

OUR CURRENT CHURCH BEGINS

During the early 60's, the church continued to grow with membership reaching 440, including 172 pledging units. On April 2, 1964, a Building Committee was established with Lloyd Rathburn as Chairman, "to explore the feasibility of building a new church." While that committee was hard at work, Reverend Moore was transferred to Westfield, having completed seven years of outstanding ministry among us. Undaunted by the loss of a beloved pastor, on June 3, 1965, the Official Board voted to authorize the Building Committee to engage an architect for a new building. The Reverend John M. Sutton was appointed to replace Reverend Moore. The mortgage on the Conant Road Parsonage was retired in 1965, and the mortgage on the Parish House was reduced to \$9,700. In the spring of 1966 a major Building Fund Drive was launched to provide a financial base for a new church building.



Reverend Sutton greets on Sunday

At the same time, the Building Committee had selected from plans presented by the architects and requested cost estimates. In the Building Committee Report for 1966, the following observations are made: *"The building estimates presented by the architects were alarmingly high. After much deliberation about what part of the plans might be feasible for immediate construction, the Committee found itself again considering the advisability, based almost entirely on economic reasons, of relocating the church. While the estimated construction figures are high, they are not unreasonable or unrealistic in the light of present-day building costs. In its projections for the future of the church, the Committee is unwilling to compromise the standards so far planned. For the following reasons relocation seems desirable:*

1. *On the present property the expense of constructing one building or one section of a building at a time is excessively costly. A unified structure could be built more economically in a well-chosen location, and it could provide a fellowship hall as well as classrooms for religious education beneath an adequate sanctuary, with both floors opening at ground level.*
2. *Our present property would provide inadequate parking in any arrangement for the future. Contiguous land is unavailable.*
3. *For the growth and well-being of the church, a location near Weston Center appears to be highly desirable.*

The foregoing are all based upon the concept that we need and want to grow in order to carry forward our mission. We must have space in which to grow. In order to acquire more space, we must move."

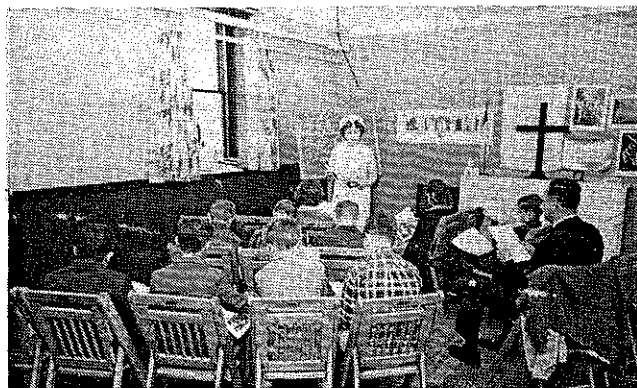
In 1967 the church engaged its first Director of Christian Education, Dot Erickson, by adding the salary usually paid to a youth minister to a new budget item for this newly created position. In December of 1967, using \$500 contributed by individuals for the purpose, the Building Committee took an option on an eleven and one-half acre plot of land located just northeast of the intersection of the Boston Post Road and the Route 20 Bypass, near St. Peter's Church.

This was a difficult period for the church as attendance and giving

declined and, in 1967, it was necessary to reduce the budget. On January 21, 1968, a Special Quarterly Conference authorized the purchase of the Boston Post Road property (subsequently done for \$115,000, reasoning that by so doing the church then had a viable option should it decide to relocate to a more central location and build a new structure.) It was assumed at that time that, in the event the church voted not to relocate, the land would increase in value so that it would prove to be a good investment. These were hard years for the congregation and, in March of 1968, Reverend Sutton notified the church that he had requested another appointment in June. He served briefly in another parish and on the staff at Boston University before moving to New York where he worked in the area of Near, Middle and Far Eastern relationships.

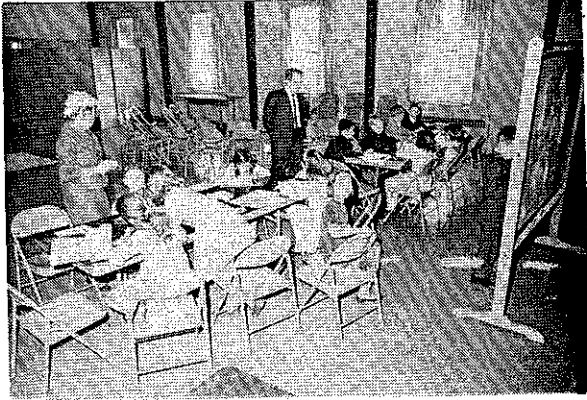


Children's Choir



Flo Harrington teaching Sunday School

Our Church School Builds Our Future - Then And Now



*Warren and Carol Norquist
teach Sunday School*



*Betty Van Cott teaches
Dede Barnes and Cheryl Wu*

REV. HOUSTON BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

With Reverend Sutton's departure the church was most fortunate in the selection of The Reverend Robert M. Houston as its new pastor. The congregation responded very positively to the new, young pastor. When the Houstons arrived, the Parsonage was in dire need of attention. A combination of a lack of funds and the possibility that the Parsonage might be sold or torn down to make way for a new building had resulted in several years of devastating neglect. In addition to the cosmetic work done when the Houstons arrived, the 1969 Annual Report noted "Plans are underway for a new boiler, new roof and exterior painting (of the Parsonage)."

In June of 1968, the Director of Christian Education left and other budget cuttings were necessitated. From a high in 1964 of 172 pledging families, the number had declined to 96 in 1968. The Fall Every Member Canvass was very successful, however, with an increase in the number of pledges by seventy percent, and in dollars pledged of \$10,000. Even with these advances, however, it was necessary to reduce the budget and delay important maintenance expenditures.

The church was deeply affected by controversy over the question of relocation. On the one hand, the first Methodist service in Weston had been conducted at the present site in 1790, and for almost 170 years our church had been the community church for

North Weston and South Lincoln. On the other hand, the architects had indicated the problems attendant to building an expanded structure on the present site and much of the growth in Weston was taking place in the south and central sectors. Finally, in May of 1969, the congregation voted not to relocate and the Building Committee was directed to proceed with plans for building on the North Avenue property.

It is interesting to note that the Couples Club, which had been so central to the life of the church during the 50's, with monthly meetings and annual variety shows which attracted packed houses, had gradually changed during the 60's so that its schedule was reduced to three or four meetings a year. During the late 60's and 70's the women's group, now called the United Methodist Women, moved into a central role in the life of the church.

NEW BUILDING TO BE CONSTRUCTED

In 1970 the congregation voted to move ahead with plans for a new building at the corner of North Avenue and Conant Road. The mortgage on the Parish Hall had been reduced to \$3,700 and a buyer had been located for the Boston Post Road property. After protracted debate, however, the motion to accept the prospective buyer's offer was rejected by one vote.

Attendance at worship continued to decline, and, in the first major clean

up of the membership records, 101 members withdrew or were removed by Change Conference Action. In May the initial plans for the new building were rejected and Peter Thomas was selected as the new architect. On November 15, a special Church Conference voted to proceed with Building Fund Drive.

The Fund Drive was successful and on January 31, 1971, a Special Church conference voted to approve the recommendations of the Building Committee, with Chester Higley as Chairman, that construction proceed on a new structure which would add approximately 10,000 square feet to the Parish Hall, which was to be incorporated into the new building. In April the beloved little white church which had housed the congregation for seventy years was taken down and the construction was underway.

Attendance recovered to 1967 levels as the congregation worshipped in the Parish Hall, awaiting completion of the new building. The balance of the Parish Hall mortgage (\$3,800) was absorbed into the new building mortgage which, after payments from the Building Fund, was \$225,000.

The Fall of 1971 marked the birth of the North Avenue Nursery School--a preschool program for area children. Key persons in this program were Jean Melby, the first lead teacher, Carol Norquist, Board Chairman and Business Manager, and Elizabeth Wolfskill, whose professional direction was invaluable.