

# Modern Building Will Replace 125-Year-Old Church

(This is the conclusion of a special feature on the razing of Bethel United Methodist Church in Woodbridge. The first installment ran on March 12.)

## Text and Photo

By BRUCE MARTIN

A one-story, 7,500-square-foot masonry structure, modern in every physical respect and built with plans allowing for practical future expansion, has been proposed and initially approved by Bethel officials for the new land. Designed for the open expanse it will occupy, the new Bethel United Methodist Church structure will retain just a touch of its predecessor's rural flavor.

The black bell which now rings from a post frame in front of old Bethel, will provide the new facility with a reminder of its ancestral past. (The bell, though, is only a recent niche in the long and mostly unrecorded history of Bethel. It was obtained about 15 years ago.) Bethel itself was originally

built through the sweat and toil of Methodists on "land and country road R. 640 2.1.m. a building standing in a grove of oak trees..." the deed records.

County records state that the land, along with the unfinished house on it which became the church was donated in 1850 by Burr and Emsey Glascock who expressed the mutual wish "...that here, it would be possible to preach and expound the Word of God." The deed was drawn in 1856, but for some reason long forgotten as it wasn't admitted to the County Clerk's records until September, 1883.

Bethel is purported to have been used as a Civil War hospital, though by which side is not fully clear. It is, of course, possible that both sides used it at one time or another as this area of Northern Virginia was in frequent dispute.

It is clear, though, that something significant did happen to Bethel during the Civil War. Church history



records that the then one-room structure had to be almost completely rebuilt after the conflict. At that time, it had a slave balcony (enclosed by a false ceiling during the 1960s) and was heated by two wood-burning stoves stoked and fed by members of the congregation (Bethel now has oil heat).

Bethel's physical appearance has changed a great deal in its last 25 years. An education and fellowship hall addition, for example, was built with the congregation's labors onto the rear of the original structure in the early 1950s. The addition also includes a kitchen.

But, like the sanctuary, these facilities are overcrowded each Sunday

because of Bethel's growth. Some church school classes must meet in the Muriel Humphrey Respite Center just across busy Davis Ford Road. The fellowship hall and kitchen are now greatly overtaxed when the congregation gets together for social events.

Additionally, Bethel's sanctuary is so small that funerals and weddings are usually held at other churches because the tiny structure just will not safely or comfortably accommodate such occasions.

The proposed new structure will cure all these physical ills, add new dimensions to Bethel's internal growth potential, and increase the church's outreach to the community.

Before the new building becomes reality, there are a number of problems the small congregation must first overcome. The primary one is financing.

Officials feel that a minimum of \$150,000 in cash and pledges is needed before ground for the proposed \$285,000 structure can be broken. The church already has \$45,000 available with another \$14,000 just guaranteed by the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

A significant amount of the \$45,000 already on hand has been raised in the past year through projects sponsored by adult and youth groups within the church. Christmas tree sales, fireworks sales, a small vegetable stand operation, a bazaar and bake sales have all provided members of the community with the opportunity to help Bethel's congregation raise funds and at the same time receive something of fair value in return. These projects are all scheduled to be repeated during 1976, along with some new endeavors.

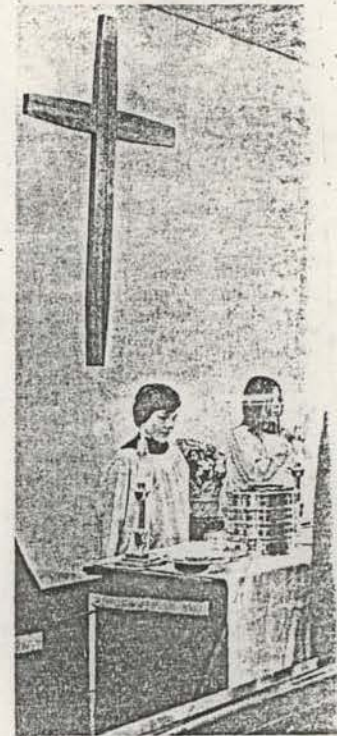
The rest of the building fund money—the majority of

the total—has come in contributions from within the congregation, as well as from several donors in the community, and a Conference grant.

In June or July, the congregation must make a move to a temporary worship site. No one really looks forward to the move, but most in the congregation are aware that it must be. Some of them fear this move will result in a drop in attendance; others feel it will give the community an opportunity to see first hand that Bethel is a growing congregation.

"I don't think moving into a temporary site will really hurt our membership," said the Rev. Frederick L. Parish who has pastored Bethel since mid-1974. "In fact, I think it will pick the membership up once the shock of having to go is over."

"Besides, when a congregation moves out of a church building to a temporary site while a new church is being built, it's a very visible indicator to the community that the church is growing and will soon be able to realistically expand its membership."



## Communion Se

The Rev. Frederick L. Parish, assisted Miller (left) and Terri Findley, w. Communion while his wife, Sandy, pro of organ music during a service Methodist Church. The 125-year-old scheduled for razing this summer, has in its sanctuary that it only can accomo dozen people at one time.