

Bucyrus United Methodist Church -- July 1, 2011  
How three churches became ONE or  
*“God’s Love in Action”*

How do three Methodist Churches merge into one congregation without anger or remorse but in agreement and working together? Years later the answer is “very successfully.”

The history of each church has included committed members with deep faith in God.

First Methodist Church was started in 1821 when the city of Bucyrus was just a village. Circuit rider Rev. Jacob Hooper delivered the first sermon under a spreading oak tree. Meetings were held outdoors and in private homes and later in a newly built schoolhouse. The present building where we worship was built in 1889, costing \$30,000. The style is Romanesque and Gothic architecture. The pews are a combination of oak and birch. The stained glass windows commemorate persons active in the church or community at that time. The elevator was installed in 1996 so handicapped parishioners could attend easily.

Epworth United Methodist Church was organized as a German Methodist Church. The first meetings in 1854 were held in the basement of the English (First) church. Many German speaking people had moved into the community. It is now the present Administrative-Outreach Center (A&O) building housing the offices, Bible studies, 4-H groups, meals for the hungry, meetings, and the clothing/food pantry. It was built in 1918 at a cost of \$43,000. The German language was used until 1928 and in 1933 the German conference joined with the English conference. The elevator was installed in 1999.

Grace United Methodist Church began its ministry as a mission German speaking church of the Evangelical Church in 1901. The cornerstone was laid in September, 1905, and dedicated in 1906. The cost was \$13,000. The Evangelical and United Brethren churches joined together in 1947 and in 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren joined with the Methodist church. It does explain why Bucyrus had four United Methodist churches at that time.

But why “merge”? Some of the reasons included: young adults moving away for jobs and education, repairs were needed in each church, elderly not able to work or attend, best use of ordained ministers and housing, and falling memberships. Bishop John Hopkins of our East Ohio Conference realized a new way of serving United Methodists was needed. Liaison Dirk Elliot was hired by East Ohio to assist churches with merging their memberships in order to better serve their communities. He was invited to Bucyrus along with area churches to a question and answer meeting. A Grace member wrote an open letter also asking if joining might be a good idea. A joint meeting of all four church representatives met in 2009 on a Sunday evening. After some thoughtful meetings and “straw” votes by the congregations, Woodlawn UMC decided not to join, but Grace, Epworth and First decided to continue the

process. Each church was kept updated on the proceedings. Every meeting was opened by prayer and closed by prayer of the delegates and ministers. Everyone was determined to let the spirit of God lead to the right decision. It was important to do what God wanted us to do, not individual wishes.

Each church selected several delegates to the many (44) meetings to work on plans, pray for guidance and decide on a workable solution for merging. D.S. Peggy Streiff worked along with the three ministers to inform and educate the congregations combining together. During Lent of 2011, a six week period of worship and Sunday school was held in the Bucyrus Elementary Building. The hymn "Amazing Grace" was highlighted in a different way each week and joint Sunday school classes gave the opportunity to know each other. Also breakfast was served each week, and a joint choir was a vital part of worship.

A final vote to merge was passed by each congregation with an effective date of July 1, 2011. Rev. French Ball retired, Rev. Don Ebert moved, and Rev. Don Kraps became associate pastor. Pastor Mike Corwin was sent to be head Pastor.

The nominating committee, with prayerful consideration, chose and asked members to serve on the new main committees. Each committee had equal membership from the former three churches. Members to serve for three years.

Chairmen of key committees included Jay Scott- of Administrative Council, Phil Harris-Trustee, Leonard Lust-Finance, Mike McBeth-SPRC. By vote, the new church name was Bucyrus United Methodist Church. Cindy Welsh became Treasurer, and Jim Leyda-Financial Treasurer.

Other actions taken were that the Grace Church would close and be sold, Epworth would be the Administrative-Outreach Center, and the First building would hold all worship services. Combined Sunday school classes were encouraged, and the nursery and upstairs classrooms for children would be updated.

To commemorate the new beginning Phil Harris built a new pulpit and it was in place on our first Sunday in July, 2011. Later Phil built a new altar.

It soon became apparent that more restroom facilities, a cloakroom, and more classrooms were desperately needed. A former member, architect Ken Garrett was hired to design an addition for the Worship Center. Zip Long was hired to help raise funds for this addition to be paid off in three years. The goal was met, and with a cost of over \$1,000,000 the addition was paid for. District Superintendent came to the dedication on a beautiful Sunday in August. The stained glass window from the razed Grace church "Jesus in the garden" or Gethsemane was incorporated into the new addition along with some light fixtures from the former Grace church.

The Grace building was demolished along with the parsonage and sold to the Bucyrus School system. Unneeded furniture and the pews were given to the Mansfield Reformatory sanctuary. Epworth pews and altar were sent to St. Johns Church, our sister church in Liberia. Each year our Christmas offering is sent as a mission project also. Pryde Bass, the liaison to the Bishop of Liberia, has visited our church to give personal thanks for the gifts. We also send scholarship money for multiple student's education with \$65. paying for one year of each child's education. Members traveled to Liberia to help install the pews and "Farmer to Farmer" machinery education.

Other building projects have included repairs and updates to the Administrative-Outreach Building: a new storage shed, updating the parsonage property, and renewing rooms in both buildings.

Worthy projects that continued from the other churches are clothing and food pantry, Sunday evening meals for the hungry, Back to School Supply Carnival (expanded), Vacation Bible School (with neighboring churches), Bratwurst Festival serving Bratwurst Casserole and Homemade Ice Cream, Election Day Luncheon, \$500 Scholarships for our College students via Noisy Can Offering and the Dale & Neva Zeller Scholarship, United Methodist Women organization, and prayer chain via email.

New projects include, Santa Claus Parade with Silent Night pageants, CABI (after school Christian Education), Adopt-A-Family at Christmas time, BORN affiliation, National Night Out, serving Funeral Dinners, Baby Jesus dolls for the little girls and Bibles for all the children, Merry Christmas yard signs, extra Bible studies, prayer shawls for the ill members, Bell & Chimes Choirs, Hope Over Heroin, and Men's Bible Studies.

At the present time, two Worship Services take place in the Worship Center. The 8:30 Early Service lasts about 45 minutes and is a shortened service but includes hymns, prayer, message and worship.

The 10:30 worship service includes several hymns, choir anthem, children message time, Praise Team music, Liturgists and tithes and offerings. It lasts 60-75 minutes. Children also may choose Children Church during the worship service.

Sunday school classes meet at 9:30 to 10:20 am. Presently there are eight classes with plans for expanding classes. The youth go to Lakeside for Youth Annual Conference. Every summer we have a family picnic/church service, and we also honor graduating seniors. Confirmation classes are given to 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders in conjunction with neighboring Methodist Churches.

Many people volunteer as greeters, hospitality, attendance counters, ushers, liturgists, and acolytes.

Several members have made decisions to serve the church as ministers and they are encouraged to work toward that goal. The Prayer team members pray each month for the church, the community, and new projects. Members take turns praying before church services, all around the church, with the ministers, in the Bible study classes, and the church members. The worship committee arranges appropriate displays for the seasons and sermons.

As United Methodists we support the various causes the “United” church sponsors. We also work in the community of Bucyrus with neighboring churches showing unity as Christians.

Christmas Eve services include a children service in the afternoon and evening service both including lighting candles. The Easter service includes a breakfast between the two morning worship services.

The church is still a work in progress. There are many people and children who need God and Jesus in their lives. We continue to seek to do God’s will with prayer and work.

Are we still learning? Yes! Are we still growing? Yes! Is there more work God wants us to do? Yes! Are we up for the challenge? With *God’s Love in Action*, we are!