

# LEGEND OF THE FLAG

by Joy Johnson, First UMC, Omaha

On Easter Sunday last year, Marv and I sat in the first row of the balcony. The music started, we stood for the processional, and all at once I was face-to-face with the smiling sun face of our rainbow flag, reaching all the way up to the balcony. I smiled back at it with tears in my eyes. When our church lost so many members after our controversial Holy Union years ago, we were so small everyone knew everyone else. We needed courage and stamina to survive. We needed hope.

He called every store in town that sold flags and finally found a small shop in the heart of North Omaha. Michael is our music director then, had seen a beautiful rainbow flag flown on a pole over a congregation in San Francisco. He saw it as a powerful symbol of hope and freedom and a reflection of our acceptance of all God's children. He wanted one for us.

Michael pointed a shaky finger at the smiling sun flag with rainbow ribbons. "I'd like that flag," he said.

"What're you gonna do with that flag?" the man asked. "I want to fly it inside my church,"

Michael said, "And which church is that?" The man frowned down at him. Michael cringed.

"First United Methodist," he nearly whispered. "That church that's havin' all that trouble," the man said. It was not a question. Michael nodded. "That was Ada Meade's church," the man said. (As in FUMC's Ada Meade Chapel.) Michael nodded again. The man smiled for the first time. "In the 1960's, black people couldn't get to the polling places. Ada Meade sent buses for us so we could go vote." The black shop-owner towered over Michael then reached down and patted his shoulder. "You just take that flag, son."

For years now the smiling sun flag with rainbow ribbons has blessed our heads, made us smile and reminded us that our vision, our history and our openness still flies high.

*Post Script:* Ada Mead was the woman who persuaded the Women's Division to cede the property of National College to St. Paul School of Theology. I remember her coming on campus for Board of Trustees meetings in the mid 1960's. She always wore pink and was a very gracious and lively woman. I am not surprised that she hired buses to take African-Americans to vote. She "took on" a lot of political people, in Omaha, Nebraska, and elsewhere. – Jean Marie Grabher

**MISSION STATEMENT** The mission of Wide Is God's Welcome - KC is to strengthen the Body of Christ through the full inclusion in the United Methodist Church of persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

**VISION STATEMENT** This mission will be fulfilled as we unite Kansas City area United Methodists for education, advocacy, and empowerment.