

***Oak Meadow
United Methodist Church***

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Laity Notes

*by
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DOTTIE BURKETT...THANK YOU

On a spring day in 2001, some two weeks after Anna Cram began as pianist for Oak Meadow UMC, Reverend Emet Huntsman was heard to say, "I don't know what we are going to do about the choir." Upon hearing this, Dottie Burkett responded with, "I have directed choirs before, and if you want I could take over until you find someone else." As so often in a small church, and especially where volunteers are concerned, the temporary became permanent and Dottie remained our choir director until the end of 2004. She has now chosen to retire from this position, and we want to thank her for that which she has freely given us for nearly four years. Dottie has been a blessing to our church and we want to thank her appropriately.

Dorothy ("Dottie") Burkett was born to a Methodist family in Baltimore, the founding city of American Methodism. It was Baltimore that in 1784 a group of Wesley pastors took action at Lovely Lane Chapel to create a new and separate denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church. From the beginning Dottie and her older sister, Florence, accompanied their parents to church each Sunday, and among her earliest memories are those of singing in the choir. God gave her talent to sing and she taught herself to play the piano when she was eight because she wanted to be able to play "Indian Love Call," her favorite song. As a teenager her voice was first tested officially and it was discovered that she had a four-octave range, a highly unusual talent. If

pressed today, she would call herself an alto, but she has memories of a far wider voice range. With one exception, a slightly more than two year stint in Athens, Greece, Dottie shared her musical talent with congregations in Baltimore and Aberdeen Maryland, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, Arlington, Virginia and San Antonio, Texas.

This mobility was mandated by the military career of her husband, Gordon Burkett, whom she married in 1941, after first dating his younger brother as a preliminary to the real thing. It was concentrated primarily in a six year period between Gordon's return from fighting in Europe in 1945 and his assignment to the Pentagon in 1951. Gordon had grown up in Baltimore in a row house not far from Dottie's childhood home. Shortly after they married, he was called to active duty and later served in the European theatre of the war. After his return from Europe in 1945 and during the next six years, they moved from Baltimore to Aberdeen, from Aberdeen to Fort Huachuca, from Fort Huachuca back to Aberdeen, from Aberdeen to Athens, Greece, and from Athens to Arlington, where they would spend twenty years before moving to San Antonio. Two of their children, Hal (1943) and Bob (1944) were born before this flurry of movement, and another two, Susan (1946) and Bill (1947) were born during this flurry. All four children were born within a span of just under four years. When Gordon and Dottie set sail for Greece in 1949, their children were six, five, three and two years old.

In 1951 Gordon's military expertise in weapons landed him an assignment to the Pentagon. For two decades their movement ceased as they settled in Arlington, Virginia. Or at least Dottie's movement ceased, for the nature of Gordon's work necessitated much travel and Dottie found herself often acting as both mom and dad to their children. In Arlington their children grew from elementary school through high school graduation. Gordon and the military had found a fit, and he served for twenty years, retiring in 1961. An ordinance expert, he once produced such a well written field manual for the 45 automatic pistol that his critics did not change a single word, not even a comma. When he retired from the Pentagon in 1961 he was immediately hired by the government to utilize his extensive knowledge of weaponry. This work he continued until 1971, when he retired and moved with Dottie to San Antonio.

Work had brought Gordon to San Antonio a handful of times, and twice he brought Dottie here to see the city. She fell in love with San Antonio and there was no question where they would move after retirement. Dottie has remained active in the Methodist Church throughout her life and Gordon acted as Barnabas, an encourager both to Dottie and their children. Experience brought them to San Antonio, and upon their arrival friends quickly invited Dottie to Colonial Hills UMC.

With the children out of the nest, Dottie had more time for church. While at Colonial Hills she sang in the choir, often singing solos as she had done at every church she attended. She started a youth choir and at times, when the situation called for it, even wrote new verses for some songs. The youth choir move was a bold initiative which turned out to be a precursor for today's "praise" services because the choir had no pianist and was accompanied only by two young men playing guitars. The youth choir was a big success for a year, performing on a monthly basis inside the church and less frequently outside the church. Unfortunately, when Colonial Hills built their new sanctuary, the youth choir fell to the wayside. During the latter part of her decade at Colonial Hills UMC, Dottie grew to appreciate Reverend Del Brown, an associate pastor. "He was not the best preacher, but he was a very good pastor." When Reverend Brown moved to Oak Meadow UMC, Dottie shortly thereafter followed him.

Dottie joined Oak Meadow UMC in 1982, only a few years after our church was founded, and, as was her habit, she immediately joined the choir. She directed the Oak Meadow UMC choir on an ad hoc basis between 1982 and 2001, and for years served as music secretary. In addition to the church hymnal, the choir director would at times purchase additional songs. As secretary, Dottie created file cards and filed every sheet of music purchased, a collection amounting to some two hundred separate songs. Each of these she carefully filed for future use. At Oak Meadow too she occasionally penned an additional verse to a song. She also served as secretary to numerous church committees and in many ways acted as a voluntary church historian, collecting and filing all of the church newsletters, creating scrap books full of church information, and gathering together pictures. She has left a potential future church historian a sizeable collection of valuable original documents.

In the spring of 2001, Dottie was well prepared to become choir director. Initially thinking that this assignment would be on an ad hoc basis as before, she never shirked when it turned into a permanent position. Having taught herself to play the piano, to sing solos and to write words for songs, she was ready for the next step as choir director. She was familiar with on the job training. She was generous with her talent.

Her fondest memory of these past four years is the manner by which the choir accepted her directorship. Some choir directors favor music and others favor words. Dottie has a penchant for words over music, believing that music cannot make up for lost theology and meaning. This affinity she explained to the choir, and steered them consistently in that direction. Their ultimate acceptance was her reward.

Oak Meadow's fondest memory of Dottie is not only of the talent she brought to the task of choir director, but also the grace by which she served and her willingness to continue on a voluntary basis even though she was preceded and followed by individuals paid for the same effort.

Before the golden calf episode in the Book of Exodus, God laid out for Moses a blueprint for the Tabernacle. After the golden calf, Moses reported God's command that "everyone whose heart so moves him" shall voluntarily offer all of the material necessary for construction. Once the material was gathered together the next step was required: "And let all among you who are skilled come and make all that the LORD has commanded." (35:10) This freewill offering turned out to be more than was needed, and the Tabernacle was completed by voluntary hands.

When the moment came for a skilled choir director, Dottie stepped forth. During the period of our lean years, when we nearly lost our Church, Dottie continued on a voluntary basis without complaint. Dottie's freewill offering turned out to be more than was needed. Not only did we survive, we also sang, guided always by Dottie's grace. When the call came, Dottie's spirit was moved and her feet followed. For that our congregation will forever be deeply grateful.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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