

A Tribute to Eleanor Bourn

Eleanor Bourn, Matriarch of North Kingstown United Methodist Church, Dies Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007

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Charter member and one of the early founders of our church



On Easter Sunday as Christians celebrated the joy of the resurrected Christ, Eleanor Bourn, a charter member of North Kingstown United Methodist Church and one of the original founders of our church, passed quietly into God's Heavenly Kingdom after nearly a century on this earth. She was 96.

When she visited Eleanor on Good Friday, **Pastor Beverly** handed her a palm cross. Eleanor clutched the cross for most of the next few days and died about 4 PM Easter Sunday with the cross in her hand. Pastor Beverly remarked "Easter was truly an appropriate day for Eleanor to pass into eternal life."

A memorial celebration of the many blessings of Eleanor's life will be held **Saturday, April 14th at 11 AM** at the house of worship which will always be a legacy of her tireless devotion and love that spanned many decades.

Eleanor recently accepted hospice care after a long and active life of service to God, family and the church she so dearly loved and was instrumental in creating. In 1965, Eleanor attended the first planning session which laid out what Eleanor often called "the birth of a dream for a new Methodist Church in North Kingstown," a dream that became a reality October 30, 1966 when the church held its first worship service at the *borrowed* Seventh Day Adventist Church on Post Road. She was among the original charter members who were the driving force behind the construction of the new church building and parsonage on Boston Neck Road. *(Photo above, Eleanor in 1975)*



Mrs. Eleanor Bourn

Deeply loved and revered as the matriarch of North Kingstown United Methodist Church, Eleanor compiled and wrote the first extensive historical account of the church, published for its anniversary celebration in 2000



([Birth of The Dream](#)). She was among the four surviving charter members who cut the cake for the congregation's 40th anniversary celebration in November 2006 ([40th anniversary celebration](#)).

*(Photo at left, **Eleanor** and her surviving charter members, **Viv** and **Sam Flade** (top row) and **Ida Green** (at right in photo) during the November 2006 celebration of the church's 40th anniversary. Ida's husband, **Ken**, also a charter member, passed away a few weeks before the celebration.)*

A long life of service

Eleanor once told me she credited her longevity in life to "being born of strong Minnesota stock" in her native Faribault, Minnesota where she attended worship at the Fourth Avenue Methodist Church. After moving to Rhode Island and helping found our church, she was active in its physical and spiritual growth.

After a return visit to her native church in Minnesota where she saw a tapestry depicting stories of the Bible, Eleanor and another member of our congregation worked with a group of women at NKUMC to reproduce the tapestry which was dedicated October 14, 1990 as a gift to the church and to the glory of God. It still hangs on a wall in our sanctuary ([History of the Tapestry](#)).



Eleanor said, "The idea for the tapestry grew out of a visit by **Maria Villanueva** and me to my home church, the Fourth Avenue Methodist Church in Faribault, Minnesota where the original tapestry hangs. Upon seeing it, Maria said, 'We must make one for our church!' Creating the tapestry became a major project for many members of the North Kingstown United Methodist Church craft group."

Despite being confined to a wheel chair in recent years, Eleanor still attended many worship services and special fellowship events at the church, including the 40th anniversary celebration last November where she cut the first piece of the celebration cake with her surviving charter members, **Ida Green**, **Vivian** and **Sam Flade**.



Eleanor's spirit of volunteerism touched many lives. For

many years she was active in F.I.S.H. -- a Rhode Island volunteer group which helped provide rides for people who had no way to get to doctor's appointments.

She carried out her dedicated work for her church with a smile and a proud remembrance of the spiritual creation she and others helped build. She bragged about our church, but never about the contributions she made. She was a role model for Christ's concept of *servant leadership*. Although a tireless worker for church committees, festivals, and fund raisers over many years and with many pastors, she never forgot priority number one -- a deep and personal relationship with God and a spiritual walk with Christ. Her walk was longer than most of us will be blessed to experience, but forever how long or brief our time, Eleanor Bourn is witness to Paul's words, "I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven." (Philippians 3:14)

A sense of history and humor

Eleanor had a deep appreciation of history and gratitude for how her church had suffered through its tough times in the navy base closing in the early 1970s to emerge stronger and more dedicated in its work for the Lord. In preparation for the church's anniversary celebration on the dawn of the new millennium in 2000, despite her advanced age, she tirelessly pecked out on a manual typewriter the lengthy and vivid historical account, [*The Birth of A Dream*](#), which was the center piece of the anniversary booklet presented to the congregation and comprises the highlight of the history section of our website, www.nkumcri.com.

Eleanor also had a keen sense of humor and a ready compliment. I will always remember and cherish her comment to me the first time I preached as a lay speaker at our church. I was fresh from the beginner's basic course in lay speaking and Pastor Beverly scheduled me to preach just a few weeks later, no doubt knowing that if a lay speaker has too much time to ponder what God has in store for you, you might grow fearful of the pulpit. After I had delivered my first sermon, Eleanor walked up to me and wagged her finger at me and in a kindly, scolding tone said, "You must have been asleep when God called you ... because you're in the wrong line of work. You should have been a preacher!" It was the nicest compliment I have ever received and it brought a smile to my face and a few tears to my eyes.

In her historical account of our church, Eleanor wrote, "We owe so many, and most of all, our Father, who gave us the will and strength to continue in His name. I hope this gives the members something to remember of our past and to inspire us to continue with enthusiasm and spirit."

We could pay Eleanor no greater tribute than to remember her words and continue our work with "enthusiasm and spirit," always thanking God for the blessings He has given us. If we do that, Eleanor Bourn will always be with us in our hearts, and wiping away our tears.

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