

----- Through The Years -----

Last month I wrote about Bishop Charles McCabe who was quoted, "We are building more than one new Methodist Church a day and propose to make it two a day." This statement highlighted the tremendous growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The church that had begun with circuit riders in the eighteenth century had become the largest Protestant denomination in the nineteenth century. This growth posed a problem, how do you build new churches to keep pace with the growth? Also, how do you keep the cost as modest as possible for new congregations?

The answer came from the Methodist Episcopal Board of Church Extension. The Board issued a catalog starting in 1870 with plans for new church buildings. This catalog predated the famous Sears & Roebuck catalogs that displayed plans for building homes. The church hired Benjamin Price to draw up layouts for new churches. Price was a Philadelphia architect known for his church plans. He lived from 1845 to 1922. Over the years, Price designed 67 different layouts for Methodist Episcopal Churches.

The catalog laid out various types of plans for churches, depending upon the size and cost. The cost for these plans ranged from \$2.50 for a small church, \$3.50 for a medium church and \$4.50 for a large church. The layout included the seating arrangements, chancel and narthex designs, as well as other rooms in the church. Each plan purchased came with two slides showing existing churches built with that plan. One slide showed a wooden church, while the second slide showed a church made out of brick or stone. The cost to built churches using these plans ranged from \$300.00 to \$1,000.00 for a small church and upwards of \$20,000.00 for a large church. Plans for a parsonage could be purchased for \$3.00. The back of the catalog was filled with ads from companies who sold items such as pews, furnaces, bells and stained glass.

The result was a great number of new churches with similar designs. The building boom continued until around the year 1950. If you travel around the country, you can notice a similarity in the look of many Methodist churches. By 1968, the year of the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which created the United Methodist Church, there was at least one UM church in every county in the United States! This is a total of over 39,000 counties. The church certainly heeded the words of John Wesley who instructed to "save as many souls as you can."

Do you have any MUMC history you would like to share with the congregation? Please send it to:

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