Bayside Presbyterian celebrates 50 years of growth

BY IRENE BOWERS
CORRESPONDENT

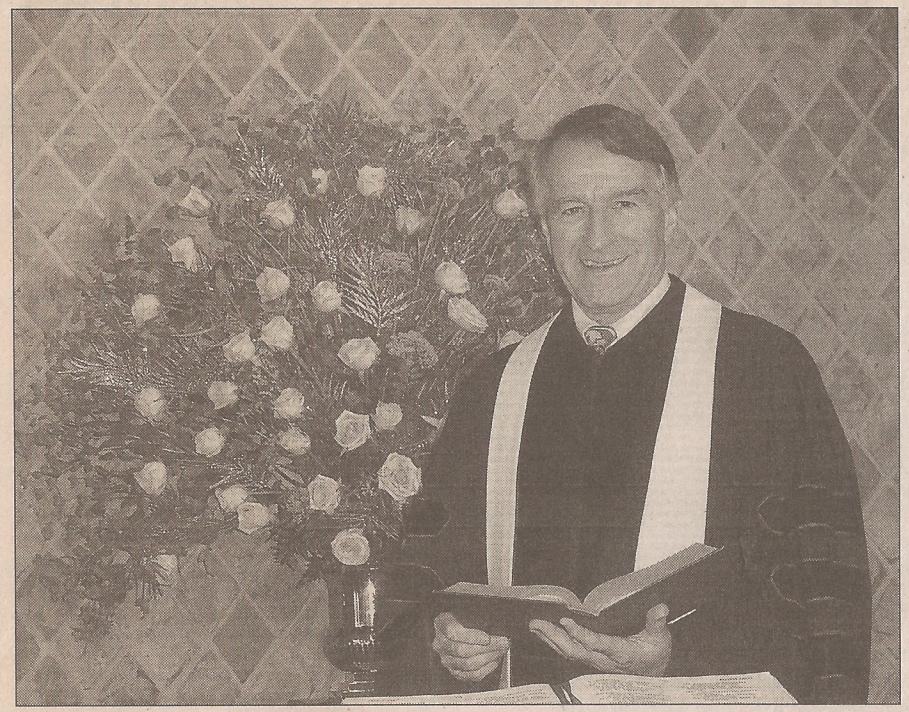
Freshly turned 50, Bayside Presbyterian Church has plenty to celebrate.

A building program that doubled church capacity has been completed and paid for ahead of schedule. Church membership is healthy and growing. The pastor, the Rev. Richard J. Keever, has put in 21 years of service. Bayside Presbyterian is sound in structure and spirit.

"Our purpose is to increase the love of God and neighbor," said Keever, who presided over 50th-anniversary celebrations Oct. 25 through 28.

"This is a pilgrimage," he said. "We have not arrived but are faithfully moving into the 21st century, by the grace of God."

Keever, who was born in Lincolnton, N.C., came to Bayside Presbyterian in 1982 by way of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Union Theological Seminary in Richmond and Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Conn. Before moving to Virginia Beach, he served in Lynchburg and Richmond.



The Rev. Richard J. Keever, pastor at Bayside Presbyterian Church, has overseen the doubling of the church's plant due to rising attendance in his 21 years there.

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His wife, Evelyn Gravesen Keever, is a United Methodist minister and chaplain of pastoral care at Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters in Norfolk. The Keevers have two sons, Daniel Keever of Virginia Beach and Andrew Keever, who lives in North Carolina with his wife, Meg, and infant son, Andrew Thomas.

Richard Keever was called to Bayside Presbyterian in 1981, after the death of its previous pastor, the Rev. Fletcher Hutchinson.

Keever is only the third pastor at the church since it began as an outpost mission for East Ocean View Presbyterian in 1948. The original structure at Bradford and Rutherford roads was chartered into the Norfolk Presbytery in 1953, then moved to its current location at Ewell and Independence roads in 1964, under the ministry of the Rev. John Johnson. From a founding charter of 77 members, church membership has grown to 1,250. Since 1988, it has followed the ministry of associate pastor, the Rev. William J. Lowrance.

Bob Baker, clerk of the session, said that Bayside Presbyterian has taken root and expanded into the community through worship, service, education and fellowship. "We have a preschool-through-kindergarten with 174 students," he said. "We open our hall to members of the community for Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, blood drives, voting, square dancing, youth groups, AA meetings."

Bayside Presbyterian operates a food pantry that last year distributed more than 8,500 meals to the community, said congregation member Helen Spore. In addition, there were 80 Thanksgiving baskets, more than 350 gifts for a Christmas wish list and angel tags, 100 Easter baskets, 600 meals at the Judeo-Christian Outreach Center, and clothing and school supplies distributed for needy children.

"What good is a church if it is a museum?" said Keever. "We are all united in the journey of the cross," he said.