

The History of Lakewood Presbyterian Church



Lakewood Presbyterian Church, 2009

Only once in a lifetime comes the privilege of helping to build a church that will stand for generations in the community for which it is built...When we build, let us think we build forever. Let it not be for present delight nor present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendents will thank us for; and let us think as we lay stone upon stone, that the time is to come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labor and the wrought substance of them, "See this our fathers did for us."

– John Ruskin
accompanying the artist's rendering of the proposed
first unit of Lakewood Presbyterian Chapel.

In the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty-two, Harry S. Truman was president of the United States of America. General Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson at the polls in November. Inflation was not a threat, but a reality. Prices continued to boom.

Ernest Hemingway was writing *The Old Man and the Sea*. Ed Sullivan shone brightly on that sparkling new medium, television. Lovers sang "Cry," "Please" and "Wish You Were Here," and Rocky Marciano knocked out Jersey Joe Wolcott. In spite of truce negotiations in Korea, light ground and air action continued and intensified in October when peace talks were temporarily postponed.

But people were optimistic and looked to the future. Divine worship was not to be forgotten in finding the full life. In the Sunshine State, Fuller Warren was governor, and more and more Americans were finding themselves on the way to Florida. The focal point for some of these new Floridians was Jacksonville, the northeast gateway city, where Haydon Burns was mayor. The future seemed so promising that embryonic plans for an expressway system were in process. Those ribbons of concrete were soon to be laid, encircling and traversing the city.

This growth – national, state and local – was to affect Jacksonville's Southside and one new development in particular: Lakewood. The new section with its homes and apartments, its pine-lined streets named for universities and colleges, its new schools and green parks, its excellent shopping center, Lakewood-San Jose Plaza, all nestled near the beautiful St. Johns River, also offered those institutions which are the heart of a real community: churches. Conceived by the developer as a "home" community, Lakewood had 300 homes, 200 apartments and an eight-acre lake, formed from a creek and lowlands situated between San Jose Boulevard and the apartment complex.

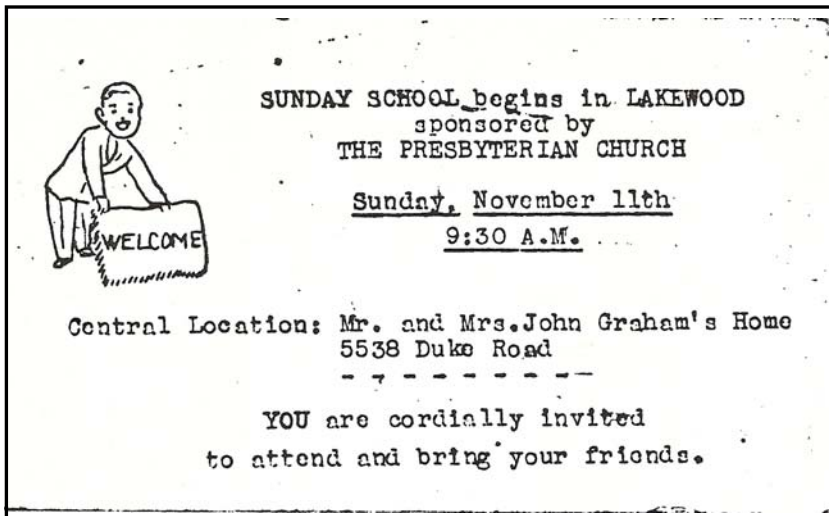
The Beginning

Jacksonville Presbyterian laymen saw the opportunity to expand the Kingdom of Christ in the rapidly expanding city. The Laymen's Association, the Executive Committee of Home Missions and the South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church began a study of area needs. As the result of a house-to-house survey in the Lakewood section during the summer of 1951, it was decided to establish a Presbyterian church in the area.

The new congregation was to have a proud heritage. Early establishments of Presbyterianism in the area were begun in Mandarin in 1834; and the first urban church, Ocean Street Church, now First Presbyterian, was established in Jacksonville in 1840. By the time of the Civil War, congregations were organized in Quincy, Micanopy, Palatka, Lake City, Kanapaha, and Fernandina Beach, and the section became known as the Suwannee Presbytery. With the war dividing the

states, division also came to the church. The Presbyterian Church U.S., commonly known as the Southern Presbyterian Church, was born in 1861. The new Lakewood Church was to join this denomination.

Following the decision to establish a church in Lakewood, a Sunday School was begun in the homes of three families on Duke Road: Mr. and Mrs. John Graham, Mr. and Mrs. John Bier and Mr. and Mrs. Jay Gilliland. There were 45 children and adults who attended the first Sunday on Nov. 11, 1951, and they came on



Sunday School announcement – 1951.

foot and on bicycle. Meetings were held in these homes for several months. South Jacksonville Presbyterian also furnished the founding Sunday School with an adult teacher, its Assistant Minister, C. Charles Benz. A Chapel Council was established on Dec. 9, 1951, and on Jan. 1, 1952, the council extended a call to Reverend Benz to serve as Chapel minister.

Twenty-five women attended the first meeting of the Women of the Church on Jan. 15, 1952. Groundbreaking for the chapel's first building took place on Feb. 10, 1952. This first single unit masonry building (that would later be incorporated into the larger facility) was acquired at a cost of \$5,750 for the land and \$8,000 for the building. The space is currently used as our nursery rooms and men's restroom but was then one large room for worship, and the smaller one for the nursery. The address was 2001 Longwood Road (it had not yet been named University Boulevard).

The following Sunday, the congregation met with the Jacksonville Presbyterian Laymen's Association on the church lot and the Women of the Church served sandwiches, coffee and cake. (We were eating well together from the very beginning!) Although there was wind and rain and no windows on Easter Sunday, April 13, 1952, a capacity crowd jammed into the yet incomplete chapel for the first service of worship in Lakewood Presbyterian Chapel. A particular atmosphere of oneness under God prevailed as people shared umbrellas, raincoats, etc. with worshippers sitting in window and door areas. Gifts from the new congregation helped provide the necessary items for a Communion service, which was held July 6, 1952.

Realizing the inadequacy of the Chapel facilities, evidenced by the new life and continuous growth of the membership and the believers, a Building Committee was formed in early June 1952. In the summer of that year, a Sunday School picnic was held, and a Vacation Bible School was conducted with attendance averaging 106. In July 1952, a petition was made to Suwannee Presbytery that the Lakewood Chapel be organized as a Church. The next month it was granted.



The newly-completed first unit of LPC – April 1952.

On Sept. 7, 1952, the Reverend Benz formally accepted the call, and the first Session of the church was installed on the same day at a special 3 p.m. service. The formal organization service for the church was held on Sept. 21, 1952. The first annual candlelight communion service was held on Dec. 24, 1952, at 11:30 p.m. with capacity congregation in attendance.

Rapid Expansion

On the recommendation of the Building Committee, groundbreaking for the second building unit took place on Jan. 25, 1953. This added two more classrooms (by partitioning the former worship space), the kitchen and a fellowship hall to seat 200.

The membership total as of March 15, 1953, was 124. Dedication of the newly completed fellowship hall, which would serve as a temporary sanctuary, was held on

June 14, 1953. In September, a kindergarten with 51 pupils was begun. Several inspired women served as directors of the kindergarten: the first was Rose Newman, followed by Ann Deitsch, Donna Fetter, and Jeannette Oakley. Three Brownie troops and two Girl Scout troops were formed, as well as a Cub Scout, one Boy Scout, and one Explorer Scout troop. Lakewood's service to the community had begun. By the end of the year membership was up to 190.



Jan. 25, 1953 – Groundbreaking for expansion of the original building

E. G. Amos, clerk of session, turned the first spadeful of earth when ground was broken for the \$22,000 addition to the new education building. Others participating were (left to right): S. Ralph Fetner, architect; J. G. Ward Jr., chairman of the board of deacons; T. J. Gilbert, chairman of the building committee; R. A. Martin, superintendent of the Sunday School; Mrs. E. G. Amos, president of the Women of the Church; Larry M. Newkirk, contractor for A. D. Newkirk and Sons; James E. Herring, chairman of the board of trustees; and Charles C. Benz, pastor.

Fundraising began on April 2, 1954, for the construction of new Sunday School rooms – the new West Wing that included those rooms west of the fellowship hall on the rear of the building.

An organ was purchased in April and two services were held on Easter, April 18, 1954, with 350 total attendance. The Youth Building (known now as the Scout Hut) was erected manually by members of the church. Adjoining property was

purchased to allow expansion room for new classrooms that would be needed in the future.

1955 began with 276 communicants on the rolls. The new Sunday School rooms were first occupied on Jan. 9. The first summer youth program was organized that summer and 93 new members joined the church during the year.

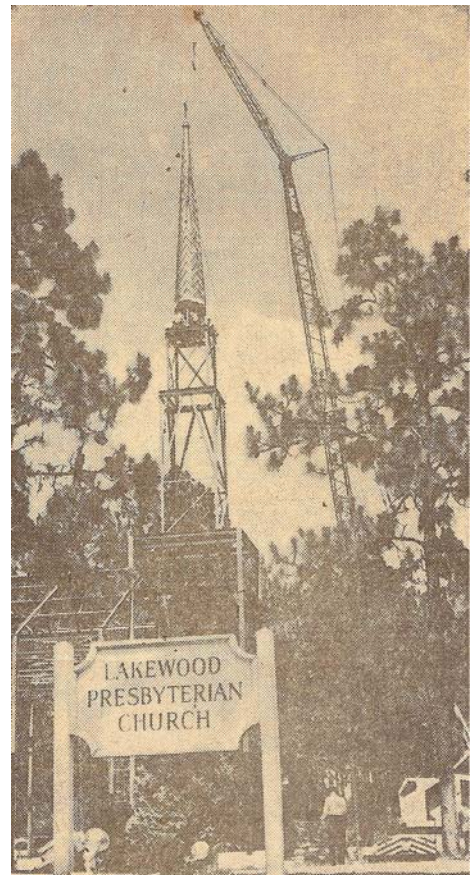
LPC erects a sanctuary

It was on Dec. 8, 1956, that plans were presented to the congregation to raise \$75,000 for a sanctuary. At the end of that year, there were 412 members.

More than three years later in 1960, construction began on the new sanctuary. On the Sunday before Christmas 1960, a *Florida Times-Union* editorial said, "A beautiful steeple rises high above the new sanctuary of the Lakewood Presbyterian Church nearing completion in our town. First services in the new house of worship are tentatively scheduled for January 1. This new steeple is a fitting symbol of the holiday season, reminding all of man's universal reaching toward the heavens and of the heights in personal dignity that can be gained through faith."

The first service was actually held on Sunday, Dec. 25, 1960, a week earlier than had been predicted. According to Charles Benz, there was a tremendous amount of activity among dedicated members in the last few days and even hours to make that happen.

Within the next few years, a new education building was constructed, providing eight new classrooms and a suite of offices. This was the South addition, which added a hall where the breezeway had been and an entire front row of offices on either side of the fellowship hall, doubling the classroom space. In 1964, James R. Lloyd was called as assistant pastor for Education and Evangelism. He was a graduate of Duke University and Union Theological Seminary and came to Lakewood from Durham. The church also acquired needed land. Over the years it purchased 700 feet of frontage on University Boulevard West.



-Florida Times Union photo

The steeple was placed on the framework of LPC's new sanctuary – 1960.

In 1966, the Suwannee Presbytery voted \$35,000 to establish new Presbytery headquarters at Lakewood Church, bringing the central office from Gainesville to Jacksonville.

Women of LPC serve God's Kingdom

The choice of a minister for the young church was a happy one. During his 20 years of service to the church, the Rev. Benz and his helpmate, Peggy, proved themselves indeed "workmen that needeth not be ashamed." Inspired by God and a faithful congregation, the Rev. Benz provided the dedicated leadership that brought to fruition a church in the Lakewood community that is a living tribute to God and the victory we have in His love. Peggy was much loved by the people, as evidenced by her being chosen for Honorary Membership by the Women of the Church on March 10, 1964, one of 12 women and one man to be honored at the time of the 25th anniversary in 1977. Wrote the church historian about her, "Not only is she an ideal wife, but she is an ideal 'preacher's wife.' She is a devoted mother and a faithful church woman."

Peggy is typical of the faithful women of Lakewood Presbyterian Church who emulate that ideal lady of Proverbs 31. Not only do these women enrich the community with their Christian homes and their participation in good community and civic endeavors, they provide that spark, both of "Mary" and "Martha," necessary for every church.

These Sarahs, Rebekahs, Ruths, Dorcas, Pricillas, Loises, and Eunices came from every part of the nation and other countries. From Montana, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Brazil, Scotland they came to the Gateway City and made their light shine through the Lakewood Church.

That light has shone through their work with the Cancer Society, which won them a national Distinguished Service Citation in 1961 and 1962. They made scrub suits, sewing gowns and caps for the Florida Medical Association. Private individuals and groups sponsored Salvador Paredes Hospital in Trujillo, Honduras.

Other projects of interest and definition were the Arts and Crafts Circle's Christmas and Easter banners for 1972 and 1974. The first shows the Dove of Peace and the Three Wise Men and the latter is resplendent with colorful butterflies made of silk and felt. These were hung in the church.

They joined with other women in "Church Women United" to undertake many Christian endeavors including sponsoring a "day of sharing" at Lakewood when clothing for needy adults and children was collected.

Not always Martha, they became Mary as they sought spiritual enrichment with others of the Suwannee Presbytery at a retreat at Camp Montgomery in October of 1972. As ever helpful, the Lakewood women, barefooted, served breakfast for the

group. Such activities are typical of all the members of Lakewood Church. It is truly a family church.

Members have sponsored the Learn to Read program, the Stewardship Fair in October of 1975, the Joy Gift dinner in December of 1976, a Vietnamese family, clothes for a mission center, classrooms for nursery school used by deaf children, the Head Start program, the Fight Against Cancer. The church joined with the Southside Estate Presbyterian Church to co-sponsor the Englewood Sans Souci Presbyterian Church.

The youth, too, have been infected with the glowing spirit as noted by a Jacksonville Journal editorial in July 1968, which commended their race relations project. The project was an outgrowth of a study of the subject, and was prompted by the plight of a young African-American boy, Robert Walker, who was accidentally shot and paralyzed. Taking odd jobs in the neighborhood, the young people of Lakewood Presbyterian raised over \$300 that summer to aid Walker with his medical bills.

Underscoring its ministry of service, the doors of the church have been open to meetings of all kinds, making it truly a church of the people. It is and has been a real gathering place for Christians, in testimony to Jesus' promise that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I also."

The 45th annual meeting of the Women of the Church, Suwannee Presbytery, Florida Synod was held at Lakewood on Oct. 8, 1961, with the appropriate theme of "Christian Vocation." This was the year that the Suwannee Centennial Communion also was held at the church.

The challenge of Lakewood's program mandated reinforcements. In 1967, Robert Walkup was called as assistant minister, having just graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary. He, his wife and two children remained with Lakewood until Rev. Walkup accepted a call to Hope Presbyterian Church, Clearwater, Florida. A reception honoring the family was given on the eve of their departure on Sept. 3, 1972.

LPC celebrates 20th anniversary

A reception was held on Feb. 6, 1972, honoring the 20th anniversary of the service of Rev. and Mrs. Benz. A drama was presented by the youth of the church, depicting points of the past, present, and expected future at Lakewood. As part of the 20th anniversary celebration, the congregation conducted a self-study to provide guidance built on a good and fruitful past. This self-study showed "Education" to lead at the first level with "Enrichment of the Present Program" to be the immediate goal. Attention was to be given to "Additional Staff Members," "Family Education and Involvement," and "Better Equipped Leaders." Others on this level were "Congregational Care," "Witness to the Community," and "Youth

Involvement." Second level priorities established were the concerns of Personal Witness, Fellowship, Worship, Physical Plant, and Assimilation of New Members. Third level priorities were Other Worship Experiences, Choir, Women of the Church, Stewardship, Canvas and Building. The Session agreed with the congregation that the physical plant was adequate for present or foreseeable needs.

Not long after the self-study, Mr. Benz accepted a call to Morningside Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Ga. The congregation expressed their love and gratitude for the Benz family at a farewell reception at the Presbyterian-sponsored Regency House on Jan. 14, 1973.

LPC's third decade of service

Later that year, the Rev. J. Hunter Coleman, associate minister of Arlington Presbyterian Church, was called to be Lakewood's minister. He, his wife Trudie and children, Joe and Julia, became a part of the church family when his ministry became effective on Nov. 15, 1973. A graduate of Presbyterian College, Clinton, S.C., Rev. Coleman studied at Columbia Seminary, Decatur, Ga., and Union Seminary, Richmond, Va. He was formerly minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Perry, Fla.

It was in May of 1974 that Mary Baine Rudolph became LPC's fulltime Director of Christian Education, having served as interim director since March 1973. Mary Baine also served as chairperson of the Division of National Mission of our General Assembly.

In 1979, Lib McGregor Simmons was called to LPC as Associate Pastor. Most outstanding among her accomplishments was the organization of many of the churches in the Southside Jacksonville area to minister to the needy in our own neighborhood. Named the United Community Outreach Ministry (UCOM), it operated a Meals on Wheels program and an emergency center, where people and families in crisis could obtain food and clothing. When Hunter Coleman left in 1984 to begin a ministry in Athens, Georgia, Lib assumed the reins of the church. She kept us on course until 1986 when she was called as senior minister to a church in St. Louis, Mo.

John Nicolson returns to Jacksonville

In August 1985, LPC called John H. Nicolson from a church in Decatur, Ga., that he had helped establish fourteen years earlier. John brought with him his wife Betty and daughter Susan and returned to Jacksonville, the city in which he was born and raised. In 1987, he was joined by Vickie Thomas, who served as Associate Minister until 1999. Under their leadership, Lakewood continued to flourish.

Habitat for Humanity was a new movement sweeping across the nation, and Jacksonville had its own brand name, Habijax, for participation in this worthy cause, beginning in 1987. The Session at LPC voted to share the cost of building a house with St. Johns Presbyterian during the annual houseraising in 1988. The women of Lakewood gave housewarming showers to many of the Habijax homeowners.

In the late 1980's LPC also began participating in the Outreach Ministry for I.M. Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless. This newly established center in downtown Jacksonville offers shelter and food to homeless men, women, and children every night. Our participation involves purchasing, preparing, and serving a dinner meal to those in the center one night every quarter.

A new group formed within the church in the 1980s. They chose to call themselves "PEPS" for Progressive, Enthusiastic Presbyterian Seniors, and they are reflective of their name. They meet once a month for social outings and offer support to one another and the rest of the church.

Journey into the Future

In 1988 with a membership of 580, Lakewood Presbyterian undertook a "Journey into the Future" and embarked on an extensive renovation project to upgrade the kitchen, enlarge the bathrooms, re-roof and paint the education building, paint the entire church exterior, paint and re-carpet the sanctuary, build a portico adjacent to it for rainy-day drop-offs, pave the side parking lot, install a sprinkler system, and re-landscape the grounds.

It was a large monetary commitment, but Lakewood's members stepped up to the challenge, and our physical body took on a new glow.

The church kicked off the campaign in September 1988 when we celebrated our 36th anniversary.

LPC's programs continue to grow

In 1996, a new program began centered around members ministering to each other during crisis situations. Called the Stephen Ministry, it is not exclusive to our denomination but is embraced by other protestant groups.

The volunteers to be Stephen Ministers are trained for 50 hours and are then assigned, one on one, to another church member who is in need of support for a particular crisis situation: loss of a loved one, a health or family crisis. Similar to the Stephen Ministry is the ChristCare Ministry, which offers small group support to members in similar loss situations.

In early 1997 plans were presented by the Christian Education Ministry for a preschool at LPC, and the fall of that year saw its realization. We were fortunate to have Gail Baker return to Lakewood to organize and direct it. Gail had been Preschool Director at Southside Presbyterian Church for several years. The halls of

the education building became a sea of activity each weekday morning and the walls of classrooms and halls alike showcased displays of prolific original works of art. That first year there were 45 children enrolled. For the fall, 2002 term, there were 145.

In February 2000, Richard Caldwell joined LPC as Interim Associate Minister, coming from a 20-year ministry at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Macon, Ga. Richard's strong leadership with the Youth and Christian Education was marked by programs he introduced and spear-headed, such as Year of the Bible in 2001 when the entire congregation joined to read the entire Bible in one year. In the fall of 2001, Children's Worship was inaugurated for children age 5 to grade 3 during the regular worship hour. This has been highly successful and participation continues to increase.

In late summer 2001, John Nicolson announced that he would retire at the end of 2001. Richard served as a strong source of continuity for LPC and was joined in February 2002 by Dr. Dwight S. Bayley, filling the position of Interim Senior Pastor. Dwight came from Orange Park Presbyterian Church to help guide us through this passage between ministers.

A half century of service

2002 marked the 50th anniversary for Lakewood Presbyterian Church, and a celebration of events from mid-August through September was planned. Dr. Charles Benz returned to preach on August 10, followed by Reverend Hunter Coleman the next week. In September, both John Nicolson and Vickie Thomas-Bossuot returned to the pulpit. On September 18, Rodney Cleveland presented a special recital following the Wednesday night dinner and Ice Cream Social in honor of this historic event. The culmination came on September 22 when Dr. Paul Eckel preached on spiritual renewal, followed by a church-wide Southern fried chicken lunch.

Rev. Terry Lucarelli joins LPC

Lakewood began a search for a senior pastor in the summer of 2002 and finally extended a call in early 2004 to Terence Lucarelli from Ohio. Terry and his wife Karen along with son Jeremy and dog Rufus moved to Jacksonville in April 2004. His first Sunday in our pulpit was April 18, 2004. LPC had endured a long period without a senior minister, and Terry's warmth and enthusiasm, as well as skilled preaching, were welcomed with open arms. Terry was installed as our pastor on July 11, 2004, by a commission of the St. Augustine Presbytery.



Rev. Terry Lucarelli (third from left) and the LPC Band entertain during the church's spring picnic.

At the end of 2004, Richard Caldwell left us to move to interim work elsewhere in our Presbytery. He had served as our Interim Associate Pastor for five years, and his strengths of commitment and innovation had carried us through a period that otherwise could have been very bumpy. He introduced a number of programs, such as Children's Worship, that are still very strong years later and add much to the opportunities we can offer our members and community.

Focus on youth revitalized

The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee had been working since 2005 and presented LPC with a candidate for Associate Pastor in February 2008 – Katherine (Katie) Robb from Denver, Colorado, who would focus on our youth and young people. A call was extended on Feb. 22, 2008, and she joined our congregation on March 14, 2008. Katie has been a wonderful addition to our staff, growing and revitalizing our Youth Program.

The year 2008 marked the 10th anniversary for "Child's Play Preschool" at Lakewood and events were held to honor that celebration. Our preschool has become one of the most outstanding in Jacksonville and fills to capacity every year. It also has brought many young families into our congregation as well as life and vitality to our church in general.

LPC launches Capital Campaign

In early 2008, LPC began a Capital Campaign to remodel and expand our physical plant. It was planned to include two phases. Phase 1 – for the first three years – was to renovate the interior sanctuary (bringing the choir and organ down from the loft), update the bathrooms, remodel and renovate the church office, add a Youth/Music wing and to remove the Scout Hut for better parking and right-of-way. The second phase intended for the second three years aimed to renovate the kitchen and Benz Hall, to add a Welcome Pavilion and covered walk outside, and to restore the sanctuary steeple. Unfortunately, the timing for this campaign coincided with the real estate mortgage bubble burst and other steep declines in the economy.

At present (2009), we are working to determine how best to use the money that has been raised to meet the modified goals that our “Discovery” groups defined in the summer of 2008.

History of LPC’s Choir

For more than a half century, the development and growth of LPC’s choir have been inextricably linked with that of the church. The choir has a rich history of its own, beginning with a group of 15 singers who gathered on a blustery Easter Sunday morning in April 1952 when the first service of worship was held in the not-yet-complete Lakewood Presbyterian Chapel. The congregation huddled under raincoats and umbrellas, as rain blew in the window openings, and they listened to the joyous music of our very first choir.

Mrs. N. M. Leslie was appointed as the first choir director, and she served until November of that year, when Mrs. Dot McEuen became the choir director. Rehearsals were held on Thursday evenings, and the very first true anthem sung by the choir was performed on Sunday, Dec. 7, 1952. A 20-voice youth choir sang a Christmas service at 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 21.

In 1953, Robert Cavanaugh was named as choir director, and a committee was formed to make plans for a chancel stage and choir loft. A new organ was obtained in 1954, when the choir consisted of 16 members. In 1955, LPC and Lakewood Methodist choirs joined together to perform an Easter Cantata – another milestone in choir history.

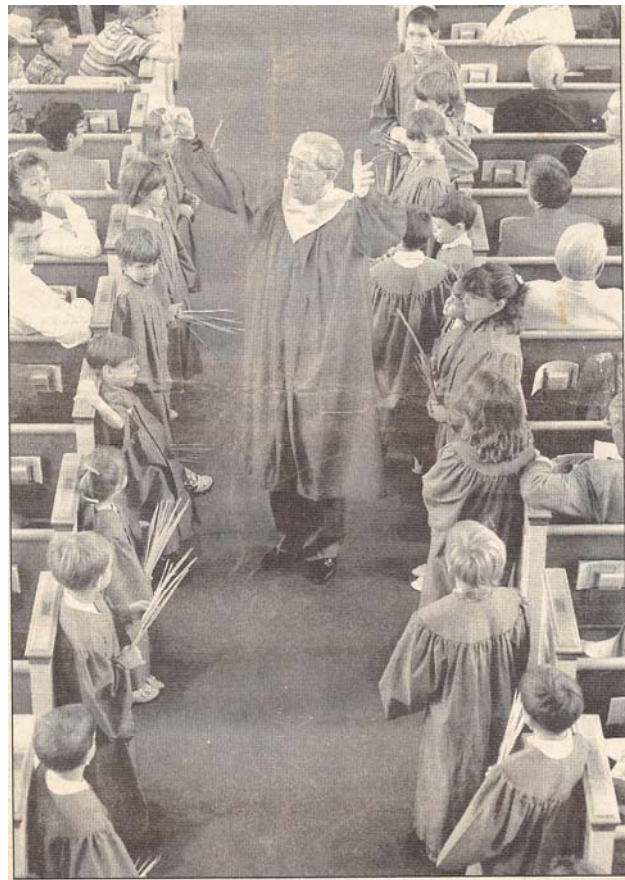
In 1956, Bill Swor, band director at DuPont Junior High, became the new chancel choir director. His enthusiasm helped increase membership. From 1957-1961, Lee Waits directed a junior choir, and Grace Marcellus was the church organist.

When Mr. Swor resigned, Grace Marcellus took over as the new director. Next, Marshall Walsh became the choir director – and the choir (and organ) moved into the balcony at the back of the Sanctuary. Marshall Walsh was succeeded by Clem

Boatright. In the 1970s, Dr. Jon Carlson came to LPC to direct the choir. Dr. Carlson is now the director of the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus.

After Dr. Carlson left LPC, several substitute directors worked with the choir until Tony Testino, piano virtuoso, was hired as Music Director in 1980. Under his leadership, the Chancel Choir grew and a Handbell Choir was formed when the church purchased a set of handbells. An Organ Fund was established and Lakewood installed and dedicated the new organ in 1987.

Near the close of the decade, Tony Testino moved on to Arlington Presbyterian Church and the members of Lakewood brought Mike Coldwell to our church as Music Director. Mike eventually became our Treasurer and computer support staff in addition to being responsible for our music programs. As a member of the Worship Ministry, Mike proposed ideas that added new depth to our special services, such as Wednesday Night Services of Wholeness, and moving Maundy Thursday services.



- Florida Times Union
Mike Coldwell leads children during Palm Sunday service.

Choir begins international tours

Along with LPC member Pat Bloebaum, Mike planned a Choir Music Tour of Germany and Austria in 1996, bringing new excitement to choir membership. And that was the beginning of the choir's memorable musical trips abroad. Preparation for the tour also provided the congregation with special music presented by the entire choir and smaller ensemble groups.

The "Alleluia Tour" in 1996 took the choir to the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and Austria, where they sang in Emperor Constantine's basilica in Trier; they were hosted by an expatriate Anglican congregation in the Catholic "Konvict Chapel" in Luxembourg City; gave a concert in the American Chapel at Smith Barracks, an Army post in Germany; sang in a 1400s onion-domed Lutheran church in Bad Windsheim, Germany; and sang a Saturday night Mass in a lovely old Catholic Church in a lakeside resort town north of Salzburg.

In December 1998, the choir presented a musical Christmas play, "For Unto Y'all" that generated more choir excitement, increased membership and inspired the congregation.

Rodney Cleveland joins LPC; more concert tours abroad

In 2000, Mike Coldwell resigned to pursue new endeavors. Rodney Cleveland joined LPC, where his outstanding talent and in-depth musical knowledge have added new dimensions to our worship and a greater number of choir participants.

He came on board just in time to make plans to take the choir to Scotland and England, where the roots of Presbyterianism are traced. In 2001, the choir began the trip just ten days after the 9/11 disaster at the Twin Towers in New York (what a brave and faithful group!).

On that trip, the choir sang at John Knox's St. Giles church in Edinburgh; in the chapel at Stirling Castle, where Mary, Queen of Scots was crowned; in the Presbyterian church of the small Scottish coal-mining town of West Calder, where Pat Bloebaum's mother attended Sunday School and church as a child; in Stratford-upon-Avon's Trinity Church, where Shakespeare is buried; and at the Royal Star and Garter Hospital and Home for Retired War Heroes outside London.

Rodney continued to amaze us with the music accomplishments he brought to our church. The children's choirs presented a spring musical production called "Fishy Tales" on April 28, 2004.

In September 2004, the Chancel Choir traveled to Italy for a 10-day tour. They had a total of eight performances during the trip, including a Sunday High Mass at St. Mark's Basilica in Venice; a packed house in the Italian resort town of Montecatini; a small, but appreciative, audience at the U.S.

Army Camp Darby; a concert at

the lovely old St. Sebastian church in Rome; and finished on a high note by singing for the 10:30 a.m. Sunday Mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Rodney also played the organ postlude (Bach) for that service, where some 6,000 were in attendance.

In May 2006, the LPC leadership named Rodney Minister of Music in recognition of his extraordinary ability to inspire the congregation and enrich their worship experience through music.



St. Peter's Basilica, 2004.

In March 2007, Lakewood was thrilled to install a new Allen organ. The operation of removing the old one and “raising” the new one to the choir loft was a challenge, but it was accomplished without incident. Rodney played a wonderful recital for the church to show off its many new features.

September 2007 found the choir singing its way across France on an 11-day tour that included performances in Nice, Monaco, Aix-en-Provence, Rouen, Caen and Paris. Three of the most moving and memorable events were a shared concert with Choeur 2000 at the Eglise du Pontet in Avignon, performing at Notre Dame and singing at the American Cemetery in Normandy.



Eglise St. Charles in Monaco, 2007

To make these journeys possible, the choir has held several hugely attended, entertaining and profitable music programs to raise funds. They have had Medieval Dinners (with the ladies in long, flowing dresses and the men in tights!), a rootin'-tootin' Cowboy musical (complete with barbecue dinner) and other memorable performances. The choir also prepares and serves Wednesday night dinners to raise funds for its travels.

The choir is looking ahead to its next musical journey, planned for Ireland in the fall of 2010.

Lakewood Presbyterian Church continues to grow and evolve. With God's help we will make progress and find the best ways to continue our ministry to this community and to each other,

Thinking with Christ's mind,
Loving with Christ's heart,
Serving with Christ's hands.