

A Brief History of First Presbyterian Church of Mt Holly, NJ

From 1767-76 John Brainerd led Presbyterian worship in Mount Holly (then called Bridgetown). Brainerd left the area during the Revolutionary War. Shortly thereafter the Rev. John Plotts led Presbyterian worship in an upper floor of his academy for young men (1783-1839). On October 26, 1839 a committee working under the Presbytery of Philadelphia met with people interested in forming a congregation. The next day the congregation was declared to be duly organized. When a Presbytery was formed in New Jersey, the church moved its membership there, eventually becoming part of the Monmouth Presbytery in 1859. FPCMH was an active member of the Monmouth Presbytery of the PCUSA for 154 years until—after two years of prayer, study and discernment—First Presbyterian Church was released from the Presbytery and, on November 1, 2013, received into the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). We are a part of the ECO Presbytery of the Northeast.

On December 17, 1845 the first church building was dedicated. On the same day the Presbytery of West Jersey ordained Samuel Miller, Jr. in the new sanctuary. Then in 1887 the first building was razed and the current sanctuary was built. (Unfortunately the underground river was not considered problematic even though it is located directly below the building.) In 1925 the Brainerd Building, consisting of Sunday school rooms and a gymnasium was dedicated. Then in 1957 the Christian Education Building (where the current entrance, offices and classrooms are) was dedicated. In 1988 the Extension at 35 Garden Street (formerly First Baptist Church of Mount Holly) was purchased and used for a contemporary service, community luncheon and youth ministries until it was sold to the Church of God/ Iglesia de Dios in 2008.

Throughout its History FPCMH has been known for at least two very significant things: we are evangelical and we serve those in need. This was for many years a rare combination. FPCMH has always held tightly to an orthodox Christian belief, stressing Evangelical theology and a high view of scripture. The Bible was considered to be the Word of God. Scripture was read, taught and lived out to bring glory to Jesus. This was done while still participating in the life and mission of Monmouth Presbytery. FPCMH has also been well known for serving in and caring for the community. The church has created a number of outreach ministries in the community from a nursing home, to a caring center, the community luncheon, the Well counseling center, the Burlington Center Mall Ministry, Homes of Hope and others. When the residents of the Mt. Holly Gardens were being forced to undersell their homes so the area could be gentrified, FPCMH spoke out for justice in the process and stood in solidarity with the residents and other churches. The case was finally settled just before it was to be heard by the Supreme Court.