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## History of Embry Hills UMC

In 1961, one of Atlanta's growing areas was centered around the intersection of Chamblee-Tucker and Henderson Mill Roads in northeast DeKalb County. That fact did not escape the notice of the North Georgia Conference of the Methodist Church. Because this neighborhood was believed to have a higher percentage of Methodist families than any other location in Atlanta, the trustees of the conference's Atlanta East District had already purchased land for a prospective church in 1957. The 5.7-acre site on Henderson Mill Road cost \$10,000.

In 1961 came the appointment of a young pastor, the Rev. Robert Wolff, whose first priority was finding a meeting place for the prospective congregation. After securing space at Sequoyah Elementary School in Doraville, Wolff turned his attention to a search for people to join the new church. He began knocking on doors all over the community, and was buoyed by the response of people willing to help build the fledgling church.

On March 19, 1961, Embry Hills Methodist Church held its opening worship service with approximately six families in attendance. The altar was a table with a white tablecloth, and the first purchases were a registration book and a second-hand piano. Joan Peery, a charter member, recalls, "to get to Sequoyah Elementary School in the Northwoods subdivision, you had to drive on the narrow, two-lane Chamblee-Tucker Road. . . there were no gas stations, no grocery stores, no Embry Hills Shopping Center, no Northlake Mall, and no I-285." But the seeds had been planted and would bear fruit. In the weeks that followed, as other Methodist churches in the area furnished hymnals and Sunday School materials, the church was off and running.

It wasn't long before the first members joined in helping their minister knock on doors, and soon the necessary forty members signed a covenant that made Embry Hills Methodist Church an official member of the North Georgia Conference. Thus the way was paved for the 5.7 acres to be deeded over to the church, and for the Executive Committee of the District Boards of Missions and Church Extension to approve a call to the "1,000 Club" of the Atlanta East District. This club was made up of 1,000 people who agreed to give \$10 each to help start new churches in the district.

With a growing membership and property in hand, the members began making plans for the first phase of building. Almost a year to the day after their first meeting in the elementary school, ground was broken for the current chapel. The congregation bade farewell to Sequoyah for the first service in the new building in July, 1962.

As membership increased steadily, so did the need for an education building. That was completed in 1966, followed by the sanctuary in 1968. The most recent addition, a family life center, was added in 1987. Each of these additional facilities required a combination of sacrificial giving, strong faith and hard work, all accomplished in a spirit of love for the church.

Destined to grow along with the church, Embry Hills Kindergarten opened its doors September 4, 1963, with 22 children in three classes. Today, 16 teachers and assistants work with 118 children under the leadership of Sally Kramer and Adele Harrison. Embry Hills Kindergarten continues to serve the educational and spiritual needs of our culturally diverse community.

As the children's chorus so wisely teaches, "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is people." During the 40 years since its inception, Embry Hills UMC has been blessed with gifted ministers providing skilled leadership, as well as countless laypeople willing to take on huge responsibilities and weather many changes within the fellowship of believers. The "Re-Visioning" process, conducted in 1998-99, is but one recent example of the congregation focusing on the needs of the surrounding community and adapting its ministry to meet new challenges. During this time, the church looked seriously and practically at who we are both as the church of Jesus Christ and as a community of people living in the northeast corner of DeKalb County, Georgia.

Other important milestones recorded in Embry Hills UMC's "recent history" include the principal reduction campaign, initiated in 1999, which eliminated the church's debt of \$1.3 million. Faithful giving was augmented by numerous fund-raising projects, including several huge flea markets, annual barbecues spearheaded by the United Methodist Men and supported by the United Methodist Women, and others. It was a great day of celebration when the church burned its mortgage on May 16, 2004.

Through the years, the Embry Hills United Methodist congregation has become a "church family" in the truest sense of the word. Both longtime members and first-time visitors are welcomed warmly, and find comfort and strength for difficult times such as family losses, health crises, wars, recessions, and attacks on our country. But it

doesn't stop there. As followers of Christ, we also share in the joy of births, baptisms, weddings, and the strong ties of Christian friendship.

An excerpt from the Revision Task Force statement perhaps epitomizes the dual process of looking back and looking forward as we celebrate our 40+ years as a congregation: "When all is said and done, our efforts over the past year have been about something very simple, yet wondrous and divine. It is all about being the church of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is all about taking our turn in Christian service, here in this place at the turn of the millennium, and continuing the great story of God's mission in the world. The marvelous heritage in Christian ministry that is Embry Hills United Methodist Church continues with renewed energy and commitment.

-Dottie Coltrane and Fern Williams

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