



**Celebrating 75 Years 1946 - 2021**



**I AM  
CAMDEN  
NAZARENE**

You may know me as the building situated on 2276 Jefferson Davis Highway in Camden, South Carolina, but I am so much more than that. Yes, I am a place, but I am also a story. You see my brick and mortar, but I see people – people with hopes, dreams, and a desire

to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to their community. They are the living stones that the Apostle Peter said are being built as a “spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (I Peter 2:5a). What you see today is one chapter of a 75-year-long story, the story of a church – His Church – Camden Nazarene.

It started like this . . .

In 1946, three men stood together in Red Bank, South Carolina discussing their hopes of planting a new church in that town. They were Rev. A.E. Kelly, District Superintendent (DS) of the South Carolina District Church of the Nazarene, Rev. E. N. Gunter, and Rev. C. M. Kelly. Every direction seemed to be blocked in Red Bank, and as the men stood deliberating their next step, Rev. Gunter recounted his experience conducting a revival in Camden. A woman, Alma Rabon, received much spiritual help during these meetings held in a store building. Her heart was set on having a Nazarene church in her community. As Rev. Gunter finished his story, DS Kelly said, "We will go to Camden!" And with these words . . .

### *The Story Begins*

*Before there was a building, there was a tent!* In 1946, tent-meeting services were conducted by Rev. E. N. Gunter and Rev. C. M. Kelly. Following these services, the church was organized with four charter members: Alma Rabon, Doris Turbeville, and Mr. and Mrs. Grover Rush. Then Alma Rabon opened her home for services and the group met there until property was purchased on Rutledge Street. A tent was erected for services and plans for a "proper" building commenced.



Mrs. Alma Rabon



Mrs. Viola Boone

Soon the tent was replaced by an army barrack. Mrs. Rabon purchased the structure from Fort Jackson and donated it in memory of her deceased veteran son. A lay pastor, Marvin Kolb, was appointed to serve the fledgling congregation, which now included 17 official charter members. Viola Boone, one of the seventeen, still actively supports the church in prayer and spirit. In 1947, Rev. Paul Hocutt, a recent grad of Trevecca Nazarene College (now University), came to lead the congregation as they gradually increased in number. Rev. Hocutt was followed by Rev. J.D. Peacock and then Rev. J.L. Power during these early days.

### *Leap of Faith*

*From Rutledge Street to McCrae Road.* In a bold move, the church enters a new phase of growth by initiating plans to relocate from the downtown area to McCrae Road. Under the leadership of Rev. G.L. Scott, property was secured and construction began. The church building was finished and a parsonage was built during the next pastor's service, Rev. Thomas Child (1957-59).

Buildings were not the only thing growing on McCrae Road. From 1959 to 1978, as pastors Rev. Jasper Alsbrooks, Rev. R.T. McElveen, Rev. Barney Baggett, and Rev. T. W. Mitchell led, the church grew numerically and spiritually. Camden families found a welcoming place for their children and teens to learn Bible truth. Many adults, teens, and children came to the Lord and disciplined during this time.

### *Growing Pains*

*New growth, new problems.* Spiritual growth brought numerical growth. So now, the once ample church on McCrae Road was crowded! It was also in need of repair. With Rev. Harold Liner leading, the church again took a leap of faith, purchasing land on Highway One for a new building. The next pastor, Rev. Barry Gay, oversaw the building of the present structure which is now home to Camden Nazarene.

The project was challenging, but very doable with God’s enabling power. The building was erected by the people of the church and friends from the city of Camden and around the state. Many hours of labor and materials were donated, and companies provided building supplies at or below cost. Truly, the congregation could echo Samuel as “He then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer (which means “the stone of help”), for he said, ‘Up to this point the LORD has helped us!’” (1 Samuel 7:12, NLT)

### *A Community Church with a Fresh Vision*

*New building, fresh vision.* With a new building located on Camden’s main highway, the congregation was poised to seek new ways to reach their community for Christ. From 1993 to the present, pastors Rev. Greg Keller, Rev. Ronald M. Adams, Rev. Hoke Robinson, Rev. Scott Roberts, and Rev. David Snodgrass have cast the vision to reach the community in a variety of ways. In recent years associates, Rev. Scott Crandall, Rev. Brandon Watts, Rev. Amanda Watts, and Rev. James Bausum, have also filled vital roles.

Part of the new vision included rebranding the church from its official name Camden First Church of the Nazarene to Camden Nazarene. A logo was developed which included these words: **Gather, Grow, Go, Give.** These words encapsulate the spirit of the congregation to be a light and blessing to the city of Camden and beyond. As part of the international Church of the Nazarene, Camden Nazarene reaches into more than 160 countries and world areas by faithfully supporting every aspect of the global church’s mission efforts.

The church’s local ministries have grown and taken various forms. Programs and events for families, youth, adults, and senior adults have flourished. The Community Life Center is a hub of activity on Wednesday night for youth and children. Camden Nazarene teen quizzers dominate district and regional competitions. Children participate in innovative programs at *The Studio* on Wednesday and Sunday morning. The Community Life Center is also home to the Chili Cookoff, the Fall Festival, and Easter Eggstravaganza, just to name a few. Fellowship is friendly and welcoming even during the heat of the infamous corn hole competitions!

Camden Nazarene reaches out to those hurting in the congregation. Times of trouble bring loving responses and care. The congregation seeks to minister to the community at large by partnering with schools, providing back-to-school supplies, participating in prayer walks, and gathering necessities for children. In cooperation with other churches, the Love, Serve, Give ministry provided meals to the needy. Although suspended during the pandemic, the church will explore other ways to help our communities in need.

Seventy-five years is a testament of God’s faithfulness and the obedience of His people at Camden Nazarene. During the COVID pandemic, the church experienced unity while implementing measures needed to worship safely. Outdoor church, Facebook live, Zoom meetings, and Online Church were created to keep the church together and spiritually fed during that time. The pastoral team and dedicated volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure worship remained at the heart of the church. As Pastor Snodgrass recounted in his report to the 2021 District Assembly: “We never knew how flexible a 75-year-old church could be until being forced to navigate COVID-19, but now there is fresh perspective on what can be accomplished for His Kingdom and the glory of God if we simply obey and unite around the Gospel.”

*Yes, I am Camden Nazarene and this is my story.* What started as a small band of believers—with limited resources but faith in an unlimited God—is now what you see today. For seventy-five years our community still experiences the move of God in their lives. **Now more than ever, we anticipate the *new thing* the Lord is preparing for the “living stones” at Camden Nazarene.**

