A Growing Church in the 1960s*

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(First United Methodist Church of Sunnyvale, California, celebrates its centennial this year of 1998. To celebrate this, I, as chairperson of the Administrative Council, will read this devotional at the beginning of the April meeting.)

Last month, we read from member Carol Amen's writings. This month, we will talk about several new Sunnyvale residents arriving in the 1960s.

1 Two Refugee Families

January 1960, Dutch refugee Napoleon Mendez Da Costa, his wife Julia, and three children arrived from Indonesia, formerly called the Dutch East Indies. The church had negotiated with the World Council of Churches to bring the family to Sunnyvale.

Three years later, Cuban refugees Jesus Perez, his wife, and four children arrived from Miami. The church provided money, food, clothing, and housing items and helped Mr. Perez find employment.

2 The Stollenwercks

That same year, Henry and Ruby Stollenwerck purchased a new house at 797 Ponderosa Avenue in a new housing development near Ponderosa Park. Life-long Methodists, they visited the newly built sanctuary, in which we worship today. Everything in Sunnyvale was new!

They quickly became involved. Ruby joined the United Methodist Women, participated in Holiday Faire, and joined many Bible studies. Henry ushered worship services, counted the money from the Sunday offerings, served on the Board of Trustees, and participated in Saturday workdays at church. Together, they folded church newsletters.

3 The Melanders

The church was growing, and one reason was the Twelve, a group of six couples calling on visitors every Sunday afternoon. One Sunday, the Stollenwercks visited Melvin and Nellie Melander, new residents from Minneapolis. Mr. Melander, just having retired from the U.S. Postal Service, was tired of dealing with snow, and so, after living all of their lives in Minnesota, they moved to sunny California. The Melanders joined the church. They and the Stollenwercks played bridge together. After just a few months, Mr. Melander died, and church members were sure that Mrs. Melander would move back to Minneapolis. A determined widow, she decided to stay, becoming an active member in the life of the church.

4 The Nutrition Program

In 1970, the church started sponsoring a Senior Nutrition Program, serving a hot lunch to senior citizens of Sunnyvale almost every day. Nellie Melander was a volunteer from almost the first day, and Henry and Ruby Stollenwerck volunteered every week. After Alzheimer's disease forced Henry to place Ruby in a nursing home, he started attending daily. Cycling from his house to church on a bicycle given to him as a retirement gift, he would sit at the same table with Nellie Melander and socialize with other participants.

We have seen that the church grew as Sunnyvale grew through the 1960s, being a vital part of the expanding city.

5 Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, we thank you for the church's growth during the 1960s and the impact that it continues to have today. Will you please help us to continue their vision as we minister to our members and the local community? Amen.

6 Closing Prayer

We close with a paraphrase of a prayer from the sixtieth anniversary of the church.

Most glorious God, we offer our thanksgiving for your unspeakable love and goodness. We thank you for founding this church and for the commitment of its ministers and members. We pray that you will continue your loving kindness toward us, that we may rejoice and be glad in you all of our days. Amen.

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