

The Restoration of Lovely Lane Church

THE "UPSIDE-DOWN" APPROACH

Lovely Lane United Methodist Church

The cornerstone for the present Lovely Lane United Methodist Church was laid in 1884, the first physical evidence of the response to a call made by the national Board of Bishops for a Centennial Monument marking the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. A hundred years before the Lovely Lane congregation had been host to the famous "Christmas Conference", where American Methodists agreed to form a united, independent church. Thus, Lovely Lane was the "Mother Church of American Methodism," and its remarkable new building in 1884 became a suitable symbol of its place in the national church.

Guided by a remarkable pastor, John Franklin Goucher, the congregation hired Stanford White to create the Centennial Monument. White was a principal in the nascent firm of McKim, Mead & White, which would become one of the most celebrated architectural firms in the nation. The firm's work would come to include the Boston Public Library; Symphony Hall, in Boston; and the now demolished Pennsylvania Railroad Station in New York. The resultant design was a church whose exterior is Romanesque in style, with Etruscan or Tuscan detailing, having massive granite walls, a 130-ton barrel-tile roof, and, as its most striking feature, a 225-foot tower capped by a conical roof of artichoke tile and a huge weather vane. Stained glass windows by Louis C. Tiffany and Francis Lathrop blended with blue and gold decoration in the 500-seat Chapel and shades of Pompeian red in the oval-shaped main worship room. Again inspired by the starry mosaics of Ravenna, the great vaulted ceiling over the 1000 seats of this latter area was painted to show the heavens as they appeared at 3:00 a.m. the day of the church's dedication, with all the major stars and planets in their proper positions.

By the mid-1970's, however, the Lovely Lane building was at a crisis point as a number of severe problems all became apparent. The tile roof was leaking in many areas because the tiles in places were cracked and brittle, allowing the deterioration of the underlayment. The original 19th-century heating system with its ingenious network of wooden ducts was collapsing. The electrical systems which were added to the building in 1906 were rapidly becoming inadequate. Very soon the building would become unusable for the closing quarter of the 20th century. Hand-in-hand with this physical urgency there also came a psychological urgency. Feeling trapped inside a deteriorating late-Victorian shell, the congregation hardly felt it had the stamina to face the challenges of continued urban life and ministry.

As the congregation began the slow and tentative process of exploring possible modes for addressing the need for restoration, events were unfolding which would radically redirect the course of the restoration efforts and give specific focus to the congregation's work for years to come. In response to a petition from the Baltimore Conference of the United Methodist Church, a resolution was adopted at the denomination's highest judicatory: "that the 1980 General Conference endorse a Churchwide campaign to secure funds for [Lovely Lane's] restoration and encourage conferences, local churches, interested groups, and individuals to contribute during the quadrennium 1980-84." 81 This endorsement by the highest governing body within United Methodism gave great moral support to the effort to save Lovely Lane, but it gave no financial support whatsoever. It permitted Lovely Lane to canvass the denomination if Lovely Lane could devise the means to do so.

Gradually the idea of an "upside down campaign" emerged in the thinking of the Congregation's Restoration Committee. Ordinarily a fundraising effort would target individual large donor sources first, and only in the final stages would it seek to reach the broadest grass-roots constituency. The Lovely Lane Campaign reversed this conventional methodology. It did so for several reasons. First of all, the General Conference mandate was for a "Churchwide" campaign within a specific time frame. The congregation felt an obligation to pursue this goal. Second, the nation-wide membership of the United Methodist Church offered what appeared to be an identifiable, broad Constitutionally- clearly defined 'interest group. Furthermore this pool of potential donors could be reached through thousands of clergy whose names and addresses were obtainable. This method of proceeding also offered Lovely Lane, an institution of very limited capital reserves, a way to utilize the American Methodist Bicentennial period to develop a wide base of support and to generate the immediate funds necessary for both sustaining other phases of fund-raising and for initiating critical construction phases.

The campaign strategy called for the rapid development of interpretive literature and communication with all congregations of the Denomination through the pastors. With the close help of F. E. Worthington, Inc., a Baltimore-based communications consulting firm, the Restoration Committee produced a "Pastor's Kit." The Kit was sent to all 38,000 local congregations through some 26,000 individual pastors. Each Pastor's Kit contained an array of materials. First came a "Pastor's Guide" containing an "Appeal to All United Methodists" giving the basic rationale of the campaign, the General Conference Resolution of 1980 calling for the campaign, details on how to distribute and utilize additional materials in the kit, step-by-step instructions on where to send a report of the congregation's offering as well as names of individual donors, and closing with sermonic material of potential use to pastors in presenting the campaign in their local setting.

Next came a photo documented booklet entitled *To Restore and To Preserve Lovely Lane* which served as a case statement on behalf of the project-detailing the history and architectural significance of the structure, the physical needs, and the appeal for support as well as a list of major gift opportunities. Each pastor received one copy of this thirty page book which was designed to also serve as the principal resource for interpreting the Restoration to individual major donors.

There was also a "Report Card" to be completed when a congregation responded and then sent to the Lovely Lane Restoration Committee. Finally each packet contained a sufficient supply of items for direct solicitation for each family in a congregation. These materials consisted of a 3 x 4-inch, color illustrated booklet, *Lovely Lane Is Falling Down*, and offering envelopes which contained a detachable flap for donor information. The production of this material was an undertaking of staggering proportions. Membership statistics for each congregation were obtained, and close to 4,000,000 copies of the congregational booklets and envelopes had to be printed.

The basic church-wide element of the "upside-down" campaign was the enlistment of "Partner Churches" which contributed an average gift of \$1-permember. Partner congregations stretch across the entire U.S.A. and around the world to England, Germany, Norway, and Japan. To date, the total amount raised from this church-by- church effort is close to \$850,000, representing about 18% of the Denomination's congregations.

The Campaign's results to date also include gifts of more than \$631,000 from Lovely Lane's own congregation, a \$315,000 challenge grant from a non Methodist source, and two grants from the City of Baltimore totaling \$175,000. The combination of support from such a variety of sources has permitted the initiation of construction.

Under the guidance of Kann and Ammon, Architects and Planners, of Baltimore, and C. Dudley Brown Associates, Preservation Consultants, of Washington, D.C., stabilization of the building was achieved by removal of the 130-ton roof, repair of wood sheathing, renewal of water carry-off systems and snow guards, and installation of a temporary shingle covering. Ultimately a tile roof must be reinstalled. Total restoration of the 225- foot tower was accomplished including cleaning and repainting and replacement of 27 tons of tile on the conical roof. Currently exterior masonry cleaning, repair, and pointing is being completed and woodwork repaired and repainted. Refurbishing and restoration of windows is being undertaken and provision is being made for handicap accessibility along with initial stages of upgrading and renewing electrical and mechanical systems.

One could be disappointed with the results of the Church-wide effort, because funds have been insufficient to complete all the needed restoration. The campaign which was hoped to be short has instead become protracted, and the congregation will live with the prospect of ongoing work and continued campaigning for years to come.

On the other hand, widespread responsiveness to the merits of the project has been demonstrated. When compared with other simultaneous appeals for support within the Denomination, the Lovely Lane Restoration fares well. Furthermore, support groups such as the Francis Asbury-John Franklin Goucher Restoration Society (Donors of \$250 or more) and a successful ongoing Annual Appeal provide a firm foundation for continued development.

The "Upside Down Campaign" has always had alongside it and as a second principal phase, the solicitation of major individual and foundation donors. The Campaign will be continuing with emphasis on this second phase, which would conventionally have been first.