

The Spanish River Papers

MAY 1978

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OLD CITY HALL, HOME OF BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of
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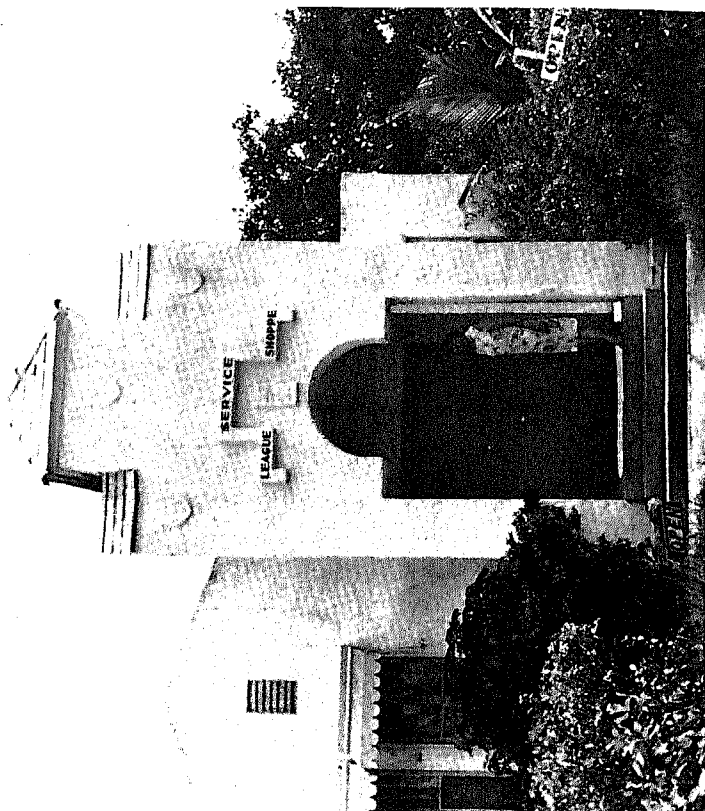
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BOCA RATON'S FIRST CHURCH



The Boca Raton Community Church building during its years as the Debbie-Rand Memorial Service League Thrift Shoppe. Mrs. Vera Kraft, a long-time dedicated worker of the League stands in the doorway.

In a city of over thirty Christian and Jewish congregations it is hard to believe that the oldest church in Boca Raton has only existed for fifty-three years. The first church was truly a community effort in which members of various Christian denominations came together to found, build, and support a formal religious organization. To show this joint effort they chose the name Community Church, though from the beginning the church was always served by Methodist ministers. The First United Methodist Church on Northeast Second Avenue can thus claim descent from this first church. This issue of the Spanish River Papers will trace the history of the Community Church and of its Methodist congregation as well as that of the first church building which served also as the founding home of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and then as the Debbie-Rand Memorial Service League thrift shop before it was demolished to make way for the First Bank and Trust Company's parking lot. Although Episcopal services were held on the Boca Raton Hotel grounds by the Reverend Henry Mizner as early as 1926, the Baptists built the second Boca Raton church. Their building on West Palmetto Park Road now houses the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship. Later issues of the Spanish River Papers will deal with the history of other Boca Raton congregations.

Donald W. Curl, Editor

* * * * *

The following made contributions to the first church building:

W. C. Fountain & Family	\$ 50.00
J. G. Brown	100.00
C. W. Brown	100.00
Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Mitchell	200.00
Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Race	250.00
Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Williams	100.00
B. B. Raulerson	250.00
Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Chesebro	300.00
Mrs. Young	10.00
Mr. Long	250.00

Mr. and Mrs. H. D. Gates	100.00
Miss Purdom	25.00
Mr. Rivers	25.00
Mr. and Mrs. Durgan	250.00
Mr. Thomas	50.00
Harris Bros.	100.00
Mr. Nelson	100.00
Mr. Hollenbeck	25.00
Mr. and Mrs. Kinney	75.00
Mr. E. T. Schmidt	25.00
Mr. Arnold	100.00
Mr. "A Friend" [G. H. Howard]	100.00
South Florida Sales Co.	100.00
Mr. Harvey	500.00
Mizner Development Corp.	1000.00
	<u>\$ 4185.00</u>

* * * * *

A record of the church compiled by Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Chesebro, Mrs. Clementine Brown and Miss Helen Howard with the assistance of the Reverend Elton G. Powell, dated June 1, 1958.

Following a period of preliminary organizational activity, new ground was broken for the BOCA RATON COMMUNITY CHURCH during appropriate ceremonies held October 28th, 1925, on property located on the south side of Royal Palm Road. Construction work on the church building proceeded immediately as the responsibility of the contractor, Mr. J. Stanley Harris. The church was completed in 1925 and before the close of that same year the first services were held by Reverend W. C. Fountain, Pastor of the Delray Beach Methodist Church.

As eventually deeded to the church in 1928, the legal description of the property on which this church was erected is as follows-

Lots 3 and 4, Block A-5
Mizner Development Corporation's Plat No. 1
Boca Raton, Florida
According to the Plat thereof on file in the
office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court
of Palm Beach County, Florida,
in Plat Book 3, page 37.

However, in 1925 title to this property was held by the South East Coast Land as part of its Plat No. 1 or 2. All information available today suggests that the president of this company, the late Mr. [LaFayette] Cook[e], intended to donate either the property or the use of the property to the church. While it is known that an instrument deeding the property to the church was actually prepared, no confirmation can be obtained that such deed was ever signed and acknowledged. It is certain that if such deed was fully executed it was never recorded on the public records. In any event, although its exact nature cannot now be determined, undoubtedly some arrangement mutually agreeable to both the owners and the



The Boca Raton Community Church decorated by Harry Chesebro for Easter Sunday in 1945. *Boca Raton News*

church existed permitting the latter to effect construction and enjoy use of the property.

The South East Coast Land Company subsequently conveyed a parcel of land, including property on which the church was located, to the Mizner Development Corporation, taking a mortgage as part consideration. However, insofar as property set aside for the church is concerned, a specific release was executed excluding same from such mortgage -- and this document was duly recorded on the public records of Palm Beach County.

Eventually the Mizner Development Corporation suffered bankruptcy and its assets were acquired by the Geist interests. On March 18th, 1928, Mr. Jerome Gedney, representing Geist, conveyed the above described Lots 3 and 4 of Block A-5 to the Miami District Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South -- the consideration being \$10.00.

Finally, in April 1928, the said church property was deeded to the Trustees of the First Methodist Church of Boca Raton although the church proper continued to function as The Boca Raton Community Church....

At the time of the founding of the Church in 1925 until 1944, it was a nine o'clock appointment connected to the Delray Charge. In 1944 Boca Raton became a station Church with Charles F. Linger as pastor. Also from its beginning until 1950 Boca Raton was served by the Miami District. In 1950 when the Miami District was split up, Boca Raton was placed in the West Palm Beach District....

In February 1953 the Sunday School addition on the original church building at 180 East Royal Palm Road was completed by Mr. Sydney Jones. And on March 15th this addition was dedicated by Dr. J. H. Daniels, District Superintendent of the West Palm Beach District....

* * * * *

"Delray [Sic.] Church 25 Years Old," from the Miami Herald, 1950.

BOCA RATON -- The 25th anniversary of the founding of the Community Methodist Church will be observed Sunday with the church's first pastor returning to preach the sermon....

It was 25 years ago this month that the Rev. W. C. Fountain, then minister at the Delray Beach Methodist Church which he also founded, organized the parish here and spearheaded the construction of the Community church.

The Rev. Fountain remained in Delray Beach for three years following which he has been in charge of parishes in Miami, Jacksonville, Fort Pierce and Frostproof, where he is now stationed. Having served in the ministry for 38 years, the clergyman expects to retire two years from now.

Among present Boca Raton residents who were active in the founding and construction of the Community church a quarter century ago are Mrs. W. P. Purdom, Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Raulerson, Mrs. Clementine Brown, Mr. and Mrs. H. D. Gates, Mrs. Lillian Williams, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Mitchell....

The Rev. D. D. Norris is present pastor of the Community church which numbers more than 60 permanent parishioners in its family.

* * * * *

"WSCS Bazaar," The Pelican, December 5, 1952.

The annual Christmas Bazaar which the Women's Society of Christian Service of the Community Church holds each year will open in the morning at 10:00 AM in the Mitchell Building on Dixie Highway under the Big Banyan. There will be a Snack Bar, in charge of Mrs. Hazel Moon, and an added attraction will be the appearance of Santa Claus, who will greet the youngsters from 3:30 to 4:30 PM. The ladies of the organization have outdone themselves this year, and have many new and timely articles for sale. A Christmas decorations table with candles, floral arrangements and other items will

be shown. If you have any donations for any of the tables, please contact one of the committee or the general chairmen, Doris White and Roberta MacSpadden immediately.

* * * * *

"Musical Planned," The Pelican, February 27, 1953.

Mrs. Lavonne Mouw is arranging her annual Musical, which is given in her home on Wavecrest Way, Por la Mar. This is the fifth such affair.... Given for the benefit of the organ fund for the Community church, a most enjoyable program is always arranged for music lovers in this vicinity....

* * * * *

"...Small town people know each other..." Hildegard F. Schine in The Spanish River Papers, May 1976.

...In the early fifties quite a few people in Boca were Methodists, so Mrs. Lavonne Mouw and I decided to give more musicals until we built a new church. We did this for four or five years. One day the very good looking minister--a younger, shorter Errol Flynn type --got up and told us that he had been transferred from Boca. He said that when he came here he had to go to a funeral parlor each Sunday to rent chairs for his congregation. The choir had no robes, no books, no organ, no piano. But with the help of Mrs. Mouw and Mrs. Schine we now have all those things plus money in the bank. So if Mrs. Mouw and Mrs. Schine want to give a concert for another charity, that will be fine. Our church really doesn't need any more money.

Mrs. Mouw turned to me and said, "Well, I guess we've fixed up your church." "But," I told her, "I'm not Methodist, I'm Jewish!" And I thought she was Methodist, but she wasn't either. She was Presbyterian!

* * * * *

"Community Church to have 28th Anniversary," The Pelican, October 23, 1953.

Sunday, October 25th Community Methodist Church will have a Homecoming program on the anniversary of the 28th year of its founding. A special program has been arranged by the Rev. Charles Greene for the 11 AM service, after which a pot luck luncheon will be served in the Lions Club. All members and friends are asked to join in to make this a most memorable occasion, and at least 200 are expected. Food may be left at the Lions Club before services, and Mrs. C. T. Sperry has charge of arrangements for the luncheon. At 7:30 in the evening, an old fashioned sing will be held at the church, to which a cordial invitation is extended to everyone.

* * * * *

"Proud Minister Tells of Church Regrowth," The Delray Beach News, June 5, 1952.

...The record of the Boca Raton Community Methodist Church had been in the past anything but impressive, but during the last year the town of Boca Raton has witnessed a miracle in the life of this church.

In June of 1951, the church was perhaps at its lowest point. There was very little interest shown in the church. Its attendance was made up of the "faithful few." The attendance began to pick up with the first Sunday in October until the average has reached 90 for the year. This is an increase of around 75 per-cent. Interest is so high in the church that it looks as though before too long, the church will need a new sanctuary to hold its Sunday attendance.

The membership of the church as reported to the Annual Conference of Florida Methodism in June of 1951 was slightly over 50. Within a years time the membership has increased to over a hundred. This was a direct result of the interest in evangelism manifest by the members during the year....

The inside of the church had not been repaired for a number of years and was not conducive to worship. The house committee started a movement to fix up the inside right after January 1, and the church was painted and new curtains were made for the rear of the



The Boca Raton Community Church building just before it was torn down in 1968. *The Boca Raton News*

church and for the altar. All of this work was done by the members, thereby saving the church a great expense. Now when one enters the sanctuary, he is struck by the simple beauty and worshipfulness of this church.

Everyone realizes the importance of good music in the making of a worship service. Prior to this year the choir was small with no professional leadership. The church has a fine pianist but no director. A professional director was discovered in the community and her services secured. Since her arrival the choir has tripled in membership. The music of the choir lifts everyone in attendance, right to the gates of Heaven so that it seems one hears the beautiful songs of angels on each Sabbath morn.

In almost every church, finances are a definite problem. The budget of the church was last year just a little over \$2,000. This year with an increased emphasis on Christian Stewardship the budget has increased to over \$4,500, which is an increase of over 100 per-cent. The church has been able to increase its program and its services because of this increased giving....

The...organization in our church which we have saved for the last because of the good job they are doing is the Woman's Society of Christian Service. These ladies are hard at work behind the scenes in the life of this growing church. Their chief responsibility in the work of the church is maintaining the Parsonage, where the minister lives. These ladies have painted the inside of the house and now have plans to paint the outside. The ladies this year have set up an organ fund whereby before too long the church may own an organ.

It is a pleasure for a minister to have such a congregation, with such vision, to work with. It is clear indication to me that the churches of this area are on the way to a grand future in the Kingdom of God.

S/Charles W. Greene.

* * * * *

"Rev. Greene Engaged," The Pelican, July 24, 1953.

Announcement has been made by Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Patton of Winter Haven, of the engagement and approaching marriage of their daughter Julianne, to Reverend Charles W. Greene, Jr. Pastor of Community Methodist Church.

Miss Patton, graduate of Winter Haven High School attended Queens College, Charlotte, N. C. and the University of Wisconsin. She was active in all campus organizations and has been affiliated with the Community Playhouse in her home town.

Rev. Greene, who has been pastor of the local church for the past two years, is a native of Thomaston, Georgia. The son of Mrs. C. W. Greene, Sr. and the late Mr. Greene, he is a graduate of R. E. Lee High School, Thomaston, Emory Junior College and received his

AB degree from Emory University. He graduated from Candler School of Theology in Atlanta in 1951 with Doctor of Divinity degree.

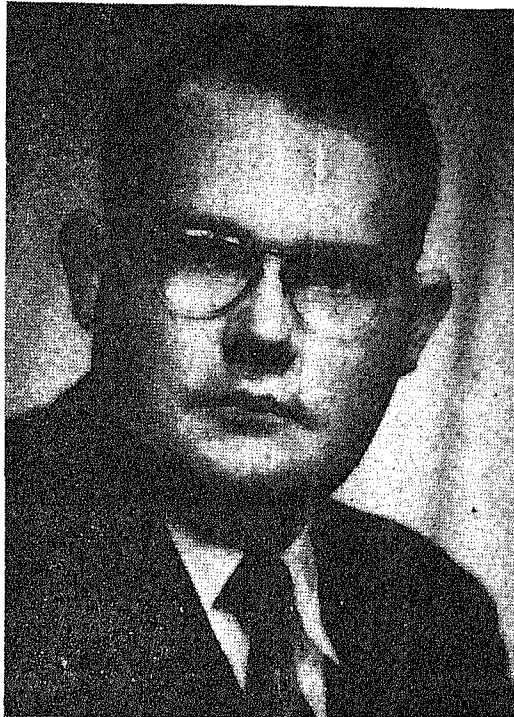
Since coming to Boca Raton, Rev. Greene has been active in civic affairs, particularly the Lions Club, for which he has served as Secretary for two years, and as a member of the Board of Directors. He is also interested in Scout work, serving as chairman of the Scout Troop Committee.

Date of the wedding has been set for September 12....

* * * * *

"Methodist Church Has Groundbreaking Ceremonies," The Boca Raton News, February 22, 1957.

The First Methodist Church of Boca Raton held groundbreaking ceremonies, Sunday, at the corner of N.E. Second Ave. and N.E. Sixth St.



The Reverend Charles W. Greene who served as pastor of the Boca Raton Community Methodist Church from 1951 to 1954. *The Delray Beach News*.

Following the call to worship; the invocation was given by Rev. Elton Powell, pastor.

Prayer of consecration was offered by the Rev. Dr. H. W. Blackburn, district superintendent, of West Palm Beach.

Following the groundbreaking, benediction was said by Rev. W. C. Fountain, who started the First Methodist Church in Boca Raton, October, 1925, and was pastor. At that time he was also pastor of the First Methodist Church in Delray Beach, founded by [the district superintendent's] father, the Dr. Frederick Blackburn....

"Methodists Dedicate Church in Ceremonies Sunday," The Boca Raton News, July 14, 1957.

Opening day ceremonies were held Sunday by the First Methodist Church in their new Educational Building. Members and friends of the church filled the new assembly hall to near capacity....

At the close of the morning service there was a covered dish dinner under the chairmanship of Mrs. John W. Lunger, Sr., assisted



Paul Bebout turning the first spade-full of dirt at groundbreaking ceremonies for the new First Methodist Church. Others, left to right: Rev. Elton Powell, Mrs. Clementine Brown, Carl Douglas, Miss Hellen Howard, Rev. W. C. Fountain and Dr. H. W. Blackburn. *Boca Raton News*

by Mrs. Raymond Tofano, Mrs. John Mitchell, and Mrs. Erskine Parks, Jr. There was approximately 125 persons present for the dinner.

In the evening an open house was held for church members and friends. This event gave people an opportunity of touring the new building. Mrs. G. H. Kleiner acted as chairman, aided by Mrs. Thomas F. Fleming, Jr., Mrs. Robert Smith, Mrs. S. T. Hershner, Nelle Mollenhour, and Mrs. Harry D. Moon.

* * * * *

"History, First United Methodist Church, Boca Raton, Florida," by Charles deVault.

...This church...had its beginning in 1925 as a community church. On October 28th of that year, it established a part time ministerial arrangement with the Delray Beach charge of the Florida Conference of Methodist Churches. Its location was at Royal Palm Road and Southeast Second Avenue. It had its beginning in a frame constructed building.

In 1928, wood gave way to stuccoed white, remaining as such until it was eventually torn down in 1968 so that its property could become part of the parking lot for the employees of the First Bank and Trust Company. Before demolition, however, it had served also as the home for St. Paul's Lutheran Church and the first location of the Debbie Rand Memorial League Thrift Shop, associated with Boca Raton Community Hospital....

The property on which the church now stands was acquired in 1957. Construction began in April of that year on the sanctuary, presently known to us as our Fellowship Hall. Building was completed in July of 1957 on this embryo of constant growth.

In 1959, a three phase building program was initiated which included Sunday School classrooms as a north wing; a new sanctuary on the south; and, finally, a probable return to the north side for additional office space and new classrooms on a second floor.

The program began on schedule November 12, 1961, with a ground breaking ceremony. A highlight of this ceremony was the first spade of dirt turned by the originating pastor of the church when he served the Delray Beach church, the Rev. W. C. Fountain. In the interim, a complete remodeling program, including air-conditioning, had taken place in the sanctuary making it considerably more serviceable and comfortable pending the start of Phase II.

Some time passed before the sanctuary, as we know it now, got underway. But, in 1964 a fund raising dinner at Boca Raton High School netted some \$62,000.00 in pledges for new construction. Coincidentally, it must be pointed out the principal at Boca Raton High School at that time is the present chairman of the Administrative Board, Charles Godwin.

When enough pledge money had been received, the church trustees negotiated a bank loan for \$80,000.00 and the Quarterly Conference in 1965 said "go ahead." The cornerstone was appropriately placed on September 19, 1965, and on October 31, 1965, formal opening ceremonies were coordinated with the church's fortieth anniversary.

Nearly ten years have passed and, although the third phase has not been started per se, it has not been forgotten. In the origin of good planning some fourteen years ago, there was no positive yardstick by which growth could be determined, particularly in the accelerated manner here. Even if there had been, it is not likely anyone would have believed its enormity....

* * * * *

"Those who have served as pastors of the First United Methodist Church"

W. C. Fountain	1925-27
Arthur G. Cox	1927-28
Walter Oldford	1928-33
L. A. Willsey	1933-
J. W. Stretton	-37
J. E. Statham	1937-41
Lawrence Radclife	1941-44
Charles F. Linger	1944-47
H. W. Dack	1947-48
Phillip T. Schuyler	1948-49
David D. Norris	1949-51
Charles W. Greene	1951-54
Elton G. Powell	1954-58
Ernest E. Hawk	1958-61
Dan M. Gill	1961-65
Clark S. Reed	1965-71
Joseph W. Howell	1971-76
Jack Downey	1976-

* * * * *

"Progress to turn another landmark into nothing more than ashes and memories," by Sandy Wesley, The Boca Raton News, November 21, 1968.

Another landmark soon will become nothing more than dust and ashes and a memory.

The landmark which has served the community as a community Methodist and Lutheran Church and finally as a thrift shop will give way to a parking lot for First Bank and Trust building presently under construction.

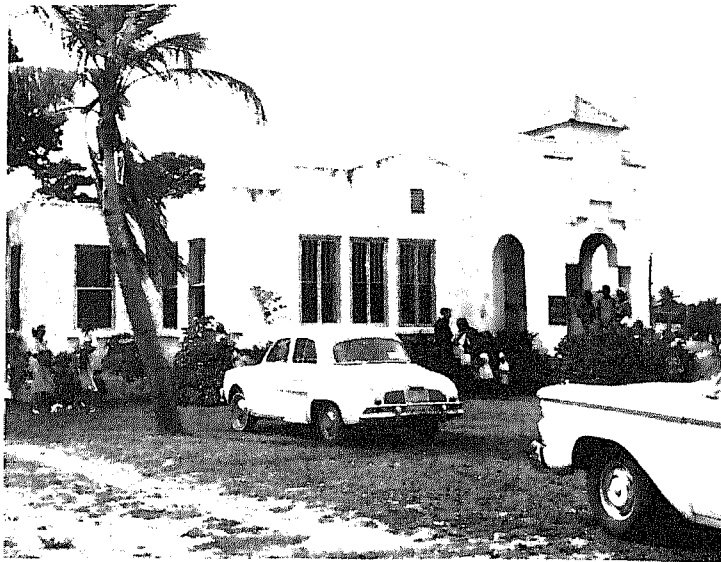
The little pink trimmed building on East Royal Palm Road sits alone now in an overgrowth of shrubbery, the only identifying sign says "Service League Shoppe," a product of the days when Debbie-Rand Memorial Service League used the building for its thrift shop.

But the story of the building begins in October, 1925, when ground was broken for Boca Raton Community Church...and such old Boca Raton family names as Brown, Mitchell, Chesebro, Raulerson, Howard, Long, Gates and Kinney were among the donors.

In February, 1953 a Sunday School addition was completed on the church by Sydney Jones. But in 1957 the little church was abandoned by First Methodist Church in favor of larger quarters at the present site on northeast Second avenue.

Later St. Paul Lutheran Church held its services in the building, but even St. Paul's congregation had to go the way of First Methodist and soon the little church was vacant again.

By 1962 another group was eyeing the little pink building, this time to serve the community as a thrift shop.



Two views of the Community Church Building during the time it served as the home of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

It took plenty of paint and new ideas, to convert the church building into the Thrift Shoppe, but it was done and in 1962 Debbie-Rand Memorial Service League opened its Thrift Shoppe doors.... A building which had served its town well as a church would now serve its town as a second hand store.

Again the organization outgrew the little building and in August of this year, the Service League shut the doors permanently on the building and moved to expanded quarters near the Boca Raton Community Hospital, which the league serves.

The building had gone through many years of use and had lived through many shut doors only this time the doors were shut for good.

The building's days of service are done and now it's time for the land to be of service to the community as a parking lot.

* * * * *

"Pencil message adds footnote to history," by Sandy Wesley in the Boca Raton News.

Boca Raton's first church building came tumbling down yesterday meeting the same fate other old landmarks have met during the past few years.

However when the destruction crew began tearing the church down, members of the crew came across a piece of wood which will remain as a reminder of Boca Raton's first church.

The wooden square reads "This platform built December 10th, 1927 by J. M. Tanner, F. W. Riley, John F. Rushing, Marian Thomson, Harry Cheesebro, George W. Race, assisted by Mrs. Rushing and A. J. Williams.

Brad Whittington of Concepts Development which is handling the demolition project now has the block of Dade County pine with the inscription....

Thanks to nine men and women who thought enough of the little church and history to sign a piece of wood, Boca Raton's first church will not be forgotten.

* * * * *

The material for this issue of the Spanish River Papers came from the scrapbooks of the First United Methodist Church, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, and the collections of the Boca Raton Historical Society.

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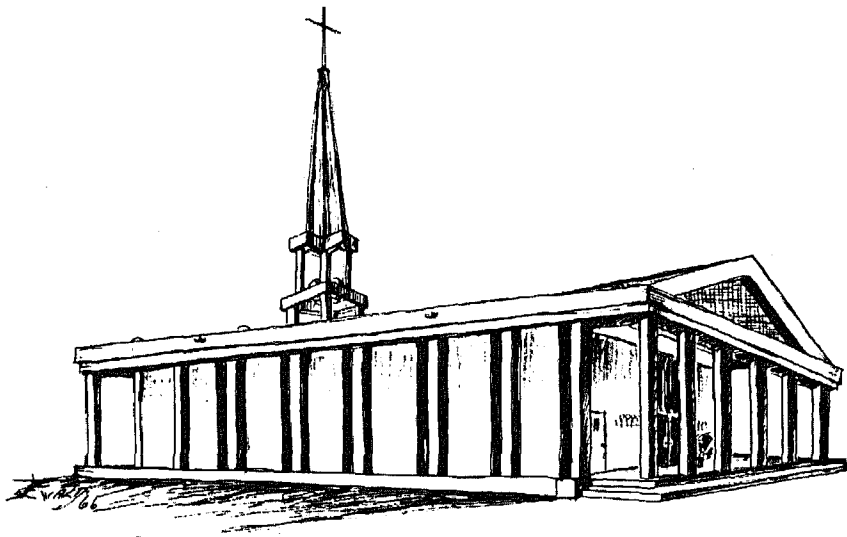
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An artist's sketch of the new Sanctuary of the First United Methodist Church, consecrated by Bishop Henley on October 31, 1965, the Fortieth Anniversary of the founding of the congregation.

ANNUAL

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Elaine A. Parry
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