

A Short History of First United Methodist of Arlington, Texas

First United Methodist Church of Arlington's roots literally reach back to the very beginning of the community. In 1878, a year after the city was established, a group of "people called Methodist" organized themselves into a church and began meeting in their homes and in the offices of Shults' Lumber Company. They bought land at the corner of Center and Division streets—the current site of the church—in 1884 and built their first church, a wooden structure, in 1885. The first brick church was erected in 1907. Its weathered white cornerstone is in the narthex of the sanctuary (Center Street entrance).

Fire destroyed that church in 1918, but a new church was built not only immediately but on the same foundation. Its cornerstone (also located in the narthex) lists names of the city's leaders, who are still well-known today: Ditto, Cooper, Fielder.

The church's membership grew along with the city, as Arlington transitioned from a farming community of about 1,000 people to a mercantile center. With the opening of the General Motors plant and the turnpike connecting Fort Worth and

Dallas, Arlington and the church continued to grow. Under the leadership of its members, including Tom Vandergriff, (the “boy mayor”) plans were made to build an even bigger sanctuary.

But before the work could begin, disaster struck again in 1954 when an electrical fire destroyed the church. While the education building survived, the twin-towered sanctuary was gone. The congregation, again, decided to rebuild in the same location. The first services held in the current sanctuary, with art glass windows, saved from the 1918 Sanctuary, were held in February 1956.

Over the years, as Arlington’s population has grown, and opportunities have come to recolonize, First United Methodist’s congregation decided to stay at its downtown location. In 1996, the Family Life Center was dedicated and the education wing refurbished. The church expanded its ministries to the neighborhoods around it. The church is at the heart of the city’s downtown rebuilding.

Today, the church is 5,000 members strong. Its past, and its future, is built on a strong foundation. First United Methodist of Arlington is here for good.