

Times for Decision
Wayne Castle, 1974 - 1976
Richard "Dick" Johnson, 1976- 1983

In the spring of 1974 Rev. Ron Sundbye decided to take sabbatical from the ministry and return to studies at the University of Kansas. On April 9, 1974 it was reported that Bishop Dixon had appointed Rev. Wayne Castle to replace him in June, the traditional time for Methodist pastor changes.



Wayne Castle

Wayne Castle, a native of Holton, Kansas, attended Baker University and later graduated from Kansas State University. His Master of Divinity degree was from St. Paul's School of Theology in Kansas City. Prior to joining First Church he served pastorates in Tecumseh, Topeka First Church (as associate), Kansas City (Kansas) Central Avenue, and Hiawatha. His first Sunday at Lawrence FUMC was June 16, 1974.

One very significant development during Wayne's ministry was the creation in the fall of 1975 of the Happy Friends class "for adults with special needs" led by Lynette Rapp, Millie Peters, and Carol Abrahamson. This class for mentally challenged adults has been an integral part of our church program now for more than 25 years. Dedicated leadership for it is still provided by Carol Abrahamson. In announcing the new class on September 10, 1975 the church newsletter article said, "We are excited about this fellowship and hope our entire congregation will support it in every way possible."

A church newsletter of July 1974 asks, "Where did we get the beautiful silver chalices and flagon used in our communion service a week ago? Answer: There were used in the German Methodist Church until it disbanded in 1918 and then were given to the keeping of Mrs. Augusta Schaake, who presented them to our church."

Early in 1975 Rev. Castle announced to the congregation that he and his wife of 13 years were separating and that he had moved out of the parsonage at 1527 Massachusetts. This followed the very difficult separation and divorce of his predecessor in ministry, Ron Sundbye. In his public announcement to the congregation in February 1975 Wayne Castle wrote, "Through this type of announcement you may be pained to know what I have known about myself for a long time, and that is my own humanness. I sometimes think that I should be without problems and difficulties, and when I have them, to be able to solve them easily. But it is not that way. And you at this time have to share with me in that human frailty. But rather than to apologize for what I cannot be, nor in any rational way expect myself to be, let us face the reality of what is, and work in every way possible to celebrate whatever joy and beauty can be found in life."

In March 1976 Wayne announced that he had requested to be assigned to a new pastorate and would be moving to Wichita to serve the West Heights United Methodist Church. He wrote, "Although my ministry here has been brief, and in many ways difficult, the relationships that I have developed with you are extremely meaningful and important to me. To leave these working relationships and friendships is a hard thing to do. ... Thanks for your cooperation in the past two

years, and may you give the same kind of support to your new pastor, the Reverend Richard Johnson, who will be coming to serve with you in June. I am personally pleased with his appointment to this church. He has been a friend for a number of years, and I know that he will effectively serve this church as pastor.”



Marking the bicentennial of our country in 1976, celebrations were held throughout the year, but Independence Day was the high point. Gerald Ford was President with Nelson A. Rockefeller as his appointed Vice President. Ford was the first person to become President without having been elected President or Vice President. The summer political campaign and fall election pitted Gerald Ford against Jimmy Carter.

At the age of 56 Dick Johnson entered service as senior pastor at First Church just prior to the July celebrations. July 4, 1976 was on Sunday and church members were invited to dress in costume of colonial times. There was only one service that day and Dick came in costume as John Wesley.



Ken and Rowena Pine in costume - 1976



Richard "Dick" Johnson

Dick Johnson was born in Rockford, Illinois on November 28, 1919. He attended public schools in Rockford and from there went on to earn an A.B. degree from Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin, in the midst of World War II in 1942. Well before graduation in February 1941 he married Gladys M. Eliason. At the time of this writing they have just celebrated their 62nd anniversary of marriage.

Dick earned his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Drew University School of Theology in Madison, New Jersey, and went from there to serve as missionary to Puerto Rico and the

Dominican Republic for the next 12 years. In 1959 he returned from missionary work to a mission of a new kind as campus minister at Kansas State College of Pittsburg (now Pittsburg State University), where he served for 7 years. Following pastorates in Fort Scott and Yates Center he became Superintendent of the Parsons District, a position he held for 5 years until 1976 when he came to Lawrence.

In May 1976 First Church purchased a parsonage at 3507 W. 5th Terrace into which the Johnsons moved in early June. Rev. Dick Johnson delivered his first FUMC sermon titled "The Needle Points North" on Sunday, June 8. The church held "Hello" sessions following each of the two Sunday services for members to "come to the back of the sanctuary to greet the Johnsons and have some punch and cookies with your fellowship worshipers." The Membership and Evangelism Commission held a series of neighborhood get-togethers with about 20 members each invited to meet the new minister.

In the fall of Dick Johnson's first year of ministry at First Church our choir director, Hubert Carson, died unexpectedly. Writing about his death in the church newsletter in March 1977 Dick wrote:

"Beginning May 1 Don Frueh will be our Director of Choral Music, and we believe he will be a stimulating and helpful influence on the life of our congregation. I can't help but remember our shock and grief when Hubert Carson died so suddenly, and I also want to share my real amazement at the way in which Ann Carson [his wife] took over for Hubert and has led the choir through a difficult time of transition so beautifully. Her courage and skill have been a real witness to all of us as we have been led in worship by a superbly disciplined and responsive choir director under her leadership. I know that you will want to thank Ann for this ministry which she has performed."



Special men's chorus in 1977

In November of that year the

“Worship Commission announces that the friends and family of Hubert Carson, our former choir director, have purchased a new seven-foot grand piano for the sanctuary. This will be dedicated on the anniversary of his death, Nov. 20, the Sunday before Thanksgiving. We want to express our appreciation to the many participants and would like to give those of you who have not contributed one final opportunity to be a part of this memorial. There is still a balance to be paid on the piano – the Carson family will take care of any amount remaining at the end of this month. Ann Carson, Dan Abrahamson, and Robert Vaughan have tried out many instruments in the Lawrence, Topeka, Kansas City area and have chosen the one they feel is the best for our situation. A piano of this quality was the dream of Hubert during his ministry here. It is a marvelous tribute to his work and his place in our Christian community to have this dream come true. Praise the Lord!”

In reflecting on his first halfyear at First Church in January 1977 Dick wrote:

“Looking back on 1976, one thing that jumps out of the records at me is the work of volunteers in our church. There is no way to calculate the number of persons and hours contributed in twelve months. Teachers, leaders, counselors, ushers, greeters, choir members are the first to come to mind because they are highly visible. Then we have people who give a number of hours every week to the keeping of financial records, attendance records, library circulation and records, calling on membership prospects and shut-ins, keeping small children involved in meaningful activity during worship, changing altar cloths and paraments, getting flowers for the altar, making and sorting name tags, getting others to volunteer for jobs, making meals, cookies, and refreshments, painting, plumbing, and repairing.

Need I go on? A hearty thanks to every volunteer from us all...but, best of all, we know you do it because it is an offering of love.”

Like the congregation that Dick Johnson inherited, Lawrence was growing. City boundaries continued their march westward and there was talk of a new Methodist church for west Lawrence. There were fears that a new church “out west” might dilute the size of the congregation of the downtown church. Even though First Church had been a fixture in downtown Lawrence since its beginnings in 1854, discussion began about the future of our church and its location. Parking was and is a perennial problem for downtown churches. During the week the churches compete with business customers, and on Sundays the churches compete with each other for parking space. The education wing built in the early 1960s was used to capacity and choices for further expansion on the existing site were very limited. The adjacent Ecke Building, which had been church property for several decades, was in need of renovation.

After about a year of discussion and deliberation a long range planning committee, chaired by Russ Mosser, made their report to the Annual Charge Conference in December 1977. The committee assignment included the following:

“The Long Range Planning Committee is charged with examining the goals of First United Methodist Church, with evaluating the resources of the church— both human and physical, and with bringing recommendations to the Administrative Board as to ways to achieve these goals.” Other members on this committee were Gerald Pearson, Joanne Wise, Ruth Ann Paddock, Jack Porter, and Dick Johnson.

Observations in the committee report included these:

“First, there is a definite feeling that it is time for the Church to remove itself from the position of landlord. The [Ecke] building continually requires repairs and in its present arrangement does not serve the needs of the congregation. Our present physical plant has many problems. It is expensive to maintain and will become increasingly so with the cost of energy continuing to rise. We have great need for a large assembly room that can be utilized for church gatherings other than worship. We need adequate kitchen facilities to serve our needs. Present church office space is badly organized and makes for inefficient staff operation. Unfortunately, the educational building was not properly designed to permit adaptation for changing programs. When we consider the costs of building additional facilities on land we have, remodeling as best we can the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall, it seems a very difficult and unrewarding project, with the result largely a make-shift solution after a great deal of effort and money has been expended.

... We believe there is a need for an active, vigorous church, designed to serve the congregation of the next 20 to 30 years. We recognize that there will be the need of a Methodist Church somewhere in the southwest or west area of this community. We know that the bulk of our present congregation now resides in this area and with the contemplated growth many more members and potential members will live in this part of Lawrence. We believe that the same amount of money can be better utilized in building a new church plant designed for the needs

of tomorrow, than trying to renovate a church plant which means a great deal to all of us, but has outlived its day. We have not explored specifics, but believe it is the consensus that we would recommend building a very functional kind of facility, hopefully well planned for serving immediate needs, but designed in such a way that it would be flexible for the future. It certainly should be designed to be energy efficient, and we hope that it would be beautiful but avoid falling in the category of an 'edifice complex.' We believe this congregation is capable of accomplishing such a project—in fact, it may need such a challenge to serve us all.”

The controversial recommendation from the committee read as follows:

“After long study and debate the Long Range Planning Committee of First United Methodist Church recommends to the Administrative Board that the EckMerwin Building be sold and funds be re-invested immediately in land, with the goal of relocating First United Methodist Church. The [committee] vote was unanimous.”

The committee's recommendation was not well received by a large segment of the congregation. Following several weeks of meetings and intense discussion our church held a Church Conference on March 29, 1978 to act on the decision of the committee.

Writing about that conference the following week Dick Johnson observed that

“I learned some things from last week's special Church Conference on the future of our congregation. First, I found out that many people really care what happens to their church, including some who could not be at the meeting and others who made heroic efforts to get their views incorporated into the decision by registering their opinions early. Second, I discovered that the two-month process of study and discussion has been a valuable and helpful experience for many people who needed to sort out the facts before they felt they could make a decision. Third, I found that such an emotionally charged subject could be discussed and voted on in an atmosphere of calm openness. Thanks to all who helped make that possible.

Congratulations to the LRP Committee, who had to take some abuse, answer countless questions, spend extra hours and days of meetings and who felt very lonely a few times since January. Now they have been given some direction to continue the process of looking ahead for our church by a decision made, through the vote of an overwhelming majority, to stay in our present location and to keep our property for the use of the church. Again, the committee has asked for input from you; give it to them – help them. There is much we need to do to make our property a fit instrument to carry out the mission God has given us in downtown Lawrence. We'll need everyone's help– and that means moral support, time and talent, leadership and money. Our church has been strengthened and renewed by this experience and I thank God for it.”

In January 1980 the church reaffirmed intent to sell the EckMerwin building. Subsequently, in April 1980 the Board of Trustees approved the sale of the building to Thompson Furniture Company for \$150,000 with \$25,000 down and monthly installments for a period of five years.

The following April 1981 a fund raising program was begun “for the purpose of building renovation, energy efficiency, and new construction.” A building committee recommended a goal of \$800,000 to \$1,000,000. By September the church had received pledges from 172 giving units totaling \$176,000.

In October 1981 while the Johnsons were on vacation in Asheville, North Carolina, Dick suffered a heart attack. The following month he wrote: “It is good to be home again. I am on a schedule of gradually increasing physical activity (just walking indoors now), and after next week I’ll have a better idea of what the doctor says I’ll be able to do and when. Meanwhile, your continued love, prayers, and support have made me highly motivated to get well soon.” Dick returned to our pulpit on December 13, 1981.

Even in Dick’s absence the work on plans for building renovation continued, and a charge conference on December 7, 1981 approved sanctuary renovations and other improvements estimated to cost about \$235,000. The plans included removal of the balcony in the sanctuary and creation of a Youth Lounge to be located in the space where the balcony had been. Other improvements included rebuilding of the organ console for \$31,213 and the covering of the Sanctuary stained glass windows with Lexon for \$36,955.

In addition to the grand piano in our sanctuary there were other memorial gifts during Dick Johnson’s tenure. The church newsletter records in November 1976 that

“The ‘symbolic guiding light of God in times of darkness’ has finally brought to pass a long time dream of Eleanor Gilchrist with the night lighting of our beautiful rose window. Drive by the West Side after dusk and see it. Thanks to the interest and expertise of John Kohl, besides the timecontrolled lighting of the rose window, we also have the badly needed lighting of the altar and choir area. Gerald Pearson is treasurer of the effort to raise funds for the project, which is sponsored by the Adult Fellowship Class and approved by the Trustees.”

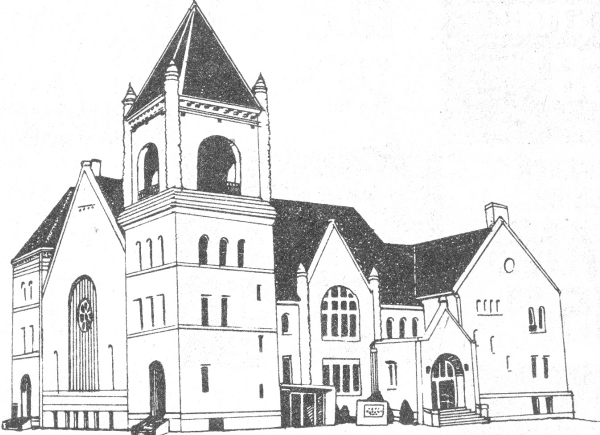
The following year with a memorial established in memory of Faye Orelup the organ chimes were rebuilt “with a new activator mechanism.” Recognition of the memorial included “specially selected music to demonstrate their use in enhancing our worship” played by Dan Abrahamson.

Family tragedy for church members, Gary and Nancy Bjorge, when their 6 year old son, Benjamin, was struck and killed by a car on Kasold, led to another memorial gift in late 1982. “On Sunday, Dec. 19th at 11 o’clock we had the privilege of dedicating another octave of handbells in memory of Benjamin Bjorge. This gift was made possible by the many people who contributed memorial gifts and by the Bjorge family. This new octave of bells, comprising the six largest and the six smallest bells, makes our three octaves complete for a total of thirtyseven bells.”

Don Frueh was Director of Music for about two years until 1979. Don was employed by Reuter Organ Company and had been a director for a Presbyterian Church in Topeka. The church newsletter reported that he is “leaving to go back to California...” He was replaced by Phil and Pat Orlando [now Pat Lorenz]. The newsletter reported that “Phil is a doctoral candidate in Choral Conducting at KU and he has had a great deal of experience in the field, both in church

and school music. Pat will be involved with him; working with the children's choirs, and Phil will lead the youth choir."

Music is Alive and Glorious
at
First United Methodist Church



HODIE ('This Day') A Christmas Contata

CONDUCTOR— Philip Michael Orlando
ORGANIST— Daniel Abrahamson
SOLOISTS— Norman Yetman, Orville Voth, John Clyatt,
Carol Abrahamson, Diana Ice, Martha Ice,
Mona Hargadine, Janice Hough, Eric Shank

CHANCEL CHOIR, YOUTH CHOIR, ANGELUS CHOIR, CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, December 16th at 8:45 and 11:00 a.m.
CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE — Dec. 24 at 7:00 p.m.
A Service of Scripture and Choral Music

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC— Philip Michael Orlando
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S CHOIR— Patricia K. Orlando
ORGANIST— Daniel Abrahamson
ACCOMPANISTS— Diana Ice, Children's Choirs, Margaret Sanford, Youth Choir

First United Methodist Church
946 Vermont Pastor, Richard Johnson, Assoc. Pastor, Robert Kendall
The Public Is Invited To Attend

12/15/79

Advertisement in the Lawrence Journal World on December 15, 1979

The newspaper ad here is shown slightly smaller than the ad as it appeared in the paper. After completing his doctoral program at KU, Phil left in 1982 and was replaced by a member of the choir, Professor Perry White of the Department of Music Education at KU. Perry had a Ph.D. in Choral Literature and directed one of the choral ensembles at KU. Patricia Sink was appointed

Director of youth choir and bell choirs. She held Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from the University of North Carolina and was a doctoral candidate in Music Education at KU.

From 1978 through the rest of his pastorate at First Church, Dick was assisted by Rev. Robert B. Kendall, who “was just old enough to take the retired relation with the Annual Conference. ...His work will be in the areas of pastoral work of all kinds, worship and Christian Education.”

Dick was a strong proponent for equal rights for women and also a bit of a prophet for women in clergy. In a church newsletter of March 9, 1981 he wrote: “Recently, our Charge Conference recommended one of our members, Beverly Streightiff, for Candidacy Studies for Ordained Ministry. Right now, Shelley Saferite, a Baker University senior, is doing special work in our congregation, under the guidance of the staff, to implement her future plans for ordained ministry. She is a UM pastor’s daughter. I am Supervising Pastor for Candidacy Studies in the Ottawa District, and have just seen one of my candidates, Jan Rhind, be accepted by the District Committee on Ordained Ministry as a Certified Candidate. I am also ready to present another candidate, Cynthia Meyer, to her District Committee in April. Women in Theological School are a greater percentage of the student body than before, reaching a third in many cases. What does this mean for the church? I think it means good things, and in jest I might add that since we have always had more women in churches with male pastors, maybe we shall finally get more males into churches with female pastors. Join me in encouraging the people God calls for ordained ministry, women and men.”

Later that same year he wrote: “Rowena Pine will be consecrated Diaconal Minister by Bishop Oliphant at the ordination and consecration service on Wednesday. She has fulfilled all the requirements, and she will now join the ranks of a few people who are so distinguished. Diaconal Ministry is not ordination, with emphasis on the preaching; rather it is concerned with the sacramental work of working with people in many different areas. Rowena has chosen Evangelism, and her work with prospective members, the aged and infirm, concern for fellowship activities in the church, being a friend and counselor are now to be given a final touch of recognition, and authorization she has not had before. I know you want to join me in congratulating her and wishing her well.”

After seven years and at the age of 63 Rev. Dick Johnson did not move into retirement. Instead, he was assigned to a new pastorate. In April 1983 a special Charge Conference was held to “authorize the sale of the present parsonage; income from this sale would be used to provide a housing allowance for the new pastor, Virgil Brady, who prefers to live in his own house.”

In his final departing pastor's letter on May 24, 198 to the First Church congregation Dick wrote:

“Gladys and I have been literally overwhelmed by your conversations, calls, notes and cards to express your feelings about our leaving. Last Sunday's dinner after the 11 o'clock service was an event we shall remember for a long time to come; so many people, so much food, and so much fun. We wish we had a videotape of the skits, especially the legitimizing of our 42year-old marriage by a ceremony in Swedish. Thanks to all of you for the generous gifts; they will help us to remember our good years with you. One of the good things about our United Methodist system is the passing of the torch from one pastor to another, and as of June 6th, Virgil Brady will have assumed his new role, and I shall be Senior Pastor at St. Mark's [Overland Park], with no interim period of uncertainty. Although I shall always be your friend, as of that date I shall no longer be your pastor, and I know that you will find ways to welcome Virgil and enable him and his family to feel at home. Grace and Peace to you all; we didn't really know how much we love you until now.”