

## **A Brief History of Methodism in Traverse City**

Traverse City has a deep and rich Methodist Church history which began in 1858. Methodism came to our area when Rev. David R. Latham set foot on the Old Mission peninsula in the first week of July 1857. He came to teach and hold services at the Dougherty Mission. He was later invited to hold services in Traverse City.

An excerpt from his journal about his meeting with the Bishop states, "The Bishop laid before me the hardships, difficulties, and even dangers of the appointment, to which, with tearful eyes, he asked my consent. I said, 'Bishop, I am laid in your hands to go anywhere and do anything I can for the church of Christ.' To which the Bishop replied, 'Let us have a season of prayer and we knelt.'"

There have been many pastors since Rev. Latham. These pastors found the courage to meet the challenges of an undeveloped yet beautiful area. We have been blessed by Methodists who shared their vision of social justice and faith in action.

The Methodists began meeting in Traverse City in 1858. Ten years later the first Methodist Church would be built on land donated by Perry Hannah. In 1867 the construction of the edifice began under the pastorate of Rev. G. W. Sherman. The church on Washington Street was completed, without a spire, and was aptly named First Methodist Episcopal church.

In 1883, a future Methodist Church was being established on the west side of town by a group of Evangelicals who took steps to establish a church. This was done under the guidance of Pastor Schmaus, pastor of Keswick Church. The first services were held in the basement of the Baptist Church. Interest grew and on September 9, 1884, Mr. and Mrs. Perry Hannah donated land for the church. In 1894 the Evangelical United Brethren church which would later become Emmanuel United Brethren Church, was completed. Then in 1968 the Evangelical UBC denomination merged with the Methodist Church to become the United Methodist Church. At this time, after the merger on June 7, 1968, Emmanuel UBC became Emmanuel United Methodist Church.

In 1885, as the town grew and expanded boundaries, a second group of Methodists began meeting on the west side of the city in a Union Chapel on Spruce Street. This relationship between Methodists and Slabtown neighbors would continue for one hundred and forty years. In 1890 the Second Methodist Episcopal Church came into existence and property was purchased on North Spruce Street. In the fall of 1896 a church building was completed and dedicated under the pastorate of Rev. Herman Smith who was also a builder. In 1904 the Second M.E. church was called Asbury.

Methodists have a tradition of placing a congregation where it can make the most impact and minister to the spiritual health of the community. As the city expanded south the new neighborhood created was called Fernwood. In 1906 a new Methodist church purchased the Fernwood Union Chapel. This church was named 14th Street Methodist Episcopal Church, also called South Side Church.

As time passed the memberships of these churches would expand and contract as cultural and transportation changes impacted our faithful institutions.

In 1910 the pastors of First M.E. Church and Asbury Church, along with Bishop Quayle, developed a plan of merging these two congregations. The rationale was for the buildings to be

demolished, the property sold, and memberships combined to create one very strong church. This new church, being centrally located, would be named Central Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1911 the plan was in motion to merge First Church and Asbury (Second Church). A few Asbury members did not agree and wanted to remain in their building to grow their members. At the annual conference this group presented their plea to Bishop Quayle. The Bishop gave them one year to prove that the Slabtown neighborhood could support the church. The plan to build a new Central Church was also carried forward.

On June 22, 1913 the new Methodist church building at 222 Cass Street was dedicated and reincorporated as Central Methodist Church of Traverse City.

Merging churches continued to be part of our Methodist history. In 1965, 14th Street M.E. Church "yoked" with Evangelical United Brethren Church. Then in 2005, Emmanuel United Methodist Church merged with Asbury United Methodist Church to become Traverse Bay United Methodist Church, the congregation remaining at the Ramsdell Road church built in 1962.

Today, in 2025, Traverse Bay United Methodist Church and Central United Methodist Church of Traverse City are the two remaining United Methodist churches in Traverse City. The First M.E. Church and the Second M.E. Church have truly come full circle. Once again side by side, planning the merger they did not fully embrace in 1911.

We members choose to become one strong and loving church congregation. We will continue the legacy of the United Methodist values in this beautiful city on Grand Traverse Bay serving communities near and far.

It is in following the guidance of the Holy Spirit as a faith community that we United Methodists, with dedicated prayer and discernment, continue the tradition of embracing grace, forgiveness and redemption.

Compiled by Cheryl King  
Traverse Bay United Methodist Church  
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