



**A History Of  
Highlands United Presbyterian Church  
1965-2015**

**Prepared for the 50th Anniversary "Jubilee Celebration"  
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by  
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## **Building the Church**

In this year of Jubilee, there are many ways to count the history of Highlands United Presbyterian Church.

The obvious number is 50, the milestone that marks the reason for our Jubilee celebration. It has been 50 years since Highlands officially became a chartered church during a Palm Sunday service on April 11, 1965. But that number really isn't large enough to fully encompass the breadth and depth of the Highlands' experience. Fifty years adds up to 2,600 Sundays of services, all filled exponentially with prayers, songs of praise, and "peace be with you" hugs and handshakes. Highlands' pastors have officiated 180 marriages. They have baptized 305 children and 93 adults. There is the number 1,655, which is the count, so far, of communicants of all ages who have stood before the congregation and become members of Highlands over the past 50 years, sharing in the growth of the church at every possible stage of people's lives.

To start at the very beginning, it's necessary to go back 51 years. The year was 1964. Hurricane Dora roared into Jacksonville. President Lyndon Johnson visited Jacksonville twice – first to survey the hurricane's damage and then to campaign for election with a motorcade through downtown. The Beatles played a shriek-filled concert at the Gator Bowl during their first United States tour.

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America also turned its eye toward Jacksonville.

On July 5, 1964, the Rev. Robert "Bob" Purrington led the first worship service for the small but dedicated group that would go on to found Highlands United Presbyterian Church. Thirty-three people attended that worship in the Holly Oaks Community Club, a cinderblock building off McCormick Road. Less than a year later, Highlands officially began on April 11, 1965, with 64 charter members in a special ceremony at Holly Oaks. Two years after that momentous day, Highlands dedicated the sanctuary of its newly built church on October 1, 1967 --- the building that has served as its sanctuary for 50 years of Sundays.

Much has changed in the half century that has passed since 1965 when Highlands gained its church charter.

Today, the 32225 zip code in which the church sits has about 22,000 homes in it. But when Highland was founded in 1965, the zip code contained about 1,000 homes. Today, the church is in the middle of Jacksonville's suburbs, but in the beginning, it was in "the country." McCormick Road was a two-lane road, not the four-lane road it is now in front of the church.

The signs pointed to growth, however. The opening of the Matthews Bridge in 1953 made Arlington the fastest-growing area of the city. That development was pushing to the east. The founding of Highlands United Presbyterian Church anticipated that growth and ultimately became part of it.

The “United” part of the church’s name came from its original affiliation with United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. At that time, a separate organization called the Presbyterian Church in the United States was the major organization for Presbyterian churches in the South. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was the “northern stream” of the church. As more and more people migrated from the north to the Sunbelt, the United Presbyterian Church followed the movement of its members by building churches in places like the East Arlington area of Jacksonville. (In 1983, United Presbyterian Church would merge with Presbyterian Church in the United States to form Presbyterian Church (USA), with which Highlands currently is affiliated).



To get the ball rolling on Highlands, the United Presbyterian Church sent the Rev. Purrington to Jacksonville, a northern transplant himself. Affectionately known as “Rev. Bob,” he faced many trials and tribulations in his life. He was with Eastman Kodak for 11 years before going into the ministry after going through a period of personal crisis. During the illness and death of his son Philip of cystic fibrosis, he received great support from his Presbyterian minister. That guidance in a time of crisis led to his calling to the ministry, which he carried out with devoted energy.

He was on the New Church Development Board of the national organization. His greatest impact was at the grass-roots level. He did the legwork – literally and figuratively -- in order to organize the founding of churches in Illinois, Ohio and

Florida. In Jacksonville, Rev. Bob went from house to house, knocking on doors and spreading the word about the new church that was coming into the Holly Oaks-Beacon Hills area of town. Many of the people on the receiving end of those cold calls had fallen out of practice of going to church. Rev. Bob’s visits reawakened their faith and brought them back to Sunday worship services.

The United Presbyterian Church purchased a manse for Rev. Bob in the Holly Oaks neighborhood. He said he chose Holly Oaks over Beacon Hills because the Beacon Hills neighborhood was very strict about yard maintenance. He said his mission in life was sharing the good news, not cutting grass.

On November 8, 1965, Highlands established a building fund. For the next two years, Highlands moved forward on two tracks – worship services at Holly Oaks

Community Club while simultaneously planning the financing and design of the new church building.



Highlands members, most notably the large Kinzey and Betty Reeves' family, made sure they had enough time on Sunday mornings to open the church and "air it out" before services by disposing leftover beer cans and other vestiges of revelry. Bill Kelley, one of the original charter members and the first clerk of the Session, said he worked so hard getting the clubhouse in shape for one Sunday service that he told Rev. Bob he was exhausted and he went home to sleep just before the service started.

Even though the clubhouse was temporary quarters, the services were full-fledged programs. One of the first purchases by the church involved a piano and organ in 1965, beginning a deep tradition of music of all kinds as part of the worship experience. To rehearse, the choir would go to the homes of members during the week and practice in the living rooms.

The first Good Friday service left a lasting impression on Libby McJunkin, a charter member of the church. She arrived a few minutes late. Besides her, four other people were in the room – Rev. Bob, his wife Kay, his mother-in-law Mrs. Galloway, and the church accompanist Carol Sheridan. Even though the number of people was so small, Carol Sheridan began playing music and the Rev. Bob conducted the entire Good Friday service. Many years later, Libby would recall the service when she delivered the eulogy for Rev. Bob, saying he was a man of great dignity. That Good Friday service illustrates what Jesus means when he tells us "that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For when two or three gather in my name, there I am with them."

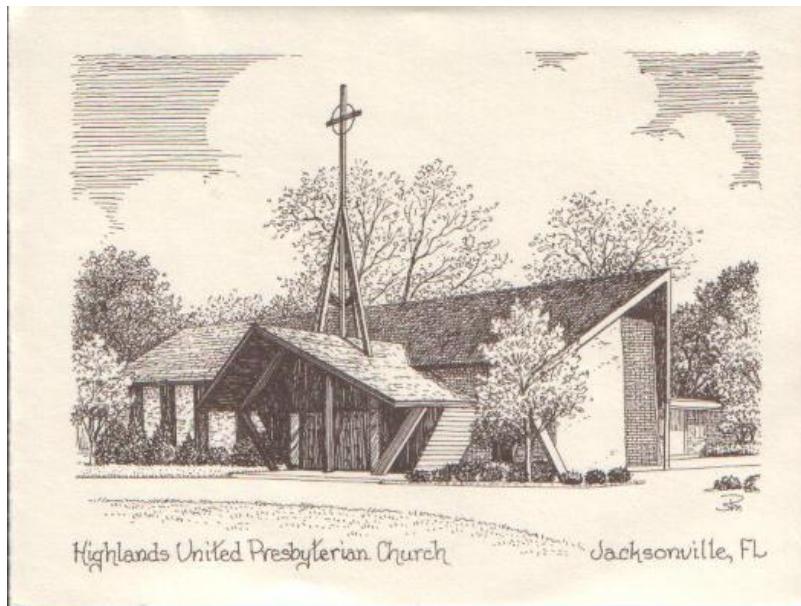
The Holly Oaks Community Club also was the setting of another big day for Libby and Joe McJunkin. The first baptism of a baby from a charter family was performed on May 8, 1966, when their daughter, Martha McJunkin, was baptized during a service at the clubhouse.

In the spring of 1967, members broke ground for construction of a new church, just a quarter mile down the road from the Holly Oaks Community Club. Throughout that summer of 1967, members of Highlands driving down McCormick Road on their way to Holly Oaks could watch the new church rise up from a clearing in the woods.

Then as now, a swimming pool sat behind the community club. Members of Highlands might be jumping off the high dive on Saturday and going to church on Sunday morning in the same place. Sometimes they had to wake up extra early on Sunday mornings to prepare for services because the clubhouse had other functions besides church. If groups used the clubhouse for a Saturday night party,

Located at 10900 McCormick Road, the property selected for Highlands is a four-acre, rectangle-shaped piece of land that starts at McCormick and extends all the way to Creekview Drive, which is mostly hidden from view by the thick stand of woods on the backside of the church campus.

Bill Buck, who was a charter member and served on the church's first session, was heavily involved in the selection and financing of the property. (His brother James owned Buck & Buck Inc., which developed the Holly Oaks Forest subdivision and donated land where Holly Oaks Community Club was built. A city park, Buck Park, surrounds the club.)



The original suggestion had been to build a cinderblock "starter church." But the commitment was great enough that Highlands was able to start with a beautiful brick building featuring angled rooflines on the outside and a high-ceilinged interior on the inside with exposed wood beams. Inside the sanctuary, worshippers could see the green canopy of trees through the high windows above the altar – a sight of

nature's beauty that continues to this day.

On Oct. 1, 1967, three hard knocks sounded loudly on the heavy wooden doors of the newly built sanctuary of Highlands United Presbyterian Church. Joe McJunkin still remembers the sound made by the ceremonial knocker, which he says will forever be etched in his memory. He was among the 86 people seated inside the church for that special Sunday afternoon service, up from the 64 charter members at the time of Highlands' acceptance into the United Presbyterian Church in 1965. As the echoes of the knocker resounded inside the church, a procession of Presbyterian Church officials in vestments entered through the door and conducted the dedication service.

In addition to Bill Buck and his wife Peggy, some others who played vital roles in the planning, construction and operations of the early church were John and Charlotte McCorkle, Cecil and Virginia "Ginny" Smith, Joe and Dottie Williams, Joe and Libby McJunkin, and Kinzey and Betty Reeves. Mary Kelley, a charter member, would be continuously active in the church in the following decades, maintaining a link to the founding.

Rev. Bob continued as pastor until he received a call to a church in Cambridge, New York, in November 1971. He had suffered a devastating blow in 1968 when his second son, Larry, died in an automobile accident at the age of 19. Highlands dedicated a memorial garden in Larry's name in November 1968. When Rev. Bob died in 1992, his ashes were buried at Arlington Memorial Cemetery near his beloved son Larry.

## NEXT STEPS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The 1970s were a decade of bumpy transition for Highlands.

The Rev. Donald Ray Jones succeeded Rev. Bob as pastor in January 1972 and served until late 1978. During that time, the neighborhoods around Highlands were rapidly growing as Jacksonville in general and the East Arlington area specifically became hot spots for new subdivision developments. Session members recognized in the early 1970s that Highlands needed more building space to provide the programs that would appeal to new residents moving into the area. The building that we think of today as the sanctuary and adjoining church offices was a multi-purpose building for worship, Sunday school classes and fellowship. When the weather was nice, members gathering for fellowship dinners would dine outside under the stars.

In the middle of the decade, discussion turned to the idea of building a 1,200 square foot fellowship hall that would be an extension of the original building. But the church could not gain traction to turn discussion into construction. The church started a youth program but could not sustain it. The biggest change to the Highlands campus took place inside the sanctuary. Ever since the church's dedication in 1967, worship services had used folding metal chairs for worship. In April 1976, Highlands dedicated the installation of new pews and carpeting.

After Rev. Jones' departure in late 1978, the Rev. Albert Kissling became interim pastor for a period of more than a year.

Dr. Kissling calmed the waters by bringing years of pastoral experience. He was in his late 70s when he came to Highlands. He had served from 1932 to 1967 as pastor of Riverside Presbyterian Church, a large congregation in the Riverside neighborhood near downtown. He was president of the Florida Council of Churches in 1950 and president of the Jacksonville Ministerial Alliance in 1934 and 1959. After retiring from Riverside Presbyterian Church, he later served an interim pastor for churches in Orange Park, Tallahassee, Titusville, Baltimore, Columbia, Missouri, and of course in Jacksonville. He brought a healing touch and stability to the church, allowing it to flourish in many ways.

Dr. Kissling's ministry set the stage for the rapid stage of growth that Highlands would experience in the 1980s. The eastward march of subdivisions meant new homes were springing up all over the area surrounding Highlands. Those new homes were bringing families with children. Highlands would reflect that change in the 1980s, starting with the arrival of its third permanent minister, the Rev. Dr. Donald Harris.

## NEW DIRECTIONS FOR NEW LIFE: BUILDINGS AND PROGRAMS FLOURISH



Rev. Harris was pastor of a church in Michigan when Bill Buck, a charter member who was heading the search committee, invited Rev. Harris and his wife Brenda to visit Jacksonville shortly after Christmas in 1979. If they thought they were getting a break from the harsh winter of Michigan by coming to the balmy Sunshine State, the opposite turned out to be the case. The church booked an oceanfront room for them at the Sea Turtle Inn at Atlantic Beach, where they could stand on the balcony and look down at palm trees coated with a half inch of ice. The cold snap notwithstanding, Rev. Harris and Highlands' members quickly warmed to each other during the visit.

In April 1980, he was called to become pastor of Highlands. He and Brenda moved to Jacksonville with their two children, Tom and Jennifer. Highlands transitioned from being a church for middle-aged and older adults to one that also brought in younger members with children in tow. It was a period of "build it and they will come," and come they did.

Over the next 13 years, Highlands would construct a new fellowship hall, renovate the sanctuary, build a new family life building, and enlarge the church offices.



In 1981, Highlands kicked off the second building fund in its history and broke ground on Sept. 13, 1981, for construction of the building that would house Sunday school classrooms, a fellowship hall and a nursery. (The nursery aimed to show young families that the church would provide care for their children.) The church hired contractors to do specialized construction work, but members also put their own sweat equity into the project. Bill Buck was at the construction site on a daily basis.

The extra space was sorely needed. Highlands had started its first vacation Bible school in 1980. It became a charter organization for the Boy Scouts of America in 1981. The spiritual education of its young members was growing in importance. Highlands dedicated its new fellowship hall on May 16, 1982.



The fellowship hall's hallway was the site of dinner with a twist. This was during a time when the church had a small dinner get-together and service on Wednesday nights. After being told to dress up for a special dinner, one group was escorted from the sanctuary to Harris Hall, where sheets of white paper covered the halls and seats were arranged along the length of the hallway to make it seem like people were sitting inside a plane. Just as they were about to "take off" for a flight to an exotic locale, hijackers burst onto the scene, forced the plane to land, and everyone was marched out to the back yard. Harry Wade was among those stunned by the turn of events, even more so since his wife Billie was one of the "hijackers." The second group was taken next to Harris Hall and the entire hijacking episode played out again. A little shocked but laughing about it, everyone then had a great time eating dinner outdoors. (A few years later, a variation of this would be done during a Mother-Daughter Dinner when attendees walked into Harris Hall for flights to Hawaii, were hijacked and landed in Arizona for an outdoors barbecue.)

After a short rest from construction, Highlands' members decided two years later to make a major renovation of the sanctuary building. Harry Wade, who worked in the executive office of the Winn-Dixie supermarket chain, persuaded the architect who designed Winn-Dixie stores to draw up a blueprint for remodeling the sanctuary building, which he did at no cost to the church.

In the original layout of the church, the sanctuary was not as big as it is today. The back of the large room was set aside for three small rooms of equal size – the minister's office on the side closest to the street, a middle room for first- and second-grade Sunday school classes, and the robe room where choir members put on their robes before services.

The renovation tore down the walls of those rooms and relocated the office, the Sunday school classroom and the robe room. The remodeling created more space for seating by adding rows of pews. It also created a new and bigger chancel – the place where the choir, minister and organist are during services. Before the renovation, Highlands had room for 140 worshippers and 14 choir members. After the changes, the sanctuary could seat 232 in worship plus 28 in the choir.

The choir was stretching its wings during that time, seeking to add new dimensions to that part of the service. DeAn Winton, who joined Highlands in 1977, remembers how the choir began appealing to Dorothy Hannah, who was the choir director and organist, for the choir to perform a cantata for Christmas. Ms. Hannah was adamantly opposed to a Christmas cantata, telling the choir outright that they weren't

capable of performing one, in part because the choir was small in number at the time. The choir persisted, trying to sweet-talk her into doing the cantata. She turned out not to be sweet-talk material, DeAn recalls. One night at choir rehearsal, after another round of pleas to perform a cantata, Ms. Hannah slammed the organ shut and resigned on the spot. She left the building and was never seen at Highlands again.

The choir came through and did perform a Christmas cantata that year, "Night of the Living Miracles," with great appreciation by the congregation.

In 1984, the time had come to replace the church organ, which had developed a mind of its own regarding when it would play during church services. At first, the organ would hum very quietly between songs during the church service, but that humming become noticeably louder, so it had to be shut off after each hymn and anthem, and then warmed up when it came time to play again. Harry Wade made a donation to buy a new organ and the music director, Wendell Smith, arranged for Kelly's Piano and Organ, where he worked, to deliver three electric organs to the sanctuary for a try-out. Wendell took turns playing all of them while a group decided which one sounded best. DeAn's husband, Charlie, called it "The Battle of the Organs." A Rodgers electric organ got the nod, and it's still in the sanctuary.

Highlands continued to expand its musical offerings during this time by adding a handbell choir. The first octaves for the bell choir were donated in 1988, and those were expanded with two more octaves – the largest and smallest bells in 1995. The Crafty Ladies made two huge, plush table covers for the bells to rest on when used in performances. The Crafty Ladies and Pastor Barbara Hamilton, who became the church's first parish associate in 2002, helped complete the hand chime octaves. If you arrive at church on Sunday and see a lot of people wearing black slacks and shirts, you know the handbell choir will be part of that day's services.

Highlands dedicated the remodeled sanctuary on Feb. 17, 1985. That same year, the church named the fellowship hall after Rev. Harris on the fifth anniversary of his being pastor. Terry Thurmond, who was chairman of the personnel committee, called Ed Albright, who was the presbytery executive for the area, and said church finances were tight but the congregation wanted to do something to celebrate the fifth anniversary. Ed Albright suggested naming a building for him. To this day, Rev. Harris says it makes him uncomfortable to have his name on a building. Still, Harris Hall does roll off the tongue. It would seem odd to call it anything else after so many years.

The church was always looking for creative ways for stewardship during this period of growth. The Pony Express involved a leather pouch that members relayed from house to house for people to fill their pledge cards. One Sunday at stewardship time, people walking into church found a plastic cover on the floor. They later found out why when Don Hall walked through the door leading a living, breathing, slipping and sliding pony into the sanctuary. (The plastic was intended as a precaution if nature called while the pony was inside the church, but it wasn't easy for the pony to get a

foothold.) Afterward, lots of children and even a few adults hopped on the pony for a ride outside the church.

On March 5, 1989, Highlands dedicated its first set of stained glass windows, surrounding the front door of the sanctuary. The window above the door depicts the logo of Presbyterian Church U.S.A., which shows a dove flying at the top of the cross with flames on each side of the lower part of the cross. The stained glass was made possible by a memorial gift given to the church by Nanetta Cridlin upon the death of her husband, Judge Clyde Cridlin.

The attention to the sanctuary wasn't always devoted to expansion.

Highlands has always been a church built in a tree-filled setting – a “church in the woods” – but over the years, the woods kept getting into the church. The huge pine beams that gird the roof were the perfect meal for pests that regularly invaded the building. Exterminators said the problem was woodborers, which are half-inch larvae of beetles. Carpenter ants also created problems, relentlessly chewing through the pine and sending fine particles of sawdust falling from the beams.

In 1989, exterminators covered the entire church with tarps, creating a huge tent over the church to trap insecticide gasses during a 20-hour fumigation. This led to the Night the Church Almost Burned Down – or at least, it might have seemed that way to anyone driving down McCormick Road that night when every fire truck on our side of town converged on the church. As a precaution, the exterminators had turned off the main circuit breaker during the treatment, but not the timers that controlled the spotlights that lit up the rooftop cross and the roofline. The heat of those lights burned through the tarp and it caught fire. A driver passing by saw the small flames and called the fire department. The lights under the tented tarp made it seem like the entire building might be on fire, and there were concerns as well about whether the insecticide gasses trapped inside the tent would explode. Ultimately, firefighters put on their breathing masks and went under the tent where they turned off the timer switches.

## REFOCUSING FOR THE FUTURE

With all its buildings intact, the church embarked in September 1992 on its third major building project in a decade – construction of the new Family Life Center and expansion of the original sanctuary building to provide more office space for church staff. The \$720,000 project erected the 100,000 square foot Family Life Center and added 7,000 square feet in office space, along with more parking and landscaping.



The Family Life Center is designed to match the architecture of the sanctuary by using a brick exterior and a high ceiling with stained wood and open, overhead beams. The dining area is big enough to comfortably seat 300 people. It contains a commercial kitchen stocked with refrigerators, ovens and stoves to prepare meals for large gatherings. For those who are counting, this is the third kitchen built for Highlands – the small one in the original building, the second one in Harris Hall, and the third one in the Family Life Center. Highlands has always been a place where “Let us pray” is followed by “Let’s eat.” A partial list would be the Pig Roast, the Low Country Boil, the annual youth spaghetti dinner, the chili cook-offs, the Grillmaster barbecue competition, the smoked Boston Butts sold as a fund-raiser and, of course, the great spread laid out during fellowship after each and every Sunday service.

The Family Life Center was built on what used to be a parking area, so the church created a new parking lot on the back side of the campus. As the church was moving toward this phase of construction, Brenda Harris joined the session and became a leader of the building committee. The original plan was to use gravel for the parking area. Brenda insisted on having it paved, saying women shouldn’t step out of their cars in high heels and walk across gravel. The design of the parking lot left in place the canopy of stately oak trees, which resulted in vehicles getting what members came to call the “Highlands dings” when acorns dropped from branches. Throughout the years, Highlands has sought to keep that treed appearance in the parking area.

The opening of the Family Life Center added even more classrooms for Sunday school. It also enabled Highlands to launch the LOGOS program and Precious Gifts Preschool in the fall of 1993. Those brought a whole new level to the church’s Christian education programs.

Indeed, the construction of new buildings at Highlands was never an end in itself. Throughout that period, the members of Highlands were finding new ways to reach out and connect with the community. The construction gave Highlands the ability to go beyond its walls as never before.

## SCOUTING COMES TO HIGHLANDS



In 1981, Highlands chartered Cub Scout Pack 181 and three years later, the church chartered Boy Scout Troop 181. Over the past three decades, 39 Scouts have earned their Eagle badges as members of Troop 181. Some of those Eagle Scouts have built their service projects on the church campus such as decorative lighting, a storage building in the playground area, a fenced and gated loading area for the metal trash bin, and a large gazebo with a fire pit that

the congregation has used as a starting point for Easter Sunday services. Highlands has also been home to Girls Scouts and Brownies who have found a welcome location for their activities.

## HIGHLANDS IN LOCAL MISSION

The year 1988 marked the start of two other community programs that continue to this day. Highlands took part for the first time in CROP Walk, an annual fundraiser. Highlands joins other churches that go on 1-mile and 5-mile walks. Proceeds go to support Arlington Community Services for local assistance and Church World Services to fight hunger globally.

Also in 1988, Highlands rolled out its participation in Meals on Wheels. Every week, members of Highlands volunteer to drive hot meals to elderly people in their homes, giving them both nourishment and the spiritual comfort of having regular visitors.

In August 1989, Highlands forged partnerships with other churches to better bring its services to help those in need. Highlands joined 12 other Arlington churches to form Arlington Community Services, a jointly supported food pantry. Highlands and the other churches had always given food and support, but the churches wanted to unify a single place to maximize the outreach and ensure no one was taking advantage of their assistance programs.

Joe Travis, who served on the session at Highlands, was the first president of Arlington Community Services. Joe and Harry Wade and many, many others have been regular volunteers in this caring ministry in our community.

Harry Wade, a long time member, was also an ACS volunteer whose career was in the grocery business. Harry's philosophy is that any child who has at least peanut butter, bread and jelly will not go hungry. By his inspiration Highlands has become known as "The Jelly Church" because it pays special attention to keeping the shelves of Arlington Community Services stocked with jars of jelly. Every Sunday, members of Highlands bring bags of food for donation to the food pantry.

In 1993, Highlands launched its first blood drive. Twice a year, a mobile blood donation unit pulls into the church's driveway so members can give blood on Sundays, an outreach program coordinated by church member Sharyn' Going. Over the years, members of Highlands have donated well over 1,500 pints of life-saving blood.

## FAITHFUL NURTURE

As Highlands reached out to the community, it also worked with equal measure to strengthen the ties within the church family. In September 1984, the first lay care committee was established. The committee looked for ways to provide support for

those going through times of crisis, such as illness or deaths in the family. This would be not only the pastor's calling, but something the whole congregation supported. Ginny Morrison served as chairwoman of the first lay care committee. In March 1987, Libby McJunkin helped start a prayer chain ministry. Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, the prayer ministry is the heartbeat of the church. It's changed some in the years since it began. Today, it's possible to request prayers by email to Nancy Moewe, the current prayer ministry contact, as well as with a phone call or personal request. But beyond the technology, the prayer chain goes to the heart of the church. Every Sunday in the worship bulletin a list of names is printed of those for whom the church is praying.

The completion of the Family Life Center in 1993 brought forth a burst of new programs to help young people grow up grounded in faith.

The first session of LOGOS started in October 1993, giving children from kindergarten through their senior year in high school a way to deepen their faith. The planning for LOGOS had been in the works for years. Part of the inspiration for building the Family Life Center stemmed from the need to have enough dining and kitchen space to support LOGOS, which is a national, non-denominational program. LOGOS comes from the Greek word for "The WORD" as in John 1:1 "In the beginning was THE WORD and THE WORD was with God and THE WORD was God." Which means that the LOGOS program teaches Jesus. The "mid-week miracle" is based on a foundation of Bible study. Young people also learn how to participate in Sunday worship by learning songs to sing before the congregation. The third part of LOGOS is a fun activity time followed by a dinner when children are joined by adult members of the church in the extended family of the church. The dining room in the Family Life Center is filled with children and their "table parents." Over the years Highlands has made LOGOS its own by adapting it and allowing it to evolve for our unique situation. Which is most likely why it is still going strong today.

The first group of LOGOS students in its inaugural year included a young girl named Laura Stewart. She would come back to Highlands after college and become interim director of Christian education in 2014. Now married with two children, Laura Sambito's oldest son has started LOGOS, so the cycle is continuing across the generations.

Another much loved tradition of the church were the annual adult retreats at the Honey Creek Conference Center in Ga. Groups would go up on Friday for a full weekend of themed retreats that built mutual affection and faith.

## HIGHLANDS PRECIOUS GIFTS

Also in the fall of 1993, Highlands formally started its Precious Gifts Preschool, taking the place of the Mother's Morning Out Program that had begun in 1986. The Family Life Center afforded plenty of classroom space for the preschool classes, which filled up fast. The first year, Precious Gifts had 24 children, the second year it grew to

56, and the number was 80 by the third year. Eventually, enrollment rose as high as 146. The guiding philosophy behind the preschool is that children learn best through play, so that means children learn to paint with both their hands and their feet. They are immersed in reading and learn the virtues of Christian values. It is both a school and a ministry of the church. Many members of Highlands came to the church by way of the school when their children attended Precious Gifts.

Ever since the founding of Precious Gifts, Rhonda DeVriendt has been its first and only director. Known to children and parents as "Ms. Rhonda," she says the 22 years she's served owe largely to the family atmosphere that has developed among her and the teachers, some of whom were students themselves in Precious Gifts and came back to the school to teach. The staff also has had staying power over the years. Eileen Blackmon has been with Precious Gifts since its first class in October 1993.

Another distinguishing feature of Precious Gifts is that it openly tells parents of diabetic preschool children that their children are welcome. "Glucose monitors and insulin pumps don't scare us," the school says on its web page. That overture stems from Rhonda's own experience as a mother when her youngest son, Daniel, was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 2 years old. To her dismay, she realized that other preschool programs didn't have a place for diabetic children, so Highlands moved to fill that void by training teachers the basics of health care for diabetes.

After 22 years directing Precious Gifts, Rhonda bumps into students and their families all the time – at the grocery store, the airport, soccer fields, even 2,400 miles from Jacksonville on the other side of the country. In 1999, she was on a honeymoon with husband Randy in San Francisco. As they were walking through downtown, they heard shouts from across the street, "Ms. Rhonda! Ms. Rhonda!" Randy turned to Rhonda and said, "I cannot believe this." It turned out to be the parents of children who had gone through the preschool.

## STAFF LEADERSHIP SHIFTS AND GROWTH

All in all, the church was a bustling place not only on Sundays, but every day of the week when Rev. Harris received a call to an administrative position with the Florida Presbyterian Retirement Communities in May 1995. In his 15 years with Highlands, he helped organize the expansion of building space at the campus, personally working with contractors to oversee the construction. But the biggest value of his leadership was his ability to work with people and encourage them. He brought many people into leadership roles and gave his backing to efforts by members of Highlands to start new programs. "It was a marriage made in heaven," Rev. Harris says of his time at Highlands. "The Lord blessed us mightily time and time again."

Dr. Edward Gammon served as interim pastor of Highlands while Highlands searched for its next minister.

In Oct. 1, 1996, the Rev. Dr. David Lee accepted the call at Highlands, bringing his many talents to the growth and nurture of the church. Not many pastors can recite the Gospel readings during a service, then walk across the chancel to join the choir singing its anthem, and then walk back to the pulpit and sing an a cappella verse from a spiritual or a Motown song as part of his sermon. Like our previous pastors, "Dr. Dave" came from the north, but not so far north. He moved from North Carolina, his home state, where he had served two pastorates. He can speak fluently about the varieties of North Carolina barbecue and is a leader of the kitchen crew, whether it's the annual spaghetti dinner or preparing an authentic Costa Rican dinner that helped the church youth group raise money for a mission trip to Costa Rica in 2014. He also started a tradition of making cinnamon rolls from scratch, using his mother's recipe from when he was growing up, and inviting the congregation to join him and his wife Susan on Christmas mornings at the fellowship hall.

Highlands has been blessed to have ministers serve for long periods of time over its 50-year history. Dr. Dave has been pastor of Highlands for more than 18 years and counting, long enough to see the infants he baptized grow up and graduate from high school. He has continued to make Highlands a church for all ages. He has helped the elderly prepare for their final days. His sermons help us feel restored and renewed, and over the course of his time as pastor, the church would reach a point when restoration and renewal would be needed for what Dr. Dave rightly calls the "life of the church."

Highlands also hired its first director of Christian education in 1996, welcoming Becky Andrews to that position. The DCE oversees all the programs that take place throughout the week, ensuring Highlands can minister and support its members. This would prove to be a very important position that Highlands would successfully continue in the future when Jaimie Shires became DCE in 2007 and then Laura Sambito became interim DCE in 2014.

## HIGHLANDS GETS CRAFTY



Highlands stepped up its community outreach in 1999 when a group of women came together and formed the Crafty Ladies, whose work at the church is exactly as the name describes – bringing their skill and artistry to crafts that have been a feature of Highlands every year since then. Some of the original members were Billie Wade, Jo An Ewing, Jo Carmichael, June Travis and Cathy Marks.

The first handiwork of the Crafty Ladies hangs in the sanctuary to this day. Those are the six banners installed on the wall behind the altar. Jo Carmichael was a member at that time of the church session and each session member received a complementary calendar from the Presbyterian Church. The back of the calendar had six illustrations that she, June Travis, Rosalie Howell, and Cathy Marks used as designs to stitch and

sew the multi-colored banners. The banners show the proclamation of the Gospel, the shelter and fellowship of the children of God, the maintenance of divine worship, the preservation of the truth, the promotion of social righteousness, and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

The annual Fall Craft Fair, always the first weekend in November, has become an institution, not only in the church but in the community. Each year the Crafty Ladies and their adjunct group the Crafty Ladies of the Evening, which was started for those who wanted to participate but could not be at the Monday morning meetings, produce a Fall and Christmas wonderland of items they create themselves. Mary Lou McNaughton's bake sale is a way for almost everyone in the church to participate in the Craft Show by baking goods and then, of course, buying and eating them!

Since its beginning, the proceeds from the Crafty Ladies craft shows have helped pay for countless improvements and programs in every facet of the church. From 2000 to 2014, the Crafty Ladies raised \$104,816 for the work of the church. It has paid for ceiling lights, Bibles for Sunday school, lawn and building renovations, Arlington Community Services, the Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless, Family Promise, youth mission projects and trips, stained glass windows – the list goes on and shows no sign of stopping.

## FAMILY PROMISE

In 2006, Highlands joined the network of churches participating in Family Promise of Jacksonville. As was the case with Arlington Community Services, Highlands was a founding church when the congregation joined together to bring Family Promise, a national organization, to Jacksonville. The church began exploring the program in 2004. Sue Heckler traveled to Gainesville to see the program in action at churches there. She was a driving force in getting it organized at Highlands and off to such a great start. The first family, a mother and her five children, spent a week at Highlands in July 2006.

In Family Promise, churches take turns hosting families who are going through hard times, an alternative to staying in traditional homeless shelters. For a week, the families stay at Highlands, and Harris Hall becomes their home. The Sunday school classrooms become their bedrooms. Members of the church join them for meals and sleep overnight at Harris Hall as well. Family Promise is a time for us to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." The families have children of all ages who enjoy being able to play with the toys and build the jigsaw puzzles at the church. The youth of Highlands join in hosting the families, so it truly is a church-wide effort to make families feel welcome. Highlands is one of 16 host congregations for Family Promise.

Since 2006, Highlands has provided a total of 21 weeks of lodging for families. That adds up to 1,799 nights of shelter for the individual family members who have

stayed at the church. Highlands has donated almost \$15,000 in cash to Family Promise, and if a dollar value were put on the meals, volunteer hours and supplies contributed by the church, that would equate to another \$204,000, according to the running total kept by Family Promise of Jacksonville.

## TIME FOR RESTORATION AND RENEWAL

The campus of Highlands did not change much in the years after the Family Life Center opened in 1993. But on May 27, 2007, Highlands dedicated a new cross on the front lawn of the church.

This cross replaced the original cross that was built atop the sanctuary constructed in 1967. Due to the weight and height of the rooftop cross, it was causing structural problems and leaking in the building, so it had come down several years earlier. The new cross was paid for through a memorial gift from Harry Wade, given in honor of his late wife Billie Smith Wade and his sister, Jeanette Wade Lawson.

Church member Chad Grimm, a landscape architect, supervised the design, construction and landscaping of the cross. The steel cross stands atop a grassy mound, making it highly visible to drivers going down McCormick Road. The dedication occurred on Pentecost Sunday, a day when the sanctuary is decorated with red streamers to symbolize the flames of the Holy Spirit coming to earth. On that dedication day, motorists passing by the church would have seen a congregation wearing bright red shirts and dresses gathered around the cross.

The installation of the new cross brought home the passage of time since the church opened its doors in 1967 with the rooftop cross. The campus of Highlands was aging, and like any set of buildings, time was taking its toll.

Leading up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone, Highlands embarked on a building fund for its Restoration and Renewal campaign. For several years, session members had been tracking a growing backlog of maintenance needs. It wasn't the best of financial times to embark on a large-scale building initiative. The country was still climbing out of the Great Recession, and Florida had been hit as hard as any state. At a session meeting on June 18, 2012, Dr. Dave encouraged members to "step out of the boat" and have faith. Session created the Restoration and Renewal Task Force with six members: Jim Ash, Chad Grimm, John Smith, Alan Robbins, Nancy Moewe, and Inge Forchtner. Three months later, the task force spoke to the congregation about plans for a wide-scale slate of work.

Unlike the previous building funds, Restoration and Renewal was not primarily intended to add more building space, but instead sought to take the existing campus and renew it in a host of ways: new stained glass windows for the sanctuary, new roofs for Harris Hall and the Family Life Center, fresh pavement and landscaping for the parking lot, repainted walls and upgraded sound and visual systems, and enhancements to the kitchen in the Family Life Center, which was enlarged with new

appliances. There was bread-and-butter work on air conditioning systems, roof trusses, door replacements, and vinyl flooring.



The first completed portion of "R & R" was the replacement of the old windows with new stained glass. Kirk Reber, of "Creative Glass Works" was the local artist.

Restoration and Renewal enlarged Harris Hall to give it more room for storage and, most importantly, make it a better place to host families as part of the church's participation in Family Promise of Jacksonville. The renovation built showers for Family Promise families to use, something that the church had previously lacked when it hosted families.

All told, Restoration and Renewal put \$420,000 of work into the campus, creating it anew and putting it on sound footing as it moves into the next 50 years.

As always at Highlands, Restoration and Renewal also meant people rolled up their sleeves and lent a hand. After contractors poured a new cement walkway for the garden in the campus courtyard, the church's Presbyterian Youth Connection planted rose bushes and shrubs, creating a garden for people to walk through on their way from the parking lot to the sanctuary.

## YOUTH IN MISSION

For the youth of Highlands, opportunities for service come early and often, starting from their pre-kindergarten years when they take small metal pails down the pews during the first Sunday service of each month and collect donations for the JEMM offering, with coins clattering into the pails for Jamaica Mutual Mission, a joint program of the St. Augustine Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church of Jamaica. Some Highlands youth have grown up and traveled on mission trips to Jamaica in their high school years.

Children also can look forward to taking part in the 30-Hour Famine, which Highlands began for its youth group in 2008. Sponsored by World Vision, 30-Hour Famine asks participants to fast for 30 hours so they can experience some of what it is like to go without food. The young people range in age from seventh graders doing it for the first time to high school seniors who are on their seventh consecutive famine.

They raise money for hunger relief by getting pledges. During the famine, they learn how many people suffer the deprivations from lack of food and clean water. Members of the church write letters encouraging the fasters to keep strong in their mission. The first night they sleep in large cardboard boxes so they can experience what it is like to face lack of shelter.

Our young people have done the 30-Hour Famine the weekend of Easter. When they break the fast on Easter morning or go to Good Friday worship while on the second night of their 30-Hour famine, it deepens their understanding of what Christ has taught us about compassion, and those of us in the congregation who watch them complete their famine have been moved as well by their dedication. Jaimie Shires, the director of Christian education, stayed with the young people for the entire time. Before accepting a call to move to another church, Jaimie did the famine for seven straight years, which adds up to 210 hours in close quarters with teens and pre-teens who are getting more and more hungry by the hour. That's dedication.

In the summer after eighth grade, Highlands youth have their first chances to "go to the mountain" for the annual trip to Montreat, the annual gathering of Presbyterian young people from across the country in North Carolina. They gather on a Saturday morning at the church with their suitcases and pillows for the 460-mile trip where they spend a week discussing their faith in small groups and worshipping in the huge stone chapel. When they come back from the mountain to our Florida coastal plain, they wear their Montreat T-shirts and lead the Sunday service upon their return.

The second event of each summer involves a week of mission work at places as close as our own Jacksonville "backyard," traveling to another part of Florida, heading to another state, or even flying to another country.



In 2014, the mission trip went to Costa Rica from June 26 through July 3. For a week, a group of youth and adults worked in the village of San Ramon de Norte, which is in the province of Perez Zeledon, near San Isidro del General. As their service project, they planted trees on a steep dirt incline in the village to prevent erosion. Host families from the town gave our missionaries a place to stay and everyone shared in the excitement of soccer-mad Costa Ricans during their team's amazing run in the World Cup.

The youth and adult chaperones worshipped at a Catholic Church service in the village. They also took zip line rides with amazing views of the rain forest and went to a national park on the Pacific Ocean coast.

How did a youth group from Jacksonville, Florida, end up not only in Costa Rica of all countries, but in this particular village among all others?

The answer lies deep in the history of Highlands. Costa Rica is the home of Kinzey and Betty Reeves, both charter members of Highlands who helped found the church way back in 1965. They later moved to Costa Rica to live on a coffee farm with their daughter Kim Wise. Their daughter Robin recalls her parents telling her that they had once had an interest in becoming missionaries. Their invitation to the youth group made it possible for the youth to be missionaries.

## WE ARE THE CHURCH -- EVERYWHERE

So there really aren't any "walls" of Highlands. Over the past 50 years, people have joined the worship at Highlands and the pathways of their lives have taken them in different directions. Some have stayed in Jacksonville and the church has two, three and even four generations of family in the church on any given Sunday. Some have gone far distances from Jacksonville like the Reeves, settling in different cities, states and countries. But no matter how much time and distance has gone by, the family of Highlands at this half-century mark in its history is always growing. They have all left their mark on Highlands, just as it has left its mark on them.

It is fitting that when Highlands dedicated its brand-new church building back in 1967, that ceremony started with three loud knocks on the door.

The people inside the sanctuary had a vision for what Highlands could become – not only in that day and time, but for the generations that would follow them through that same door. The generosity of its members has built a wonderful, peaceful campus with a sanctuary, education building and Family Life Center. Its members have faithfully preserved and built upon that foundation. They have formed prayer groups and prayer chains. They have given countless hours of their time to the church and its ministries. This Jubilee year is a time to rejoice at all that has happened in the life of the church and also look ahead with new energy brought by Restoration and Renewal.

Jesus told his disciples, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Whatever the next 50 years bring, Highlands will be a church whose members keep knocking on the door.

## **Highlands Through the Years**

**April 1964:** 1<sup>st</sup> pastor, the Rev. Robert “Bob” Purrington arrives in Jacksonville.

**April 1964:** 1<sup>st</sup> (and only) manse purchased at 10545 Serena Drive.

**July 5, 1964:** 1<sup>st</sup> worship service conducted at Holly Oaks Community Club, 11210 McCormick Road.

*Hurricane Dora strikes Jacksonville in September 1964.*

**October 1964:** 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday school program.

**October 4, 1964:** 1<sup>st</sup> baptism – Michelle Mackey, daughter of Fred and Donna Culp Mackey.

*The decade’s top-grossing movie, “The Sound of Music,” is released in 1965.*

**April 11, 1965:** 1<sup>st</sup> chartered as Highlands United Presbyterian Church during service at Holly Oaks Community Club. Church begins with 64 charter members.

**May 2, 1965:** 1<sup>st</sup> session meeting with six founding members: William Buck, Ordway Emmons, Harold Huff, William Kelley, Joseph McJunkin and William Sheddan.

**June 6, 1965:** 1<sup>st</sup> church by-laws adopted.

**November 1965:** 1<sup>st</sup> stewardship campaign. Twelve families make pledges.

**November 8, 1965:** 1st building fund established. The 1<sup>st</sup> building committee is comprised of John McCorkle, Rudy Black, Ordway Emmons, Tom McEady, Dottie Williams, John Morrison, and Milt Cummings.

**February 1966:** 1<sup>st</sup> organ purchased. Carol Sheridan is first choir director/pianist.

**Spring 1966:** 1<sup>st</sup> communicant’s class: Linda Buck, Susan Kelley, Sharon Kelley and Robert Strockley.

**May 8, 1966:** 1<sup>st</sup> baptism after chartering of Highlands: Martha Jo McJunkin, daughter of Joseph and Libby McJunkin.

**May 15, 1966:** 1<sup>st</sup> church picnic.

**June 3, 1966:** Flagler Memorial Church of St. Augustine donates \$15,000 to Highlands’ building fund.

**June 26, 1967:** 1<sup>st</sup> marriages performed by Rev. Purrington: Ralph E. Raesemann and Shirley A. Horn and Robert C. Raeaseman and Helen S. Charleston. Married in house at 1842 St. Johns Bluff Road.

*Regency Square mall opens on March 2, 1967, giving Arlington the site of the biggest shopping mall in the city.*

**Spring, 1967:** Ground-breaking for construction of church at 10900 McCormick Road.

**October 1, 1967:** Dedication of new sanctuary with special Sunday afternoon service.

**October 29, 1967:** 1st wedding performed in new sanctuary for marriage of George Spache and Evelyn Schoonover.

**November 1967:** Memorial garden established in memory of Larry Purrington, the son of Rev. Robert Purrington.

*Richard Nixon inaugurated as president in January 1969.*

*Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to walk on the moon on July 20, 1969.*

**June 1970:** Session decides to sell the church manse on Serena Drive and give housing allowance to pastor.

*Disney World opens in Orlando on Oct. 1, 1971.*

**December 1971:** Rev. Purrington departs Highlands. He is called to serve church in Cambridge, New York.

**January, 1972:** Highlands calls the Rev. Donald Roy Jones to be the second pastor of Highlands.

*The University of North Florida opens its doors to first group of students.*

**November 1972:** The session is expanded to nine members.

**September 1973:** 1<sup>st</sup> Children's Church program started.

**December 1973 :** 1<sup>st</sup> Chrismon project started by Women's Group.

**April 25, 1976:** 1<sup>st</sup> pews in sanctuary. The dedication also is for new carpeting in the sanctuary. Until this time, church used liturgical chairs for worship service.

*Jimmy Carter inaugurated as president in January 1977.*

*Star Wars released in May 1977 and becomes one of the all-time movie blockbusters.*

**December 1977:** 1<sup>st</sup> fenced playground for children is constructed. The church is legally incorporated.

**December 1978:** Rev. Jones departs as pastor.

**January 1979:** The Rev. Albert Kissling begins serving as interim pastor.

**February 1980:** 1st chimes installed in sanctuary.

**April 1980:** Call to Rev. Dr. Donald Harris to become third pastor of Highlands.

**June 1980:** 1st Vacation Bible School, directed by Betty Reeves.

**November 1980:** 1<sup>st</sup> church secretary, Brenda Harris.

*Ronald Reagan inaugurated as president in January 1981.*

**September 13, 1981:** Groundbreaking for new fellowship hall, which will be built as a detached building immediately behind sanctuary building.

*The decade's biggest movie is "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial," released in 1982.*

**May 16, 1982:** Dedication of new fellowship hall.

**May 1982:** 1<sup>st</sup> mother-daughter banquet.

*The United Presbyterian Church in the USA (of which Highlands was a member church) merges with the Presbyterian Church in the United States to form the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the summer of 1983.*

**October 1983:** Session increased from nine members to twelve members.

**May 1984:** Planning begins for remodeling of the sanctuary.

**September 1984:** 1st lay care committee established. Ginny Morrison serves as chairwoman.

**Feb. 17, 1985:** Dedication of remodeled sanctuary.

**April 14, 1985:** Dedication of Harris Hall. The fellowship hall is named in honor of Rev. Harris.

*Space Shuttle "Challenger" explodes shortly after lift-off.*

*Mayo Clinic in Florida opens in Jacksonville in 1986.*

**April 1986:** 1st men versus women softball game.

**August 1986:** 1<sup>st</sup> Mother's Morning Out program established under direction of Kim Wise.

**October 1986:** Establishment of 2 Cents-A-Meal program.

**October 1986:** 1<sup>st</sup> Chili Cook-Off.

**November 1986:** 1<sup>st</sup> acolytes.

**March 1987:** 1<sup>st</sup> Prayer Chain Ministry begins with leadership by Libby McJunkin.

**April 3, 1988:** 1<sup>st</sup> handbell choir performance on Easter Sunday service. The first, second and third octaves of handbells are made possible by gifts from the congregation.

**April 1988:** 1<sup>st</sup> Meals on Wheels deliveries by Highlands to homebound seniors.

**October 1988:** 1<sup>st</sup> CROP Walk participation by Highlands.

*George H.W. Bush inaugurated as president in January 1989.*

**March 5, 1989:** 1<sup>st</sup> stained glass windows celebrated with dedication of windows installed at the front door to the sanctuary.

*The Dames Point bridge opens to traffic, connecting Arlington to the Northside, in 1989.*

**August 1989:** 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary dinner, this one marking 25 years since first church service. Anniversary dinner is held at Holly Oaks Community Club.

**August 1989:** Ribbon-cutting ceremony for start of Arlington Community Services. Highlands is a founding member of the church network supporting the food pantry.

**September 1989:** Worship expands to two services on Sundays.

**June 1990:** 1st fish fry.

*Cold War ends with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1992.*

**September 1992:** Groundbreaking for construction of new Family Life Center and expansion of original sanctuary building to provide more office space.

*Bill Clinton inaugurated as president in January 1993.*

**January 1993:** Mother's Morning Out Program changed to Precious Gifts Preschool. ("Highlands" would be added to name a few years later.)

**March 1993:** 1<sup>st</sup> men's softball team, the "Over the Hill Gang," takes the field.

**June 1993:** 1<sup>st</sup> major function in Family Life Center is Vacation Bible School.

**July 18, 1993:** Dedication of Family Life Center and office extension.

**October 1993:** 1<sup>st</sup> sessions of LOGOS, which gives young people a time in the middle of the week for fellowship and Christian education.

**May 1994:** 1<sup>st</sup> Monday morning prayer group meetings.

**September 1994:** Remodeling of Harris Hall encloses the choir rehearsal room.

**September 1994:** 1<sup>st</sup> church blood drive.

**December 1994:** Session increases from 12 members to 15 members.

**January 1995:** 1<sup>st</sup> gatherings of Hi Yo Silvers program.

**January 1995:** 1<sup>st</sup> wedding coordinator is Cindy Sweeney.

**January 1995:** 1<sup>st</sup> pulpit assistant is Rhonda DeVreindt.

**February 1995:** 1<sup>st</sup> Souper Bowl Sunday.

**March 12, 1995:** Fourth and fifth octave bells are added to the handbell choir.

*The Jacksonville Jaguars play their first ever regular-season NFL game on Sept. 3, 1995.*

**April 1996:** 1<sup>st</sup> TLC parking spaces.

**July 1996:** Rev. Harris departs from Highlands. He accepts call to an administrative position with Florida Presbyterian Retirement Communities.

**July 1996:** Rev. Edward Gammons serves as interim pastor.

**November 1996:** Call to the Rev. Dr. David Lee to become Highlands' third pastor.

**November 1996:** 1<sup>st</sup> Director of Christian education, Becky Andrews.

**December 1996:** 1<sup>st</sup> three-time Christmas services.

**December 1996:** 1<sup>st</sup> time children receive communion.

*Jacksonville Jaguars make it to AFC Championship Game before losing to New England Patriots 20-6 in January 1997.*

*The decade's biggest movie "Titanic" is released in 1997.*

**January 1997:** 1<sup>st</sup> Barnabas Club

**March 1997:** 1<sup>st</sup> session sponsors for communicants' class

**August 1998:** Highlands meets requirements to become part of Presbyterian Youth Connection (PYC), the national youth ministry of Presbyterian Church (USA).

*The Jacksonville metropolitan area surpasses the 1 million mark for population in 2000.*

*Jacksonville Jaguars reach AFC Championship Game a second time, losing 33-14 to Tennessee Titans.*

**January 2000:** 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of Crafty Ladies. Their first project is Great Ends of the Church banners that hang in the sanctuary on the wall behind the altar.

*Florida Supreme Court ruling in Florida's "hanging chads" election results in George W. Bush winning presidency of Al Gore. Bush inaugurated in January 2001.*

**Summer 2001:** 1<sup>st</sup> time youth traveling to Montreat stay in a cabin instead of a dormitory.

**August 2001:** Three Highlands members travel to South Korea to work on a Habitat for Humanity project. They are George Carpenter, Karen Prewitt and Chun Park.

**August 2002:** Call to Barbara Hamilton as parish associate.

*Two hijacked airliners crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.*

**August 2002:** Large cross is removed from roof of the church to prevent leakage.

**October 2003:** Replacement of pews and carpeting in the sanctuary.

**July 2004:** 1<sup>st</sup> discussion during church session meeting of Highlands participating in Family Promise program.

*Jacksonville captures the national spotlight by hosting Super Bowl XXXIX on Feb. 6, 2005.*

**July 15-22, 2006:** 1<sup>st</sup> Family Promise family stays for a week at Highlands. Church hosts a mother and her five children.

**September 2006:** Church receives \$34,200 as compensation for impact of Wonderwood Connector project widening McCormick Road in front of the church.

**September 10, 2007:** Gibson Dixon assumes the role of Choir Director/Organist.

*The real estate boom crashes in Florida, part of the economic turmoil that becomes the worst national recession since the Great Depression.*

**May 27, 2007:** Dedication of new cross installed on the front lawn of the church.

**June 24, 2007:** Launch of “Be a Part of It” campaign to retire \$240,000 debt. An anonymous donor contributes \$80,000.

**June 2007:** Call to Jaimie Shires as the church’s second Director of Christian Education.

*The Navy decommissions the USS John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier, leaving Mayport base without an aircraft carrier, though there are plans to someday bring a nuclear-powered carrier.*

**March 21-23, 2008:** 1<sup>st</sup> 30-Hour Famine by Presbyterian youth.

**2008:** 1<sup>st</sup> Adopt-a-Road by Highlands, sponsored jointly by Troop 181, Pack 181 and PYC for section of McCormick Road.

**September 2008:** 1<sup>st</sup> “Walk to Bethlehem.” Walkers post their miles walked on a church log.

*Jacksonville Transportation Authority finally completes the years-long construction of Wonderwood Connector in December 2008.*

*Barack Obama inaugurated as president in January 2009.*

*“Avatar,” released in 2009, becomes the decade’s biggest movie.*

**September 2010:** Sunday services consolidate from two services to a single service.

**June 2012:** Sessions form a building and grounds task force that marks the first step in the Restoration & Renewal campaign.

**September 2012:** Rally Day at church marks the official debut of the Restoration & Renewal campaign.

**Feb. 2, 2013:** 1<sup>st</sup> barbecue butt fundraiser for Montreat and youth mission trips.

**September 7, 2013:** 1<sup>st</sup> Grillmaster Dinner raises money for R&R and for Family Promise.

**September 22, 2013:** Congregation approves seeking loan to help pay for R&R.

**January 25, 2014:** 1<sup>st</sup> gathering of Bridge, a new program for youth in fourth through eighth grades.

**June 26-July 3, 2014:** PYC mission team travels to Costa Rica and small village of San Ramon de Norte where they are guests of charter church members Kinzey and Betty Reeves and their daughter Kim Wise.

**July 20, 2014:** Sunday worship service features bilingual songs and prayers as youth and adult chaperones reflect on their mission trip to Costa Rica.

**July 27, 2014:** Family Promise families return again after renovation of Harris Hall is complete.

**November 23, 2014:** Dedication of all the Restoration and Renewal projects on the church campus.

**December 7, 2014:** Congregation has farewell ceremony for Jaimie Shires who is leaving as Director of Christian Education to take a position at Palms Presbyterian Church.

**December 2014:** Laura Sambito becomes interim director of Christian education.

**April 25, 2015:** 1<sup>st</sup> Jubilee celebration marking 50 years of Highlands. Members do a mission project Saturday morning and then gather for a "Celebrate HUPC Banquet" on Saturday night.

**April 26, 2015:** Jubilee continues with a special guest preacher, the Rev. John Purrington, the grandson of our organizing pastor, the Rev. Robert Purrington. Rev. John Purrington traveled to Jacksonville from Atlanta where he is pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church. After the service, everyone "walks back in time" by going up the road to Holly Oaks Community Center for a cook-out and old-fashioned "field day" with games and activities led by our youth.

## **Charter members of Highlands**

The roll of church members when Highlands was chartered on April 11, 1965.

- Ronald Altman
- Mrs. Patrick Bauer
- Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Black
- Bill and Peggy Buck. Robert Buck.
- Mr. and Mrs. Hal Culp. Diane Culp.
- Susan Cummings
- Mr. and Mrs. Ordway Emmons
- J. David Finley and Mary Finley. Susan Finley and Kathy Finley.
- Mr. and Mrs. Harold R. Huff
- Bill and Mary Kelley. Pamela Kelley.
- Mrs. Lyman D. Mabon
- Donna Mackey
- W.F. and Marion Malsberger. Bill Malsberger and Kitty Malsberger.
- Mr. and Mrs. Neil MacDonald
- John and Charlotte McCorkle. Sandra McCorkle and Robert McCorkle.
- Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. McEaddy
- Joseph and Libby McJunkin
- Mrs. James Neely
- Mr. and Mrs. Frank Panzarino
- Hubert and Betty Penfield. Kathy Penfield, Terry Penfield, Thomas Penfield.
- Kay Purrington. Lawrence “Larry” Purrington.
- Marcus and Minnie Rawls. Thomas Rawls and Marcus Rawls Jr.
- Kinzey and Betty Reeves. Kizzie Reeves, Robin Reeves, and Jon Reeves.
- William and Carol Sheddan. Kathy Sheddan and Larry Sheddan.
- Carol Sheridan
- Mrs. Frank Smokelin
- Mrs. Robert Werder

## Session Members

The session started with six elders in April 1965. Over the years, the session grew as large as 18 elders, and now is 15 elders. They serve three-year terms.

**Founding session:** William Buck, Ordway Emmons, Harold Huff, William Kelley, Joseph McJunkin, William Sheddan

**Class of 1969:** John McCorkle, Kinzey Reeves, Stewart Nystrom

**Class of 1970:** Albert Heston, John Morrison

**Class of 1971:** Robert Hines, Roger Strockey, Cecil Smith

**Class of 1972:** H.R. Culf, Joseph Purrington, Joseph Williams

**Class of 1973:** John Anderson, William Lantz

**Class of 1974:** Roger Johnson, Willard Smith, Peggy Buck, Richard Golson

**Class of 1975:** Robert C. Collins Jr., H.R. Culp, G.B. Youmans Jr.

**Class of 1976:** William Pressley Jr., Allen Clark, Ross Sheldon

**Class of 1977:** Dorothy Anderson, Charles A. Smith, William Lantz

**Class of 1978:** John Dyer, Doyle Stanfield, Jo Bell Stansell

**Class of 1979:** O.R. Haller, Garland Smith, E.W. Davison

**Class of 1980:** Thelma Hall, Earl Holcomb, William Skeeles

**Class of 1981:** Mary Kelley, C.F. Green, Les Dreifke, Ron Raby

**Class of 1982:** Betty Reeves, Dot Perrin, William Buck

**Class of 1983:** Theresa Greene, Nanette Cridlin, Richard Snyder

**Class of 1984:** Mark Morrison, Francis "Sonny" Bourne, Hazel Langenbach, Alan Hale, Robert Hallman, Linda Cheryl Lennon, Mildred Woodham

**Class of 1985:** Rosellyn Calvert, Paul Hankin, Joan Leake, Ben Whitfield, Judy Hall, Bob Glover

**Class of 1986:** Homer "Butch" Loan Jr., Virginia "Ginny" Morrison, Terry Thurmond

**Class of 1987:** Maggie Baxter, Shelton Hobbs, Joe McJunkin, Stacy Scott

**Class of 1988:** Cathy Gearhart, Bob Glover, Don Hall, Eileen Regnier, Sharon Koch, Sandra McCorkle Whitfield

**Class of 1989:** George Carpenter, Norm Going, Joan Leake, Fran Thurmond, Brenda Harris

**Class of 1990:** Owen Scott, Marleen Hobbs, Grace-Ann Vickers, Roger Wilde

**Class of 1991:** Victor Stewart, Joseph Travis, Candy Cole, Beverly DeVriendt, Sara Wilde

**Class of 1992:** DeAn Winton, Orie Taylor, Mark Morrison, Sharyn' Going, Shelton Hobbs, Allen Clark

**Class of 1993:** Ginni Carpenter, Frank Thrower, Chris Dahlgren, Janet Paparelli, Art Richard

**Class of 1994:** Jake Reber, Dan Beasley, Dan Sharp, Sara Wilde, Suzanne Morrison, Chet Smith, Brenda Harris

**Class of 1995:** Kathy Brown, Stewart Keen, Jim Marks, Libby McJunkin, Lorin Mitchell

**Class of 1996:** Hoagy Carmichael, Dave Lucas, Betty Stewart, Kerri Ross, Rhonda Hanson, Jake Reber

**Class of 1997:** Rick McCook, Ron Moewe, Hal Morrison, Sandra Richard, Judy Smith, Ginny Morrison

**Class of 1998:** Mary Spivey, Mary Miller, Ruthie Sharp, Joe Travis, Jan Kukar, Norm Going

**Class of 1999:** Scott Hanson, Tom Sweeney, Cathy Marks, Tom Johnson, Jo Carmichael, Jan Kukar

**Class of 2000:** Leslee Burch, Bruce Hays, Karen Prewitt, Chun Park, Don Hall, Patt Martin

**Class of 2001:** Bob Abbott, Gene Fulham, Katie Anderson, Tyler Cole, Nolan Winn, Nancy Moewe

**Class of 2003:** Kimberly Rounds, Bill Hart, Jo An Ewing, Samantha Barger, Linda Heinzman, Joe Travis

**Class of 2004:** Becky Andrews, Dennis Kleppen, Chet Smith, Shayrn' Going, Kim Guenot, Tom Douget, Alan Robbins

**Class of 2005:** Terrell Newberry, Mark Hand, Bonnie Bue, June Etsminger, Donna Wilson, Randy DeVriendt

**Class of 2006:** Leslee Burch, Jim Drank, Clara Whitaker, Belinda Abbott, Michele Loerop, Vohn Williamson, Larry Ewing

**Class of 2007:** Lee Anderson, Debbie Douget, Teri Grimm, Jason Heckler, Karen Prewitt, Betty Stewart

**Class of 2008:** Diane Bierne, Linda Bohling, Gene Fulham, Karen Inman, Bonnie McDowell, Michael Rounds, Nancy Hart

**Class of 2009:** Bob Burch, Dennis Kleppen, Nancy Moewe, Art Richard, Bev Smith, Beth Stotz-Potter

**Class of 2010:** Dawn Barney, Bruce Hays, Steve Mandella, Craig Steed, Laura Sambito, Lisa Weitzel

**Class of 2011:** Bob Abbott, Tom Douget, Alex Martin, Mark Morrison, Betty Reeves, Virginia Williamson

**Class of 2012:** Candy Cole, Linda Hall, Rick Regnier, John Smith, Rufus Taylor, Katie Potter

**Class of 2013:** Jim Ash, Jeff Burch, Michele Loerop, Nancy Moewe, Chad Grimm

**Class of 2014:** Inge Forchtnner, Richard Marsh, Alan Robbins, Paul Wubbena, Chad Sambito, Virginia Williamson

**Class of 2015:** David Bauerlein, Debbie Douget, Lidia Knouse, Ann Riggs, Clara Whitaker, Ashton Robbins

**Class of 2016:** Erika Conner, Charles Goodyear, Dennis Kleppen, Jan Johnson, Tom Sweeney

**Class of 2017:** Cat Briones, Audrey Regnier, Helen Middaugh, Christina Trombley, Diane Bierne

## **Eagles Soaring From Highlands**

Highlands is the charter organization through Boy Scouts of America for Pack 181 (Cub Scouts) and Troop 181 (Boy Scouts). Highlands provides organizational support and meeting space for the Scouts, who in turn have done numerous projects on our church campus. Many Scouts have gone on to earn their Eagle badges from Troop 181.

- 1985:** Eric Ehrenberg, William Moredock Jr.
- 1989:** Darren Ross
- 1990:** Dwight Ottesen
- 1991:** Alexander Lee
- 1993:** Herbert Jungbluth II
- 1994:** Zachary Lynde, Christopher Lee, Robert Sparks Jr., Brian Byrd, Thomas Kukar \*
- 1996:** John Kelly \*
- 1997:** James Ian Balcom
- 1998:** Christopher Caps, Kevin Lee Jordan, Kevin Wayne Connor, Craig Stuart Ross, Blaine Drum
- 1999:** Brandon Lewis, Benjamin Lewis
- 2000:** Jeff Burch, \* Jordan Glover\*
- 2001:** Ryan Hand \*
- 2002:** Kyle Simmons, Timothy Paul Brown
- 2003:** Thomas Yarger
- 2004:** Matthew Kunkle
- 2005:** Lawrence Stratton
- 2006:** Stephen Scratch, William Easterling
- 2007:** Trae Baker, Jack Pukay
- 2009:** Jordan Mackenzie, Sean Scratch
- 2012:** Nicholas Thomas Clayton, Zachary Michael Bodden
- 2013:** Noah Mackenzie, Jackson Scott Smith
- 2014:** Zachary Adam Morrell

\* Members of Highlands

## **REFLECTIONS ON A CHURCH BY DR. DAVE...**

Over 2100 Sundays of Worshiping God who calls the church into being....

Over 500 occasions of gathering at the Lord's table....

Hundreds of baptisms....

Over 200 professions of faith from confirmands and those who affirm their faith for the first time....

Thousands who have come and gone as members and guests...

Well over 3500 sermons preached seeking to allow God's people an opportunity to hear in a human voice the Word of God in the here and now...

Making real the great old hymn "O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing" thousands of hymns of grateful praise, numerous anthems and solos refocusing attention from us to the God of song, Handbells and chimes tolling the variety of music, childrens' voices delighting our eye and making glad the heart of God. Our musicians doing as the Psalmist envisions: "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!"

Over a hundred couples making a life commitment to one another in marriage...

Scores of services in which witness to the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the saints of Highlands has been given, as those loved dearly have entered the kingdom....

Over fifty gatherings of God's people wrapped up in the wonder of Christmas Eve and celebrating the glorious truth of Easter morning while learning about the richness of the liturgical year from Advent to Christ the King...

About a million cups of coffee, cookies, donuts and other delights served as tokens of fellowship as sure signs of the hospitality of Jesus himself breaking bread with his friends...

Countless meals shared around tables when more than food was consumed...as God's people were also fed with the true and good notion that as bread is broken we come to recognize Christ in each of us...

You'd have to figure probably more than a billion prayers lifted up....some in joy...some in sorrow....some born of deep concern...some quick words of thanks and others mysterious sighs, far too deep for words...but all, all earnest and compelling intercessions for God's action in the midst of God's people and the whole world...

Countless people who have shown up on Saturday mornings, just like the last few, to lay sod, to decorate God's holy space with the Hanging Greens of Advent and the red of Pentecost, to slice the ham and ice the cake, to strategize plans for fun and fellowship, work and worship, stewardship and member care....

Millions of dollars, some of which, then and now, have been agonized over and sometimes in shorter supply, but all given freely so that God's work might be done in the mundane necessity of lights and air conditioning, but others designated to build a home for Habijax, provide a roof over homeless heads, support a mission in Jamaica, and to relieve victims of fire and flood, storm and famine around the world...

Hundreds and hundreds who have answered God's call to serve as Elders to support, nurture and lead this congregation....

DCEs whose call was to feed the children of God, of whatever age, with God's living presence through faithful nurture, engaging program and creative love...

Hundreds of others who have studied lessons, taught Sunday School, volunteered at LOGOS, spent some of their summertime in Vacation Bible School, have lent their care and affection to countless youth who have in their friendship and dedication found the face of faith.

Thousands of children, youth and adults who have come to have their understanding of God expanded and their faith nurtured in Sunday School, Bible Study, small group Study, at retreats, at LOGOS, at PYC, at Montreat, at VBS and other occasions where they are met by God.

4 full time and other interim ministers of the word and sacrament who sought to bless a congregation of God's people with dedicated service, not in their perfection, but in their desire to serve God by ministering to God's people, faithfully preaching God's word, sharing the grace of the sacraments, but who, instead, found themselves nurtured by kindness, in awe of faith exhibited in the face of adversity, and convinced time and again of the abiding presence of almighty God in the lives of God's people known as Highlands United Presbyterian Church.

What is the church? You are the church, from those 1<sup>st</sup> ones who joined an adventure born in Faith to those who gather each Sunday in the halls of these hallowed buildings, you are the church joined together by a bond of faith, hope, and love in a circle of grace. Will that circle be unbroken....absolutely ....because this is God's church....this Highlands United Presbyterian Church...and for over 50 years....and 50 more...and 50 more...it will continue to be God's church....and when by God's decree this church is no more it will be only because we join our hearts and minds, our voices with the whole church ... "*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The inspiration for this "History of Highlands" comes from an earlier work by Charter Member and Elder Joe McJunkin, whose love for Highlands continues unabated to this day. Joe and Elder Libby McJunkin make their home in Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

To all of the "scribes" of the church, our Clerks of Session, from the first, William E. Kelley, who was followed by Stewart Nystrom, James A. Morrison, R.J. Harris, Ross Sheldon, William Lantz, Doyle Stanfield, Thelma Hall, Theresa Greene, Joanie Leak (McLaughlin), Lorin Mitchell, Mary Miller, Jan Kukar, Leslee Burch, Karen Prewitt and the most faithful of them all and our present Clerk, Sharyn' Going. These were the ones who faithfully recorded the actions of the Session and the discussions, deliberations and decisions that determined the life and direction of our church.

To Elder David Bauerlein, who undertook this task with his customary humility, with energy, imagination and love. David is a writer for *The Florida Times-Union*, and we count ourselves fortunate that he 'took up the mantle' and produced for us this wonderful narrative.

Editor's Disclaimer: All of the stories, events and happenings of fifty years would fill many more pages. Some highs and some lows are not reported. Herein is captured the essence of who we are as a church and it is a testimony to the enduring presence of the Holy Spirit, the love of God for us, and the grace of Jesus Christ in our midst.

Therefore, our final acknowledgment is not in words alone, but in lives which have been lived and will continue to be lived according to our calling to be the Church, the present body, of Jesus Christ our Lord. To God be the glory!

