

A History of Suntree United Methodist Church 1983-2024



In the beginning, the land belonged to God, who covered it with pine trees and palmetto bushes sprinkled among the wetlands that provided fresh water for the animals and water birds. As early as 4,500 B.C., God brought men and women to live on the bountiful land along the shores of the river that separated the mainland from the barrier islands which protect it from the strong sea winds. By the 16th Century, the Ais Indians lived off the fish they caught in the river and the deer they hunted inland. In 1513, Juan Ponce de Leon explored here as he made his journey up the Florida coast. Later, white and African American families settled in the wild and inhospitable area, seeking fortune and freedom.

In 1855, the Florida Legislature named Brevard County in honor of Judge Theodore Washington Brevard, great-grandson of a Huguenot orphan who fled France rather than renounce his Protestant beliefs. From the 16th century until the early 1960s, central Brevard County was still largely inhospitable.

In 1962, a development group bought 3000 acres that a decade later became the Planned Unit Development called Suntree. The opening of the Wickham Road exit off I-95 in 1965 brought more residents and by 1980, the community comprised about 600 homes. The Suntree Country Club officially opened on July 4, 1975.

It may have been in the clubhouse of the Suntree Country Club – nobody remembers for sure – where a group of men including Bob Carlton, Bill Cole, George Gnann, Lloyd Nobles and Charlie Wolfe decided that the new community needed a Methodist church. The nearest church was fifteen miles away. They contacted the United Methodist Florida Conference about starting a church in Suntree.

In 1981, under the leadership of District Superintendent Dr. Ed Dinkins, the Melbourne District purchased 4.2 acres from the Suntree Corp. in the still-rural area along Wickham Road, a two-lane path that ran just over ten miles north from Melbourne, then curved west to connect to I-95. The property at the corner of Waelti Road cost \$58,000 and nestled the church site into the Suntree community.

In October of 1982, the Rev. Kenneth Dunn began a door-to-door survey of the community, and in January of 1983 he organized a “gathering meeting” in the Cabana Room of the Suntree Country Club. Forty people attended. “We were united with a goal to establish our church,” remembers Patty Rexrode. Speaker at the meeting was Dr. Glenn Quam, Associate Pastor at Christ-by-the-Sea United Methodist Church in Vero Beach. Dr. Quam and his wife, Vivian, sang a duet of “He Touched Me.”



Rev. Kenneth Dunn

The Rev. Dunn was appointed interim pastor and on Sunday, Jan. 30, 1983. The first church worship service was held at the Brevard Wildlife Center on Wickham Road near I-95 on the site where the McDonald's now sits. The Wildlife Center treated and housed injured animals and birds and notes from that time recall that in the training room, there was space for 75 to 80 theater-type seats; the overflow sat on a cot and boxes. The



Outdoor Church at the Wildlife Center

doors to the un-air-conditioned building were left open, and peacocks, turtles and other ‘patients’ at the center often paraded by the doors during the service. Church attendees walked narrow planks across a muddy ditch to get to the building. Worshipers shared 50 used hymnals donated by the First United Methodist Church, Vero Beach. Jugs of water were brought in for a coffee hour held after the service. Sometimes following the service, rangers would take

worshippers on tours of the wildlife center. Soon, the ranger's office in the back of the training room became a Sunday School room, where Patty Rexrode taught the first Sunday School class of five children, age three to 12, and a tarantula.



Dr. Glenn Quam at the Wildlife Center

On **Easter Sunday, April 3, 1983**, Dr. Glenn Quam took over as the first appointed pastor. Early music included Phil Sabelli on his accordion and Dr. Quam on his banjo. Soon, William and Cay Cole donated a new Spinet piano, and Norma Perry became the pianist and soloist. Ushers counted the money in the collection plates in the back of the room after the service and some remembered the frustration of never getting the same amount twice. Sometimes, they would give up and let the bank figure it out.

On May 1, Suntime United Methodist Church was chartered at a 4PM ceremony at the Suntime Country Club.

During that month, the first potluck dinner was held at the



Dr. Ed Dinkins at the Charter Service

Suntime Fire Station and the first Vacation Bible School was held with 50 children and workers in attendance.

With the arrival of summer, the church worship services moved to the Sherwood Elementary School cafeteria.

The school was air-conditioned and although the



Sherwood Elementary 1983

elementary school chairs were not comfortable, attendees were grateful to have a place to meet, recalls Billie McElroy.

Charlie Wolfe and Bob Perry would break down

the school's tables and set up chairs on Saturdays. Carl Cortner began a choir with six people. Dave Fritz played the organ. Dorothy Fritz made coffee. Jim Shafer led an adult Sunday School class. Patty Rexrode still taught



Sunday School at Sherwood Elementary

her Sunday School class for children and Vivian Quam started a class for teens. Every Sunday, Bob and Patty Rexrode would bring play pens, a crib and toys for a nursery.

By the time of the first Charge Conference in October 1983, with its spiritual foundation firm, the church recorded those who made up its human foundation. They were:

Members of the Administrative Council
 Nelson Hamilton, *Chairman*
 Bill Latimer Norma Perry
 Bob Carlton Bill Cole
 Floyd Dickerson Steve Greer
 George Gnann Russell Lunnen
 John Harris Fred Nehrbas
 Chuck Huseman Wilmott Pray
 Malcolm Stubblefield Vivian Quam
 Ann Stubblefield Dee Blume
 Bob Rexrode Phil Sabelli
 Judy Tom Torry Visnich
 Bob Wilbur Lloyd Nobles
 Linda Owen Ralph Frazier
 Bob Perry Ray Withers
 Gertrude Blount Yvonne Sabelli
 Jack Johnston Charles Wolfe
 Beverly Wolfe

Age-level Coordinators
 Terry Eastwood, Family Ministries
 Linda Greer, Children's Ministries
 Linda Owen, Youth Ministries
 Kay Breiner, Adult Ministries.

1983 COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Staff-Parish Relations Committee
 Bill Latimer, chairman; Mary Louise Nobles, Bill Cole, Phil Sabelli, Doy Hansen, Sophie Bettien, Wilmott Pray, Beverly Wolfe, Chuck Huseman

Finance Committee
 Bob Carlton, Chairman; Steve Greer, Marie Carlton, Phil Sabelli, John Harris, George Gnann, Bob Rexrode, Nelson Hamilton, Marney Greenwald and Russell Lunnen

Board of Trustees
 Joe Wickham, Lynn Lunnen, Bill Simpkins, Bill Cole, Ann Stubblefield, Judy Tom, Lloyd Nobles, Les Luehrs, Nelson Hamilton

Lay members of the Annual Conference
 Harriet Simpkins
 Jim Shafer, alternate.

1983

Work Areas Chairpersons

Rosette Huseman
Inter-Religious Concerns
 Doy Hansen
Church & Society
 Patty Rexrode
Education
 Jim & Snow Shafer
Evangelism
 Mary Wasson
Higher Education & Campus Ministry
 Vivian Quam
Missions
 Marney Greenwald
Stewardship
 Cay Cole
Worship

The Council on Ministries

Bob Rexrode, *Chairman*
 Jacquie Kurtz
Youth
 Linda Owen
Young Adults

Patty Rexrode, *Church School Superintendent*
 Dr. Dennis Freeland
Health & Welfare Ministries

Beth Arthaud
Communications

Phil Sabelli
District Steward

Rosette Huseman and Ken Mitchell
Church Historians

Linda Owen
Membership Secretary

Nominations & Personnel

Dr. Glenn Quam,
 Bob Carlton,
 Mary Louise Nobles
 Chuck Huseman
 Dr. William Cole

Charter Members

Beth Arthaud, Richard Arthaud, Sophie Bettien, Connie Biscoe, Gertrude Blount, Dee Blum, Robert Carlton, Marie Carlton, Dr. William Cole, Cay Cole, Jean Cutter, Edith Daynard, Floyd Dickerson, Mildred Dickerson, Ralph Frazier, Eleanor Frazier, Dr. Dennis Freeland, Sheri Freeland, George Gnann, Ann Gnann, Steve Greer, Linda Greer, Greg Rue Greer, Marney Greenwald, Nelson Hamilton, Patsy Hamilton, Doy Hanson, John Harris, Syble Harris, Charles Huseman, Rosette Huseman (associate member), Stanley Johnston, Marge Johnston, Jacquie Kurtz, Bill Latimer, Barbara Latimer, Russell Lunnen, Lynn Lunnen, Billie McElroy, Fred Nehrbas, Sandra Nehrbas, Lloyd Nobles, Mary Louise Nobles, Tim Owen, Linda Owen, Lisa Owen, Blossom Ost, Louise Parmer, Norma Perry, Robert Perry, Wilmot Pray, Evelyn Pray, Vivian Quam, Kathy Quam, Robert Rexrode, Patricia Rexrode, Sandra Rossman, Alice Reed, Kelly Rue, Brannon Rue, Phil Sabelli, Yvonne Sabelli, Oscar Saunders, Elizabeth Saunders, Malcomb Stubblefield, Ann Stubblefield, Judith Tom, Tyna Tyre, Torry Visnich, Robert Wilbur, Anna Wilbur, Ray Withers, Beverly Wolfe, Charles Wolfe.

Torry Visnich and Snow Shafer started a SUMC United Methodist Women's (UMW) group, which met in members' homes. A SUMC United Methodist Men's group also began, meeting in restaurants and sometimes, Bob Rexrode recalls, in the 19th Hole bar at the Suntime Country Club.

Pruitt Insurance Co. donated office space for the church so Dr. Quam could have a desk and committees would have a place to meet. A building committee was formed to plan for a church building. Members were Chuck Huseman, chairman; Charles Wolfe, Malcolm Stubblefield, Bob Perry, Bob Wilbur, Fred Nehrbas, Ray Withers, Judy Tom and Yvonne Sabelli. In August, Chuck Huseman presented plans for Phase I, the worship center. Torry Visnich, president of the UMW, pledged the UMW would buy cabinets and furnishings for the church kitchen. At the time of the Charge Conference, plans were in place for the concrete foundation of the church. Almost \$18,000 had been raised for the building fund.



Building Plans

By December 1983, the church was in full fellowship mode. "It was an exciting time," Patty Rexrode recalls. A tight bond existed among the members of the new church. "We were never a typical United Methodist Church,



**1983 Christmas Service
at Suntime Country Club**

and we took great pride in our uniqueness. Every Sunday was like a family reunion."

That Christmas, Beth and Dick Arthaud arranged "Golf Cart Caroling" for the Suntime neighborhood. A Christmas Social was held at Christine's Restaurant on US1. A Christmas Candlelight Service was held with Lutherans in the Suntime Country Club Cabana Room.

By the end of 1983, the church had 105 members. Linda Owen and Laura Nichols were volunteer staff for Dr. Quam. Nelson Hamilton was Administrative Board Chairman; Bob Rexrode was Council on Ministries Chairman; Steve Greer was church treasurer; Phil Sabelli was Lay Leader; Tim Owen was Finance Chairman and Marie Carlton was Financial Secretary.



**Dr. Ed Dinkins, Rev. Ken
Dunn, Dr. Glenn Quam,
and Joe Wickham**

As **1984** began, final plans were being put in place for a church building. On March 11, members drove golf carts and brought lawn chairs to the site at 7200 N. Wickham Road for ground-breaking ceremonies. County Commissioner, Joe Wickham – for whom Wickham Rd was named – joined the building committee and many of the attendees in turning a shovel of dirt. Dr. Glenn Quam received a plaque for his guidance in starting the church. Members returned to the Wildlife Center one last time to hold a potluck supper.



1984 Groundbreaking

Church ministries began to blossom and grow. A hospital in Zaire became the first mission project. There were 24 in the children's department and 9

in the youth department. Church membership reached 150. As 1984 ended, members purchased and donated folding tables, chairs, pew Bibles and hymnals. Donations of a Communion Set, an altar, stained glass windows, Christian and American flags, an office credenza and office chairs were received. The new church building was almost complete.



First Suntree UMYF



7200 N. Wickham Rd.

Even before there was a church building, SUMC UMW held a rummage sale at the Azan Shriner Temple on Eau Gallie Blvd. This event would evolve into the annual Christmas Bazaar at the church with top local artists and crafters raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to support the church and many outreach ministries.

In January of **1985**, the congregation celebrated its first Sunday in our new building as the youth processed with the choir carrying the altar cross, Bible and candles brought from the school. On February 17, 1985, Bishop Earl G. Hunt Jr. of the Florida United Methodist Annual Conference, consecrated the church at a 3:30PM service, followed by a 5:30PM potluck supper. The building gave itself a baptism of sorts when a water pipe burst and flooded the choir room. Bob Wilbur rescued the carpet with a wet-vac.



"The kitchen was a Godsend," recalls Billie McElroy. In addition to the kitchen, the building consisted of an all-purpose room where the congregation met, three offices, a choir room and bathrooms. "Then we looked around and realized there was no place for Sunday School." So, Patty Rexrode taught her Sunday School classes in the kitchen, and Vivian Quam taught the youth in the pastor's office. Planning began immediately for a Christian Education wing. Rick Kendust designed the plan and Les Lehrs led the effort to make it a reality.

The Nagawiecki family donated a wooden cross to hang over the altar after the loss of their child. This cross has come to represent the faith of the congregation and hangs in the front of the worship center.

Dick Arthaud, president of the United Methodist Men, and Ann Stubblefield, president of the United Methodist Women, both announced their groups would begin that month to meet in the new church building. Since both groups met on the evening of the third Thursday of the month, there was some speculation as to how that was going to work out! It did!



Suntree UMW



First Easter egg hunt

On Easter 1985, the church held its first egg hunt followed by an Easter Service attended by 200 people. The church continued to add ministries: Phil Sabelli and Howard Parker started "Top 40", a social group for seniors and SUM Company, a social group of younger couples began.

Choirs for children and youth were organized by Jean Meredith. Bible studies based on the New Media Bible Series began. Karen McLinden and Bruce Mitchell became the first couple to marry in the church on August 31, 1985. The first Christmas Bazaar was held that year and two Candlelight Services were held Christmas Eve. The year ended with 217 members and the news that their pastor would be leaving the church.



Joni Van Kley's booth at a Christmas Bazaar

In early **1986**, a parsonage committee was formed to find an official church residence. On June 11, the Quams left SUMC for a church in St. Petersburg. The new pastor would be Dr. Jeffrey Hoy. He and his wife Ann, and children Tiffany and Jeffrey, moved into the church parsonage at 642 Casa Grande Drive. In 1986, Suntree United Methodist Church had its own Baby Boom, with nine babies born into the church family: Megan White, Matthew Hoyman, Jay Russell, Mark Wheeler, Garrett Garner, Evan Fischbeck, Andrew Hoy, Nathan Ellyson and Rebekah Anderson.

As church membership grew, so did Christian outreach ministries: UMW outfitted 13 children at the Florida Children's Home with school clothes; the youth group raised money for service projects. A video teaching series, "The Care and Maintenance of a Good Marriage" was begun. In October, SUMC offered two Sunday morning worship services, with Sunday School in between. There were now three adult Sunday School classes. The children's and youth Sunday Schools had outgrown the kitchen and pastor's office, so they met across Waelti Road in the Suntree Early Learning Center.

1987 began with a new theme of "Forward with Faith." Planning continued for the Christian Education wing, and plans were started for a new church parsonage. Ministries and support groups were born: A Lay Witness Mission Weekend; "Learning to Live Without," a support group for those who had lost loved ones; District Women's Day Apart for UMW; spring retreat for the United Methodist Youth Fellowship at Life for Youth Ranch in Vero Beach. On Easter Sunday, April 19, there were overflow crowds for two services.



**Joan and Warren
Seekins with Jeff Hoy
building a Habitat**

In the second half of 1987, the church made its commitment to Habitat for Humanity; a weekly women's Bible study group was formed; six classes of Vacation Bible School were held; and "Little Lambs," a mother's morning out program, was created for preschoolers and moms. The loan was approved for the Christian Education wing, and construction of the parsonage in Spanish Wells begun. Patty Rexrode proposed the idea of a church library which was established through the efforts of Lynn Fishbeck. At Christmas, the church presented a Live

Nativity Scene on the lawn, with shepherds tending their flocks of grazing sheep and wise men approaching the cradle of the Baby Jesus. Two Christmas Eve Candlelight services were held.

The theme for **1988** was "Walking in the Word," emphasizing the importance of the Bible in everyday living. Bob Rexrode spearheaded a One Year Bible Club. A "Walk Through the Bible" seminar was held, and members were encouraged to donate a pew Bible during Lent. Community service projects increased and grew: Church members participated in Meals on Wheels, donated to the UM Children's Home, sponsored a Cub Scout troop, and supported The Haven shelter. Billie McElroy joined the church staff.

On Palm Sunday, church members brought shovels to break ground for the Christian Education wing. That Holy Week the church observed its first Seder Supper. Attendance at Easter services had outgrown the church building, so two services were held at the King Center for the Performing Arts, beginning an almost 20-year tradition of community outreach at Easter. Ribbon cutting for the new Christian Education wing was August 28, 1988. Ray Harrison, District Superintendent, held a consecration service.



**Jeff Hoy preaching at
the King Center**

During the next few years, church members continued to develop ministries as they saw need: Top 40 became TNT (Time and Talent) social group for seniors; parents with older children started the Empty Nest Sunday School Class; when Ann Stubblefield lost her husband, she gathered a group of widows who became the Suntree Older Kids (SOKs) Sunday School class.

United Methodist Women created interest groups called Circles, and they were named Ruth, Dorcas, Lydia, and Esther. Eventually, some of the circles became small groups. Small groups for women, men and couples became a way for the church to keep the bonds tight as the membership grew. Dorcas Circle has raised thousands of dollars through their bi-annual Attic Treasures sales to raise money for outside charities.

A Wonderful Wednesday program of dinner and education was started on Wednesday nights. Singles and divorced members organized social and support groups; a team of mission workers provided supplies in Homestead following Hurricane Andrew and the second Habitat for Humanity house was completed. Volunteers started the Stephen Ministry, and in the fall of 1988, the Disciple program was started with 2 classes which quickly grew to well over 100 people enrolled each year. Disciple continued for many years and many of the folks in active ministry today claim their Disciple experience as a catalyst to becoming more involved in the work of the church. Preschool started in **1991**.



**Corky Calhoun and Bob Rexrode
at
Disciple Retreat**



**1000th Member,
Jeanenne Norwood.**

In **1992**, Jeanenne Norwood became the 1000th member of SUMC; and a youngster named Clarence Van Ens joined the staff as Minister of Pastoral Care.

In **1993**, as the church prepared to celebrate its 10th anniversary, members learned that Dr. Hoy would be leaving to lead Southside UMC in Jacksonville. In June, SUMC welcomed Gary and Judy Spencer and children Kirby and Katie from the 1st United Methodist Church of Winter Park. The Rev. Spencer preached his first service on June 13 but already had gotten to know the heart of SUMC: he was diagnosed with a kidney stone immediately after arriving in Brevard County, and was overwhelmed with care, concern, prayers and food from his new congregation.



**Ann & Jeff Hoy lighting the
candles for the 10th anniver
celebrating SUMC's 10th
Anniversary.**

As the Spencer's arrived at SUMC, plans were well underway for a new church building at a new location. Twenty-one acres of land were purchased for a new



Cross Tower going up

Worship and Christian Life Center to seat 650, space for nursery, pre-school and more, with a total area of 32,678 square feet. The Rev. Spencer led the groundbreaking service February 13, **1994**.



**1994 Ground Breaking:
Pastors Clarence Van Ens
& Gary Spencer, and
Bob White.**

The Cross Tower was the first thing to go up on the new site. On December 11, 1994, at the end of the 11AM service, Rev. Spencer led the flock in an Altar Cross Procession, carrying the cross from the old church to the new church campus. The first service was held on December 18.



**Carrying the cross from
the old church to the new**

A new Praise & Worship service was added in **1995**. There were traditional services at 8:15 am & 11 am and



7400 N. Wickham Road

a contemporary service at 9:30 am. At Easter there were three services. The contemporary music was led by volunteer singers, with Music Director John Anderson on his keyboard & midi player ("a band in a box"). As the service developed, musicians were added to the group and the band went to all live music in 2000.

The Suntree Youth Fellowship (UMYF) had begun holding their own summer youth camps in 1991 at locations around the state and in **1996** they were lead in music by the popular Christian rock group, Jars of Clay, followed by FFH the following years. A significant number of Suntree's young people have committed to full-time Christian ministry. One example is SUMC-youth-turned-university-professor Philip Tallon. Dr. Tallon is the author of "The Absolute Basics of the Christian Faith", the curriculum for SUMC's 2018 confirmands. Other former SUMC youth who have gone into Christian Ministry include Shannon Nehrbas, Eric Swank, William Kendust. Stephen Jackson, Alan Jackson, Casey Hickman Mursten and Bryan Geer.



Church membership continued to grow, fellowship groups to flourish, support groups to organize, and ministries to increase: Service projects benefited Daily Bread, Methodist Children's Home, Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, Resurrection Ranch, Salvation Army shelters and more.

In April **1997**, the SUMC UMYF voted to change the name of the group to L.O.F.T (Life Outreach to Teens). The youth continued their tradition of service, visiting nursing homes, working at Daily Bread and many other service projects, both locally and on trips to work where needed.



**Joel Lusz and youth
Fun in the Sun**

In **1998**, the Memorial Garden was consecrated at the Cross Tower.

In **2000**, SUMC entered the new century with a new youth pastor, Joel Lusz who traveled from Palm Beach Community Church where he also served as youth pastor. He was joined by his wife Angie and their daughters, Koral and Willow. He came with

a commitment to minister to the SUMC young people and their families. Right away he started the Fun in the Sun Fundraiser which raises on average about \$25,000 to fund the church's youth ministry.



**Groundbreaking for the New
Sanctuary**

As the church grew, it was determined more worship space was needed. A new



**Contemporary Praise
Team**

sanctuary was planned for a more traditional worship setting with plans for a future pipe organ.

Groundbreaking for the new Sanctuary was held February 18, **2001**. Later that year, the church welcomed hundreds of worshipers and mourners to a special prayer service on September 12, 2001, for those who were lost in the tragic events of the previous day.

In **2003** the first "IMPAKT Youth Service" was launched upstairs with 183 people on the first Sunday. It was about 2007, under the leadership of John and Terri Hill, that the IMPAKT service was integrated into the contemporary service in the worship center which became the "Gathering."

With the larger congregation, some of the connections between members, which is so important in the life of the church, were lost so a new initiative to involve members in small covenant groups was started. Small Groups eventually evolved into Life Groups but continue to give members a close-knit community where they can build friendships and grow in their spiritual lives.

Members, both individually and as Life Groups, are involved in many community and international ministries and services such as the Daily Bread, Family Promise of Brevard, Foster Caregivers, Stephen Ministry and Compassion International.

It was about this time that members Nat and Mary Lou Natto lead our church into a partnership with our sister church, El Redentor, in Cuba. Several missions and new churches have spurred from El Redentor and still today, we send mission groups each year to deliver donations from our congregation and give support to our brothers and sisters in Cuba.

The new educational wing allowed the expansion of Son City, the children's Sunday School Program, and has also permitted us to expand the SUM School to include VPK and Kindergarten. It now serves 230 children with 39 teachers in 18 classrooms. Summer programs, VBS and MADD week provide spiritual development for the children.

Dr. Gary Spencer, who received his doctorate in 1996, and his family learned they were to return to the Orlando area in early 2003. In June, SUMC welcomed the Revs. John and Terri Hill. The Hills would bring the church another "first" – a married couple as co-senior pastors.

Both Revs. Hill brought new programs and ideas to SUMC, including Theology at the Tavern, a community outreach series, and both taught, enriching the Journey program (formerly Wonderful Wednesdays) with their classes.

While Suntree UMC was a praying church from the beginning, a regular prayer group began to meet in the small chapel to pray for the needs of members in our congregation and community, our church, our nation and the world in which we live. The Intercessory Prayer Chain lists the specific requests from the congregation.



Robert Lamb leads the traditional service choir

By November of 2003, SUMC offered six services on Sunday mornings:

- 7am Communion service in the chapel
- 8am Traditional service
- 9:15m Contemporary Service in the Worship Center
- 9:15am IMPAKT service for youth in the Youth Wing
- 11am Traditional Service in the Sanctuary
- 11am Contemporary Service in the Worship Center

In February of **2004**, a 9:30 am Traditional Service in the Sanctuary was added, and Fellowship Time between worship services was begun so that worshipers could gather for coffee and juice on the "front porch" of both the Sanctuary and the Worship Center.

In late August of 2004, Hurricane Frances came ashore in Central Florida and left damage and destruction throughout Brevard County. Before residents had time to take a breath, yet another storm, Hurricane Jeanne, came ashore. The church building sustained water and wind damage. But again, as thousands in the county were without electricity and some without homes, SUMC put the spirit of God and the teachings of Jesus above all. The church opened its doors to serve hot meals to members of



SUMC offers hot food and free ice to the 2004 hurricane victims.

the community. Faithful church members called elderly members of the congregation and those who lived alone, and then dispatched to help those who needed it. Dozens traveled around the county to help, including providing food and assistance to homeless migrant workers in Fellsmere.

Joel Lusz, youth pastor, met with 12 adults and students in the summer and fall of **2008** and discussed doing more in terms of missions. Joel stated, "Amber Carroll and I prayed long and hard about our ministry becoming more 'Disciple



**SUMC Youth
Missionaries in Jamaica**

oriented' and less 'Fun and Crazy' oriented around 2008" (though there is still that fun and crazy element in the program). The shift took about a year, but it caught on. Their first trip to a poor community in Jamaica was in June **2009**. They took 24 missionaries. Brevard Mission Week started in 2009, and by 2017 had close to 200 people involved, serving over 4,000 hours helping 28 organizations in the area.



**Pastor Terri at Cuba's
2008 annual district
conference**

In **2010** Amber Carroll, Jan Janicki and Pat Hendrickson began planning Oasis, a new women's ministry for spiritual enrichment. Oasis has become a very successful ministry affecting many women's lives.



**SUMC ladies enjoy
fellowship at OASIS**

In **2011**, Pastor Terri and Ginna Beckett launched e3, which stood for Loving God, Loving Each Other, and Loving our Neighbors in Extraordinary ways. This was done in combination with Celebrate Jesus, a mission-related focus comprised of three aspects, Neighborhood Prayer Visits, Intentional Acts of Kindness and Community Service Projects. Additional outreach initiatives included Movie on the Lawn, a July 4th picnic and patriotic concert and a Halloween Trunk or Treat, most of which continue today.

In **2015**, the Hills moved on to their beloved Key West and to serve in that district before retirement. In July, Senior Pastor Rev. Annette Stiles Pendergrass and Associate Pastor Rev. Rob Tucker arrived. Pastor Annette quickly endeared herself to the congregation and came with a passion to lead the church to realize a vision for the future. Pastor Rob was immediately thrown into the role of a pastor in the church and quickly endeared himself to the congregation through meaningful, heartfelt sermons. Rob moved SUMC into the technology age through regular podcasts of both the Gathering and Traditional worship services and his style of preaching made those listening on the podcasts a part of the worship experience.

In **2016**, Suntime UMC's women participated in the A.B.I.D.E., a national conference organized as a ministry to "...see women transformed and walk in the freedom that they already have as they encounter God in a personal way." The success of that conference lead the church to continue participating every year.

In 2016, the Blue Sky Community Garden was established where volunteers raise produce for local soup kitchens and other community needs.

In **2017**, the church acquired pipes for the sanctuary organ. Their installation in 2018 brought to fulfillment the vision from almost 20 years earlier when the sanctuary was being planned.



SUMC Abide Women's Conference - May 20, 2017

The youth began Church Mission Week (CMW), which later became Brevard Mission Week (BMW) where youth spend a week completing projects around the church and within our county. The youth ministry averaged about 60+ students at LOFT (high school ministry) and about the same at EDGE (middle school ministry) each week.



Sanctuary Pipe Organ

As we entered the 2017 Advent season, Pastor Annette introduced our first Blue Christmas service to bring the message of remembrance and hope to people in our church and community who had or are experiencing loss in the midst of a season of joy and excitement.

A 4D Five Year Vision Plan was developed in 2017 and 2018 by pastors, staff and members. It is the church's hope and prayer that God will enable members to carry out the mission and vision to shape Suntime UMC, the community and the world.

During the summer of **2018** we said goodbye to pastor Rob Tucker and his wife Molly Shoulta Tucker, who left to serve in Owensboro, Kentucky. At the same time, SUMC welcomed pastor Allee Willcox as our new associate pastor, who didn't miss a beat endearing herself to the congregation. We also said goodbye to William (Willie) Kendust who grew up in our church, assisted Joel Lusz with the youth program and was a leader in the Gathering



Pastor Allee Willcox



Mike Mayes

worship service. Willie felt the call into the ordained ministry and left for seminary. Mike Mayes joined us as our new Director of Worship and Arts.

Over the years, there have been several men's study groups meeting at different times to accommodate various schedules. As part of the 4D plan,

Augie Allen spearheaded an intentional effort to expand men's opportunities to bring together men of different ages and backgrounds to create a strong men's community within the church.

Suntree entered a partnership with Harbor City Elementary School by providing backpacks full of school supplies to this economically depressed school and supporting the teachers with treats throughout the year.



SUMC's vision, to be followers of Jesus who love God, love each other, and love our neighbors in extraordinary ways, is lived out as it continues to minister to the members of the congregation, the neighborhood and the world. SUMC serves as a lifeline for those who are experiencing some of life's greatest challenges through programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), support groups for people dealing with grief, cancer and other congregational care needs.

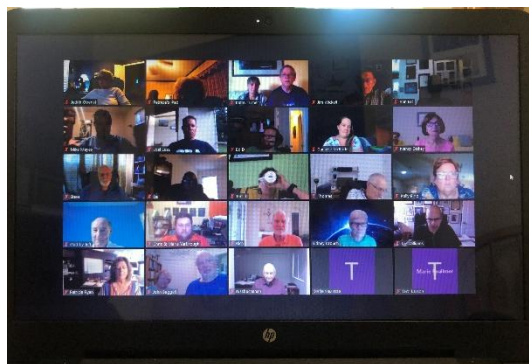
During the 35th Anniversary Celebration on May 20, 2018, SUMC members recognized that the church is still young. What 74 charter members started in 1983 has grown into a source of ministry, support, companionship, education and service, for thousands who come to worship God.

In **2019**, a Fresh Expressions Committee was formed to explore how Suntree could meet new people, in new places, and in new ways. The team began to brainstorm what it could mean to initiate new Fresh Expressions of church here in our community. Unfortunately, with the start of COVID in 2020, much of the activities on this Committee were put on hold.

Also in 2019, SUMC member Augie Allen, was confirmed at the Annual Conference as a licensed local pastor and continued to serve our church as the Director of Outreach, enabling us to steer more energy in living into our statement of loving our neighbors in extraordinary ways.



Pastor Augie & his parents



Church Council Meeting via Zoom

2020 started off like any other year, with lots of plans and excitement around spreading God's love within our church and in the community, but things drastically changed when the whole world was impacted by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. March 15 was the last in-person worship service until August 9th, when we met again for in-person worship, at 25% capacity.

The staff and worship leaders quickly adapted to doing ministry amid a pandemic. Electronic communications greatly increased, as the church stayed in touch with the congregation through email, pre-taped & live streamed worship services, phone calls and various updates and devotion videos on the website and Facebook. Face masks and social distancing became the norm until vaccines became available in early 2021.

Deana Massey-Dunlap (Assistant Director of Congregational Care), Staci Plonsky (Director of Outreach Ministry), and Tanner Smith (Director of Communications and Media) joined the SUMC staff, and the 4-stage Grow Discipleship Launch Sequence was launched in August designed to increase spiritual growth through acts of the Head (training), Hands (participation), and Heart (radical spirituality).



The need for social distancing also brought about drive-through celebrations for the class of 2020 high school seniors and to say goodbye to Pastor Augustus (Augie) Allen, his wife Mary and their four children, who was appointed to his own church, First UMC Alachua.

Drive Through Nativity

Christmas time also looked a little different with a two-day drive through nativity experience, where over 800 cars experienced Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, and a pre-Christmas Eve outdoor worship service attended by 300+ people.



Pre-Christmas Eve Outdoor Service



Throughout the year God enabled and empowered us to continue to “Be the Church” amid incredible challenges.

While **2021** was not yet COVID-free, people started coming back to in-person worship and activities once they had been vaccinated. The Brevard Justice Ministry was chartered, with Suntree UMC being one of the participating churches and Pastor Allee Willcox appointed as a Board Member. The first area of focus was affordable housing for everyone in our community.

SUMC hosted several events on our campus including the July 4th Stars & Stripes, Trunk or Treat in October, the Christmas Bazaar, which raised over \$7000 for missions and the 2nd Annual Nativity Drive-Thru, where over 1000 people heard and experienced the gospel story of Jesus' birth.

Instead of providing backpacks full of school supplies for our Harbor City



Barb Fernandez at the Christmas Bazaar

Elementary School Ministry, money was collected to provide 384 \$35 gift cards

for each student so that they could enjoy the experience of back-to-school shopping with their parents. Suntree UMC was named Partner of the Year at Harbor City Elementary, and Faith Based Partner of the Year by the Child Abuse Prevention Task Force of Brevard County.



The Give Mission Essential highlight was the Finish Strong Campaign, which was to reduce the mortgage debt of \$2.2 million. The campaign raised \$1.1+ million in commitments over the next 3 years, and First Fruits Sunday, held on June 6, resulted in \$354,030 being collected upfront.

Unfortunately, the TNT (Time 'n Talent) Senior Outreach Program and Dorcas Circle, a group of ladies who joined together using their spiritual gifts in service to church and community, both disbanded after participants did not return after COVID.

The staff welcomed Pastor Mike Mayes as a licensed local pastor and Pastor Allee Willcox, who was ordained in full connection as an elder, both in the United Methodist Church.

The year **2022** generated some new and improved missions. The Brevard Justice Ministry changed its name to BRIGHT (Brevard Righteously Igniting Good Hope Today) and hired Brittany Pendergrass as the Lead Community Organizer. In addition to affordable housing, the team added educational



improvements to its agenda. GriefShare (which replaced the Grief Journey Support Group) held two 13-week sessions for anyone dealing with grief. The Caring Congregation Ministry (which replaced the Stephen Ministry Program) was launched in March 2022, with a team of six who customized the program to SUMC's needs. Seventeen Care Ministers, who went through training, were commissioned at worship in December 2022 and are now actively caring for our congregants in many ways.

The First Annual Community Christmas Concert was held on December 11 featuring holiday arrangements from local musicians and ensembles from Brevard Symphony Orchestra, Viera Dance Conservatory and our own SUMC Music Ministry. These pieces were performed between live drama segments portraying faith's power to change our lives at Christmas. Over 400 people attended and \$2000 was raised for Zoe Empowers.



Grace Stiles Williams accepted the position of Director of Welcome and Outreach in July, replacing Ulrike Gonzalez and Staci Plonsky, who was appointed as Lead Pastor at Edgewater UMC in New Smyrna Beach after receiving her license as a local pastor. Shawna Couture was hired as a financial assistant and front desk receptionist, replacing Cathy Jalsoviczky who resigned to continue her seminary journey. Summer Interns Caroline Maley, Bri Gabe and Lauren Shoemaker, who were all graduates of our youth ministry and currently attending college, worked in the youth, worship and children's ministries, respectively.

Dominic Lies, Manager of Building and Grounds, passed away in August after a short illness and was replaced by Lovit White, who has been a member of Suntree for over 10 years and has an extensive background in facilities management.

The theme for **2023** was "JOY", which was incorporated into all worship series throughout the year starting with Joyful Living in January.

One of the biggest joys of 2023 was being able to celebrate our 40th Anniversary on Sunday, May 28, with our newly appointed Bishop, Tom Berlin, and some of the charter members and former clergy.



Tom Berlin,
Mike Mayes,
Allee Willcox
Wood, Joel
Lusz &
Annette
Stiles
Pendergrass



SUMC Charter Members

Notable changes included the focus on a specific mission each month and implementing the Digital Church Directory, which gave 800+ members the opportunity to register and obtain access to SUMC member contact info, the church calendar and their personal information.

Starting in August, the new Suntime Meet & Greet and Discover Suntime 101 & 102 programs were launched. These programs were focused on new or fairly new SUMC attendees who wanted to learn more about SUMC, our United Methodist roots, and how we strive to love God, love each other and love our neighbors in extraordinary ways.

The Blessings of the Animals event was a huge success with many members attending with their 4-legged family members.



Dr. Robert Lamb

The 2nd Annual Community Christmas Concert was held on December 10th with two showings featuring the Brevard Symphony Orchestra, Brevard Community Chorus, Central Florida Winds, the Viera Dance Conservatory and our SUMC Music Ministry, performed between segments of live drama performed by the SUMC Drama Team.

The theme for **2024** was “LIGHT”, which was incorporated into all worship series throughout the year. One of the bigger changes this year was in our pastoral staff. Pastor Allee Wood, along with her husband Morgan, started their new adventure at First UMC in Clearwater. Their last Sunday at Suntime UMC was June 2nd and July 7th we welcomed Pastor Bailey, his wife Allison and their infant daughter, Piper. Since Pastor Bailey's role focused more on Missions and Outreach, the Church Council decided to eliminate one of the Traditional Worship Services. Starting May 25th, there were now only two worship services: The contemporary at 9am in the Worship Center and the 10:30am traditional service in the Sanctuary. Hospitality refreshments were served at the same time in both locations, between 10am and 10:30am.



Bailey & Allison
Schreiner

Allee & Morgan Wood



Other staffing changes included both Grace Stiles Williams and Shawna Couture leaving SUMC to pursue other opportunities and for the first time (that we know of) Ulrike Gonzalez and Kathy Lahn joined the staff as Co-Coordinator of Welcome & Lay Ministries.

This year the opportunities for spiritual growth and outreach were numerous throughout the year, with a few new ones added this year, including Midlife Mingle, a group for middle aged singles, and Wise Guys, a group of 'baby boomer's' meeting monthly for snacks, fellowship and learning opportunities. GriefShare and DivorceCare held numerous sessions this year and Discover Suntree 101 & 102 classes were held every other month for those who wanted to learn more about our faith and church as they consider membership. Both the Cocoa and the Viera Initiatives kicked off as our congregation expanded into our local community. The Beloved Community hosted a guided tour of the Harry T. & Harriet V. Moore Museum in Mims on Saturday, May 4, followed by a catered lunch at a local business. Over 50 people participated.



Harry T. & Harriet V. Moore Home

The Dare to Dream Debt Elimination Campaign kicked off in January and by September, the end date of the mortgage loan moved from up six months and savings of over \$75,000 in interest were realized. In October, the mortgage debt was below \$900,000 for the first time ever.



The annual Dare to Care Mental Health Fair was held on Saturday, Sep. 14 from 8:30am-1pm. This year's theme is, "A Time for Hope". Stories of hope were shared by people who have experienced mental health crisis and learned from mental health professionals through specialized breakout sessions.

The children and youth at Suntree UMC were also very active this year, with summer mission trips to Key West and Ft. Myers, and four other churches coming to SUMC for Brevard Mission



Week. Both the VBS



"Food Truck Rally" and Art Camp were a huge success with registrations filling up fast.

We started the year out strong with an incredible worship experience featuring BCU's Inspirational Gospel Choir.



In February Our Church Council met for a yearly planning and visioning meeting. They had the opportunity to dream, strategize, and pray about how we could make this transition smooth and effortless for our incoming Senior Pastor.

In March our Youth Group hosted their annual Fun N' the Sun fundraiser, where they raised over \$22,000 for youth missions!



In April we walked through the last days of Jesus with a meaningful Holy Week and celebrated the resurrected Christ on Easter Sunday!

In May, we said goodbye to Pastor Annette and Scott and celebrated her extraordinary ministry and the ripples of her influence and leadership.



We kicked off our Summer with Vacation Bible School and Youth Mission Trips.

In July we had the joy of welcoming Pastor Lisa and Ed to the Suntree family!



We kicked off a Fall Semester of Grow Classes, including Wednesday Evening Dinners. Throughout the Fall, our Wednesday Dinner team served over 700 meals!

In September we held our annual Cuba Mission Dinner, where we raised over \$17,000 for our Sister Churches in Cuba and donated well over 100 pounds of over-the-counter medications.



Suntree Kids hosted their annual Trunk-or-Treat event, where we welcomed thousands of people to our campus and handed out over 32,000 pieces of candy!

We collected over 204 Thanksgiving Bags, which were distributed to people in our community facing food insecurity during the Thanksgiving Season.



We welcomed thousands of people on our campus for Christmas Eve services as we sang carols, lit candles, and proclaimed the good news of Jesus, the light of the world.