

*A Brief History of Knox Presbyterian Church
Pasadena, California (1895-2013)*

In 1895 after one failed attempt at organizing a United Presbyterian Church in Pasadena, a petition was brought before the Presbytery of Los Angeles to establish a congregation in Pasadena again. At that meeting the petition was granted. Dr. E.S. McKitrick was appointed as the pastor for the congregation with 28 charter members. This small church community purchased property on the northeast corner of Colorado Boulevard and Los Robles Avenue. By 1897, construction was completed on a 650-seat sanctuary with classrooms.

Dr. McKitrick resigned after six and a half years as pastor due to health concerns. However, he continued to serve as superintendent of the church school until 1939. In Dr. McKitrick's will he left a bequest to the church to be used for church expenses. This bequest was used to purchase the chancel cross at the Hill Avenue church as a tribute to the church's founding pastor.

The early years of the church were marked by construction and financial challenges. The Los Robles building's interior was completed in 1903. In 1909 with a church membership of 89 the congregation voted to become self-supporting. Since the church's founding it had been supported by the Board of Church Extension of the United Presbyterian Church. Then, in 1910 the church paid off its debts, and in 1911, the church celebrated ending the year with a balanced budget instead of a deficit.

By 1925 church membership had risen to 189 with 165 in the church school. By that time the church had been incorporated as the First United Presbyterian Church of Pasadena, California (May, 1915). The church had also been served by six pastors and gone for almost a year without a pastor. The church would be without a pastor for eleven months again at the end of 1923. In its 118 year history Knox has been served by 28 pastors and interim pastors. The commitment of the church's lay leaders and volunteers to the serving the church is demonstrated by the church's perseverance during difficult times. This perseverance was demonstrated again in the early 2000s when a small group of faithful members kept the church running despite pressure to shut the church down.

The property at Los Robles and Colorado was desirable to commercial developers since 1915. At first the congregation refused to sell. They wanted to be a part of the city. Their most notable involvement was being one of the first organizations to erect viewing stands for the New Year's Parade (the Rose Parade). Finally in September 1923, the congregation voted to sell. They gave up possession in July 1924 and held services at the Shakespeare Club at 230 S. Los Robles for a year until the church school area of the new building was completed.

The church purchased property at 219 S. Lake Avenue. The building committee chose the architectural firm of Marston, Van Pelt, and Maybury. This firm was one of the most prestigious architectural firms in Pasadena at the time. The firm also designed Westminster Presbyterian Church, Pasadena. The church was designed in the French Gothic style with a 500-seat sanctuary and an assembly hall. The theater organ that had been installed in the Los Robles sanctuary in 1914 was rebuilt in the Lake sanctuary. (This organ was later moved and rebuilt again in the Hill sanctuary.) The Lake sanctuary was dedicated in October 1925.

By 1928 the membership had increased to 300. Unfortunately, in 1929, the church became divided over the calling of Rev. Milo Jamison as pastor. As one Knox historian reports, " the feelings in the church ran high". He ended his ministry in October. The minutes indicated that 206 people left the church leaving 110.

The next years were difficult as Rev. Dr. Rankin was tasked with rebuilding the church and taking it through the Great Depression. The church made it through with only one year in a deficit. In 1936, it was reported that the church had the largest average percentage attendance at Sunday school in the presbytery and the largest average per member giving to missions. Dr. Rankin ended his pastorate in 1937 at the age of 82.

By 1944 the church membership had grown to 220 members. The church had also gained a manse located at 735 S. El Molino. The manse was purchased from a gift given by Mr. Samuel Robinson. Mr. Robinson was the head of a chain of grocery stores on the East Coast. He had a winter home in Pasadena and attended the church. One day a member of the congregation gave Mr. Robinson a ride to his home. Mr. Robinson asked what the church needed and the member said a manse. The manse was sold in 1964.

In 1953 Rev. Ralph Grove became pastor. Rev. Grove served the longest pastorate in Knox's history. He also led the church through its third move to the Hill Avenue location. Another change was on the horizon for the church as the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and the United Presbyterian Church united. Because Pasadena Presbyterian Church had been organized prior to our organization, the congregation had to decide on a new name. After deliberations and a vote the name was changed in 1958 from The First United Presbyterian Church, Pasadena to Knox United Presbyterian Church.

Just as commercial developers had courted the church for its property in 1923, they courted it again in 1959. The congregation refused the first offer by a tie vote in a congregational meeting. After much negotiation and the threat of having office buildings on three sides of the church, the church decided to sell. They purchased new property at the corner of Hill Avenue and Del Mar Boulevard along with the house at 195 S. Hill Avenue. Groundbreaking services were held on April 23, 1960. Mr. Culver Heaton was chosen as the architect of the new building. The new building project included a 300-seat sanctuary with a 30-seat choir, an office building, and a multipurpose room. The first floor of the house at 195 S. Hill was renovated to house the church school. Continuing the tradition of the Lake Ave building the teenagers in the church put together items to put in the cornerstone. These items included a version of the Knox history, an RSV Bible, the by-laws of the congregation, the roll of members, the 1960 Annual Report, pictures, and a few other documents about the church.

The first services were held in the new sanctuary on December 24, 1961. The congregation entered the main doors under the "Christ of the Invitation"—a mosaic sculpture rendered by Clifford Nelson—and felt a sense of continuity on seeing the stained-glass medallions along the north side of the sanctuary that had been saved from the windows of the Lake Avenue building. Church members Douglas Callander and J. Balph McNary carved the communion table. They also carved the main doors leading from the narthex to the sanctuary.

In the decade after the move to Hill Avenue Knox focused on providing fellowship and education experiences to every age group. It was a time of growth in small groups. The high school group doubled in size and formed a boy's choir. The pastor Rev. Patten formed a college group. The Women's Association flourished. They cared for church members and organized missions' activities; they also started monthly prayer meetings, and hosted receptions for weddings at the church.

In 1965, the church welcomed Celia Christopher as the church organist. Mrs. Christopher would hold that position until 2007 serving for forty-two years. In 1967, the Knox U.P. Blood bank was formed and continued to serve the Pasadena

community for the next thirteen years. In 1968, Knox began to host the Pasadena Community College Parent Education class. This class continued to meet at Knox in one form or another until budget cuts at PCC ended its tenure at Knox in 2011.

In the 1970s, Knox became a more socially conscious institution. The church focused its energies on its surrounding community. In the 1970s the demographics around the church were changing with the expansion of Caltech and the construction of apartments and condominiums in place of single-family housing. The number of families in the church declined. Trying to reach out to the college students that were moving into the area, the church established a young adult fellowship and a Caltech ministry. The church also created a coffee-house in the Northside House called the Burning Bush. It was a gathering spot on Friday and Saturday nights. It closed in 1972 after two years.

The deacons were established in 1973. Each deacon cared for a parish, which contained nine to ten church families. The deacons have continued that service today.

The 1970s also brought the beginning of Knox's tradition of offering internships to Fuller students. These interns have been an integral part of the ministries at Knox providing extra hands for the ministries and filling in during times between pastors.

1981 brought the first increase in membership since 1967 reaching 125 and attendance at the Sunday services began to increase. The church, which had been discouraged by the declines in the 1970s and the changes in the surrounding community had a sense of optimism for the future. Knox noted that it was becoming a community with more transient members with students, visiting faculty, and missionaries on furlough.

The 1980s brought a renewed energy to small groups and missions. For two years, Knox had a sister church in Escatepec, Mexico. The church also became to host mission fairs where missionaries who had attended Knox and were home for a visit would share about their work abroad. In 1987 Rev. Dr. Marguerite Shuster became the first female pastor of Knox. She brought more adult education opportunities to Knox including a mid-week Bible study at 6:30 am and a New Testament Greek class on Monday nights. Also during her pastorate the committee organization was changed and the Women's Association, which had been an integral part of the Knox community for so many years, had declined due to its aging membership and gave up many of its responsibilities to other groups. Dr. Shuster left Knox in 1992 to take a faculty position at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The 1990s were marked by decline for Knox. The church had several interim pastors and a pastorate that lasted for only three months. The church continued to struggle finding a pastor until they called Rev. Jane Newstead as a designated pastor in 2001. By 2001 the church's membership had declined considerably and Sunday morning attendance was as few of 20 people.

In 2004 Knox welcomed twelve new members, which marked the beginning of a new chapter in Knox's history. After a period of decline the church began to grow. These new members were families with young children. They partnered with the faithful members of the church to bring new life to the church. One of these new members was Pam King, who had served as an intern in 1997 with Rev. Edwards. In 2005, Rev. Newstead's designated pastor term came to an end and a pastoral nominating committee was formed. During this time Rev. Dan Newhall took over the preaching responsibilities until the new pastor could be called.

In 2007 the congregation voted to call Rev. Matthew Colwell as the designated pastor for four years. In 2011 Rev. Dr. Colwell ended his period as designated pastor (a time limited call) and now serves as pastor without a limited term. In the five years since his call, Knox's membership has increased to 120 members with an average Sunday attendance of 210. Knox has also grown its staff from one pastor, an office administrator, and an organist

to include a Director of Worship Arts and Youth Ministries, a Director of Children's Ministries, a custodian, and a bookkeeper. Knox also continues its tradition of Fuller interns.

This period of time has also include efforts to care for our facilities and grounds with renovations to the Atrium and the Northside House along with a major lawn renovation which included installing a new sprinkler system. A new sound system was installed in the Sanctuary and has been a work in progress as new technology including a new screen and new wireless receivers have been installed. The work to the facilities and lawn has been championed by our stewardship and worship committees, which are now full committees again after being dissolved in the early 2000s.

Knox has expanded its committees to include a separate Christian Education committee with three subcommittees for children, youth, and adults, and a separate committee for Congregational Life. The increase in committees is a result of an increase in Knox's programs. In 2007 Knox established a relationship with La Casa De Esperanza, an orphanage in Tijuana. Since then the church has taken at least one trip a year to the orphanage to spend a day helping with projects and spending time with the children. In 2009, Knox took its first All-Church Retreat. Since 2007, Knox has been blessed with choirs led by Fred Davison and Jill Colwell. These special music groups also led to the establishment of a regular Knox band when Heather Thomsen began as intern and later Director of Worship Arts. The children's ministries, which have continued to grow, now reach over 90 children. In 2012 after a few years of a fledgling group, Knox established a youth group led by a director of youth and an intern. Knox also established children's programing on Wednesday nights and a children's choir.

Despite the many changes that have happened in recent years, Knox's character remains the same. Knox is still a church known for its friendly and hard-working members.