

Blaze

From The Flint

March

2016

All Saints Presbyterian Church Midland, GA

Each month, Blaze will highlight a member of Flint River Presbytery in the hope that a greater sense of community will assist all of us in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This month we highlight All Saints Presbyterian Church of Midland, GA.

In 1985, the Presbytery of Southwest Georgia (now known as Flint River Presbytery) purchased five acres of land on Beaver Run Road in Midland, Georgia for a new Presbyterian church. In March of 1986, the Presbytery called Rev. Dr. William R. Conine, Jr. to be the minister for the new church. The churches of Columbus and their pastors pledged their support for the new congregation.

Rev. Dr. Conine who came from First Presbyterian of Americus, was joined by a number of members from First Presbyterian of Columbus who came to get the church started. Included among these members were Jean and Bill Clemmons. Jean is the editor of the *Blaze*. They became charter members, along with their young daughter, Jill.

On June 29, 1986, the first worship service was held at the Three Lakes Lodge on Gray Rock Road which was an old hunting lodge in the woods of Midland that belonged to the late Barnett Woodruff, who was a member of First Columbus. The lodge had no electricity and no running water, so it was a wee bit rustic but, nonetheless, said to possess a bit of atmosphere being lit by candles and warmed by a huge fireplace in the winter. Later, services were held at the United Methodist Family Life Center on Milgen Road. On June 28, 1987, a groundbreaking service was



held at 7170 Beaver Run Road for construction of the building which we now occupy. The first service was held in the new sanctuary on January 17, 1988.

On May 14, 1988, in a meeting of Flint River Presbytery, the charter for All Saints church was received and approved. A worship/dedication service was held at Edgewood Presbyterian Church in Columbus. Thus, All Saints became a member church of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Subsequent installed pastors include Rev. Dan Graham, now retired, and our



current pastor, Rev. Dr. Leanne Simmons. Sadly, Rev. Dr. Conine died this past autumn after a long illness with cancer.

*Our motto is
"All Saints.... All Welcome"*

So far, All Saints has never grown much above 100 members, and the membership has often dipped perilously below that.

There has been more than one time when members thought they might have to close. But somehow, All Saints has hung on. Just when the days have seemed darkest God has found a way for the church to continue.

So what is the nature of All Saints? You might get as many different answers as we have members, but there are some distinctive qualities that a number of us might mention.

- **We are a "family" church with a difference.**

Unlike most small and many large churches, few in our congregation have been here a long time. Fully two-thirds have been attending All Saints for four years or less. Most of us do not attend All Saints because we grew up here or have deep roots in the community around us. We have a few "cradle Presbyterians," but none who grew up at All Saints. So those of us who are here, made a deliberate choice to become part of this church community, and while we may not have known each other all that long, there is nonetheless a strong sense of

family and connection to one another.

- **We are fully inclusive and proud of it.**

Our motto is "All Saints....All Welcome" and we mean it. We have a diverse congregation that includes African-Americans, Asians, Caucasians, Hispanics, LGBT people, people with disabilities, military families, college students, young professionals, retirees, stay-at-home moms, empty nesters, white collars, blue collars, and no collars at all. All are not just welcome, but embraced. All are encouraged to use whatever gifts for service, leadership, and caregiving they possess. We are a family that cherishes everyone equally.

- **We are grateful and proud to be a part of Flint River Presbytery, and we believe in serving it as well as our own church.**

In 2015, ten of our 50+ members served the presbytery in one way or another either serving on committees or in individual roles. Several others have served in some capacity in the past. In addition, one of our members (Matthew Cowell) is currently serving his second year as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) and another (Sam Shields) is about to become an Inquirer in FRP with plans to enroll in a seminary this fall. This level of presbytery participation is part of our DNA, and is encouraged by our pastor, our session, and the congregation at large. By the same token, we encourage our pastor to be active in the presbytery and do not begrudge her the time it takes to do so. We appreciate the many ways Flint River Presbytery has aided All Saints, and All Saints seeks to return the favor.

- **We have our disagreements, but we get over it.**

In any group of people, including and perhaps especially families, there will be occasional conflicts or disagreements, but we treat each other with respect and forgive one another's obstinacies, peculiarities, and missteps. After all, that is what God calls us to do-- love one another--and what makes us healthy as a church and as individuals.

So that is what we are like, but what do we DO? Some of the things in which our members have been involved are:

- ◆ enthusiastic participation both years in the Columbus Cluster "Stop Hunger Now" event on World Communion Sunday
- ◆ participation by eight of our members on presbytery mission trips to Guatemala

- ◆ providing lunch at the Abbey campus ministry three times a year to over 100 students each time
- ◆ holding a Pre-Thanksgiving "casserole sale" fundraiser in 2015 netting \$3400
- ◆ partnering with First Columbus in hosting Valley Interfaith Promise (VIP), providing meals to homeless families four to five times per year
- ◆ participating, in the summer and fall of 2015, in a class on evangelism with members of Morningside Presbyterian Church led by our two pastors, Stephanie Boaz and Leanne Simmons
- ◆ teaching and attending Sunday School classes for both children and adults, Bible studies, support groups of various stripes, and a faith-in-practice class for kids. Some are led by laity and some by our pastor. We are always looking for new ways to stretch our minds and strengthen our faith.
- ◆ singing in a small but dedicated choir led by member and professional music teacher, Mark Montgomery. Our organist, Gary Nearhoof, has been with us almost since our beginning, and has rarely missed a Sunday.
- ◆ participating in and preparing for a monthly potluck, most often after Sunday worship and other annual fellowship events to include a fish fry at the home of members, Sherrill and Mike Smith, a chili cookoff in October, caroling at the homes of homebound members. Coming next is a pancake breakfast Easter morning.
- ◆ monthly "Lunch Bunch" gatherings in local restaurants for the women of the church where we have anywhere from eight to eighteen in attendance
- ◆ volunteering with Columbus Christian Preschool which is housed in our church and fills our classrooms, hallways, and playground with adorable children Monday through Friday mornings. CCP is led by Director Tammy Watts, who for many years led the preschool at St. Luke Methodist in Columbus. This is their fourth year at All Saints and they are operating at capacity. It is a great partnership, and our pastor, Leanne Simmons, leads chapel for them on Wednesday mornings.
- ◆ And lots more! It's a busy church.