

# CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

## IS...

...an expression of trust, love,  
and appreciation.

...an act of obedience.

*A **tithe** of everything  
from the land, whether  
grain from the soil or fruit  
from the trees, belongs to  
the Lord; it is holy to the  
Lord.*

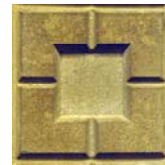
Leviticus 27:30



**...GIVING OF YOUR  
TIME, TALENT,  
GIFTS AND  
SERVICE.**

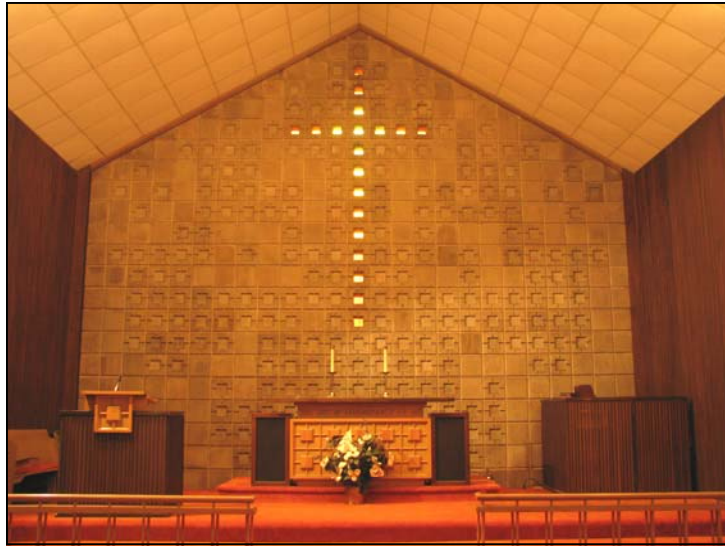
# LEGACIES OF LOVE

Bethany has been blessed with many dedicated stewards whose gifts continue to touch us and connect us. Each week during our 2009 Stewardship Campaign, we will bring you a story of a special gift that has had a profound impact on the life of our church. Initiated with a hopeful spirit and carried out with teamwork and camaraderie, each gift reminds us of the power of love at work, linking us to the past and inspiring us to create new ways to make a difference through giving.



*Come to him, a living stone,  
though rejected by mortals yet chosen and  
precious in God's sight,  
and like living stones,  
let yourselves be built into  
a spiritual house,  
to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual  
sacrifice acceptable to God through  
Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 2:4-5



# THE BLOCKS OF BETHANY

The spring of 1954 was wet, muddy—booming.

On block after block, plat after plat, the earth was scraped clean, making way for the rise of thousands of modest tract homes from their seeded lots, as Houston home builders leapfrogged each other to catch the wave of post-war demand for America's new suburban lifestyle.

And so when Harry and Linda Hackethorn stuck their mailbox in the ground on Bluebonnet, they found themselves all alone on a street that was not yet on anyone's map.

At times, Linda felt they were teetering on the city's edge. Like the evening they heard the rustling outside their window.



The Hackethorns with  
Rev. Harris

They suspected a peeping Tom.

It turned out to be a grazing Elsie, a cow munching on their bushes.

“We were living on the prairie,” Linda says now.

But it was here, on the prairie, that Reverend Bill Harris saw God's promise—that of a new church, riding that suburban wave, growing as fast as the neighborhoods that surrounded it.

At the time, Reverend Harris says they had a list of 19 names, who would become the original members of Bethany United Methodist Church.

“But we had no church,” says Reverend Harris, “and no land.”

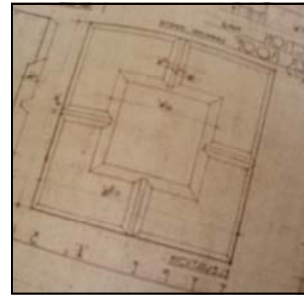
Sunday mornings, they congregated at Pershing Junior High, and later Mark Twain elementary, with an altar that church members would carry inside. On Easter Sunday, it fell out of the back

of a pick-up truck on the way to services. Their sense of urgency heightened.

They needed a church.

It is, at this point, that the story sometimes becomes muddled. And for obvious reason. Most of those who then resided here, now reside in the here after.

What is clear is that it was a local architect, Ed Reichert, a member of First Church downtown, who took the congregation's vision and put ink to paper in detailed drawings which included the Bethany Blocks.



Reichert suggested the church could save some money if members would create the cement blocks that formed the altar wall of the chapel.

“He said you can make these yourselves,” recalls Hackethorn, “and we had a number of engineers—some good hands—to do the work.”

And so they began.

Every evening, fifteen to twenty men would come to Linkwood, dressed to work. Their wives would provide dinner. And with a generator and lights, they would work right through dusk.

The blocks took six forms—some plain, some with an empty middle where they would later insert stained glass, and some carried a four-cornered square design.



The original  
Bethany Block form.

That design was Reichert's.

“He came up with the idea of carrying the design all through the church,” says Reverend Harris. Indeed, the Bethany Block can be found in walls and on door handles, on pins and in plexiglass light coverings.

It became the church's signature, its symbol. But a symbol of what?

For Reverend Harris it represented the four-square gospel. Others saw the cross. Some thought the square cutout in the middle was a representation of man's emptiness without God.



Chapel Wall

They made hundreds of them, filling the wooden forms with a drier-than-normal cement, which they pounded until it was packed like gunpowder in a barrel. It was then left to dry.

The work party saved the church money, yes. Probably thousands of dollars in labor costs.

More importantly, it cemented the foundation for a congregation that grew from the original 19 into two thousand members.

“It was probably the best experience I ever had,” says Harry Hackethorn. Linda confided, “I never wanted to see another baked potato in my life.”

They were heady days, the fifties. Every Sunday, another family or two—or three—joined the church. By the first October in 1954, the day they unveiled the new chapel, it was already too small. They had two services that morning.

“It was a real celebration,” says Harris.

But here again, the legend of the creation of Bethany’s Blocks, and its actual history, has suffered a few degrees of separation.



Sanctuary Door  
Handles



James Avery  
Lapel Pin



Exterior Block

It goes back to what Harris calls the asymmetry, what others called a mistake.

If you study the pattern of blocks in the chapel wall, you'll find the pattern on one side of the cross isn't the same as the other side. Not exactly. It's one block off.

"Ed did that on purpose" says Reverend Harris. It was said to represent the flaws of mankind brought before God. But Reichert said he'd never noticed it, nor even heard of it.

And that four-corner image?

"It was just an architectural design," says Reichert. No religious symbolism was intended.

Which may have been best.

For fifty-four years, parishioners could see in the blocks whatever they wanted to see. It was all things to all people.

But always it was distinctly Bethany.

Dan Lauck  
November 2, 2008



The Chapel Altar