

History of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church

Edwin Shurig

920-1325

### Town Origins:

The purpose of this paper is to present the history of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church. The history of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church begins with the formation of the town of Broad Ripple. Jacob Coil was the owner of the land that is now Broad Ripple. (Frank, 1953) In 1837, with the vision of building a community, Coil divided the land into 48 lots. Unfortunately by 1885, two thirds of the lots had returned to farmland. Despite this set back, the community grew and was named Broad Ripple, a descriptive reference in Coil's will, locating the land next to the widest ripple of the White River.

### Early Spiritual Need:

The construction of the Central Canal and the subsequent need for labor brought a great influx of people to Indianapolis and Broad Ripple. Germans and Irish men "immigrated with promise of work to be found." (Village Sampler, 1996) It is in the spiritual needs of this growing community of Broad Ripple, that the church took root. The town originally had a rowdy reputation, having several crowded saloons. Canal builder John Burke paid canal workers with "juggers" of Whiskey. "Residents and neighbors...commonly referred to it as 'Hell's Half Acre.'" (Village Sampler, 1996) This context is not too different from today, as even now Broad Ripple is known for its taverns and is ripe with spiritual need.

In response to this "rowdy" element, some members of the community sought God. (Village Sampler, p.7) Prior to the establishment of a dedicated build, Methodist and other Christians would gather in one another's homes for prayer, fellowship, and study. Many were brought into the Methodist fellowship through the "brush arbor" camp meetings, lead by a fiery Methodist preacher and evangelist Vanburan Blackburn. Another camp meeting preacher was James Havens, nicknamed "Old Sorrel." Havens earned his nickname in an encounter with a man named Burkhart, who was a leader among a group of unruly, out of work canal workers,

infamous for "breaking up camp meetings" and "for sponging of farmers." (Village Sampler, p.7) During a camp meeting held in 1822 by Havens, Burkhart came into the camp singing, "rabid and disruptive songs." Havens confronted Burkhart. After Burkhart refused to quiet down, Rev. Havens subsequently knocked him out with a single punch.

#### First Church:

Just as John Burke had contributed to the forces of vise gripping Broad Ripple, he too contributed to the building it's first church, Union Church. Located were today sits the Broad Ripple Fire Department, the Union Church was erected in 1851, with Mr. Burke as an original trustee. Ministers from several different denominations would take turns preaching at this site, venturing out from Indianapolis when weather permitted. (Earle, 1968) Among these visiting ministers was a Rev. Jones. The Union Church was also used as a public meeting space.

#### First Methodist Church:

In 1852, a leader of the community named Squire Pendleton drew together a few of his fellow Methodist into his home. (Earle, 1968) In this meeting, the group discussed and agreed upon organizing a separate Methodist Church. Pendleton along with Joseph Ferguson and Robert Earl Sr. traveled to Indianapolis to inform the Bishop of their desires. The Bishop gave their plan his blessing and sent a letter with them to the Presiding Elder, Rev. Chas E. Engle. After receiving the letter, Rev. Engle preached the next Sunday, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1852, to the Methodist Community of Broad Ripple. That day he received 31 charter church members and held elections for lay leadership. Justice of the Peace and practicing attorney, Squire Pendleton was elected Chairman of Officers. Robert Earl was elected President of Trustees. Ferguson was elected to Secretary and Treasurer. The following were elected Trustees: Jacob and Mary Coil, Cassandra Mustard, Uriah Day, John bacon, and William Dawson Sr. Reverend Koontz was to be the first pastor of this congregation, being assigned to the Castleton Circuit, a circuit that included the

communities of Castleton, Broad Ripple, and Fishers. On a typical Sunday, Koontz would preach in the morning in Castleton, the afternoon in Broad Ripple, and the evening in Fishers. By 1880, the Broad Ripple congregation had been served by 15 different pastors. People often think of churches in terms of buildings, so it is important to note that by 1880, despite lacking an edifice, the Church of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church had grown to 115 members.

#### First Physical Church:

In November of 1886, the Board considered two sites for the construction of the first edifice for the Broad Ripple United Methodist Church. It is an interesting note to today's urban member, that the current site was thought by many to be too far out in the country, but ultimately chosen over the other due to its relative safety from flooding.(Earle, 1968) Broad Ripple was savaged by floods in 1847, 1875, and 1913.(Bullock, p.1) Once again a Coil comes into the history of BRUMC. Ms. Mary Coil Dawson, daughter of Jacob Coil,(Helen Hague, Nov.9,1977) donated the land in which the Church is located.(Church Bulletin, Oct.7,1962) In June of 1887, the first Broad Ripple United Methodist Church building was dedicated in a service. This building consisted of only one 65x38ft room.(Earl, 1968) The church was equipped with two Burnside stoves, several hanging oil lamps, and plank seats, each having a six inch backboard. The total cost of construction was \$8,800.00. The pastor at that time was Rev. Conner and the Trustees included: William Dawson, J. S. Mustard, O. B. Boardman, Dennis Garriety, J. W. Bates, and William Earl. Later that fall, Rev. Current was assigned to the Castleton Circuit.(Blackburn and Earl)

#### Continued Growth:

In time this first wooden church received several additions.(Church Bulletin, undated) In 1916 a ladies parlor and bell tower were added. Earl in his "History of Broad Ripple,"(1953) gives us an interesting contextual picture of Broad Ripple during this time. He notes that in 1894,



coinciding with the electrical hookup of Indianapolis, a streetcar service was completed between Indianapolis to Broad Ripple. In 1897, a steamboat named the "Sunshine" was launched onto the White River, docked at Broad Ripple Park. By 1898, Broad Ripple United Methodist Church had increased to 202 members. (BRUMC membership Directory, 1952) A partial basement was excavated. That same year the congregation of BRUMC requested from the Conference a full time Minister, and received a Rev. Risley. (Church Bulletin, undated) In 1910, a storm damaged the bell tower, which was removed and replaced by a large window and two rows of additional seating. (Blackburn and Earl) In the North West corner a double door was added and a new bell tower was constructed. The church then purchased new oak pews. In 1920, members using horses and slip scrappers enlarged the basement. In this enlarged space, a circulating furnace was installed to replace the Burnside stoves. In the mid 1920's BRUMC hit the peak in terms of membership, (Bulletin, Oct. 7, 1962) only to come crashing down with the depression of 1929. In 1930, construction began on a Sunday school, unit which was not completed until 1939, under the leadership of Rev. Edwin Gillette. (Church Bulletin, undated)

### Blackburn Era

One dramatic period of transformation took place under the leadership of Rev. Otho Blackburn, Thd. Rev. Blackburn had previously served as pastor for First Methodist Church, Of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where he had established a large thriving congregation. According to his daughter, Blackburn was motivated to transfer to Broad Ripple United Methodist by his desire to live closer to his only child, Jeanne, who was recently married and living in Indiana. (Interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001) After notifying the conference of his desire to transfer, he was offered an assignment at Broad Ripple United Methodist in 1947. He soon discovered that Broad Ripple United Methodist was not as prosperous as had been told. Jeanne stated that her father was told that it had 900 members and a building fund," he arrived to find only 47 members. Jeanne

recounted that she and her mother cried over the poor prospect of this new assignment for a week. Nevertheless, Rev. Blackburn was undaunted and set about rebuilding the congregation.

Rev. Blackburn first step was to straighten out the church records on exact membership. Blackburn then set out, "canvassing," or survey of the neighborhood to determine which members of the community were a member or would be inclined to join. Third, he embarked on an ambitious building program for a new church building.

Jeanne described the wooden church of that time as being in poor repair, with rotting floorboards. She also notes that Rev. Blackburn had a way of presenting his building proposal in a way that people would begin to believe that it was their idea to give to the building program. (Interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001) Rev. Blackburn took his plan to the businessmen of the Broad Ripple community. One of his earliest and strongest partner on this project was C.T. Foxworthy, owner of Foxworthy Ford. Foxworthy was appointed to Honorary Campaign Chairman. Kenneth W. Williams, A. I. A. of Kokomo, In. was chosen as the architect. An initial draft of the building was completed. (Item 1) Note that the original design called for a slightly larger building with a basketball court in the basement. Blackburn felt that the church should be at the center of community life, especially in reaching out in ministry to the youth. Eventually, another slightly small, yet still ambitious design was chosen. (see item 2) One of more successful capital raising techniques was in the solicitation of honorary plaques. (see item 3) in which, members would donate a set amount of money towards a part of the church, were in a memorial bronze engraved name plaque would be attached. Even today, these plaques can be found throughout the church. With enough initial capital gathered, a ten year mortgage of \$75,000 was signed. (Ripple Visitor, No.2) Costs of construction were estimated at \$300,000.

Construction costs were kept to a minimum, by many of the jobs being done by parishioners themselves. (Interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>) These tasks included painting, cleanup, and dry walling among others. Jeanne recalled seeing her father help guide in the laminated sanctuary support beams as they were lowered by a crane. The new church was build wrapping around the

older wooden church. At one point a wall was knocked out of a Sunday school room in the wooden church, that faced the front entrance of the new building, so that a piano could be carried into the new church. Earle, who personally participated in this move, recalled that it has a terrifying endeavor, as the stairway had not yet been installed. (Interview, March 14<sup>th</sup>) Note, the stairs had yet to be installed into the church, planks were placed between the ground and sanctuary levels. The piano was moved, up onto the sanctuary level by several men, carrying the piano, balancing on the two by fours spanning across the gap. At one point, the piano slipped backwards and was caught by Rev. Blackburn, who had taken up the rear. (Interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>) The pews of the old church were carried out through the windows of the old church and into the balcony of the current church. They can still be found on the balcony today. "The old alter, cross, and candles were included in the Blake Memorial Chapel, so named after a young girl of the church." (Bullock, p.4) According to Jeanne, on the day the new pews were installed, a large financial contributor had scheduled a wedding in the new sanctuary. (Interview, March 13<sup>th</sup>) Rev. Blackburn asked for help among the members present, and was able to clean up the construction mess just at the last minutes leading up to the wedding.

On July 6, 1954 the first Sunday service was held in the new sanctuary of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church. (Earle) Bishop J. McGee preached that Sunday. At the time of the consecration services, the congregation had raised \$115,018 of the \$300,000 since planning began in 1950. (news article, undated) Membership at that time numbered 540 members.

Rev. Blackburn's timing could not have been better, as "from 1947-1957, Broad Ripple's population grew from 5,000 to 50,000. (Bullock, p.3) This increase in population was a golden opportunity that was capitalized on by Blackburn's work and ministry. Jeanne stated that Rev. Blackburn's favorite saying was "a friendly church for a friendly community." (Interview, March 10<sup>th</sup>) She noted that while he was not a particularly gifted preacher, he excelled at pastoral care. On one occasion, Rev. Blackburn received a letter from a fellow Methodist minister, notifying him that a family from his congregation was moving to Broad Ripple. Rev. Blackburn met the

family as they arrived, and helped them move. One successful technique Rev. Blackburn used was to have the church secretary stand behind him, while he greeting members after a service. As Rev. Blackburn introduce himself, he would repeat loudly, “ oh so your Mr. so and so, and you live where...” The secretary would then record the visitors information. Blackburn would then pay a visit later in the week to the prospective member. By 1957, membership BRUMC had grown to 1,265 members. (Bullock, p.3) According to Blackburn’s records, in total 1601 men, women, and children were “received into the church.”

#### Post Blackburn Decline and Shadows:

Several pastors followed Blackburn with the most recent being: Rev. Sexton Rev. Ashley,( Bulletin, Oct. 7,1962),Rev. Echols, Rev. Cook, Rev. Bachert, Rev. Schwein, Arthur K. Friesen (Church Directory, 1985), Jay Allen Coahran (Church Directory, 1988), and Larry Schwarts (Church Bulletin, 1994) It is known that membership has dropped since Blackburn. A 1985 church history described the strength of the church during the period of 1962 to 1985 as “not so much in receiving new members but in loyalty and commitment to God.” (Bullock, p.4) This statement acknowledges that the growth experienced during the Blackburn era had shifted to a steady decline in numbers. Between 1974 and 1995, over half of the membership had withdrawn or passed away. Bullock in her history left a dramatic statistic describing this decline in membership. (p.4)

Year	1960	65	70	80	85	90	95
Membership	784	974	875	437	432	384	337
Worship	464	351	345	258	208	200	154
Sunday School	261	238	226	118	80	75	61

A letter by Rev. Coahran dated Dec. 1991, lists 34 members to be removed from the church membership records. Membership in 1991, as recorded in a “Members” binder found in the BRUMC records cabinet, is listed as having only 865 individuals. This record appears slightly optimistic as Bullock notes that the church database only lists 663 active members in 1985.

Bullock notes that part of the drop in Sunday school attendance reflected the flight of families with children out of the IPS school district, due to the "rough" character the Broad Ripple High school has developed.(p.6) While the community of Broad Ripple has developed a positive, cultured, artistic element, there has also been a trend of the past years of small businesses being replaced by bars. Broad Ripple in some ways is returning to it's "rowdy" roots.

### New Beginnings

While the decline of the past years has placed an ominous shadow on some members, others have responded to this challenge with hope. In 1999, two local artists, Kelly Ross and Chris Cassel created a "three story mural depicting the story of Noah's Ark." (Hoosier United Methodist News, Jan 1999) The mural took 10 days and \$3,800. Pastor Larry Schwarts is quoted as describing it as "an investment in our children's future." Pastor Schwarts also obtained permission for additional parking at the neighboring Kroger grocery store and a place in the Broad Ripple Community Board.

In Jan of 2000 Rev. Nancy Blevins (Interview, April 10<sup>th</sup>) became the first female pastor of Broad Ripple United Methodist. While this change reflects a change in the attitude of the Methodist Church towards the roles of women, Nancy also provides a link to our past. Like Blackburn, Nancy was educated at Asbury Seminary. Possibly, it is through this common origin that Nancy's ministry focus and leadership matches Rev. Blackburn. Blackburn's "a friendly church for a friendly community" is much alive in today's outreaching, and socially concerned congregation. In addition to spiritual growth and renewal, Broad Ripple UMC has also enjoyed a growth in membership. Broad Ripple United Methodist Church draws to a marker of a 150 years, heading into a new millennium with a bright future.

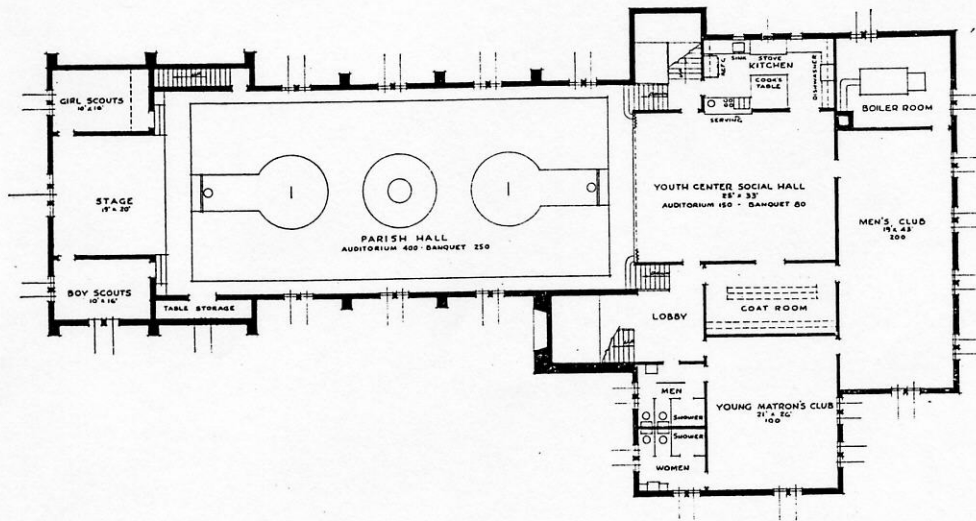


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"Arise ye there and build the Sanctuary"



GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1" = 10'

THE GROUND FLOOR

## Social Hall—Dramatics—Recreation

MEN'S CLUB, BOY SCOUTS, CAMP FIRE GIRLS

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP FOR ALL

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"

JOHN 10:10

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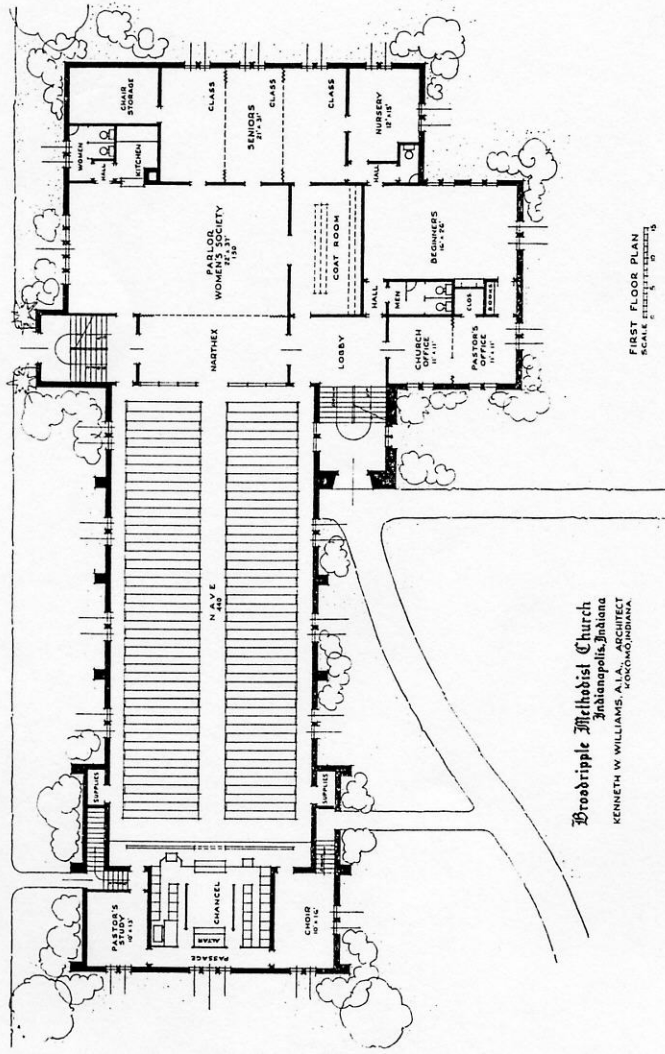
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Thurs. 7

"It was in thine heart to build a temple to My Name"

"Ye did well to have it in your heart"

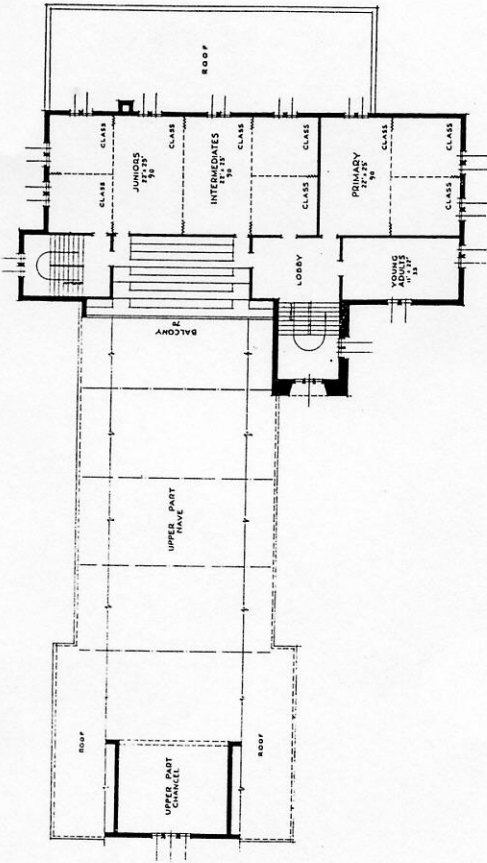


THE MAIN FLOOR

## "A Place Of Beauty And Worship"

The Church will be built of Indiana Limestone, with Interior Beauty Conducive to Adoration and Reverence. The Sanctuary will seat 440, with additional seating capacity of 360, by using balcony and Ladies' Parlor area.

"Strength and Beauty are in His Sanctuary"



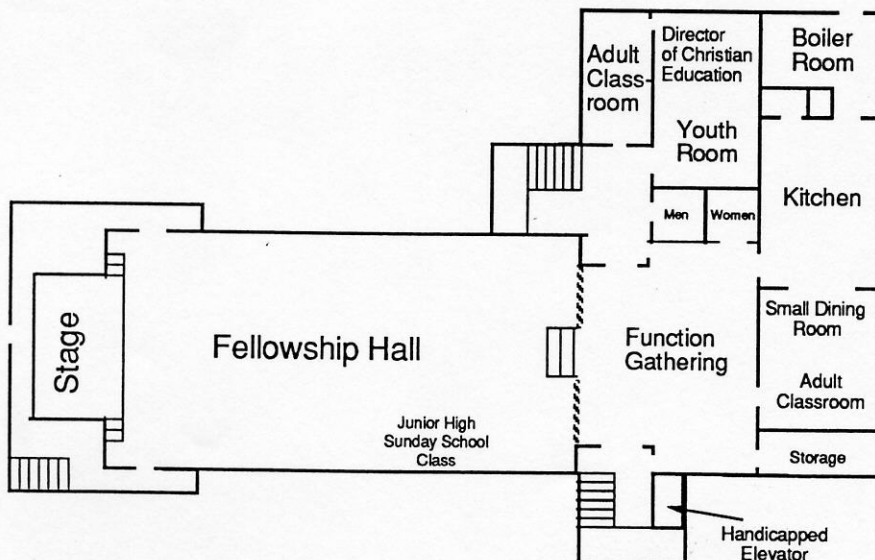
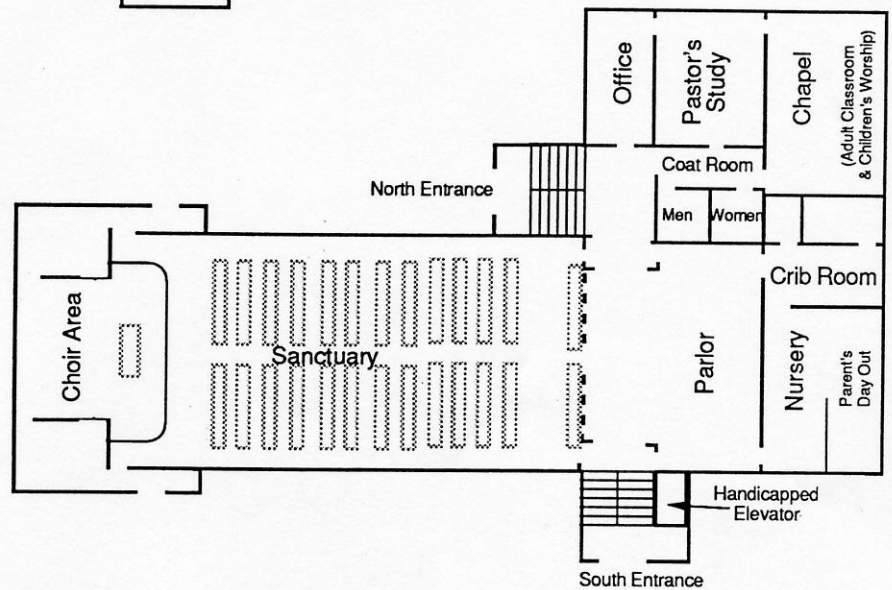
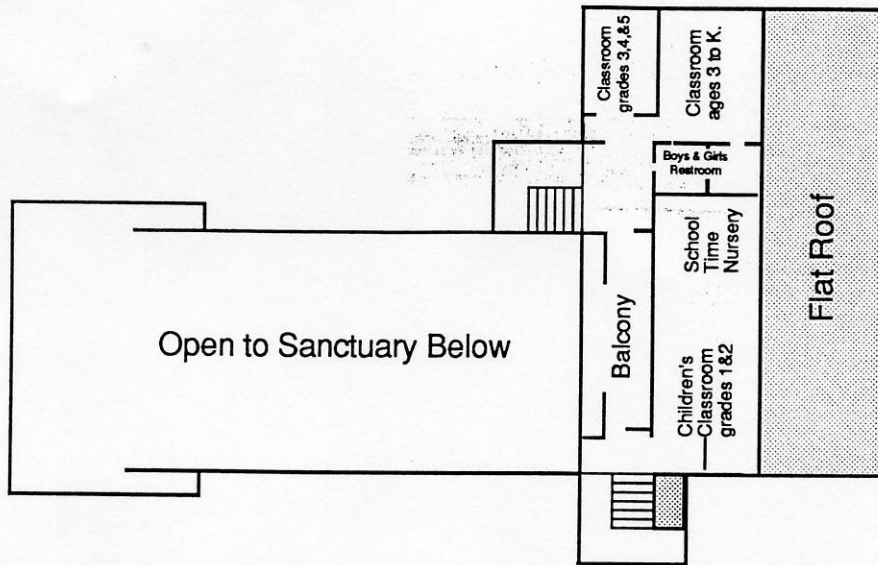
THE SECOND FLOOR

## Christian Education And Training

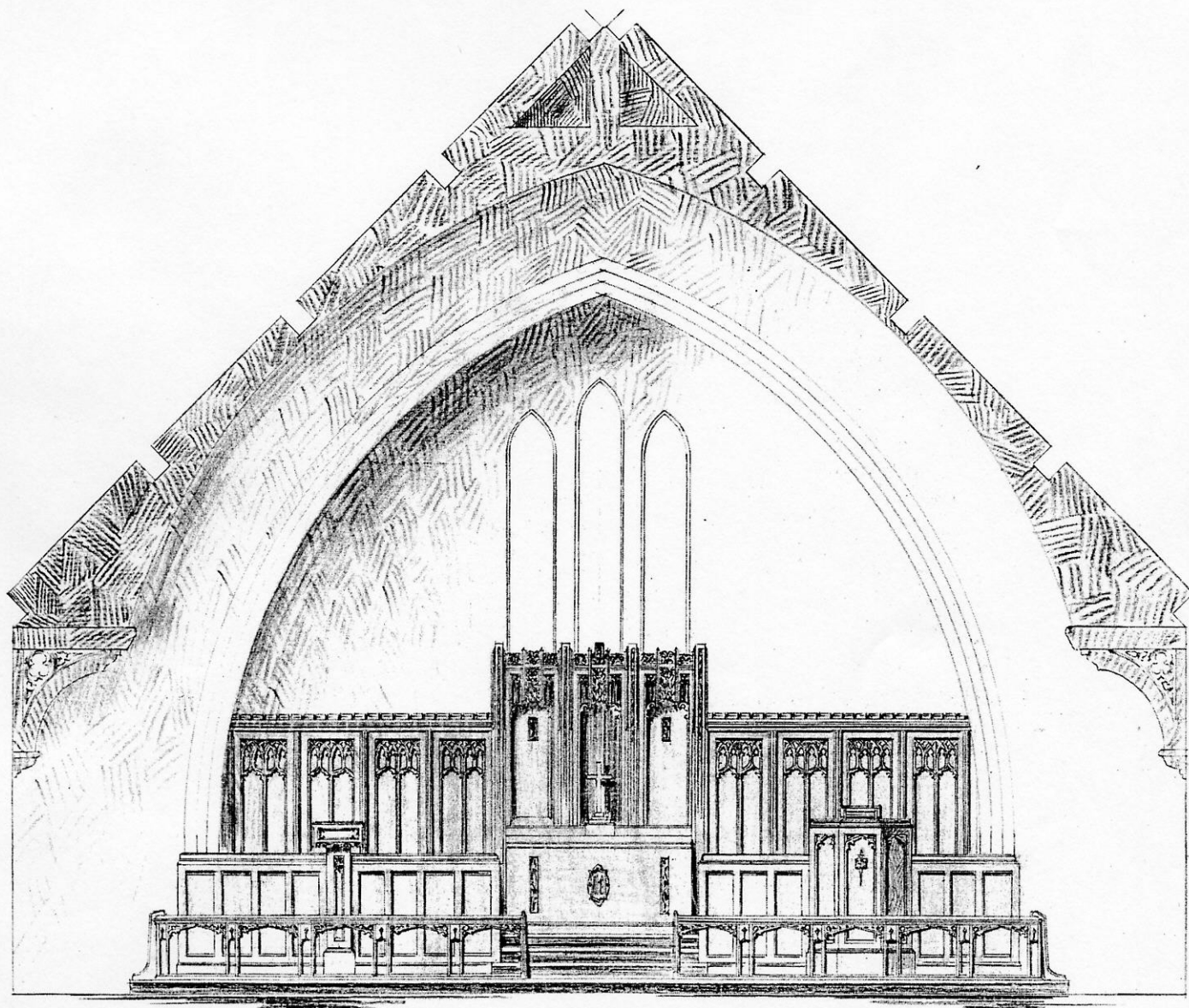
Facilities comparable to our fine Public Schools, where our boys and girls may learn the true way of life—and build character foundations.

"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man"  
LUKE 2:52

"Strength and Beauty are in His Sanctuary"







CHANCEL

# Ministers of Broad Ripple United Methodist Church 1852 - 1985

- |                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Rev. Mr. Koontz     | 28. Rev. Mr. Lewis               |
| 2. Rev. Mr. Grubbs     | 29. Rev. Mr. Morris              |
| 3. Rev. Mr. Harding    | 30. Rev. Mr. Raff                |
| 4. Rev. Mr. White      | 31. Rev. Mr. Moore               |
| 5. Rev. Mr. Burt       | 32. Rev. Mr. Flynn               |
| 6. Rev. Mr. Stallard   | 33. Rev. Mr. Welker              |
| 7. Rev. Mr. Spellman   | 34. Rev. Mr. Allison             |
| 8. Rev. Mr. Smith      | 35. Rev. Mr. Ragsdale            |
| 9. Rev. Mr. Havens     | 36. Rev. Mr. Robertson           |
| 10. Rev. Mr. Jameson   | 37. Rev. Mr. Biddle              |
| 11. Rev. Mr. McCarty   | 38. Rev. Mr. Spaulding           |
| 12. Rev. Mr. Tincher   | 39. Rev. Mr. St. Clair           |
| 13. Rev. Mr. Benjamin  | 40. Rev. Mr. Farr                |
| 14. Rev. Mr. Grubbs    | 41. Rev. Mr. Talbott             |
| 15. Rev. Mr. Stallard  | 42. Rev. Mr. Gillett             |
| 16. Rev. Mr. Jones     | 43. Rev. H. Otho Blackburn       |
| 17. Rev. Mr. Connor    | 44. Assoc. Rev. Chas. Armstrong  |
| 18. Rev. Mr. Current   | 45. Rev. Virgil W. Sexton        |
| 19. Rev. Mr. Robertson | 46. Assoc. Rev. Ralph O. Pearson |
| 20. Rev. Mr. Kennedy   | 47. Rev. Albert R. Ashley        |
| 21. Rev. Mr. Morgan    | 48. Rev. Raymond Echols          |
| 22. Rev. Mr. Crawford  | 49. Rev. Floyd Cook              |
| 23. Rev. Mr. Machlan   | 50. Assoc. Rev. John E. Hoadley  |
| 24. Rev. Mr. Maupin    | 51. Rev. Harold Bachert          |
| 25. Rev. Mr. Sheldon   | 52. Rev. W. Merlin Schwein       |
| 26. Rev. Mr. Risley    | 53. Assoc. Rev. C.V. McMillan    |
| 27. Rev. Mr. Wilson    | 54. Rev. Arthur Friesen          |

Like a normal child, Broad Ripple United Methodist Church, beginning small, has grown, sometimes in spurts, for 133 years.

# *Living Memorials*



(New Doors)  
March, 1996



(Old Doors)



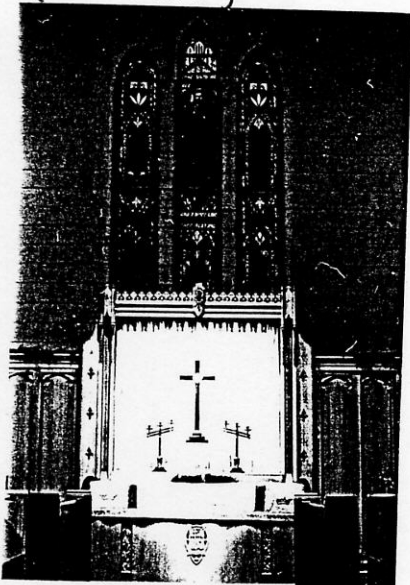
(Old Church Altar)

## *Broad Ripple Methodist Church*

H. OTHO BLACKBURN, TH.D.

INDIANAPOLIS 20, INDIANA

6195 GUILFORD AVE.



(New Altar)

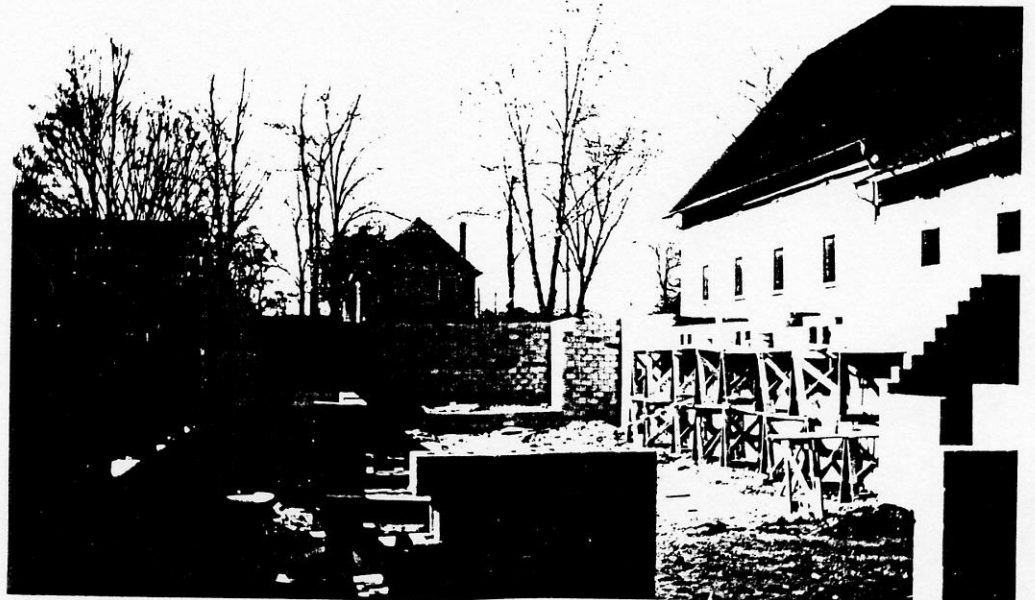


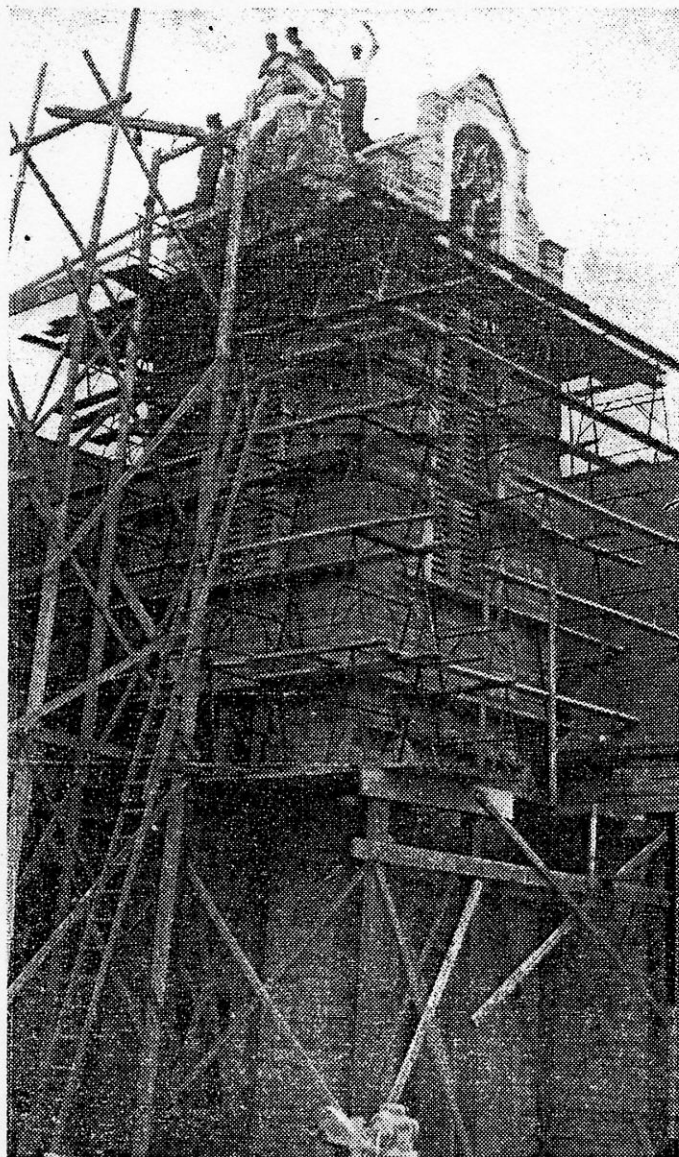
Ground Breaking  
Aug. 12, 1951

Phil  
Ralph V. Earle Sr.  
Helen M. Earle  
Janie Ellen Earle  
Pat Earle  
R. Vernon Earle Jr.  
Kurt Ehlert  
Marilyn Ehlert took picture



↑ HELEN EARLE





## Three Years Abuilding

Rev. H. Otho Blackburn waves an arm from atop the new Broad Ripple Methodist Church as the last stone is put in place. Work was begun in 1951.

## Raines to Lead Ripple Service

First service in a new church will be held tomorrow by the members of the Broad Ripple Methodist Church, 6200 Guilford.

Theme of the 10:30 a.m. service, which is to be led by Bishop Richard C. Raines, is "Salt, Light and Leaven." The bishop will be assisted by the pastor, Rev. H. Otho Blackburn.

The new limestone structure of the church, which is beginning its 102d year, is the result of more than three year's work. The project was begun August 12, 1951.

Tomorrow's service also will mark the opening of an eight-week loyalty program for the church. Simultaneously, other Methodist churches will be beginning their loyalty schedules.

The program consists of recruiting new members and bringing back to the church those who have become lax in attendance. The loyalty program is conducted as a function of the Spiritual Light Mission of which Bishop Raines is director.

Rev. Blackburn, who is in his eighth year as pastor at Broad Ripple, personally laid the last stone of the new building.

Seating capacity of the new church is more than 1,000. Previously services and func-

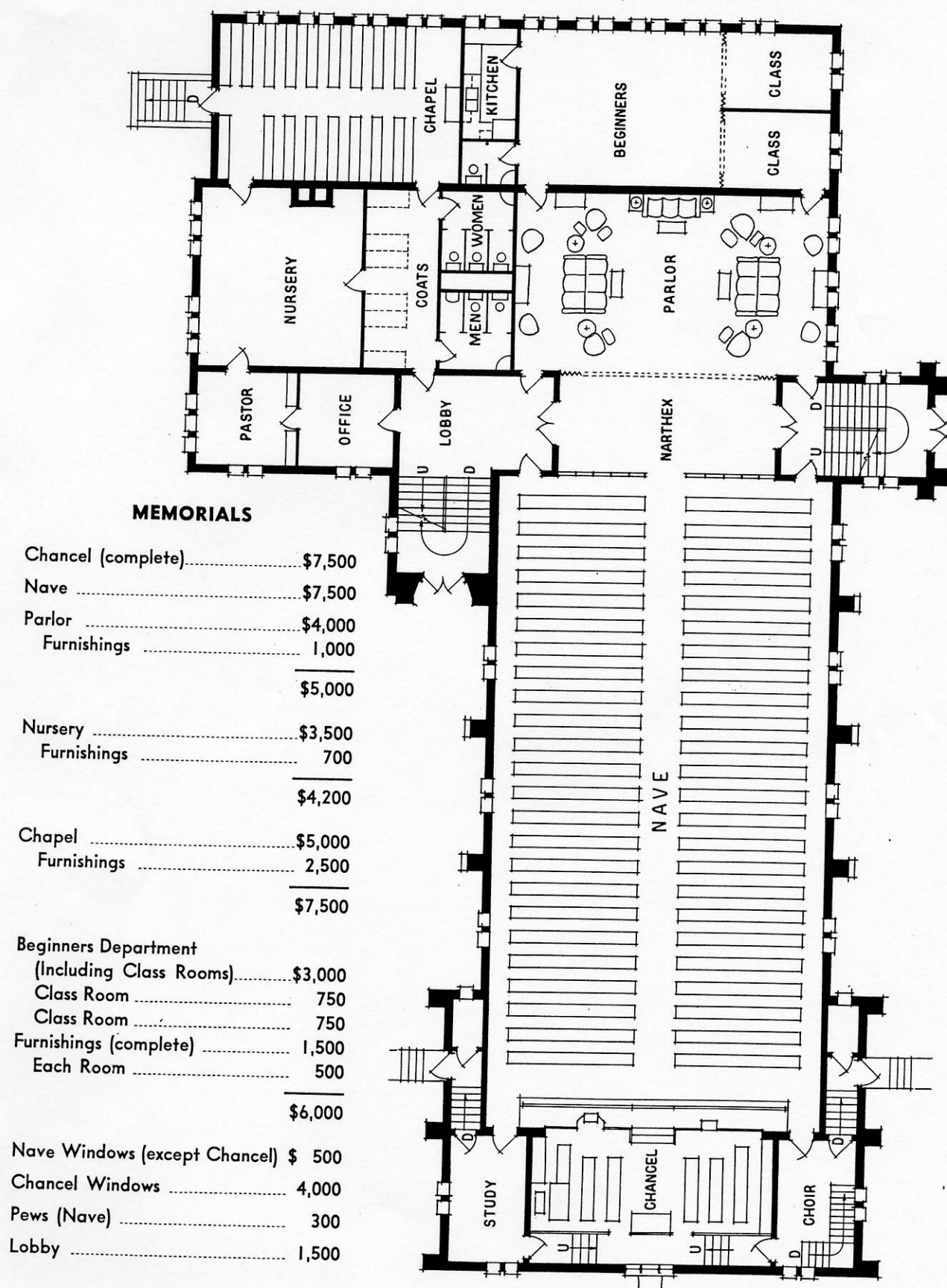
tions of the congregation were held in a white frame building.

The pastor said a room in the sanctuary affords room for approximately 300, the main sanctuary seats nearly 550, the choir loft 40 and the balcony more than 100.

Rev. Blackburn said the space has been sorely needed. In the last four years the church has added more than 600 members.

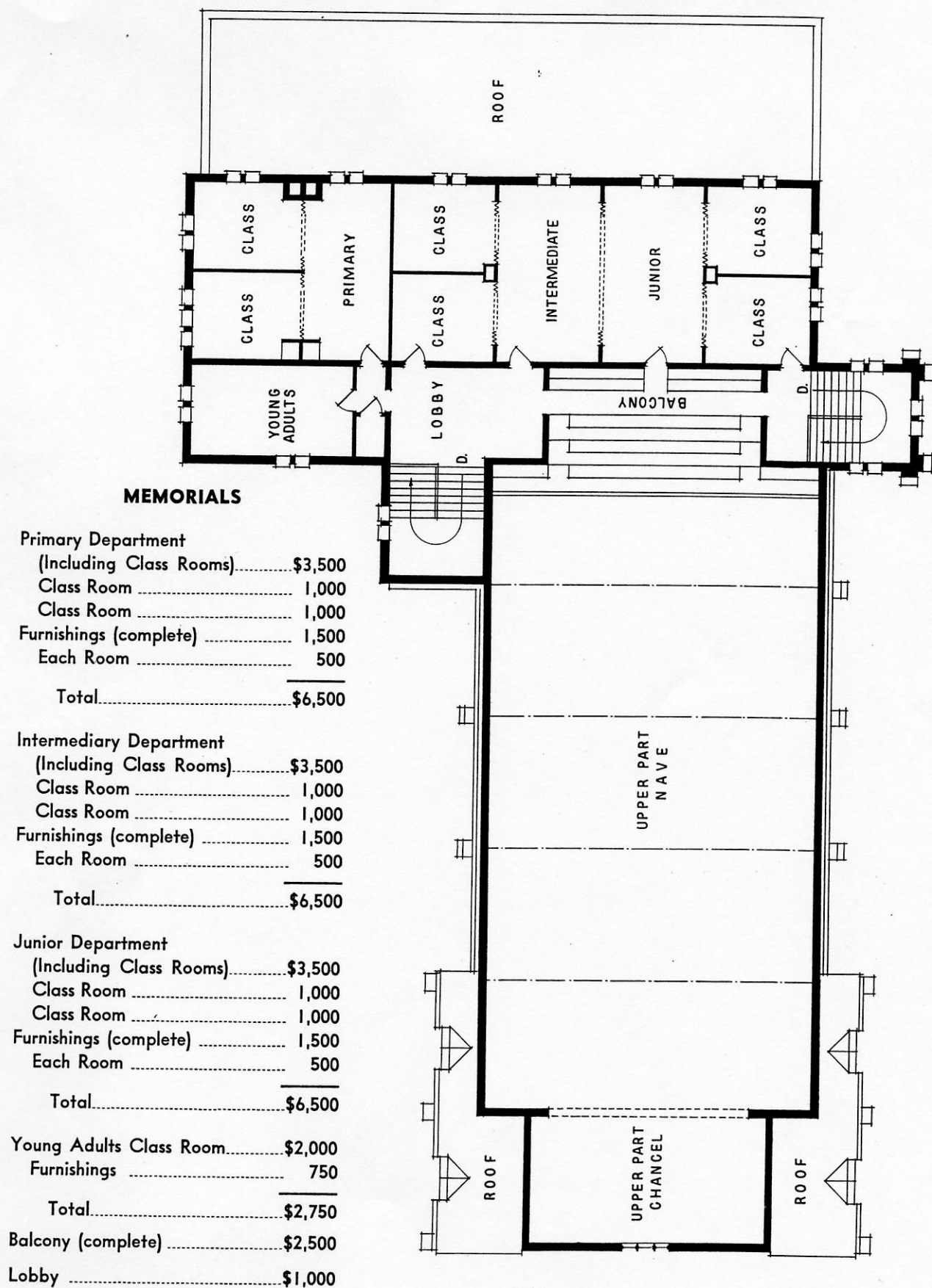


*Pledgors may select any one of the room or equipment memorials appearing on this page, or may memorialize the entire unit, if so desired.*



MAIN FLOOR PLAN

*Pledgors may select any one of the room or equipment memorials appearing on this page, or may memorialize the entire unit, if so desired.*



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

# Living Memorials

As we consecrate our new building for worship and service to all, some may wish to perpetuate the memory of loved ones, by assuming the cost of units, or portions of units, (such as are listed below), or even some important equipment. Such may become a living memorial to those who have passed on to us our high ideals and common reverence for Christian teachings.

Also, such monuments, consecrated in our family name, embodies the highest ideals which bind our Church Family together, in the continuing faith and service, through generations for years ahead.

Timely recognition will be given all memorials. Fitting bronze plaques will be properly placed to bring recognition to the honored.

## MEMORIAL OPPORTUNITIES

*"The Greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will out last it."*

ALTAR TABLE.....		LECTERN.....	
PULPIT.....	\$500	REREDOS.....	\$575
ORGAN.....	\$1000	DOSSIL CURTAIN.....	\$500
BAPTISMAL FONT.....	\$4157	CHOIR PEWS.....	\$100
CLERGY SEATS.....	\$300	COMMUNION RAIL.....	\$500
LECTERN BIBLE.....	\$75	SANCTUARY WINDOWS.....	\$300
ART WINDOWS.....	\$2400	STUDY WINDOWS.....	\$200
VIGIL LIGHTS.....	\$100 Each	OTHER WINDOWS.....	\$100 Single
SANCTUARY LANTERNS.....	\$100 Each	OFFERING PLATES.....	\$150
SANCTUARY PEWS.....	\$150 Each	STUDY FURNISHINGS.....	\$1000
CHANCEL CARPETING.....	\$100	OFFICE EQUIPMENT.....	\$1200
SANCTUARY CARPETING.....	\$150	COUNCIL ROOM EQUIPMENT.....	\$500
NARTHEX LIGHTS.....	\$25 Each	PICTURES—LADIES PARLORS.....	
"THE LAST SUPPER".....	\$50	NURSERY EQUIPMENT.....	\$300
MAIN ENTRANCE DOORS.....	\$1000	KINDERGARTEN EQUIPMENT.....	\$300
SOUTH ENTRANCE DOORS.....	\$750	KITCHENETTE.....	\$100
CHAPEL—(WORSHIP CENTER).....	\$500	CLUB ROOM.....	\$500
CHAPEL.....	\$2000	HYMNALS.....	100 cost \$150
CROSS & CANDELABRA.....	\$160		



# Living Memorials

MODERN FOLD DOORS.....	Modern Fold Doors.....
Ladies' Parlors, \$800; Parish Hall, \$800; Kindergarten, \$350; Juniors, \$350.	
KITCHEN EQUIPMENT.....	
\$3800, Men's Club	
FIREPLACES.....	
Club Room, \$300; Council Room, \$200	
AMPLIFICATION.....	
Tower Chimes, \$300	
Public Address, \$400	
OTHER OUTSIDE DOORS.....	
\$100 Each—Study Entrance; Choir Entrance; Parish Hall Entrance	
PARISH HALL RECREATIONAL.....	
Equipment, \$1000—May be broken into \$100 or \$50 units.	
ELECTRIC WATER COOLER & FOUNT.....	
\$100—Main Floor	
BUBBLER FOUNT—KINDERGARTEN.....	
\$50	
ITCHER AND DRINK FOUNT.....	
\$50	

There are many other units that may be memorialized, units or portion of units—from \$50.00—? Half of the amounts for fixed units may be applied from money already paid in on edges. Each family should have a fixed memorial. One to which you point with pride, and say, "This I had a part in building?" LET THE COMMITTEE KNOW YOUR WISHES.

## COMMITTEE ON MEMORIALS

Dr. H. Otho Blackburn  
Dr. Ralph O. Pearson

Edwin McClure  
J. Fred Murphy

RECORDER—CHURCH SECRETARY



## Broad Ripple Methodist Church

H. OTHO BLACKBURN, TH.D.

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