

## **A VISIT WITH THE REVEREND WALTER AND ELEANOR CLAYTON . . . .**

### **In his retirement years, Walter Clayton brought to First Church a wide variety of church experiences.**

**Having just retired after ten years as minister** of Bay Park Baptist Church of San Diego, Eleanor and Walter were looking for a home church. They were having lunch in the May Company dining room across the valley from First Church. They wondered how the church had landscaped the hill behind the large sanctuary window. Eleanor said, "Let's go next Sunday and find out." They had visited the church years before when Walter was on active duty in the Navy as a chaplain. That first Sunday ended their search for a church home in which to spend their retirement years. They were convinced this was the right church because of the good music, fine sermon, and friendly congregation that really overwhelmed them. They joined the church in June 1988. In September they joined the Koinonia Bible Class. Walter became President of the class in 1989 and again in 2004.

Chaplain Jim Ferris and Rev. Felton Whittle were the visitation ministers of First Church for many years. They both moved away within three months of each other. Jim moved to Washington state and Rev. Whittle moved to Florida. Mark Trotter, the senior minister approached Walter to see if he would be interested in becoming the Minister of Visitation. Walter became a member of the church staff in 1990 and served in this capacity for 10 years, retiring December 30, 1999. This was Walter's third time to retire. His first was from the Navy after 23 years of active duty in 1976. Then, he retired again, after ten years as pastor of the Bay Park Baptist Church in 1987. Upon his 1999 retirement from the church staff, Walter joined the Chain Gang and is now the gardener for the Memorial Garden. He has been a member of the Memorial Garden Board since 1992. He also has been supportive of the Interfaith Shelter Network, which the church sponsors twice a year by spending a night with the homeless guests and providing the main course for the evening meal.

Walter states that he counts being the Minister of Visitation one of the highlights of his ministerial career. He usually had 35 to 40 members to visit on a regular basis. He took each of them the Sunday bulletin, printed sermons by Mark Trotter, and large print *Upper Room* devotionals. He became friends with these members and got to know about their lives before they became institutionalized or home bound. Over the years these members would share their life stories and show him their photo albums. Being a woodworker, he made each one a small table crèche for Christmas and would add something to each succeeding year. Many would keep them up all year.

Walter said he has seen many changes at First Church over the years: The acquisition of the Methodist Center, the building of the Memorial Garden, and now the building of the Trotter Chapel. It is his belief that the future holds great promise for the on-going ministry of First Church to the greater metropolitan area of San Diego.