

History of the Second Presbyterian Church

The Second Presbyterian Church of Sumter has served the City of Sumter and the surrounding rural areas for more than 144 years, with a ministry of Christian worship, education, and fellowship. The land which initially consisted of more than five acres was given by Mr. Monaghan of Sumter. Under the auspices of the Board of National Mission of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., the church was organized in 1880 under the pastoral administration of the Reverend James Lawton. Fifty charter members comprised the founding congregation.

The first edifice, a rectangular frame building, measuring 20 x 40 feet was demolished and replaced by a new building constructed from brick made of white sand by students at Kendall Institute. The new sanctuary had a capacity of 300. The new structure included a basement area which covered the same amount of space as the main sanctuary. The basement served the Sunday School and other religious activities. The plant was valued at \$14,000. The construction was completed in 1911 under the Reverend A. U. Frierson. A two-story manse was erected on the grounds valued at \$3,000.

Kendall Institute was founded 1891 and was sustained by the Board for Freedmen. The school was named for Mrs. Julia B. Kendall, wife of Reverend Henry Kendall, Secretary of the Board of Missions from 1870 to 1892. Reverend J. C. Watkins, the second pastor of the church built the school from its foundation to a recognized center of training for Christian education from first grade through high school. His pastorate lasted for eleven years.

Dr. A. U. Frierson, a product of the Goodwill Parochial School Mayesville, South Carolina, succeeded Reverend Watkins as pastor and principal of the school. During his administration, Kendall Institute attracted students from all over the state. A three-story framed girl's dormitory was proposed in 1908 and later built at a cost of five thousand (\$5,000). By 1912 the school's enrollment reached its highest peak of 436 for boarding and day students. During the thirteen years Reverend Frierson was at Kendall, eleven classes with an average of eleven girls and boys per class were graduated. The Reverend John P. Foster succeeded Dr. Frierson. Under the administration of Reverend Foster, a dedicatory service was held.

Reverend Foster's first year at Kendall was completely gratifying to the board and the community as one of the brightest chapters in the school's recorded history. The academic program was expanded and enriched. The curriculum added practical arts and crafts and athletics became a part of the extracurricular program. Reverend Foster remained at Kendall twelve years and relinquished the principalship to Reverend I. P. Pogue in 1928. A cottage was built for boys in 1928 and athletics continued with robust competitions. 1932, Kendall closed.

Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, a Scotia Seminary alumna, was one of earliest instructors at Kendall Institute.

The Reverend Thomas E. Wilson was Reverend Pogue's successor. Under his leadership the numerical strength of the church increased. The Reverend James A. Martin was the next ordinant to serve the church. His tenure and leadership marked the purchase of a four-acre tract on Old Pocalla Road in 1967, the current site of the Second Presbyterian Church.

The Reverend Robert E. Bligen, who first served as supply, was installed in 1970, and his leadership resulted in the erection of a new edifice and educational wing. The groundbreaking ceremonies for the new structure took place on February 24, 1974.

The erection of the new structure, which Reverend Bligen designed, was an act of stewardship for many of the men of the church who used their talents to complete in-kind labor for a building valued at nearly \$250,000. A dedicatory service held on April 23, 1976, with Dr. Clinton Marsh, the 185th Moderator of the General Assembly as the speaker.

Under the direction of Reverend Bligen and the Session, the church operated a very successful five day weekly senior citizens program. He established the Willing Workers, a service-oriented group and the Shepherd Leaders program that paired deacons and elders as ministry partners to the congregation. Dr. Bligen honorably retired September 30, 1998 after 28 years of service.

Following the retirement of Dr. Bligen, Reverend Emma W. Thompson whose membership had a lengthy history in the Second Presbyterian Church was elected as Interim Pastor in 1998. Reverend Thompson served admirably for three years and resigned in 2001.

The Session hired Reverend Julia A. Prince as Temporary Supply Pastor in 2001. The temporary status of her service and others gave way to several ministers sharing their gifts with the congregation to fill the spiritual leadership void until a pastor could be contractually secured. Second Presbyterian Church was blessed to embrace messages from visiting pastors Othan Franklin Sharp, Omar Hilton, and Daryl Cunningham.

Reverend Dr. Gloria Jones Williams became the ninth pastor of Second Presbyterian Church on March 25, 2007. She led the church into community ministries, including a tutoring ministry with Morris College. She presided as an able and competent leader. Reverend Williams resigned in 2014.

Second Church was once again seeking pastoral leadership. The church called upon its elders, deacons and visiting ministers to keep the flock spiritually nourished and engaged. The search concluded with a familiar voice and face, the vibrant and spiritually gifted Rev. Dr. Ella Franklin Busby. The Session hired the honorably retired Dr. Busby in 2016. Her inspiration, faith and leadership produced the renovation of the church fellowship hall and dining facility with a zero-balance owed at completion.

Second Presbyterian Church has a rich, distinctive, and impactful history of Christian service to the Sumter community. Kendall Institute enhanced the academic lives of Black children and left an indelible cultural imprint. The Sumter County Historical Commission erected a historical marker at the original site on the corner of Watkins and Harvin Streets. The boys and girls whose lives were enriched through the scouting programs directed by Mr. E. H. Roman, Sr. and Mr. K. D. Singleton for boys and Rev. Emma Thompson and her associates organized an ecumenical activity for girls. Dr. Bligen's senior citizens program enlivened the daily routine for so many residents in the Sumter community. Dr. Busby's drive, vision, determination, and faith continue to forge a path toward the fulfillment of the Second Presbyterian Church mission of "To know God's will and to do it".