

Former Pastors of Our Church
Rev. John E. Johnson
(Served 1955 to 1967)



The Reverend Dr. John Edward Johnson, D. D., or “Dr. Johnny” answered the call, replacing Rev. Emurian, on January 1, 1955. He was born in Dubuque, Iowa on May 2, 1899, and grew up in St. Louis. His father was a Presbyterian Pastor. Rev. Johnson served 30 years in the Chaplain Corps of the Navy, eventually earning the rank of Captain. He then worked briefly at the Norfolk Presbytery (now called Presbytery of Eastern Virginia) before coming to Bayside. He married the former Miss Lila M. Thomas. They had three children: Carolyn, Thomas, and Merwyn.

During Rev. Johnson’s tenure at Bayside, the church purchased the house next to the old church building (on Bradford/Rutherford Road) to be used for our ever-expanding Sunday School purposes. Under his leadership membership grew from approximately 150 to 490, and over that time 749 new members were added to Bayside’s rolls. He was our first Pastor to occupy our Manse – in Lakeview at 101 Parson’s Lane.

Probably Rev. Johnson’s most significant contribution to Bayside was to preside

over the building our new church (Vision II) and moving our congregation to its present location on the corner of Independence Boulevard and Ewell Road. This effort began as early as June 28, 1959 when the Norfolk Presbytery was informed of the church's desire to secure a building site on Shore Drive and Bayville Road (in Baylake Pines). The site was owned by the Presbytery. However, the Presbytery then purchased a 5-acre site on the corner of Ewell Road and Bayside Road (i.e., later named Independence Boulevard), and our church considered this site to be closer to the population we served, which at the time was Thoroughgood and Lakeview Shores. Bayside Road was also considered "conspicuous and well-traveled." It was said at the time that "A church constructed on this site would be clearly seen over a wide countryside." So, on October 8, 1961 action was taken by our church to exchange the site on Shore Drive with the site on Ewell. Groundbreaking was August 18, 1963, and the new building dedicated July 12, 1964.

During his time at our pulpit, Rev. and Mrs. Johnson's two sons were ordained (August 23, 1964), and thereafter have supplied our pulpit from time to time.

Mrs. Lila Johnson was very active in the church as well. She directed two choirs for ten years, assisted in making choir robes. She assisted and sometimes moderated discussion in Adult Sunday School; frequently led the regular Bible study for the Women of the Church; and worked with the youth group and organized the first Pioneer group. She served as Chairman of World Missions in the Women of the Church, attended Massanetta as a delegate in 1959. She was Church Historian and Women of the Church Historian. She was presented an Honorary Life Membership in the Women of the Church, Presbyterian Church, U.S. on September 21, 1971.

Rev. Johnson retired January 31, 1967 after 12 ½ years of serving Bayside. He resided in Virginia Beach at 1213 Five Forks Road, interestingly just across the street from the Manse Bayside owned starting in 1968. One of his departing gifts from the congregation was a trash can – representing the Pastor's efforts of removing the trash from the church when it accumulated, and of trying to remove accumulations of trash from people's minds.

Rev. Johnson was elected Pastor Emeritus on July 27, 1969.

Rev. Johnson died November 17, 1998. His last years were spent living with his daughter Carolyn in Birmingham, Alabama. His wife, Lila had died the previous May. In his obituary, the Johnson family suggested that in lieu of flowers, memorials could be made to Bayside Presbyterian Church Vision III.

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