

60 Years and Counting: A History of the Witness of John Calvin Presbyterian Church, Florence SC (November 2023)

As we celebrate the witness that this congregation has had in this community for the last 60 years, we look ahead with anticipation to where God is leading us for the next 60. Organized formally on February 2, 1964, the community was born out of the dreams of the Pee Dee Presbytery Church Extension Committee, that saw a need for a new worshipping community in the Sandhurst area of Florence. When the property was purchased, Third Loop was a dirt road, and most of the surrounding area was undeveloped farmland.

Rev. Dr. Richard Andrews (whom the children believed to be God because of his stature, voice, and demeanor) was the founding pastor and served from 1963 to 1998. Through the three and a half decades of his leadership, the church building was constructed in three phases. In 1966, the Fellowship Hall (that was then also used as the sanctuary) was completed and the congregation moved from Royall Elementary where they had been worshipping. The education wing was completed in 1977, and the new offices and sanctuary finished in 1980. Our church members work diligently to ensure that the building is maintained so that it can be used to accomplish our mission and ministry goals.

Over the years, more than 1400 persons have joined in membership, and more than 150 have been ordained as ruling elders. There have been 4 installed pastors and 4 interim pastors, not including Rev. Jennifer Kottler who began her tenure here in 2020. There was a diaconate ministry that began in 1962 and continued until 1975, at which time the decision was made to disband and give their responsibilities to the Session. The Session started with 6 men elected as Elders, expanded to as many as 12 men and women and today numbers 9, not including the pastor who serves as moderator. The church began with 64 charter members, grew to well over 400 in the mid-eighties and we currently have around 110 with between 60 and 80 in worship on any given Sunday.

From the outset, John Calvin has been a community that welcomes everyone. On June 27, 2023 the Session adopted a statement of inclusion so that we might be explicit in our welcome to everyone in Florence. In part it reads,

“John Calvin Presbyterian Church (JCPC) is an inclusive community of faith. Each of us is created in God's image, and as such, we are beloved children of God. Jesus called all people to follow him, especially those who had been shunned, outcast, and marginalized in their community. We welcome everyone into our community regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, financial means, political affiliation, culture or ethnicity.”

Everyone is encouraged to participate in the mission, ministry, worship and welcome of this congregation, and all members can be called to serve in leadership. Led by an amazing choir, and gifted director and musicians, the energy here is palpable. We are excited about the future of this church and believe that we are called to serve this community for such a time as this.