

RPC

70th Anniversary

# 1956–1966 | Rooted in a Growing Community

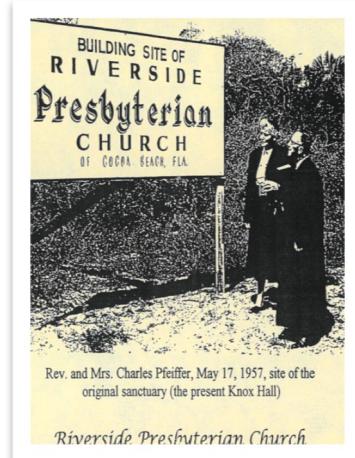
## Our Community

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Riverside Presbyterian Church was born alongside the rapid growth of Cocoa Beach during the dawn of the Space Age. The city transformed quickly: the Starlite Motel opened in 1956 as the first motel, Cape Canaveral Hospital construction began in 1957, schools opened to serve a booming population, and businesses followed as families poured into the area. The excitement of the Space Race defined the era. On May 6, 1961, crowds gathered to witness Alan Shepard's historic Freedom 7 launch, followed in 1962 by more than 75,000 people watching John Glenn orbit the Earth aboard Friendship 7. Longtime member Rusty Fischer recalled businesses throughout Brevard County hanging banners wishing "God Speed" to the astronauts. It was a time of shared hope, energy, and faith in the future—an environment in which Riverside took root.



## Our Church

Riverside Presbyterian Church unofficially began on January 23, 1956, when 18 women met at the home of Helen Trabue to form Women's Circle #8 of Rockledge Presbyterian Church. They soon learned of plans to establish a new church in Cocoa Beach and committed to supporting that mission. Rev. Charles W. Pfeiffer led the first worship service on April 29, 1956, at St. David's Episcopal Church. Regular worship began June 3, and by July the congregation voted to purchase land on A-1-A for \$16,000. On October 7, 1956, Riverside Presbyterian Church was formally organized with 78 charter members. Groundbreaking for Knox Hall took place in March 1957, with the first service held there that June. Rev. Pfeiffer was installed as pastor in 1960 and served until 1964. During this decade, Riverside grew steadily—launching the *Down By the Riverside* newsletter, approving plans for a new sanctuary, and celebrating the first worship service in that space on Palm Sunday 1964. By then, membership had grown to 307. In 1965, the first Board of Deacons was established, strengthening the church's ministry and leadership.



## Our People

Joe Morgan was ordained as a deacon at Riverside, Joe also served as Mayor of Cocoa Beach and Chairman of the Brevard County Historical Commission. He exemplified Riverside's deep connection to the community. Arriving in Cocoa Beach in 1960, he describes the early days: "In the early 60s we had lots of children here in Cocoa Beach. All our churches were packed with children. The first doctor came to Cocoa Beach in the late '50s, Dr. Joe Von Thron. Where you go into Slow & Low now, that was his office. Around that time, I met Gus Edwards. Cocoa Beach was incorporated in 1925, and Gus was the first Mayor. At the time I met him, I think he was in his early 80s. He came down to give the Presbyterian Church \$1000." Joe's memorial service was held at Riverside in 2013, a fitting tribute to a life of service. From these early years, Riverside Presbyterian Church became a place of worship, learning, and serving community—faithfully planted and growing alongside Cocoa Beach.

