small door on the south was enlarged and made the main entrance; the side galleries were removed. The congregation moved back in April; but the organ was not yet installed, and there was much work yet to be done, including the decoration of classrooms. The organ was partly installed before October 30 and was used for the first time that day. It was formally dedicated March 19, 1939. The organ, made by the Reuter Company of Lawrence, was given by Mr. Charles B. Russell and Mr. Lloyd Russell in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Russell, who had been members of the church for many years in the past. Mr. Charles Russell was present on the occasion of the dedication and made the address of presentation to which Dr. Hunt responded.

Meanwhile, requests for further memorial gifts had been made in several bulletins at least as early as January 1938 and a committee appointed to confer with prospective donors. Apparently there were several services of dedication, particularly one on November 26, 1939. The rose window was dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Fannie Ecke, her husband, Julius Ecke, and their son, Walter Ecke. The lectern was dedicated to Mrs. Clara Kanaga and was given by her family. A lighted cross and open Bible were to be placed on an altar table under the rose window. The cross was the gift of Mr. E. H. Emmett, who made it out of walnut from the old brick church and dedicated it to the memory of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Emmett.

The Ecke building was opened for use and space was arranged for classes, especially for a nursery. A fireproof bridge or corridor was built over the alley so that people could move freely from one building to the other in any kind of weather and with a minimum of stair climbing. In 1950 there was a further re-arrangement of Ecke, particularly the second floor, and in September an open house reception was held at which young girls of the Sunday School acted as guides to explain the improvements to the many visitors. In January 1944 extensive improvements were completed in the kitchen and this fact was celebrated with an all-church dinner. In 1943 the pulpit became a memorial to Mr. W.B. Wilcox through a gift of money for that purpose from his wife. In 1946 the public address system was installed, having been given by Mrs. Margaret Woolfe in memory of her husband, Lt. Charles E. Woolfe who had lost his life in Germany during the war. In the same year the chimes were presented to the church by Mr. Alfred Bromelsick as a memorial to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Bromelsick.



Oscar E. Allison

When Dr. Hunt's ten-year ministry here ended¹¹ in May 1941 another of still longer duration was inaugurated under Dr. Oscar Ethan Allison, an Indiana man who had been in Kansas for about twenty years. He was born in Mr. Vernon, Indiana, but at the age of nine moved with his parents to Oakland City, Indiana, where he lived on a small farm and where he received his elementary and high school education. He joined the church when fourteen years old and a few years later was active in youth work as a leader in an evangelistic campaign. He was president of an interdenominational youth group and later of an Epworth League. He was licensed to preach in 1902 and supplied the Evansville Circuit for one year.

He attended Oakland City College, a Baptist institution, and later DePauw University, from which he received the A.B. degree in 1906. In the same year he was received into the Indiana Conference on trial, and also was married to Miss Emma Antoinette Olmsted. He served two pastorates in Indiana before going to the East to study at Boston University. The M.A. degree was conferred upon him in 1914 and the Ph.D. degree in 1916. He served two churches in Indiana, Broad Ripple, Indianapolis, and Trinity, New Albany, before his transfer to Kansas in 1920. In Kansas he had held pastorates in five places, Baldwin, Manhattan, Kansas City, the Washington Avenue Church, Emporia, and Lawrence, First Church.

Apparently there was no regular evening preaching service such as Methodists had been accustomed to in earlier years. But the church building was not unused at the end of the day. The Wesley Foundation held its supper meetings and worship services in the building and various youth groups also gathered for their activities. In addition there were many all church programs either in the church or in Ecke Hall. Some of these were fellowship meetings with a supper, some recreation, and either talks by visiting speakers or study classes with other classes for various youth groups at the same time. This was the age of study classes. Some of them were under the auspices of the Women's Society of Christian Service and were not always held at night. Those that were at night were open also to men. On the other hand many classes were designated as "all church classes" and were usually led by Dr. Allison or some speaker. Space forbids a listing of all the subjects and leaders even if complete information were at hand. But some indication can be given of the wide variety of subject matter. Some groups studied missions in specified areas of the world, as India, Africa, South East Asia, the Near East, Latin America, etc. Some studied racial or economic groups, as the American Negro, "Uprooted Americans" meaning the Japanese displaced during the war, migrant workers, and people in the slum districts in American Cities. Others concentrated on special books of the Bible, or other subjects as the Christian Home, the Meaning of Suffering, the Crusade for Christ, and the Church after the War. Occasionally there was a vesper service or an evening forum. Altogether this series of gatherings represents much in the way of imparting information or the stimulating of thought with regard to the world in which we live.

This leads us to a consideration of the great out standing conditions of the world, which conditioned churches and all other organizations. These were of course the war and its aftermath. Special collections were taken for relief of war-torn areas, and many bundles of food or clothing were shipped out for the same purpose. This church like all others had its service flag with stars to represent members in the war, and its service lists, the latter being put in permanent form in 1944 by the preparation of a memorial plaque. The Brotherhood had special responsibility for such lists and in the summer of 1944 published in the Bulletin eighty-two names with a request for help in adding any that had been missed. Early in 1946 this same organization was advertising for information as to which persons on the list had returned. Not only was the Church concerned about those that had gone out from here to the war, but also for any that had come in as transients on their way from one camp to another and attended this Church. Cards were printed with a picture of the church and blank space on which the soldier could write home that he had been present at the Lawrence Methodist Church. Uniforms were present everywhere, and travel, for the church people as well as everybody else, was restricted. Even Church dinners were interfered with by rationing.

In October 1944 and again in April 1945 the Ministerial Alliance of Lawrence made arrangements in advance for V-Day; and again in August 1945 similar plans were worked out for V-J Day. In either case if the announcement came before a certain hour each church would hold a service of thanksgiving at a specified hour, and in some cases there would be a union service. Anyone who reads old Bulletins or other church material for this period lives over again the anxiety, disappointment, and finally relief when fighting was finally ended.

But the peace as well as the war had its problems and its repercussions on individual churches. Sometimes movements pertaining to war and peace overlapped. One symptom of our world-mindedness is the World Day of Prayer; another is the World Wide Communion, which we still have. The communion, whether World Wide or otherwise, was early tied in with war and post-war conditions. As early as December 1941 the Council of Bishops asked that local churches when taking the traditional collection for the poor at communion, remember not only local poor but the "world parish"; that is two thirds of the collection was to be given to the "Fellowship of Suffering and Service", to be divided between overseas relief, and the work of the chaplains for boys and girls in service.

Just as various national and international groups in the world met before fighting ended to plan for the peace and try to avoid the unpleasant developments after World War I; so church organizations also began planning for peace when war was still in progress. In 1943-1944 the Council of Bishops was preparing a "Crusade for a New World Order", with three outstanding principles, opposition to "national aloofness, support for the United Nations, and larger and more energetic missionary policy." This movement was to co-operate with the Federal Council of Churches in furthering six propositions known as the Six Pillars of Peace, including such principles as freedom of thought and religion, and self-government for the subject peoples. By July 1944 the Methodist Church had developed the Crusade for Christ which "united and carried forward" five movements.

One of the five was the Crusade for a New World Order, but they included also plans for relief and reconstruction, evangelism, stewardship, and increased enrollment in Sunday Schools. The cost of this effort was estimated at \$25,000,000 to be raised in a little more than a year. The purpose of the whole movement was to begin early so that the church might have a voice in the peace. This church, along with all the others, participated in the money raising aspect of the Crusade and through its minister was interested also in the administration of it. A committee of two hundred was appointed to have charge of this program. In 1944 Dr. Allison was appointed to represent the Kansas-Nebraska area at a meeting of this committee in Chicago; and later he attended a meeting for similar purpose at Atlantic City. Perhaps it should be added that our local goal for the Crusade in 1945 was \$5500 and the amount raised was \$7162.

The Crusade was followed by another church-wide movement called the Advance for Christ and his Church, commonly referred to as the Advance. The various fields of endeavor were divided by the bishops or some group representing them among the different areas of the church. The Kansas Conference was given special responsibility for work in education, sanitation, evangelism, etc. in the Philippine Islands and Lawrence First Church made contributions to this effort.

In June 1952 Dr. Allison resigned from the church to become professor of churchmanship at Baker University. He and Mrs. Allison bought a home in Lawrence on East Nineteenth Street and moved there before conference. Thus, they are still with us.¹²



Albert F. Bramble

Dr. Allison's successor, our present minister, is Dr. Albert F. Bramble who, though born in Missouri, was brought up in Kansas at El Dorado. There he received his elementary and high school education, and attended junior college. He is a graduate of Baker University and holds three degrees from Boston University. In 1937 he was married to Miss Sadie E. Crommett of El Dorado who graduated from the University of Kansas in 1936. Dr. Bramble was for two years in charge of the Crawford County Larger Parish with headquarters at Arma; and for six years was the minister of First Church at Parsons before coming to Lawrence.

In summing up developments of his two years from 1952 to 1954 we can begin, as in some other periods, with changes in the physical plant of the church. For weeks in late 1952 and early 1953 there was a campaign for an elaborate building program, and a planning committee reported repeatedly on various suggestions. At the end of April 1953 the Official Board approved a plan for repairs and improvements to cost \$100,000. A financial or building fund committee labored tirelessly and work was begun in a few weeks. The chimney, which had been about the middle of the partition between the sanctuary and rear sanctuary, was torn down and replaced by a smokestack outside the building to the north. The pillars between the two rooms were removed and narrow metal posts substituted. The floor of the rear sanctuary was slanted so that it is now continuous with the rest of the main room, and this rear space as well as the main room and the

gallery equipped with pews, uniform throughout. The rooms above and below the rear sanctuary were made over in departmental quarters for Sunday School groups. The plans also call for new carpet and much redecorating. The work on the building and the campaign for money still go on.

The various organizations continued to function as usual and a new one was added in the summer of 1953. This is called the Older Adult Fellowship and is in keeping with movements in other parts of the country. This group of older persons meets about once a month for an afternoon of games, worship, a program and usually refreshments. For the young people a "fun festival" on Friday night was instituted. For people of all ages a few "family night fellowship suppers" were held. The Sunday evening problem was solved very much as it had been occasionally before but now with a more continuous program. The gathering was held usually in Ecke Hall and consisted of recreation, handicrafts, a cafeteria supper, a worship period, and then a program for adults with children scattering to different rooms for activities fitted to the age groups. This series lasts for a number of weeks in the year, excluding the summer. Post war relief work was continued. It was necessary to send clothing and bedding. At times the women met to sew for "packets for peace".

In the autumn of 1952 a weekly visitation was begun. Members of the church went out two by two calling on new families in the city. In 1953 the Methodists of Kansas had a statewide Evangelistic Mission. In Lawrence this took the form of two weeks of nightly visitation, followed by a week of special meetings at which the talks were made by Rev. Virgil Kraft of the University of Chicago. A particularly active committee on Membership and Evangelism continued to make many calls and as a result of all this activity many persons united with the church.

Of course the church was, as ever, interested in missions. In the spring of 1954 a printed report estimated the annual contribution through the usual channels at \$7000. Also mission study classes were still being offered at intervals. But the special personal interest at this time was directed toward the work of Rev. and Mrs. Roy Spear and their daughter, Nancy, of Pegu, Burma. Mrs. Spear was a Lawrence girl of whom more will be said later. They were in Lawrence on furlough for about a year in 1952 and 1953 and made many talks about their work in different organizations. Not only those who had known Mrs. Spear before, but newer members of the church became much interested. Before the family left Lawrence to return to Burma in the spring of 1953 this interest was expressed through a social gathering on a weeknight advertised as "Godspeed to the Spears". It was more or less an old-fashioned ice cream social but with the additional features of a program, and a collection of money to be used in the missionary work in Burma. A year from that time this enterprise was repeated except for the absence of the missionaries. This time it was called Burma Festival and resulted in the collection of \$525 to help build a house for a retired Burmese minister.