

RISE

ST. SIMONS
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

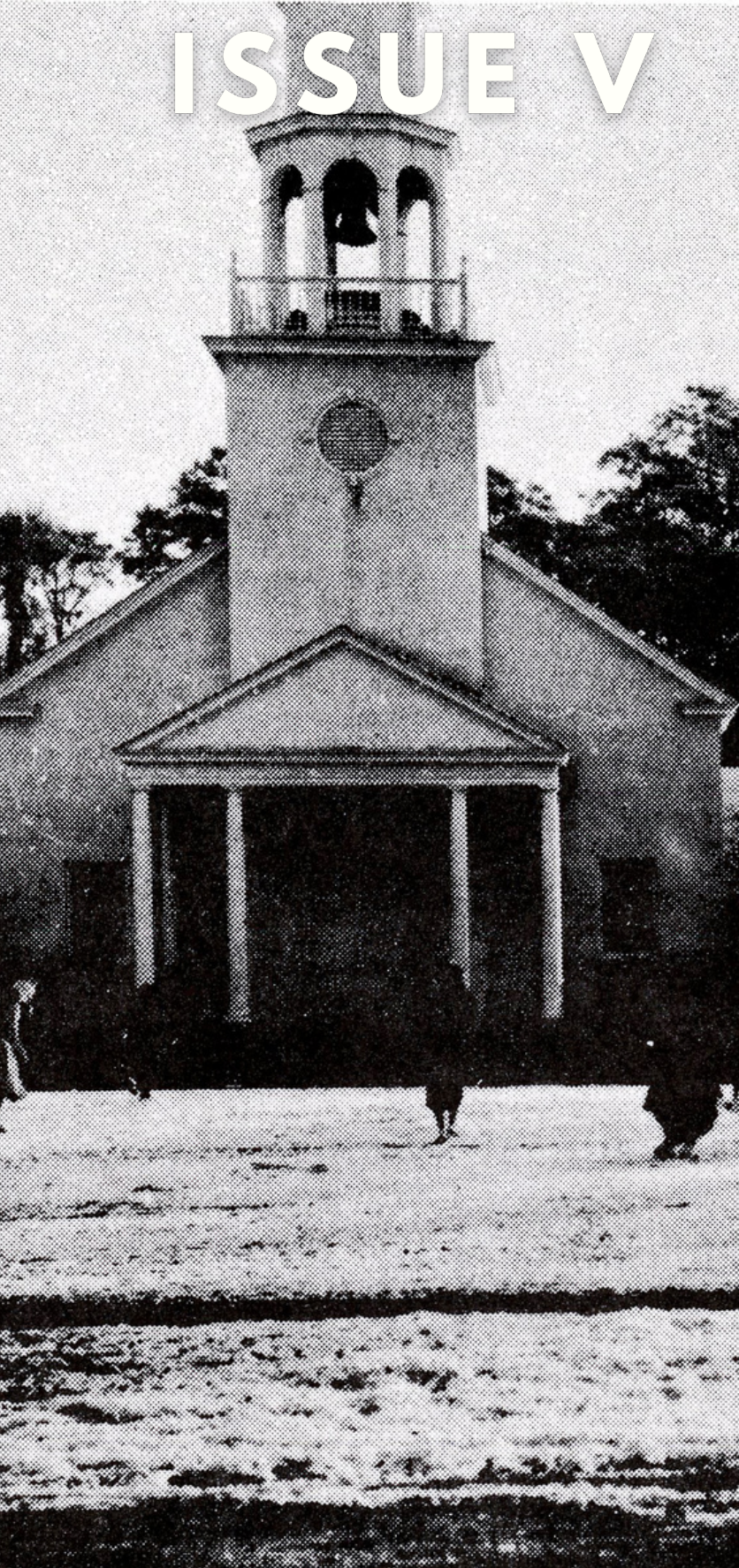
Celebrating
75 YEARS
of Faith

RISE | Issue 05 | November 2021



RISE

ISSUE V



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PASTOR'S CORNER

Rev. Alan Dyer



You are holding a very special edition of RISE Magazine. The pages that follow are a joyful celebration of the people, places, and stories that make our church, well... church. For over three quarters of a century now, St. Simons Presbyterian has been a community of faith that laughs together, cries together, plays together, eats together, serves together, worships together, and places its trust fully in God together.

None of our ministry – past or present – would be possible though without the faithful vision and leadership of countless women and men dating all the way back to 1946. And so the stories told in the pages ahead seek to give a glimpse of all the different ways God has been and still is at work through the ministry of our church. As you read, I hope you will learn something new, find a smile occasionally crossing your face, and consider how and where God is calling you to insert your own story into the ongoing ministry of St. Simons Presbyterian. And so my prayer is that as we “Look Back” and celebrate 75-years of ministry, we will all also find ourselves looking ahead and striving to follow wherever God is leading us for the 75-years still to come.

Happy birthday St. Simons Presbyterian!

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan".

1946

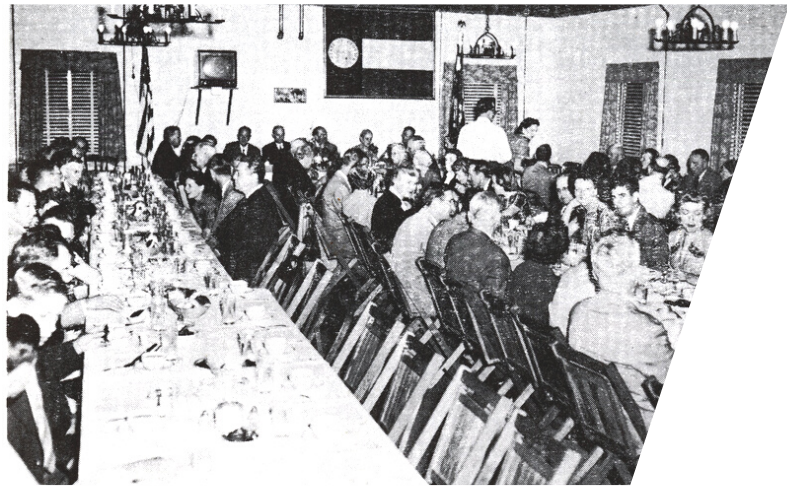
FIRST PASTOR

Installed Sept. 14, 1947

"In November 1946, the congregation called Dr. James Thornwell Gillespie to be the first preacher. Dr. Gillespie preached his first sermon on January 5, 1947, at the Casino Theatre. That same afternoon the ladies of the Auxiliary gave a tea for Dr. and Mrs. Gillespie at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Fendig."



1951



BUILDING FUND CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF DINNER

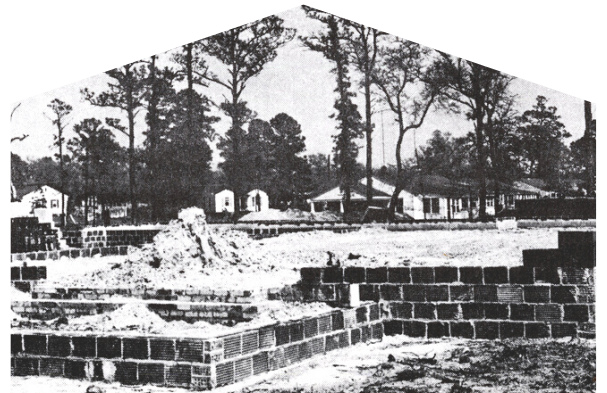
March 1, 1951

"In a three year period the building fund went from \$3,330 to \$76,616.21. The church purchased six lots from Sea Island Company at the cost of \$4,000."

COMMUNITY CHURCH BUILDING

July 6, 1947

"On July 6th, 1947, the first service in church surroundings was held. The small annex building was furnished and a kitchen equipped. The Sunday School, Youth Fellowship, and Choir were formed."



THE FOUNDATION

March, 1954

The contract was let on March 1, 1954 and on the next day, March 2, construction began.

1947

1954

On the next few pages you will find a short timeline and a brief compilation of "firsts" for St. Simons Presbyterian. For a more in-depth look into our past, check out the book "A History of St. Simons Presbyterian Church" (1946-1971) in our church library!

Source: A History of St. Simons Presbyterian Church (1946-1971)

MAY



THE STEEPLE GOES UP

May 21, 1954

"The work progressed speedily and soon, on May 21st, huge mobile cranes were seen slowly twisting, turning, and finally lifting a large pyramid shaped object which was the steeple.. Now one could see something which really resembled a church."

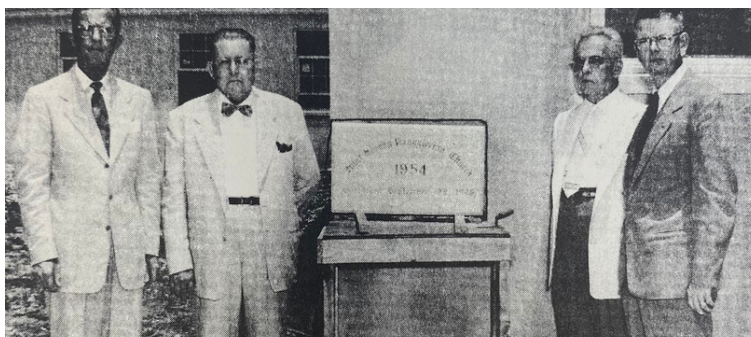
SEPTEMBER



DAY OF DEDICATION

September 26, 1954

"May all who enter this place of worship come with a prayer in his heart for himself, for his fellow man, and for the sanctity of this service."



CORNERSTONE LAYING SERVICE

June 27, 1954

"The contents of the cornerstone include the following: a brief history of the church with lists of the charter members and all members to date; fourteen church bulletins of historic occasions; eight pictures showing progress from community church to the cornerstone laying; two copies of the Christian Observer, two of the Southern Presbyterian Journal and one copy of the Missionary Survey; Four clippings from the Brunswick News about the progress of construction of the church; and a marked copy of the Bible from which selections were read at the Cornerstone Service."

DAY OF DEDICATION BULLETIN

Visit sspres.org/anniversary to view the full Bulletin for the Service of Dedication and the Dedication of the Building.

Saint Simons Presbyterian Church
St. Simons Island, Georgia
Organized September 26, 1896
JAMES THORNWELL GILLESPIE, P.D., Pastor

*I Was Glad When They Said Unto Me,
Let Us Go Unto The House Of The Lord.*

*I Had Rather Be A Doorkeeper In The
House Of My God, Than To Dwell In The
Tents Of Wickedness.*

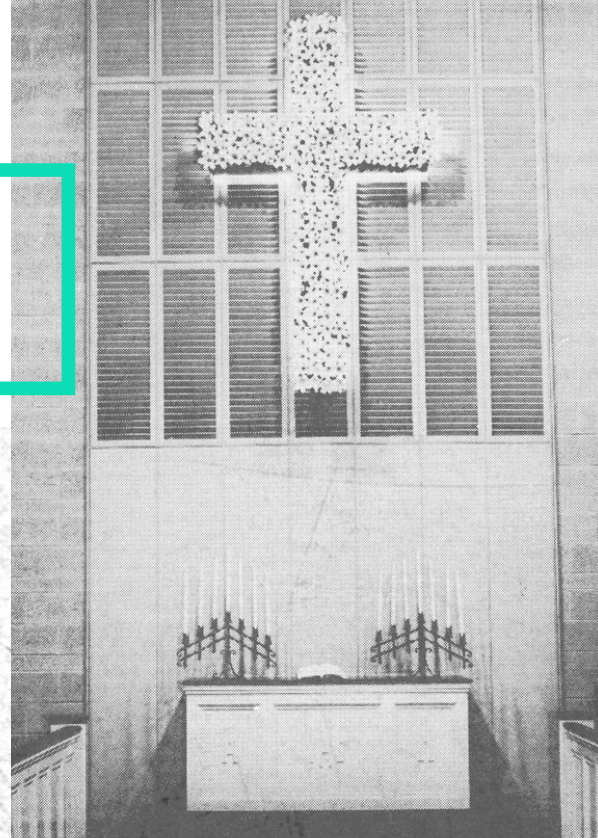


*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts
with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.*

JUNE

SSPC FIRSTS

FIRST EASTER
IN CHURCH
SANCTUARY
April 10, 1955



FIRST ELDERS

Installed Oct. 6, 1946

C. M. Ward

E. H. Mclean

FIRST TRUSTEE

Elected Dec. 15, 1946

E. H. McLean

FIRST DEACONS

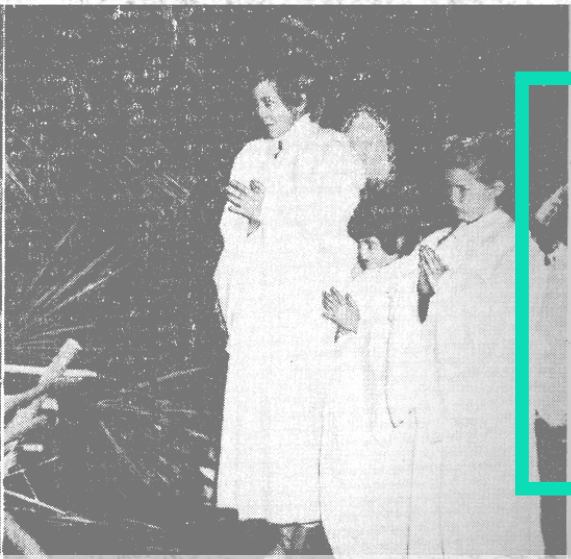
Installed Oct. 6, 1946

Jere Newton

E. A. Parry

Edwin Fendig

Charles Gowen



"The living nativity scene, which has become a cherished tradition in the church and community, was first presented in **1963** two nights before Christmas. The senoir high fellowship, with the help of the men & women of the church, staged and presented the pageant."

*-A History of St. Simons
Presbyterian Church*

FIRST INFANT BAPTISM

May 4, 1947

Mary Anne Hawkins

(Daughter of Lt. and

Mrs. Marion H Hawkins)

FIRST ADULT BAPTISM

Sept 29, 1946

Miss Virginia Griffin

FIRST MARRIAGE

Dec. 30, 1950

Edwin Rubel Fendig Jr.
& Elizabeth Jane Bruce

FIRST DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

August, 1947

Mrs. E. H. Langston



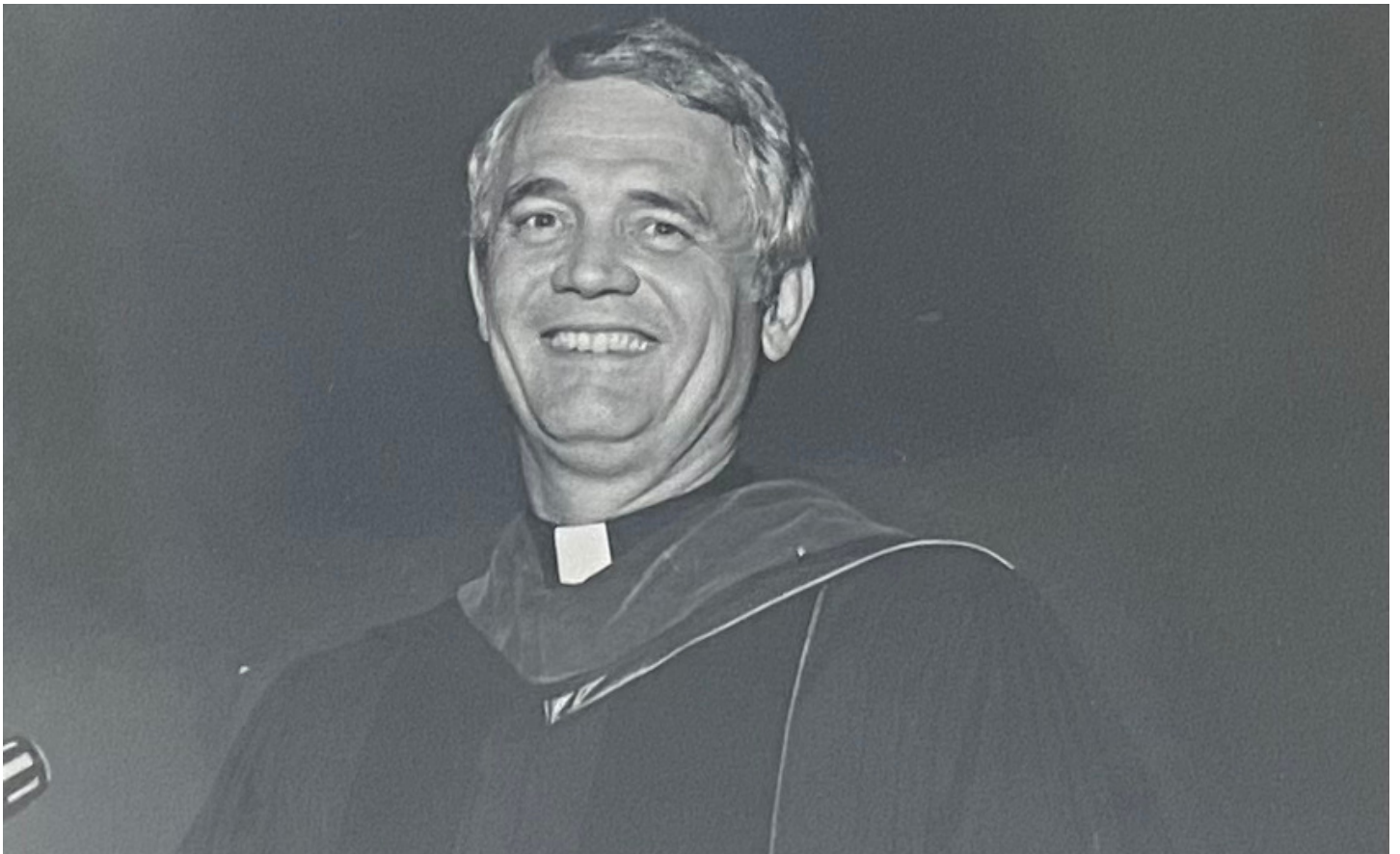
LOOKING BACK

A REFLECTION BY

REV. DR. JOHN LAW

Pastor From 1981 - 1997

I was twelve years old when the St. Simons Presbyterian Church was formed. Our family lived in Brunswick, and we were members of the First Presbyterian Church there. My father, mother, and sister all sang in the choir, and he served on the Session. On that September day, my dad asked me to "ride with them over to St. Simons" because the Savannah Presbytery was going to be organizing a Presbyterian Church there, and he thought I would be interested (and maybe inspired.) A large group gathered at the Casino theater, and the service began. There were people there from as far away as Savannah and Waycross and Dublin. Many of the ministers in the Presbytery were present, and I remember thinking that the service was going to be very long if all of them preached a sermon! As it turned out, of course, there was only one sermon, and the entire service, though somewhat longer than a typical Sunday service, lasted only about an hour and twenty minutes. I remember the upbeat spirit about the service and all of the proceedings. There were many words of challenge and many references to what God could do and what the future might hold for this group of dedicated people who were coming together as a brand-new Presbyterian Church. There was uplifting and joyful music and leadership from members of the First Presbyterian choir. There were long and wonderful prayers asking for God's favor and blessing to rest upon the group gathered that day and upon all of those who would follow them.







Looking Back
A REFLECTION BY

Rev. Bob Brearley

Pastor From
1998 - 2018

St. Simons Presbyterian Church is celebrating 75 years of ministry as a community of faith, and I am so thankful that God called me to journey with you as pastor for part of that time. Mary Ann joins me in rejoicing with the congregation during this significant milestone. To share life with a church is a sacred privilege, and many memories of our time with St. Simons Presbyterian Church continue to give us great pleasure and inspiration.

Worship is the heartbeat of the church, and I know of

no other congregation that has so many wonderful worship traditions, so many times to praise God and renew our souls. The stirring Kirkin' of the Tartan gatherings, the candlelight services at Christmas, the toe-tapping bluegrass festivals, and the glorious Easter sunrise at the village pier where creation and humanity wait together for the whole world to be reborn in resurrection splendor. I remember when the whole island crowded into our sanctuary after the tragic attacks on September 11, 2001, and all the pastors

read scripture and prayed prayers as we held hands and comforted one another in a time of peril. St. Simons Presbyterian has a quiet strength that comes from trusting in God and seeking to be open to all people. The whole community is thankful for its long and steadfast witness to Jesus Christ.

But my favorite memories will always be those Holy Spirit times when by God's grace we forgot ourselves and just had fun together. I remember when we invited Cheryl Haworth, a Presbyterian youth from Savannah who won the bronze medal in weightlifting at the 2000 Olympics, to come speak at a covered-dish dinner. And Dennie McCrary came up to me and asked if we had anyone in our church strong enough to introduce Cheryl. I told him that we had no one that strong. Denny asked if we needed Super Man! Yes, indeed. When it was time to introduce our speaker at the dinner, Denny flew into the room in his Super Man costume, complete with built-in muscles and red cape, and welcomed Cheryl Haworth to St. Simons Presbyterian Church! God was with us that night.

And then there was that Sunday School Rally Day assembly in the fellowship hall. Our creative bunch of planners decided to do a skit on "Ten Reasons Not to Come to Sunday School." As each reason was announced, a church member or two would do a dramatic presentation of the temptation to miss Sunday School. The list included such things as oversleeping or going to the beach. The last reason to miss Sunday School was because you had a tee time at the golf course. At that point in the skit, I was supposed to come out wearing my golf clothes and carrying my golf clubs. But right before the Rally Day assembly began, Joey Strength noticed that Davis and Robin Love were in the audience. Someone said, "Tell Davis that we need him!" So Davis joined us back stage in our dressing room and suggested ways to improve our skit. When they announced that the number one reason to miss Sunday School was because you had a tee time, I walked out disguised as a golfer and Davis Love followed carrying my clubs. Davis was

caddying for Bob! The congregation let out an audible gasp, and then a roar. God was nearby.

And then there was that time when we were going to celebrate the church's 60th anniversary by attempting to welcome 60 new members on the last Sunday in September, 2006. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but we could not find 60 people who wanted to join St. Simons Presbyterian Church. So we changed the rules. You did not have to become a new member. You could just increase your connection to the church by becoming an affiliate member. We still were coming up short. Someone suggested that we include everyone who simply walked past the church that Sunday morning! We got as close as we did by baptizing two babies on anniversary Sunday and adding them to the count! God appreciated the effort.



My favorite memories will always be those Holy Spirit times when by God's grace we forgot ourselves and just had fun together.

I love St. Simons Presbyterian Church for its giving spirit, its friendly acceptance of others, its desire to make a difference in this world, and its tender love for all within its reach. I love St. Simons Presbyterian Church for all the times it takes Jesus Christ seriously and then follows the lead of the Spirit to rejoice in one another. God bless you and keep you always.



ST. SIMONS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MORNING WORSHIP
8:45 & 11:00 A.M.
CHURCH SCHOOL 9:45

DEANIE
SAID
YES!

PASTOR
ROBERT M. BREARLEY



Looking Back

A REFLECTION BY

REV. DEANIE STRENGTH

ASSOCIATE PASTOR FROM
1999 - 2006

It was a simpler time technologically when I checked into my new office at St. Simons Presbyterian Church in September 1999. Waiting for me was my office computer with its orange monochromatic monitor and my dot matrix printer. The “mobile” phone I was using was mobile only when driving because it was bolted to the inside of my car – and I only used it for emergencies!

In the fall of 1999, we were on the cusp of “Y2K” wondering what technological havoc would be wreaked when we woke up on January 1, 2000. But when Joey and I woke up that morning and went to greet the new millennium at sunrise on East Beach, we were treated to a full rainbow crossing the sky. That morning we reflected on the rainbow as the sign of God’s covenant with every living creature on earth and then we took our next steps of faith into life, work and ministry. These 21 years later it is clear that God has continued to care for our family and for St. Simons Presbyterian Church.

When I think about my wonderful chapter at SSPC, I think of ministry teams, mission trips, and motherhood. When I arrived, Rev. Bob Brearley asked me to help him build ministry teams to expand the

framework of involvement for church members. We mapped out an organizational chart and watched teams come to life under the enthusiastic leadership of elders and deacons. We would kick off the fall and the spring with a team rally in the Fellowship Hall and then fill every available meeting spot in the church with teams making their plans. The campus was like a beehive of activity with folks ready to roll up their sleeves and work for their church and it was all very inspiring.

I also give thanks for the experiences of leading and supporting mission trips for the church. Trips to Jamaica with youth and Malawi/South Africa with adults helped us “cross the bridge” and see God at work outside of our own context. A new friend at a conference introduced me to Montana de Luz in Honduras, and while I didn’t get to go myself, many trips were made there and loving relationships were sustained. The hallway cross wall began with these trips and I love to pass by it when I’m there and see how bold the church has been to continue reaching beyond itself. Remembering that the Session was always seeking to increase its mission giving is also a wonderful memory.

Finally, the gift of motherhood stands out. When Joey and I arrived, we were received with love and “mothered” by so many women who were serving as church leaders in a variety of ways. On Sunday mornings, I would look out from my post at the lectern or pulpit and see faces filled with encouragement. As the first young woman called to pastoral ministry at SSPC, that support filled my heart with deep feelings of gratitude. When I experienced an early pregnancy loss and then became a mother myself with the birth of James in 2003 and Nell in 2006, the whole church was incredible. I am so happy that there is still room for pastors who are also mothers on the staff at SSPC. Thank you for praying for them and for all the staff and their families continuously.

I rejoice with you on this 75th anniversary and give thanks to God for everyone who has had a part in creating the family of faith that is St. Simons Presbyterian Church. God bless you and thank you for inviting me to play a part!





ST. SIMONS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent Calendar

DECEMBER 1

PW Christmas Luncheon • 11AM

DECEMBER 2

*Meal with Friends at Driftwood Bistro
& Jekyll Lights Tour • 5PM*
With the Try Something New Group

DECEMBER 4

Messiah Performance • 3PM

DECEMBER 8

Caroling on the Trolley • 4:30PM

DECEMBER 12

Children & Bells in Worship • 10:30AM
A Christmas Carol at The Ritz • 3PM
With SSPC Youth and the Try Something New Group

DECEMBER 17 & 18

Live Nativity • 6PM & 7PM

DECEMBER 19

A Festival of Lessons and Carols 10:30AM
Chancel Choir and Chamber Orchestra

DECEMBER 21

Longest Night Service • 7PM

DECEMBER 24

Candles & Carols Service • 4PM
Candles & Carols Service • 5:30PM
Candlelight & Communion Service • 10PM

DECEMBER 26

Carols with GIYO Ensemble • 10:30AM

For detailed information on events,
please visit our website at sspres.org/events

REFLECT






A STORY OF PEWS

BY ALEX BINKNEY



I've been sitting on the pews at St. Simons Presbyterian Church for over 65 years. I've sat there almost every Sunday morning for worship as well as for weddings, funerals, Christmas Eves, Good Fridays, Sunday night worship, All Saints Days, Ash Wednesdays and all types of special events. Not to mention sleeping on a pew for four nights during hurricane Dora in 1964!

One of my early memories took place on the second pew on the right for many years. I sat on this pew with my Mama and Daddy. The Woodward sisters, Woodie and Debbie, either sat with us or we alternated to sit with their parents. Woodie, the oldest, insisted that we spend the sermon trying to memorize the final hymn! Then during the singing of the final hymn, we would see who could sing the most verses without looking at the hymnal. It's only in recent years that I realized I know so many verses to so many hymns, including the 6 verses to the First Noel!

A photograph of the interior of St. Simons Presbyterian Church. The view is from the back of the sanctuary, looking down the length of the church. Rows of dark wooden pews are visible in the foreground and middle ground. At the front, there is a white altar with a large cross on the wall behind it. The ceiling is high with exposed wooden beams and several large, rectangular, lantern-style pendant lights hanging from it. A white text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

As a single mother of three boys, I often joined Brenda Dohn with her two boys on the first pew on the left. To say the least, there was a lot of activity on that pew! One particular Sunday, just as Rick Baggett began the morning prayer, an airplane made from a bulletin encircled Rick's head! There was never a confession about who threw, but we narrowed it down to two!

There have been times when my faith is not as strong as it should be, and I have so many questions. But really all I need to do is remember the lessons I heard and learned on those pews at St. Simons Presbyterian, and I quickly remember how strong my faith is.

I am looking forward to sharing my faith with our grandchildren when the pews are a part of their dining room, and they are sitting on the same pews that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents sat on in worship!

St. Simons Presbyterian Pews
1954 - 2019.

WHERE THEY ARE NOW



Rich & Sandi
Goeldner's front porch.



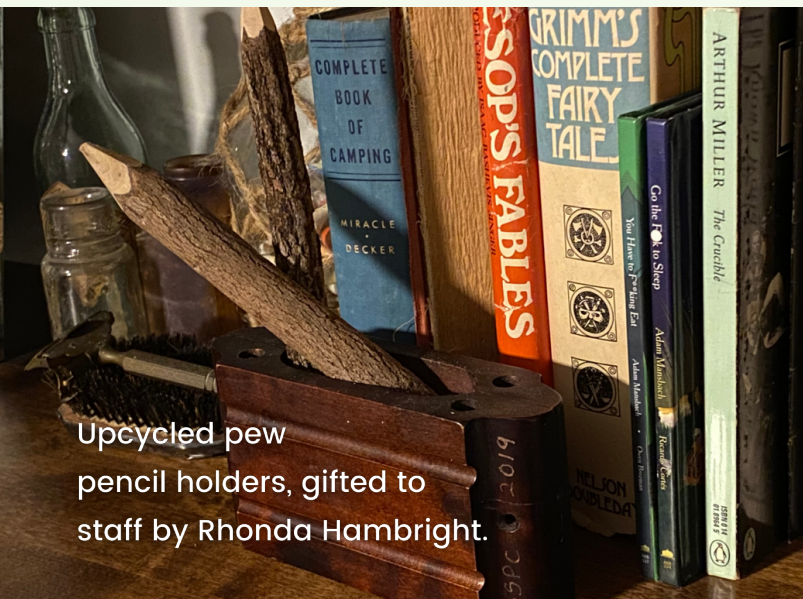
Handcross carved
from the pews.



Pew Bookend,
gifted to the
church by Leslie
McCracken.



Asa & Ansel Owens
on Pew in back yard.



Upcycled pew
pencil holders, gifted to
staff by Rhonda Hambright.



Ben & Mary Bryson's porch.

A SANCTUARY OF STORIES

BY ADA OWENS

I've been a member of St. Simons Presbyterian Church for eight years now and working on staff as Director of Communications for just over three years. Usually, I'm the first person in the building on any given weekday. The lights are off, the hallways are empty, and the sanctuary is quiet. Exactly what I need. It's one of my favorite places to meditate early in the morning. I haven't found any particular pew that I prefer over another although I do lean towards the right side of the sanctuary, where the light beams through the windows as the sun reaches higher into the sky with every passing second. Each breath I take echoes from the marble floor to the vaulted ceiling. This is where I can find peace. But the funny thing is, more often than not, when I close my eyes in that empty sanctuary, with the all-consuming silence capturing my racing mind, I almost always reach a point where I envision the sanctuary bustling with people. One loving congregation filling up this holy space with affection and friendship, worship and praise. The intricacies of time have no place in the imagination, allowing my mind to picture a single congregation together that spans over 75 years of existence. Countless lives have been brought to this incredible place of worship and with each one comes a story. What I want to do now is share a few of those stories with you.



Susan Hartman holding a picture of her father, Carlyle Ward, and his pharmacy, Ward's, which was located in Pier Village on SSI.

I had the honor of documenting some of the earliest memories of our church in celebration of our 75th anniversary weekend. Five members of our congregation were brave enough to sit down with me and share their memories on camera: Betty Fendig, Betty Smith, Jimmy Gash, Susan Hartman, and Alex Binkney. Each of them met me with specific memories of the church they were eager to share. Betty White remembers how the Presbyterian Women circles used to alternate groups every month, giving the women an opportunity to interact with new people

and befriend almost all of the women in the church. Alex Binkney grew up just down the street from the church, and remembers walking with her father almost every night during the construction to keep an eye on the progress. Jimmy Gash remembers the cornerstone laying ceremony and running around with his friends after the service. He knew every single family that lived along Kings Way.

Susan Hartman remembers how dedicated her father was to the mission of this church and Betty Fendig recalls squeezing into a packed Community Church Building with an ever-growing congregation and a Bible group that almost every member of the church wanted to be a part of. It was the Margaret Britt class. All of these memories came so naturally and prompted a smile across the face of each storyteller.



Betty Fendig standing at the same door that her late husband, Edwin Fendig, posed by as a child in the same home.

Their memories of the church were everything I'd hoped for but, honestly, it was what would happen next that got my attention. As I tagged along down memory lane with each person, I would watch their eyes light up as a tangential memory would come to mind. Something spontaneous and random that hadn't surfaced in a while. Here's a bit of what I learned.

Jimmy Gash used to hitchhike. As a child, he would catch a ride to and from school in Brunswick. He even made a few trips home with strangers during college. He wouldn't recommend it now, but that was another time, and he got to meet some interesting people!

Alex Binkney camped out on church pews during Hurricane Dora. Her family was joined by the Woodwards, the Andersons, and even a few family pets. During the storm, the kids practiced giving sermons in the pulpit as a distraction. The police came the morning after the storm and informed the families that almost every house along the shore had been washed away. I watched as her eyes glazed over with tears, reliving that memory. She and her family lived in a home on the shore. But somehow, by the grace of God, her home survived Dora and Alex still lives there to this very day. No stormwater has ever made its way into that house.



Betty Smith showing off the puzzles she won from two different Bingo Nights at SSPC.

Betty White lit up at the memory of her grandchildren being baptized at St. Simons Presbyterian and a mission trip she took to Australia, led by Dr. Hardy. There were eight people from SSPC and another eight from a church in West Virginia. Betty made a lifelong friend from the church in West Virginia, who she still keeps in touch with today. Together, they visited a historical prison called Port Arthur in Tasmania. Betty has since seen several documentaries on Port Arthur and is excited to say that she's been there!

Susan Hartman recalled her granddaughter, Carly, coming down to visit from South Carolina one Christmas. Susan and Jack took Carly to the live nativity at church, where her cousins were participating in the holy reenactment. They watched as Carly ran into the church to greet her cousins but took much, much longer than expected to come back out. The next thing they knew, the nativity lineup walked out of the church and there was Carly, dressed up as an angel of the Lord! I also learned that Susan's mother was raised Baptist, and, before joining St. Simons Presbyterian, had always joked that, "Presbyterians don't sing loud enough." I guess she was eventually convinced otherwise!

Hearing all of these stories and witnessing the pure joy wash over their faces while reminiscing on the past really brought something to light for me. Every single person who has ever been a part of this church - past, present, and future - is a walking library of stories and experiences. Encounters that happen within the walls of our sanctuary, but even more so in our everyday lives. And this church, St. Simons Presbyterian, is a crossroads where thousands of people are able to bring their stories. Some are spoken aloud and others whispered in prayer, but each and every one being accepted and met with an unfaltering love from our God. I pray that we may all open our ears and our hearts to the stories around us and welcome many more in the years to come.



Jimmy Gash laughing, while sharing his memories during our interview.



Alex Binkney feeding her goldfish in the stone pond her father built when she was a child.



INTERVIEWS & 16MM REELS

Visit sspres.org/anniversary to watch our anniversary video, featuring the storytellers mentioned above, and for the full 16mm footage shared with the church by Betty Fendig.

 Saint Simons
Presbyterian Church
205 Kings Way
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

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An Advent Sermon Series | Beginning Nov 24

PREPARING THE WAY FOR CHRISTMAS



JOURNEYING THROUGH ADVENT
WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST