

A Brief Glance at First Presbyterian Church

In 1896, Reverend Milton Chalmers Arrowood from Wadesboro, visited this territory in search of Presbyterians. With some encouragement and strengthened by a growing population in this bustling town of industry, he began preaching one Sunday afternoon each month at the courthouse, Masonic Hall, and Hillside School House. On March 18, 1898, eleven people took upon themselves the “vows of discipleship to walk together according to the rules and discipline of the Presbyterian Church” and were regularly constituted a church body by the Mecklenburg Presbytery on April 6, 1898.

The first church building was completed in the spring of 1900 diagonally across the street corner from the present structure. By 1904, the congregation had grown to fifty-one and all indebtedness on the building had been paid. In 1908, there were eighty-two members, five elders, and seven Deacons. At the end of 1913, the church was entirely self-supporting, paying the minister \$1,300 per year, and furnishing a manse, and by 1921 two hundred and eight members were on the rolls.

Plans were completed and construction of a newer church building began in 1923 at an eventual cost of \$87,000, which included the purchase and installation of a pipe organ. The sanctuary was full when dedication ceremonies were held on February 3, 1924. Nearly twenty years later on May 17, 1942, the newly debt free church was re-dedicated to the Glory of God.

During the dark and apprehensive days of World War II, the church published and mailed a monthly newsletter, “Under Two Flags” to all fifty-four names on the Honor Service Roll. A copy of the devotional quarterly, “Day by Day” was included.

During the summer of 1959, the congregation voted to air-condition the sanctuary and a major renovation program resulted in a ramp to the front porch, a lovely ladies’ lounge (parlor) and fireproofed stairwell from the third floor. In 1964, a new master plan called for the addition of an educational center and renovation of the existing building to include a week-day playschool and kindergarten, classrooms for the entire preschool division of the Sunday School department, and a spacious gymnasium/fellowship hall.

Ground breaking ceremonies were held April 17, 1966.

Several very successful capital campaigns in more recent years, chaired by individual church members, have transformed the spaces in which the congregation worships, fellowships, and brings the community together. The original (1924) pipe organ was repaired and enhanced in a major initiative in 1966. The sanctuary was re-modeled in 1977 (\$60,000) and ten years later, extensive upgrades were made to the parlor and educational wing and an elevator was installed between floors (\$426, 000). In 1997, in preparation for the Centennial Year, the “Second Century Fund” was created (\$750,000). Funds raised were designated for the beautiful redesign of the current sanctuary, rebuilding the front steps on North Street, repairing the pipe organ, and focusing specifically on select mission projects. The 2015 “Our Living Legacy” campaign (\$200,000) re-invested in critical repair and renovation. Primary among its projects were the extensive remodeling of the entire heavily scheduled and used kitchen facility, outside brick repair and repointing, and installation of energy efficient windows in the parlor.

Music and mission have always defined and been central to First Presbyterian Church. Sacred music has been a tradition since the church’s founding and worship anthems are chosen and prepared from the finest of church choral literature. In 2005, an intensive campaign was initiated to replace the often supplemented and repaired original 1924 pipe organ. Continued maintenance on an assortment of replacement parts was seen as untenable. An astounding \$607,000 was raised in a relatively short time to purchase a magnificent new Letarneau pipe organ. In his initial introductory letter to members of the congregation, the Campaign Chairman wrote “our spirits are raised and souls uplifted by the power and majesty of the organ”.

A partial listing of past and on-going mission projects also reflects congregational priorities. Each was or is currently financially supported by the church and members of the congregation have been or are actively involved in daily operations.

1955- \$5,000 was pledged to help build a future St. Andrews College in Laurinburg, NC.

1959- A clothing closet, including the mending and repair of garments, was established in the church basement. The Clothing Closet is now a major component of the Stanly Community Christian Ministries outreach.

1960- A “prayer line” was created for the community which was designed to be general in scope but also geared to meet any emergency, tragedy, or problem of widespread concern in the community.

1970 –The FLOC program (For the Love of Children) was established to meet the needs of disadvantaged students. The group met in the gym on Fridays.

1972- The Stanly County Vocational Workshop used the gym in its training of special needs adults for useful work.

1976- \$30,000 was raised to support the Mecklenburg Presbytery Haiti Mission Project to build a road and find a water source for a remote mountain village..

1981 – The Refugee Resettlement Committee brought the Sydalack’s from Laos to this community. Each family member became an American Citizen in 1993.

Throughout the early 2000’s the church has continued and increased the local scope of financial support and involvement by members in:

Crisis Assistance Ministry (financial assistance to overcome emergency crises)

Community Care Clinic (medical help for those without health insurance)

Education Fund (formerly Necklace Ministry) that provided formula for babies of HIV positive mothers and currently supports orphans in the African community and region of Mwandia, Zambia.

Homes of Hope (emergency overnight shelter and a structured transitional housing program for the homeless)

Stanly Community Christian Ministries (food, clothing, and other support for families in need)

Congregational support has also provided leadership in international mission trips, including:

2005- The first of multiple trips to Montana de Luz, a Presbyterian sponsored agency in Honduras to empower children, youth, and families affected with HIV. Daily activities included improving a hilltop road, re-wiring, mixing cement and building home foundations and sidewalks. Most importantly was the structured and unstructured play and support times with the children.

2008-A major initiative was undertaken to travel to Mwandu, Zambia to support the community and its hospital. Painting the TB ward, structuring programs for OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children), and building an outdoor kitchen for a local congregation of the United Church of Zambia were part of each day's routine.

2016-A second trip to nearby Mabumbu in the area around Mwandu was focused on digging a well and ensuring a source of clean water for a community school.

An official 1968 History closed with the words, *“With the harmonious relationship between pastor and people and the cooperative spirit now prevailing among the members, this fellowship, with God’s guidance, is destined to accomplish great and wonderful things for the ongoing of Christ’s Kingdom in Albemarle, Stanly County, and to the uttermost ends of the earth.”* And we will meet our tomorrows in the same spirit of discovery, optimism, commitment, and determination!!

Sources:

History of the First Presbyterian Church, Albemarle, North Carolina, March 1968, Mrs. W.E. Milton; and consultation with Skeet Ayscue, Dr. Bob Gaither, Donna Gaither, Gus Holbrook, Ben Jolly, Dr. Bill Jolly, Joyce Lambert, and Kyle Lambert
