

July 22, 2018

All Our Sisters and Brothers in Christ  
First Presbyterian Church  
224 East Mobile Street  
Florence, Alabama 35630

Dear Friends and Loved Ones,

On this day, July 22, 2018, you will be celebrating your 200<sup>th</sup> birthday as the "Mother Church" of Florence, AL., located right there, virtually in that same location at East Mobile and Seminary. Words escape me (Richard) to capture how truly wonderful, amazing and momentous this day is! My mind immediately goes to all those Saints who have gone before us, most long forgotten by us, but not by God, having given scores of years, serving faithfully and dilligently in the Florence Vineyard. I think of all the memorial services I conducted when I served among you, and I continue stalwart in my belief in the goodness and faithfulness of God, who in Jesus Christ has most clearly revealed the greatest and deepest of all truths ... though we die, yet shall we live, following Jesus into the resurrection to eternal life. How glorious that day of resurrection will be!! But even now, with that knowledge and faith, as we live each day God is blessing us with, as the old hymn says, a foretaste of glory divine! Look for it, and you will see it!

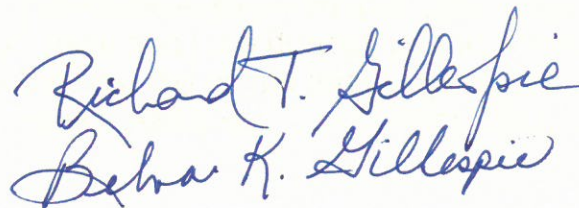
Belva and I regret we are not physically present with you to celebrate this fabulous event. Today is my first day serving a new call as the Interim Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Moultrie, GA. Belle and I are grateful for this opportunity to continue to serve and stay active. I have never believed that Jesus calls us, all of us, to come and follow in faith, only to one day retire from that endeavor. I used to have an old coffee cup with this written on it: "Old ministers never retire, they just go out to pastor!" I never dreamed that one day that would define me!

Please know that you are in our thoughts and our prayers on this great occasion. This is a day to remember the past, to celebrate today, to anticipate the future, rejoicing and giving thanks for all things and for God's goodness. God has been with us all along the way, and God will be with us in all the days ahead, sustaining us, guiding us, protecting our lives and the life of this grand old church we love.

With gratitude and deep affection, it was our joy to live with you, to know you and to work among you for seven years. Together, we sought to be faithful in our call to follow Jesus and to carry on the great traditions of First Presbyterian Florence in serving Florence and the people of North Alabama. We will pray for you as you continue in those great traditions. May there be another 200 years! In the meantime, remember us, an extension of yourselves, taking up a new adventure, a new mission among the saints in Moultrie, Georgia.

God bless and keep you always!

Richard and Belva Gillespie



Richard T. Gillespie  
Belva K. Gillespie