

Stidham United Methodist Church celebrates 100th anniversary

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Rev. David Inskeep speaks during service at Stidham United Methodist Church, in Lafayette, on Sunday, June 17, 2012. The church is observing its centennial celebration (1912-2012).

By Brent Drinkut/Journal & Courier



Bill Byers of Lafayette has been a member of Stidham United Methodist Church since 1946.



Written by
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Membership at the church runs in the family. His father and grandfather were members back in the 1920s.

“My folks didn’t send you, they brought you,” said 81-year-old Byers.

His fondest memories surround his decision to continue his family’s legacy by raising his own children in that church. “They were involved in the church all their lives, baptized here,” he said.

Byers recalls what it was like to attend the church in the 1940s. There were more teens but the same music. He knows because he sang in the choir.

“At that age, we were all in the choir,” he said. “We may not have been able to carry a tune, but we made joyful noise.”

The church’s history predates Byers’ recollections. This summer the church celebrates its 100th anniversary with summer and fall events.

Before the death of Jasper Stidham in 1912, the Quaker landowner left instructions to will \$10,000 to incorporate a church near Taylor Station. The first service was held in July 1912 in Union Township’s Consolidated School Building.

The small church, which still stands nestled in Shadeland surrounded by farmland and cornfields, was subsequently built by Joshua Chew, and Lafayette architect Charles Nicol was contracted for the job.

The design aesthetic has historical remnants, including wooden pews, a small choral chamber and floral motif stained glass windows. The windows and stained glass dome structure that highlights the pulpit were contributing factors to the church’s placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

The Rev. David Inskip said he believes the stained glass windows were helpful in keeping people focused during worship services. “I think they were able to come in, worship, and not be distracted by the outside.”

As a pastor in a long list of ministers who have served at the church, Inskip appreciates the history.

A picture of the church from the 1920s spoke to him when he first visited. It was a simple photograph of the building with dozens of Model T cars parked in front.

“That spoke to me because it was an era when everybody was the same,” he said. “You didn’t feel less than anybody else. You were all just trying to survive.”

Today in a congregation of about 90 members on an average Sunday, there are known differences between the haves and have nots.

But it doesn’t make a difference, Byers said. “No matter whether they are driving a Cadillac or a Model T, they still rub elbows.”