

# History of First Presbyterian Church, Myrtle Beach, SC

First Presbyterian Church, Myrtle Beach, was organized by Pee Dee Presbytery on July 8, 1928. The congregation was given land at 11th Avenue N and Kings Highway by a company owned by John Woodside, an Elder from Greenville, SC. A building was erected in 1928 for worship and Sunday School. The years between 1932-1934 were difficult, and the church was nearly forced to close. The Great Depression gripped the nation. Many members who worked for Mr. Woodside's company left. At one time, the church had only 9 active members, but they worked and sacrificed to keep the church open and its witness alive.

In its first 12 years, the church had no full-time pastor. Dr. Cecil Brearley, pastor of Kingston Presbyterian Church, led worship on the first and third Sunday evenings each month. In the summer, the church was supplied by seminary students. By 1940, FPC had grown and the financial crisis in the nation was easing. With a congregation of 70 members, the church needed a full-time pastor. On November 3, 1940, the Reverend Frank Kincaid was called, and he served from December, 1940, until June 30, 1942.

In 1945, Myrtle Beach Farms Co., (now Burroughs and Chapin) traded the church's half block of land for a full block on Kings Highway. They gave \$3,000 to move the building. After moving to the new location, the church drew plans for a new sanctuary, as the old sanctuary could hold 90 people and the church had 162 members. Also, in March, 1945, the church called Dr. Brearley as their pastor. He served until 1961. The new sanctuary, completed in December of 1948, accommodated 280 people for worship.

Dr. Brearley served the congregation and community with love and devotion, laying a foundation for the future. In 1962, the church called the Rev. Murphy Williams. The '60's were years of growth for the church and the Grand Strand. FPC began a summer Campground Ministry. A Moravian Love Feast in December continues to be a major event in the community. Facilities were expanded and the FPC Kindergarten was started. In 1972, Mr. Williams accepted a call to a church in Texas.

In February 1973, the Rev. Joe Stowe, became pastor. During his ministry, the church thrived, and FPC's local outreach led to the founding of Mobile Meals. The church and Pee Dee Presbytery hosted the General Assembly of the PCUS in 1980, the first General Assembly meeting in South Carolina since 1906. When Rev. Stowe retired in 1982, church membership was about 600.

In 1983 the congregation called Dr. Robert C. Wilkes, Jr. as pastor. FPC continued to grow, as did its outreach and its commitment to benevolent causes. The church supports global missions as well as local agencies such as Associated Charities, Helping Hands, Mobile Meals, Community Kitchen, Street Reach Ministries, and Habitat For Humanity. FPC led the effort to bring Habitat to Horry County and has helped to build more than 30 homes. Also the church has built homes in Mexico and the Bahamas. Since 1983, the church has created the FPC Concert Series, the Growing Tree Pre-School, and ministries for children and youth.

By 1988, the membership had outgrown the facilities on Kings Highway. A capital campaign was launched to build a fellowship hall and to enlarge the sanctuary to double the seating capacity. Ground-breaking was held in November, 1988, and on November 18, 1990, the expansion was dedicated to the Glory of God. By 2001, growing needs, real estate restrictions, and a vision for the future led the congregation to purchase 18.6 acres on Grissom Parkway at 38th Avenue N. It was a bold decision, made difficult because the old sanctuary was filled with so many memories. But the congregation did not let memories become a hitching post but rather a launching pad for years to come. The first building on the new site was opened in November of 2008. After 28 years of service, Dr. Wilkes retired on December 31, 2011. He and his wife, Pat, were honored as the Great Hall of the Grissom campus was named "Wilkes Hall" and dedicated to the Glory of God.

Dr. J. Lewis Johnson served as Interim Pastor for 18 months in 2012- 2013, and on June 23, 2013, the congregation called the Rev. Dr. John C. Brearley as pastor. Dr. Brearley, grandson of FPC's first pastor, began service in August, 2013. Pursuit of the vision continued as the Music & Education wing and the Sanctuary were completed in April, 2019. In 2021, FPC expanded our partnership with Habitat for Humanity to include neighborhood revitalization. We entered into a scholarship covenant with Presbyterian College and joined Thornwell in ministry to families and children by providing office space for a Foster Care Specialist and a Building Families Specialist. In addition to its Pastors, the church has been blessed by gifted Associate Pastors, Christian Educators, Youth Directors, Music Directors and Musicians, Parish Health Coordinators, Business Administrators, Administrative Staff, Sextons, and volunteers who have strengthened and expanded its witness to God's love.

We know our history is not about building buildings, moving buildings, and acquiring land. It is not about pastors, associate pastors and staff members. The history of FPC is about a community of people who serve faithfully as channels of God's love for this community and the world. It is about one generation that sacrificed and gave its all, so the next generation would have a greater opportunity to serve the God we love. Our history is about teaching the young, remembering and supporting the elderly, lifting the fallen, comforting the sad, helping the needy, finding the lost, and sharing God's love through the life, work and witness of the congregation. This is a church that understands we are blessed by God to be a blessing to others. As we recall our past, celebrate our present, and look forward to our future, we thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.