

*The History
of
First Presbyterian Church of Naples*



*In the Heart of Naples with the Love of God:
we worship, we love, we grow, we serve*



HISTORY

First Presbyterian Church of Naples, Florida

Naples, Florida in 1951 had 1,500 residents and about 6,000 people resided in all of Collier County. A handful of those citizens, led by Rufus and Louise Burnham wished to start a Presbyterian Church. The Burnhams conveyed that message to the Southwest Florida Presbytery in Fort Myers on April 10, 1951. Upon examination, the Florida Synod determined that Naples was too small a community to warrant the establishment of a Presbyterian Church.

By November 1951, a local committee had compiled a list of 42 people who agreed to support financially and attend a Presbyterian Church in Naples. Arrangements were made to rent the Women's Club building for Sunday services during the coming winter.

Rev. Tracy Day Spencer had tendered his resignation as Director of Woodland Center (later Garden Valley) Neighborhood House in Cleveland, Ohio and was vacationing with Mrs. Spencer in Florida when he heard from a friend of Rufus Burnham about the situation in Naples. He arrived in Naples on January 15, 1952 and conducted services the following Sunday, January 20, 1952 in the Naples Women's Club building. Thirty-four adults attended the service with six children in attendance at the first Sunday school, under the guidance of Mrs. Spencer.

Rev. Spencer agreed to serve as acting minister of the proposed Presbyterian Church, and at the request of the Board of National Missions, a survey and religious census was completed indicating some sixty persons interested in affiliating with a Presbyterian Church in Naples. Messrs. Rufus Burnham, James E. DeVogt and Henry Hoffman were elected to attend the Presbytery meeting held in Winter Haven on March 18, 1952 where a petition for establishment of a Presbyterian Church in Naples was unanimously granted.

The official organization meeting was held in the Naples Women's Club on March 25, 1952, with the Reverend Dr. T. D. Simpson, Moderator of the Presbytery of Southwest Florida, presiding. There were fifty-one charter members, and thirty-two associate members; however, the official roll of charter members was not closed until November 30, 1952 and the number of charter members by then was seventy.

At a congregational meeting on April 6, 1952, the Reverend Tracy Day Spencer was called to be permanent pastor of the new church. He served, along with his wife Dorothy for the next 10 years. He was a risk-taker and a deliverer of dreams, building one facility after another (Spencer Hall, 1954, Sanctuary 1960).

A building campaign kicked off in January 1953 brought in \$6,000 in cash contributions and \$21,000 in pledges, payable over a three-year period. A suitable building site was located with a 1/2 block of land on Sixth Street South, running from Second to Third Avenue South and was purchased for \$8,000, paid in full and deed delivered on April 2, 1953.

On July 30, Mr. C. A. Tuell was declared low bidder at \$33,406.56 for the construction of the first of three planned buildings, Friendship Hall (later Spencer Hall). The contractor was paid in full upon completion, and first services were held in the new building, October 18, 1953. There were 10 members in the choir, directed by Mrs. Carol Pulling. Dedication services were held February 14, 1954.

By the spring of 1956, a rapidly expanding church school program caused the congregation to embark on the second step in the church building plan, the Sunday School class room building, located on the north and west sides of the Fellowship Hall. The building was dedicated on July 1 and within two years of that date, Church School enrollment had increased from fifty-seven to one hundred and twenty.

In January 1957, there were two hundred eighty full-time members and thirty-five associates on the church roll, prompting the need to proceed with the third step of the building program, the Sanctuary. Mr. Harold A. Wagoner, A.I.A., of Philadelphia was selected to prepare plans for a Sanctuary capable of seating five hundred people with an auxiliary patio with seating capacity for two hundred. The architect's estimated cost of construction was \$140,000. A building campaign goal was set for \$155,000, which included a \$15,000 sum which remained unpaid on the Church School classroom addition completed in July 1956.

After successfully completing the building fund campaign, plans were submitted to five bonded contractors for construction bids, which surprisingly ranged from \$280,000 to \$315,000. Working with the low bidder, Hamilton Construction Company of Miami and the architect, the Building Committee was able to reduce construction costs to \$189,100, exclusive of furnishings, estimated at an additional \$35,000.

One of First Presbyterian Church's first traditions was begun in 1958. The Soliloquy Tableau was presented for the first time on Maundy Thursday.

The groundbreaking service for the Sanctuary was held on June 28, 1959 and on December 27, 1959 a copper box containing pertinent memorabilia was placed in the corner stone. In September of that year, Rev. Ronald Ekberg began his duties as the first Assistant Minister serving First Presbyterian Church but served only a year before he was called as minister to a Congregational Church in north Florida. The first church cookbook was compiled that year (others followed in 1985 and 2001).

The first worship service in the new Sanctuary was held Sunday, May 15, 1960. It was followed on May 20 by the dedication of the Staley Memorial Carillon, a donation from church members, Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Staley. The gift of the Schulmerich carillon was in honor of their parents and the tower housing it remains a church landmark to this day.

Hurricane Donna made a direct hit on Naples on September 10, 1960. The community suffered \$20,000,000 in property damage, including \$5,000 to First Presbyterian Church. In spite of the damage, the Church immediately opened its doors to Naples residents as a shelter. Spencer Hall served as a center where volunteers assisted storm victims cope with losses and helped them put their lives back together again. The center remained open to those in need for weeks following the disaster.

The Margaret Perry Hunkin Chapel was dedicated November 29, 1960 and on February 15, 1961, the dedication of the Sanctuary was honored with a carillon recital by Anton Brees, Carillonneur for the Bok singing Tower at Lake Wales, Florida.

After ten years of service, Rev. Tracy Day Spencer announced his intention to retire effective January 1, 1962. Rev. Spencer was a man of courage and vision, taking what some considered to be a "risky" position in a "backwater town". He then helped to build a church to accommodate the future. He retired as "Minister Emeritus", a position he held until his death in June 1991.

For a year, beginning January 1962, the Church's pastor was Rev. Roger M. Rice, who requested to be relieved of his duties because of pollen allergy. He remained in service until his successor, Reverend John W. Stump was able to respond to his call as pastor January 1, 1963. That same date, The First Presbyterian Church of Naples was included in the South Florida Presbytery headquartered in Miami, Florida.

An Ohio native, Rev. Stump arrived in Naples with his family from a pastorate in Sarasota, Florida and in his twelve-year tenure vitalized and modernized the church as it responded to a growing, more sophisticated community. He became well known for his first-person sermons and innovative approaches to worship.

Miss E. Polly Williams was called late in 1963 to be the first Director of Christian Education. Soon (1965) began the construction of a new Christian Education building and remodeling of the existing CE facilities, costing \$160,217. The expanded facilities made possible the First Presbyterian Church Preschool, inaugurated that year. Church membership had grown to 678 communicant members.

When Miss Williams departed, Rev. Harold Abram came as Assistant Minister in charge of Christian Education in 1967. Rev. Abram stayed two years, accepting a call to a pastorate in New Jersey and was followed by the Reverend Clinton E. Kinney who arrived January 1970. The “Early Bird” Service was inaugurated and by year-end the church had 947 communicant members and 102 associate members. The budget for the Church’s benevolent work was \$30,000.

In 1971 the Church staff was increased by two when Mr. Don Ryno and Mr. Seth Wertz were engaged as the first full-time music personnel. It was during their tenure that the church began the concert series and bell choirs. At the close of that year, the church budget was \$165, 000, membership was 1,041 and the property was valued at \$750,000.

The third service was added during “the season” in 1972 to accommodate our burgeoning winter population. That same year, a non-profit organization called Presbyterian Homes (now Goodlette Arms) was formed to provide much needed low-income housing for the community. Rev. Paul Jassimides joined staff the following year as Minister of Visitation, a position he held until his retirement in 1980.

The year 1974 brought Doreen Reynolds in to the position of full-time Christian Education Director. The Moeller pipe organ was installed and noted organist Virgil Fox gave the dedicatory organ recital. The Continuing Concert Series was approved by Session and the Sew and Sews group was initiated under the auspices of Presbyterian Women.

Rev. John Stump left First Presbyterian Church in 1975 and interim pastor Dr. Fred Christian served until 1976. Dr. and Mrs. Christian brought to the church the International Bazaar, a popular and successful fund-raising event that was held in Spencer Hall for ten years. In 1976, the Senior High Bell Choir traveled as “Ambassadors of Friendship” to Poland.

With a church membership just over 1,000, Rev. Russell E. Mase, yet another Ohio native, was installed as Senior Pastor on May 1, 1976. He, his wife Carman and two sons came to Naples from Bucyrus, Ohio, which was one of several pastorates he held along Ohio’s Route 30.

About this time, The Men's Club was formed, encouraged, it was said, by a lady parishioner who wanted her husband to have an activity outside of the home. The group continues to provide a forum for speakers on a variety of subjects and welcomes guests. Another group called "Moonshiners", so called because of the early hour they met, evolved into the 3D Men's Group and was comprised of businessmen who met for breakfast and devotions in the morning prior to work. The group evolved into Devotion, Dialogue, and Doughnuts.

The following year, Carol Schneider, a long-time church member joined staff as Interim Christian Education Director. She would later become full-time CE Director, and serve the youth of the Church for 15 years. Rev. Dr. Robert Laughlin who had served two churches, one in Northern Ireland and one in Kentucky joined the church and shortly thereafter was asked to serve as Minister of Visitation, a position he held for seven years.

On March 27, 1977, First Presbyterian Church celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a special commemorative service. Following the departure of Don Ryno and Seth Wertz after nine years of service, Bob Fritz joined the church staff as Minister of Music. While serving the church, Fritz completed a Ph.D. in Music from Ohio State University. During this time The Rev. Bernie Philip Jones briefly held a position as Assistant Minister. It was after his departure that he established the Bernie's coffee shop chain.

During the next ten years the Church experienced great growth. Boy Scout Troop #38 was officially sponsored in 1978, bringing a 20-year legacy of annual breakfasts to our church. In an effort to involve more working women and young mothers in the church, Mrs. Mase organized The Businesswoman's Circle and the Young Women's Fellowship, later known as Charity Fellowship, producer of buckeye candies and special projects for nearly 30 years. The Christian Arts Program (CAP) for young people was also established and was a part of the church's youth program for nearly two decades.

Habitat for Humanity was initiated in Collier County April 1, 1978, with First Presbyterian Church of Naples as one of four founding churches. Through the years, church members have given mission dollars and labor and served as mentors, on family selection and on the board of directors. The Collier Habitat for Humanity is the second oldest affiliate in the United States and one of the largest. By the end of 2001 they had build 400 homes, 27 of them funded by First Presbyterian Church and its members.

In 1979 Focus was initiated under the direction of Helen Mosbach, evolving into today's publication entitled Outreach. Rev. John McLaren was installed as the church's first Assistant Minister. The Early Bird Singers were led by Bob Mortland and daughter, Beth and remained active for several years. Ken Axelson became Director of Music in 1980. He would serve the Church for the next seven years and during his tenure the church sponsored its first music intern in 1983-84.

In 1981, First Presbyterian Church established an Endowment Fund. The Milestone Youth Home (MY HOME) opened with strong support and involvement from church members. The following year church members assisted the start-up of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church, giving of time, funds and materials. The church had an internal face-lift on the occasion of its 30th birthday, including new upholstered pews and chairs.

The student loan initiative was established in 1983 and the following year saw the first Christmas dinner and the debut of First Church Adventurers. This popular program, designed to provide reasonably priced group travel and fellowship, was very active for about 15 years.

With the blessing of Session, Rev. Russell Mase, Senior Pastor enrolled in The Pittsburgh Theological Seminary from which he received his Doctor of Ministry degree in 1989, quipping on that occasion that it took him 50 years to get out of school.

Ginger Godley joined staff as the Director of First Presbyterian Church Preschool in 1984. Serendipity, a couple's fellowship group began meeting that year and in 1986, the church purchased the Olymphia Apartments from Naples Community Hospital.

Bruce Scott was called to be Associate Pastor, formed and installed the first Stephen Ministries group on February 12, 1988. Dr. Charles Goehring was selected as the new Director of Music in 1987. He and his wife Joy worked as a team, expanding the church music program and concert series. The new Spencer Hall, with a modern kitchen, was dedicated in 1988.

The final decade of the century, the 1990's, truly reflected not only our growth, but also our outreach. Rev. Donald Sherman was called to be Associate Pastor in 1990, the same year that the Men's Prayer Group and the first Saturday Services were begun. First Presbyterian Pre-school celebrated 25 years. In 1991, Rev. Bruce Scott brought us the Project 5000 Program to provide food to the homeless and needy in Collier County. A relationship was established with our sister church in Guatemala. James McDonald began work as Interim Director of

Christian Education in 1992 and in 1993 Rev. Bruce Scott departed. A fellowship group called Babyboomers became active and thrived as it provided social interaction for couples. In 1994 Dr. David Pierce was installed as Associate Pastor and Gary Klarenbeek joined us as Director of Music. The organ renovation was completed and dedicated.

The church was staggered to learn in March 1994 of the embezzlement of funds in excess of a million dollars by its long-time treasurer who was subsequently convicted and served time in jail for the crime.

A twenty-year Celebration of the Ministry of Rev. Dr. Russell Mase was held on May 1, 1996 and just two years later on December 27, 1998, he and Mrs. Mase were honored at a reception on the occasion of his retirement. During Rev. Mase's 22-year tenure, membership at First Presbyterian Church grew to 1,604, an increase of 55%. That figure was 90% and when affiliate members were included rose to 1,960. This phenomenal growth in membership was due greatly to his exceptional sermons and ability to relate to parishioners.

The Angel Tree Christmas Project was adopted in 1997 and the Endowment Account had grown to over \$2 million dollars. June saw the first of several "Star Spangled Spectacular" programs celebrating the Fourth of July holiday and 35 singers made a debut as the Jubilation Singers choir that winter. First Presbyterian sponsored Rosemary Welton, long-time choir soloist and lay reader, when she entered Princeton Theological Seminary that fall. She received a Master of Arts in Christian Education and a Master of Divinity. Rev. Russell Mase presented the sermon on the occasion of her ordination June 24, 2001 at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church.

Session began to research possible solutions to accommodate the growing members, programs and ministry of First Presbyterian Church. To better serve our increasing family membership, Gloria Gulley was hired as Director of Young Adult & Family Ministries and Cammy Miller was hired as Director of Children & Family Ministries in 1998. The Brackett property west of the C.E. Building was purchased for church expansion.

The years 1999 through 2001 were marked by extraordinary change for the church. The decision to rebuild First Presbyterian Church on the existing site was made after a long study as to the possibility of moving the congregation north of Pine Ridge Road. Rev. Fred Webb, Jr. became Interim Senior Pastor for First Presbyterian and came to Naples in March 1999. A First Presbyterian Church web site was set in operation and the building fund campaign and building committee were

established. After 22 years of service, George Healy retired as head custodian.

In early 2000, arrangements were completed to house worship activities, preschool, staff functions and concert series in alternate sites during construction of the new facility. A contract was executed for the new Ruffatti pipe organ, and in June of that year, on the Sunday prior to the demolition of the church building, a Festival of Praise and Promise was held to celebrate the past and the future.

We had come full circle, returning to meeting in The Women's Club on Park Avenue and also in the Wynn Building on First Avenue South. Sunday services were conducted in the auditorium/cafeteria of Gulf View Middle School. Rev. Webb left in August 2000 and a call was issued to Rev. Kirt E. Anderson who arrived in September with his wife Kim and teenage children Erin (18), Bryant (17) and Amy (14). Rev. Anderson was born in Spokane, Washington, but spent most of his youth in California. He was educated at the University of California and Princeton Seminary and came to Naples from Michigan. His expressed goal was to, "address the mission given me by the church that the work expands to enhance ministries to young families, children and youth".

In the year 2001, while worshiping at Gulf View Middle School, many staff changes occurred, including the departure of Gary Klarenbeek in January of that year. Mr. Klarenbeek had built an impressive repertoire of choirs and programs, including the hugely popular "Star Spangled Spectacular" and his resignation left a great void. Interim Associate Bill Cowfer left Naples for North Port to become Interim Executive Presbyterian of the Peace River Presbytery. In March Rev. Derek Richman arrived after six years with Covenant Church in Ft. Myers to take the position of Interim Associate Pastor of Education. A California native, Rev. Richman received his MA in Divinity from Dubuque Seminary in Iowa while at FPCN and became a doctoral candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. In July Brice Gerlach joined the staff as Director of Music Ministries. Mr. Gerlach, yet another California native, had served seven years as director of Music at Naples United Church of Christ and continued his position as Assistant Director of the Philharmonic Center Chorale and Youth Chorale after taking his position with First Presbyterian Church of Naples.

With the intent to consolidate church real estate to contiguous properties, the church in that year sold two "across street" parking lots and purchased two properties, one west of the former church building on 2nd Ave. S. and the other on north of 2nd Avenue S. on 6th Street. With escalating property values in the City of Naples, the church property was

appraised at \$17 million.

Jeannie Snedeker was welcomed in October 2001 as Director of Children's Ministries bringing to the program an extensive background in Christian Education and music. She received a B.M. degree from Ohio State University in voice performance, is a licensed Kindermusik educator and professional musician. She served for more than five years, enhancing the youth music and VBS presence in the community.

On October 21, 2001, the cornerstones from the initial sanctuary (1959) and from the renovation of Spencer Hall (1988) were returned to their respective locations in ceremonies that included a walk-through of the nearly completed facility. A dedication ceremony of the refurbished carillon was held on December 16. A ribbon cutting ceremony signifying the opening of the Christian Education Building and the laying of the new cornerstone occurred on January 6, 2002 on the occasion of Epiphany. Contents of all cornerstone boxes are listed in the church records.

Fifty years after the official organization of First Presbyterian Church, in the winter of 2002, the congregation was housed once again under its own roof. The enormous rebuild on the original church site had been completed and the final building costs were estimated to be about \$10.2 million dollars. A service of rededication of the sanctuary was held on March 17, 2002 with many participants, and special guests Rev. Graham Hart, Executive of Peace River Presbytery, and former Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Russell and Mrs. Mase.

Like the church, the community had grown, with a County population numbering 251,377 in the 2000 census, not including seasonal or tourist visitors. City of Naples population was built-out at about 25,000. In March 2002 the Cerulean Cross was installed. Also, in 2002, First Presbyterian Church was prepared and primed to serve future generations of Neapolitans and in that year adopted The Stephen Ministries Program, the Fall Festival, Thanksgiving Dinner, and re-established First Church Adventures as Prime Timers.

In May, after many years of service Rev. Don Sherman preached his final sermon, which was followed by a reception in Spencer Hall. Rev. Sherman was the driving factor of the St. Matthew's House Golf Marathon, among his many other good works. The senior high school youth participated in the first Mexico Mission Trip. The Deacons redefined the geographical lines for the parishes.

Early 2003 saw the beginning of the church blood drives and

Celebration of the Faithful, which continued for about five years. The church printed a Photo Directory, and Deacons and Stephen Ministries began the first of many annual health fairs which expanded to include blood drives. Jennifer Wilson joined the staff of Director of Student Ministries, and that summer the Chancel Choir led by Brice Gerlach took a 10-day tour of Europe and the International Church Music Festival.

The following year in March 2004, a new pipe organ with 5,500 pipes and built by Fratelli Ruffatti organ builders of Padua, Italy was installed in the church. The organ was dedicated as the Julia Thompson Smith Memorial Organ and the dedicatory recital was performed by Thomas Murray, professor of organ at Yale University. Brice Gerlach presented a debut concert on July 4th which turned out to be a predecessor of ongoing Fourth of July celebrations in future years.

The year was fraught with some difficulties too as both Rev. Dr. Kirt Anderson, Senior Pastor and Brice Gerlach, Director of Music Ministries both suffered health problems. The Preschool Director, Ginger Godley retired after 21 years of service. Becky Jarrell was hired as Director of Congregational Care, a position she held for 6 years. That summer, Hurricane Charley gave Naples a glancing blow, resulting in Rev. John McWilliams organizing “Chainsaws for Jesus,” a group of several church members whose mission it was to help cleanup for people in need in counties to the north of us which were harder hit by the hurricane.

That work bore more fruit as “Chainsaws for Jesus” helped again in the summer of 2005 after infamous Hurricane Katrina hit Miami prior to heading to New Orleans, and again in October when Wilma slammed into Naples before crossing the Florida coast. We were joined by a new Director of Preschool, Judy Knope.

In the summer of 2006, John and Barbara McWilliams were accompanied by 15 parishioners on a 10-day mission trip to Russia. In a church ceremony and celebration, we officially “Burned the Mortgage”.

Due to unresolved differences, both Dr. Anderson and Dr. Richman left the church in the latter half of 2006. Rev. Dr. Russell Mase, Pastor Emeritus, served several months as Head of Staff, until Rev. Dr. Robert Bohl joined us to serve 22 months as Interim Pastor. During Dr. Bohl’s tenure, we began the Feed the 5,000 Project and at his suggestion, the Birthday Mission Fund was established to benefit the Endowment Fund to support youth mission work.

In 2007, Sandy Poore celebrated 25 years of service, the longest of any church employee, to First Presbyterian Church of Naples. Dr. Greg Smith joined us in October 2007 as Director of Educational Ministries and introduced us to Church on Wednesdays (COW), replacing the

Wednesday Night Live adult education series. Judy Knope resigned and was replaced as Director of Preschool by Lee Walsh.

The Pastor Nominating Committee began its work in November 2007 and in that same month, the congregation voted to purchase the Fuller property abutting the North parking lot on 6th Street up to First Avenue S. to accommodate our continuing parking needs for \$1.5M. In December we held a Consecration Sunday Brunch, which was popular with congregants and successful to stewardship efforts, and thus continued through many future years.

On July 20, 2008, the Reverend Dr. Edward Thompson was called to serve as the fifth Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Naples. A Scot by birth, he and his wife, Elizabeth were welcomed among us in a congregational celebration in the fall. We honored Dr. Brice Gerlach, Director of Music Ministries on receiving his Doctorate of Music (DM) Degree, with emphasis in Choral Conducting from the University of Indiana School Of Music. We said goodbye to Pastor John McWilliams who had served us so well for seven years and Dr. Greg Smith continued McWilliams tradition by heading a group of church volunteers to aid in cleanup for victims of Hurricane Ike in Texas.

The year 2009 heralded the arrival of the antiphonal organ pipes from Padua, Italy with the Ruffatti family of Italy very much in attendance for the installation process. The Preschool and Christian Education Committee outlined a campaign to raise funds in the amount of \$30,000 to renovate the playground area adjacent to Second Avenue South on the North side of the C.E. Building (completed in 2012). A pictorial directory was being produced for 2010.

By then, the national economic climate was being hugely felt in Southwest Florida and in the church, resulting in both budget cuts and personnel changes. We eliminated some positions and reduced hours on others. Early in 2010, Gregory Smith resigned his position as Director of Educational Ministries, followed by Becky Jarrell, Director of Congregational Care. Rev. Dr. Kathleen Weller joined us in June as Temporary Supply Pastor.

In April 2011, Ashley Houk joined us as the new Preschool Director. The school was now over 45 years old and serving 100 children. Under her guidance the Preschool would establish the Angel Fund to help fund scholarships and enhance curriculum. Our volunteer youth director accepted a full-time job with another church Christian Education Dept., thus ending nearly a decade of youth Mexico Mission trips.

With thanks to Dr. Weller for her 16 months of service, we welcomed the arrival of Jonathan Evans, Associate Pastor and his family in the fall. An agreement was reached with Cumberland Presbyterian Church/Grace Presbytery (led by Ramon Garcia) to use the chapel for worship services on late Sunday mornings, an arrangement that continues to be renewed. A new baptismal font was donated by Fern Aitchison and William Botter in memory of his wife, Lil. The stand was built by Virgil Batcher.

The purchase of the beautiful Blüthner piano was made possible by a gift received from the estate of Louise Pohler. The piano was purchased from Central Music in April 2012 at a cost of \$76,190.

The church was saddened at the resignation of Rev. Dr. Edward Thompson in November, 2012 who took employment with the Board of Pensions of Presbyterian Church USA. Following a final sermon and reception for Elizabeth and Edward, they departed for Kansas in mid-December.

Interim Pastor Dr. David Lewis Horne, while serving only a year as Interim Pastor did good work on helping us to work on a transition process. A slow economic recovery, declining membership (782), loss of staff and budget shortages took a toll, but the church continued to rally. In 2013 the church began participation in Meals of Hope, packing food items to be distributed to needy organizations in the community. We designated \$8,000 of Presbytery mission funds be specifically earmarked for Mission Peniel in Immokalee. We commemorated and celebrated 32 years of service by our Facilities Manager, Sandy Poore.

Shana Dublan joined the staff as Director of Children and Family Ministries on January 15, 2014.

On February 28, 2014, Rev. Dr. Kathleen Weller was welcomed back as Temporary Head of Staff until a new Interim Pastor could be found. The Christian Education Committee initiated a new fundraiser to raise \$10,440 for a Montreat youth trip, called "144 Envelope Fundraiser". It was so successful, they repeated it the following year. We continued with Meals of Hope and the Evangelism Committee added a new "Prayer Shawl" ministry of shawls knitted by members for distribution for comfort and caring as needed.

We said goodbye to Associate Pastor, Jonathan Evans on September 28, 2014, who would be seeking a new position. Rev. Dr. William (Will) Browne arrived October 1, 2014, to take the position of Interim Pastor, commuting to work from Sarasota where his wife is the Minister of Visitation at The Church of the Palms, another Presbyterian Church. On December 21 during the 10 a.m. service Dan and Sherrie MacLea were

honored with a 12” replica of the chancel cross for their 23 years as leaders of the church money counters.

Valentine’s Day 2015 was the occasion for a festive dinner with entertainment, singing and 14 youth servers. The youth of the church also went on a ski trip in March and began First Friday’s meetings. In May, we heard testimony from two college youth who were being supported by the church on summer mission trips to Haiti and Jamaica. On July 1, 2015 the church sold the north 150’ of the church parking lot located at Sixth Street South and Second Avenue South.

On September 20, 2015, Rev. Craig Goodrich accepted the call to be our Senior Pastor/Head of Staff. He and his wife, Andie relocated to Naples from Atlanta, GA. His Installation service occurred on February 14, 2016, a week prior to the celebration of First Presbyterian Preschool’s 50th Anniversary. The church reinstated an 8-week confirmation class for grades 8 and above, confirming a class of 7 members.

The congregation approved the position of an Associate Pastor at its Congregational meeting December 11, 2016. On July 9, 2017 the congregation approved the slate of nominees to serve on the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee.

Adopting, Rev. Goodrich’s church motto, “In the Heart of Naples with the Love of God”, the church looked forward to new growth and improved finances as it prepared to celebrate 65 years of service to the community in February of 2017. On Sunday, February 12, 2017, First Presbyterian Church of Naples was filled to capacity for a single service on the occasion of its 65th Anniversary Celebration. A two-part sermon entitled “65 and Not Retiring!” was presented by Rev. Craig Goodrich and Dr. Russell Mase, Pastor Emeritus, who served the church from 1976 to 1998. Rev. Graham Hart, General Presbyter brought greetings from Peace River Presbytery and Bill Barnett, Mayor of Naples, presented FPCN with the official Key to the City, a first for a city church. A special dedication made possible through the generosity of Arlene and Jerry Nichols was the naming of the Dr. Russell Mase Christian Education Center.

At the May 21, 2017 worship service, the congregation celebrated Kathleen Law’s 15th anniversary as an employee at FPCN. Our summer music intern, Colleen Kirkpatrick, who had been Brice Gerlach’s student since 2015, came to us from Ave Maria University. Shana Dublan, Director of Children and Family Ministries left after serving the church for 3 1/2 years to take a similar position in Indiana to be near her family.

Hurricane Irma made landfall in Naples as a category 3 on Sunday, September 10, 2017 (same date as Hurricane Donna in 1960). It was the first time regular worship services were cancelled. We gathered the following Sunday with Moorings Presbyterian Church in their generator-cooled gymnasium. Power was restored two weeks after and the church property and buildings sustained damage in the amount of \$41,323. Our Stephen Ministers were very busy for months, and volunteers literally washed down the entire church, including Bibles and hymnals.

In October, several youth from Etowah High School in Woodstock, GA brought 2,000 lbs. of food and water for distribution following the hurricane. The Missions committee took them to Immokalee where the need was great. The group stayed overnight in the youth room for 3 days and attended church where they were recognized for their efforts.

During the summer of 2017, the church underwent the renovation of the upstairs office, replacing office cubicles with two enclosed offices for the Director of Finance and the Executive Office Manager. Spencer Hall was updated with new lighting and carpet and a closet was added to the hallway next to the Narthex creating additional storage for communion ware.

On Sunday, October 1, 2017, we celebrated World Communion Sunday with Iglasia Nacion Santa Internacional (Cumberland Presbytery Church), which has met weekly in our Chapel since 2011.

A Search committee was formed in January 2018 to hire a new Director of Christian Education.

On May 13, 2018, the congregation approved the call of Rex Childs as the Associate Pastor. Rex and his wife, Cayla are native Floridians and Rex is a member of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church where he served in an administrative capacity. Rex began his duties as the Associate Pastor on July 2, 2018 and was ordained and installed on July 29, 2018.

For the safety and security of the church during worship, it was decided to use off-duty Police Officers during Sunday services and major events.

The Ladies Sanctuary restroom underwent a \$57,000 renovation in October 2018.

A Strategic Committee kick-off meeting took place October 25, 2018, chaired by Gary Root. The committee was to work at developing a Mission and Vision statement for the church.

January 20, 2019, Carrie Newcomer, a Grammy-winning songwriter, recording artist, performer and educator, performed for one of our Season of Music concert series along with her accompanist, Gary Walters.

Five people from our church, Pat Nordbrock, Jim Kier, Bill Crawford, Craig and Andie Goodrich traveled to Cuba with about 25 or 30 members of Peace River Presbytery to focus with how we can build a partnership with churches in the Matanzas, Cuba Presbytery. Subsequently, the Session adopted a Partnership Agreement between Central Presbyterian Church in Matanzas, Cuba and the First Presbyterian Church of Naples on January 22, 2019.

The First Friday program was renamed Parent's Night Out as the program no longer meets just on the first Friday of the month. There are approximately 40-50 children who attend.

On April 23, 2019, Session approved the addition to the mission statement as presented by the Strategic Planning committee of "In the Heart of Naples with the Love of God: we worship, we love, we grow, we serve." A Wish List was developed to offer a means for those wishing to provide additional gifts to the church over and above their pledge, to do so.

The summer of 2019 included several renovations to the outside of the church building. The decorative banding was removed and replaced with a cement filled banding to prevent birds for burrowing and making nests in the previous fiberglass banding. The church was painted and new light sconces were installed. Safety film was installed on the outside windows of the entry doors and preschool windows. The courtyard was repaired and a new cedar trellis was installed. Included with the renovations on the inside was the repainting of the Youth Room and new carpeting in the front office. New sofas and chairs were purchased for the Youth Room. A new and updated telephone system was installed.

To help in supporting the Cedarkirk Camp's Capital Campaign, the church purchased a brick in the amount of \$1,000 to be installed at the entry of their new building. Sunday school was renamed "Kidz Lab; a Journey of Faith and Formation." A new Children and Youth Ministry Policy was adopted, coinciding with training for all volunteers involved with the youth or children. Chuck Gomori retired as Head Usher Coordinator, a voluntary position he held for 18 years. Barbara Weiss was nominated to the Presbytery as a commissioner to the General Assembly. A special offering was taken to support the Bahamas after suffering devastating damage from Hurricane Dorian. Over \$5,300 was collected for this effort.

Nancy Van Fleet was hired to serve as the Director of Children and Youth. Her duties began December 3, 2019. A schedule was established recognizing employees for their service to the church in 5-year increments.

The church Library was relocated to the Parlor and opened February 23, 2020.

The world suffered a COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic which hit the United States in early 2020. As cases of the virus spread to Florida, the church closed worship services on March 15 followed by closure of the offices on March 17. All employees worked remotely from their homes as the world underwent a lockdown. Worship services were recorded in the church Sanctuary and posted on our website and social media. A link to the services was e-mailed weekly to over 800 recipients for viewing. This resulted in more people watching the recordings than what would have attended on any given Sunday. Participating in the services were the ministry staff, Rev. Craig Goodrich, Rev. Rex Childs, Nancy Van Fleet, Dr. Brice Gerlach. Hymns were led by soloist, Michele Byrd.

As time went on, a Task Force was formed of Elders, Shirley Hagerson, Jim Kier, Deborah Meeson-Vige, Tom Morr (chair), Barbara Weiss and ex-officio's, Rev. Craig Goodrich and Sharman Pfaus. Upon the recommendation of the Task Force, Session approved the opening of the church offices on June 9. However, the Sanctuary would remain closed to worship and services would continue to be recorded and publicized. On June 23, Session met and determined, that due to the increased cases of COVID-19, to extend the suspension of worship services. Committee meetings and programs continued to meet virtually via Zoom.

The First Presbyterian Preschool resumed classes in August 2020 but with smaller classes and with revised drop-off and pick-up for the students.

Live worship services began on September 20, 2020 with safety protocols in place for our congregants, however, worship services continued to be recorded and publicized. Christmas Eve worship services were held virtually due to increasing COVID-19 cases and to keep our congregants safe.

In January 2021 Rev. Rex Childs was elected Moderator of the Peace River Presbytery. Rev. Craig Goodrich co-chairs the Finance Committee of the Peace River Presbytery.

In March 2021 the Peace River Presbytery named First Presbyterian Church a certified Earth Care Congregation. This honor speaks to the great commitment that our church has made to care for God's earth.

First Presbyterian Church has historically had an admirable benevolent record, giving nationally to facilitate evangelism, mission, seminaries, education and medical and health issues. More importantly, this church is recognized in the Naples/Collier community as being quick to meet and respond to needs. The list of some local recipients of this church's benevolence can be found in the Missions records of the church. It represents a traditional legacy of service in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ON FILE IN CHURCH ARCHIVES IS THE FOLLOWING
INFORMATION AND LISTS:

CHARTER MEMBERS

ANNUAL REPORTS

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NAMES OF ELDERS, DEACONS AND TRUSTEES

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PICTORAL AND PROGRAM MEMORABILIA

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PROGRAM DIRECTORY

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