

# The History of Providence



Providence Early Childhood Est. 1973 - Providence Christian School Est. 1995

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## The Beginning

At a stated First Church session meeting on April 16, 1973, a motion was made to establish a nursery school for three and four year olds. The motion was approved, and thus began a program which has developed into the thriving educational ministry that we know today, serving families from all over our community. The preschool opened in the fall of 1973. Preschool directors and leadership in early years included Liz Caro, Sandi Bilbee, Dot Brown, and Marion Loftin.

A childcare program was approved in 1984, and opened in January of 1985, to function as a support to the childcare needs of the preschool teachers, and as an outreach to the church and community needs for full time childcare.

There was great excitement in 1992 when a groundbreaking took place for a building to house the preschool ministry, as growing enrollment--a wonderful problem--had created a pressing need. The new building allowed preschool classrooms to relocate, thereby leaving much-needed space in the main church building for the church nursery programs and childcare program. Preschool classes relocated to the new facility in the fall of 1992 under the leadership of Director Libby Lee. In 1996, the children's programs of First Presbyterian Church had grown so that it became desirable to hire separate directors for the various ministries. The First Presbyterian Children's Ministry was placed under the direction of Lesa Willard to oversee the various church-related children's ministries, along with the Mother's Morning Out ministry.

A separate board was designated as the First Presbyterian Early Childhood Community Ministries to oversee the Preschool and Childcare programs. After having taught in the preschool program for eight years and at Providence Christian School in its inaugural year, Bonnie Wright returned to the preschool as director in the summer of 1996.

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## **The Beginning (Continued)**

Over time, the church began to prayerfully consider a desire expressed by many preschool families: to have school for older students which combined the biblical worldview and academic excellence their children experienced during the preschool years. Through many blessing God provided and made this desire a reality.

## **The Meadow Wood Blessing**

One of the most significant Providence blessings centers around how the school came to be located at Camp Meadow Wood. The story began nearly forty years ago when Dothan businessman Charles Woods deeded a large piece of property on Murphy Mill Road to the local Girl Scouts. For decades, the front 15 acres remained a terraced field as the back portion of the property was developed into a well-equipped camp which hosted overnight and daytime outings for scouting groups. After many years, "Camp Meadow Wood" reverted back to Mr. Woods.

Woods then contacted his long-time friend and television station associate, Ann Varnum. As a result of the call, Ann and her husband, Jerome, agreed to accept the responsibility of setting up a not-for-profit corporation to oversee the use of the former camp. First Presbyterian Church members Carl Jones, and his wife, Melinda, were asked by the Varnums to serve on the new board. Mr. Jones would later serve on the founding board of Providence Christian School.

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## Providence Christian School Beginning

Prompted by God's leading and the enthusiasm of current and former First Presbyterian Preschool families, the session of First Presbyterian Church made the decision in 1995 to start a classical, Christian School. However, the church felt that due to nearly full use of its own facility, the school needed to be located on other property. Since a fundamental principle of the school was that the families involved would give primary leadership to providing school funding, it seemed that a fall 1995 start-up would be unlikely. The newly-formed school board voted in April to establish July 1 as the deadline for both hiring an administrator and for determining the school's location.

In late April the Meadow Wood board offered Providence the use of the front 15 acres of land for \$1 per year for 99 years. A formal agreement was drawn up with Meadow Wood, Mr. Woods, the First Presbyterian Church Session, and the Providence School Board all agreeing to the proposal. Significant problems remained, however. No water or sewerage existed. There were no buildings and no long range plan on how to best use the 15 acres.

In the course of a few weeks, God brought a very special team together. The group included a civil engineer, a builder, and a board member with the time and ability to oversee the project. The late George Gaut played a crucial role in getting the City of Dothan to move up its 1996 plans to run water to the point on Murphy Mill Road that would service the school. An anonymous donor provided the funds for a waste disposal system that has the ability to grow with the school for years to come. Other money was raised to pay for the buildings, the driveway, electrical hook-ups, and other related needs. A budget providing for a 3 year loan became feasible.

While the blessings of that summer are too numerous to describe in this brief overview, a few are worth noting: In May, a couple with no children or grandchildren in the school gave approximately \$29,000 to be used to endow a scholarship fund.

Soli Deo Gloria

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## **Providence Christian School Blessing (Continued)**

In July, Alfred Saliba Homes approached the Meadow Wood Board about being annexed into the city. The proposed annexation would help Saliba get other property into the city limits. In return for Meadow Wood's help, Saliba agreed to pay for one half the cost of a nearly \$30,000 turn lane. An anonymous donor contributed another fourth of the cost.

The result was that in August of 1995, Providence Christian School opened with 56 students. Today, PCS serves more than 700 students and employs a staff of more than 80. Our campus has grown to include numerous academic buildings and co-curricular facilities. Our multi-purpose gymnasium and academic building was completed in 2003, and our grammar school building, including two state-of-the-art libraries, was opened in 2007. Our original core campus, known as the cottages, still houses our Logic School and is a hub of campus activity.

In 2021, Providence was able to purchase the 92 acres adjacent to the Meadow Wood Campus, expanding our campus to over 130 acres.

## **God's Continued Providence**

In the early years of the life of PCS, the blessings continued: Trinity Presbyterian Church of Dothan voted to close their church on South Oates Street and give their property to Providence. As the first school to offer Christian education to area families in 1959, Trinity's generosity enabled them to re-invest a valuable asset in a way that continues to make this type of education available locally.

The School has been blessed with a "widow's mite" account as well. A widow in the community, who loves the Lord and children, made monthly contributions from her social security-based income every month for almost a decade. She had no family enrolled in the school.

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## God's Continued Providence (Continued)

Providence Christian School is blessed with a facility that is literally a gift from God. He used people to bring it about, but in a way that prompts all involved to say “to God alone be the glory.” Our campus serves as a clear reminder of God’s faithfulness in often doing immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. PCS continues to grow in God’s blessings, as increasing student enrollment drives expansion of programs and facilities. We are thankful for the Lord's provision, and for so many families who have embraced the vision for classical, Christ-centered education in the Wiregrass.