



A Brief History of *Smith Chapel*

To understand the story of Smith Chapel, we begin not in Virginia, but across the ocean in mid-17th century England. There, a group of devout young men at Oxford University—among them **John Wesley** (1703-1791, picture below) and his brother Charles—sought to live holy and disciplined Christian lives. Sons of an Anglican clergyman and his remarkable wife Susannah, John (the 15th of 19 children) and Charles would go on to ignite a global movement.



In 1738, John Wesley had a life-changing experience at age 35. Though faithful to the practices of the Church of England, it was only then that he trusted **Jesus Christ alone for salvation**. That moment of assurance—that his sins were forgiven and he was saved by grace—marked the beginning of a ministry that would span over 50 years and include over 42,000 sermons.

John Wesley's followers, known as **Methodists**, joined him in preaching the gospel across England, the American colonies, and beyond. His "itinerant" preachers were called to "come and suffer"—offered no salary, often traveling by foot or horseback, with nothing but the hope of heaven. Wesley himself rode 60 to 70 miles a day and preached three sermons daily, well into his 70s.

The Methodist revival was distinctive for its field preaching. Wesley and his preachers went to where people lived and worked: fields, markets, city streets. As people were converted, they gathered in Methodist societies, which eventually grew into churches. But their success invited opposition. Lacking formal authority to preach, many itinerants were beaten, stoned, or ridiculed.

In 1769, missionaries were sent to America. Wesley organized them into "circuits" overseen by lay preachers. Following the American Revolution, in 1784, these Methodists formally organized

as the **Methodist Episcopal Church at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore** (picture below: sanctuary). Interestingly, Wesley remained an Anglican priest to the end.



Methodism in America spread quickly. Circuit riders followed the settlers westward, braving disease, harsh terrain, and short life spans for the sake of the gospel.

METHODISM COMES TO VIRGINIA

Meanwhile, in Hanover County, Virginia, around **1740**, a bricklayer named Samuel Morris began the “Meeting House Movement.” He and his neighbors, stirred by Christian writings, met in homes to study and pray. When the group outgrew homes, they built a meeting house, unknowingly preparing a foundation for the Methodists.

By **1768**, **Liberty Meeting House** (picture on the right) was established nearby—a shared space eventually used by Baptists, Presbyterians, and eventually Methodists. As the Methodists took root, they eventually acquired the property. Today, that site is home to **Dranesville United Methodist Church on Route 7**.



But by the **1840s**, tensions over slavery fractured the Methodist Episcopal Church. In **1844**, the denomination split, creating the

Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This division—alongside similar splits among Baptists and Presbyterians—deepened national tensions leading up to the Civil War. As one historian put it, the “*strongest cords which bound the states together were religious—and they snapped over slavery.*”

In the years following the war, the Methodist Episcopal congregation with abolitionist leanings began gathering at the

Jefferson School House

(picture on the right: This building no longer exists), built in **1852** on **Beach Mill Road**. There are no official records, but it’s believed that class meetings and Sunday schools were held there.



When a preacher was coming, word spread—people would walk, ride horses, or arrive in lumber wagons. Services often lasted several hours, as long journeys demanded a full spiritual meal.

THE BIRTH OF SMITH CHAPEL

By **1888**, the people began making plans for a new church building. Women led the charge—organizing festivals, collecting donations (many just 25 cents or \$1), and even writing poems like this one:

*“Here I stand; a little man.
To build a church, I think is right,
Although I am a little mite.”*

In **1890**, a parcel of land was purchased from Joseph Cockrell for \$52.50. Construction began on **May 23rd** with the **laying of the cornerstone**. Community members—men, women, children, Methodists and non-Methodists alike—donated labor, materials,

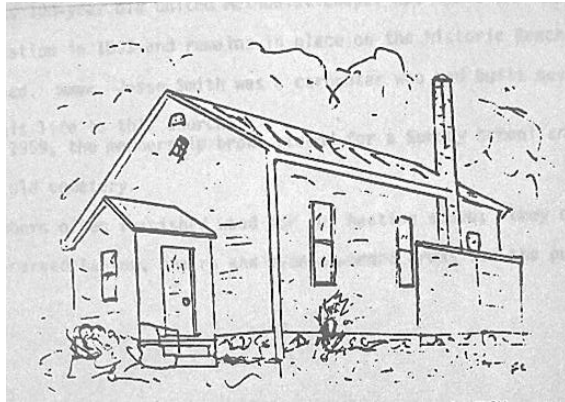
and time. The total cost for the building, fence, and land was \$1,200.



The church was named in honor of **Jesse Smith** (1818–1906, picture on the left), a master carpenter originally from Maidstone, England. Having helped build churches in New York, Jesse and his wife **Lucina** moved to Virginia in 1854. He took personal responsibility for constructing this new church—a place of worship and fellowship, built with “love, hope, and real belief in God.”

Smith Chapel was dedicated in **1893**. Despite hard times, the collection at the dedication totaled \$28.68. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bishop donated the first pulpit Bible, which is still preserved today.

In those early years, the congregation worshiped, celebrated holidays, held funerals, and gathered for prayer in this small sanctuary. A hitching post stood at the back for horses, and water came from Bicksler’s spring nearby.



In **1899**, there were 37 members, and biweekly prayer meetings drew about a dozen people. The Ladies Aid Society raised money for an organ through strawberry festivals, box suppers, and chain letters. In a bold act of faith, 15-year-old Daisy Poole drove a team of horses to Georgetown, bought the organ for \$50, and returned to Smith Chapel. She then served as the organist for five years.

By **1908**, Smith Chapel was part of a circuit with Herndon, Brown’s Chapel, and Wiehle. The women of the church maintained the building, supported the pastor, and raised funds in creative ways—

like donating proceeds from eggs laid on Sundays or pennies for every rainy day.

In **1945**, the wood stove was replaced with an oil burner costing \$68. Yet by **1952**, attendance had dwindled so drastically that the church was closed, and plans were made to sell it within a year.

A NEW BEGINNING

That same year, a seminary student named **Ronald Clark** visited the area, saw the empty chapel, and—climbing through a window—decided to preach. People came. Soon the Alexandria District appointed a committee to consider reopening the church. They discovered that while women and children were eager to return, the men had disengaged. The committee agreed: if the church reopened, the gospel must speak to everyone—especially the men.



One committee member, **Thresa G. Parrish** (1889–1974, picture on the left), had not been a member of Smith Chapel. She was asked only to bring food to the meeting. But she became a key figure in Smith Chapel’s revival. Her prayer of reluctance turned into a prayer of surrender:

“Dear Lord, Smith’s Chapel is your church. Take me, humble me to Thy will... This flesh may be weak but it is willing.”

In **1953**, Smith Chapel reopened on a trial basis, and by June **1954**, it was officially revived.



In **1959**, the church held a revival and raised an “impossible” \$1,000 to build **Lambert Hall** (picture on the left: inside), the Sunday School and social gathering space. Groundbreaking was held on April 12, **1959**, and the hall was consecrated on Easter Sunday, April 17, **1960**.



In 1982, Smith Chapel became a station church, no longer part of a circuit. After decades of faithful ministry, **Pastor Dave Zuchelli** retired in **2018**. Since then, **Pastor Ho Kang** (picture on the right), along with his wife Yeon Me and daughters Charis and Noelle, has led the church into a new season.

A NEW CHAPTER: JOINING THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH



SMITH CHAPEL
GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH

In **2023**, amid denominational conflicts over biblical authority and human sexuality, Smith Chapel’s members prayerfully discerned their future. After extensive discussion, the congregation voted to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. This decision was ratified by the Virginia

Annual Conference on October 7, **2023**. On December 31, Smith Chapel officially joined the **Global Methodist Church**.

OUR PRESENT MISSION AND VISION



Smith Chapel now stands as a vibrant witness to the gospel, with a mission: **To make disciples of Jesus Christ and to spread scriptural holiness across the globe**. Our vision is simple and powerful: **To Know Jesus and Make Him Known**. We are committed to **transformational discipleship, multiplying believers, and empowering lay people**. We yearn for a fresh outpouring of the **Holy Spirit**—for healing, restoration, and salvation in our world. We invite you to join us on this journey—to live as a **missional life, missional home, and missional church**.

“I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” — Philippians 1:6

Shalom, Shalom!

