

Churches in the Shenandoah Valley

Oak Level United Methodist Church
1809 Camp Roosevelt Rd
Fort Valley, VA 22652



A brief History

The Methodist churches of today are the result of a gradual fusion during and after the American Revolution between the more formal Anglican tradition and John Wesley's Methodism, which emphasized extemporaneous prayer and preaching. Oak Level United Methodist Church is the direct descendant of the little Methodist Episcopal Church that began to serve the iron workers at Caroline Furnace in the upper Fort Valley in the 1840s.

Church website:
Telephone: (540) 933-6606

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Once a month, a circuit riding preacher from New Market would travel over the mountain to conduct services in what was then called the Lebanon Union Church; he received \$1.00 for each service. Although the iron furnace never reopened after its destruction during the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal South congregation continued to meet and grow. They used Lebanon Church until the early 1900s, after which services were held for a time in the Oak Level School House across the road.

In 1906, Methodist Episcopal officials send the young Rev. Harry Bitner to work with the congregation in building a new church. Church members provided all the materials and labor needed for the new Oak Level Methodist Episcopal Church. Pews for the sanctuary were those from the old Cross Roads Union Church, bought by Dora Marston for \$5.00. Rev. Bitner became the first pastor, married a local woman, and raised his family in Fort Valley.

In 1968, the same year in which the Methodist Episcopal South denomination merged with the Evangelical and United Brethren to become the United Methodist Church, Oak Level members built and dedicated a new Sunday school wing. Throughout its proud history, the Oak Level congregation has remained a vital and active part of the community. By the time of the church's Sesquicentennial Celebration in 2006, the Rev. Sherry Waddell had become Oak Level's pastor. She continues to serve both Oak Level and the White Chapel Methodist Church, located farther north in Fort Valley.

Written by Maisel Lamma, June 2012

Written by 2011

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