



## History of an Urban Church

Worship bulletins for First Presbyterian Church have carried the language "For Christ in the Heart of Charlotte" since August 7, 1960, when the pastor at that time, Dr. E. Lee Stoffel, originated the language for an issue of the Sunday worship bulletin.

The spirit of that language, however, has been at work at this location in the heart of this ever-changing community since before this church was officially recognized in 1821.

It would be safe to say that First Presbyterian Church has experienced a lot of history during almost 200 years at this corner of Trade and Church streets. Certainly, one of the church's most historic moments came in 1951, when

Dr. Charles E.S. Kraemer preached a sermon entitled, "We Do Not Plan to Move." Dr. Kraemer admitted the location might not be convenient, especially as residents of the city migrated to the suburbs. But he staked First Presbyterian's claim on its mission field when he said, "The very presence of a church building here in the heart of the central business section of this city is important."

He then told the story of overhearing two men talking outside the church's fence one evening. One of them commented that it was a shame to use such valuable business property for a church. The other man, however, said, "Maybe it is more important to have something here to remind people of God than to have more stores where a few more people can sell things and buy things from one another."

First Presbyterian remained in the heart of Charlotte through a decline in the center city and is still here during this period of growth and evolution from a purely commercial district to once more being a home to residents.

When Charlotte incorporated in 1768, Mecklenburg County was served by a number of Presbyterian churches, as the area had been settled predominately by Ulster-Scot Presbyterians. For about fifty years the little village at the heart of the county had no church. Preaching was held when a minister was available, with services in the courthouse at the crossroads and at this corner we now call home.

A few significant dates associated with the history of First Presbyterian Church are:

- 1815: The town commissioners set aside a plot of land to be used for a town church. It was to be built by the townspeople and used by all denominations. Construction began about 1818.
- 1821: The Concord Presbytery, in session at Hopewell Church, officially recognized Presbyterians of Charlotte as a church on September 5, 1821. We view this as the birth of First Presbyterian Church.

- 1823: The church building was dedicated; townspeople called it the Brick Church or the Town Church. Since the predominant denomination meeting there was Presbyterian, it was most often known as the Presbyterian Church.
- 1835: John Irwin, a Presbyterian and town commissioner, paid of the debt for the construction of the church. He was deeded the property in trust for the Presbyterians.
- 1841: John Irwin deeded a clear title to the trustees of the church “...for the members of the Presbyterian Church in the aforesaid Town of Charlotte.”
- 1857: The congregation outgrew the original building and erected a second building at a cost of about \$13,000. Its Gothic Revival style of architecture has been retained through all subsequent additions. The facade, narthex and tower, with the steeple rebuilt in 1883-84, remain as part of the present building.
- 1876: A manse was built.
- 1947: The Child Development Center, a pioneer in the field that has served as a model for other churches, was founded.
- 1984: Session voted to purchase the city block bounded by Trade, Poplar, Fifth and Pine streets, which has been primarily used for parking.



Many people believe the old cemetery off Fifth Street behind First Presbyterian Church belongs to the church, but it is and always has been the property of Charlotte.

Through the years the church has been closely associated with Davidson College and Queens College, Alexander Children’s Center, Barium Springs Home for Children, Union Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Hospital and other institutions.

First Presbyterian has a long history of doing the work of Christ and for Christ in the heart of Charlotte.