

Rooted and Reaching

First Presbyterian Church, Greer, South Carolina

1991-2016



Jenny Munro

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1991-2016



Joey Myers

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Rooted and Reaching: The 25-year History of the First Presbyterian Church of Greer following the Sesquicentennial Celebration – 1991-2016

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Rooted and Reaching

*The 25-year history of the
First Presbyterian Church of Greer
following the Sesquicentennial Celebration
1991-2016*

Jenny Munro

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First Edition

Rooted and Reaching



Taking root - Gathered on the front steps of the church a quarter century ago were a group of today's young community leaders, left to right: (unknown), Brian Williams, Amy McLeod, Chelsea Jarrett and Hannah Couch. In the foreground is Nikki Baldwin.

Dedicated to Our Children

This book was compiled and written to the Glory of God, in grateful recognition of the saints of First Presbyterian Church, Greer.

Rooted and Reaching is dedicated to the children – past, present and future – of the First Presbyterian Church, Greer, South Carolina. Each one is a child of God, blessed to be surrounded by this loving church family. These

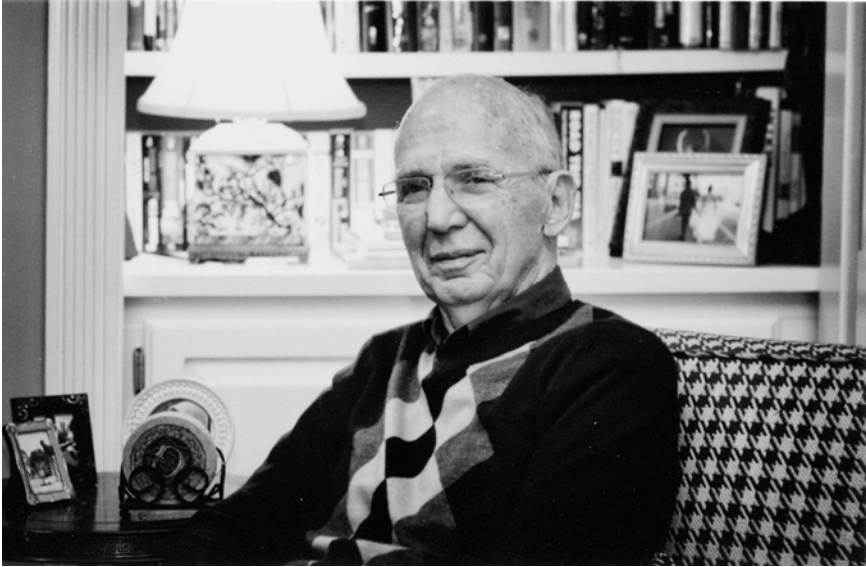
Rooted and Reaching

children are rooted in God's love through Jesus Christ, in the Word of God, in the faithful service of many who have gone before them, and in the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

They are reaching to find the calling for which God has created them. Through all their experiences in worship, study and mission, they are strong participants in the life of our church. The children bring joy to this congregation. We are thankful for them. As they seek to follow the teachings of Jesus, it is the children who will carry God's love and the church into the future.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” - Colossians 2:6-7

In Memory of



Rev. Raymon Lee White

Pastor Emeritus

First Presbyterian Church, Greer, South Carolina
1935 – 2016

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen."

- 1 Peter 4:10-11 (NRSV)

Acknowledgements

Rooted and Reaching would not be possible without the hard work of our History Committee – Margo Green, Jack Green, Carey Green, Linda Nicholson, Leland Burch, Nancy Jones and Jenny Munro. Our church staff has also been invaluable.

Notes were taken from 25 years of newsletters and annual reports, and many people were interviewed. Pictures were captured and lists compiled. In addition to interviews, Leland Burch helped with the pictures and edited the book. Most of all, we are grateful to Jenny Munro for her skill and tireless effort in writing *Rooted and Reaching*. We have tried to be as accurate as possible based on the information available to us and apologize for any errors or omissions in information you may find.

This work has reminded us of how blessed we are to be a part of the First Presbyterian Church, Greer. We hope that all we have done will be used to reflect God's love to the world.

Elizabeth Clayton
Church Historian

Table of Contents

A Vibrant, Growing Church.....	1
Growth in Worship, Study, Service.....	3
Nurture	5
Budgets Grow; Capital Campaign Successful	6
Focus Is Constantly on Missions.....	7
A Welcoming Congregation.....	9
Challenges Continue.....	10
Part of a Growing Community	11
1991 - McLeod Served During Church's 150th Year.....	13
The Sesquicentennial Celebration	15
McLeods Spur Activities, Growth.....	16
An Array of Activities	17
New DCE Joins Staff	19
1992 - Youths Bury Time Capsule.....	23
Mission Work Strong	24
New Members Become Active.....	25
1993 - Long-range Planning Begins.....	27
Youth Take Mission Trip	28
Rev. Hill Honored	30
Sanctuary Balcony Renovated.....	31
1994 - Commitment to Missions Continues	33
New Local Missions	33
1995 – Library Named for Jean Smith	37
Deaths.....	37
Pinkerman Named Music Director.....	38
Rev. McLeod Leaves.....	40
Anderson Named Interim Pastor	42

Rooted and Reaching

Pastoral Care.....	44
1996 - The Anderson Interim.....	47
New Minister Called.....	51
1997 - Allen Teaches Seekers Class	53
Two Service Experiment	53
Mission Emphasis Still Strong	54
1998 - Strategic Planning Starts	57
New Fellowship Group.....	59
Mission Emphasis Continues.....	60
Search for New Music Director	60
Allens Involved in the Community.....	61
1999 - Kids Planet Built	63
Allens Lead Kids Planet Project	63
Mission Statement Adopted.....	64
New Ministries	65
2000 - A Year of Change	67
Missions Emphasized	67
New Communion Service.....	68
New Staff Members.....	68
2001 - Dillard Named Director of Music.....	73
Responding to 911	74
Master Plan Drafted.....	75
A Busy Summer	76
2002 – “Pass It On” Launched.....	79
Youth Work in Montreat and Maryland	80
Fellowship Hall Construction Starts.....	80
Mission Madness Created.....	82
2003 - Fellowship Hall Dedicated	85
Turnage Named Music Assistant.....	86
Mission Work Continues	88

Rooted and Reaching

2004 - Playground Gets Makeover	89
Second Worship Service Proposed.....	90
2005 - Contemporary Worship Service Launched.....	93
Music Program Grows.....	94
Safe Place Task Force Created	96
Reaching Out To Hurricane Victims	97
2006 - A Year of Transitions	99
Dr. Allen Departs	101
Rev. Casto-Waters Named Interim Pastor.....	102
2007 - Search for Permanent Pastor Begins	105
Arms Named Praise Team Leader.....	106
2008 - The Great Recession.....	109
Support for Theological Students.....	109
Moss Named New Youth Director	110
2009 - Casto-Waters Becomes Stated Supply	113
Long-Range Plans Put On Hold	114
2010 - Sunday School Classes Growing	117
Wonderful Wednesday	119
2011 - Coping with a Weak Economy	121
New Grand Pianos.....	122
Tompkins Receives Sabbatical.....	122
Continued Mission Emphasis	123
2012 - Children and Youth.....	125
An Important Part of the Church	125
The Columbarium.....	126
Jamaica Mission Trips Launched	127
Congregational Life Survey	129

Rooted and Reaching

2013 - Church Purchases Davenport Library	131
Dunbar Buddies Outreach	133
A Safe Place	134
2014 - Cazel Joins Church Staff.....	137
Kirk Hall Opens.....	138
New Outreach Programs.....	140
2015 - Capital Campaign Successful	143
Casto-Waters Takes Sabbatical	145
Missions Emphasis Continues	146
2016 - Celebrating 175 Years	149
Deaths.....	151
Mission Efforts Continue.....	153
What Do You Love About Our Church?	155
Members Share Their Joy.....	155
Epilogue	161
First Presbyterian Staff	171
Membership Roster	175
Index.....	223

Rooted and Reaching



Lifeblood of the church - Anne Helton's (left) Christmas Pageant annually attracts dozens of children, the lifeblood of a growing congregation.

A Vibrant, Growing Church

First Presbyterian Church in Greer, originally known as Mount Tabor Presbyterian Church, opened its doors 175 years ago and continues to be a

vibrant, growing church reaching out to its members, its community and the world.

Dr. Brandi Casto-Waters said, “God has been working in this church for a long time. It is an honor and a joy to serve alongside the people of First Presbyterian Church.”

“This is a church with great and solid history,” said Whitney Moss, Director of Youth and Mission. “It is exciting to look back and to look forward to see where God is leading us.”

Carole Olmert, who grew up in the church, said, “I believe that our mission is to live and move and have our being in Christ and to reflect that out into the world. Our strength is that we are a family that tries to love one another. When we have challenges, we weather them well as a family, and we return to our best way to love and serve God and reflect that out into the world.”

Growth, planning, building, and technology dominated the past 25 years of the church’s history. Thad and Leanna McCord said the most important things that have changed in the church since they joined in 1990 are the addition of a second service and the modernizing of the facilities.

Most agree that a major growth in ministry during the past 25 years was the addition of a second Sunday service at 8:55 a.m. That service came with much planning and has evolved over the years.

“There are different styles in the two different services which is good. Things are not stagnant,” said Justin Cazel, former Pastoral Associate.

The music program has expanded over the years. First Presbyterian now has the chancel choir, children’s choirs, handbell choirs and much special music by talented people in the church, adults and youth.

“I am thrilled at the ministries of this church,” said the late Ray White, Pastor Emeritus. “A context or seeds for these ministries were sewn while we were here before. They have been nurtured by every pastor since: the Christian Education ministries and programs, Dunbar Development Center, Soup Kitchen, Triune Mercy Center, Presbyterian Women, choirs, all bringing the beauty of our faith into our lives every week, Wayne’s pastoring, all are significant ministries.”

He also commented on Brandi Casto-Waters' service as pastor being "a primary spiritual nourishment to me. I come to church to hear her preach. Often I cry. Her personal style, wise leadership, capacity to be herself and ongoing relationships are very significant. One of the messages for me is Brandi preaches to both men and women in a way only a woman could preach. That is unique."

Growth in Worship, Study, Service

During the church's growth, First Presbyterian continued its passion for mission work, care of its members and the nurture of people new to their callings in the ministry and the life of Christ. Over the years, First Presbyterian has encouraged and supported many children of the church as they moved in ministry and other church vocations.

During the past 25 years, the church has grown in worship, study and service. In 2002, we had an average of 193 people in worship each week. In 2015, there were 300.

Growth is partially a result of a church that is good for children, said Bill Helton, who joined First Presbyterian in 1962 and has served as an elder for many years. He said First Presbyterian has grown increasingly child-friendly in recent years.

His wife, Anne, said that the best change she has seen in the church is the expansion of programs for the children. One of the longest-serving Sunday school teachers at the church, she has been a primary inspiration of First Presbyterian's child-friendly activities and is a positive influence on all the children who have attended her class.

Ashlyn Fulkerson, a member of Anne Helton's 4 and 5 year old Sunday school class, said, "Our church is about Jesus!" Several of the children commented that 175 years is really old and that things at the church are getting old.

Jo Sullivan, who moved to Greer with her husband Frank in 1954 and joined First Presbyterian because "it was the only Presbyterian church in

town,” said the biggest change she has seen over the years is increased programming for children and young people and their participation in intergenerational activities, such as the missions to Jamaica.

“We encourage, nurture and grow children to be active and joyful participants, as well as leaders in worship,” said Susan Tompkins, Director of Christian Education and a member of the church since 1989 when she joined with her family. “Worship is central to everything we do.” She added, “this church family helps raise our children.”

A group of senior high students in the church said that among the most important things which have taken place since they’ve been part of First Presbyterian are the Stop Hunger Now event, the youth group which helps them connect with each other and God, retreats, missions, Vacation Bible School, confirmation class and the partnerships with Café Justo and Thornwell Home for Children.

“Everybody in the church has helped me get through stuff and make me into the person I am today,” said Warner James, a student at Greer High School who has grown up in the church.

He remembered participating in Anne Helton’s Sunday school class as a four year old. “She was really nice and loving with all of us.” And he recalled Mid-High and Senior High group gatherings, youth retreats to Bonclarken and Montreat, lock-ins at the church and a mission trip to Charleston “where we helped build houses for Habitat for Humanity.” He also enjoyed the intergenerational mission trip to Jamaica the past two years.

Brad Clayton, who grew up in the church and is now Lead Pastor at Faith Presbyterian in Tallahassee, Fla., said Greer First Presbyterian “is pretty special. When I grew up, I thought every church was supposed to be like ours, but that is not the case. When you visit other churches, some are full of conflict, large egos and guile. Ours is a great church.”



Brad Clayton



Elizabeth Howell Link



Lauren Slingerland

Nurture

The nurturing of children in the church can be seen in the number of young people who grew up in the church and became ministers or work in

the church in other capacities. Children and young people also bring much to the church through their activities and their joy.

The Presbyterian Church has always valued education for everyone, said Elizabeth Clayton. “This church has nurtured and been especially supportive of members who feel called into ministry.”

In these past 25 years there are two people who grew up in this church who are now ordained ministers (Teaching Elders). They are Samuel Bradley Clayton (Brad) and Elizabeth Howell Link. Both are actively serving churches. Brad also has begun his Doctor of Ministry Degree. Ryan Larkin and Lauren Slingerland have completed Seminary and are pending a call to be ordained. The church also has two who are presently in Seminary – Whitney Moss and Alexandra Mauney.

The church also encouraged and supported Pastor Brandi Casto-Waters in completing her Doctor of Ministry Degree. Susan Tompkins, our Director of Christian Education, has also been working hard and is completing studies to be a Certified Christian Educator this year.

Budgets Grow; Capital Campaign Successful

The budget also has increased over the last quarter of a century to \$873,942 in 2015 from \$300,692 in 1991. Construction during the past quarter century included a fellowship hall, Sunday School classrooms, a Columbarium, renovation of the sanctuary, installation of an elevator, a bridge connecting the sanctuary and the Sunday school rooms and refurbishing of various rooms. The church also purchased Kirk Hall across School Street from the main church campus.

In 2015, the church initiated a capital campaign, with a goal of \$1.2 million with an added addition of \$400,000 in existing funds. The congregation responded with great enthusiasm and surpassed the goal. In December of 2015, the church began construction on the two million dollar renovation project.



Rooted - Senior Highs dug a foundation for a home during their 2015 mission trip to assist Sea Island Habitat for Humanity.

Focus Is Constantly on Missions

Another change Tompkins sees at First Presbyterian is mission work and the way the church carries it out.

“Missions are very important,” she said. “We have evolved. We used to write, for the most part, checks to support missions, and youth groups went on the mission trips. Congregationally, we are far more involved relationally and hands-on with our mission partners.”

The McCords agreed: “Mission trips are more than having the opportunity to use your gifts and skills to help others. Mission trips are really about relationships, the relationships that you build with the people you are helping. The relationship that you cultivate with the organization you are working with, the relationship you strengthen with your fellow church members and the relationship you fortify with God.”

Casto-Waters said, “The church has always been committed to serving in the community. In recent years, we have been intentional about cultivating meaningful relationships with our partners in mission. Our relationship with Mark Adams, PC (USA) Mission Co-worker, is an example.”

Travis Olmert, a seventh-generation member of First Presbyterian who has served as a deacon and elder, said the church’s change in its approach to missions had a huge impact on his life. About 25 years ago, the Session decided to place more emphasis on mission by making it a line item in the church budget. He was 12 at the time and had just been confirmed as a member of the church.

The youth group took a van to Mobile, Alabama, on a mission trip that summer, staying in a campground. “There was no complaining among our group, which was a miracle,” Travis Olmert said. He recalled going into town daily and working at a soup kitchen. This was the first time he and other children from the church had seen drug addicts and really poor people. “It had a profound influence on us.”

The intergenerational mission trip to Jamaica began five years ago in conjunction with American Caribbean Experience (ACE) in St. Mary’s Parish. The annual trip has attracted participants aged 16 to 70 plus. Both senior high and junior high groups participate in mission trips yearly. And when these summer mission trips are complete, participants explain what they learned to the congregation during a worship service.

Nancy Welch, who joined the church in 1966 and has served as an elder, said she agrees the church’s mission emphasis has shifted.

“We’ve always had a mission focus,” she said. “It was more supporting missionaries rather than going and doing. I think that most started with Dr. Casto-Waters. I think the change has been good. I think there’s more awareness. It’s been wonderful to do more than send a check.”

Mission work will continue at First Presbyterian. A mission trip to Jamaica occurred in June and a mission trip to the border of Mexico and the United States is planned for October 2016.

“The future of our church is the mission-minded set of our congregation,” Moss said. “It is the way we live our faith. “Mission and ministry hap-

pen within the walls and also outside the walls of our church. We are called to be in relationship with one another,” she said.

Judy Pearson said, “The church needs to be a place to come and get fired up to go out and serve. We have built Habitat houses and Kids’ Planet. We have an attitude of service. We support each other. We ask, ‘How can we help?’”

The church ministers to its members as well as to the community. Jo Ernest, who joined with her husband, Hugh, in 1979, said that ministering goes both ways. “The church has also been our mission.”

Ministering to each other at church happens in many different ways. Education through Sunday school is important and over the years, “the quality of Sunday school teaching has improved,” Pearson said. “People are hungry for that challenging teaching. Weekly Bible study has been important.”

Becky Schafer, who joined the church with her family in 1991 when she was a junior in high school, views the increase in the staff as another major change. “We have so much more staff leadership now,” she said. “I think that attests to the growth of the church.”

Currently, First Presbyterian has two pastors, Casto-Waters, Senior Pastor, and the Rev. Wayne Cole, Associate Pastor, and a staff of nine. Cole announced plans to retire in 2017 and a search is underway for another Associate Pastor.

A Welcoming Congregation

Steve Dillard, who was baptized at First Presbyterian in 1941 and has been a member for the second longest length of time of any current member, said the earliest memories he has of the church are “the caring people.”

Becky Schafer, who came from a small church, said First Presbyterian turned out to be the only church her family visited upon leaving her home church. “We felt welcomed. I liked the programs they had for the youth. I knew people here from school,” she said.

Her father, Ken, agreed. “When we walked in the door of First Presbyterian, it felt like home,” he said.

Part of that welcoming spirit has been Anne Helton's project to bake an apple pie for every family that joined the church, Jo Sullivan said.

"'Church family' describes our congregation," said Moss. "It is a place where all people can feel nurtured, and come together to study, worship and serve together."

Ray White agreed. "One of our church's strengths is a capacity to be a welcoming community. Every Sunday, people young and old, visit and find expressions of welcoming and warmth. They come and join. These people are providing leadership and participating. Our challenge is to keep it up. We are all benefitting from being a part of this church family."

Carole Olmert said her first memories of the church were "that everybody loved me. I could run and play and run into anybody's arms as a child. I still get a lot of hugs and laugh a lot."

"Another strength of the church is its spirituality," said Jeff White, who first came to the church in 1977 when his father, Rev. Ray White, became the minister here. Jeff and his wife Patty chose First Presbyterian in 1992 because they wanted to raise their children here.

"Accepting other ideas makes for unity. When someone doesn't agree with things, they go out and find a church where they feel like they fit in," he said. "This is a good sense of what makes us work as a congregation. There have been challenges, but the church always manages to work things out as a congregation."

Church member Barbara Brandenburg said that one of First Presbyterian's strengths is its concern for all members.

"Our church is doing a better job of helping new people who are joining to feel they are part of our family," said Elizabeth Clayton. "That is one of the ways we have grown over the years, but we do have other ways to grow and improve."

Challenges Continue

The Senior Highs said that church strengths include the basketball program and the fact that everyone knows everyone else. That is also one of the

challenges – when someone in the congregation dies, it is like losing a family member.

Another challenge, said the McCord's, is the age of the facilities and its accessibility issues. That challenge is being faced now with current expansion and renovation of the building.

Elder Nancy Welch said that one of First Presbyterian's strengths can also be its challenge. One strength, she said, is "we take care of each other in small groups, such as Fellowship Groups, choir, circles, and other small-group activities. When new people join the church, it is important to make an effort to get people to participate in these groups."

Casto-Waters said, "The changing nature of our culture means the church is not the center of community life as it once was. In the old days average worship attendance was defined as three out of four Sundays. Now it is one out of four. Although, we are faring better than average it is a challenge even still."

Part of a Growing Community

First Presbyterian is part of a community and the church did not grow in isolation. BMW Manufacturing broke ground for its first and only U.S. factory in September 1992, hired its first associates in January 1994 and the first U.S. built BMW rolled off the line on Sept. 8 of that year. The first car to be shipped from the plant was a BMW-328i shipped on March 2, 1995.

The company promised in 1992 that it would create 2,000 direct jobs and \$400 million in capital investment. Today it boasts about 8,800 direct and contractor jobs on site and a total of \$6.3 billion in capital investment.

The move of BMW and other industry into the area spurred growth in the city of Greer and the surrounding region. In 1993, the city's geographic area expanded through major annexations from 7.5 square miles to 14 square miles. Plans also began that year for state construction of a bypass highway, named the Verne Smith Parkway after a long-time state senator who was a member of First Presbyterian. In addition, the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport expanded its runway to 11,001 feet, the longest in the state at that time, to handle 747 cargo planes to serve BMW.

Greer, one of the fastest growing cities in South Carolina, had a population of more than 27,600 in 2014, up from 11,861 in 1999 and an area of more than 20 square miles. The city grew 8.1 percent in population from 2010 to 2014. While it is a rapidly growing city with a median household income of \$44,111, slightly more than 19 percent of the city residents live in poverty.

First Presbyterian is very involved in the community, with members on numerous boards and sharing their talents with the community.

“We are true partners with community organizations”, Moss said. “We are not trying to ‘reinvent the wheel.’ Great systems are in place that we can walk along side and support.”

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Joey Moore

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