

# The History of the Cross Eli Hewed

## Port Charlotte United Methodist Church

By Dr. Pierre J. Fisher

While the sanctuary was being built, Chaplain Eli D. Richards, Associate Pastor of the Port Charlotte Methodist Church, decided to make a replica of the "Old Rugged Cross" to hang in the sanctuary on the west wall, behind the pulpit.

There were no trees on the church grounds considered suitable. Chaplain Richards got permission from General Development to go into the woods and cut down a southern pine tree near Orlando Blvd. and Hillsboro Blvd. in Port Charlotte. The tree had died in the stub, was well weathered and worm eaten, which was exactly what Eli was looking for.



Chaplain Eli Richardson is shown using one of his tools he used to hew the cross

He and his neighbor, Leslie Harkness, cut it and hauled it to Richard's back yard where he, with the help of many loving hands, hand-carved the wooden cross, peeled the bark, removed the sap wood, wire brushed it and treated it with mineral oil.

He then fashioned it into two lengths, twelve feet and eight feet. The shorter one would be the cross bar.

In the center of the cross bar he carved the initials INRI, the same letters Pontius Pilate had placed above the cross meaning. "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." On one end he carved the Greek symbol Alpha and on the other, the Greek symbol for Omega.



Α

Alpha

INRI

Ω

Omega

It was hung into place with an electric hoist by the men of Mayes Construction Company using three-colored chains — bronze for judgement, silver for redemption and red for the blood of forgiveness. It weighed about two-hundred and fifty pounds.

The making of the cross required a lot of labor, but Chaplain Eli said, “it was a Labor of Love.”



The Cross hangs, not as an image to worship, but as a reminder that Christ once was crucified and died on it for our sake.

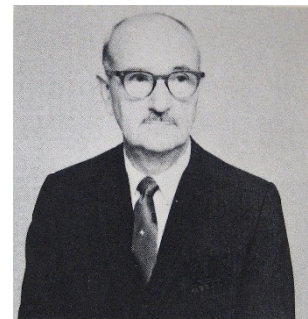
## Dedication Service

A dedication service for the cross was held in 1969 with Chaplain Richard preaching.

“I came to a service of this kind with a great deal of emotion because the Cross has always been a deep part of my Christian experience. No one person, especially me, could have completed a project such as this alone.

“I want to call the names of those who helped me in this project and, if they will stand, I will appreciate that very much because no job of this proportion can be done by one person, certainly, not by me.

“Mrs. Richard for helping me, and by the way this is her birthday. She learned how to use a drawshave and learned how to use a screw



CHAPLAIN ELI RICHARD

driver and how to fill the worm holes and things of that kind and cheered me on when I needed it, and I appreciate that.

“Mr. Oaks, who works with General Development Company, received permission from them for cutting down a tree. He helped me cut down one and it didn’t prove to be the right one, and then he loaned me his chain saw and has been a lot of help in regard to the project.

“Thanks to Carl, Mr. Harkness, my good neighbor who lives across the street from me, who went out and helped with the chain saw and the axe and hauling it in, and we really appreciate it. Thanks to him and we are glad that Mr. and Mrs. Harkness are here.

“Harry Kellogg, my other neighbor who is here had helped with hauling the log in and I must say that Harry and Les have helped over and above anything that they did physically with their observations and their suggestions, and some corrections too, whenever I made a mistake.

“Mr. Griffin, who helped me carry the log in the church. The hardware and the chains were paid for by Gerald Manning, Orville Holts and Lyle Meadows.

“Mr. and Mrs. Carlton Adams for the loan of their truck to haul the log in from the place we cut it down to our yard and when the Cross was finished, we borrowed the truck to bring it over here.

“Mr. Marble of Charlet Drugs donated mineral oil to help and it took three and one-half pints of oil to treat the wood,

“Joe B. Mayes and his son hung the Cross and that was no small item. They worked almost two and one-half hours on a Saturday morning and Mr. —, I didn’t learn the name of the man — from the window company loaned his chain hoist and operated it in putting up this Cross, which weighs between 250 and 300 lbs.

“Mr. William Meek, who loaned the necessary size bit for drilling the holes. He also loaned us his block and tackle.

“And I want to thank the building Committee for permitting me to do this and to Rev. Howell for permitting me to have this dedication service.

“If I have missed anyone, I wish you would tell me, as I would not want to omit any credit to anyone who helped in this project, and the people who are assisting in the dedication, which will be at the close of the sermon.

“I guess I am of the old school of preachers for I cannot preach without a text. You will find it in the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians in the 2nd Chapter, the 20th verse. It may be one of your favorite verses. ‘I am Crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live and the life that I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.’

“When we were talking about the building of this sanctuary, there were people who cooperated so beautifully and willingly. I had a dream of what we could do by way of a cross and somehow, I connected it with the trees which stand out

in the area here, some with the bark gone; one could be made into a cross which could be hung in the sanctuary. So, I asked the Building Committee if I could do it and they said to go ahead, because they were wondering what they would do for a cross for the sanctuary. The matter of suspending it and making it safe was something I thought deeply about because it had to be exactly right.

“Then we went out and cut down this tree that I found, but when I began dressing it down, I discovered there was not enough sound wood in the center to make it safe, so I discarded it and yet that is not completely true for I used it as a terrace on one side of my garden at home, so I still have it and it is beautifully covered with nasturtiums; now if you want to look at something really beautiful, that bed of nasturtiums will be it.

“Then I looked around and finally I found one just off Orlando Blvd., almost at the very end of Port Charlotte, almost up to Hillsboro Blvd. Then Les and I went out and we cut it into the necessary length, peeled the bark off from it and let it lay there to dry, as there was probably three or four hundred pounds of water in it.

“About a week later, fortified by another man by the name of Harry, we went out with Mr. Adams’ truck and we loaded it in. I don’t know exactly what happened, but some of the fanciest footsteps you have ever seen in your life, not scheduled on our part, but when we got it to our place it was too heavy for the three of us to carry in, so we summoned Tommy Preston across the street and he came over and helped us carry it into our back yard. There on the horses we worked on it.

“Before I started to carve I had the idea of counting the rings and finding out the age of the tree. I counted them twice and then, because I didn’t believe the results, I called to my wife and asked her to count them. When she said, ‘It looks to me like there are thirty-three,’ and I said, ‘That is what I counted.’ So, without realizing it, we had selected a tree that died at the same age of our Lord when He died.

“It was necessary to cut away about two and one-half inches of sap wood, all of this made it possible to dig out the worms and worm holes and sawdust. How those little worms could pack sawdust so tight in their burrows, I’ll never know, but if you get close to it you will notice that there are some fancy designs and I hope that nobody looking at it will try to decipher the characters and find out what it might say.

“And the matter of fitting it together, I didn’t want to make just a conventional joint where it would be notched to make it flat. I wanted to make a U-shaped joint, so that one bolt would hold it, and after trial and error of fitting and refitting, we finally made it.

“When it came to the matter of suspending it, one chain would not be enough. I gauged the weight of it by how many of us it took to carry it, and it does weigh something over 250 lbs. I can carry the crossbar myself and I’ll let you judge how much I can carry. So, we devised the idea of using clevises. That may not mean anything to you, unless you were raised on a farm or worked in a lumber

camp, but that is what you put over the top and it is held with three bolts and this should be significant of the Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

“And the Carving on it — on the ends Alpha and Omega — the ends of the crossbar, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, but the Lord Jesus Christ brings together Heaven and earth. He brings together all the people of the earth. He also shows us that there is nothing beyond His reach in any direction whatsoever. There are two symbols which could be carved on the cross that would be significant, but which we did not put there. One of them would be the Lamb of God, for Jesus was the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins, which was used as a symbol by Christians for 300 years after Christ. In the catacombs they have found the figure of a fish that has been dug into the rock, the head of the fish pointing to where the service would be held. And this was true until 300 A.D.

“The Cross became the symbol of Christianity when Constantine became a convert and put this banner of Cross on his flag and a motto, ‘By this sign conquer.’

“We didn’t use either the fish or the lamb because we wanted to keep it simple, but in the center, we have the first letters of the Latin inscription which Pilate put above the Cross, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ The Latin, of course, ‘*I*’ is the same – Jesus and a Jew; the ‘*N*’ is understandable, it’s for Nazareth; and the ‘*R*’ is the first letter of the Latin word for King, so when anyone asks you, you can tell them they are the first letters of the inscription that Pilate put over the Cross. He put it in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. We didn’t attempt to do anything like that. The only other carving on it is three letters — *Eli* — and no other work that I do is genuine without this signature.

“There are three chains and you don’t need to worry about it falling down, because any one of the chains would hold it; but, there are three colors. The color may not show up so well, but it is there; the brass, which is a type of judgement. In the Old Testament, you will remember when Moses lifted up the brazen serpent, the people had been bitten by the fiery serpents and if they looked at the brazen serpent, in faith they were healed, but by looking at it they judged themselves as sinners, At the tabernacle, the brazen altar and all the pillars of the court were brass, as a type of judgement. The chain on the other side is silver, which is a type of redemption. When a man brought his offering to the gate of the tabernacle, the gate was opened and he looked in, everything he saw first was brass. The brass pillars, the brazen altar, the laver and his foot were colored brass, but if he looked long enough and intently enough, he would discover that under each of the pillars of brass there was a base of silver. This would mean his redemption and we know that then, Joseph, who was a type of Christ delivering his people, was sold into Egypt; the price was paid in silver. When Judas betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ, it was for thirty pieces of silver. Silver is the type of redemption, wherever you find it in Scripture. The red chain at the back denotes the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for it is by his blood that our sins are forgiven. There, again, we have significance of the Trinity, and we hope that these things and this part of the Cross will be an inspiration and a challenge to everyone who shall look upon it.

“Dr. Bob Pierce, who is now pastor of the Chicago Temple, in the loop in Chicago, tells this rather interesting story that happened early in his ministry. He went to a jeweler to buy something of a gift for his wife and he told the saleslady why he was there and what he wanted and he would like suggestions. So, the saleslady said, ‘Well, crosses in jewelry are good this year.’ She brought out a tray of crosses with brooches, pins, pendants, everything one could think of centered around the idea of a cross and the saleslady said, ‘These are it now. These are things that are best.’ Dr. Bob just didn’t think of it that way. As he looked at all these ornaments on this tray, he thought in his heart, ‘Is that what the cross means to people today? He didn’t buy one and neither he nor his wife has ever worn a cross as an ornament. I’m not saying this to belittle anyone who does wear one, because I wear a cross on my tie clasp. But, if all it means is something of an ornament, if all it means is a piece of jewelry, then it has lost its significance. It becomes something of an idol or something strictly of dress, but, if when we wear a cross as something of an outside indication that in our hearts we have accepted the cross of Jesus Christ, then we are redeemed and our sins are forgiven; that, in us, there lives a reality of the life of Jesus Christ, then we can wear it, wear it proudly, understandingly and make it an occasion of witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

“There are many things to be said about bearing the cross. There are crosses we bear which are brought on by our own poor decisions. I hope we understand that anyone who mistreats his body in any way by overindulgence or foolish things and, as a result, has impaired health, should not think of it as a cross, because they have brought it on themselves. There are enough things that come to us by circumstances themselves bringing a cross to us, and we need not seek the others. Perhaps, ill health that we cannot in any wise avoid. Perhaps, the care of a member of our family that is a burden and you can enumerate.

“What is your cross? You know. It should be a matter between yourselves and God. If it is something you parade in front of people and say, ‘I am carrying my cross, this is my cross,’ then somehow or other it loses its significance. Crosses are not for that purpose. But, if on the other hand, you joyfully take what God gives you and carry it without publishing it, coming up with a smile because you have the privilege of sharing somehow or other with the Lord Jesus Christ, the carrying of a cross, then you have achieved victory. Then you have learned the true meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ. For the cross was an altar; it was a departure.

“Before the time of Christ, it (the cross) had been used by the Persians, by the Egyptians, by the Greeks and then by the Romans as a means of execution, as a means of punishment; and it had always been used as a means of degradation or belittlement, but when Christ that day picked up the cross, it was changed.

“Mrs. Richard and I stood on those stones before Pilates Hall, in 1965, where the cross was laid on the back of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s hard to tell just what feelings you have in a time like that, it all comes back, so real and so deep, as I think about it now, but at that point, Jesus changed completely the idea of a cross from a burden, from an insult, from something that was wrong and mean and

small. He turned it into a thing of glory and achievement, and all of the things which are fine and worthwhile. We can carry that kind of a cross if we share the true kind of devotion to Jesus Christ.

“There is a little pamphlet that comes to me every month from the Bible Literature International and in a late issue I received there was a picture on the front of a Hindu man who was bound between two iron wheels and he was tied to those wheels by bars put through his flesh at various places in his body and then tied to the wheels. This he will carry over a prescribed route for a certain length of time and if he does this and doesn't fall or quit, then his sins will be remitted for three years. But, if he should fall or give up, then his sins would still be on his head. Then after another three years, he would have to go back and go through the whole thing all the rest of his life.

“It demands a certain amount of courage and devotion to what he believes, to do such a hard thing. But, how futile it is. We have a much better choice. We have a cross and once we accept it, our sins are forgiven completely and forever, as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. He has cast our sins behind Him in the sea of forgetfulness to remember them no more against us, forever. This is our faith; this is the significance of the cross. May we keep it proudly, understandingly and as a part of our life. If there is any cross we have to bear that is greater than any other, it's our own selves, and own selfish wishes. May God help us to carry the cross, with God's help all our lives; and sing his praises while we do? I live, nevertheless, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

“Let us pray. We thank Thee Lord for everything that the Cross means to us and what it has brought. Help us to open the door of our hearts and say, 'Come in, Lord Jesus, Cross and all.' in His name we pray, Amen.”



The Cross, Christmastime in 2017