

## WHO'S GONNA FILL THOSE SHOES?

Bob Pfrangle and Bob Kendall stood tall in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida. With Bob Kendall's move to New Port Richey, the pulpit became vacant.

It is not unusual for a Presbyterian pulpit to remain vacant for a year when a minister leaves or retires. Some surveys show that an eighteen month interim is the norm. This is not the case with First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia. When Drennon Cottingham left in 1970, Bob Pfrangle was called two months later. When Bob Pfrangle retired, it took a mere six months to call Bob Kendall. When Bob Kendall left in the spring of 1985, the search committee had a name to place before the congregation on September 15.

That name was the Reverend Doctor Teddy Weaver Land, better known as Ted Land, the author of this work.

Almost as tall as Pfrangle and Kendall, and heavier than either, my presence in the pulpit may be more that of a big, shambling, teddy bear than the commanding presence of the "Bobs," but my feet were deemed big enough to fill their shoes. In fact, shortly after Bob Pfrangle's death, I was visiting with Mamie Pfrangle, and she asked me what size shoe I wore.

"Thirteen, B," I replied.

"That's what Bob wore," she said. When I left her home that day, I carried with me several pairs of shoes that Bob Pfrangle had worn in life. On the occasion of the ground breaking of Pfrangle Hall, at its dedication, and at the dedication service for the other Pfrangle Hall in Bradenton, I wore a pair of Bob Pfrangle's shoes.

By the way, Bob Kendall's feet aren't that big. He wears size eleven.

My first contact with the Arcadia search committee came when Mike Pooser called me at my home, the manse in Montgomery, West Virginia. I was running a summer horse camp program for Greenbrier Presbytery, four weeks on a farm a hundred miles from the church I served, and when Mike called, we talked for half an hour or so about horses and camping. I really wasn't all that interested in coming to Florida. I was serving a church with around 200 members, had a position (paid) as part-time hospital chaplain in addition to that, and was very much involved in the horse camping ministry.

I agreed to let Mike send me a copy of the church information form, and the Chamber of Commerce material, and a whole packet of stuff that the search committee had put together.

When the material came, there was one page in the Chamber of Commerce stuff that caught my attention. It was printed on a hideous green paper, in black ink. It looked like it might have come out of a mimeograph machine. There was one word in the middle of the page, and four pictures. The word was "lifestyle." The pictures were of a cowboy riding a bronc in the rodeo, a boy sliding into home plate in a Little League game, a family canoeing on the Peace River, and what I later learned was Pine Level United Methodist Church.

I don't know why that piece of publicity caught my fancy, but it did. I've always loved horses, and the "western" lifestyle. My son, Kris, and I did quite a bit of canoeing when we lived in



Mississippi, and at the time we received that mailing, he had just finished a very successful Little League baseball campaign. It seemed to me that a place that valued those three things, and put a church on the same page, might have something to offer to a pastor with a wife and a ball-playing son.

When Mike Pooser called me back the next time, I told him I was interested. In our next telephone conversation after that, he told me that if we wanted to, the whole family could come to Florida, that the church would pay to fly us down here, put us up in a motel, give us a car to drive for the weekend, and all I had to do was preach once and meet with the committee a couple of times.

How could any preacher turn down an all expense paid trip to Florida, even if it was in August?

We came. I preached in the pulpit of the Palmetto Presbyterian Church. And the search committee liked me, my wife, my son, enough to want to invite me to accept the call to be the pastor of this church. I agreed, we met with the Committee on Ministry of Southwest Florida Presbytery on Monday morning on the way to the airport, they approved me for the call, and the congregation was called to meet on September 15, 1985. The call was unanimous, and, needless to say, I was delighted to accept it.

Our first night in Arcadia was Halloween, October 31, 1985. We spent the night in the apartment that Joy Tinsley owns, on North Monroe, and there was a terrible storm, with thunder and lightning all night long. We awoke to discover that the power had been off, the breaker to the water heater had been thrown off, and so, with cold showers, we faced moving into the manse.

This is the fourth manse in which we have lived. Having lived in it for thirteen years as of this writing, it is the house Polly and I have spent more time in than any place except the homes in which we grew up, and since Kris was just eleven when we moved here, it has been his home for more than half his life.

Polly and I were both born in Knox County, Tennessee. I was born in Fort Sanders Presbyterian Hospital, now Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, on November 14, 1946. Polly was born at the home of her parents, on Raccoon Valley Road. Educated in the public school system of Knoxville, I graduated from East High School there, and went on to the University of Tennessee, receiving my Bachelor of Science degree in 1968.

I ceased being a bachelor on Saturday after my college graduation, when on June 15, 1968, Polly and I were married in the chapel of First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Tennessee.

I went directly to Louisville Seminary, completing my Master of Divinity degree in 1971. While a seminary student, I served as student assistant pastor at Stuart Robinson Memorial Presbyterian Church, Louisville, and for two years as student supply pastor of the Perryville, Kentucky, church.

The Reverend R. Christy Morgan had been chair of the Candidates Committee of Knoxville Presbytery while I was under care. Because my home church, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian



Church, was pastorless, and its old sanctuary was closed due to termite damage, Christy had married us in the church where he was associate pastor. We were the last marriage he performed in Knoxville before he moved to Corinth, Mississippi. His children, Caroline and Chris, attended Camp John Knox, the presbytery camp where Polly and I spent our honeymoon, so that in later years, we could say that the children of the pastor who married us went on our honeymoon with us. It was my pleasure and honor to work with both of the Morgan children when I served as advisor to the St. Andrew Presbytery Youth Council from 1972-1976.

Though I had no real interest in serving a church in Mississippi, Christy Morgan gave my name to S.L. McCullough, the executive of St. Andrew Presbytery as "a prospect," and he and the Reverend Robert Boyton Smith, then pastor of the Tupelo church, and chair of the committee on ministry of St. Andrew Presbytery, interviewed me at Louisville Seminary. They recommended me to the pulpit committee of First Presbyterian Church, Aberdeen, Mississippi, and I was called there for my first pastorate, which lasted from June, 1971, until March, 1974. Our son, Kris, was born on January 9, 1974, in Aberdeen.

Through my work with the youth council, I had become known to the Leland Presbyterian Church, across the state in the delta, and that church became my second pastorate. During the Leland years, I served on the General Assembly Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, as well as on several Presbytery and Synod Committees.

My work on the Mission Board introduced me to Pat Kennedy, of the Montgomery, West Virginia Church. When her church became pastorless, she gave my name to the search committee, and I wound up being called there, beginning my ministry in Greenbrier Presbytery on July 1, 1980. I also served on several committees of that now-vanished presbytery, and the now defunct Synod of the Virginias.

The five years that I spent in West Virginia were learning and growing years. I took a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Francis Hospital in Charleston. That led to my hiring on as one of three chaplains at Montgomery General Hospital. Over the years, the other two chaplains left, leaving me with increased responsibility to that ministry. The unit of Clinical Pastoral Education also led me into the Doctor of Ministry program at Columbia Theological Seminary, in Decatur, Georgia, where I completed my degree in May, 1984.

It was while serving the Montgomery Church that I began another interest of my life, one that has marked my ministry indelibly, and may indeed have led me to Arcadia. That was where I bought my first horse, an Appaloosa, affectionately known as "Steamy," in 1982. "Steamy" led me into horse camping, which I did successfully for two years in West Virginia and have done for seven years as of this writing in Florida. My love of youth and horses has enriched what I do in ministry with sermon illustrations galore, as well as being a part of the lifestyle that attracted me to Arcadia and has kept me here all these years. At the age of twenty three in 1998, my old horse is still with me, and still is used in our camp programs.

In an age of specialization in every field, where there are surgeons who operate only on hands, and mechanics who work only on transmissions, many ministers are viewed as specialists. If I have a specialty, it is small town ministry. All of the places where I have done ministry are small towns. When the Arcadia church honored me on the twenty-fifth anniversary of my ordination, I was presented with three gifts: a black Stetson cowboy hat, a silver belt buckle, and a new Oxford Annotated Bible.

During my years as pastor here, I have served as president of the All-Florida Saddle Club, as a Director of the Arcadia All-Florida Championship Rodeo, and, most recently and most importantly, as Chairman of the Board of Directors of DeSoto Memorial Hospital. Everything I've ever done in my life has been in preparation for filling the shoes that were waiting for me here. And if those shoes sometimes look a little like cowboy boots, it's just part of the lifestyle.



## THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG...

It really isn't my story, nor is it a song. But that line from the old favorite hymn came to mind as I started to put down on paper the story of my years in Arcadia, Florida, as pastor of First Presbyterian Church. The next words are, "praising my savior all the day long."

I do indeed give praise to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for calling me to the ministry here in this place. There can be no doubt in my mind that it was God's call that led me here, and God's grace, and the patience of the people, have allowed me to remain as pastor of this church for more than a dozen years.

The first person that I met from Arcadia was Millie Mattison. I guess all I really needed to know was that this was the church that had shaped Millie's life, and whose life had been shaped by Millie, and I would have come here. But Mike Pooser didn't know that I knew and admired Millie, when he telephoned me in July of 1985, to talk to me about the pastoral vacancy here.

I first met Millie at Montreat. She and I were on the staff of the 1977 General Assembly Youth Conference together. She had just been ordained the year before, and was the oldest person ever ordained as a Presbyterian minister at the time. She had been featured in an article in Presbyterian Survey, and had been recruited to lead a small group at the conference and to lead an interest group focusing on ministry to the elderly. I was leading an interest group about death, dying and grief. I'll have to confess, my class was better attended than hers.

Millie and I were both staying in Assembly Inn, and since we were both early risers, in contrast to most of the conference staff, we would sit together at breakfast. Over the two weeks of the conference, we must have shared breakfast a dozen times, and I came to admire and respect this gentle woman, with a quick wit and a true sense of calling to the ministry. Remember, at that time, Millie was past sixty, and I was a mere thirty.

Several years later, in one of the final classes that I took for my doctorate from Columbia Seminary, I encountered Millie as a classmate. It was essentially a sociology of religion class, taught by Harvey Newman, a professor at Georgia State. It must have been a tough class, for it was the only one in my doctoral program in which I made below an A. My B plus was not the reason I recall the class. Millie's presence made it memorable. Millie had a gift of laughter, of making people feel at ease, and though she had accomplished much, she was humble about it.

That class was Millie's first in the pursuit of her doctorate. She finished all of her degree requirements but the dissertation.

When Mike Pooser telephoned me in West Virginia, he was thus the second person from Arcadia, Florida that I'd ever talked to in my life. When Mike called, he talked about the horse that he could see in his back yard as we were conversing. He told me that this was cowboy country, and that the church needed a pastor who could fit into the life of the community.

I'll have to confess, I'd never thought about serving a church in Florida. I'd been to Disney World, and Daytona Beach, and thought of Florida as a great place to visit, but I really wouldn't want to live here.

But when the search committee offered to fly our whole family down for a weekend, put us up in a motel, and furnish us with an automobile to drive, in return for my interviewing for the position and preaching in a neutral pulpit, it was too good to pass up.

I'm not sure whether Kris, our son, fell in love with the town, with the school, or with the teenage daughters of the members of the search committee, but he didn't want to go back to West Virginia when it was time to leave. He was eleven at the time, and just entering middle school.

I preached in the Palmetto Presbyterian Church on the third Sunday in August of 1985. The committee met after we'd been out to brunch, while Lee and Heather Sanders took Polly, Kris, and me to the beach. The head of their family, Mike, was one of the members of the search committee, along with Tom Griffin, Sue Maassen, Kay Kelly, and of course, Mike Pooser, the chair.

The committee must have liked my sermon and my family, because that afternoon, in a meeting at Johnny and Sue Maassen's home, they offered me the opportunity to come and be the pastor of this church. I agreed, if the way was clear.

The committee must have thought that I was a good prospect, for they had already made arrangements for me to meet with the Committee on Ministry the next morning. We gathered at Whitfield Estates Church, in Sarasota, with John Hunter, the pastor of that church, Ben Jacobson, then pastor at Venice, Bill Clark, of the Presbytery staff, and Jean Mattison, Millie Mattison's daughter-in-law, as a sub-committee. Ben Jacobson wanted to be sure that I knew what I was getting into. I assured him that I was.

Ten years later, in a telephone conversation, Ben asked me, "How long are you going to stay out there in Arcadia, anyhow?" I answered, "Until I retire or they run me off." He replied, "It's been a good match."

Ironically, it was a computer match. No one referred me here, and I wasn't even actively searching for a call. I was serving a church which had turned a corner, working over and above that position as chaplain at Montgomery General Hospital, and had free rein over the horse camp program for the Presbytery. In truth, I took a pay cut to come to Florida, but the cost of living was lower and the quality of life here was so superior to what we had known that it was well worth it.

God can work through computers. That the computer in the denominational headquarters in Atlanta, in its very last batch of Personal Information Forms sent to churches, should spit mine out and send it this way was an act of divine providence. After serving what is now the second longest tenure of any pastor in this church's history, I feel certain that God called me here, and that I will remain here until God calls me away.



Millie Mattison preached the sermon when I was installed as pastor here on November 24, 1985. My old friend from seminary days, Craig Countiss, pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Fort Myers for more than twenty years, was a part of the commission to install me. So was Mike Pooser. Praying that evening was the Reverend Moody McNair, Kay Holloman's father, pastor Emeritus of the First Church of Sarasota. And Bob Pfrangle came to bless my installation by his presence.

That was one of several occasions during the first year of my pastorate and the last year of his life that Bob Pfrangle and I would be together. In fact, on a couple of occasions, for funerals, including Mary Rutter's, Bob Kendall and Bob Pfrangle and I all stood on the elevated chancel together. That to me is a remarkable statement about the quality of this Presbytery, this church and the ministers who preceded me, that with no jealousy, no rivalry, we were able to work together.

Another time when we were all together in November was when we celebrated Albert and Eva Gill's fiftieth wedding anniversary. Ironically, Polly and Kris were in Tennessee, celebrating her mother and father's golden anniversary at the same time.

I shall never forget our first holiday season here in Arcadia. We began with Thanksgiving dinner with Bob and Janice O'Connor, and their family including her mother, Marjorie Quave, Marge's husband, J.L., and Marge's sister, Phyllis Bishop, and her husband, Bob. Bob Bishop and I shared an interest in horses, and we formed a bond that day that would last the rest of his life. Sadly, that life would be shortened by ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

In December, I made my first trip to G. Pierce Wood State Hospital for the Christmas concert by the choir. I went in full clergy attire, black robe, black shirt with white band collar, and preaching tabs. One of the patients confused me with a Roman Catholic priest, and came over, saying, "Father, hear my confession." No amount of persuading would convince her that I wasn't a priest, and so I proceeded to listen to her confession, and then tell her that "in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven."

By this time, a line had formed, and I spent most of my first evening at GPW hearing confessions of spiritually hungry and mentally deranged Roman Catholics, some of whom spoke only Spanish. Needless to say, I don't wear a backwards collar when I go to the state hospital any more!

The concert that year was dedicated in loving memory of Gordon McSwain, M.D. His widow, Lew, was the organist. His daughter, Genie, directed the choir, which included granddaughter Lew, and grandsons Mac and Calvin, the latter also playing trumpet. Great-granddaughter Genie Hendry sang in the children's choir. Of course, son-in-law Calvin Martin, M.D., Genie's husband and father and grandfather of the rest, was also in the choir.

I spent five years in West Virginia, which has a state motto, "Almost Heaven." When I heard the choir sing at that Christmas concert, and experienced the beautiful Florida weather during the holiday season, I knew that I'd made it to the closest place to heaven on this earth.

The largest crowd that I had seen in Arcadia was the one which assembled on Christmas Eve, for the candlelight communion service. This is still one of the best attended services of the year,



with college students home for the holidays and former members in town to visit filling the pews. I thought that the Christmas concert was a joyous occasion, but when the lights were dimmed, the candles lit, and all of the voices of the Christmas Eve congregation were lifted in the singing of "Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright," it was a transcendent moment.

If I ever lose that sense of the joy of the Lord and God's transcendence, I will leave not only this place, but the ministry. Each year, when we celebrate our savior's birth, when we sing the old songs of Christmas, and hear the voices of the choir and the ringing of the bells, and then end it all with the sweetest carol ever written, God renews my faith and my commitment to share the good news of the gospel. Quite often, over the years, Genie Martin has sung "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" at the Christmas Eve service. It was one of her father's favorites. The first time she sang it after his death, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

December of 1985 also marked my first encounter with the holiday tradition at "Happy Timers," our older adult fellowship group that meets on the third Wednesday of each month at noon. The Toftness sisters, Harriet and June in particular, usually lead the singing of Christmas carols. White Christmas took on a new meaning for me as I listened to the voices of these ladies from Wisconsin sing it. I heard the poem, Christmas in Florida for the first time, which compares the climate here to the climate of Bethlehem. at that joyous occasion. That was one of the first times I spent with Harriet's late husband, Harry Zeigler, and June's late husband, Glenn Peterson, two fellows who though winter visitors were "regular guys."

When the Land family came to Arcadia in November, we brought one of our animals, our Lhasa Apso dog, "Smoki Bear," with us. We left two horses behind in West Virginia, and in January, Bob Bishop and I went to get them. It turned cold, twelve below zero when we picked the horses up, and all of the rubber on Bob's trailer, used to Florida sunshine, froze up, and fell off, leaving the wires bare. Every time we'd turn a corner or hit a bump, we'd blow a fuse and the lights would blink, or the wipers would go off, or the heater fan would quit running, and we'd have to stop and change a fuse. Our worst problem came when we blew a tire along Interstate 75. Bob and I still hold the record for changing a flat on a fully loaded horse trailer: three minutes.

We arrived back in Arcadia on Kris's twelfth birthday, with his pony, "Dr. Doolittle," and my Appaloosa, "Locomotive Steam." A trip like that causes two people either never to speak again or to be friends forever. Bob and I became friends, and shared the stories of that trip for the next three years, until he made his final journey to God's kingdom, where there are no flat tires or blown fuses.

My first year in Arcadia was spent learning, growing, getting to know the people and the community. Bill Williams, elder and church treasurer, Mike Pooser, and Jan Hancock, who was church secretary at the time, were invaluable to me in that process.

As I review the sessional minutes of that year, almost every month we were receiving new members, and also dismissing members who had moved from the community. The confirmation/communicants class received in March had thirteen children, including my son, Kris, and Janice and Bob O'Connor's children, Kevin and Charlotte. That group would become the nucleus for an active youth program for the next several years.



Several loans and mortgages, including the one on the duplex, were paid off that year, thanks in no small part to a \$20,000 check from the Morgan Foundation.

A stained glass window committee was appointed, and proposals were received from five studios. A building planning committee was at work with plans for the new fellowship hall, and it was decided to acknowledge the payment of the mortgages at the time action was taken to borrow money to build.

Reverend Robert Abbott Pfrangle died in July, just about the time he was to fill the pulpit here for my vacation. Others in the pulpit that summer were Millie Mattison and Moody McNair, both for the last time.

In September, we endured the crisis of discovering that we were not in compliance with state regulations for our preschool program. The solution for the problem was simply not to charge for the service until we were in compliance, and under Janice O'Connor's leadership, we were able to comply. During the time we were not able to charge, almost every family donated the amount of their child's tuition to the church. The preschool program remains state-certified, with the highest ratings.

At the annual meeting of the congregation, held on October 26, 1986, elders and deacons were elected. Bill Williams gave a short report of the several mortgages which had been satisfied during the year, and he and Margaret Way, assisted by the moderator (me), performed a ceremonial burning of those mortgages, celebrating a debt free condition.

The budget for 1987, which included a seminary intern, was adopted. Just shy of \$130,000, it was the largest in the history of the church.

Dr. Calvin Martin reported for the building planning committee, and plans were approved, and the committee was authorized to proceed with the building, total cost including furnishings not to exceed \$275,000.

Resolutions were adopted which named the new fellowship hall to be constructed as Robert Abbott Pfrangle Memorial Hall and the education building built in 1951 as the John James Martin Education Building, and we adjourned to dinner on the grounds.

The busy year of 1986 was not yet over. New members were received in November and December, including Willis and Gladys Peacock, their son, Bill, his wife, Pam, and children Skye and Melissa.

Bob O'Connor was designated by the Session to be elected by Presbytery as one of the delegates to the brand new Synod of the South Atlantic and Mike Pooser was endorsed for subsequent election as a commissioner to General Assembly.

At the final meeting of the year, held at the manse, a contract was approved to commission Statesville Stained Glass Studio, of Statesville, North Carolina, to do preliminary work on the long-anticipated windows.

Every expert in the field of pastoral leadership says that the first year of a minister in a new place ought to be one of learning, getting established in the community, and that little or nothing of substance is ever accomplished in the first year. Those experts have never spent a first year of ministry in Arcadia, Florida. When I look at all that was accomplished in the first fourteen months of my tenure here, I marvel. But it isn't really to my credit. The church was ready to move forward, to build, to grow. I simply turned loose of the reins and hung on for the ride, as we raced into the future. The leaders of the church, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the protection of God the Father Almighty carried us forward into that future.



## BUILDING PFRANGLE HALL

It is never as easy as it ought to be, to build a building. There are always people to tell you what can't be done, and there are always problems that are unforeseen. The building of Pfrangle Hall was no different from the building of any other building, in that respect. In other ways, no building has ever been built exactly that way.

A complete set of plans had been prepared by an architect, calling for a large institutional kitchen, concrete block with brick veneer construction, and lots of other niceties. Those plans, when analyzed by builders, were going to cost close to a half a million dollars to build, almost double what funds were approved for the building.

So, the first thing the building planning committee did was scrap the architect's plans. In truth, the building as it exists was built without an architect. But before I tell you that part of the story, let me introduce the cast of characters in this story. The building planning committee was chaired by Dr. Calvin Martin. George Boring was also a member from the Session. Linda Hollingsworth and Kathy Tanner were members of the committee. Wilson Mathis served on the committee as chair of the Property Committee of the Board of Deacons, and his "replacement" David Maassen, was added to the committee. Johnny Maassen, David's older brother, was also on the committee, as was Richard Erwin, administrator of DeSoto Memorial Hospital, who moved before the building was completed.

Plans were completed by the staff of Kahn Construction, whose president, Marvin Kahn, had gone to high school in Sebring with Dr. Martin. A young draftsman, Doug Hammond, actually drew the plans, meeting with the committee, getting their ideas down on paper, and then getting an architect to sign off on them. Carter Gordon was one of Kahn's chief superintendents on the project, and Earl Hill, Jr., a member of First Presbyterian at the time, was the local construction supervisor.

The completed plans called for a 5,000 square foot structure, including a fellowship hall, a large parlor, nice rest rooms, a connecting hallway to the Martin Building, and a covered "port cochere" connecting to the sanctuary. The construction method was the first of its kind built in DeSoto County. On a concrete slab, a giant steel frame was erected, complete with a single-pitch steel roof system. Steel studs were used in the walls. Styrofoam insulation board was covered on the outside with brick veneer and on the inside with sheet rock to complete the walls. The resulting structure has been called one of the most "hurricane proof" in the county, as well as entirely "termite proof". Wood framing and trim was used only in the parlor and rest room areas. With the connecting hallway and drive-through, 5,400 feet was under roof. Total cost of the building and furnishings, including a wooden parquet floor, and Ethan Allen furniture for the parlor, and two hundred new padded stacking chairs and two dozen six-foot round tables came to less than \$250,000.

But before the building could be built, there were obstacles that had to be overcome. Southwest Florida Water Management District, known as SWIFTMUD, took approximately six months to approve the plans, delaying construction. The retention pond behind the building was the issue in point, and at one point, the plans were lost. At the time, it seemed odd to place a retention pond on top of a sand hill, but the pond has proved its worth in summer storms time and again.



An unexpected hurdle came from the trustees of Southwest Florida Presbytery, who were concerned because Kahn Construction had never built a project of this size, because the construction methodology was new, and because they did not understand the will of the church to build. With more than \$125,000 in the bank, folks were standing ready, willing and able to give the rest of the money to pay off a loan guaranteed at 1% over prime rate by First State Bank. The President and Chairman of the Board of that bank, Tom Griffin and Willis Peacock, were both members of our church, Tom chairing the Administration Committee while serving on the Session.

At the Spring, 1987, meeting of the Board of Trustees, George Boring and Linda Hollingsworth expected the plans for the building and the financing to be approved, so that Presbytery could grant its approval at its Spring Stated Meeting. The trustees were concerned. One member of the board said, "Remember, if the church goes belly up, the Presbytery will have to assume the loan." George Boring's reply was that the presbytery would be belly up a long time before this church would. Those words proved prophetic, as within three years, Southwest Florida would cease to be. Thanks in no small part to the leadership of Bob Thompson, Executive Presbyter, the trustees and the presbytery approved the plans for building and financing, and on June 7, 1987, ground was broken for Pfrangle Hall.

Mamie Pfrangle turned the first shovel full of dirt. Bob Thompson was there, the committee dug in, so did representatives of the contractor, and I, as the pastor, turned my shovelful wearing a pair of Bob Pfrangle's shoes, just before the skies opened up with a downpour that drove us inside to a covered dish luncheon.

Construction was well-supervised by the committee, with hardly a day passing that one member or another didn't stop by the job site. Furniture was selected by Linda and Kathy with an eye toward coordination and durability.

Early in the construction, the Luther family of Arcadia was responsible for pouring the slab. I will never forget watching three or four generations of this African-American family work together, singing, dancing, laughing, cooking over "burn barrels" as the job continued into the night, smoothing the slab by hand, hosing it down so that it cooled uniformly. It was like a tribal rite, a ritual, a ceremony, a labor of love, filled with joy. That the slab is smooth and level and free from cracks and a solid foundation is in no small part the result of the love, joy, and pride that went into it. Alas, that family no longer practices their trade, age and other employment having caused them to disband.

There were surprises in the construction process, like the discovery of a sewer line (active) that did not appear on any of the city sewer maps, and the cutting of a water line that didn't run where the maps showed it to be.

Finish carpentry and trim work in the parlor had to be redone, and painting of the interior became a problem as the year of 1987 entered its last month.

December 20 had been set as dedication Sunday. Plans were to dedicate the building on the day of the annual Christmas music program, with guests invited including Dr. Thompson and Mrs. Pfrangle, and former pastors and interims.



With the new stage in place, the new chairs in rows, and the walls freshly painted, the building was dedicated. That the floor was still the concrete slab, and that the building wouldn't be signed over by the contractor for another ninety days, was not important. It was dedicated on December 20, right on schedule, to the glory of God and in loving memory of Robert Abbott Pfrangle.

The dreams of a fellowship hall had begun during the time of J.J. Martin's service to the church. First plans were drawn in 1950. Why did it take so long to bring those plans to fruition?

Other buildings were needed worse. The education building now known as the Martin Building was completed in 1951. The manse was built in the mid-sixties, and the sanctuary in the late sixties. High interest rates in the 1970's made construction almost impossible.

But in 1987, with the church reporting over 300 members for the first time, with total contributions for the year nearing \$200,000, the time was right. Indeed, the January 31, 1987 financial statement showed \$267,970.55 in the bank, including \$139,077.01 in the Fellowship Hall Fund, \$81,729.59 in the Building Fund, and \$36,095.17 in the Stained Glass Window Fund.

Let it also be noted that during 1987, other things were taking place in the life of the church.

A new sound system, purchased at a cost of over \$12,000, was installed. The owner of the company which installed the system, Dave Thomas, was married by the same minister, R. Christy Morgan, who married Polly and Ted Land, but in different churches in different states, ten years apart.

A new organ was also purchased, replacing one bought in 1968. A concert was held to commemorate the dedication of the new organ.

During the summer, a special anniversary was observed, as the church honored Mrs. Gordon McSwain for fifty years of service as pianist and organist. This was done with a surprise "resolution" read at the end of the worship service by the pastor, and a presentation of flowers and a gold necklace, symbolizing the "golden anniversary" of her hiring as church musician.

In September of 1987, Karen Petersohn, a student at Columbia Theological Seminary, came to spend a year of supervised ministry here. Though called to work with youth, it soon became evident that Karen's gifts lay elsewhere, and she spent extensive time visiting with older members of the church, particularly those who were shut-ins and in nursing homes.

Hugh Rushing, Elder Emeritus, died on November 15, 1987, and was memorialized by the Session. A belated memorial honoring Dr. Gordon McSwain was also adopted by the Session.

Building Pfrangle Hall was just one of many things that happened in the life of the church in 1987. We thought we were building a fellowship hall. In truth, we were building fellowship itself, and strengthening the church as we built it.



## ENDING THE EIGHTIES

Our church entered the 1988 year with its largest membership yet, its largest budget to date, its largest debt ever, and a sense of excitement. New activities in the new fellowship hall were responsible for growth and activity in the church. Added programs included Wednesday evening fellowship suppers, making a covered dish supper a weekly event in the life of the church. The parlor became a popular place for church committee meetings, as well as for the adult Sunday School class taught by Mike Pooser and the mid-week Bible Study led by the pastor.

Early in the year, plans began for the celebration of the 90th Anniversary of the founding of the church, in August.

The Stained Glass Window Committee was hard at work, making plans and reviewing designs. Money was still coming in for the project, which appeared to be coming in at a cost of around \$70,000.

The youth group, with Karen Petersohn, our seminary intern, was active, continuing a tradition of past years with a ski trip to North Carolina.

In 1986 and 1987, Doug and Ruth Welch had visited our church as Mission Interpreters. At that time, they were living in Sebring, where Doug taught agriculture at the high school. In 1988, they returned to the mission field in Africa, with Doug as an agricultural missionary and Ruth as a teacher. Our church continued to sponsor them with occasional special Fifth Sunday offerings, until during our 100th year, Doug returned to the United States to be the national staff person for African mission in Louisville, Kentucky. Those fifth Sunday mission offerings now support a variety of special mission causes, local and national, as well as our international mission.

During the eighties, the Worship Committee of the church took part in the study of the Proposed Brief Statement of Faith. In adopting this new theological stance for our new denomination, each church was encouraged to make suggestions, corrections, to express their views. A correction proposed by long-time church member Kayo Welles was adopted as a part of the statement of faith, so that the line now reads that Jesus was "unjustly condemned." The word "unjustly" was Mr. Welles' invaluable addition.

Mike Pooser represented Southwest Florida Presbytery at the 200th General Assembly in St. Louis, Missouri, and reported his work to the congregation.

In early summer of 1988, "Mammie Lew" McSwain and her daughter, Genie Martin, made their annual "pilgrimage" to Montreat, for the Worship and Music Conference.

Mrs. McSwain became ill while there, and succumbed to oat cell lung cancer the last week of July.

Her death came as a shock to all. The youth of the church, who were at Montreat for the youth conference, caused the special offering taken at the closing communion service there to be dedicated as a memorial to her. The Session adopted a memorial resolution honoring her.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to her life and memory came the Sunday after her death, when her granddaughter, also named Lew, assumed her place at the organ console.



I was scheduled to be on vacation in Tennessee during the month of July, and the last time I saw Mrs. McSwain to talk to her, she had returned from North Carolina, but wasn't feeling well. She was scheduled to see a lung specialist. We talked in the sanctuary as she was practicing to play for communion on the first Sunday in July, for she practiced diligently each week, before every service. She played for that service, I left on vacation, and so sudden was her death that I cut my vacation short to come home to conduct her funeral. For fifty one years, almost to the day, she served this church as its musical accompanist. All who knew her miss her still.

Though saddened by the loss of our beloved organist, the church celebrated its 90th Anniversary with a joyous service. Millie Mattison, Bob Kendall, and Rodger Sillars were special guests for the day.

In September, Southwest Florida Presbytery met in our sanctuary, and dined in Pfrangle Hall. Tables were decorated with cat-tails and bandannas, and all church members wore denim and red bandannas.

During 1988 and 1989, a Task Force of the Council of Presbytery was at work to determine new boundaries for the organization of Presbyterian mission in Southwest Florida. Ted Land, the author of this work, was one of the members of that group, attending meetings monthly, sometimes weekly, as mission and structure were proposed. Perhaps because of my gifts as a writer, I was chosen to write the mission statements for both proposed new presbyteries. In an initial draft, the task force referred to the northernmost of the two as the Presbytery of the Bays and the southernmost as the Presbytery of the Rivers. At the time of voting, they were called simply Presbytery A and Presbytery B, but became the Presbytery of Tampa Bay and Peace River, respectively. The Arcadia Church became one of the founding members of Peace River Presbytery, with Bill Williams elected to be one of the founding commissioners.

Late in 1989, Mike Pooser, David Holloman, and Fred Mann, member of our church and a wood-worker, and this author, went out into the Peace River swamp and cut wood, from which was crafted the gavel and striking block used by the moderator of Peace River Presbytery from its inception. Fred, a man in his eighties, suffered a fall while we were in the woods, and his injuries prevented his accomplishment of the task, which was completed by a good Arcadia Baptist friend, Carl Bradshaw, long time shop teacher at the high school.

With 351 members on the roll, our church had reached a record not yet matched as we entered the 1990's.



## WINDOWS ON A NEW DECADE

The way Bob Pfrangle told me the story, some time during his tenure as pastor in Arcadia, a group of folks from the church went on a European tour, and when they saw the beautiful stained glass windows in the cathedrals there, they wanted beautiful stained glass windows in their church.

Many fondly remembered the windows in the old church, which had been sold when the building was torn down in the late sixties. Incidentally, most of the memories of those windows have been proven to be inaccurate. One of the windows remains in the Arcadia home of Arthur Roe. They were plain, with opalescent centers and brown and green tones. They had no pictorial content, though some folks remember them otherwise.

Dr. Pfrangle did not agree that the sanctuary needed stained glass windows. He liked the hammered glass, with its rose tint, that had been installed when the building was built.

Early in the tenure of Bob Kendall, a committee was appointed and after much study it was agreed that the stained glass windows could be purchased when they were fully subscribed, and that all ten had to be installed at the same time, and that they should follow the theme of the Apostles Creed. It was Dr. Joel Mattison who first suggested that theme.

It took nine years to complete the process, but in January of 1990, in one week, new windows were installed.

The committee that led to the culmination of the process was chaired by Dr. Calvin Martin, Sr., and included Donald McKay, David Maassen, Catherine Fenton, Kathryn Welles, with this author serving as an advisory, ex officio member.

When the project came off the back burner in the late eighties, approximately half the money needed to complete the windows was in the bank. Much had been given as memorials. The decision was made that all of the windows would be memorials, and that individuals could subscribe to the entire cost of a window, and there would be plaques installed designating each subscribed windows, as well as a plaque recognizing smaller gifts.

After a competition which attracted proposals from stained glass window studios from all across America, the contract for the windows was awarded to Statesville Stained Glass Company of Statesville, North Carolina. Designs for each window were submitted in small sketches, initially, and then in full size "cartoons." These were displayed in the sanctuary, and the congregation was allowed to express its opinions. It was difficult to divide the creed into ten statements capable of artistic rendering, but after many trials and not a few errors, the process was completed.

The first window was completed but for leading in, and the committee went to North Carolina to view it. It was rejected. The colors were wrong. Thus, Mr. Laws created a spectrum utilizing several shades of blue, using antique-process stained glass, hand blown in Germany, for the windows. These colors met the approval of the committee, and they were soon completed, and brought to the site for installation the first week of January, 1990.

A series of sermons was preached interpreting the creed and the windows symbols, and so popular was that series that seven years later it was repeated. It has been published by the church in the booklet, "The Creed in Stained Glass."



Photographs for that booklet were prepared by Mack Lundy, a long time friend of the church.

The impact of the windows upon the sanctuary is significant. The first Sunday or two after they were installed, I might just as well have not preached, for folks were gazing at the beauty and splendor of the windows.

During the first year of the windows presence, Peace River Presbytery, also in its first year, met in the sanctuary, the only Sunday Stated Meeting in the history of the Presbytery. The traditional dinner of ribs, cole slaw, and baked beans, was served in Pfrangle Hall as an evening meal. Don Jafvert, pastor of Chapel by the Sea at Fort Myers Beach, who was the first moderator of the Presbytery, praised the food and the beauty of the windows.

It was my honor to serve as a commissioner to General Assembly in the first group of commissioners from Peace River Presbytery. In May of 1990, I attended the first meeting of a Presbyterian national body to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah. I served on the committee of the Assembly which recommended policy papers dealing with our relationship with the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, better known as the Mormons. I could not have felt any more a stranger in a strange land in an Islamic or Buddhist state.

1990 also saw the church hire Carrie Collier as its first full-time secretary. She would be replaced the following year by Kim Maxon. In September of 1992, Marcia Brown would assume the position that she still holds as of the 100th birthday of the church.

During the year 1990, June Green prepared a beautiful new banner for the church, involving the skills of a significant portion of the congregation in its construction.

As Peace River Presbytery began its mission, the shovel used in the ground breaking for Pfrangle Hall became the official ground breaking shovel for Peace River Presbytery. It now remains in a place of honor in the Presbytery Center at North Port, its handle nearly filled with bands identifying the church facilities it has been used to begin.

On Easter Sunday, 1990, a theft occurred in the sanctuary. The offering plates, which were brass, the silver communion service from the Seneca Presbyterian Church, dated 1887, and several other items including organ speakers, were stolen by someone who hid in the building during the morning worship service, and then came out of hiding to haul away several thousand dollars worth of church property. So cunning was the theft that the items were not missed until the following Sunday, when the offering plates were missing at the time of the collection. The organist thought something was wrong with the organ, for the thieves had left enough speakers in place for the organ to function.

The theft was part of a rash of such crimes, which extended from Fort Myers to Venice, to Avon Park, to Leesburg, and thence across Georgia and Tennessee. None of the objects stolen from any of the churches were ever recovered.



Following the theft, a security system was installed in the church office and sanctuary. This is in marked contrast to the way that things used to be in a small town, where church doors and even the doors of homes were left unlocked.

During the summer of 1990, the sanctuary was refurbished with a gift from the estate of Louise P. Davis. Mrs. Davis, the widow of Bruce Davis, had remained an active member of the church well into her nineties, and her son, Bruce, Jr., felt it appropriate that his share of the proceeds of the sale of his mother's home go to this project. All of the pews and pulpit furnishings were repainted and reupholstered, and the interior and exterior of the sanctuary repainted for the first time, as well as all carpet replaced. For the several weeks that the sanctuary was in a state of disarray, the congregation worshipped in Pfrangle Hall.

Weekly fellowship suppers and Bible Study, which had been taking place in Pfrangle Hall, were suspended for the summer. The mid-week programs, with choir practice on Wednesday as well, have become a high-light of the church program activities.

Susan Burtscher was nominated and elected to be Peace River Presbytery's Youth Delegate to Synod of the South Atlantic, its first. She served two years in that capacity.

It was in August of 1990 that the session first gave approval for the use of Pfrangle Hall for a Nurturing and Parenting Program to meet. Church members Jean then Richards later Borsmann and Mary Pete Martin, along with others, have taught this class annually since, as a ministry to the community, equipping parents who may not be able to cope with their children to do so better.

New choir robes were also purchased in 1990, complementing new paraments which had been acquired a year or two previously.

1990 also saw our church's first entry into a basketball league which was held in the Family Life Center of First Baptist Church. For five consecutive years, as long as the league was in existence, our team won the championship. We didn't always have the best record, or the best players, the team never practiced, but because of talent, numbers, persistence, and predestination, we emerged victorious each year until the league dissolved. Key members of the team included Bob Bray, Don Knoche, David Bremer, Kim Halvorson, Ron Jacobson, Paul Harris, Ted Land, and in later years David Bray, Jarrett Zolkos, and Russ Beckham. During the hey-day of the league, it was not unusual for there to be a couple of dozen or more fans in the stands to cheer our team to victory.

1990 also saw the resignation as Assistant Treasurer of Margaret Way, after many years of service. "Maggie" had broken both wrists during that year, and it was difficult for her to maintain all of her many responsibilities. In her letter of resignation, dated November 30, she stated that the work could better be better done in the church office with a computer program. That is still in the process of implementation nearly eight years later.

The Presbyterian Camp and Conference Committee of Southwest Florida, a joint agency of Peace River and Tampa Bay Presbyteries, acquired a tract of land, some 175 acres, near Nocatee in 1990, which came to be known as the Joshua Creek Camp. The property, bounded on the east by the abandoned Seaboard Railroad right of way, on the south by County Road 760, and on the



north and west by Josuha Creek, has been used for wilderness camping. This writer has been very much involved as a camp director and worship leader on the site. Church members including Bill and Martin Williams, Johnny Maassen, Rodney Hollingsworth, mowed the grounds in the early days, and Roland Green and the church's Boy Scout Troop cleared a campsite, and did much work to make the place fit for use. Deer, wild turkey and wild hogs, and birds of all kinds, including scrub jays, bald eagles, and owls, were often seen on the trails and in the woods of the secluded, overgrown site. My son, Kris Land, and I, even encountered a bear in the early summer of 1991.

Virginia Simmons Ellis, pastor of Bayshore Presbyterian Church in Tampa, directed the first camp at Joshua Creek in 1991, and the following week I directed the first ever horse camp for Presbyterian young people in Florida. Horses from Iron Horse ranch provided opportunities for youth to ride. In subsequent years, with the closing of Iron Horse Ranch, Up River Adventure provided mounts and instruction. Trail rides were often taken on Terry Welles ranch between Nocatee and Fort Ogden. With the closing of Up River Adventure in 1998, the horse camping program moved to Cedarkirk, but not before I had the opportunity to take a group for a week's riding in Tennessee in 1997.

October of 1991 saw the death of long-time church servant Dorothy Sharpe. Historian, church school teacher, pre-school helper, tireless worker in the church, she led many to a closeness with Jesus Christ by her witness and example, as well as by her teaching, during the many years she served this congregation.

At her funeral, I commented that though she and her late husband, Carlos, had no children of their own, she had countless children who were hers, and who would remember her always. These words were borne out by one of her former students from the pre-school, then in elementary school, who rode his bicycle to the funeral, and thence to the cemetery for the interment. He had gotten ahead of the funeral cortege, and as it crept northward on Lee Avenue, he stopped on the corner of Lee and Gibson, his hand over his heart, straddling his bike, until the procession passed by. He fell in behind, and pedaled with all his might and main to be at the cemetery for his beloved teacher's last rites.

November of 1991 saw the church purchase its second Ford van. The first van was retained, and both were used in the ministry of the church for several years. The 1980 van was retired, and finally, after many problems associated with having bought a used van, the 1990 unit was replaced in 1996.

Thanksgiving of 1991 saw the death of another faithful church member. Mable Rice, poet laureate of Arcadia, with five books of poetry published, and also a long-time member and servant of the church, was found dead the day after Thanksgiving in her Brownville home.

Mrs. Rice's poems, which told of her native Kentucky and her adopted Florida, have become the property of First Presbyterian Church, and many have bought copies of her works in the church office over the years. A woman of acute attention to detail, she was always critical of church secretaries over the years, particularly their spelling and punctuation in the Sunday bulletin and monthly newsletter. Thus, she was designated by this writer as the "official nitpicker," and proof reader of church publications. I've missed her as I've prepared this history.



## RETREAT TO GO FORWARD

In January of 1992, for the first time, the elders and deacons of First Presbyterian Church participated in a one day planning retreat at the Longino Ranch.

Owned by Buster Longino, an elder in Pine Shores Presbyterian Church in Sarasota, the ranch is just west of the DeSoto County line in Sarasota County. Even though it has an Arcadia mailing address, it is in Sarasota County, and just far enough away from home to give one the feeling of having gone someplace to get away for a day. Actually registered as a tree farm, the ranch has cattle, sod, watermelons, etc. as its products, but its chief attraction for our officers is its sense of isolation, its beauty, and the abundance of wildlife found in its environs.

From 1992 until 1998, one weekend in January our officers would retreat into the woods, to the rustic lodge, for a huge breakfast, followed by a morning devotional led by the pastor, and then a day of study and programming, ending with a big barbecue to which the families of the officers were invited. Walking and van tours of the ranch have been the highlights of the day.

For the inaugural retreat in 1992, Martin Lehman was our guest speaker. Reverend Lehman is a retired bishop of the Mennonite Church. Residing in Sarasota, he was interim pastor of the Pine Creek Chapel in DeSoto County, and through his participation in the ministerial association became friends with this writer. He led the officers in a self study of our own personalities and the way in which we relate to each other. The learning of the day, the planning of the day, the fellowship of the day, set the tone for that year, and each retreat has had its own special emphasis and program.

In 1993, Mike Pooser, Janice O'Connor, and Ted Land led the retreat, using a format borrowed from a previous Peace River Presbytery planning retreat. 1994 saw Ruth Bone (later Hicks) of the Congregational Development Committee of Presbytery and Carl Schlich, General Presbyter as leaders. Subsequent years have focused on internal planning, with the pastor providing leadership. The 1998 retreat had to be held in Pfrangle Hall, though it was scheduled for Joshua Creek. Wet weather, flooding, the press of time, dictated first a postponement and then its moving indoors. But the food was just as good, and so was the fellowship.

In a very real sense, the impetus for calling our first associate pastor came out of the 1994 officers retreat. But before we get to that point, we must look at what was taking place earlier in the '90's, in one family in our church.

Janice O'Connor had served admirably as Coordinator of Christian Education from the mid-eighties. But in the early years of the 1990's, her husband, Bob, who was an active elder, even serving at the time on the Committee on Ministry of Peace River Presbytery, was transferred and promoted by the State Department of Corrections. Bob had been a real leader in our church, a regular commissioner to Presbytery and Synod meetings, and his removal left a void. Because the O'Connor children, Kevin and Charlotte, were both in high school, and active in the church youth group, Janice and Bob made the difficult decision to keep their residence here, and let Bob commute home on the weekends, until the children could finish high school.



Thus, in the early '90's, we knew that Janice would be leaving. A search for a Director of Christian Education began. Candidates were brought in for interviews. A delegation from the Christian Education Committee went to a national Face to Face event. The right person for our position could not be found, and finally, in 1993, as Charlotte neared graduation, the O'Connor family home sold. Janice moved to be with Bob, and Kevin, who had graduated the prior year. As Janice left with our love, the church experienced a decline in program leadership and indeed membership over the next couple of years.

There were changes in the leadership of Peace River Presbytery as well. Bill Clark, who had been the General Presbyter from the birth of the presbytery, retired in 1992. Ruth Bone had served a brief tenure as Associate Presbyter, before returning to her position as Associate Pastor at Kirkwood Presbyterian Church. Ruth had been a source of advice and counsel to our session and committees during the search for a Christian Educator. She remained that as a member of the Congregational Development Committee of Presbytery.

In the fall of 1992, Carl Schlich was called as General Presbyter. Carl and I had become good friends in West Virginia when we both served churches there. I gave his name to the search committee, and in spite of that, he got the job. His first official function on Presbytery Staff was to come and have supper with our officers at the Longino Ranch, and his affection and concern for our church and its officers and staff have continued in his years of leadership of our governing body.

A highlight of the program year of 1992 was the concert and worship service featuring Loonis McGlohan, of Charlotte, North Carolina. Over the years, Loonis has made several appearances with his trio in our church, but the 1992 performance was unsurpassed, as he presented an improvisation based on the themes found in the stained glass windows, weaving familiar hymn tunes together to tell the stories found in the pictures in the windows.

In April of 1992, Ruth McElya died at the age of 94. Miss McElya had been a member of the church for three quarters of a century and more. A retired legal secretary, she had grown up on what is now known as Little Gasparilla Island, in Charlotte Harbor. Her estate included a significant bequest to the church, which was spent in the subsequent year in renovations and remodeling of the church kitchen and the education building.

On July 10, 1992, Elder Tom Griffin died. President of First State Bank, Tom was a tireless leader in the church and community. He chaired the Administration Committee of the church several times, indeed presiding over his last meeting with the committee just a few weeks before his untimely death. He succumbed at age fifty five to the same type of lung cancer which had claimed Mrs. McSwain four years previously.

In January, 1993, at the same meeting where Carl Schlich was installed as General Presbyter, Mike Pooser was installed as Moderator of Peace River Presbytery. He adjourned the meeting with the gavel made from wood that he'd help gather.

This marked a highlight in a long career of service to the church. First as a deacon, and then as an elder, Mike Pooser has served First Presbyterian church as an officer and a gentleman. For a quarter of a century, he was clerk of the session, except when he would be rotated off every

fourth year. In those "off" years, Paul Whitlock would serve as clerk. Mike Pooser served as chair of the search committee that brought Bob Kendall to this church as pastor, and of the one that brought me here. When he retired from the real estate business in 1991, he established an office in the work room of the church office complex, better known as "the duplex."

First, this was the clerk of session's office. Then, with his ascendancy to the moderatorial office, it became the office of the Moderator of Presbytery. Declining to serve on the session because of his conviction that younger folks ought to do it, Mike remains in that office through the centennial celebration, bearing now the title of "Senior Volunteer."

Mike Pooser has represented the Arcadia church at more meetings on Presbytery, and Synod, than any other elder in its history. He has served more years on committees of governing bodies than anyone else, serving on the committee responsible for camp and conference programs under four different structures over almost a quarter of a century. In between, he served on new church development committees in two presbyteries. As "Senior Volunteer," he is available to do what needs to be done around the church office, and as greeter, welcomer, guide, to visitors and guests. He represented Southwest Florida Presbytery at the 200th General Assembly, and was a commissioner at the final meeting of the Synod of Florida. His election as moderator made him the first layman to hold that position in Peace River Presbytery. His service as moderator did not conclude his work in the church, but was a significant event both for himself, our church, and the Presbytery. His wit and wisdom as moderator remain unsurpassed.



## CELEBRATING NINETY FIVE YEARS

In August of 1993, the church celebrated its ninety fifth birthday. Special guests at the morning worship service included the widows of former ministers Robert Pfrangle and Vance Gordon. Former pastors Robert Kendall and Drennon Cottingham, as well as former interim pastor Rodger Sillars, participated in the morning worship service, led by the pastor.

A highlight of the day was the dedication of the newly-remodeled church kitchen, and the renovated education building. For the first time, rest rooms were available on the second floor of the building named in honor of J.J. Martin. It had been more than forty years since the building had been built, and the kitchen was badly in need of a modernization. New ovens, including a microwave, two automatic dishwashers, a huge refrigerator, an ice maker, and a spacious island with a range and vent hood in the middle of the kitchen, were the chief improvements, along with new cabinetry and floor tile.

A delicious pot-luck diner followed the worship service, and tours of the updated facilities were the order of the day.

1993 was a year of ups and downs. The church had plenty of money to spend on repairs, thanks to the bequest of Ruth McElya, but struggled to meet bills and payroll.

Janice O'Connor was gone, but the committee striving to find a replacement was frustrated in its attempts.

For the first time in several years, the session reviewed the rolls of membership, moving several folks who had left the area to the inactive roll.

A select committee studied the issue of selling the manse, and paying the pastor a housing allowance. Though after much discussion and two congregational meetings, the congregation voted to do so, the pastor felt the vote was too close to move forward, and action was not taken.

At the annual meeting of the congregation, William Word Dishong was elected Deacon Emeritus. Bill and his wife Nell, had given tirelessly of themselves until failing health forced both of them into the status of shut-ins. In January of 1994, their three daughters and their families joined with the congregation to bestow the title of Deacon Emeritus upon Bill Dishong. In the summer of 1998, both Bill and Nell moved to nursing homes in the Sarasota area where two of their daughters reside.

The annual statistical report filed in 1994 showed the church with 314 members, down from 351 the previous year. Placing 23 members on the inactive roll accounts for most of these losses.

Receipts for the year exceeded \$300,000, with expenditures of \$262,32, leaving almost \$100,00 in building fund reserves.

On the last day of February, John Hicks, Director of the Presbyterian Camp and Conference Ministry, presented the work underway at Joshua Creek Camp and Conference Center. The session voted unanimously, in response to a motion by long-time church treasurer Bill Williams, to begin a campaign to raise \$20,000 towards the cost of a building on the property.



On Friday, March 11, 1994, Bill Williams died following surgery in Blake Memorial Hospital, Bradenton. It was a shock, a loss, a painful thing for his family and many friends. He had served this church for thirty one years as its treasurer, for longer than that as a deacon and elder and church school teacher. He had cooked breakfast for all of the officers retreats until that time, and had been a mainstay in the annual trips of the youth group to Montreat, and he and his wife, Dorothy, had chaperoned one of the ski trips of the senior high youth. A rancher and citrus grower, Bill Williams was in many ways the heart and soul of this church. I will devote a later chapter to his story, but would say two things here as a part of this record. First, the Arcadia Rodeo on March 11, 12, and 13, 1994, was dedicated in his memory. And so was the building constructed at Joshua Creek Conference Center. The money to pay for that pledge was given in memory of Bill, and well exceeded the \$20,000 committed.

Albert Murden volunteered to serve as church treasurer following Bill Williams death, and continues in that capacity.

In May of 1994, a meeting was held with Carl Schlich and Ruth Hicks, formerly Bone, sort of a mini-retreat. Combined with the frustration of being unable to find a Director of Christian Education, and a sense to move forward in another direction, the elders and deacons meeting on that occasion decided to abandon the search for a D.C.E. and move in the direction of finding an associate pastor. The Presbytery, through its Congregational Development Committee, would provide funding to help make this possible.

Over the summer of 1994, a Covenant between the Presbytery and the congregation was drawn up, the paperwork for creating the position of associate pastor was completed, a church information form prepared, and all was in readiness by the September meetings of the congregation and Presbytery. Both of those meetings unanimously approved the concept, and a search committee, chaired once more by Mike Pooser, was empowered to find the church an associate pastor.



## A COVENANT FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

On October 9, 1994, in the annual meeting of the congregation, a covenant was adopted by the congregation, calling for a commitment to Christian Education, Evangelism, Visitation, and Youth. It was in fact a covenant for growth and change. Increases in membership and in stewardship were goals for the church to achieve during the three years of the covenant relationship with Presbytery, which would begin with the installation of an Associate Pastor. Presbytery committed itself to supporting the cause with \$50,000, to be prorated over the length of the covenant in decreasing amounts of \$25,000, \$15,000, and \$10,000. The Session had asked for a five year covenant, at \$10,000 a year, so this was an effective compromise.

Growth in stewardship was needed, as was growth in membership. An additional 24 members were placed on the inactive roll, most young adults who had moved away from the community following graduation from high school.

As the year ended, the search committee began its work by receiving Personal Information Forms of prospective candidates for the position.

Tim Stewart, pastor of Burnt Store Presbyterian Church in Punta Gorda, was the liaison between the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery and the Search Committee. He suggested that Robert James Leek, a candidate under the care of Presbytery, contact the church when he was home from his studies at Dubuque University School of Theology over the Thanksgiving holiday. He did, and the committee met with him, but as other candidates were pouring in, no action to follow up was taken.

One of more than 200 personal information forms received was that of Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, daughter of the then-executive for World Mission, later Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Cliff Kirkpatrick. Elizabeth came and visited with us over the weekend of our officer's retreat in 1995, but it was agreed that her talents and interests and our needs were not the same. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Eminence, Kentucky, where long-time winter visitors Jim and Eileen Prewitt are members. When they were introduced to their new pastor, they said, "Oh, we met you when you visited Arcadia." Thanks to the Prewitts, I was invited to participate along with Cliff and Elizabeth Kirkpatrick in the 120th anniversary of the Eminence Church in 1997.

Two other candidates for the position were brought in for interviews, one of whom entered into serious dialogue, but nothing came of the discussions.

Thus, the committee returned to its initial interview, and offered the call to R.J. Leek. R.J. had considered several other options, but when the call from Arcadia came, he accepted joyfully.

R.J. had grown up and graduated from high school in our neighboring community of Port Charlotte. His mother and sister still live there. He had attended college just up the road in Lake Wales, where he met his wife, Trisha. Thus, coming to Arcadia was like coming home.

Following his call by the congregation, R.J. was examined and approved by Peace River Presbytery for ordination to the ministry of word and sacraments and installation as our first



Associate Pastor. Of interest is that the motion to sustain his examination and approve him was made by Margaret Towner, the first woman ordained as a Presbyterian minister.

In July of 1995, R.J. was ordained first in a service held at First Presbyterian Church of Port Charlotte, and then installed the following week in First Church, Arcadia. This marked the first time in the history of Peace River Presbytery that one of its candidates had come home, and the first time that a new provision in the Book of Order mandating ordination in the home church had been in effect. The combined choirs of both churches sang at each service. Miles McDonald, who had been R.J.'s pastor, preached on both occasions, and I offered the installation prayers.

With both Mike Pooser and Paul Whitlock being off the Session in 1995, Don Knoche was elected Clerk. He served until he rotated off at the end of 1997, with Judy Kirkpatrick being elected the first woman to serve as Clerk of Session of this church in 1998.

1995 also saw the completion and dedication of the Bill Williams Building, located on Bill Williams Way, at Joshua Creek Camp and Conference Center near Nocatee. Thanks to a challenge grant, the church completed its obligation to pay a major part of that construction. A steel multipurpose building with rest rooms and showers, the facility has been used for camps and retreats for both PCCM groups and local churches from across the Presbytery.

In May, 1995, First, Arcadia, hosted the first Presbytery Wide Youth Rally in Pfrangle Hall. More than a hundred teen-agers from area churches attended.

Peace River Presbytery met in our facilities once again in September, with R.J. Leek serving as the host pastor, due to the fact that I had suffered a detached retina, which forced my absence from the pulpit for several weeks. R.J. was thrown into the fray with full responsibility for preaching, visitation, and moderating session meetings with less than three months actual experience, and both he and the church survived. Of particular interest was that during the Presbytery meeting, Deacon Skip West used a radio transmitter and receiver so that I could listen to everything that took place during the Presbytery meeting. From time to time, I would telephone in comments. It added to the humor of the day.

As 1995 drew to a close, the Garner property directly behind the sanctuary was purchased for parking, using McElya estate money for the purchase. During the month of December, 18 members were added to the church, at four different meetings, giving witness to the fact that growth was indeed taking place with the increased interest and program generated by a second ordained minister on the staff.

R.J.'s primary work has always been with the young people, with the Youth of the church. During his three years in Arcadia, he has served as sponsor of the Key Club at DeSoto High School, as sponsor of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at DeSoto Middle School, and has taught a Bible study at the high school.

The growth of the Youth group meeting on Sunday nights has been steady and spectacular, but more important than that has been the addition of a Wednesday night Bible Study program which often has more than 20 youngsters in attendance. The Youth also had a Senior Bible Study during the 1997-98 school year. Concerts, scavenger hunts, movies, bowling, flag football with other churches, these and more have kept our young people and our associate pastor busy.



R.J. has also taught both Youth and adult church school classes, and regularly teaches circle Bible Study to the older women's circle of Presbyterian Women.

1996 was particularly a year of growth, with new members being added to the church almost every month. R.J. Leek, Judy Kirkpatrick, and Mac Martin formed an Evangelism Task Force, which offers advice, resources, and programming, to increase our membership and outreach.

August of 1996 saw the birth of Claire Elizabeth Leek, daughter of R.J. and Trisha. As best as I can determine, this is the only child born into the family of a minister serving this church in its history. Claire has become our congregational grandchild.

In October, the election of officers included the election to the status of Elder Emeritus of George Boring. In the service of ordination, installation, and recognition held in January, I acknowledged three major contributions that George had made to the life of this church. His service on the committee that built Pfrangle Hall (particularly his defense of our church before the trustees of Presbytery), his wise counsel to his fellow elders concerning visitation, and his insistence that we use round tables in Pfrangle Hall, which has made for better fellowship. A gentleman and a true faithful leader, he truly is worthy of the title Elder Emeritus.

1996 was a special year in the life of the church because of the more than a dozen weddings that took place, including the marriage of Kris Land to Wendy Barrus, on December 21.

Sadly, at a wedding on December 14, Roland Green died in the narthex of a heart attack, after having supervised the parking of cars for the wedding. Mr. Green had revitalized the Boy Scout movement in DeSoto County, and had served as a deacon for two terms. His service as an elder at Pine Shores Presbyterian Church had brought him into a close friendship with Buster Longino, and had led to our annual retreats being held on the Longino Ranch. Having just been elected to the Session, he had not yet been installed at the time of his death, which was mourned by many from our community and from Sarasota as well. Mr. Green was a retired postal worker, and he and his wife, June, and their grandsons, Adam, Robert, and Richard, had added much to the life of our church during their time with us. About six months after his death, Mrs. Green moved to Michigan, from whence the Greens had come to Florida many years ago, to be near her daughter.

During the three years that R.J. has been with us, a number of young people have been led to a relationship with Jesus Christ through his ministry, being baptized and received into our church. Young families have joined, and activities for both these groups have increased. Both the Stated Clerk of Presbytery, Craig Countiss, and our General Presbyter, Carl Schlich, have called our church "the youngest church in the Presbytery." As we approach our centennial, we realize that we are indeed one of the older churches (only Bradenton First, Punta Gorda, and Palmetto are actually older) but our membership is becoming more youthful. This happens at the time when there are more members on the roll over ninety years of age than in the history of the church.

We have truly been in a process of growth and change, as membership has increased from below 300 to around 325, and stewardship has shown an increase of more than \$50,000 in pledges over the three years of our covenant. We still operate on a deficit budget, but God still provides.

Though our covenant has ended, and our support payments ceased, growth and change will continue, and the need for a second professional on the church staff has been amply shown.