



## A Brief History of Damascus United Methodist Church

The first church was built in 1822 on land that was deeded to the trustees of the church by Benjamin Benton. This church was named "Mount Lebanon Methodist Episcopal Church." The name chosen for the church was most appropriate, considering it was built on the land tract "Pleasant Plains of Damascus." Services were held for 47 years in this church building.

- It served as a shelter during the Civil War for both the Union and Confederate soldiers.
- It stood on what is now called "Mullinix Mill Road" almost two miles from our present-day location
- It was probably of log construction; however, it was later weather boarded.
- Women sat on the right side of the aisle and men sat on the left.
- There was no organ. Organs were not considered proper for religious purposes in the early years of Methodism. However, singing was very much a part of the service and was unaccompanied.
- It was part of the Montgomery Circuit, which had been formed in 1788 from the Frederick Circuit.



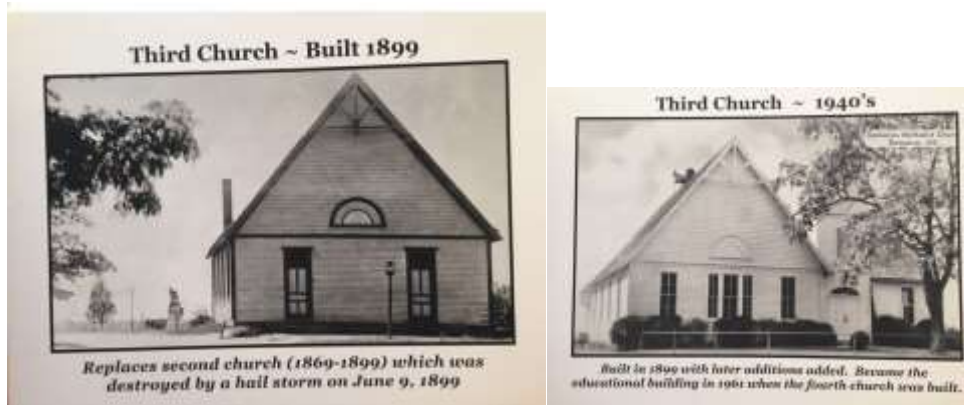
The second church was built in 1869 in the town of Damascus and was renamed the "Damascus Methodist Episcopal Church." Services were held for 30 years in that church building.

- It was destroyed by a hailstorm on June 9, 1899. Those who remembered the storm said there was never another like it.
- This church building, which stood to the rear of the present Harwood House Thrift Shop, was a simply constructed red frame building with a center front door, center aisle and a gallery.

The third church was built in 1899 on the same property just north of the old structure and was named the "Methodist Episcopal Church at Damascus." The cornerstone was laid on July 22, 1899. It was dedicated on January 21, 1900.

- The new church was a frame structure with two entrance doors and two aisles.
- The custom was still followed of having the men and women sit apart. Women entered the church through the right door and sat on the right side, while the men entered through the left door and sat on the left side.
- In 1932 an addition was added. The church sanctuary had become inadequate to serve the growing enrollment of the Sunday school. Also, an all-purpose room and a kitchen were very much needed. A major project of remodeling the sanctuary and adding a Sunday school wing (no basement yet) was completed in November 1932. So extensive was the remodeling that it was referred to as the "New Damascus Methodist Episcopal Church."
- In 1937 the Church's kitchen was remodeled, including the addition of running water.
- On April 25, 1939 at the United Conference in Kansas City, the three great divisions of American Methodism - the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church - South, and the Methodist Protestant Church - joined together to become the Methodist Church. As a result of this merger, our church's name became the "Damascus Methodist Church."

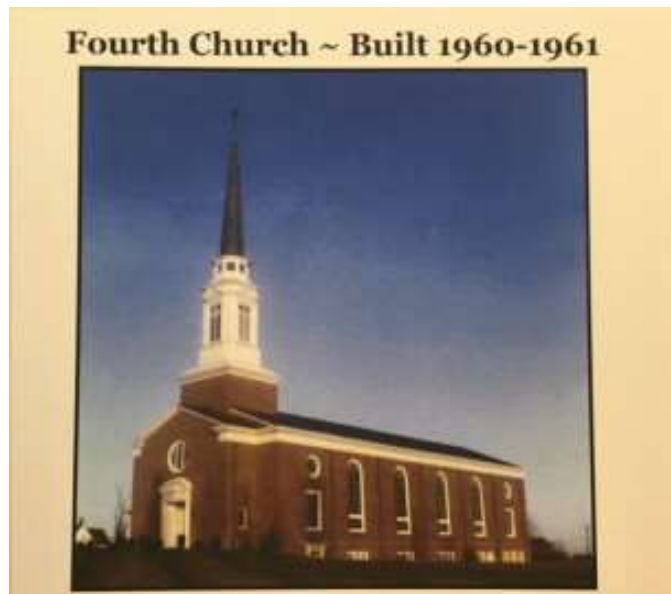
- In 1947 and early 1948, another major building project was undertaken. The south Sunday school wing was constructed with a basement underneath. We even got indoor toilets for the first time!
- In 1951, we become a "church station" church and for the first time in our history had a full-time minister.



The fourth church was built in 1960-61 across Woodfield Road from the 3<sup>rd</sup> church. The groundbreaking ceremony was held May 5, 1960, the cornerstone laying ceremony was held November 27, 1960, and the church was consecrated June 4, 1961.

- The sanctuary was designed to seat 334 in the nave, 50 in the choir, and 40 in the balcony. Space was provided for eight Sunday school rooms, choir room, and pastor's study and church office.
- The age-old tradition of men and women sitting apart had long since ended and finally everyone could sit where they pleased.
- Construction was started on a new parsonage on February 17, 1967 and was completed on May 5, 1967. This parsonage (now the church office, known as the Annex) is located on Church St. next to the new brick sanctuary.
- On August 9, 1967 lightning struck the Educational Building. This was our historic sanctuary (third church). There was a serious fire that damaged the building.

- About eight months after the fire, the restored building once again began to serve the church and the community. At this time the name was changed from the Educational Building to the Damascus United Methodist Educational Center. Today this building houses our current Harwood House Thrift Shop.
- Beginning April 21, 1968, in Dallas, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church were united at the joint session of the two General Conferences. As a result of this merger, our church's name became "Damascus United Methodist Church" and continues to hold that name to the present.



- In 1992 construction began on a Christian Fellowship Center (CFC) addition to the 4<sup>th</sup> church building. This addition added 16,000 sq. ft. and included a fellowship hall seating 300, a stage with lighting, an elevator, a choir room, a commercial kitchen, a dining hall seating 200, and classrooms. When the CFC opened in September 1994, Sunday school classes, church suppers, and many community activities were relocated there from the Educational Center.

The fourth church with the CFC addition - 1994



- The church thrift shop had been operating in the basement of the Educational Center since 1993. It was the inspiration of several church members under the leadership of Bill Harwood and had been so successful that it was moved out of the basement and began operating from the main floor with the basement used as storage and work space. It was then renamed Harwood House Thrift Shop in honor of Mr. Harwood. The shop currently has only 2 paid staff but over 90 volunteers who represent 20 community churches. Proceeds from the shop help support over 32 charities.
- Another program that operated out of the Educational Center in the 1990s was a preschool run by the YWCA. After the CFC opened, the church began its own preschool program in 1995 which was named Pleasant Plains of Damascus Preschool, after the first land tract in the area. It is licensed as both a preschool and childcare provider and currently employs eight teachers and offers classes two, three, or five days per week.
- DUMC continues its long tradition of supporting and participating in many missions. We currently support over 20 programs locally, nationally, and internationally.
- A labyrinth was added to the courtyard of the 4<sup>th</sup> church in 2011 using stone pavers to create the design. It is available for individual meditation and prayer even when the church building is not open. A group called the Sacred Path was formed in 2022 to help educate and promote its use.



- A Youth Center, a separate building acquired in 2005 from the Damascus Church of Christ, is within a short walking distance of our other church buildings. It is used for youth Sunday school and youth group meetings, as well as other general church meetings.
- The church property is quite extensive and also has a large pavilion located behind the Annex which contains picnic tables with benches. This protected outdoor space is used for church and community events, outdoor meetings, dinners, vacation bible school, and fundraisers which include an annual plant sale with proceeds going to the mission programs of the church.
- Located behind the Harwood House Thrift Shop and adjacent to the church cemetery is the Boyer Chapel, built in 1954. It has been used for a variety of purposes including Bible study, Sunday school classes, and Vacation Bible School as well as weddings, christenings, baptisms, and funerals.
- The church cemetery was begun in 1869 with the first burial being that of the wife of the grandson of Benjamin Benton, the church's founder.



- Over the years music has been at the heart of our church worship experience. Our magnificent Skinner organ was purchased before completion of our 4<sup>th</sup> church and installed before the building's dedication. Prior to the pandemic in 2020, the church music program consisted of 4 vocal choirs and 3 hand bell choirs. The Academy of Saint Cecilia Youth Orchestra was founded by the Reverend Walter Edmonds in September 2001 with DUMC is its home base and one of its performance locations with additional concerts performed elsewhere in the area.

The year of our 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 2022, was such a momentous year that we chose to celebrate all year long. There was a grand birthday party in May which included speakers, a slideshow, videos, and cake and ice cream. In July we participated in the community's Celebrate Damascus parade, and hosted a number of events on our front lawn, including a moon bounce, pony rides, a yard sale, and a food truck. In October, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling spoke at our morning service which included recognition of those who have been church members for fifty years and more. After the service, there were videos of long-time members sharing their church memories followed by a wonderful brunch attended by about 200 people which was prepared in our church kitchen. Diners were entertained by a continuous slide show of many pictures. There were additional displays of church artifacts and pictures, including three quilts made by women of the church from 1915, 1977, and 2022.

When Benjamin Benton founded our church in 1822 he planted seeds of faith that continue to grow today. At the beginning of 2022, Damascus United Methodist Church had 27 Benjamin Benton descendants who were church members, unfortunately 2 have since passed away. As we head into the next 200 years, we are confident that our church will continue to nourish these seeds of faith with love, hope, and perseverance as our forebears did for the past 200 years.