

Abridged History of 2nd Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, TN

Second Presbyterian Church was organized in October 1818 and became enrolled in the Presbytery of Union, the Synod of Tennessee, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The forefather of Second Church is Dr. Samuel Hopkins, a Congregational minister during the American Revolution in Newport, Rhode Island. He pleaded unsuccessfully with the writers of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States to lay the foundation for the elimination of slavery. He developed an extensive anti-slavery theology known as Hopkinsianism, which varied from traditional Calvinism.

After the War of 1812, there arose a great surge in the anti-slavery movement. It divided the nation, the mid-south, Knoxville, the Presbyterian General Assembly, and many individual congregations. The crest of the post-war anti-slavery wave in the mid-south occurred about 1818. The Congress was then pursuing the Missouri Compromise which formally established American slavery sectionalism.

The nucleus of the original Second Church congregation was a group of Hopkinsian anti-slavery sympathizers in First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville. Although First Church had a new building and an excellent pastor, the disaffected body aspired to the pastoral service of Dr. Isaac Anderson, who had been a student under Dr. Samuel Carrick at First Church. Dr. Anderson was a theological genius, a Hopkinsian, and an ardent opponent of slavery. As of 1818, he was pastor of New Providence Church in Maryville. He later founded Maryville College while continuing as pastor at New Providence. The would-be Second Presbyterians merely wanted Dr. Anderson to preach to them every other week on Saturday or Sunday.

In April 1818 the Hopkinsian faction petitioned the Presbytery of Union for a separate congregation. Rather than raise the highly volatile issues of either Hopkinsianism or slavery, the petitioners used the pretext of a pew rental dispute. Presbytery denied the petition without entering any reasons in the record. In October 1818, the separatist group appealed presbytery's decision to the Synod of Tennessee. The synod ordered the immediate organization of Second Church.

In 1819, the congregation called Dr. Anderson as its part-time pastor. The congregation worshipped temporarily in the courthouse while speedily building a modest edifice with a rustic interior in the the northwest corner of Clinch Avenue and Prince Street (now Market Street). Dr. Anderson stayed ten years. He was succeeded by Rev. Jefferson Montgomery and later by Rev. Joseph Martin.

In 1858, Second Church approved a larger and more pretentious church to be erected immediately behind the first building. This new building was dedicated

on November 11, 1860, five days after the election of President Lincoln. The original building was then razed. Its materials were used for a chapel behind the new edifice.

The eruption of the Civil War found Second Church substantially divided between Confederate and Union supporters. The pastor, the Rev. Martin, was originally a Union supporter. Like many Tennessee clergymen, he switched to the support of the Confederacy after the Tennessee secession. Four of the leading laymen in the congregation -- Horace Maynard, Oliver Temple, James Cowan, and Perez Dickinson -- remained Union supporters throughout.

At the end of the war, Second Church recovered its church building in poor condition. The congregation called a fine interim pastor, the Rev. Rufus Wells, to lead the church restoration. Under the Rev. Wells' leadership, the African-American members in Second Church in September 1865 organized the present Shiloh Presbyterian Church.

In 1866 the Rev. Nathan Bachman became pastor for ten years. He provided great leadership in restoring the church building, expanding membership, and instituting programs and benevolence. His prosperous tenure was presumably a tribute to the harmonious working relationship between former Confederate and Union supporters.

Between the Civil War and World War I, Second Church concentrated on establishing churches and missions in Knoxville and supporting benevolence programs. It also contributed heavily to mountain schools in Sevier and Cocke Counties and to a hospital in China.

In 1905 commercial interests desired the site of Second Church on Prince Street. Thereupon, Second Church sold its church for a very large portion of the cost of erecting a larger and beautiful stone Gothic building on the site of the present Knox County Library. The building was dedicated in 1907 during the fifteen-year ministry of the Rev. Robert Bachman, a younger brother of the Rev. Nathan Bachman. The present tower bells were memorial gifts in the new church.

Between 1912 and 1921, Second Church was served by Dr. Herbert Smith and Dr. Roy Vale, both of whom later were elected Moderator of the General Assembly.

Dr. Clifford Barbour holds the longest tenure as pastor of Second Church, from 1928 to 1951. He served as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1949. Under his profound preaching, the membership of the congregation nearly doubled. At the conclusion of his tenure, it was apparent that the church building and its location were inadequate for the future ministry of Second Church. It was under the threat of death by slow strangulation.

In 1952 the congregation called Dr. Joseph Copeland as pastor with the expectation of building a new metropolitan church on the near west side. The

promotional effort generated a protracted and very bitter dispute. The final congregational vote in 1954 to approve purchase of the lot on Kingston Pike and erection of the building thereon was 306 to 292. The move to the new (and current) church building occurred in 1957.

The current church sanctuary is replete with beautiful artistic symbols and windows portraying the Bible, church history, and the glorification of the divine/human nature of Jesus Christ. The chancel window, given in honor of Dr. Joseph and Glenda Copeland, exalts the Old and New Testaments in which the crucifixion, the resurrection, and ascension are the climactic events.

The Session responded to the civil rights movement of the 1960's under the leadership of Dr. John Page by declaring itself to be an open membership congregation and by endorsing an open admission policy for local hospitals. Dr. W. Edmund Carver served as pastor from 1976 to 1996. Under his leadership, the congregation between 1992 and 1995 remodeled and modernized the rear of the original Kingston Pike campus, including the addition of Hudson Hall, a multi-purpose gymnasium/large meeting room, a new atrium office entrance and staff offices, a new kitchen, and new classrooms. This enlarged facility has enhanced Second Church's ministry to a host of religious and civic organizations.

Following Dr. Carver's retirement, the congregation called Dr. Arnold B. Lovell in 1997, and he served as senior pastor through 2007. Dr. Lovell conducted a tour of the Holy Land for several Second Church members in 2000. During Dr. Lovell's tenure, Second Church continued to develop new ministries and improve existing ones, including the operation of a highly rated daycare/early learning center available to the general public, frequent work trips for youth and adults to both stateside and international locations, the maintenance of an excellent library, and on-going close relations with the University of Tennessee and the Presbyterian Shannondale Retirement Center.

In early 2009, after a two year search during the very able interim leadership of Reverend William Waterstradt, the church called its current senior pastor. Reverend Bryan Wilson joined Second on April 1, 2009, relocating his family to Knoxville from Grace Presbyterian in Houston, Texas. Bringing a renewed spirit and youthful enthusiasm, Reverend Wilson is poised to expand Second Presbyterian's role in the community as a church for the city and beyond. As Second approaches 200 years of serving its members and the community through God's gifts, great things are expected -- Gathering, Glorifying, Growing and Giving -- on into the 21st century.