

# *Highlights in History*

## **First Christian Church**

### **(Disciples of Christ)**

## **West Memphis, Arkansas**

The history of West Memphis' First Christian Church, though it has its origin in the national and state movement, actually began locally on January 12, 1956. A small group of people led by Dr. Frank C. Rustemeyer, pastor of Highland Christian Church, Memphis, Tennessee; Ira D. Crewson, Executive Secretary of the Arkansas Christian Missionary Society; and Rev. C. A. Pruitt, pastor of First Christian Church, Jonesboro, Arkansas, met for the purpose of organizing a local church.

The first church service was held January 22, 1956 at West Memphis Community House on Missouri, a site now occupied by the Boys' Club. Rev. Frank Beach conducted services for 24 people on this date. He was to be called as the church's first minister.

During the first few months of 1956 the congregation found itself without a permanent meeting place. The community house, Fellowship Hall of First Methodist Church, and Wonder City Café were some of the first meeting places. For a time, the church even met at Citizens Funeral Home when it was on Missouri street. This led to the start of a building fund, with its first donation being made Easter, 1956.

The first building was purchased in November, 1957. A house was purchased on Belvedere at Balfour. First Christian Church now had its first permanent meeting place. As this was only a three bedroom dwelling, the church quickly outgrew it and began looking for more space.

On February 17, 1966, papers were signed for the purchase of the Nazarene Church at the corner of South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street and Polk. The first church service was held there on Father's Day, June 19, 1966.

The church purchased 3.19 acres of land at 1015 Balfour, its current location, on December 3, 1978. Groundbreaking was on August 30, 1980, and the first worship service in the new facility was held on March 29, 1981. The second phase of construction was begun and completed in 1987, which gave the addition of a sanctuary and baptistry to the church facility.

On March 1, 2009, First Christian Church welcomed its first female minister, Reverend Jill Westbrook, and so begins the next 50 years of history.....