

United Child Development Center (UCDC)
By Janet Mody

Early in 1968, the Outreach Commission of First United Methodist Church began studying the need for a child care center for preschool children of working parents. They discovered only two full-time facilities existed for group care in Lawrence except in a few homes. One center was only for children from welfare families, and the other had places for only 12 children. In May, the Commission presented a proposal to the Official Board to establish a child care center accommodating 30 children. The projected budget would be \$2164 permonth, including salaries.

The Day Care Center opened September 3, 1968, with 14 children, two teachers, and a cook. Judy Bencivengo was director-teacher, and the Board of Directors included chair Glenn Kappelman, Phyllis Wilson, Anne Yetman, Lucille Beard, David Hough, Joan Kanet, Bob Sanders, Barbara Bell, Phyllis Sapp, Janet Mody, Lucille Paden, and church staff members Bonnie Miller and Dennis Bowers. Joe Langhofer helped with finance and Andy Anderson with publicity.

From the beginning, the Board hoped to serve a diverse population. By February, 1969, the Center served 16 three year olds and 14 four year olds. Included were Black children and White children as well as four from foreign countries. Most were from low income homes, including K.U. students. Thirty-two children participated in the summer program. The Board also began consideration of a halfday enrichment program for children in kindergarten.

By March of 1970 the Board had 14 members plus three ex-officio representatives, and the staff consisted of the director, head teacher, kindergarten teacher, naproom assistant (Marietta Martin), and three aides. To increase diversity and financial stability, the Center included children from both middle income and low income families with 16 of 32 from single parent homes. Carolyn Thomson served as chair and Carol Abrahamson as secretary.

By 1971, the United Child Development Center had enrolled 46 children including 10 kindergartners. An evaluation reported, "In summary, the strength of any day care center is its staff. This group of people is dedicated, talented, diverse, and hard working." In October, 1971, the Commission on Outreach transferred responsibility of UCDC to the Commission on Education. At the May 1972 meeting of the Administrative Board, a resolution passed that the governing boards and the administrations of UCDC and the Nursery School be combined. On May 11, 1972, Judy Bencivengo submitted her resignation to become Director of Hilltop Child Care Center, effective August 1; the Board accepted the resignation with thanks for her excellent work as UCDC's first Director.

Barbara Bell joined the staff as Administrator-teacher on August 1, 1972, and Carol Abrahamson also taught. Shirley Phillips became a parttime Administrator-accountant. By July 1980 enrollment had grown to 163. In 1979 the total income was \$175,235.02, and expenses, \$173,009.82 (a net gain of \$2,225.20). Music and drama activities added to the program's effectiveness.

In 1992, Bev Bartscher served as Board chair. Lucy Paden, chair of the Personnel Committee, wrote a report for the Staff Parish Committee with positive evaluations of Barbara Bell and Shirley Phillips. However, by March, philosophical differences with the minister led to the resignations of both Barbara and Shirley and of Bev Bartscher as chair. Eventually, Judy Burget became director and Vicki Reeves, part-time accountant. By 1994 Mary Ann Dean served as Director. In January 1996, 95 children were enrolled, 30 of whom were funded by SRS, allowing for a diversity of the student population, one of UCDC's goals. Staff turnover was high, but Mary Ann and Vicki remained. Vicki continued a practice started by Shirley Phillips of counseling many families in financial planning, enabling them to achieve more stability. UCDC enrollment began to slip, causing some budget problems, but in 1999 UCDC celebrated its 31st year serving children and families.

In 2000 Mary Ann Dean resigned; Angela Grimes, who had served many years as an excellent Lead Teacher, agreed to be the Interim Director with the Board conducting a search for the permanent Director. Numerous teacher changes also occurred, and these changes with new staff led to problems in supervising children. The church staff and Leadership Team determined that UCDC should be closed immediately. UCDC Board members strongly objected, presenting alternatives to keep at least one or two programs going. Parents also met with the Leadership Team chair and protested the decision. However, in May of 2000, UCDC closed.

The financial assets and some equipment of UCDC are still available. Both the Children's Dream Team and Downtown Ministries Committee have named establishment of a Child Care Center a priority for FUMC's future.

The United Child Development Center was a pioneer in providing excellent child care for a diverse population in Lawrence. It brought together children of different economic levels, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities, and it represented an important ministry for a downtown church. At the time of its closing, it served Black, White, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian children. Just before UCDC closed, a Japanese family ready to return to Japan sent a check for \$100 in gratitude for the joy and care their child experienced. The loss of this program has saddened many FUMC members who hope UCDC will be resurrected in the future.

Rowena Pine
Diaconal Minister Emerita

It was 1976 when the office of Diaconal Minister was created and adopted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church. Soon after, Rowena Pine, Parish Visitor for several years for First Church began the disciplinary process and study to become a consecrated Diaconal Minister.

In 1981 at the Annual Conference of the Kansas East Conference, Rowena was consecrated by Bishop Benjamin Oliphint for the office of Diaconal Minister with a certification in Evangelism. Rowena's title became Parish Minister and her position on the First Church staff was approved by Bishop Oliphint.

Rowena began her long affiliation with First Church staff in 1954 when Al Bramble was pastor. Rowena served as Junior High Choir Director.

Rowena served on several Conference Boards and committees: Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry, the State Ecumenical Body on Campus Ministry, the Board of Evangelism, the Board of Discipleship, and the Board of Camping Ministries. She was elected twice as an alternate delegate to the South Central Jurisdictional Conference.

Rowena retired from First Church staff in 1993 after 40 years of service. She served on the staff of six pastors in her long tenure. In 2003 First Church honored her with the title Diaconal Minister Emerita.

Writing about her retirement in 1993 in the May 3 NEXUS Rev. Virgil Brady says:

“When I think of all Rowena has given to the ministry of this church through study, prayer, care, phone calls, visitation, programs, etc., I find it difficult to express what I want to say in words of appreciation. I take my hat off to this woman who has remained on the staff of our church for 30+ years and has continued to remain vital and relevant. It is a tribute to her calling that over the years she has sustained the highest admiration of this congregation. She has worked hard, and stayed up-to-date with current trends in the church and world. I always felt her spirit of cooperation with me. For all of this, I am deeply grateful.”

On Sunday, October 19, 2003, Rowena was installed as Diaconal Minister Emerita. Of her Rev. Sharon Howell said, “During her 39 years on the First Church staff Rowena literally defined the role of Minister of Evangelism. She was one of the first consecrated diaconal ministers in the Kansas East Conference. Diaconal Ministers are consecrated to the ministries of love, justice, and service. I am thrilled that we have the pleasure of honoring Rowena with this special recognition.

In 1996 Rowena began a part time position as Chaplain at Lawrence Presbyterian Manor, a retirement community in Lawrence, which she still holds at the time of this writing.

Dan Abrahamson
Church Organist 1963- present

Two persons have been on staff through most of the past 50 year period. One of them is Rowena Pine, Diaconal Minister, described elsewhere. The other is Dan Abrahamson, our organist, bell ringer, and choir pianist. Judy Niebaum wrote the following for the church newsletter, the NEXUS, for July 19, 1999.



Dan Abrahamson has been our organist here at First United Methodist Church since 1963. When I asked him how this came to be he told me that he first became interested in music because of his parents. His father, with no formal lessons, played the piano using only the black keys so that his large fingers avoided getting caught between the keys. His mother insisted that Dan and his brother and sister have musical training, so at the age of seven, he began piano lessons.

He learned and played all through grade school and high school. Then one Sunday, in his hometown of Appleton, Minnesota, the regular organist didn't show up for their Presbyterian Church service! He had never played the organ before, but was well known for his fine piano playing. The minister asked him to substitute for them that day on the organ. He did and ENJOYED it!

After high school he headed to the university to study music education but soon discovered that even though he loved music, he didn't want to be a teacher of music. He dropped out of school and began to work for the Wick's Organ Co. in Illinois. While there he realized that to create the kind of music he loved, he did need more training so he went to Illinois Wesleyan in Bloomington, Illinois and graduated with a Bachelor of Sacred Music degree in 1959. The next two years were in the military serving as the chaplain's assistant and playing tuba in the band.

On July 22, 1961, he and his high school sweetheart, Carol, were married. They came to Lawrence, Kansas then where Dan would begin work with Reuter's Organ Company and play organ for the Presbyterian Church. In August of 1963, the organist across the street at First United Methodist Church left suddenly. Dan's boss at Reuter, a member at the Methodist Church, asked him to come to substitute in this church. With an eye to less travel for the organ company, and more time playing the organ, Dan agreed to become the permanent organist in September of 1963. And, as Dan puts it, "The rest is history!"

Happily and thankfully Dan Abrahamson IS part of the history of our church! These 36 years have seen Dan and Carol's four children, Emily, Heather, Jennifer, and Rik all baptized in this church and we do appreciate the beauty and grace in service that Dan and Carol and their family have given us here at FUMC!

On September 7, 2003 First Church celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Dan's tenure as organist. The litany of celebration included these words "Thanks be to God for the worship and music ministry of this church and the servant leadership of Dan Abrahamson. We are awed by the 40 year commitment, loving loyalty, and heartfelt music that you have shared with us. With gratitude we say, Thank you, Dan! It is with joy that we anticipate 'more and more' of God's delicious music that comes through you. Happy Anniversary!"

Carol Abrahamson retired from teaching in May 2001 and Dan retired from Reuter Organ in December 2001. Dan continues as our Church organist, and Carol continues to bless us in choir with her beautiful voice.

The Russell Memorial Pipe Organ
Compiled by Carol Abrahamson

First United Methodist Church of Lawrence, Kansas, had a freestanding pipe organ that sat in the northwest corner of its chancel for many years at the beginning of the twentieth century. As is the case with many cultural items, as time went by, the church felt the need for a change. Even today, musical instruments go “out-of-fashion” and begin to deteriorate beyond the ability to repair them to current standards. This happened to the pipe organ in the 1930’s at First Church.

The vice-president of the Reuter Organ Company, Mr. C.B. Russell, and his brother Mr. Lloyd E. Russell gave a new “state-of-the-art” pipe organ to the church as a memorial to their parents in 1938. It was later dedicated on March 20, 1939, by Dr. William H. Barnes, Mus. Doc., self described organ architect, and recitalist. At the time of its installation, it was featured in an editorial by the same Dr. William H. Barnes in *The American Organist* and described as a “Reuter four-manual of unusual merit.” (*The American Organist*, 1938, p.233). Of course, the fact that Dr. Barnes helped design the organ may have colored his evaluation. Nonetheless, this organ was conceived at a time when organ designers were changing from a thick Romantic sound to one of more clarity. Dr. Barnes played a part in adjusting scales in its organ specification in order to reach that goal. According to Dr. Barnes, “the organ under discussion is certainly in my mind an excellent example of the blending of the older and newer ideals of tonal design. Such an organ has my most cordial approval.” (*The American Organist*, 1939, p. 233). The new organ was well-received by the church and the general public

This auspicious beginning provided a 44 rank instrument that served First United Methodist Church well for many years and through several organists: Dorothy Enloe Miller; Franklin Mitchell; and Robert Schaf. In 1963, Robert Schaf left Kansas suddenly, and the church needed a substitute organist. Alan Fisher was Chairman of the Official Board at the time and also personnel manager for the Reuter Organ Company. In 1961, Alan had hired a young man named Dan Abrahamson to work as an organ technician. Alan knew that Dan had experience playing the organ for church services and asked Dan to substitute a few Sundays while the church figured out what to do about hiring a permanent organist. It seems that Dan filled the bill and within weeks he was hired as the church’s official organist, beginning September 1, 1963.

As it turns out, Dan had been tinkering with organs for a number of years and knew quite a bit about organ mechanics. It didn’t take long for him to see that the Russell Organ had fallen into serious disrepair and was now quite difficult to play because of dead notes, water damage, and other mechanical problems. Ken Pine was chairman of the Music Committee at that time and listened intently to Dan’s description of problems with the organ. Together they decided to invite the Administrative Board to listen to an organ demonstration that would highlight its problems and then ask them to authorize repairs. It didn’t take long for the Administrative Board to agree that mechanical problems were indeed interfering with the use of the organ. By November, 1965, fixing mechanical defects had been accomplished using Dan's expertise and church funds, the organ had been retuned, and a rededication scheduled. This began a period of rebuilding and tonal modernization. Dan had since become a Reuter voicer and knew what was required. He and his organ friends were able to fix mechanical problems as they occurred, and Dan began improving the organ’s sound.

The church thought the organ was fixed for good, until August 1966 when water poured into parts of the organ through a leaky roof during a heavy rainstorm. Parts of the previous years' restoration were ruined. Unfortunately, water damage recurred for the next several years. In 1971, Reuter had to be contracted to build new wind chests to replace those damaged by water over the years. While the wind chests were being replaced, Dan took advantage of the chest removal to enlarge and renovate other parts of the organ. Many church people as well as some Reuter employees, who were Dan's friends, contributed hours of labor to accomplish this renovation. The organ increased from 44 to 54 ranks by the time this work was complete.

Unfortunately, this was not the end of the "water saga". On December 16 1972, Dan wrote in his organ log, "Found that the roof is leaking on the bass end of the Oboe Tierce-Geigen chest in the Sw. Pulled # 1-12 of 4' Oboe as they were ciphering. Chest was full of water, which blew out when organ was turned on. Immediately called Steve Sublett (Chairman of Trustees) to let him know and to have him investigate our insurance relative to the organ and water damage. Here we go again! D.F.A." This meant more work. Reuter was again contracted to make repairs to chests in the Swell and Choir organs to the tune of \$5,888, not too much considering that the organ by then had an estimated replacement value of \$100,000. When this work was complete, Dan looked back over his records and discovered that for the previous eight years, the work of 75 individuals, and 2,300 hours of labor had been donated toward the organ project. Then in November 1973, the organ was featured in recital again with Burton K. Tidwell playing an organ that had 4000 more pipes than it had in 1938.

Rainy years come in cycles, and if you don't take care of the underlying causes of water in the organ, you are likely to have problems again. In January 1974, water began to leak again. Dan discovered that the plastic he had installed on the ceiling of the Choir chamber was full of water, ready to fall on the organ. The organ did not get wet, thanks to the plastic. However, Dan did call Ken Pine, Steve Sublett, Bev Burrows, and John Kohl to explain the situation to them. His hopeful note shouts, "We should get some action now!" If memory serves, the roof finally got repaired.

During 1981-1983, the sanctuary was closed for renovation. The church had decided to remove the balcony to effect ceiling truss repair, revise the chancel arrangement, renew the sanctuary painting, renovate the youth area, weatherize windows, repair more water problems, and rebuild the organ console, the latter at a cost of \$27,000. The organ console exterior was retained because it matched the original 1938 chancel woodwork built by the Reuter Organ Co., which also included the pulpit, lectern, and communion table. The combination action, the pedal keyboard, the stop jambs and the draw-knob units were replaced. The new combination action was state-of-the-art "Solid-State Duo-Set with Quad-Memory", every organists dream. Now Dan could use more presets to allow for quick registration changes, as is often required during any complicated service.

February 1985, brought heavy roof ice to FUMC forming an ice dam, which caused water to cascade into the choir organ chamber once again. This time Dan completely lined the choir chamber ceiling with sloped fiberglass connected with tubing to a drain in order to discharge any water that might fall over the organ at some future date. (As of 2003, the chamber is still dry!)

In April 1986, the Memorials Committee asked the congregation to dream about potential projects for future memorials. Dan started dreaming. He decided that it was finally time to complete the organ's specifications; this would mean adding two newexposed stops to the organ: a 16' Pedal Principal and an 16' Trompette en Chamade to achieve a more massive sound for festival occasions. Dan's letter to the Memorials Committee would set the wheels in motion; but his letter remained in the files of the memorials committee for many years, awaiting the time when an appropriate substantial memorial gifts might become available.

FUMC continued to improve its facilities for the future. Unfortunately, the next renovation proved to be costly to the organ. Before construction, Dan had alerted the pastor and the contractor about the need to protect the organ from construction dust. In spite of warnings, early in 1986, while in the process of improving office and education space and building a new fellowship hall, contractors allowed rock and plaster dust to filter into the sanctuary. During May of 1987, all of the pipes had to be removed, cleaned, and some revoiced because of dust damage. This hard lesson cost both the insurance company and the church. The church discovered that the organ was insured only up to \$400,000. The current estimated replacement price of our organ at the time of the damage was \$631,085. Litigation determined that the church would have to pay one-third of the repair costs. This event caused the church to update its insurance plan to avoid future problems. There was a silver lining. Dan took this opportunity to paint all of the organ chambers and to consider rescaling and re-voicing selected stops. There was a goal in his mind. John Walker, organist at Riverside Church in New York City, was going to play an American Guild of Organist's recital in October of 1987. By this time the organ had grown to 67 Stops and 103 Ranks and was a truly fine instrument for any recitalist to play.

Dan continued to work behind the scenes. By September of 1988, the organ specification showed 78 Stops, 118 Ranks, 6947 Pipes and had undergone a complete tonal refinishing. As a special gift to Dan, there was a second rededication in April of 1989. This also happened to be Dan's 25th anniversary as the church organist. The festivities included special music, a festive potluck, and a card shower for Dan. During 1990 Dan built a new tuba stop for the organ, something he had always wanted. By June 1990, he specification showed 80 Stops, 120 Ranks, and 7028 pipes. Recitals by Marie Rubis and Michael Bauer in April and June gave Dan additional incentive and positive feedback that his work was done well. Dan continued to build chests and pipes; he continued to do all of the accompanying work to install them as well. Bob Vaughan, church member and Reuter employee, continued to assist him with engineering. The church decided to set up an organ repair fund from which Dan could draw periodically. The Music Committee had become aware that an ongoing fund would be necessary for the future when Dan is no longer able to maintain the organ as it should be.

Meanwhile, the church had identified a substantial memorial from the estate of Arlene Schaake. Dan's proposal of 1986 was to finally be implemented: a 16' Pedal Principal and 16' Trompette en Chamade were to be installed on the rear wall of the chancel. Arlene had always loved the organ and the music of the church; she would have enjoyed the new additions tremendously. The pipes were built and the chancel revised by Reuter to accommodate them. A new rededication during church services was held on Sunday, July 17, 1994. With these additions, the organ now had a sound that had long been missing, the Pedal Principal, and a festival trumpet to

make worship even more exciting than it already was. This was also a time to honor Dan for 30 years of service to the church. At least 163 volunteers had provided over 7,700 hours of work to maintain and develop the organ since 1964. Our organ now had 83 Stops, 122 Ranks, and 7114 Pipes and a completely new look. Another recital, this one by Thomas Murray of Yale University was scheduled by the American Guild of Organists for April 23, 1995 to showcase the improvements.

The improvements continued! A MSP 1000 combination action was added; revoicing, rebuilding, replacing magnets, rewiring--on and on the project progressed. In 1999, the façade pipes and the Trompette en Chamade were temporarily removed to accommodate chancel ceiling repair and painting. Removing pipes was done by Reuter to prevent damage to them. In 2000, a solid state switching system was delivered but not immediately installed. In 2003 Dan discovered that the Solo primary and tremolo needed to be re-leathered. The leather was over 60 years old and ready to be changed. Then in February Dan began wiring the new choir Peterson relay (the switching system), which had been waiting for his attention for three years.

Dan's goal of completing the specification is coming closer to fruition.