Church History of Fellowship of Wesley Chapel

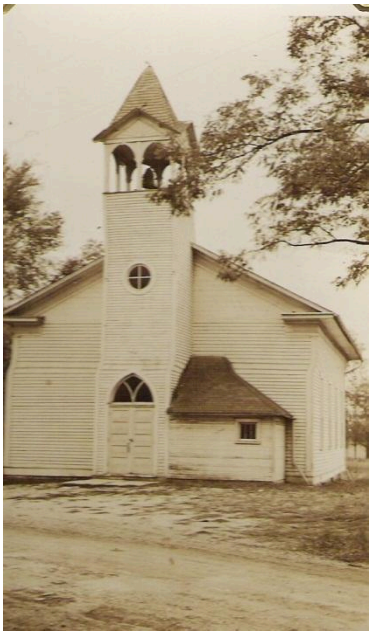
The Fellowship of Wesley Chapel has gone through many changes throughout the years. One of the most recent changes occurred in 2022 when we became an independent church after disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. The origins of FWC go back to 1837 when the people in the community felt the need to have a place of worship in the area.

Wesley Chapel Church was the first place of worship in Eel River Township, Allen County. In the spring of 1837, a group of neighbors realized the need for religious meetings and met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John McKee. They organized what stands today as the congregation of the Fellowship of Wesley Chapel, Inc. Ten members were present. Mr. John Bennett was chosen Class Leader and Rev. James Ross made occasional visits. During the winter months, the meetings were held at the John McKee home, but in the spring, they were transferred to the Old Hickory School on the John Mayo farm. In good weather, the meetings were held outside in the grove.

County maps at the Allen County Public Library shows that our first church landmark was at the northwest corner of Shoaff Rd and Johnson Rd., known as the Johnson and McKee Corners. A general store and post office were located near this landmark. In 1898, the county map does not show Shoaff Rd, it was vacated and the landmark was named Hellers Corners.

In 1843, they erected a hewn log house opposite the present building and consecrated it as a place of worship. A visiting Pastor came on alternate Sundays. Mr. John McKee, an ordained minister, was a great help in the church.

On April 13, 1848, the first recorded wedding was performed by an ordained minister, Mr. John McKee. He married Mr. Adam Jefferies and Miss Rebecca Bixby.



In the early 1860's the first organ was purchased even though a number of members opposed it.

The present church building was built in 1865 on ground donated by Joseph Johnson. The building measured 40 feet by 60 feet and cost $2500.00. At that time, there were two entrances and two aisles. The heat was furnished by two large box style stoves that burned wood. There was no vestibule, but two doors that opened into the main room.

The dedication was Feb. 18th 1866, by Rev. S.N. Campbell and Rev. D.P. Hartman was Pastor. S.K. Watterson and A.W. Robinson were stewards; and S.K. Watterson, Israel Hollopeter and Henry Dice were Class Leaders.

About 1880, S.K. Watterson, a local minister, assisted the ministers in their work as this was a five point circuit. The Churches were Huntertown, Wallen, Swan, Cedar Creek and Wesley Chapel. About 1890 Wesley Chapel was separated from the Huntertown circuit and placed the circuit with Salem and Churubusco. In 1911 the Churubusco



circuit was formed which consisted of Wesley Chapel, Blue River and Charter Oak.

During the years of 1890,92 & 93 there was a great revival conducted by Rev. B. S. Hollopeter.

In 1897, the first ladies Aid Society was organized which lasted only five months.

The church was remodeled in 1900 and 1901 when the two aisles were changed to one. A vestibule and belfry with the first bell were built. When the work was completed, the building was rededicated Feb. 17, 1901. The pastor was Rev. Charles Tinkham.

A series of meetings for six weeks in 1906 – 1907 were held by Rev. Miller with 85 accepting Jesus as their Savior.

The Ladies Aid Society was reorganized in 1907, but lasted only three years. In 1914, it was reorganized and has been working faithfully since that date. In the fall of 1940, it was changed to Women's Society for Christian Service (WSCS). Mrs. Leo Smith was chosen the first president.

The upholstered chairs that were used on the rostrum were purchased in Sept. 1907, from Mr. F.M.Sonday of Churubusco.

Rev. L.J. Sheldon came to Wesley Chapel in the spring of 1911. He found the church spiritually weakened, but by Rev. Sheldon's unwavering faith in God, the church was revived.

During the winter of 1915, the organ purchased in the early 1860's was replaced by a piano. The piano was purchased from W. E. Moudy in Churubusco.

In the spring of 1927, the Church was again remodeled. Under the leadership of Rev. Frank Young, a basement was built consisting of three rooms; a kitchen, a dining room, and furnace room.

The old plastering was taken off in 1935 and replaced with stucco plastering. At the dedication in April, was the unveiling of a pulpit desk which was purchased with money bequeathed to the Church by Mrs. Jane McBride.

In Oct. 1937, electricity was installed in the Church

In Oct. 1937, over 200 friends and members of the Wesley Chapel Church came home to attend the home coming and Centennial celebration of our pioneer church. Dr. M.O. Lester, Supt. Of the Wabash District, was the principal speaker and Rev. Harold Blakley was the pastor of the church.



In Oct. 1945, the grounds were beautified with trees and shrubs, a memorial gift from Mr. and Mrs. Forest Spitler

In 1952, as the Wesley Chapel Sunday school grew in members, our building became inadequate for class rooms. A building committee was appointed to make plans and decide how to enlarge our building. After the committee

inspected several churches, it was decided it would be best to build a balcony in the back of the church. Immediately, a building fund was started to get money to carry out this project.

Members and friends of the Church and community donated native materials. The WSCS, MYF, all Sunday School Classes, members, and friends of the church contributed to the fund. The total amount received was $4105.00.



Men of the church and community cut the trees that were donated and had them sawed into lumber. All planning and carpenter work was done by the men under the supervision of Mr. Alvin Smith and Rev. Charles Echelbarger, the minister. The women did their part to help complete the work by helping with the oak varnishing. Folding doors were installed to divide classes and enclose the balcony. Everybody was happy to have had a part in adding four classrooms, a cloak room, and a storage room to the church.

Some other improvements made before the rededication services were; a sound system was purchased with money received from the Greenwalt Estate; Electric pump, cupboards, and an electric stove were installed in the basement; Redecorating was done by a hired painter.

After the remodeling was completed, the church was rededicated in Oct. 1954. Rev. Ernest A. Minegar was the minister and Dr. Geo. Greer, Wabash District Supt., was the principal speaker.



An automatic lighted bulletin board has been placed in front of the church.

A new roof and exterior of the church were painted in 1955.

Mr. & Mrs. George Dafforn celebrated their Golden Anniversary Sept. 9, 1956.

For a number of years, we talked about trying to get into the Fort Wayne District. In July 1956, a survey was sent to members of the Church to find out their desires for Wesley Chapel. The results were approved by the members. The next step was that the Official Board wrote to Dr. Greer, Superintendent of Wabash District, and asked to be transferred to the Fort Wayne District and placed on a two-point circuit. Dr. Greer presented this to the cabinet from whom we received a letter stating that they would make a study of these requests. The results of this work were that Dr. Byron Stroh, Superintendent of the Fort Wayne District, asked that a committee from the church meet with him at his office. He explained that there was an opening with Robinson Chapel where we could be placed on a two-point circuit. After a committee meeting with Robinson Chapel, the Official Board agreed to the plan that Robinson Chapel would build the parsonage and that we would pay them $30.00 a month for rent.

In June 1958 Rev. Jual Evans was appointed minister for this new two-point circuit. He was the minister of this circuit until June 1960.



In January and February 1963, men under the leadership of Rev. Kenneth Tousley rebuilt the sanctuary, laid new carpeting and furnished it with new furniture.

In 1961, a new organ was purchased, mainly through the efforts of the Friendship Class. Also, in 1963 a new piano was purchased by the WSCS and now the piano is used for the Sunday School Hour, and the organ for the worship service.

In the fall of 1963, the exterior of the Church was again repainted & plans were being made at that time to add modern restrooms.



To complete the plans for the two modern restrooms in our church, it was necessary to build and addition on the northeast side. This work was started early in May 1964. Since the well was near the restrooms, and also under the basement floor, it was condemned by the Board of Health. The new well and septic tank meet with the specifications of the Board of Health. Another entrance was made into the church and the basement through the new addition. This also adds a safety exit from the church. The church grounds were leveled and covered with crushed stone for parking convenience. This work was all completed July 1, 1964.

Rev. Charles Hill served as our minister from 1965 – 1968. Reverend Gilbert Dilley was our minister from 1968 – 1972. A spirit filled revival was lead by him during these years with over 125 souls accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. Under Rev. Dilley's leadership the new part of the church which consists of a full basement, four classrooms, and a study with two more exits from the church was added. Part of the balcony was made into a nursery. During VBS in June of 1970, all the church was used.



Rev. Harold Schram followed as pastor from 1972 -1974, then David Shoemaker from 1974-1975. At this time, Wesley Chapel decided to try going to a one church charge. Gary Parker provided a house for a parsonage until we purchased a parsonage on Johnson Road in 1976. In 1976, the Reverend James Rhine came to minister to us. In 1977, Reverend Marilyn Bales became our pastor. It was during this time that we shared our minister with Altarstar United Methodist Church in Dekalb County. We celebrated again when the church building debt was paid and the

mortgage was burned. In 1979 Rev. James O'Dell became our pastor and remained with us until 1986, when he retired from the ministry. Since the parsonage had only two bedrooms, the garage was converted into a bedroom and bath. This left the house without a garage, under the direction of Max Smith, the men of the church built a two- and one-half garage and breezeway was built in 1983 – 84. Jack Thompson was pastoring our church beginning in 1986 with Pastor Larry Smith as Associate Pastor in 1987. The debt on the parsonage was completely paid in January of 1987.

In 1989, an auction was held on the church grounds, the highest bidder would purchase the 7.3 acres of land west of the current church property. With great debate and God's blessing, we were able to purchase the 7.3 acres. Praise God!

In 1991, VBS started up again after not having it for many years. During 1992 VBS, our attendance doubled from 55 to 110 children. Many children came forward to the altar and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Rev. Jack Thompson was transferred to Mishawaka East, Indiana in 1993. Pastor Larry Smith transferred his license to preach from the Marion District to the Ft. Wayne District in 1993.

In 1994, a new furnace and central air was installed in the church, also, the first-floor carpeting was replaced. An outside basketball court was laid.

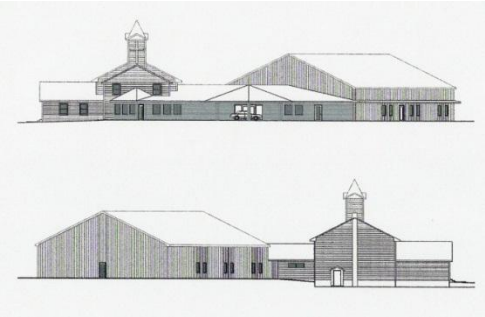


In 1995, members of our church and friends built a pavilion. We have used this building for our church picnics, VBS recreations, live Christmas Nativity scene. This same year, Wesley Chapel Herald was established and Mike Bockart was the editor. He would publish people's testimonies and the pastor's message of what Jesus Christ has done for their lives.

During 1993 and 1996 a spirit filled revival touched the hearts of many people of our church and community with Jack Kaley as the evangelist.

In 1998, the church purchased an electric keyboard piano and determined that there was a need for a new sound system. Electric drums were added in March of 2000.

In 2003 the church was incorporated to become Fellowship of Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church Incorporated.



Discussion began concerning building a new fellowship hall, kitchen, restrooms, classrooms, nursery & office for the Pastor.

In 2002 the ground was broken to put in a new septic system. On March 2, 2004 the members of Fellowship of Wesley Chapel



UMC voted on proceeding with the building of a new addition to the church. On March 21st 2004 the groundbreaking for the new addition took place.



In March of 2005 the church secured a loan for $165,000.00 from the Indiana United Methodist Loan fund. An additional $25,000.00 was acquired from the Indiana United Methodist Loan Fund.

During this time the county moved the road over to give us more room in front of the church

In June of 2004 construction began with the arrival of the steel for the building. Community member, Gary Parker saw the importance of Wesley Chapel and wanted to help in the building, he donated his time & finances to help construct the concrete & steel for the structure.

The majority of the building project was done by our church congregation. Many Saturday's were filled with men, women & children of our congregation coming together to build the addition.



In November of 2005 we had our Dedication of the new addition.

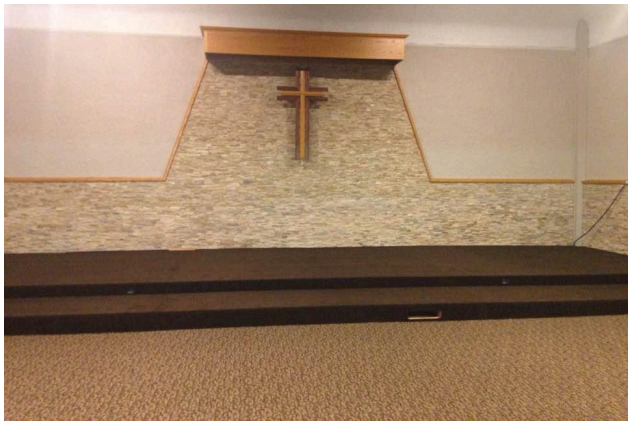


District Superintendent Lamar Imes was present for the ribbon cutting ceremony. We had approximately 150 attend our dedication service & catered luncheon to celebrate.

In 2011 Kevin Thomas was installed as the Lay Pastor to assist Pastor Larry Smith. July 2013 Kevin Thomas left Wesley Chapel to become the lead Pastor at Oak Grove United Methodist Church in Columbia City.



For 12 years members of the congregation and community gave in big, small, and huge ways to pay off the mortgage. On November 20th, 2016 the final payment was made on the mortgage for the building addition. In the



fall of 2016 discussion began concerning updating the sanctuary. In the beginning of 2017, the remodel of the sanctuary began. New carpet, painting and a stone wall was added to the sanctuary.

After many months of prayer & discernment the members of FWC voted to disaffiliate from the UMC. December 2022, Fellowship of Wesley Chapel officially disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church.

List of Pastors

1850	Rev. Jesse Sparks
1855	Rev. M.M. Hawn
1856 – 1857	Rev. James Johnston
1858 – 1859	Rev. R.A. Newton
1860 – 1861	Rev. C. W. Lynch
1863 – 1864	Rev. J.H. Slead
1865	Rev. E.E. Pierman
1879 – 1880	Rev. D.P. Hartman
1883 – 1884	Rev. Bicknel
1886 – 1887	Rev. James Greer
1890	Rev. U.S.A. Bridges
1890	Rev. Dan Markley
1891 – 1893	Rev. Brenton S. Hollopeter
	Rev. Cartrite
	Rev. Carr
	Rev. B. Sawyer
1894 – 1896	Rev. Mr. Haines
1899 – 1901	Rev. Charles Tinkham
1902 – 1905	Rev. Wm. Murray
1906 – 1907	Rev. Miller
1908 – 1910	Rev. Riecelderfer
1911	Rev. Brown
1914	Rev. Lorain Sheldon
1915	Rev. Jones
1916	Rev. Lyons
1917 – 1918	Rev. Fra. P. Johnson
1919	Rev. Henry Lacey
1920	Rev. Wm. Murr
1921	Rev. Geo. Thomas
1924	Rev. Wyant
1925	Rev. Charles Kendall
1926	Rev. Frank Young
1928 – 1929	Rev. Loran Coyner
1930	Rev. Ora C. Bogue
1931 – 1932	Rev. Robert Wagner
1933 – 1934	Rev. E.J. Hults
1936	Rev. Lester J. Brunner
1937	Rev. Harold F. Blakley
1938 – 1940	Rev. Russell Humerickhouse
1941	Rev. Roy Ballard
1942	Rev. A.E. Burk
1945	Rev. Geo. Houdt

1946	Mrs. Blodgett
1947	Rev. Herman Surber
1948 – 1949	Rev. Wesley Bullis
1950 – 1952	Rev. Chas. Echelbarger
1953 June	Rev. Chas. Armstrong
1953 September	Rev. Ernest Minegar
1956 – 1957	Rev. Donald Clark
1958 – 1960	Rev. Jual Evans
1960 – 1965	Rev. Kenneth Tousley
1965 – 1968	Rev. Charles Hill
1968 – 1972	Rev. Gilbert Dilley
1972 – 1974	Rev. Harold Schram
1974 – 1975	Rev. David Shoemaker
1975 – 1977	Rev. James Rhine
1977 – 1979	Rev. Marilyn Bales
1979 – 1986	Rev. James Odell
1986 – 1993	Rev. Jack Thompson
1993 – 2023	Rev. Larry L. Smith
2024-	Pastor Emeritus Larry L. Smith
2024-	Pastor Kevin Thomas