A beautiful, spacious church edifice is a credit to the membership and to God; however if it is to function adequately today, there must be a forward-looking plan of activity to promote continuing communication and service, along with dedicated, able leadership - both ministerial and laic. If this is so, then truly the church becomes more than a place of worship: it vibrates with faith and works that recognize no bounds. Is First United Methodist Church of Carrollton a case in point in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-one? Let us see.

This church easily could have assumed a false posture of pride and status quo years ago. During the recent decade it has experienced exciting and beautiful innovations within its physical structure, with provision for continuous giving to honor or memorialize friends and loved ones, all gifts recorded in a magnificent Memorial Volume open at all times for viewing. Accompanying this effort, more importantly, there was brought to bear a definite emphasis on participation of membership in church-related activities and purposes, along with other requisites for a progressive, vibrant program.

In April, 1974, a nine o'clock service was added to the regular Sunday worship, stimulating great interest and fine attendance, alleviating somewhat the crowded condition always experienced at the eleven o'clock services. The fact that in 1981 the latter hour finds the church filled to comfortable capacity and the former well attended, substantiates the validity of the need for the extra service and points up the steady growth the church experiences. The addition of a full-time associate minister, who usually fills the pulpit at the evening service and shares ministerial duties at the other workshop hours, has been a blessing.

Growth today indicates that the church maintains a healthy status with a widening influence upon the church family. Regular attendance each Sabbath Day to the various
services averages between nine hundred and nine hundred fifty out of a total membership of some twelve hundred.

Since it stands by Methodist philosophy, membership of First Methodist is open to all who will come, regardless of race or color. Minorities have become a part of the church family. It also has for years contributed greatly to the Wesley Foundation at West Georgia College. It does not forget that "Go ye into all the world" is the duty and the privilege of the established church today as it continues to support two missionaries in foreign lands.

Years ago the activity of the church reflected a comparatively small but dedicated membership. In addition to Sunday School, there were several organized groups participating in the over-all church program. The women worked in the Women's Missionary Society, meeting each Monday afternoon; the children, in Junior Missionary Society, meeting on Sunday afternoons; the youth in Epworth League, meeting each Sunday evening prior to the church service hour.

All classes of the Sunday School Division met together to have opening devotion. Later on, the adults and young adults met for opening devotion in the Sanctuary, while the children gathered in a large classroom.

One of the biggest events of the year was Homecoming Sunday, which always was held in October. Occasional Sunday School picnics, Easter egg hunts for the children (held in the old Carrollton City Park), and special Christmas programs usually planned and presented in the Sanctuary by the Epworth League, added to the zest of the over-all program. Annual church revivals and the visits of the Presiding Elder spelled big events for the membership - both filling the church to capacity.

With the addition of the Education Building, the program was greatly expanded; however, currently a rather crowded condition in the building points up the need for additional space, providing for a more diversified program to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The wooden structure adjunct to the Education Building located to the north-west corner of the lot has already been purchased, renovated, and put to use, housing
primarily the Kindergarten, the Clothing Center, and the Boy and Girl Scouts. To the membership this is a temporary structure. Under the able leadership of the Board of Trustees, an impending project calling for an annex to the Education Building on this part of the property is under consideration and hopefully, the purchase of the remaining area to the north for further expansion, thus affording First Methodist the ownership of the entire block. The one great remaining lack then will continue to be no church-owned parking area at the location of the church. The church program, congested into an area not equal to the expansive program carried out in the face of somewhat cramped conditions, continues to grow, to reach out, to influence.

The business of the church is in capable hands. The Administrative Board takes its responsibilities and commitments seriously. It is through their faithful consideration of the merit of fact and proposal that the church program is planned, underwritten, and executed.

Another big factor in the successful operation of church business has been the contribution of efficient and dedicated secretaries - in the recent decade: Donna Hetherington, Ernestine Maddox, Meredith Miller, and Gail Walker.

The total church program today is dynamic and broad. It might be characterized as involving worship, work, and recreation. In preparation for drawing up the proposal for each year of activities, the Council on Ministries plans and carries out an annual retreat to design a broad outline incorporating the work program and to budget all work areas, including organizational groups of the church participating in the annual church design. Out of this comes not only assignments and allotments but also ideas for improvements and innovations for greater service.

For example, the need for a church bus was proposed. Translation of the proposal into a recommendation followed. One Sunday School Class raised the basic initial amount needed for purchase of the bus, other classes raised funds to help, and a church-spirited member added to the effort his personal check so that the total amount required was raised within the year and the vehicle was purchased.

The expenditure for the bus which was outside the adopted budget for the year,
therefore moved from a suggestion to a reality in a reasonably brief time, adding a new dimension to the church program, serving the purposes of all age levels in the church, in a recreational as well as a spiritual and a work sense. Senior citizens are taken to Conference, to special celebrations at recreation centers and/or beaches for sharing fun; children are escorted via the bus to picnic outings, to Shiloh Camp Grounds, to Camp Glisson; youth use it to take trips to the mountains, to youth retreats, to roller skating parties, etc.; people who need rides to church-sponsored camp meetings or to participate in scenic trips sponsored by the church are accommodated by use of the bus. The vehicle has come to mean more than accommodation; rather, it is a medium to afford members a broader participation in wholesome and inspirational activities beyond the physical structure of the church per se.

Services emanating from the established church program extend into a variety of activities. Social concerns is a ministration of broad concept, demanding constant sacrifice on the part of volunteer workers, who might not participate at all if they were not true Christians, dedicated to the outreach philosophy of Methodism. Leadership is evident in the cooperative spirit exemplified in assisting in Carrollton's Day Care and Counselling Centers - especially in the Family and Marital and Alcohol Abuse areas. The Communion Fund (freewill offering at the altar) assists a large number of needy people with expenditures for emergency food, for utilities, for medical prescriptions, for hospital costs. In a recent year alone, over two hundred fifty families were touched by the outpouring of this expression of Christian love.

The Children's Clothing Center covers Carroll County, serving approximately two thousand children a year, manned totally by volunteers who adjust the program to coincide with the school year.

In a recent outreach program, First Methodist in cooperation with St. Margaret's Episcopal Church and Rotary of Carrollton, sponsored seventeen "boat people", furnishing housing, classes in reading English, transportation, and medical care.

The various Sunday School classes make a great contribution in reaching out to those who need the assurance that people care. They visit the Carroll County Cor-
rective Institution to share morning devotionals, nursing homes for inspirational hours of sharing, shut-ins who love to have church literature distributed to them personally and to receive the blessing of the personal touch.

Actually the classes are a major part of the total church program, contributing of their means, their time, their talent to worthy projects, such as orphan homes, Georgia Sheriff's Boys Ranch, needed accoutrements to the church for added comfort and attractiveness. They frequently prepare the menu and serve at special occasions, for example, on Fellowship Nights, which are planned about ten or twelve times per year.

The five-day kindergarten is a tremendously valuable arm of the church program, serving three, four, and five year-olds without regard to race, color, or creed. The scouting programs follow the same open pattern, helping to develop sound character principles in the children and youth of our town; in fact, the entire youth program is broad and effective. The boys and girls, as well as the young adults, frequently participate in various church programs and activities planned for the over-all membership - where they are invariably a great credit to themselves, to their parents, to their counsellors, and to the total effort of First Methodist Church.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of the youth has now become rather institutionalized - their own shared celebration of Holy Week. The young people erect an Easter Cross on the front lawn of the church, with an on-going build-up throughout the week toward The Tomb covered with lilies and the Resurrection scene. Day by day in symbolism there appear for the entire community to see, various stages of the Crucifixion, built further day by day to the whole effect, beginning on Monday with sword and whip at the foot of the Cross; on Tuesday the Robe and the Dice; on Wednesday the Jug and the Sponge; on Thursday the Thorns and the Sign: "King of the Jews"; then on Friday the Cross draped in black completing the telling of the greatest of tragedies in history and the marvelous extent of God's love.

One of the most significant and effective groups offering services in First Methodist is the Altar Guild, which without fanfare, goes about its commitment to enhance church services. Some duties are routine; however one effort is so radiant, so inspirational
that mere words cannot adequately describe it.

The Altar Guild in 1972 began the preparation of a ten foot Chrismon Tree which graces the left side of the Altar during the Christmas Season. Every exquisite religious symbol on it is handmade by the members - each representing the monogram of Christ. Every year more symbols have been added until today THE TREE has become so breathtakingly radiant that people of various religious persuasions journey from far and near to gaze upon it and experience the spiritual uplift that accompanies the sight of the vision prepared by talented, loving hands to honor Christ during Advent and Christmastide.

One of the most vital and enjoyable phases of the total church program is the music which today has reached a height never before experienced in the history of First Methodist. Music has always been under capable, generally expertly trained leadership. The greatness today lies in the fact that the Director, Joyce Alford, is not only accomplished herself in the field of music but also is able to inspire participation of membership in an all-out music program which actually involves every broad age level, well organized for happy, congenial performances. The time and skill she brings to her effort is quite evident in the resulting numbers of members involved and the excellent performance on the part of the individual and/or the group - not only on Sundays but on many special occasions.

In recent years Charles Wilson and Ed Cook have been making their mark upon the history of First Methodist. Their training, dedication, amiability, and leadership ability have combined to bring the membership more closely together in worship, in work, and in play; too, they have offered fresh vistas in the art of sharing of means as well as of time and talent to the on-going of the church.

They do not packsaddle as the olden-times Methodist parsons did to reach church and community; however, together with fine laic leadership they are putting into use the effective Pony Express Financial System as a stewardship plan to underwrite the budget of the church. Some forty leaders carry the pouch containing estimate-of-giving cards to the beginning "rider" of his or her designated group, who in turn de-
livers the pouch promptly to the next one on the list, etc. This is a simultaneous activity covering the church membership in some four hours on a Sunday afternoon in the late fall. From home to home the "run" is made, with the final person in each group returning the pouch of pledges to the leader, who then reports to the Church Office to turn in his or her Pony Express Pouch. Underwriting the church budget is a totally painless process with all members participating in the effort. The 1980-1981 budget was over-subscribed - a credit to the ministerial and laic expression of this phase of Christian stewardship.

The crowded condition experienced presently in the Education Building serves as a spur to membership to move ahead toward expansion of the physical structure. A definite plan for additional space is in the making, which will afford a more effective, more varied pattern of activity to meet the needs of decades ahead, including a new Fellowship Hall and well-equipped kitchen. Under the able leadership of the Board of Trustees, an impending project calling for an annex to the Education Building on the church-owned area now accommodating the temporary wooden structure, and hopefully on the remaining plot now owned by the county as well, as seemingly, the church will be in a position to purchase this county-owned land at a later time.

Program-wise, in projection the Music Director hopes to organize and train a handbell choir. In the Church School Department there is consideration being given to developing a drama group. There possibly will be added a fulltime Minister of Education.

All in all, one must have a positive attitude about First United Methodist Church of Carrollton. It has indeed continued to build upon its magnificent heritage to the degree that today it is attaining splendid heights of service, not only within its own congregation but also to the greater community and the world beyond its immediate sphere. Excellent leadership and a dynamic program have combined to create a quiet spiritual as well as a motivating climate, bringing about an unusual involvement of membership to participate in worship and in service. In the face of an historical national era torn by strife, abuse, unrest, uncertainty, prevalent amoral attitudes,
First Methodist has maintained its posture of faith, stability, and fervor which moves all who are touched by its influence to stand fast to the charge the church must keep. Through the lives of her members, seemingly there runs the eternal thread.

Definite plans in the making and those in projection; behests, gifts large and small; attendance at worship services; participation in church-sponsored activities, excellent church leadership - all combine to give promise and challenge for an even more comprehensive and effective program as the years move swiftly on and our spiritual and related needs increase.

The future of Carrollton First United Methodist Church is bright.

Edith Foster
April, 1981