

## *A History of First Presbyterian Church, Union, South Carolina 1840 - Present*

Session records in the possession of the First Presbyterian Church indicate that the church was organized on August 1, 1840. However, official records in the Clerk of Court's office differ. At the courthouse in Union, S.C., records show that there was a Presbyterian church two miles east of the present site of Union. This land had been donated by William Porter, and a building erected.

The Session Minutes state that the Presbyterian Church was organized into the Presbytery of Bethel in the year 1840. This is its first association with the Southern Presbyterian Church. By order of Bethel Presbytery, the Reverend J. Douglas and A. H. Caldwell attended a meeting to reorganize the examination of their faith. Immediately after the organization, an election was held for Elders, which resulted in William K. Clowney, Christopher Brandon, and Wesley W. Wallace being duly elected and ordained. The service closed with the administration of the Lord's supper.

In 1841, Bethel Presbytery convened in Unionville Church, at which time, W. A. Munro, a licentiate, received and accepted a call to become its first Presbyterian Pastor. Munro, who served until 1860, was followed by J.H. Saye who served until 1864. Next was R. L. Douglas from 1864 to 1870. There was no pastor from 1871 to 1874. B. G. Clifford served as pastor from 1874 to 1885.

In 1880 or 1881 the congregation decided to build a larger and better building on South Street on a lot donated by Mrs. Louisa Gage. Mrs. Gage was the wife of a former Elder of the church and the daughter of Governor William H. and Louisa Bowen Gist. The new structure on South Street was dedicated on June 17, 1883. This dedication was made by Dr. John L. Girardeau, assisted by B. G. Clifford, Reverend C. T. Scaife of the Baptist Church and J. E. Carlisle of the Methodist Church. There were very high ceilings in the new framed building and it had a unique steeple. The church seated 450 - 500 people. The choir occupied the space in back of the pulpit. Carved in the arch above the chancel was the verse, "God is a spirit, and they that worship, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24).

In November of 1902, a motion was made at a congregational meeting to build the present church that stands on the corner of South and Pinckney Streets. Also, at the same meeting the name was changed from the Unionville Presbyterian Church to First Presbyterian Church of Union. The motion passed and the ground breaking for the new church took place in 1902. A dedication ceremony was held on Sunday, June 5, 1904.

In 1923, a larger and more modern Sunday School building was erected. The cost of the new building was approximately \$35,879.00. This building which is used today has two floors and a basement. Classrooms on both floors accommodate Sunday school classes for all age levels. By 1945 the Session felt a need for Christian training in young children so a Kindergarten was organized. This training was under the direction of Mrs. B.B. James, Jr. Through the years,

this program proved to be very successful. When the public school began kindergarten programs the church kindergarten program was disbanded.

In the early 1980's the educational building was renovated making the church office accessible from the rear parking area of the church. At the same time the kitchen was moved and updated and a conference room was added. The parking area was also enlarged.

The first church organ was a gift in 1883 by Mr. William Nicholson, an elder in the church. It was used in the old wooden sanctuary and later in the present sanctuary until 1913. This Clough and Warren Reed Organ with ornately carved cabinet, complete with a wooden pipe façade was moved to the old Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church where it was electrified and used until 1987. Then it was moved back to first Presbyterian and placed in the church parlor. This beautiful antique reed organ has been recently restored and is once again playable.

A Moller pipe organ was installed in the sanctuary in 1913 which served the congregation until 1951 when a new Estey pipe organ served the congregation until 1974. In the spring of 1975 a 32 rank tracker organ containing 1,528 pipes was installed by the Schlicker Organ Company of Buffalo, New York in memory of Dr. Thomas A. Murrah, Jr. and Dr. Thomas A. Murrah, III. This fine instrument has served the church as well as the music community very efficiently for the past 28 years. The Sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church is noted for its superb acoustics and has been the setting for many musical events in addition to worship services, weddings, and funerals for the Union Community since 1904.

In December 2006 the church dedicated a new addition and renovation of the current Educational Building. This renovation was extensive providing more classroom space, children and youth centers, a new nursery, music room, and office space. It included a renovation to the Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, and restrooms. An elevator was also added. This space will serve the growing needs of the congregation and the community for years to come.

The mission statement of First Presbyterian Church states that "we seek to be God's faithful people through worship, discipleship, service, and above all else, love." Historically, officers and members of First Presbyterian Church have been instrumental in establishing Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church, Enoree Presbyterian Church, Lockhart Presbyterian Church, Monarch Presbyterian Church and Second Presbyterian Church. Several members of the congregation have served on the home and foreign mission fields. Members have gone on to Seminary and served as pastors of other churches.

Today we continue to strive to use our gifts to serve God locally and abroad and to provide a setting where all can experience the love and grace of God. We give thanks to God for the many blessings that have been given to First Presbyterian Church. We pray for guidance, wisdom, and courage to faithfully serve God and to be good stewards of the many gifts entrusted to us.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**