



## Center Presbyterian Church Yesterday and Today

Center Presbyterian Church began as a Sunday School on May 15, 1915 in the old Center School building. Local ministers of various faiths preached following Sunday School in the afternoons. The most frequent minister and by far the most influential was the Rev. Sam Wolfe, pastor of Farner Presbyterian Church.

In 1923, a brush arbor was built across the street from the present church site for the purpose of holding a revival. Sam Wolfe, and his brother, the Rev. Davis Wolfe, preached alternately. The attendance and professions of faith were so substantial it was decided a Presbyterian Church would be established there. Knoxville Presbytery organized Center Presbyterian Church on November 11, 1923 with 11 Charter members: Ed and Florence Akins, Louis Blair, Ella Burris, Grover and Edith Frye, Merda and Joisie Lynn, Anna Thomas, Ruella Watson and Mamie Fox.

The Church met in the school until 1924 when a frame building was erected on land donated by C.A. Scott, a local businessman. The church members and community donated money, materials and labor. The church was dedicated Easter Sunday, April 24, 1924. The Wolfe brothers served as co-pastors until 1930 and Sam Wolfe alone until March 1935.

Rev. C. McCoy Franklin, pastor of Madisonville Presbyterian Church was called as pastor in March 1935. Center became part of a five church parish along with Madisonville, Toqua, Wilson Station, and Leonard's Chapel Presbyterian Churches. Rev. Franklin served as supply from 1935 until 1958, with the exception of 5 years when he served as Evangelist for Knoxville Presbytery. During this absence Rev. Tom Buchanan served as Center's pastor.

With increased membership and the need for a larger building, the old frame church was torn down and a new Crab Orchard stone building was completed in 1952 with partial financial help from the Knoxville Presbytery. It was debt free in less than a year. Tragedy struck three years later on a Sunday in February 1956 when the church and its contents were completely destroyed by fire, caused by a faulty flue. By Monday morning, volunteers from the church, as well as the community, came ready to clear the debris in preparation for rebuilding. In six months a new church stood on the ashes of the burned structure, identical to the stone church it replaced.

In 1958 "Preacher" Franklin left to become pastor of the Lenoir City Presbyterian Church and his son-in-law, Rev. W.R. (Bill) Childress, was called as pastor. He served until his retirement in March, 1987. During those 29 years the church became self-supporting (without financial help from Presbytery), purchased two organs and built an addition to the church—an upstairs fellowship hall.

Center was without a pastor for a period of two years, until February 1989. During that time the church was served by various supply pastors. In February 1989 Rev. David Maude from Concord Presbyterian Church was called. He was the first pastor called without being yoked to another church. David left in March, 1991. In March 1991-2002, the church was served by Rev. Paul Young. Currently we have been blest with Rev. John B. Rogers of Chattanooga. We have been fortunate to have had pastors dedicated to God and the building of His church in a rural community. Church membership has continued to grow, and our ministry to our community, both in Tellico Plains and the outside world, continues to expand.

Today at Center we are involved in many community projects. We sponsor the Good Shepherd Center in Monroe County, Bachman Academy near Cleveland, TN (a home for children with learning disabilities) Samaritan Hands (an orphanage in Guatemala) Holyland Ministries, The Lighthouse and Seminary in Estonia, Presbyterian Disaster Relief fund which goes to victims of tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanoes and other natural disasters; Joy Gift (a fund to aid widows and orphans of ministers) and conduct vacation Bible camp. Our talented choir has been invited many times to perform for the community. The Youth Group earns money by staging a haunted house every Halloween and they use the money to provide food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas. The Dorcas Ladies is a sewing group in our Church that raises money for various church and community projects. We are very proud of all our energetic members.

As we enter the twenty-first century, we look forward to continued growth and opportunities to serve God in His world.