

Times of Tumult
Ron Sundbye, 1966 - 1974

In 1966 our country was heavily engaged in the Viet Nam war. Emotions about our involvement in that conflict ran high on both sides. President Lyndon Johnson was midway through his first elected term as President. Racial tensions were high in many parts of the country, including Lawrence. In eloquent speeches throughout the country the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others spoke of racial injustice.

In June 1966 Rev. Ron Sundbye, at the age of 34, entered the pulpit of First Church for the first time, beginning an extraordinary and tumultuous pastorate of eight years. His first sermon title was "While We Are Waiting."



Ron Sundbye

Ron Sundbye was born in Olathe, Kansas on September 15, 1931. His parents were Clifford and Lucille (Moll) Sundbye. He attended the University of Kansas and Baker University, graduating in 1953 with a B.A. in Speech and Dramatics. He received his Bachelor of Divinity Degree from Boston University School of Theology in 1956. On returning to Kansas he served a three-year pastorate at Moran, and seven years at Countryside United Methodist in Topeka. At Countryside membership grew from 300 to 1600 during his tenure and a new sanctuary was constructed. At the time he came to First Church his four children ranged in ages from 6 months to 8 years.

Rev. Sundbye was serving on the Board of Evangelism of the Kansas Conference, had just finished a term as president of the Ministerial Alliance of Topeka, and was a member of the Board of Directors of the Shawnee County Mental Health Association at the time he moved to Lawrence. By October he was elected to the Douglas County Mental Health Association.

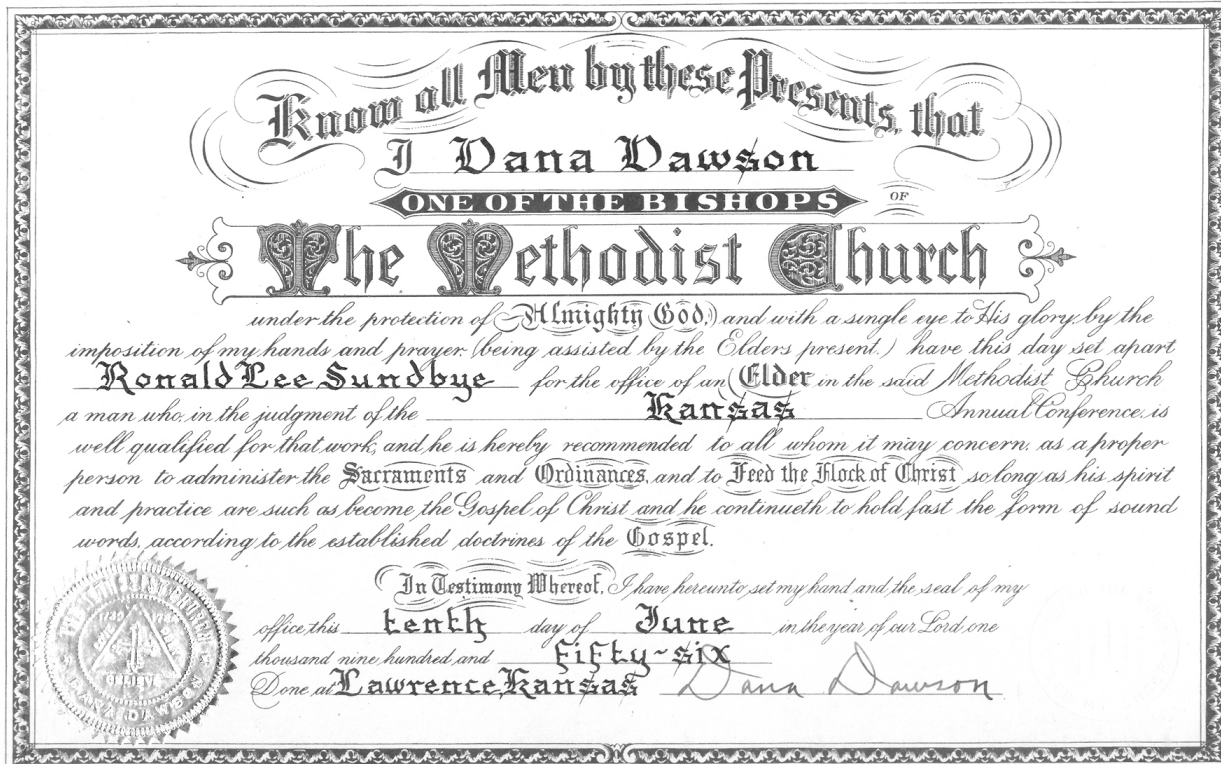
In 1966 he had a reputation as a popular and dynamic preacher. The Baker Orange campus paper of Baker University on November 1966 reported:

"Rev. Ronald Sundbye, minister of the First Methodist Church in Lawrence, will be the guest preacher at All-University Worship tomorrow at 9:45 a.m. in the Baldwin Methodist Church.

Rev. Sundbye, returning to the campus after an enthusiastically received appearance last year, will speak on the topic, 'Stop the World, I Want To Get On!'

Since coming to the First Methodist Church in June, he has had to schedule three Sunday morning services instead of two in order to accommodate the overflow congregation."

Rev. Sundbye was guest speaker for the Union Thanksgiving Service of 1966 at First Presbyterian Church. The following spring he delivered baccalaureate sermons at Pittsburg State Teacher's College and at Lawrence and Chapman High Schools. He gave commencement addresses in Burlington, Eudora, and Tonganoxie.



Certificate of becoming an Elder of The Methodist Church

This certification is used for all Methodist Ministers as part of ordination. The above certificate reads as follows:

“Know all men by these presents, that I, Dana Dawson, one of the Bishops of The Methodist Church, under the protection of Almighty God and with a single eye to His glory by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by the Elders present) have this day set apart Ronald Lee Sundbye for the office of an Elder in the said Methodist Church, a man who, in the judgment of the Kansas Annual Conference, is well qualified for that work; and he is hereby recommended to all whom it may concern as a proper person to administer the Sacraments and Ordinances and to Feed the Flock of Christ so long as his spirit and practice are such as become the Gospel of Christ and he continueth to hold fast the form of sound words according to the established doctrines of the Gospel. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of my office this tenth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and fifty-six. Done at Lawrence, Kansas. Dana Dawson”

In his first year at First Church attendance tripled and included more than a thousand students from the University of Kansas each Sunday. In addition to 3 Sunday morning services a closed circuit television system, loaned by First Methodist Church of Topeka, was installed to serve more than 200 persons in rooms other than the sanctuary.

Other First Church staff members were getting recognition as well as noted in the Church newsletter. "Methodist kindergartners around the country read a story in their story paper written by our staff member, Bonnie Miller, Director of Christian Education. It was entitled, 'The Flowers Appear on the Earth.' We are fortunate to have her on our staff. Her talents and training combine to make her one of the outstanding educators in our denomination." Most of the newsletter articles such as this gave no attribution to the author, but many were written by Rev. Sundbye and others by church staff.

In October 1966 a former member of First Methodist Church, residing in another state, sent a check for \$4,000 for "some unbudgeted items." At the specific request of the donor, the money was used for new choir robes for the Chancel and Angelus Choirs, 2 pianos for the church school, and an IBM electric typewriter for the church office.

October also saw the beginnings of a weekday nursery school "operating with a full enrollment of 48 children in three classes." The following year a joint committee of the Commissions on Education and Outreach was investigating initiation of a fulltime day care center at First United Methodist. This day care would run 5 days a week. In

September 1968 the United Child Care Center opened with 15 children enrolled. The Center employed Mrs. Judith Bencivengo as both director and teacher with Mrs. Anita Martin as the second head teacher and Mrs. Zella Myer as cook. These were the beginnings of the very successful United Child Day Care (UCDC) program

The January 31, 1967 First Church newsletter reported that several families in our church were participating in a special program of friendship with the Methodist students at Haskell. "These families 'adopt' two or three students for a year, having them in their home taking them to some event from time to time and remembering them on special occasions."

In late Spring 1967 arrangements were made to hold First Church Easter services at Hoch Auditorium at 11 a.m. in addition to regular services in the sanctuary at 8:15 a.m. Rev. Sundbye's sermon for the services was titled 'For Christ's Sake.'

MORNING WORSHIP EASTER SUNDAY

March 26, 1967

RONALD L. SUNDBYE, Minister

8:15 a.m. In the sanctuary

11:00 a.m. Hoch Auditorium

"From the spectral mist and the driving clouds,
From the shifting shadows and phantom crowds
From unreal words and unreal lives,
Where truth with falsehood feebly strives;
From the passings away, the chance and change,
Flickerings, vanishings, swift and strange,
I turn to my glorious rest in Thee,
Who art the grand Reality!"

ORGAN PRELUDE.....MR. DAN ABRAHAMSON
"Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now"—Manz
*ORGAN FANFARE (Signal to stand)
*CALL TO WORSHIP.....(8:15) DR. E. F. PRICE
.....(11) REV. THOMAS REHORN
*PROCESSIONAL HYMN.....Unison
"Christ the Lord is Risen Today"

Portion of the bulletin on Easter Sunday 1967

Four of Rev. Sundbye's Sunday sermons were pressed into a two album LP record set and sold for \$5 per album in the late Spring of 1967. The announcement below also appeared in the Easter Sunday bulletin on March 26, 1967

SOUVENIR RECORD ALBUM AVAILABLE MAY 1

Designed to help all persons find deeper meaning in their lives, and to help the worshippers at First Methodist recapture some of the services this year, a two-record album will be available May 1. The four sermons, which were recorded during services the mornings they were delivered by Rev. Sundbye, will be:

"What's It All About, Alfie?"

"The Dangling Conversation"

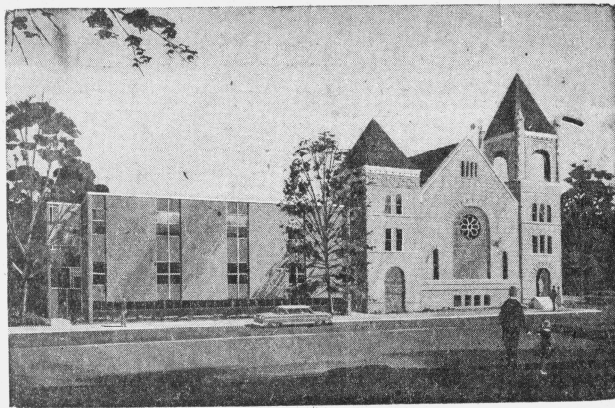
"I'd Like to Go to Innisfree"

"For Christ's Sake"

More details will be available later, but plan to purchase your own album and give another as a gift to some friend or member of your family. The cost is \$5 per album (50¢ additional for mailing). To order your reserve copy now, call the church office, VI 3-7134.

From the church bulletin on Easter 1967

In 1967 Mr. David Bezona, a graduate of Ohio State University with a bachelor's degree in music education was named the new choir director. He was enrolled at Kansas University completing a degree for a Voice Degree and Master's work in Voice. He replaced Mr. Frank Purvis, who had been choir director for 4 years.



FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

946 Vermont

Worship with us each Sunday as we attempt to make an ancient faith relevant to 20th century conditions.

Rev. Ronald L. Sundbye, minister, came to the church last year after a seven year ministry at the Countryside Methodist Church in Topeka. He is a graduate of Baker University and the Boston University School of Theology. During the last year, many students and faculty have worshipped with us. We invite you to our services.

SUNDAY SERVICES

Morning Worship, 8:15, 9:30 and 11:00 a.m.
 Church School, 9:20 and 10:50 a.m.
 Teen Action Group (Sr. High), 7-8:30 p.m.
 Junior Youth Fellowship, 5-7 p.m.
 Campus Wesley Foundation
 Sunday Evening Program
 5-7 p.m., dinner included (50c)
 1314 Oread
 Tuesday 9:30 p.m. Worship

Rev. R. Dennis Bowers, associate minister, is a former newspaperman and a graduate of Kansas University. He is a graduate of Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J.

Rev. Thomas Rehorn, Jr. is the director of the Wesley Foundation. He is a graduate of Baker University and the Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

"It is not for us to foretell the day, but the day will come when men will be called to utter the Word of God in such a way that the world is changed and renewed. There will be a new language, perhaps quite unreligious, but liberating and saving, like the language of Jesus, so that men are horrified at it, and yet conquered by its power . . ."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Advertisement in the Lawrence Journal World in 1967

July 25, 1967

"NEXUS was picked as the name of the church newsletter. No, the word is not Greek or Hebrew, but English meaning the 'tie, the link, the Interconnection.' We hope it will be just that, a link of communications between members of First Church. We thank all those who sent in names for our newsletter."

In July 1967 Rev. Dennis Bowers was appointed Associate Minister to First Church after becoming an ordained elder at the concluding session of Annual Conference. Dennis was a native of Kansas City, KS, and a graduate of Kansas University and Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, NJ. His degree from KU was in Journalism and he served for two years on the editorial staff of the Kansas City Star before leaving for seminary. While in seminary he served as part-time asst. minister at Chatham UMC. His work with youth was the subject of an article in the March issue of Together Magazine. On June 17 Dennis Bowers married Nell Shuman at Trinity UMC in Kansas City. After a trip to the Jamaica Islands, they returned to Lawrence where Rev. Bowers assumed his pastoral duties on July 1. Nell was a fulltime student at the university.

Under the ministry of Dennis Bowers big changes were in store for the youth program of first church and they began to happen almost immediately on his arrival.

June 1967 NEXUS

“The MYF is about to undergo some changes during the rest of the fall to prepare for a totally new approach to youth fellowship activities in the fall. With the assistance of Mr. & Mrs. Peters and Rev. Bowers, the youth group, which numbers about 23 active members, hopes to expand both program and membership. The first signs of this “new approach” has already taken place in the MYF’s sponsoring of ‘Thing #1’ and their hope of sponsoring a biweekly dance for all Lawrence teenagers in Ecke Hall. These planning times are being called ‘TEEN ACTIONS sessions.’”

July 25, 1967 NEXUS

“TAG [Teen Action Group] replaces MYF [Methodist Youth Fellowship] as the Church-sponsored youth group. Attendance is up 300%. The MYF voted itself out of existence at their meeting Sunday, July 16. The action made way for the birth of a new church-sponsored youth group know as “Teen Action Group”. The action was in keeping with a trend in modern church youth programs to de-emphasize the denominational emphasis of the group because it tends to limit the ministry of the group. The new group is planning a whole series of programs for the rest of the summer. They have asked the church to allow them to sponsor a teenage dance for all Lawrence HighSchool students to be run by TAG members with adult supervision.”

By late summer a plea was made that “Adult help is needed to transform Ecke Hall for TAG activities. Men with electrical training and carpentry are needed. Also someone with artistic talent is needed to paint a mural on the wall of Ecke.”

August 1967 NEXUS

“The ‘Thirsty Ear’ teen dance attracted about 325 youth to Ecke Hall. Eight adult couples chaperoned the dance, which is now being promoted by eight other churches in Lawrence and the recreation commission. Not one ‘incident’ occurred during the entire evening. Enough profit was gained from selling of ID cards to begin three of TAG service projects immediately”

October 24, 1967 NEXUS

“Thirty members of the TAG group leave Thursday for a 3-day work project in the inner city in Kansas City. They will be involved in several Methodist and community sponsored projects, from tutoring and visitation to physical labor and working with other teenagers.”

November 14, 1967 NEXUS

“The head of youth work of the General Board of Education of The Methodist Church and the person responsible for youth work for the World Council of Churches have written letters of inquiry about the positive steps taken in youth

work here at First. One of our young people has been invited to present one of five papers at the National Convention of Christian Educators to be held in Dallas in February. So you see- the churches that are willing to flounder a bit and take some time to work out some kinks are the ones that might, in the long run, be the forerunners in the reformation.”

Ron Sundbye.

The First Church TAG program began to attract regional and national attention. It was covered at length in the Sunday magazine supplement of January 28, 1968 of the Topeka Capital Journal cover article titled, “THE TURNED ON TEENS.” The article records that there are “approximately 85 Lawrence High School participants.” In his article Dick Russell writes: “In an era when American youth is often berated for draftdodging, potsmoking, and generally not caring, these Lawrence students have come up with a unique interdenominational youth group. It is based on action and involvement– not only inter-city and community involvement but inter personal relationships as well.” He goes on to say that, “Ironically, the TAG slogan is straight out of hippie-land: ‘Don’t get so hung up on your hang-ups that you can’t do your own thing.’ But ‘doing their own thing’ means more than rebellion to this group.” Russell concludes with this observation that, “TAG has brought renewed individuality and a feeling of accomplishment to a group of teenagers that might otherwise be lost in a cliquedominated, mass society.”

February 12, 1968 NEXUS

“Ron Casteel, a member of First Methodist and president of TAG, left Monday for Dallas where he will be the only teenager to present a paper at the National Convention of Christian Educators. The paper presents the TAG philosophy as a possible prototype for churches of other denominations

July 9, 1968 NEXUS

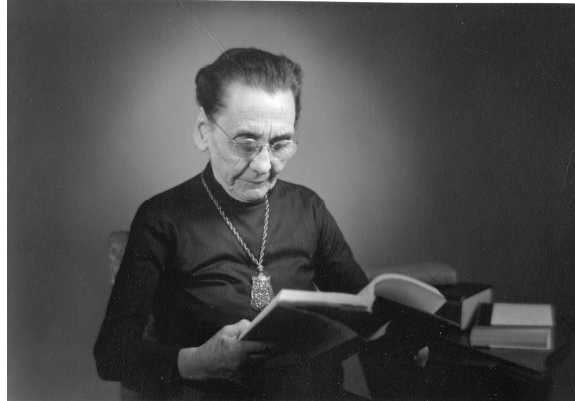
“Our youth program is at a very critical stage right now. It has grown rapidly during the last year to the point that at present we have nearly 50 youth waiting to participate in the program. It is unfortunate that even after several appeals, only two persons from the entire church have offered to help with the youth program. Please, if you have some time to work with the youth, even if you feel unqualified, call Rev. Bowers. Your services are needed.”

In July Rev. Bowers made another appeal noting that, “It is unfortunate that even after several appeals, only two persons from the entire church have offered to help with the youth program.”

February 12, 1968 NEXUS

“Miss Bessie Daum has found it necessary to retire as church librarian after many years of devoted loyal service. On behalf of the entire congregation, a genuine “thank you” is expressed. The library has grown under her supervision and the many selections she has made have been varied and well chosen. She has spent many hours cataloging and the records are in excellent shape. A successor will be named soon by the Commission on Education. The Church Library will be known as Bessie Daum Library. A citation and expression of appreciation from the board

has been sent to Miss Daum along with the information of the board's decision to name the library in her honor."



Bessie Daum

Merger became a reality for the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church in April 1968. After years of study and planning the Uniting Conference for the United Methodist Church was held in the Memorial auditorium in Dallas, TX. The following Ministers and laymen represented Kansas Conferences:

C Moyer, Floyd Coffman, Mrs. Barton Dean, Charles S. Scott, Albert F. Bramble, Clare J. Hayes, Don W. Holter, and Roger E. Biddle.

In July 1968 the former EUB and Methodist Churches of the Kansas East Conference were formally joined in an uniting conference on July 31 at Baker University in a service titled, 'The Act of Union.' Bishop Paul W. Milhouse of Kansas City, MO, bishop of this area for the former EUB church, presided and Bishop Stowe of the Methodist Conference spoke. An interpretative dance group of Lawrence First Church, directed by Mrs. Robert Shelton, performed.

In October 1968 with the unification of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren denominations, the women's groups in the churches were reorganized and each local society rechartered. The charter service called a "Service of Celebration," was planned by Mrs. Monte Pearson with Mrs. Leroy Dutt serving as the leader. Mrs. Clyde Woods served as new president of the Women's Society, replacing Mrs. J.D. Sheppard who moved to Texas. Following the charter service, a business meeting and fellowship hour was held in Fellowship Hall.

In November 1968 two historical banners were hung in the sanctuary made especially for the formal uniting conference of the EUB and Methodist denominations in Kansas last summer. The orange banner on the south depicted the history of the EUB denomination. The women from the First Methodist and Central Methodist in Lawrence who made them were Mrs. James Stoner, Mrs. Glenn Kappelman, Mrs. Richard Garrett, Mrs. Orvel Durham, Mrs. Ott Gather and Mrs. Elmer Pippert.

November 12, 1968 NEXUS

"In conjunction with the Commission on Membership and Evangelism Teen Action Group will begin this Sunday to provide homemade rolls for the first all church coffee, to be held after each of the three services. Since most of these

coffee will coincide with new members Sundays, it will provide a time to come meet new members. The youth are hoping many members of the congregation will want to order rolls on a regular monthly basis. Profits will go towards TAG service projects such as the African orphan, which they support, and their annual trip.”

In late December 1968 Rev. Sundbye entered Menorah Hospital in Kansas City where he stayed for several days recovering from physical exhaustion. It was an early warning of serious medical problems that would arise again later. The church newsletter offered the following on December 31, 1968:

“Most of us forget that ministers are human though no one has tried harder to convey this humanness than he [Rev. Sundbye] has.

Many pressures have weighed upon Rev. Sundbye’s heart and mind these past few months and he was in dire need of complete quiet and rest. He is planning on leaving the hospital tomorrow. He will meet his counseling appointments for this week unless you are called specifically with different information. He probably will not return to the pulpit before February 2nd.”

In the following series of letters to First Church congregation over the next few weeks Ron Sundbye would reveal more of himself and his own personal problems in a very public forum:

January 7, 1969 NEXUS

“I cannot tell you how much your cards and notes are meaning to me. They make receiving mail a pure joy. Thank you most sincerely.

As I said on Sunday, it will no longer be possible for me to preach three services. We have canceled the 8:30 service effective immediately. Let me repeat the two suggestions I made to those of you who have preferred that service. First, I know some of you like it because you do not like the large crowd at 11. If you go to Sunday school, you have to attend that service. My suggestions are that you talk this over in your classes and see if they could meet at 11. That would free you to attend the 9:30 service. Second, I know that some of you prefer the more traditional forms of worship. I would be willing to find preachers for an 8:30 service if enough of you feel this way. Please drop me a line, letting me know what your wishes are, and I will cooperate as much as possible to provide a service, which you find meaningful.

My recovery is a bit too slow for my impatient nature. I still find that I tire very rapidly and so I am going to have to work at a very limited pace this month. I want to be completely well by February, and I know that depends largely on how sensible I approach things now.”

January 19, 1969 NEXUS

“Because a minister’s life is open to very little privacy I felt it best that I be the one to tell you that my wife and I have reached the decision to terminate our

marriage. This comes after 16 years of frustration and unhappiness for both of us. We have sought to preserve the union by using every kind of professional counseling. Our decision comes only because all efforts to find happiness together have failed.

The adjustment that lies ahead of me is going to be difficult, and it will be helpful to be with friends and people I know. This situation presents you with the unique opportunity to “minister to the minister.” I need you now far more badly than you need me. Perhaps this can be a very strengthening experience for you.

I give you my word there is no scandal: there is no other woman, no other man. The situation is one of gross incompatibility. We have weighed heaviest the interests of our four children, and we truly feel they will be better off without a marriage that produces nothing but tensions and strains.

I ask that you not judge us. Let me remind you again of the Indian prayer: “Great Spirit, let me not judge my brother until I have walked in his moccasins for two weeks.” You have not lived through this marriage, and it is therefore not possible for you to make judgments as to whether we have made the best decision. That decision was ours to make and it is now ours to live with. I ask, as I have so many times, for your continuing love and support as we go on in this church to make Christ’s word vital and profound for the people of this century.”

In spite of his problems he continued to lead the church in innovative new directions of worship and service. On January 29, 1969 Rev. Sundbye returned to the pulpit. The service was the first in a series of four utilizing popular and folk artists. His first was based on the music of Simon and Garfunkel with a focus on “Bridge Over Troubled Water.”

Nita Sundbye Sewell offers the following about Rev. Sundbye’s methods:

“One of Ron's innovations was his annual ‘sermon at the piano.’ He wove songs into his sermon outline that illustrated or supported the ideas and feelings he wanted to communicate. Then he sat at the piano to deliver the sermon, playing and singing the songs when they appeared in his outline. The songs were usually contemporary music that did not appear in the church hymnal.

For renewal and inspiration he made an annual vacation pilgrimage to New York City where he spent two weeks attending all the recent Broadway plays. He absorbed the human emotions and conflicts in the newest dramas for potential use in his sermons. He also bought recordings of the musicals so he would have the lyrics and music for possible use at church services.”

February 4, 1969 NEXUS

“It is very, very good to be back on the job again. My month of rest was badly needed but enough is enough. I am still going to take it slow for awhile, as the last thing I want to encounter is a setback. I will be in the office several hours a day and am again available for appointments.

I hope you will participate in the experimental services we are having during February. As I stated last Sunday, no one insists you like the new music we are using. We ask only that you come with an open mind and hear what is being said through the songs.”

February 9, 1969 NEXUS

“A former professor of mine once said that the two most neglected words in the English language are thank you. I don’t want to neglect those words any longer. Thank you for the many acts of thoughtfulness you are performing to make this difficult time in my life easier. The cards and letters continue to arrive daily and how I welcome each one of them. I have also been very grateful for the dinner invitations that have been extended to my son and me. These are particularly welcomed, as we are not the best cooks in the world. ...

I also want to thank those of you who are entering into the experimental services this month with a spirit of openness. I realize that the music represents a sharp change and change is always painful. However, I feel those kinds of experiments are necessary now if we are to meet the future with relevant forms of worship. I hope none of you think such experiments are going on in our church alone. They are being conducted in churches of every denomination all across the country.”

March 18, 1969 NEXUS

“One of the things we have tried hardest to achieve this year has been to develop services and programs that enable us to become a ‘servant church.’ We are trying to be sensitive to the needs of our community and to serve those needs when we can. There has been a wonderful response from many persons in the congregation. This response has enabled us to provide volunteer workers for many social agencies in the city.

Probably our biggest undertaking has been the establishment of a Child Care Center. We now have an enrollment of thirty, and most of the children come from low-income families receiving government assistance. The Center makes it possible for children to receive professional care while their mothers work. The service goes beyond baby-sitting. There is a very creative effort to help ready them for Kindergarten and to provide them with skills they would not achieve without help from outside the home. The parents pay a fee of \$17.50 per week and the Dept. of Health Education and Welfare pays \$3 per day for each day the child attends.

Some of the most important work a church accomplishes does not show and easily goes unnoticed. Those of us on the staff are constantly searching for new ways in which we can efficiently minister to real needs. We are deeply grateful to those of you who are helping and hope others will enlist themselves in worthwhile service projects”

In April 1969 the Administrative Board, a new title brought about by unification with the EUB church, passed “several important resolutions” exhibited here:

“Charles Saunders, Chairman of First United Methodist Committee to investigate possibilities of low cost housing in Lawrence, reported on the general plan and development to date of the proposed Michigan Street low-income housing project. He then moved that the Board approve the following statement: “The Administrative Board of the First United Methodist Church of Lawrence, Kansas hereby requests that it be approved as a co-sponsor for the proposed Michigan Street low-income housing project (Section 236 of the National Housing Act.). The motion was seconded by J.J. Wilson and unanimously approved by voice vote of members present.”

“Rev. Sundbye discussed some current developments in the area of Ministerial Assignments and suggested it would be in order for the Board to issue a statement pertaining thereto. It was moved by Warren Bell and seconded by Gerald Pearson that the following resolution be adopted: ‘We resolve that the Administrative Board of First United Methodist Church of Lawrence would not refuse to accept a ministerial appointment on the basis of race or color.’ Motion carried unanimously.”

In May of 1969 the death of Charles B. Russell was reported in the church newsletter. “Our church will always be most grateful for our lovely pipe organ given in 1938 by Mr. Russell and his brother, Lloyd Russell, as a memorial to their parents, Mr. & Mrs. J.B. Russell.”

In June 1969 Rev. Stuart Herrick replaced Dennis Bowers as Associate Pastor. Stuart was a native of Minnesota and a recent graduate of the St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City. He held a degree in psychology from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. While in seminary, he served as a student intern for the Methodist Inner City Parish in Kansas City where he was a community organizer with such groups as welfare rights, public housing and communitybased model cities planning organizations. He also served the College Heights United Methodist Church as part-time student director of the senior high group.

Also, in June 1969 Mr. Hubert Carson replaced David Bezona as choir director. Mr. Carson held a Bachelor of Science degree in music education from McMurry College in Abilene, Texas and a master’s in music education from North Texas University. He also held a bachelor’s degree of arts from Texas Technological College and a master’s in Spanish and was working on a Ph.D. in Spanish at KU. He had been director of high school band and choir in Throckmorton, Texas; director of Christian Education and Minister of Music in several Methodist churches in Kansas City. Mrs. Carson, Ann, had served as director of the South Junior High School orchestra the prior year.

October 26, 1969 NEXUS

The youth committee of our church has recently been reorganized with Mr. Jim Welborn as the new chairman. It also now numbers among its members an equal number of youth and adults. They are: Mike Sutton, Cheryl Allison representing the Junior High groups; Diane Miller, Marty Wiley and Barbara Boozer representing the Senior High groups and Betty Kappelman, Janet Mody and Allen Vick. Bonnie Miller and Stuart Herrick are staff representatives.

In a church brochure prepared during this time the staff were shown as:

THE CHURCH STAFF	
Minister	Rev. Ronald L. Sundbye
Associate Minister	Rev. R. Dennis Bowers
Director of Christian Education	Miss Bonnie Miller
Director of Evangelism	Mrs. Kenneth Pine
Director of Chancel and Chapel Choirs.	David Bezona
Director of Angelus Choir	Mrs. Duane Knos
Organist	Dan Abrahamson
Secretary	Mrs. Cloyd Ingerson
Assistant Secretary	Mrs. Phil Stiles
Custodian	Wilbur Ray
Lay Leader.	Joe Wilson
Official Board Chairman	Dr. Carl Knox
Trustee Chairman	L. Martin Jones
Commission Chairmen:	
Education	Warren Bell
Finance	Gerald Pearson
Outreach	Glenn Kappelman
Worship	Rev. Ronald L. Sundbye
Membership and Evangelism.	Phil Brown

November 11, 1969 NEXUS

“I would like to use my space this week to explain an important phase of our ministry at FUMC and to thank some of those who volunteer time to make it possible. That is our calling ministry. Each month, a group of men who compose what is called the “Fishermen’s Club” call in the homes of newcomers in our community. They are Bob Wright, Chairman, Warren Boozer, Jim Henry, Nelson Kueger, George Brenner, Clyde Woods, Bob Candlin, Fred Shaw, Dick Ailor, Don Cooper and John Wakeman. The Commission on Membership and Evangelism coordinates their work. It is through their efforts that we find persons interested in uniting with the fellowship of our church.

Each month, Mrs. Pine, who serves on the staff as Parish Visitor, visits in the homes of our shut-ins. She also provides Christmas Luncheons each December for these persons, and on Holy Thursday each year, she and I take communion to their homes. Mrs. Pine also does a great deal of visitation among newcomers.”

Thursday, November 6th, 110 high school youth danced, listened, talked, and day dreamed to the sounds and lights of the “Joint Offering”, a band of seven senior high students. Sponsored by the Teen Action Group (T.A.G.), the occasion was the reopening of the Thirsty Ear— the third floor of Ecke Hall— for a teen dance. Fifteen adult sponsors, two personnel from the Lawrence Department of Public Safety, and eight youth workers helped to make the evening a smoothly operating success.

1970 was another eventful year for Ron Sundbye both personally and professionally.

His reputation as a preacher continued to draw large congregations and regional attention. The Kansas City Star Magazine ran an extensive article about First Church and its senior minister titled "It's Standing Room Only at Reverend Sundbye's Place by Ivan G. Goodman. In his article Mr. Goodman writes:

"Driving into Lawrence on a miserable rainy morning not long ago, we feared the weather would keep churchgoers home, thereby ruining any photographic possibilities. But we arrived to find the familiar lengthy lines filing into the church. And despite the elements the place was filled to its 900 capacity for the 11 o'clock service. (An earlier service draws largely townspeople, while the latter is made up primarily of University of Kansas students). ...

Indicating his awareness that students do not generally have much money to spare, the minister made a small joke about the paucity in the plate on an earlier morning, and then he went on to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Moore [now U.S. Representative from Kansas Third District], a young couple who performed a folk rendition of 'Help' a John Lennon-Paul McCartney song. ...

The favored course of this spiritual and intellectual banquet is a sermon of relevance. And unqualified frankness. 'The church has sold out and violated its mission in this world. For we have turned our backs on the people in hell and there is our mission.' Those are the words of Mr. Sundbye, ordained Methodist minister.

'Every rose has its roots in the dirt,' is the theme of his 'Midnight Cowboy' sermon, in which he finds the moving power of love lifting the souls of Ratso and Joe. ..."

The article also describes some of the financial problems created for the church with expanding programs and declining revenues. "And in fact, not too many years ago the First Methodist functioned on a \$50,000 annual budget. It stands now at \$100,000." Some of the more traditional Methodist members and larger contributors had left the church.

On May 10, 1970 occurred a singular event in the history of First Church. It was reported in the Lawrence Journal World the following day:

Blacks Interrupt Church Service to Demand \$75,000

"'Lawrence has one of the most viciously racist power structures that exist in this country.'

On this alleged basis, 10 to 12 black men interrupted late Sunday morning services at the First United Methodist Church, 10th and Vermont, and demanded \$75,000 for Lawrence's 3,000 black residents."

In his letter to the congregation the following week Rev. Sundbye described the incident this way:

“You probably have heard by now that a group of black men interrupted the 11 o’clock service Sunday and read a manifesto asking for \$75,000 to aid blacks in the Lawrence community. I was totally unprepared for them and had no knowledge that they were coming. To say I was completely surprised, however, would be untrue. This has occurred in many churches. The men who came to our church represented the Coordinating Committee for the Black Community, and Mr. Bryce Rivers, the chairman of that committee, read the manifesto. The document ends with the following sentence: “We will return at this time next week for your answer.” I have notified Bishop Stowe and Rev. Neal Hiatt, our District Superintendent about the situation. Three meetings are planned this week to discuss this matter. The first is an open forum for all members and friends of the church to express their views and offer suggestions. We will read the manifesto again so those of you who were not here will know its content. The second meeting will be a meeting of the Executive Committee. The third will be a meeting of the Administrative Board.

Being Christian has NEVER been easy. Let us not run from our difficulties. Let us face them bravely and together.”

Rev. Sundbye described the response to the ‘Black Manifesto’ in two subsequent letters.

May 19, 1970

“First, I want to thank all of you who gave extensively of your time last week to help us work through to an answer for the Committee for the Black Community in order to have it ready on Sunday. According to the newspaper, it was not acceptable to them, but I have not been given a copy of their reply. At any rate, we have made our answer and will proceed now to be honest about it.

The Executive Committee will meet to form a committee of six representatives from the church to discover how we can help meet needs in all of the minority communities and to formulate administrative procedures for implementing that help. Those who want to give to the CCBC may leave their checks in the office and we will see that they are forwarded. After the 11 o service this Sunday, there will be an informal discussion in Fellowship Hall to glean any ideas any of you may have which might prove helpful to the newly formed committee.”

September 29, 1970

A detailed proposal concerning the restructuring of the Teen Lounge as a recreation center open weekday afternoons and Saturdays was passed at the last meeting of the Commission on Education. The general purpose of the Lounge is to provide well-designed programming for youth who need a place to go to establish sound relationships with adults and young adults who are interested in

relating to them on both a personal and an activity level. Copies of the proposal are available in the north hallway on the sermon table. It is vital to the youth who use this service to have a wide variety of people with whom to identify. It is therefore crucial that church adults volunteer to serve as a Lounge Sponsor. Details of what this would involve can be obtained from either me or Sally Hoffman of the Youth Committee.

Cordially,
Stuart Herrick

October 6, 1970

The Teen Lounge project is making rapid strides in staff development. Approximately 20 KU young adults have volunteered to work weekday afternoons and Saturdays. The tentative opening date is October 14th. On Tuesday, the 13th there will be an extensive orientation session for the entire staff to prepare them for the highlights and responsibilities of supervising the Lounge activities.

October 13, 1970

Next Sunday evening, two new youth groups will be initiated. The one for Junior Highs will meet in Ecke Hall from 7:00 to 8:30. The sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Benji Wyatt. The Senior High group will be sponsored by Rev. Sundbye, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Young, Maribeth Blich and Steve Langhofer and will meet at the Parsonage at 7:00 p.m.

The Teen Lounge will open on this Saturday the 17th and will be open from 1 to 5 and 7 to 11. Weekday hours are 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The chaperones had a 6 hour orientation session on Tuesday of this week.

October 19, 1970

“The Committee of six [Charles Saundes, Russell Mosser, Lee Lohrenz, Norman Yetman, Nancy Bengel and Carmen Cabrero]. worked long and hard all summer to come up with suggestions as to ways we can provide help for minority groups in this city. Their final recommendation is for \$10,000 to be divided three ways:

St. Luke's AME Church: \$3,000

This is one of the oldest Black institutions in Lawrence. Needs are very great. They lack critical facilities and supplies.

Concerned Black Parents \$3,000

This will help a new organization composed of responsible, concerned parents from the Black community initiate programs they feel will effect the well being of our entire city.

Education: \$4,000

The largest sum of money is reserved for programs to help people learn skills and trades through which they could secure better jobs.

Because of budget problems two staff positions will be eliminated. These include the Associate Pastor and one full-time secretary. There is money for additional help but only on a part-time basis. This decision becomes effective Dec. 31 for the secretary and May 31 for our Associate.”

October 6, 1970- --from REPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

“It was voted that the United Child Care Center be asked to contribute \$50 per month to help pay for utilities.

It was reported that at the last Trustees meeting they approved a policy that there will be no smoking in the church.”

In early summer 1970 Nita Wyatt, Professor of Education at the University of Kansas, and Rev. Ron Sundbye announced their engagement. Their wedding on August 9, 1970 was held in First Church sanctuary with Rev. Neal Malicky, dean of the college at Baker University, officiating. Among the wedding participants were Dan and Carol Abrahamson and Dennis Moore [now U.S. Congressman].



The Wedding of Nita Wyatt and Ron Sundbye – August 9, 1970

In August 1972 after ten years as Director of Christian Education, Bonnie Miller resigned to accept a position with the UMC of Nichols Hills in Oklahoma City.

The death of Edwin Price in 1972 marked the end of a long and distinguished career of service. It was reported in the church newsletter as follows:

November 22, 1972

“Our church was saddened this week by the death of Dr. Edwin Price. He spent most of his adult life as director of the Wesley Foundation at KU. He touched thousands of young lives in his ministry there. He served on our staff as parttime Financial Secretary and deeply enriched the ministry of our church. His loving way of dealing with people gave him a special place in many hearts. He helped me in many ways, and I truly feel I have lost a very good friend.

-Ron Sundbye”

Rev. Price's family donated the library of Rev. Price to the church and it was dedicated on November 6, 1974. The Library Committee "wishes to announce that Rev. Price's library is now ready for your use." For a while his library was cataloged as a separate unit from the main library. This was a temporary arrangement to afford members "an opportunity to browse through and to check out books from his collection before it is incorporated into the main library at a later date." Hilda Koehler and Pam Joyce were credited with "cataloging this great collection."

Mr. & Mrs. Allen Vick and the United Methodist Women donated the picture of Dr. and Mrs. Price, shown here.



Lena and Edwin Price

January 9, 1973

"The first meeting of the Planning and Steering Committee for the formation of the new women's unit, United Methodist Women, will be held Sunday, January 14, at 10:30 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. The committee includes 5 women from Wesleyan Service Guild, 6 from Women's Society of Christian Service, and 6 church members not currently holding membership in either group. A permanent chair and secretary will be elected during this meeting."

June 19, 1974

"A memorial service will be held in our sanctuary at 3 p.m. on June 23 for Lena Price. The family will be in Fellowship Hall to meet friends after the service. Mrs. Price died in Jonesboro, Arkansas, June 11 after a long illness. In lieu of flowers the family requests memorial contributions to the Chapel Fund."

During Ron Sundbye's era there were numerous support staff changes due in part to the transient nature of student population experienced in college towns. Rowena Pine became a fulltime staff member as Director of Evangelism in 1966. Rev. Dennis Maack was hired as parttime minister responsible for the teen lounge and for the ACT and TAG youth groups. In 1970 Mrs. Zella Ingerson resigned to move to Nebraska after serving 16 years as church secretary. She was replaced by Sonia Rodriguez, a native of Chile. She had previously been office supervisor in the northern part of Chili for forty-five Peace Corp workers. In 1972 she moved to Chicago and was replaced by Karen Gordon. Other secretarial staff mentioned in church notes included Rozana Leak, Carolyn Gaddis, Janet Vaughan, and Maxine Bascom. Bob Brotsman was custodian.

Memorial gifts to the church during Ron Sundbye's pastorate included a \$10,000 gift to FUMC by Grace Emmett in memory of her husband, Mr. L.H. Emmett. The money was used to buy

new carpeting for the sanctuary, new entrance doors on tenth street and renovation of the south and west halls. Donald Roberts, presented four altar frontals, with liturgical colors appropriate to the church year, in memory of his mother, Mrs. Clara Roberts. A new sound system in the sanctuary was purchased and installed with money given by the estate of Mrs. Cynthia Mock. Two banners in memory of Ron Casteel were donated by the Casteel family.

The last few years of Ron Sundbye's pastorate at First Church were marred by periods of illness as he struggled with his manic depressive disorder. The Church at that time had limited support mechanisms for pastors with such an illness. Church leaders struggled to find ways to help with little success. In the Spring of 1974 the Staff-Parish Relations Committee asked the church conference to reassign Rev. Sundbye to another church.

Of those times Nita Sundbye Sewell writes the following:

“He asked the conference for a sabbatical leave to complete a Master's degree in Speech Communication and Human Relations (SCHR) at KU. His goal was to be a speech teacher at a junior college. He finished the Master's degree in October of 1975. When he finished, there were no jobs available in the junior colleges unless the applicant had a doctoral degree. He was accepted into the doctoral program in SCHR and completed most of the coursework required. When he got to the statistics course, he dropped out of the program.

He then asked the conference to give him another church assignment. They sent him to Meriden, Kansas, a church in a small country town north of Topeka similar to the Moran church at which Ron had begun his career many years earlier. He left that church in January of 1979 after a stay of about a year. It was a mismatch from the beginning.”

April 30, 1974 NEXUS

“A reception for Nita and Ron Sundbye will be held after the worship service on Sunday, May 19 in Fellowship Hall. Members of UMW will be hostesses. This will be an opportunity for all of us to show appreciation for Ron's eight years of ministry, which have enriched the lives of all of us. His last Sunday in the pulpit will be May 26, before taking his sabbatical to study at KU.”

This marked the end of an extraordinary and tumultuous period for First Church. It had been both energizing and agonizing.

At the invitation of Rev. Virgil Brady, Ron did return to First Church as guest preacher one Sunday in August 1990. In an oral history taken in 2002 Nita Sundbye Sewell recalled that Ron agonized over whether his sermon had been good enough on that occasion. As a member of the congregation that day hearing Rev. Sundbye for the first time, this author found it to be inspiring.

Ron Sundbye died suddenly of a heart attack on September 14, 1994, one day before his 63rd birthday. Funeral services were held at First Church with Rev. Virgil Brady officiating. Ron and Nita had been married 24 years at the time of his death.

The following are remarks given by Ron Sundbye's sister, Jean Sundbye Hines, at the memorial service on September 17, 1994:

“Ron was remarkable in his career as a Methodist minister in achieving in such a short time what many take years to accomplish. He was truly gifted in his ability to preach to people about meaningful, real issues in their lives and was able to touch the lives of young and old alike.

I took great comfort and inspiration the other night, listening to some of the sermons he had recorded when he was in his prime, and was struck by how prophetic some of his comments were regarding life's adversities and the meaning of love, given the adversities he lived with in his later years. I have ached remembering the Ron I grew up with and seeing the Ron who endured so much pain and suffering. It is true that it sometimes takes more courage to live than to die and Ron's courage surpassed the limits. I want to remember his courage.

I have two hopes today: one is that we can all remember Ron when he was able to live life to its fullest and secondly that he has found peace.”



Caricature of Ron Sundbye done at Disneyland