

The History of Southlawn United Methodist Church

Southlawn United Methodist Church began as a mission post in 1924 and a predominately Anglo congregation in the Calumet Heights Community. Sunday School classes began in June of that year in a portable school at 8337 South Constance, under the leadership of a theological student from Garrett Biblical Institute.

The church was legally organized in 1925 as the Southlawn Methodist Episcopal Church and received eight adults into membership. The church was built on the southwest corner of 86th and McFarlane (now known as Cregier) Avenue. A Quonset hut" was purchased and erected and served as the worship site.

The church purchased a portable school building in 1934 and attached it to the church building. During that same year, the St. Luke Methodist Church was linked with Southlawn to make a two-point circuit for the pastor. By January 1934, Southlawn had grown to the point where it could use and support a full time pastor, St. Luke Church was later separated from Southlawn.

In 1945, a building fund drive was undertaken, plans and sketches for a new building was made. After a year of fruitless effort to secure the lot to the west of the old building, it was decided to purchase the property across the street on the southeast corner of 86th and Cregier. This additional property was needed in order to provide for a more adequate setting for the envisioned project. Final revised plans were approved by the Home Mission Board in January 1949.

On July 23, 1950, the Southlawn Church building in its present location was occupied. That building is presently the southeast wing of our current edifice including the first Fellowship Hall, which was used as the temporary setting for the worship services and the kitchen. On the second floor, there is a church parlor, two departmental worship rooms, each with two adjoining classrooms. One of the departmental rooms was used as a chapel. After a period of eleven years, the second unit of Southlawn, or the northwest wing containing the sanctuary, the pastor's study, nursery, office and narthex, was completed and consecrated on March 12, 1961. The church parsonage was built on the site of the old church building in 1963.

Around 1965, the Calumet Heights Community began undergoing racial change and transition, as did Southlawn. African-Americans were welcomed. The church doors were opened to all who felt the need and cared to come, as well as community groups.

In January 1966, one arson fire followed eight days later by a suspected second arson fire occurred at St. Luke Methodist Church which destroyed the church. Some believed that the fires were related to then pastor, John K. Brown's active support of civil rights. In support Southlawn allowed St. Luke to hold Sunday services in its sanctuary.

Following the arson fires the St. Luke congregation was merged with Southlawn. St Luke Church stood on two lots at 93rd and Paxton.

In 1968, the Methodist Church abolished the Central Jurisdiction. Portions were added to the Rock River Conference which was the predecessor Conference of The Northern Illinois Annual Conference. The merger created The United Methodist.

By 1978, Southlawn's racial transition was complete. Southlawn had come through the change as forthrightly and gracefully as the lines of the cross atop its pinnacle. The church continues to progress. Its "Open Door" and commitment to God, family and community is manifest in its openness to the community, ecumenical commitment and willingness to share resources for ministry with all of God's people.

Southlawn has also been blessed to witness God call some of its own sons and daughters into ordained ministry. Those entering the ministry include Betty Jane Greer, Genetta Jackson, Felicia Howell LaBoy, Dennis Langdon and Jacqueline Ford.

The pastors who have served Southlawn United Methodist Church are:

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| 1925 – 1928 | Rev. Frank T. Palm |
| 1928 – 1929 | Rev. Lagrone |
| 1929 – 1932 | Rev. P.B. Duffendack |
| 1932 – 1938 | Rev. Frank T. Palm |
| 1938 – 1946 | Rev. E. Lester Stanton |
| 1946 – 1958 | Rev. Guy Chester Jones |
| 1958 – 1963 | Rev. Leonard Lowe |
| 1963 – 1968 | Rev. William A. Nicoll |
| 1968 – 1972 | Rev. F.A. Laxamana* |
| 1972 – 1975 | Rev. Alton Washington |
| 1975 – 1976 | Rev. Philip Harley (Interim Minister) |
| 1976 – 1981 | Rev. C. Abner Hammonds |
| 1981 – 1986 | Rev. Tallulah F. Williams** |
| 1986 – 1994 | Rev. Norval I. Brown |
| 1994 – 1996 | Rev. Linda H. Hollies*** |
| 1996 – 2001 | Rev. Tracy Smith Malone |
| 2001 – 2006 | Rev. Pamela R. Lightsey |
| 2006 - 2007 | Rev. Melwyn Alagodi (Interim Minister) |
| 2007 – 2012 | Rev. Robert E. Biekman |
| 2012 – 2014 | Rev. Dr. Larry D. Pickens |
| 2015 - | Rev. Dwayne Craig |

*Rev. Fernando A. Laxamana died February 11, 1996.

**Rev. Tallulah F. Williams died June 20, 1999.

*** Rev. Linda Hollies died August 18, 2007

We are an African-American community of faith that is grounded in God's love and engaged in transforming persons and systems in the name of Jesus Christ. Our history represents God's transformative love and the continuing struggle for human dignity and hope.