

The History of FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NOBLESVILLE

Our church was founded on December 20, 1848, at a time when Central Indiana was little more than a wilderness. At that time Noblesville was three years from being incorporated as a town in 1851, and was then only 25 years old and the State of Indiana only 32. The world in which our founding families lived was almost unimaginably different than the world in which we live. There were no telephones, no telegraphs, no radio or television, no decent roads. No railroads had yet come to Noblesville. Families lived without running water, central heating, electric lights or indoor plumbing.

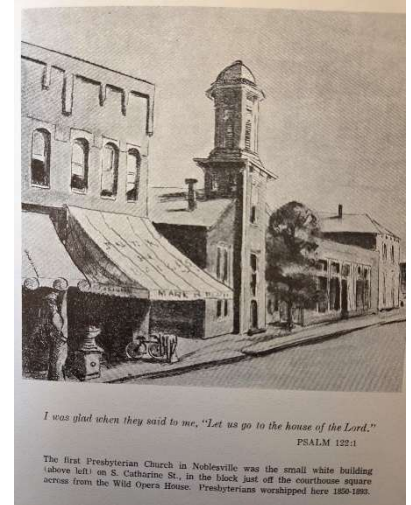
Twelve members comprised the first church organized in 1848. These were: Curtis Mallery, elder; Nancy Mallery; Joseph Carlin, elder; Margaret Carlin; John T. Carlin; Robert L. Carlin; John T. Lower, secretary; Sabina Lower; Abner Jones; Nancy Jones; Mrs. Dunlap; W. F. Wagoman. The lot for the church on Catherine Street (now 9th Street) was purchased from Curtis and Nancy Mallery on July 27, 1850.

There was a note in the church files from 1859, which said "As was the custom in the early days, being your brother's keeper was a serious business in church. Members were suspended for non-attendance, or for conduct unbecoming a church member, such as profanity, association with people of bad habits, embezzlement or adultery". There are cases in the Session minutes, where each of these situations occurred by members of the church, and the Session stepped in to solve them one way or another.

Then, Eighteen and a half years later the church was reorganized June 7, 1867. "The Presbyterian Church heretofore existing in the town of Noblesville, having so far lost its organization as to be unable for the past five years to operate to any considerable effect as a church. And having during the first month repaired & improved their hours of Worship and resolved to reorganize & resuscitate the church. Set apart this day for the purpose of holding a Rededication Service." In March 1868, Rev. John S. Craig, D.D. was employed as Stated Supply at Noblesville Presbyterian Church while he was also supplying other places. Under his leadership the church grew from 20 members under the reorganization to 74 members and on advancing ground according to a piece of paper that was sealed in the time capsule of the Courthouse when it was built 1878.

On August 24, 1871 the Session met and drew up the following list of standards for church members to follow:

1. Every member is under the most solemn obligation to attend the preaching of the Word, the meeting for prayer and praise, and all other appointments of the church regularly when not physically hindered.
2. Every member according to his ability is bound by the same authority to bear cheerfully his portion of the expenses of the church.
3. The neglect to perform these plain Scriptural precepts for any considerable length of time will greatly hinder



the growth of grace of all who are guilty of such neglect and to subject them to such discipline as in the best judgement of the Session may have the effect to remove the Evil from the church.

4. This neglect of duty on the part of professions of religion in the judgement of the Session may be a stumbling block in the way of sinners being converted and cannot be countenanced in any of our members.” Copies of these standards were sent to members who were not following them. The Session offered members receiving them a chance to explain their actions. Depending on their responses or lack of response, members were subject to suspension and expulsion from the church as the Session saw fit.

Women have played a large part in the program of the Noblesville church. In its reorganization in 1867, fifteen of the twenty participating members were women. In 1886, all women of the church were welcomed to membership in the new Presbyterian Ladies’ Working Society. A Women’s Missionary Society, which came into being in the 1870’s or 80’s, set something of a record in meeting monthly over a period of seventy-five to eighty-five years. The church adopted a unicameral form of government in 1972, prior to the church adopting a unicameral form of government, our church had already elected and installed a woman elder on February 19, 1956, Lora Jane Cullen. Currently the church has five women elders and nine deacons.

Bake sales in the 1880’s and following saw a once-a-month Saturday bake exchange sponsored by the Presbyterian Ladies’ Working Society, reputed to net over \$300 per year some years and enabling the women to donate \$500 on the new church edifice in 1893, besides donating nearly \$300 for the carpets, the mantels and tile on the vestibule floors in the church edifice in 1893.

The white framed building for worship on Catherine Street (now 9th Street) served the congregation until 1893 when the present brick church at Conner and Twelfth Streets was built. “In January 8, 1893 Dr. George F. Burroughs, President of Wabash College, on invitation of this church, preached to our people and made an appeal for funds with which to erect this building. On that day something over \$4,000.00 was subscribed which was afterwards increased to a subscription of \$7,000.00.” After the sell of the old church on Catherine Street for \$4,250.00 and the use of \$1,800.00 was used to pay for the lot on Conner and 12th Streets, and

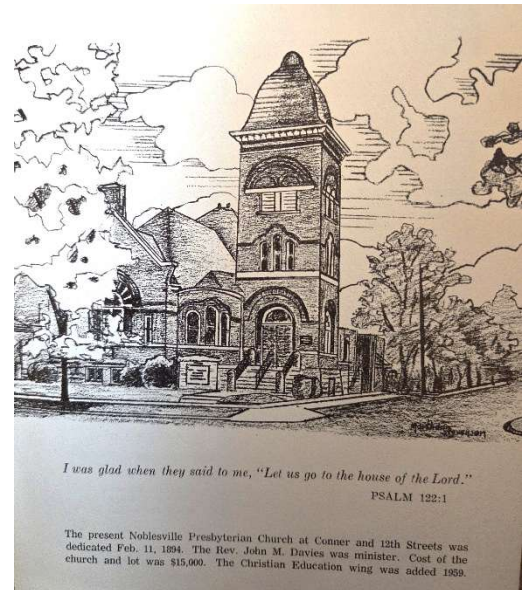


\$1,000.00 was paid on the parsonage, this gave the church something over \$8,000.00 for the building fund for the new church building. For several months a plan was trying to be secured for the building of the church that would meet their approbation and fit their pocket books. After two unsuccessful efforts, a committee of Rev. John M. Davies, D.D., Will H. Craig and others visited Elgin, Illinois, where the prototype of this building had been erected. According to Will H. Craig’s

description, they “were captivated at first sight with the general architecture and convenience of the church..... It was with difficulty that we got Dr. Davies to leave at all, and he was so worked up over the plan that he would not rest till we sent him back a second time to view that work of art.”

“All during the erection of this structure as the work went rapidly on, Dr. Davies was so full of the subject that he sang its praises from morning till night – taking for his subject ‘It’s a thing of beauty and a joy forever’. Why

he couldn't even wait till the day to dedicate this church but came in here two weeks before all alone and dedicated this church with a good old Welsh hymn." The Church cost \$15,000.00 to build which includes the cost of the lot which was \$1,800.00. The parsonage was purchased for \$3,500.00. The total cost of the church, lot and parsonage was \$18,500.00, which the congregation was able to raise except for \$4,500.00. The congregation decided they could raise this amount without a formal appeal from the members the day of the dedication. At the time the church was built, they had no pipe organ but, in a few years, the fine present organ was installed. The Church's membership in November, 1895 was 160.



Among the members were some of the most prominent business and professional men of our city. One of these men was Will H. Craig, who was once part owner of the Noblesville Tribune (now Noblesville Daily Ledger), and the son of Rev. John S. Craig. The Craigs still have descendants, such as Steve Craig, who previously owned Adriene's Flowers until just a year or so ago, who were still serving the community as their ancestors did.

And speaking of the Noblesville Tribune, in 1894, the First Presbyterian Church women went to the Noblesville Tribune office and took over the writing and publishing of the paper for the Friday, Nov. 29th issue. It seems that they did this to raise money for the women's association. They said they owned the Tribune for this week and they paid to do so. They published the paper that day which was full of information for people of all walks of life. In their "Fairwell" of this issue, they stated "We are loth to rise from the easy editorial chair and shake the journalistic dust from our feet. Women were born to be ministering angels, not (printer's) devils. Pandemonium reigns supreme in our households. We must return, build up the waste places, and see how the "new" man likes his new field of labor".

Eight years later, November 17, 1901 the present organ was purchased and dedicated for a cost of \$3,500.00. It was made by the Kimball Organ Co. of Chicago and purchased through the Indianapolis firm of Carlin and Lenox. Will Carlin of the firm was the grandson of Joseph Carlin, a founding member and one of the first elders of this church. Not only did the congregation celebrate the dedication of the new organ that day, they also celebrated that the Church's indebtedness would be wiped out. The organ's blower was later powered by water, as churches were free from water taxes and did not have to pay water bills. In 1965 the organ was rebuilt and electric actions were installed for \$7,640.00. The organ was completely renovated in 2002-2003 by the Miller Pipe Organ Company, Louisville, Kentucky at the same time that the sanctuary renovation took place. The church's beautiful stain glass windows were renovated in 2004-2005, both through a generous bequeath of a former church member couple. In doing this renovation, the staircase which was originally in the Northeast vestibule section of the original church building, was closed because it was steep, narrow, and unsafe. The narrow and steep steps were an accident ready to happen and possibly had in the past. While all of this renovation was being done, the Sunday Worship Service was held in the Church's Fellowship Hall.

The women of the church continued to raise money to benefit their beloved church, but rummage sales were much different in 1915, when the Women's Missionary Society held their first one in a room on the west side of the square donated by Mrs. Prudence Darrah. It lasted a week from 1:00pm to 9:00pm, but alas the room had no heat, and the weather was cold. Subsequently someone donated a large base burner. Henry Gaeth furnished kindling and blocks from his box factory and different families brought baskets of coal each day. At dinner time the men joined the "girls" for supper in the room. In October of 1957, the Women's Missionary Society disbanded. Women continued activities in three independent "circles"; Circle, Chimes and Bells. Then in January 1964, all women's organizations merged into United Presbyterian Women's Association with these three "circles" as component parts: Bells, Chimes, Circle.

The membership of the church was growing and grew to the point where the church building would no longer satisfy the Sunday school, fellowship and administrative needs of the church. At this time a vote was taken to add a two-story addition to the back of the sanctuary. So, in 1958, the church built an addition which was designed by John G. Pecsok. This addition consisted of a new larger office for the pastor, a nursery, a fellowship hall, a kitchen, restrooms, class rooms and a coat hall. There were few solid divisions separating the rooms, so portable dividers were permanently in existence, sliding along tracks in the ceiling. This addition joined with the south vestibules of the original building and provided another entrance from the outside to the interior of the building, as well as a tunnel-like corridor along which were secretary's office and a storage room. The tunnel connected the lower floor of the new addition with the existing basement of the original building.

The pocket door in the archway of the parlor separated the sanctuary from the parlor, which was referred to as the auditorium. The parlor served a different function than it does today. It was most likely used as a second place in which to hold meetings among the church elders. The pocket door would be pulled down for this purpose. Later on, it was used as coffee hour after the Sunday Service until the new Fellowship Hall was eventually built. Now the parlor is no longer needed in this manner so the pocket door remains up and out of use.

The year 1966 brought more interior renovation to the church. These renovations included a new red carpet was laid, the pews were completely refinished by hand in a dark stain. The door to the chancel was changed and a beautiful Celtic Cross, six feet in length, was hung over the organ. In the basement a new kitchen was installed along with restrooms and a social room. While the renovation was taking place, the congregation had been meeting in the community room at the Indiana Loan and Savings. The rededication service was held at the newly renovated church on Sunday, October 23, 1966 and the sermon "And you are that Temple" was given by Rev. John Burbank.

Between the years 1970 and 1980, a rapid population growth caused the church members to consider further development of their facility. A Long-Range Planning Committee was formed and work diligently to establish a directional plan for the future of the church. The land where the south parking lot now is, was acquired and was considered as a possible extension site by the Church committee. The congregation reaffirmed its desire to remain at the present location. So, in 1981 The Craig House, which was on the lot just east of the church, was purchased for office space and Christian Education classrooms.

April of 1986, the church's first audio cassette tape "Music Favorites" was released. It featured the musical talents of Susie DeHart (organist) and Lynn Sylvester (choir director). Followed by a CD in 1998, "Capture the Spirit..." a musical tribute to the First Presbyterian Church of Noblesville, Indiana commemorating its 150 years of ministry in the community.



In 1986, LeRoy Troyer and Associates was selected to prepare a feasibility study for expansion of the church at the present location. The study was approved and a building fund campaign was begun. During this time, the church was in a much-heated situation with a concerned group of Noblesville citizens over the church's expansion plans and the demolition of the East House (Craig House). The William Craig house, also known as the East house, was built in 1893 and is recognized as one of the most significant brick structures in the area. In December 1987, much controversy ensued over the disposition of the Craig House. The church did not really want to demolish the house, but it also did not have the funds to have it moved, in order to do its expansion. Preservationist were very much opposed to the destruction of the house. Thanks to an outside source, the funds were given to move the Craig House across the street to a vacant lot. It was moved on March 5, 1988. It was quite the event. There were folks from all over along with some vendors, selling items such as balloons. It was also a very cold but festive day. The owner of the company who moved the house, Elmer Buchta, made a bet of a steak dinner with one of our parishioners, that he could move the house with a glass of water on one of the window sills and not spill it. Mr. Buchta won that bet.

In 1988, the church was in a state of disgruntle with the leadership of the church. Many members were upset with the present pastor, Rev. Stephen J. Brownlee and many were not. It resulted in Rev. Brownlee dissolving his pastoral relationship with the church. He departed from the church on November 13, 1988. The church's membership in 1988 was 338. The church also lost some of its members and there was a steady decline in the membership. Rev. William E. Sexton served as the stated supply from 1989 to 1990. Then Rev. James R. Snyder took the position of pastor on March 1, 1991. Again, the church did not like how Rev. Snyder was leading the church, so he broke his pastoral relationship with the church December 15, 1991. Then on January 19, 1992 to November 30, 1992, Rev. John Fox was the pulpit supply. Then from December 1, 1992 to March 31, 1993, Rev. Dewey E. Dodds became the church's pastor. From when Rev. Snyder left in December of 1991, the church had a pastor search committee working on finding a permanent pastor for First Presbyterian Church of Noblesville. Then on April 1, 1993, Rev. Eric R. Gale accepted the position to be our church's designated pastor and 2 years later Rev. Gale was installed as the permanent pastor.

In 1998, the church celebrated its 150th Birthday. The church's membership in 1998 was 283. It was a yearlong celebration. In February of 1998, the Historical Committee invited everyone to a gigantic birthday party. We began with a pitch-in dinner after the church service on February 8th. Twelve birthday cakes (one for each month) were given away in a random drawing. The congregation continued the celebration with a display setup with "Pages from Our Past". Everyone had a wonderful time matching pictures from the past with the faces of current members. We ended the game with two winners. Celebrating with song, the committee focused on our music ministry with a display about our beautiful pipe organ and the organists who played it. We called this display: "Blest be the tie that binds...." Our music ministry has always been a blessing reaching

the ears of many over the years. It was important in our past; it continues to be a blessing in our present and hopefully it will continue to fill our ears with the sound of music in the years to come. To celebrate this special year, Jane Parker Huber wrote a special hymn for our church.

On May 17, 1998, Heritage Sunday, we “officially” celebrated our 150th birthday by hosting a dinner after the church service. Eight former ministers of the church and their spouses were specially invited to join us for this special time. Many past members, who had been invited to the celebration, also joined us for the day. The time line was on the wall, our hymn was sung, our past ministers participated in the church service, memories were relived, old friends reunited, and a great time was had by all who were present including first-time visitors who were wondering what is going on?

On January 4, 2006, the Session called a Special Meeting to Finalize the Budget. Pastor Gale said due to developments since their last regular meeting, he had requested Ms. Fowler and Messrs. Geckeler and Heimack to be present at the meeting. The Clerk ask the Session since this was a special meeting, did they agreed to a suspension of the rules, all elders being present and there being no objection to suspension of the rules, the rules were suspended to discuss the newly arisen matters mentioned by the Pastor. Pastor Gale then began to discuss the current state of the church, and announced his intention to ask the Presbytery Committee on Ministry for assistance in dissolving his pastoral relationship with this church. Following an extended discussion of Pastor Gale’s decision to terminate his pastorate, and his indication that he remained open to reconsidering this decision, a motion was made and duly seconded, voted upon and carried: That the Session table any further action on Pastor Gale’s request for termination of his pastoral relationship with this church, and proceed as scheduled with the discernment process on January 22, 2006. This Session Statement was adopted by the Session on January 22, 2006: Our discernment process has brought the Session to the following conclusion; the Session agrees that Reverend Gale will remain in our pulpit until his or our circumstances change. Due to its limited physical and financial resources, First Presbyterian Church will remain a church similar to its current size for the foreseeable future. However, within those limitations, the Session intends to work diligently to extend the church’s ministry and share the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

On December 2025, Rev. Eric R. Gale, retired from the pastoral service with the First Presbyterian Church of Noblesville. Our church appointed a Congregational Mission Study Team in July of 2026, to being putting together the information which the Session will need to develop and approve a mission statement which will enable a Pastor Search Committee to commence looking for a pastor for our growing church. Our Membership at the end of 2025 was 231.

The Christian Education at First Presbyterian Church has always been strong. It may have been smaller in its attendees compared to other congregations in the area, but very mighty in its ministry. Moffett Robinson Craig, who in 1989, served for 8 years as the Christian Education Elder on the Session tells us around 1962 when she was a freshman in High School, she actually was attending the First Methodist and sung in the adult choir, helped teach Sunday School, and was active in the Youth Group. Because of Stephen Craig, she started to attend both churches singing in both choirs and going to both youth groups. FPC youth group was smaller than the Methodist youth group, but they did so much more: created a band, did drama presentations, caroled at Christmas and more. My Mom wanted my brother and I to decide on our own what church to become a member. Rev. Burbank decided to give me private confirmation classes after school because I was

older (16). I liked how Presbyterians governed and the Creeds over history and their commitment to Christian Education and so I decided this was what I wanted in my life. Even while we were in college, Sara Garrard, who was also a member of FPC and I had a Children's Choir at FPC, and with Stephen Craig we helped with the youth group, and participated as we could on school breaks.

After Stephen and Moffett Craig were married, they left the Noblesville community for a few years, but when they moved back to Noblesville in 1973, they once again participated at FPC. Carol Bixby was the Christian Ed Elder and she had put new life into the Christian Ed program. Classrooms were full and Stephen and Moffett became youth group leaders. Once again, the Christian Ed program was encouraging the young people to the point that an assistant pastor was hired to help Dr. Clark.

After Dr. Clark retired, Rev. Steve Brownlee became FPC new pastor. Rev. Brownlee was great with the Senior Highs and once again there was growth at FPC. With other church members like the Howells and Wilhelms families, Christian Ed grew. Mrs. Patti Brownlee started the kids' musicals with "The Music Machine." Every year after that, Patti and Moffett co-directed Christian musicals. After Patti and Steve Brownlee left, Moffett kept the musicals going and named them our Young People's Special Worship Service. At one point the Christian Education had 82 young people between the ages of 3-16 participating. We even got Michael Davis, Eric Gale, Bob Foster, Jason Story, Serina Hickie, and Alison Wessel to form a band to accompany the kids. Talented members volunteered to help with choreography, sets, lighting, and costumes. It was exciting and basically lasted from 1984-2011. Sunday school classes got so big that Moffett and Stephen had classes at their flower shop.

Rev. Dewey Dodds and his wife, Jean, revitalized Christian Ed through Jean's children's stories with Opossum Paul and his friends. She had puppets and a puppet theatre was built and the Youth Groups did presentations with the puppets. The youth, as well as the adults, enjoyed the few years where the Christian Ed made arrangements to have a donkey on Palm Sunday. Those in attendance, were given palms and the congregation would walk around the block waving the palms as the donkey was led down the streets.

The Presbyterian Women supported the Young People's Special Worship Services for a few years when the Christian Ed budget was being stretched. They also helped young people go to Camp Pyoca for several years.

Summer Vacation Bible School has always been very popular every year. In previous years, it has been replaced with Art Camp, which too has been very successful with the youth.

During Rev. Brownlee's and Rev. Gale's time, adult Christian Ed grew, too. There was The Inbetweeners and Dinners for 8. For years the adults and youth did Christmas Caroling to shut-ins, retirement homes, and the hospital. We followed the caroling with a pitch-in party at the home of Stephen and Moffett Craig for many years. There were 10 adult classes going with the Purpose Driven Life study and the addition of Financial Peace classes. Small groups became popular. Ed Adams and Bill Jourdan led adult classes for several years. With the leadership of Ed and Judy Adams we had two "Care and Kindness" Days. James Kok attended from California. The public was invited and many non-profit organizations have given presentations. The Presbyterian Women also had two Bible study groups. Special Advent and Lenten classes were added. There were special reader's theatre presentations, Advent and Lenten countdown reflections, and dramas (The Room Upstairs was done twice with a great group of FPC men), especially during Holy Week.

Our church was becoming more involved in Mission Trips around 2000, which included going to Mexico with our sister church, about 9 years or so, until our sister church left the presbytery down there. Our Mission was to share the Spirit of Jesus Christ as we continue to do today. A 2019 Mission Trip to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota was accomplished for our youth and adults under the leadership of Anita Snyder, Christian Ed superintendent. Since that time, our church has been very involved in going to the Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Kentucky. Each year as the mission team has assembled for that trip, the volunteers have increased. This year 2026, we have a couple of members from our congregation joining others to go to Londrina, Brazil to help with wiring and painting at Londrina Bible Seminary. The church, for many years, has supported Operation Christmas Child with shoe boxes filled and shipped to children in need. The number of boxes for this mission has kept increasing over the years. Closer to home, the congregation supports the Community Yellow Non-Perishable Food Pantry, which located outside on the church property for our neighbors in need and can be easily accessed. For over ten years, our congregation has supported Last Bell Ministries through financial gifts, donations of winter coats, clothing and basic needs, and two mission trips to Ukraine for English Camp. FPC annually donates to the Dorcas Basket Ministry in the Dominican Republic, providing VBS materials for Iglesia Evangelica Dominicana (IED Church). The annual artisan market held the third Saturday in August, helps our church raise funds for local, state, and international church mission projects through the rental of booth space to our vendors, admission is free. As you can well see, our congregation spreads the Spirit in many ways, and is a very giving congregation, both with time and money.

This is the story of the First Presbyterian Church of Noblesville, Indiana, and its members and ministers, past and present. Enjoy our fine past, preserve our present, and pass on our rich heritage to future generations.

In the words of “our hymn”:

God of days and years and decades,
All our lives are in Your care.
We recall with deep thanksgiving
Founders of this house of prayer.

Through the years, as context changes,
Still Your Word is preached and taught.
Keep us always in that pathway
Where Your Spirit can be caught.

Lead us now in new directions
Challenge us with work to do
Grant us insight for our mission
Helping others, praising you.

Refrain

Clouds of faithful saints and servants
Through all ages praising You!
Through all ages praising You!