THE HISTORY OF
LEWIS MEMORIAL UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

Lewis Memorial United Methodist Church began at Sardis, founded by Mrs. William Ellis Lewis. Around 1900, Sardis was organized with the Rev. A.B. Sanders serving as its first pastor. Mrs. Lewis, or “Miss Lou” as she was known, having small children of her own, saw a need for a school in the community. The County agreed to send a teacher to the community if they would have at least five students; so Miss Lou sent her three children and a niece and a nephew. Miss Lou also boarded the teacher for free. Out of this school grew Sunday School, which was the beginning of Lewis Memorial Methodist Church with approximately eight or nine members. Earlier, the people of the community attended St. Mary’s Church located between Sardis Community and Appling, Georgia.

William Ellis Lewis donated the land for the church as well as the materials to build the first sanctuary. Mr. Lewis, his farm laborers, and others gave their time and effort to construct the building. In 1912, a tornado struck the community and nearly demolished the church. The men of the community under the leadership of Ellis Lewis, repaired, and braced the damaged structure which was used for the church school and worship services until 1919, when it was torn down to make way for the present building. Again, Ellis Lewis donated his time, his money, the services of his laborers, and the necessary building materials. By this time, his four sons were large
enough to help with the rebuilding of the church. The church membership had grown to approximately 34 people, including children.

Lou and Ellis’ daughter, Annie, started playing the pump organ at a very early age. As her legs were too short to reach the pedals, her brothers, Johnnie and Willie, would pump the pedals while she played. Annie played organ and piano continuously at the church until her 85th year. Annie’s daughter, Ruth Penland and granddaughter, Lou Ann Penland and Willie’s granddaughter, Cynthia Rachels, also served as church pianists.

The history and founding of Sardis Church is indeed the history of Lou and Ellis Lewis and their children: Annie, Willie, Johnnie, Clinton, and Howard. For this reason, in 1947 under the leadership of the Rev. Henry Norris, the Quarterly Conference, by unanimous vote decided to change the name of the church to Lewis Memorial United Methodist Church in honor and in memory of Ellis and Lou Lewis, founders and benefactors of the church. Today, Lou and Ellis’ granddaughters, Ruth Penland, Mary Crook, Maness Hensley, and Miriam Rupert, are very active members of the church.

Sardis Church was on a circuit with Grovetown, Marvin, Pierce Memorial, Philadelphia and at one time, Mann Memorial in Augusta. One pastor served all of these churches. Since there was only one pastor, it was not possible to have a regular church service every Sunday. Usually, this was held only once a month. Most services consisted of Sunday School and lots and lots of singing.

Gradually as each church grew, the circuit became smaller as Pierce, Mann, and Marvin became station churches. Finally only Lewis, Grovetown and Philadelphia were left with Riverview in Evans being added in 1952.

In the late 1940’s, four classrooms were added to the rear of the church building. Previously, all of the classes were held in the same building at the same time! During the time the Rev. C.C. Stuart served the church, a vestibule and steeple were added and also work was begun on a Fellowship Hall in 1955. This was completed in 1959 during the time the Rev. Grady Wheeless served the charge. This is the building now being used by the Extended Session under the guidance of Denise Robinson and Charlene Johnson. In 1962, under the leadership of Rev. C.W. Edwards, a two-story Education Building was completed.

In 1974, the Fellowship Hall was remodeled while the Rev. Francis Ford served the charge. Under his leadership in 1975, the church took the final steps necessary to leave the Grovetown Circuit and become a station church. Land was purchased from Johnnie Lewis for a parsonage to be built behind the church. This parsonage was constructed in May 1975 under the leadership of Franklin Maddox and the Rev. Joel Fehd was the first full-time pastor of Lewis Memorial. This house is now being used by our Missionary Family, the Rices, who are on furlough from the Philippines.

In 1976, the church celebrated its 76th anniversary by ringing a recently installed bell. The bell was one that
had been used by the Lewis family on the farm as a dinner bell. This bell was given to the church by Howard Lewis who now owned the Lewis homestead.

In 1980, the inside of the church was renovated which included new pews and new carpeting. This renovation was completed under the direction of John Sprowls and Dr. William Pugh, pastor.

In 1985, land was purchased from Mrs. John Lewis and under the guidance of Roy Goodwin and Rev. Benjie Lewis; a new Fellowship Hall was completed and consecrated in September.

As the church membership continued to grow and more families began moving into the community, there was a desperate need for a larger church building. It was time to move out of the wooden, tin roof, “little” church that had served the community and its people for so many years. Under the able leadership of Rev. Lewis and later, the Rev. Wm. Pierce Norman, a Building Committee was selected with Roy Goodwin as Chairman. To some of the older members of the church, all of this seemed an impossibility. Many of them said, “I’ll never live to see the new church completed”, but with Mr. Goodwin also serving as Finance Chairman, a Building Fund campaign was begun and we were on our way.

On Homecoming Day in September 1990, a Groundbreaking Service was held with former pastor Joel Fehd assisting Rev. Norman and the Kirby Construction Company began work in January 1991.

It was very exciting to the congregation as they came each Sunday to see what progress had been made during the week. James Hair, Trustee Chairman, was always on hand during the week to see that everything was going the way it should. Although to some of the older members it would be difficult to leave the small church where they had worshipped all of their lives, it was a wonderful feeling to know that the church was growing and a larger facility was needed.

Finally, the new building was completed and all new furnishings and hymnals were in place. Most of the furnishings and hymnals were given as memorials or honorary gifts from members and friends of the church. On November 24, 1991, with over 500 people in attendance, a Consecration Service was held with two former pastors, the Rev. C.W. Edwards and Dr. Francis Ford assisting Rev. Norman. It was a great day in the life of Lewis Memorial and all of the older members were there to witness the wonderful event. Also during this time, funds were raised to purchase a Wicks Pipe Organ and this instrument was dedicated in December 1991. In 1994, Memorial Windows were installed and dedicated on September 18th. A three-rank addition to the Pipe Organ also was dedicated at this time. Finally, the new Lewis Memorial United Methodist Church was completed. The old church building is now being used as the Chapel.

The church membership was continuing to grow, over 600, and again there was a desperate need for additional space for Sunday School classes and recreational areas. After the death of Mrs. John (Inez) Lewis in July 1995,
the church bought property from her estate for expansion. Also “Miss Inez” left her house to the church to be used as needed. A Building Committee was selected with Don Wenzel as Chairman and in September 1998, groundbreaking was held for a new Educational Building. In May 1999, this phase of the building program was completed and Consecration services were held on May 16, 1999 with Bishop G. Lindsay Davis, District Superintendent Jane Brooks, and Rev. Wm. Pierce Norman officiating.

Other influential families in the leadership of the church have been the Hair, Percival, and Grimaud families. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hair, (Miss Rosa), were both Sunday School teachers with Miss Rosa teaching the Primary group and Mr. Gordon, the Bible teacher for the Adult class. They taught in the days when there were no classrooms and all of the classes were taught in the church building, with curtains separating the classes. Robert Percival, who had died in March 1993, was a long time and faithful member of the church. He attended Epworth League, now the Youth Fellowship, as a young man and would walk from near Grovetown on Sunday nights for services and to see Mildred Kelley. Robert, Mildred and three or four more would sit around the pot-bellied stove and read their “parts” for the program. Foster and Fannie Grimaud were faithful members, raising nine children and bringing them all to church every Sunday. What a sight to see all of that marvelous family getting out of that Hudson automobile (no vans in those days). Mr. and Mrs. Grimaud still have family members attending the church today. The Hair, Lewis, and Percival families now have the sixth generation of active members attending church.

Another milestone was reached in June 1999 when the congregation welcomed the Rev. Nicole Sims as Associate Pastor. Not only were we “big enough” to have an Associate—HE was a “woman”. “Miss Lou” would be very proud to have Nicole as part of the leadership of the former Sardis Methodist Church.

In this year 2000, Lewis Memorial is celebrating 100 years of service and commitment to God and His people in the Lewiston Community. Future plans are to start on the much-needed Recreation Building to fulfill the many needs of our growing congregation.

Building on a rich and faithful heritage, the membership continues to look to the future with faith in God and witness to His Everlasting Love.

Lou Ann Penland, Historian
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