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HISTORY OF CENTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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 Buchanon 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 the period of two years, relying on various supply pastors until February 1989 the Rev. David Maude accepted as a stated supply pastor. He was the first pastor called without being yoked to another church and served to March of 1991. In March 1991, Rev. Paul Young accepted the call to serve and during his eleven years of ministry, Center Church enjoyed a time of satisfaction and stability in its mission to serve Christ. When Rev. Young moved to Harriman, God opened the door for the Rev. John Rogers to come and serve as a part time pastor while he also served as a Chaplain and golf coach for McCallie all boys boarding School in Chattanooga until 2008 when he accepted a call to be campus minister at UNC- Greensboro. It was during this time that a new fellowship hall was added along with additional space for an office, restrooms, and a Sunday School room. Retired Pastor, the Rev Chuck Neder stepped in and served as an Interim pastor until the Rev. Dr. Jon Faraone accepted the call to serve Center Presbyterian Church in January of 2011.

During Rev. Faraone’s time of service, Center Presbyterian Church has transitioned in its discernment of how it serves and supports a variety of ministries. Though Center Church continues to support Presbyterian ministries like Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the One Great Hour of Sharing and Joy Gift special offerings along with providing funds for the John Knox Center Presbytery camp, the congregation is supporting several local and international missions and ministries. Every Halloween season, the Youth convert the old school house into a “haunted school house” and raises thousands of dollars to provide a month supply of food to over 100 needy families during the Christmas season. In addition, the Deacons began the Shelter My Sheep ministry which provides temporary transitional housing for individuals and families going through homeless situations in their lives. They currently have 4 micro houses and is currently working with Lighthouse ministry in Madisonville to establish a homeless shelter. We also support the Valley of Blessings ministry for women, Rev. John Rogers ministry at the Peterson House and the Springs of Joy ministries as Michael Montgomery translates God’s word into the native Quichi people located in the Guatemala mountain regions. Finally, there is the quilt ministry of the Dorcas ladies who create patchwork masterpieces that bring comfort to those who are battling pains and sickness. In many ways, their ministry reflects how God can touch people from different backgrounds and experiences and stitch them together with the love of Christ and witness together what God can do through them.

Blessings, Rev. Dr. Jon Faraone