

First United Methodist of Melbourne invests in renovation — Building Management Systems reshapes campus; the Revs. Craig and Dionne Hammond are co-pastors

By Ken Datzman

Eight years ago, the husband-and-wife co-pastor team of Craig and Dionne Hammond took charge of First United Methodist Church of Melbourne on East New Haven Avenue.

Working alongside Lou Weber, executive pastor, they have transformed the parish in a number of ways. Today, it is reaching new heights and is uniquely positioned in the market as an intergenerational church, serving people across various age groups.

"We are a congregation that is always about bringing more people into relationships with Jesus," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond, whose church just completed a 5,000-square-foot renovation, modernizing various spaces of the facility and creating an attractive, soaring triangular façade to the church entrance.

"We are a unique church in the sense that we are intergenerational, which these days is uncommon. We serve children, young families, and the elderly — people of all ages. We feel like that's definitely one of our strengths."

She added, "Lou Weber works with a lot of the young families. So we have different groups of worship to meet the different needs of the community, and the extended community. It's really a customized approach to addressing the different generations, and it's been a successful undertaking for our church."

Today's society includes at least four distinct adult generations: the Silent Generation (born 1925–1945), the Baby-Boomer Generation (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1981), and the Millennial Generation (1982–2001).

It's unusual in that this many generations of Americans share leadership in society, in the workplace, and in the church.

First United Methodist Church of Melbourne has quite a history. It's 133 years old. Today, the church has about 1,200 members, making it one of the largest such organizations of its kind in South Brevard County.

"We have a lot of exciting things going on at our church and we have developed strong outreach efforts in the local community as part of our mission," said the Rev. Craig Hammond.

"For example, we entered into a partnership over the last several years with University Park Elementary School in Melbourne, where weekly we send 40 people to mentor students. We do whatever we can to help uplift the administrators and the teachers there. Dionne has been a big part of that initiative."

In the first quarter of this year, the Rev.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

First United Methodist Church of Melbourne, with 1,200 members, has invested in a 5,000-square-foot renovation. The project included 1,000 square feet of new space. It's the first of a multi-phase upgrading project the church plans to do under its 'Forward in Faith' fundraising campaign. The general contractor for the project is Building Management Systems. From left: Lou Weber, executive pastor; Craig Hammond, co-pastor; Dionne Hammond, co-pastor; and Jason Bartlett, president, BMS.

Dionne Hammond was promoted to district superintendent for the Atlantic Central District, overseeing 65 Methodist Churches from Ormond Beach north to West Palm Beach in South Florida.

In the announcement, Florida Conference Bishop Ken Carter said, "The Rev. Dionne Hammond is a highly respected pastor in the Florida Conference. She has strong gifts in administration and preaching and has provided remarkable leadership, most recently at First United Methodist Church of Melbourne and as chairwoman of the Order of Elders. She is also a significant mentor to many clergy in our conference."

She began her candidacy through First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables. Before being commissioned and ordained, she served on the staff ministry teams of Everglades Community Church, First United Methodist Church of Coral Gables, Hope United Methodist Church, and Wellspring United Methodist Church.

Recently, United Methodists from across the state gathered for the 177th

annual Florida Conference hosted at Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

The Hammonds have served churches in Florida for more than 20 years. Craig Hammond is from Spring Lake, Mich., and Dionne is from Centerport, N.Y.

The two met at Houghton College in upstate New York. They both went on to earn master's of divinity degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary.

The First United Methodist Church of Melbourne campus includes a Life Enrichment Center, featuring a full gymnasium, offices and classrooms. There is a pre-school too, as well as a church sanctuary and chapel.

"This is the third location of this congregation," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond. "When our sanctuary was built, which was the first building at this location in 1957, there was a lot of rumbling that we were going to be too far out of town for people to attend services. We're now part of the downtown Melbourne area."

To better meet the needs of their growing congregation and to create a more easy-to-navigate campus, First United Methodist Church of Melbourne took on a renovation project. The church launched a "Forward in Faith" campaign and set a \$1.5 million goal, raising \$1.3 million.

"This is the first building campaign in more than 25 years for this church, so there is grand excitement. And the project we just finished is phase one of a master plan to update existing space as a tool for our ministry," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond.

She added, "We see this renovation project as an investment in the downtown Melbourne area."

Her organization hired Building Management Systems Inc. in Melbourne as the general contractor. Area firm Tsark Architecture LLC, run by Greg Tsark, was the project architect.

Through the last 30 years, Building Management Systems, a full-service commercial construction firm, has com-

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pleted a sizable portfolio of church projects in the region. The First United Methodist Church of Melbourne renovation was a 10-month undertaking.

"We are extremely happy with the end product," said businessman Jason Bartlett, president of Building Management Systems, an employee-owned company. "The areas that we renovated totaled about 5,000 square feet, which included 4,000 square feet of air-conditioned existing space."

He said his company "added 1,000 square feet of air-conditioned space, creating a lobby and closing in the breezeways. Now, churchgoers can move through the building in air-conditioned space and feel more comfortable."

"As we started looking at this renovation project, the goal was to define a central point of entry and figure out a way in which people could more easily navigate the flow of the campus," said Weber. "There were so many entrances to the campus I think it was confusing for some people, especially newcomers."

He continued, "The church is built like a fortress and has lots of doors. We often joke that it's a survival-of-the-fittest routine to make it into worship. You have to know the right doors to pull on."

The project committee and "our community partners began looking at

creating one identifiable entrance onto the campus, creating a smooth traffic flow," Weber said, adding that church members are asked to use the west entrance.

"A lot of this project was about honoring the legacy of faith of this community, while at the same time showing that we are not a church stuck in the past, but that we are a church reaching out into the future," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond.

"I believe this project is a good representation of that, as we strive to continue to be a vital ministry in Melbourne. Lou Weber was the point person for this project. We had a building team — a wonderful group of people — visionaries, but Lou was the 'person on the ground.' He made a lot of the decisions working with Jason Bartlett and his outstanding team."

Weber said the renovation goal centered on "moving people as efficiently as possible around the campus as they gather in comfortable spaces. We have a wide generational spread of members. So we worked to make the spaces as handicapped-accessible as possible and as kid-friendly as possible. Those types of spaces were incorporated into the design."

He said there were "a lot of odd steps — mainly near the preschool — for people with strollers and people in wheelchairs to navigate. Building Management Systems did a great job helping us work through

those issues and make improvements."

The open-air entrance to the church with the triangular façade "is a piece of art. It's really a beautiful structure, which also features a new courtyard. It's going to be a great gathering space — just what we had envisioned in our planning for the renovation," added Weber.

As part of the project, one of the buildings on campus damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017 was torn down. The 9,000-square-foot classroom building experienced extensive damage because of flooding. "We salvaged all the impact-resistant windows and tried to repurpose and reuse as much of that building as we could," said Bartlett.

Building Management Systems also made major improvements to parking for church members.

Across the street from First United Methodist Church of Melbourne, Building Management Systems put in lighting and made the sidewalks handicap-accessible, as well as other improvements.


"We're excited to show off our new look to the community. We created spaces where people can connect with one another — deepening friendships. We welcome new people to the congregation as the worship community grows in our faith. This is a new chapter in the history of our church," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond.

First United Methodist Church of Melbourne is active in the community working with nonprofit organizations to enhance the lives of people. For instance, the church provided Easter baskets for children in the Brevard Rescue Mission program and hosted a table at their "Women Who Care Share" fundraiser.

First United Methodist Church of Melbourne also works with The Daily Bread, an organization that provides hot lunches for the poor and homeless. The church provides a team of workers to cook and serve meals on the second Friday of each month.


And the church supports the South Brevard Sharing Center, which provides food, clothing and other assistance to families in need. Each week, First United Methodist Church of Melbourne asks its members to bring a nonperishable food item for the church's "We Can" program. The yearly goal is to donate 10,000 items. Volunteers from the church also help stock shelves at the South Brevard Sharing Center.

"The church is always reaching out to help less fortunate people in the community. Our mission statement is: 'Love God, love people, change the world.' We try to format everything we do around that statement," said the Rev. Dionne Hammond.



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Cybersecurity Information Session

Wednesday, July 17, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Please RSVP to Melbourne@Webster.edu
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