

A SABBATICAL YEAR

The Ten Commandments remind us to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. Old Testament law includes a sabbatical year, and a year of jubilee. The concept of a sabbatical, a year off for travel, study, writing, is a common thing in academic circles. When I was in seminary, it seemed that the professor whose class I wanted to take was always off on a sabbatical.

It has been many years since a committee of the General Assembly, chaired by Dr. Albert Curry Winn, who was President of Louisville Seminary when I was a student there, advocated a sabbatical year for parish clergy. The idea has not been widely embraced.

Peace River Presbytery, however, has suggested in its guidelines for ministerial compensation, that any minister serving a church in the Presbytery for more than seven years should take a sabbatical, suggesting a quarter rather than a year free from the responsibilities of the church.

1997 marked the seventh year of Peace River Presbytery, and though it was my twelfth year of service to this church, it seemed an appropriate time to take a sabbatical. The purpose of the sabbatical would be travel, study, and writing, with the specific task of the study and writing being the preparation of a history of the first 100 years of ministry of our local church.

R.J. Leek, our Associate Pastor, would fill the pulpit and moderate session meetings, and function in essence as interim pastor during the time of the sabbatical, which was approved by the Session, Congregation, and Committee on Ministry of Presbytery.

On the first Sunday in July, I preached, served communion to the congregation and to the shut-ins, offered the opening prayer on the final day of the annual rodeo, and took the next three months off.

July saw Polly and me attending a training event for hospital trustees in Nashville, Tennessee.

We worshipped our first sabbatical Sunday at the church in Leland, Mississippi, which I served from 1974-1980, and received communion there. The following Sunday, we worshipped in the church where I was received as a candidate for the ministry, Westminster Presbyterian, in Knoxville, Tennessee. They were also celebrating communion. Of interest is that we had now had communion three Sundays in a row, in three different states, and our youth from Arcadia, the youth from Leland, and the youth from Westminster, had all been at Montreat the week before. What a reminder of the communion of the saints, and the connectional nature of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) After participating in an antique and collectible show and sale in Knoxville, Polly and I next went to do research at the Historical Society in Montreat, North Carolina. There we opted to worship with a mission team of college age young people, rather than attending a communion service. But we then attended the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the church in Eminence, Kentucky. And yes, they had communion!

The first chapter of this history to be written was written on the kitchen table of my mother-in-law, Edna Smith, in Raccoon Valley, Halls Crossroads, Tennessee.

August saw us return "inognito" to Arcadia, where, closeting myself in the manse, I was able to complete several more chapters of the work. That month saw me come out of hiding to conduct two very unusual funerals. One was for Albert (Pop) Lyons, who had moved to Arcadia many years ago from Ohio. Though Pop never came to our church, he was a Presbyterian, and considered me his pastor and friend. He was a long-time member of the Rodeo Association, where our friendship blossomed and grew. He loved Polly, calling her, "his little girl."

When Pop died, Fred Grady called me to conduct the service in our local funeral home. There was not a single person there who was related by blood or marriage to Pop, but the chapel was full. Friends from our church included Mike and Dodo Pooser and Paul and Lucille Whitlock. The day before, I had conducted a service for Harold Mounts in the chapel of a funeral home in Fort Myers, where he had been in a nursing home. Mr. Mounts, whose wife, Dorothy, had died in March, 1986, not too long after they had celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, kept active well into his eighties, and died in his nineties. The chapel at the funeral home was full as well, with everyone in the place related to Harold either by marriage or by descent. Because his death had not been publicized in local newspapers, and happened in the middle of the week when it was not announced in church, almost no one in Arcadia knew of his death, and those who did were too old or infirm to attend.

The contrast between the two, coming so close together, is a metaphor for the ministry of this church throughout its history. The spiritual needs of the community are met, and strangers are welcomed, baptized, married, buried. And in between, we try to love them.

On August 28, 1997, the Centennial Committee met for the first time, and Mac Martin was elected to chair the committee. Over the next twelve months, plans for invitations, publications, souvenirs, the Stated Meeting of Presbytery, and other issues would cause the committee to meet almost every other Sunday, usually at 9 A.M.

During the month of August, Polly and I worshipped at area churches, including First Presbyterian of Punta Gorda, Holy Trinity of North Fort Myers; Burnt Store Church of Punta Gorda, and First Presbyterian of Port Charlotte.

September saw us return to Nashville for another hospital trustee training event, and then on a visit to the north and east. Pausing briefly to visit with the Prewitts in Kentucky, we stayed with friends Charlie and Kim Doan in Cincinnati. Kim worshipped in the Arcadia church when she lived here, and has maintained close ties with the Lands and the Kendalls. In Cincinnati, we worshipped in a church served by Jim Bernard, a senior at Louisville when I was a first year student, and the former church of Arcadia member Karen Creamer.

From there, we visited Claire Wells in Carrollton, Ohio. Mr. Wells, and his wife, Jane, were long-time winter visitors to Arcadia, actually inheriting a place in the city trailer park from Jane's father, Joe Taylor. Sadly, Jane died in April, 1997, and Claire has sold their Arcadia place. He took us on a tour of the Amish and Mennonite communities of Ohio that enriched our knowledge of the lifestyle of these people.

From Ohio, we crossed Pennsylvania and New York to Massachusetts, where we visited Ralph and Lucille Pease, who are also "second generation" winter visitors to Arcadia, at their home in

Westfield. After touring "western Mass.," we jumped the state line to New Hampshire, for a weekend with Berkley and Peggy Latimer, at St. Paul's School, in Concord.

Berkley is the nephew of Sara York, long-time resident of Arcadia, and widow of John York. Peggy taught for two decades as "Miss Braine," at DeSoto County High School and in our church school and summer Bible School. She and Sara's daughter, Nancy, are close friends.

Berkeley is also an educator, now on the faculty at St. Paul's, an old and prestigious Episcopal School, where Polly and I worshipped in chapel.

Berkeley's parents, Mansfield and Catherine, were also frequent winter visitors to Arcadia in years past. The closeness of Peggy to the family of her future husband was such that when Edith York, other daughter of John and Sara, married in the early 1970's, Berkley was a groomsman and Peggy was a bridesmaid. Nearly twenty years would elapse before their marriage in the Arcadia church in 1993, and their marriage was a worship service dedicated to the glory of God. Visiting in their home was a highlight of our sabbatical time.

From New Hampshire, we headed to Spruce Head Island, Maine, the home of Bill and Verna Gargan, who have "wintered" in Arcadia for three decades. A retired "lobsterman" and fishing boat captain, Bill took us through the local "lobster pound," where two of his grandsons were loading lobsters for shipment all over America. After too short a stay, we headed for Cape Cod, and a visit with Sara and Nancy.

A whirlwind tour of the Shenandoah Valley brought us back to Tennessee in time to celebrate the final Sunday of the sabbatical experience with the 25th Anniversary Celebration of New Covenant Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, where my mother is an elder.

On the way back to Arcadia, we visited briefly with my brother Robert, and his wife, Sue, in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Twelve weeks, and a variety of worship experiences, in a dozen places. Yet in each, the body of Christ in the world was present, and He was Head of the Church. I could have worked the whole time on this history, and it would have been finished and better. Or I could have spent more time visiting with our brothers and sisters in Christ wherever we were.

Next sabbatical, I may take a whole year, and not just three months. And next sabbatical, I'll work less, and rest more. And in between now and the next sabbatical year, I hope to go back and visit all the friends and places whose hospitality we only sampled in 1997.

THE CENTENNIAL YEAR

When the world history of 1998 is written, one of the chapters will surely be dedicated to the phenomenon known as "El Nino." This weather system, spawned by warm waters in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, led to record rainfall and devastating flooding and evacuations in DeSoto County, and other parts of the state and nation. Thanks be to God, not a single life was lost in the flooding in our area, but Elder Eliot Sperry was forced from his home, and Deacon Jerry Merrill and his wife, Pat, came to church several Sundays after having paddled by canoe from their home to the road. Elder Vera Reeve, who was serving as Red Cross Coordinator for the County, was in charge of sheltering the victims of the flood, and several folks from the church helped her staff the emergency shelters that were opened.

The annual officers retreat had to be postponed and moved due to the flooding, finally being held in February in Pfrangle Hall.

The annual statistical report adopted by the Session early in 1998 showed 331 members, with 22 having joined the church by profession or reaffirmation of faith during 1997, and only six losses.

Total receipts for the year were \$296,141, with expenditures reaching \$311,980, as building fund reserves continued to be utilized.

Average attendance for worship services was 160.

During most of the 1990's First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia led Peace River Presbytery in per capita giving to mission of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. For 1997, this total neared \$29,000, for a per capita amount of \$87.40. This exceeded the second place church by more than \$30 per member.

As our covenant with presbytery came to an end, it was noted that giving had increased by over 20%, membership had increased by more than 10%, the involvement by youth in the life of the church had increased immeasurably, particularly with regards to the Wednesday evening Bible Study group, which averaged around 20, year round.

As our officers and leaders looked to the future, increased outreach, continued hospitality, and strengthening our Sunday School program remain goals for the future.

Our Associate Pastor, R.J. Leek, has become involved in the volunteer chaplaincy program at Kingsley Center, a Juvenile Justice Detention Center located south of the State Mental Hospital.

As such, he becomes one of several ministers in the community providing a weekly worship service and a weekly counseling service for the girls who are residents there.

On the last Sunday of May, nine young people who had completed the confirmation class were added to the church membership, along with two young men who came by transfer of letter.

Two van loads of teenagers attended the Youth Conference at Montreat the first week of June.

This was the largest group we have ever sent, and Jill Maassen accompanied R.J. and Trisha Leek as chaperone.

Jill Maassen was also the key leader in another project of the church, under the Centennial Committee. She chaired the committee which prepared a cook book, entitled FEEDING THE FLOCK. This work featured recipes from church members, living and dead, from friends of the church, almost 200 pages of good food. Other members of the cook book committee included Kay Holloman, Pat Merrill, and Claudia Waggoner.

It was not unusual to have the cookbook committee meeting at one round table in Pfrangle Hall at 9 o'clock on a Sunday morning. At another table would be the Centennial Committee, chaired by Mac Martin, with Genie Martin as Secretary, Joyce Shenefield, Ann Pepper, Marie Crowe, Wayne Gallant, Kay Holloman, and others as needed, including the pastors.

In addition to the cookbook, the Centennial Committee produced ball caps and t-shirts featuring a special design created by Joyce Shenefield. Mugs featuring photographs of the church before 1927 and the present sanctuary were also prepared and offered for sale. These souvenirs of the 100th birthday of the church were sold to church members and friends, and the caps and shirts were worn by our entry in the local co-ed church softball league. A downtown coffee shop also offered the mugs for sale.

As the Centennial neared, plans for a weekend long celebration were made. On Friday, August 28, an old-fashioned ice cream social will be held in the evening. Wayne Gallant and I have threatened to shoot off fire works to celebrate the 100th birthday of the church, but that is illegal and we don't want to spend the rest of the weekend in jail

On Saturday, we will host the stated meeting of Peace River Presbytery. A special display from the Presbyterian Historical Foundation will be present, and we will have our Centennial Souvenirs for sale to the Presbytery, which will be moderated by Susan DeWyngaert, pastor of First Church of Sarasota, and the first woman minister to moderate this governing body. Of course, ribs, baked beans, and cole slaw, will be served, in keeping with our tradition of hospitality.

Sunday, a special worship service, including a bag piper, a flute solo, the hand bell choir, and adult and youth choirs, will be the true culmination of our Centennial Celebration. The two living former pastors, Bob Kendall and Drennon Cottingham, will be in attendance, as will Dr. Joel Mattison. Carl Schlich, our General Presbytery, and Rebecca Davis, Associate Presbyter, will also be our guests that day. Following the service of worship, a fellowship luncheon will be served in Pfrangle Hall. Mamie Pfrangle, widow of Bob, will also be our special guest for the day. Greetings have been received from the Vice Moderator of General Assembly, the Stated Clerk of General Assembly, the Stated Clerk of Synod, the Moderator of Synod, and the Stated Clerk and Moderator of Presbytery.

A special guest register has been prepared, to record all of those attending the three days of festivities.

As August 1 and my date with the printer for this work approached, I was struggling to find a title, something to call it. What do you call a history that is this personal, this much a labor of my love for this church?

As I sat at the supper table in late July, with my family gathered together, someone asked, "How's the history coming?"

I replied, "I've decided that when the day comes to take it to the printer, I'm just going to type, "To be continued...." and take it to the shop.

"What are you going to call it?" someone asked.

"I don't know," I responded. "How about 'To Be Continued...'"

The history of this church is to be continued. It is continued in this volume, with articles or chapters devoted to the preachers, the second persons on the staff, the leaders, and the mission, of the church, as well as a special tribute to my most unforgettable character of this church.

This isn't a complete history. It isn't a scholarly history. It is a personal history. There are so many good stories that I didn't have time or space to include that I could write another volume. And I probably will. Maybe for the 105th Anniversary. Or the 110th. Maybe, if God gives me strength, for the 125th.

At the close of John's Gospel, the author wrote, "There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25, RSV)

It is true of the history of this church, because it is what Jesus did, and what people did in the name of Jesus Christ, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, that make up the history of this church. And as long as Jesus Christ is Head of the Church, and is honored and worshipped here, it is to be continued.

THE PREACHERS

The first person to proclaim the gospel to a gathering of Presbyterians in Arcadia was surely the Reverend Henry Keigwin, who conducted evangelistic services in DeSoto County in the late 1890's. But Henry Keigwin was not the first pastor of the church that was founded on August 28, 1898. That honor fell to C. H. Ferran. According to records on file in the Department of History at Montreat, and to previous histories of the Arcadia church. Ferran served in Arcadia from 1898-1903. Interestingly, it appears that this was his first pastorate, and that he also served the Punta Gorda church during that time. Reverend Mr. Ferran was unmarried at the time of his service in Arcadia, and was only 25 years old when his ministry began. A graduate of Center College and Danville Theological Seminary, both in Kentucky. A member of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the northern branch, he moved to Lake City, in the "southern" church in 1903. Marrying in 1907, he earned a Masters of Art degree from the University of Florida, and was later honored with a Doctor of Divinity degree from Center College. At the time the Arcadia church entered the P.C.U.S. in 1910, Reverend C. H. Ferran was a member of St. Johns Presbytery, which received the transfer of the church. Retiring in Orlando in 1942 at the age of 59, he died the next year.

Henry Keigwin followed Mr. Ferran in the Arcadia pulpit. A native of Jeffersonville, Indiana, just across the river from Louisville, Kentucky, Reverend Henry Keigwin received a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Arts degree from Hanover College, a Presbyterian related school in Indiana. He also attended Austin College. His seminary training was at Danville Theological Seminary, and at Columbia Seminary while it was still in South Carolina, before it moved to Decatur, Georgia where it remains. Thus, his education was at institutions related to both the northern and southern branches of the Presbyterian family tree. Therefore, it is not surprising that though he was ordained in the southern denomination, his service was also in the northern church. He served pastorates in Kentucky, including the Harrodsburg church, and then came to Florida, serving churches in Orlando and Leesburg. These churches were "southern," but in 1892, he returned to the U.S.A. church as superintendent for Home Missions of the Presbyteries of East Florida and South Florida.

It is in that role that he first came to DeSoto County. Following the departure of a thirty year old pastor, Ferran, the Arcadia church was blessed with the mature leadership that Keigwin, then sixty-eight years old, brought with him in 1904. He served the church until 1909, and then moved to Punta Gorda, where he died three years later, still supplying the church there at the age of 76. He held the title of Superintendent of Home Missions throughout his tenure in Arcadia. In many of the old U.S.A. presbyteries, this was the only paid executive position.

During the vacancy following Henry Keigwin's pastorate, the church moved from one denomination to another, being received by St. Johns Presbytery on April 12, 1910. On April 11, 1911, the minutes of the Presbytery record the enrollment of Reverend T. J. Allison of the Presbytery of Asheville, who had been supplying the Wauchula and Arcadia churches. He received an appropriation of \$200 per year from the Presbytery for his services.

Reverend Mr. Allison followed the classic formula of educational success in the "southern" church being a graduate of Davidson College in North Carolina and of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Indeed, he held both B.A. and M.A. degrees from Davidson. Born in 1849, he would have been in his sixty-first year when he began serving the Arcadia church in 1910. He served various North Carolina churches early in his career, but was forced to leave the pastorate for a while due to ill health. He served as an evangelist in both Savannah and

Mecklenberg Presbyteries, and was Stated Clerk of the prestigious Mecklenberg Presbytery from 1900-1908. During that time, he was also editor of one of the southern Presbyterian churches independent publications, "The Presbyterian Standard." Following a brief tenure in Arcadia, it appears that his health failed once more. Leaving Arcadia in 1912, he died seven years later.

If Allison was a true southerner, his successor, R. T. Bell was a true product of the northern stream. Born in Indiana on an unknown date, he served churches in Nebraska, Arizona, and Colorado following his graduation from Wabash College in 1887 and McCormick Theological Seminary, in Chicago, in 1890. Why he came to Arcadia, then a P.C.U.S. church, in 1912 is unknown, but he stayed for nine years, until 1921.

Kathryn Welles, who remembers Reverend Bell in her childhood, reported that after all those years the people of the Arcadia Presbyterian Church had grown tired of Reverend Bell, so they asked him to leave. According to her recollection, he went up the street to the Episcopal Church, and preached there. The minutes of the 90th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of St. Johns, October 31 - November 2, 1922, seem to confirm this strange event, for they include this remarkable entry: "After information received that Reverend R. T. Bell had joined another denomination his name was ordered dropped from the roll of Presbytery."

Bell's successor was a man whose name, or rather initials, are often mis-recorded in other histories and even in the minutes of St. Johns Presbytery. Other histories of the Arcadia church have reported him as R. W. Dubose, but in fact his name was Pierre Wilds Dubose. Born in China of missionary parents in 1892, Dubose was educated at Davidson College and Columbia Seminary. He served the Arcadia church from 1921 until 1924, and then spent six years serving a church in Miami. From thence he went to Palmer College, in Defuniak Springs, Florida, as President. In 1931, he was elected Moderator of the Synod of Florida. Bob Jones University bestowed a Doctor of Divinity degree upon him in 1933. In 1934, he became the President of the Hampden Dubose Academy, in Zellwood, Florida.

Dubose left the Presbyterian church in 1953 to join a group known as the Fellowship of Independent Evangelists. His son, P. W. Dubose, Jr., born in 1928, was ordained in the P.C.U.S. and served as an ordained missionary in Brazil, beginning in 1957. P. W. Dubose, Sr., was twenty-nine years old when he came to Arcadia and thirty-three years old when he left.

The thirty-four year old who succeeded Dubose, J. J. Martin, is in many ways the most significant preacher in the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida. Of the 100 year history of the church, he served as pastor for nearly 30 years. That he served for nearly a decade, left for a decade, and then came back for almost twenty years, during which time he tried to leave and was asked to stay, speaks of the love and admiration that Arcadia felt for John James Martin. It is a part of his remarkable record of service that for more than a dozen years, he was also the beloved and devoted chaplain at the state mental hospital located in DeSoto County.

A graduate of Alabama Presbyterian College and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, J. J. Martin served several small churches in Kentucky before coming to Arcadia in 1925. When he left in 1934, it was to be pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Georgia, then one of the most prominent pulpits in the P.C.U.S. His love for Arcadia and Arcadia's love for him was so great that the two would be reunited but two ministers served the church during the time he was gone.

Vance Gordon and his wife Sara were just as beloved by the people of Arcadia as were the Martins. A graduate of Vanderbilt University and Columbia Seminary, in keeping with the denominational wanderings of the Arcadia church and its pastors, though educated at a P.C.U.S. seminary, and ordained in that fellowship, Vance Gordon had been called to the U.S.A. church, and served there from 1929 until called to Arcadia as a thirty-year old in 1935. Vance and Sara Gordon were young and vibrant, and enjoyed a special relationship with the young people of the Arcadia church. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, they left for the Murray Hill Church, in Jacksonville, Florida, a church which Vance Gordon served until his retirement in 1969. He was Moderator of the Synod of Florida in 1960. Vance Gordon died in 1971, but his widow, Sara, was able to attend the 95th anniversary celebration of the Arcadia church in 1993, shortly before her death.

A young bachelor followed Vance Gordon as pastor in Arcadia. His name was A. R. Martin. Coming in 1941, he was pastor in Arcadia when Calstrom and Dorr Fields were at their peak, training pilots for the war effort. Many couples who stop by to visit the church office were married by A. R. Martin during his short pastorate. He himself married in 1942, in Parma, Missouri, and as so many of those he married were in uniform, he too, put on the uniform of his country, leaving in 1943 to become a U.S. Army chaplain. Educated at Louisiana State University and Union Theological Seminary, A. R. Martin's last pastorate was in Hollywood, Florida. He taught from 1967 until his retirement in 1974 by Everglades Presbytery, and died the following year.

Mike Pooser, who was gone in military service most of the time that A. R. Martin was serving the Arcadia church, recalls that a lot of people didn't seem to like A. R. Martin. Pooser comments, "The only thing wrong with him was that he wasn't J. J. Martin."

That being the case, when A. R. Martin left for military service as a chaplain, the best thing the church in Arcadia could do was reach out and call back their beloved pastor, and that is exactly what they did.

On April 14, 1944, John J. Martin and his wife, Alfa, returned officially to the manse of First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida. Just short of his fiftieth birthday, he would continue as pastor until the compulsory retirement age of 70 occurred on June 16, 1963.

With the close of World War II, the facilities built as air fields for the training of pilots became obsolete, and were converted into mental health facilities. A state mental hospital for men was located at what had been Carlstrom Field, and a facility for women at the former Dorr Field. Both facilities were later consolidated at the former site.

Official records show that from 1951 until 1964, J. J. Martin served as the Protestant Chaplain for the state mental health facilities in DeSoto County. This was a paid position, which somewhere along the line became a full time job. Thus, J. J. Martin was a full time pastor to the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia and a full time chaplain at the state mental health facilities at the same time, and from all reports performed both tasks with excellence and diligence.

As Reverend Martin neared retirement, he is said to have cautioned the officers of the church by saying, "You'll have to pay your next preacher more than you are paying me." Since the church had been an aid receiving church for much of its history, it is obvious that Reverend Martin supplemental the low salary the church paid him with his salary from the state.

There may be a correlation between the state position and Reverend Martin's long tenure in Arcadia. Dorothy Sharpe's history of the church notes on page 29:

"In October 1949, the Rev. Martin asked to be relieved of his pastorate, but the congregation voted not to accept his resignation. He was serving as part time chaplain at the State Hospitals, with ministers of other churches assisting. In January 1950, Rev. Martin became full time chaplain at the G. Pierce Wood Memorial Hospitals (State Hospitals) for the mentally ill."

Reverend Martin's attempted resignation in the fall of 1949 appeared to be a catalyst for growth and expansion of the Arcadia church. The Educational Building was built in 1951, and at the close of 1953's program year, there were 220 communicants on the church roll and 210 students enrolled in Sunday School. The latter number appears to be an all-time high.

Reverend Martin continued as pastor of the church for another decade, and then in retirement from the church continued for a brief time at the state hospital.

The Rev. J. J. Martin died on July 17, 1970, in Bardstown, Kentucky. At that time, his son, John J. Martin, Jr., M.D., was living in Louisville, Kentucky, and Reverend and Mrs. Martin were living nearby, in the beautiful old town where Stephen Foster wrote, "My Old Kentucky Home."

His funeral service was held in the Bloomfield, Kentucky, church, which had been his first charge.

His obituary, which appears as Appendix #6 in the Margaret Hayes volume of the church history, notes:

"He had innumerable friends in Arcadia. His known and unknown deeds and words of kindness and charity are inestimable. One epitaph heard in Arcadia was: 'To know Rev. Martin was to know Christ living on earth.'"

A memorial service was held on Sunday, July 19, 1970, in First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, for the one who had served it so well for most of three decades.

Throughout his career, J. J. Martin had participated in ecumenical ministries, in the work of the ministerial association in Arcadia as well as at the state hospital. In 1956, as a part of a rotating system within the ministerial association, he preached the first broadcast sermon from First Presbyterian Church. His work at the state hospital was truly ecumenical, for he ministered to people from all faiths, and was assisted by many ministers of other denominations. One of his colleagues in ministry, the Rev. J. E. M. Massie, Rector of St. Edmunds Episcopal Church, spoke at the memorial service.

A newspaper clipping included in Appendix #6 of the Hayes history recounts Rev. Massie's recollections:

"The warm friendliness of Rev. Martin was not just a thing that was reserved for people that he was thrown together with. This warm friendliness was something that he felt for all people. He never saw Rev. Martin irritated or never saw anybody Rev. Martin disliked. He always felt of Rev. Martin that this is one of God's

children; this is part of the body of Christ. Rev. Martin had not only this warm friendliness, he had sincerity, a sincerity that is hard to find nowadays, not superficial, not put on. It wasn't anything he said but it emanated from the man. You could feel it. He was a gentle man.

When Rev. Martin was Protestant Chaplain at Carlstrom Field, often people upon arrival were frightened and lonely and didn't know what to expect or who they could talk to. Rev. Martin was never in a hurry. If somebody needed him, he was there with all the time in the world. He was so kind and gentle with them. He was a gentle man of God. Rev. Martin was a really profound minister.

He could speak on the most profound truths of the Christian faith, the background of the doctrines, and could put these across in the simplest language. This is a great gift. Rev. Martin lived his religion. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy might and thy neighbor as thyself.' This is the way Rev. Martin believed. This is the way he lived. And to have known this great man--and he was great--was a benediction for any person who come under his influence. May he rest in peace and may light perpetual shine upon him."

A memorial resolution adopted by the Session and Board of Deacons and the Women of the Church of the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia, Florida, found as Appendix #7 in the Hayes history, states:

"Truly this man fulfilled the definition of the ministry as given by John Hall who said that the minister is to be a real man, a live man, a true man, a simple man, a man great in his love, in his life, in his work, in his simplicity, and in his gentleness. Those of us who knew The Reverend Mr. Martin subscribe fully to the fact that as he lived with us he felt much for others and little for himself; that he restrained the selfish and exercised benevolent affections; and that by his precepts he preached a better sermon than those that came from his lips."

Six months later, on December 20, 1970, the minister who succeeded John J. Martin as pastor of the Arcadia church would resign, but the years of Drennon B. Cottingham's service to the First Presbyterian Church were marked by unprecedented success in building and stewardship.

Born in 1929, Drennon Cottingham was educated in engineering at Mississippi State University, and worked in that field for several years before returning to complete a degree at Millsaps College in 1958, preparatory to his graduation from Columbia Seminary in 1961. Ordained by Westminster Presbytery, of which the Arcadia church was a member, he served the Keystone Church at Odessa, Florida in his first pastorate for three years before being called to Arcadia.

He brought with him a young family that included his wife, "Virgie", three daughters, and a small son. The old manse which had been adequate for the Martins for so many years did not meet the needs of this young, energetic, bustling family, and so plans for a new manse were drawn up, funds raised, property acquired, and a new residence for the pastor and his family was completed. The new manse was occupied the first week in June of 1966.

Plans and fund raising continued for the new sanctuary, and it was dedicated four years later, in March, 1969.

In a letter which was read to the congregation on December 20, 1970, Drennon Cottingham requested that the pastoral relationship be dissolved. He wrote, in part:

"So, in the inscrutable plans of both man and God, certain circumstances and incidents have caused one avenue of service to terminate and another to begin. Upon the completion of my effectiveness here, I have received a call to serve in another church in another Synod." (Appendix #8, Hayes)

That call was to a church in Dothan, Alabama. Following a brief tenure there, Reverend Cottingham returned to Florida, to be associate pastor of a church in the Miami area. That church left the P.C.U.S. in 1973 and Mr. Cottingham went with it into the Presbyterian Church in America. He later served as a chaplain at the Miami Baptist Hospital, retiring to Lake Wales, Florida in 1996.

With the help and counsel of Westminster Presbytery, the name of Robert A. Pfrangle was submitted to the congregation barely two months after Cottingham's letter, on February 21, 1971, and he was called to be pastor of the church. This is an incredibly short 'interim,' during which the Reverend Clayton Crawford of Lakeland filled the pulpit. Dr. Pfrangle's first service in Arcadia was April 4, 1971.

Tall and slender, commanding of presence, "Bob" Pfrangle came to Arcadia from the thousand-member Old Stone Church of Lewisburg, West Virginia, the most historic church in that state. He had served as pastor there for eighteen years, and many saw his move to a church of around 200 members in Florida as "retirement," since he was in his sixty-first year. Anyone who thought that "Bob" Pfrangle would ever truly retire didn't know him very well at all.

Born in Laurel, Mississippi, and educated at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Memphis, and at Louisville Seminary, he served three churches in Kentucky, had been a U.S. Navy Chaplain during World War II, and had been moderator of the Synod of West Virginia. This was the vast well of experience he had to draw upon as he became pastor of the Arcadia church in the spring of '71.

Bob's partner in all his ministry in Arcadia was his beloved wife, Mamie.

Early in Dr. Pfrangle's ministry, plans were begun for a fellowship hall, not the first time that such an endeavor was undertaken. During his eight plus years as pastor, "Bob" Pfrangle built up the Arcadia church, not just in membership but also in stewardship and commitment and programs.

In 1974, his leadership caused Candice Reid to be employed as Director of Christian Education, and in the following year, a Pre-School program was begun which has ministered to countless children of our community for almost a quarter of a century.

During his tenure in Arcadia, Dr. Pfrangle exchanged pulpits, manses, and cars, with Reverend James Aitchison of the Broomhill Presbyterian Church in Glasgow, Scotland. From mid-July to September 1, the Pfrangles enjoyed the cooler climate of Glasgow while the Aitchisons baked in the Florida sun. The warm relationships which folks in Arcadia felt for their summer exchange pastor persisted until his death two decades later.

In 1976, in addition to the bi-centennial celebration, another Scots preacher, Dr. Andrew Herron,

Clerk of the Glasgow Presbytery, filled the pulpit of July 18. That summer marked the first appearance in the pulpit of one minister who is mentioned in another chapter of this work, Millie Mattison.

As he neared the compulsory retirement age of 70, Bob Pfrangle announced his retirement from the Arcadia church. Both the church and the Presbytery of Westminister adopted resolutions honoring him upon his retirement, and it was noted in the latter that he had served on the Boards of Trustees of West Virginia Homes, Inc., the Mountain Retreat Association, Davis and Elkins College, which had bestowed upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1957.

His service on the General Assembly's Board of National Missions, and Council on Chaplains and Military Personnel was recognized, as was his representation of the P.C.U.S. at the 1964 meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Frankfurt, Germany, and at the 1966 General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It was also noted that in 1977 he had the dual distinction of moderating Westminister Presbytery and serving as one of its commissioners to the General Assembly. (Appendix #21, Hayes).

Retired he might have been, but Bob Pfrangle did not stop his ministry or his service to the church. He began the new church development that became Kirkwood Presbyterian Church in Bradenton, where he and Mamie moved in retirement. That church is now over 800 members strong. He served several churches across the south as interim pastor, until his health began to fail. During the last year of his life, he served on the commission of Southwest Florida Presbytery that installed Ted Land, this writer, as pastor of the Arcadia church, and assisted with funerals of members that he had known well. In fact, though he would have been unable to fill the commitment due to his use of oxygen, he was scheduled to preach in Arcadia for the vacationing pastor the Sunday after he died in July of 1986.

In this writer's last visit with Dr. Pfrangle, I told him that I intended to ask the session and congregation of the Arcadia church to name its fellowship hall in his honor. He replied, "Oh, don't do that! I'm not dead yet, and there are some folks that won't give you any money if you name it after me!" By the time ground was broken for the building on June 20, 1987, Dr. Pfrangle was dead, but the money came in anyway to build Pfrangle Hall. Mamie Pfrangle turned the first shovel of dirt in the ground-breaking, and was there for the dedication on December 20, 1987. The fellowship hall of the Kirkwood Presbyterian Church was dedicated in 1996 as the Robert and Mamie Pfrangle Hall, honoring both of those servants of the church. As of this writing in 1998, Mamie remains a resident of one of the Presbyterian retirement facilities in Bradenton.

During Dr. Pfrangle's tenure, the need had arisen for his services to be shared with the Wauchula church, as it struggled to find a denominational identity, finally dividing into two congregations, one P.C.U.S., the other P.C.A. The minister who followed Dr. Pfrangle as interim pastor, Dr. C. Grier Davis, retired president of Montreat, served the Arcadia church from February until May, and then went "up the road" to Wauchula, to try to keep that struggling church going. The Rev. Alex Stenhouse, of Lakeland filled the pulpit from May 1 to August 3, and after that brief a vacancy, a new pastor arrived.

Indeed, it took the search committee less than six months to find a worthy successor to Dr. Pfrangle, and on July 13, 1980, another "Bob," the Reverend William Robert Kendall was called to serve as pastor. As tall as his predecessor, Bob Kendall had been an outstanding athlete in his youth, and brought an impressive physical presence into the pulpit. Indeed, he had the opportunity to play both professional football and professional hockey in the land of his birth.

Bob Kendall and his wife, Joan, are both natives of Toronto, Canada. Though forty-nine years old when he arrived in Arcadia, this was Bob Kendall's first pastorate. He had been ordained by Westminster Presbytery in 1978, and served as associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Lakeland. Educated at Bob Jones University and Fuller Seminary in California. Kendall had served for a number of years with Campus Crusade for Christ International, as an area director, for Latin America.

With that experience, the Kendalls brought a new perspective to the Arcadia church. The Kendalls have four children, but only the youngest, Jim, was still at home when they moved to Arcadia. He completed his high school education here. One of the Kendall's daughters is married to a Presbyterian minister, Reverend Paul Hayden, who participated in his father-in-law's installation in Arcadia on September 7, 1980.

Only three months after Reverend Kendall came, Candy Reid left to pursue a position in North Carolina, and her replacement, Mary Mewborn, stayed only a short time. At that point, Janice O'Connor became coordinator of Christian Education. She served in that position until 1993.

During Bob Kendall's tenure in Arcadia, he completed his Doctor of Ministry degree from Pittsburgh Seminary, focussing on the issue of Presbyterian Reunion. That reunion between the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, took place the same year he received his doctorate, 1983.

As Bob and Mamie Pfrangle had been an effective team as pastor and wife, so were Bob and Joan. Joan served as President of the Presbyterian Women's organization during their last year in Arcadia.

Early in 1985, Bob Kendall received a call to become pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, New Port Richey, Florida. He served that church with distinction for more than a decade, during which he and Joan both faced several health problems. He was granted honorable retirement in 1996, continuing to live in the community he served last and longer.

THE SECOND PERSON

One of the keys to growth and strength of the church in Arcadia during the last quarter of a century has been the second professional staff person. Varied in talents, abilities, interests, experience, and education, each has served in a special way. Some merely passed through Arcadia on their way somewhere else. Others have become part of the church family in ways that will bind them to this community forever.

Candice Reid, better known as "Candy" was the first person hired to be the second professional staff person. A native of Miami, Florida, Candy graduated from Miami Dade Junior College and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte before completing her Masters degree at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia. Upon her graduation in 1971, she accepted a position on the staff of the day care program of New Covenant Presbyterian Church in Miami.

By 1974, Candy was living in Seminole, Florida, caring for her father while he recuperated from a stroke. The Arcadia church employed her to be its Director of Christian Education in June of that year. While she was called as Director of Christian Education, a full-time position, in truth Candy was part-time secretary, part-time janitor and full-time educator.

Early in her tenure in Arcadia, Candy established the choir and crafts program one afternoon a week after school, which has become an on-going ministry and program of the church. In 1975, the preschool program was begun, for three half days a week, providing three and four year olds with the necessary skills to enter public school kindergarten at the end of their pre-school time.

The first "graduates" of the Presbyterian Preschool have graduated from college now, and the number of pupils in the program has doubled, to almost forty. The program remains three half days, and is regarded by kindergarten teachers as an excellent preparatory experience for children. It is not unusual for parents of new-born babies to call the church office to sign their children up for preschool. Even pregnant women have called to make sure their child would have a place in the program!

Candy worked with all ages in the church. The youth loved her, and she had a real following among the senior citizens as well. She trained church school teachers as well as the staff of the pre-school to be effective communicators of loving concern.

Candy was instrumental in getting folks from Arcadia to go to Montreat for the Christian Education Conference each summer. Of course, she didn't have any trouble getting Bill and Dorothy Williams to go and cook breakfast.

In a real sense, Candy Reid became a part of the Arcadia Presbyterian family. She remains close to the Williams family, and to Margaret Way, often spending the Christmas holidays here when her schedule allows.

In reflecting on her Arcadia years, Candy said, "I am forever grateful that I had my first DCE job under Bob Pfrangle. He taught me how to be a Director of Christian Education."

In January of 1981, Candy left Arcadia to become Director of Christian Education at Alamance Presbyterian Church, in Greensboro, North Carolina. In November of 1985, she moved to St. Giles Church, Greenville, South Carolina.

From 1991 until 1993, Candy was a "foreign missionary," serving as Educator of the Derry, Pennsylvania, Church. She returned south in 1994, to the Reid Memorial Church (no relation), Augusta, Georgia. Since 1995, Candy has served as the DCE of First Presbyterian Church, Laurens, South Carolina.

Mary Mewborn, a graduate of Presbyterian College in South Carolina and P.S.C.E., succeeded Candy Reid in July of 1981, and stayed for two years. Mary did not have the secretarial responsibilities, and continued to build upon the foundation that Candy had prepared in the pre-school and choir and crafts program. One who worked with her says, "Mary was really good at getting people to volunteer to help with the programs of the church." This was her last church-related position, and she has been dropped from the list of Certified Educators.

After Mary Mewborn left, the church shifted directions away from a full-time, certified Director of Christian Education. Janice O'Connor, a member of the church, who had been working in the preschool since the early days of its organization, was named Director of the Preschool and Coordinator of Christian Education. These were both part-time positions, and the sum of them did not quite constitute a full-time position.

Janice continued to serve in this dual roll for ten years. She grew and learned in her service. She attended recreation workshops at Montreat, classes sponsored by Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Orlando, and numerous other workshops and classes, including the certification program in child development offered by the State of Florida.

Janice served on Peace River Presbytery's Christian Education Committee, chairing the sub-committee for the resource center, and played a major role in the establishment of that center. During her years as Coordinator of Christian Education, she led workshops in early-childhood programming at Presbytery and Synod level, quite often taking several folks with her to the School of the Synod of the South Atlantic at Saint Simon's Island, Georgia.

When the State Department of Corrections transferred Janice's husband, Bob, to the Lake County Correctional Institution in Clermont in early 1990, it was obvious that sooner or later she would follow him. Because their children, Kevin and Charlotte, were both students at DeSoto County High, involved in the band, and in the youth group of the church, Janice and the children remained in Arcadia until Charlotte's graduation in 1993. The family was then re-united. Janice continued her work with children in the pre-school program of the Episcopal church in Clermont, and on the staff of the Wee Care program of First Baptist Church, Clermont. She and Bob are members of the Oakland Presbyterian Church. Janice is now employed by that church as its educator.

Janice was succeeded as Director of the Preschool by Cherie Thomas, who had worked as a teacher under Janice's leadership for nearly ten years. Surveys were conducted to see if all-day programs, or five day a week programs were desired. The mandate of the parents sending their children to our program was to continue doing what we have been doing. Other churches are now providing full day and full time programs, offering child-care, and there are many day care centers operated by private individuals in the community, as well as a model public school pre-school program for children at risk.

Under Cherie's administration, the size of the preschool program has doubled. The preschool is certified by the State of Florida Department of Children's and Family Services.

Certification was first earned during the years that Janice O'Connor served as director. It is interesting to note that as that process began, the program found itself in a situation where to operate, it could not charge tuition. During the month or so that it took to resolve the lack of certification, and begin charging again, every family with a child in the program made a donation to the church, in the amount of what the tuition would have been.

During the last years of Janice O'Connor's tenure as Coordinator of Christian Education, a search had been launched for a full-time, certified or certifiable, DCE. Several applicants were interviewed, the position was offered to at least one candidate, but no one was found to fill the position.

During the 1987-1988 program year, a seminary intern was employed to assist the pastor and provide additional program leadership. Karen Petersohn of Columbia Seminary was here for twelve months. She returned to Columbia and completed her degree, as well as a year of chaplaincy training at Georgia Baptist Hospital. Ordained by Greater Atlanta Presbytery, she pursued her education in Germany, where she married. As of the 1997 directory of the General Assembly, she is a member at large of Southeastern Illinois Presbytery, living in Champaign.

In January of 1994, the elders and deacons met for their annual officers retreat at the Longino Ranch in Sarasota County. Carl Schlich, General Presbyter of Peace River Presbytery, and Ruth Hicks, former Associate Presbyter, representing the Congregational Development Committee of presbytery, led a goal setting and soul searching day. In May, Ruth came to Arcadia for a mini-retreat.

The realization of the officers was that our search for a Director of Christian Education had been futile because what our church needed was more than a DCE was equipped or prepared to offer. We needed an associate pastor.

The salary package the church had been offering for a DCE was not adequate to meet the presbytery minimum standards for an ordained person. The Congregational Development Committee was able to provide funds to supplement what the church could offer, and at the September Stated Meeting of Peace River Presbytery, a Covenant between the First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia and Peace River Presbytery was approved, having been previously approved by the Session and Congregation of the Arcadia church.

Thus, the search began for an Associate Pastor.

Tim Stewart, pastor of Burnt Store Presbyterian Church, Punta Gorda, was liaison between the Committee on Ministry and the Arcadia search committee. He also chaired the candidates sub-committee of Presbytery. When a candidate under care of Presbytery had completed the process allowing him to be interviewed by churches, Tim suggested to that candidate that he contact the Arcadia church. In the fall of 1994, that candidate, R.J. Leek, called the pastor, who referred him to the search committee chair, Mike Pooser. When the candidate was in the area for Thanksgiving with his family, he and his wife met with the search committee.

That search committee received personal information forms on almost every student planning to

graduate from a Presbyterian seminary in 1995. The committee received forms from men and women of all ages and experience levels, from all parts of the nation. The search for an associate pastor was truly inclusive and nation wide.

In addition to R.J. Leek, interviews were conducted with a graduate of Columbia Seminary who was living with his in-laws in West Palm Beach, with the daughter of one of the highest ranking leaders of the denomination who was a senior at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, and with a student at Fuller Seminary in California.

After due diligence and prayerful consideration, the committee offered the call to Robert James Leek, and he accepted the challenge of becoming the first associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Arcadia, Florida.

R.J. , as he prefers to be called, was born in Berea, Ohio, but moved at an early age to Port Charlotte, Florida, where he grew up in First Presbyterian Church. Following graduation from Port Charlotte High School, where he was on the football and wrestling teams, he went to Warner Southern College, a church-related school in Lake Wales, Florida.

There he met and married his wife, Trisha.

Following his graduation from Warner Southern, R.J. attended Dubuque Seminary, in Iowa, one of the recognized seminaries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

R.J was the first candidate taken under care of Peace River Presbytery to return to serve in the Presbytery. A change in the Book of Order caused him to be ordained in his home church and then installed in the Arcadia church on subsequent Sundays of July, 1995. Thus, for two Sunday afternoons in a row, folks from both churches gathered together to hear Miles McDonald, pastor emeritus of Port Charlotte First, and R.J.'s boyhood minister, preach.

R.J.'s primary area of emphasis in his ministry is youth, and during the three years he has been here, he has increased the size of the youth group, and organized many programs of fellowship and service for them. A special success is the Wednesday evening youth Bible study, which sometimes has two dozen teenagers gathered together.

As the history of this church is written, the Reverend R.J. Leek stands alone for two reasons.

He is the first and so far only Associate Pastor to serve the church. But more importantly, he is the father of Claire Elizabeth Leek, born August 12, 1996. Claire is the first child born to a minister serving this church in its history. She has become the pride and joy of the entire congregation, and a regular attendee of worship services from the first weeks of her life.

For most of the last quarter of its history, the Arcadia church has been a church that has required the leadership of two trained professionals to sustain the level of program and service required.

As the church continues to grow in its second century, this will remain true.

THE LEADERS

Throughout its one hundred year history, our church has provided outstanding leadership to the community. Officers of civic and service clubs routinely are dominated by Presbyterians, and a significant number have been elected or appointed to public office. The following listing attempts to record those who have served:

Mayor of Arcadia: R.B. Armstrong, S. Chesterfield Smith, Marshall Whidden, Mike Pooser, Ronny Allen

Tax Assessor: C.D. Boring, Margaret McAnly

Postmaster: C.D. Boring, Mike Pooser

City Council: Gus Dickhaut, Dr. Ed Green, Hugh Martin, Marvin Tidwell, Sr., Jerry Tinsley, Marshall Whidden, John York, William A. Channel, Robert E. Kelly, Jr., Mike Pooser, E.J. Yelvington, S. Chesterfield Smith, Worley Whidden, Claude Jones, Jr., Ivy Dykes, Ronny Allen..

School Board: George Boring, W.A. Way, E.J. Yelvington, William A. Channel, Ivy Dykes, Rodney Hollingsworth (elected to his fourth consecutive term in 1998)

County School Superintendent: Cook H. Smith, Hugh Flanders, Charles (Chuck) Weaver

Tax Collector: Martin (Mutt) Noland, J.L. Dishong

County Sheriff: J.L. Dishong

Property Appraiser: Margaret McAnly

Prosecuting Attorney: William W. Dishong (many terms)

County Judge: Gordon Hays (many terms), Chesterfield (Bus) Hays

City Attorney: Gordon Hays, John H. (Red) Treadwell, III, David Holloman

County Commission: Donald McKay, Paul Whitlock

State Legislator: S. Chesterfield Smith

City Recorder: Margaret Way

The last named lady graduated from DeSoto County High in 1941, and went to work in the office which she would later be elected to hold. As of this writing, in July of 1998, she still works in the same place. Almost as note-worthy, Margaret McAnly worked for several years in the court house before being elected to office in 1956. She retired as Property Appraiser in 1988.

THE MISSION AND MINISTRY

Thirteen years ago, when I met with the search committee, I asked them what the most important ministry of the church to the community was. The answer I received was, "The pre-school. It helps lots of families, lots of children." That is true, but it isn't the most important ministry.

After I'd been here a year or two, I would probably have answered, "the music program." Our Christmas Music program is a cultural highlight of the year in Arcadia, and the children's musical in the Spring, the youth talent show, the special concerts by folks like Loonis McGlohan, the Davidson College and Eckerd College and Stillman College Choirs and bands, all minister to the community as a whole. But the week in and week out high quality of our music program, with Genie Martin directing, Lew Cassels on the organ, Phyllis Bishop on the piano, Ellie Sutphin and Nicole Maassen playing their flutes, Calvin Martin, Jr., adding his trumpet when he is home, is unsurpassed anywhere I've ever been. It is truly a wonderful ministry.

I'm convinced that one of the most important ministries we have is our radio broadcast. For many people who are shut-ins, who have to work on Sundays, or who just don't get to church, our weekly worship service, which was first broadcast in 1956 and has been broadcast almost every Sunday for the last twenty five years, is a special ministry. The other day, my post man handed me the mail at the manse, and commented on something that had occurred in a worship service a few weeks back. He listens every Sunday. When we lost the 11 A.M. live broadcast a year or so ago, I thought it was a disaster. It was instead a blessing. Now members of our church who go to a football games in Gainesville or Tallahassee, who spend the weekend at the lake or the beach or at Disneyworld, or who go hunting or fishing or golfing or horseback riding, are usually home in time to hear the 6 P.M. broadcast, or else they are close enough to tune it in on their car radios as they drive home.

I'm convinced that our most important ministry to the community is what we do to help people, the things we do to meet human need. Grocery carts sit in the narthex and the fellowship hall, to receive food that is distributed through the Arcadia Center for the Needy, located right across Oak Street from our church parking lot. Local benevolence dollars pay for prescription drugs for people without money, often referred by the County Health Department or the hospital Emergency Department. We administer the local Salvation Army Welfare Fund, to help shelter transients, and speed them on their way with gasoline purchases or bus tickets. We also administer Florida Power and Light's Care to Share program, and help folks pay their electric bills. The Angel Tree program provides Christmas gifts for children who have a parent in prison, and we have taken on four or five dozen children in recent years, and always had plenty of gifts to give them. Thanksgiving baskets for the needy overflow as well.

We worship, and we serve, and we help our neighbors in need, for that is the pattern and the purpose of the church throughout its history. We preach the gospel, and witness to its transforming love in our lives, and reach out to the community, to teach them of Christ, and to show them His love. That is our mission and our ministry, in which all members and staff are involved.

WE CALLED HIM BILL

If I mentioned Homer E. Williams, Junior, to most folks around Arcadia, they wouldn't know who I was talking about. But anyone who lived in Arcadia from World War II to the mid-nineties would immediately recognize the name of Bill Williams. It would be hard to write a history of the Arcadia church without mentioning Bill Williams. Bill's father, who had been Executive Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, died when Bill was a youngster. His mother, the former Hazel Garner, held that job and a variety of others to support herself and her son. But Bill went to work himself, in early adolescence, when he was eleven or twelve years old. As Bill would put it "he went to the woods."

Bill was a genuine authentic Florida Cracker cow hunter. Those men (and boys) never called themselves cowboys. That came later, by others. They hunted cows on the open range. In a very real way, the cow camps were where Bill Williams grew up. Missing a father, he found father figures in the cattlemen of his youth. Bill often said that "Mister Ab" Wright, a cattleman well up in years when Bill worked for him, was his role model, or ideal.

But Bill had another father figure, the Reverend J.J. Martin. So much did Bill admire Reverend Martin that he named his only son John Martin Williams in his honor. In 1986, when the education building built during Reverend Martin's pastorate was dedicated as the J.J. Martin Building, Bill had a photograph of the pastor he loved and admired enlarged, and built a beautiful frame out of cypress wood from an old cowpen for it. That picture hangs on the wall of the hallway of the Martin Building to this day.

Dorothy Croy and Bill Williams were married by J.J. Martin in the old manse, August 24, 1963, the last year of Reverend Martin's pastorate.

Bill became a rancher, a cattleman, a citrus grower, serving on soil and water conservation agency boards, known and respected in that field. And as tirelessly as Bill worked as a rancher, so he devoted himself fully to the church he loved. What growing up Bill Williams hadn't done in the cow camps, he did in the church.

He was a regular at the meetings of Christian Endeavor. He sang in the choir for at least fifty years, and was a regular in the men's quartet. When Bill "outgrew" the young people's Sunday school class, he began to teach in the junior department. Bill taught Sunday school for over forty years. He and his wife Dorothy, taught "the little bittys in the nursery," and in the eighties and nineties he taught the "old folks" class, and they all loved him.

When Elder A.P. Holloman gave up the church treasurer's job in 1962, it was deacon Bill Williams who assumed the responsibility, which he fulfilled for more than three decades.

In 1964, Bill Williams was ordained an elder, an office he would hold for thirty years.

Bill's financial reports were often brief, "Well, we've got a little money left in the bank after the bills are paid."

Bill was a story-teller, a student of history and human nature. How one man could be so pious, so devout, and still so down to earth and downright funny is a marvel and a mystery to all who knew him.

Though Bill's father came to Arcadia from Illinois, he had roots in Tennessee, and in that "hillbilly" blood that coursed through Bill's veins was a love of Appalachia, the region, the mountains, the culture, but particularly the music. Bluegrass was all right, but a real mountain

string band, and clog dancing, that was more what Bill liked to hear and see. He became a regular at Montreat and in the folk festivals of Asheville, North Carolina.

Bill knew where to go in the farmer's market in Asheville to get the freshest corn, the best tomatoes, the sweetest honey. You've never eaten breakfast unless you've eaten one of the ones that Bill cooked in the kitchens of rented cottages at Montreat, or in later years in the Longino Ranch kitchen on officer's retreats. Bill got his bacon from a butcher shop in Tifton, Georgia, and if you were going to Montreat with Bill, you had to go by way of Tifton to pick up a couple of sides and maybe some frozen black-eyed peas at the same place. Sliced thick and fried in the big, black cast iron skillet that Bill carried with him, it was the best bacon on earth. Of course eggs, grits, and sliced tomatoes, boiled coffee and good Florida orange juice were served as well as Bill's own biscuits. Others could cook the same things, but without Bill in his "shorty" pajamas with an apron over them, they wouldn't be the same.

Sometime during the 1980's, we started using Bill's biscuits as communion bread in the Arcadia church. He would bake them fresh, on Sunday mornings, Maundy Thursday evenings, Christmas Eves, and bring them hot to the church to be broken and shared.

Christmas Eve of 1989 threatened DeSoto County with one of the worst freezes in history. Bill had just planted around fifty acres of orange grove on Addison Road. He had a crew including his wife, Dorothy, their daughter, Melanie, son, Martin, his future son-in-law, Frankie George, even his pastor's son, Kris Land, putting covers over those baby orange trees to hold the warmth from the micro-jet irrigation system. About an hour before the Christmas Eve communion service, Bill called the church office. "What time's the service?" he asked.

"About an hour from now." I answered.

"Be standing in the drive-through between the sanctuary and Pfrangle Hall about five minutes before it starts, and I'll bring you the bread."

Bill was notorious for being late, but on that Christmas Eve, with about five minutes to go, he drove his old green Ford truck through the driveway at the church, handed his pastor the piping hot communion bread, and went back to covering little orange trees. It wasn't just the bread that was warm that evening, it was a pastor's heart, warmed by the love and devotion of Bill Williams to his church.

Bill's heart was never really in growing oranges, though he did it well. Bill loved cattle, having some of the first Santa Gertrudis cattle in the county. He loved to ride horses, and had stories to tell about the little black mare that was his best one. A "wreck", which Bill described as a sandwich with a horse in the middle, a bull on top, and him on the bottom, ended his riding days, but the two old McClelland saddles, modified to solid seats, still hang in the garage of Bill and Dorothy's place in the Owens community.

Bill represented the Arcadia church fairly often at meetings of Presbytery, and represented Westminster Presbytery at General Assembly when it met on the campus of Stillman College, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He attended the meeting the year before on the campus of Queen's College at Charlotte, North Carolina, as an alternate. Dorothy and Martin, just a toddler at the time, accompanied Bill, and for two years, Martin was the "mascot" of the General Assembly.

For a Florida Cracker to be a commissioner to General Assembly on the campus of an all-Black college is just a statement of the kind of person that Bill Williams was. In the early nineties, while attending the Youth Conference at Montreat, he became quite close to the Reverend Joan Salmon Campbell, then retiring moderator of the General Assembly, and the first African American woman minister to moderate the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Bill considered her one of the best preachers he'd ever heard. She liked to be called, "Reverend Joan," and she always called Bill, "Brother Bill." Bill was present, and "Reverend Joan" recognized him when she preached for an annual celebration of Peace River Presbytery.

One of the precious memories of my ministry is of serving communion at a table in the rear of Anderson Auditorium at Montreat, on the final night of a youth conference. Bill and Dorothy served the bread and wine to those who came to the table, and I pronounced the words of institution and benediction over them. "Reverend Joan" preached that night, too.

A year or so after that, Bill and the Arcadia group at Montreat "adopted" a member of the planning team for that year's conference, a teenager from Mississippi named Akili King. The son of the first African American minister ordained in St. Andrew Presbytery, Theophilus King, Akili went on to play football at West Point. It was my honor, while serving in Leland, Mississippi, to lay hands on Theophilus King to ordain him to the Gospel ministry and to charge him as he began his first pastorate at Calvary Presbyterian Church, Greenville, Mississippi, where I baptized his first born son, Akili. The Arcadia group gave Akili a little different baptism, taking him white water rafting with them. We never could get Bill into a raft, though Dorothy did make one trip down the Nantahala gorge.

Bill served on several committees of our local church, most often Christian Education. In 1993, he was elected by Peace River Presbytery to serve on the Board of Directors of Presbyterian Camps and Conference Ministries of Southwest Florida. Bill had a love of the outdoors and of camping and had been to enough events at Montreat and Cedarkirk to have a real handle on what was going on. More importantly, Bill had a real interest in what was going on with a development at Nocatee, not too far from one of his orange groves, or from his Owens home, for that matter.

In 1991, real estate had been acquired to develop a camp/retreat/conference center on Joshua Creek, and Bill had become very involved in that project, with he and Martin volunteering to do the mowing on tractors.

At the Session meeting in February of 1994, John Hicks, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Camps and Conference Ministry, made a request for help with the development of the property.

He asked for twenty thousand dollars from our church. Bill made the motion that we raise the money, and it was seconded and passed unanimously, with no real discussion. Obviously, if the treasurer thought we could do it, then we could.

Less than a month later, Bill Williams entered Blake Memorial Hospital in Bradenton for prostate gland surgery. He knew going in to the surgery that there was a malignancy, but was prepared to do what had to be done to overcome it. He had a good example standing by him. Frankie George, his son-in-law, had battled testicular cancer, and defeated it. The surgery was routine, and Dorothy left Bill in the care of the nurses, spending the night with her dear friend, Mamie Pfrangle, who lived near the hospital.

Early on the morning of Friday, March 11, 1994, Bill Williams' heart stopped. An autopsy revealed a condition that caused a cardiac arrhythmia. Those of us who knew Bill had seen him nod off to sleep in meetings, or just sitting around on the porch at Montreat, or watching television. A few months earlier, he'd gone to sleep at the wheel and wrecked his car, coming home from a meeting at Cedarkirk. But the condition had not shown up on his pre-operative testing, and so his death came as a shock to his family. Included in that family was Justin Wilson Williams, Martin's son, born March 31, 1992, and thus slightly less than two years old when his grandfather died.

Dorothy called her pastor immediately after she received the news from the hospital, and Polly and I rushed to Bradenton to be with her. I accompanied Dorothy to the hospital, and there we entered the room, to see Bill looking as though he had just so peacefully dropped off to sleep. Seeing the hint of a smile on his lips, and the gentle repose of his features, there could be no doubt that God had called his servant home.

The Arcadia Rodeo was beginning that afternoon, and as the minister giving the opening prayer, I called the attention of the crowd to the fact that we'd lost one of the last of the real Cracker cowboys. All three days of the rodeo were dedicated to the memory of Bill Williams.

At its next meeting, the Session of the Arcadia church voted to designate its gift to the Joshua Creek development towards the building of a facility in memory of Bill Williams, and less than a year later, almost twenty-five thousand dollars had been raised and the Bill Williams Building became a reality. The future of that site is in doubt as these words are written, but wherever a camp and conference facility exists in this area, there will be a Bill Williams Building as a part of it.

There is another postscript to the life of Bill Williams. Frankie and Melanie wanted a child, and had tried hard to conceive one. But young men who have had surgery and treatment for testicular cancer don't often father children. On January 16, 1995, almost nine months to the day after Bill's death, Melanie gave birth to Dalton, Bill's second grandson.

I'll always believe that when Bill Williams got to heaven, the first thing he did was to ask the Lord to send Melanie and Frankie a baby. And the Lord did.

The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord, and of the Lord's servant, Bill Williams.