50 years ago…

…. did you know?

Fifty years ago, families starting joining a new Presbyterian church being formed in Metairie, called John Calvin. As today, these young families were interested in programs to benefit their young children. What could be better than to start a Playschool for these children and those in the growing local community?

The first building built for the new church included 4 classrooms. Soon thereafter, in the fall of 1970, with borrowed books and toys, the John Calvin Playschool was started, utilizing these classrooms. The philosophy of this new school then and still today is: “Play as an integral part of childhood learning” – that through play, children develop social skill, creativity, self-confidence, positive attitude toward school, self-discipline, and curiosity about the world around them.

The first classes met two mornings a week for 2 through 4 year olds, and the response was so great that these quickly grew to five mornings a week for 2 through 5 year olds. In 1973, with the growing Playschool and competing pressures from other groups needing space, a Christian Education Building was built adding 4 more classrooms. Through the years the Playschool grew to include morning and afternoon classes and Kindergarten classes (there was no kindergarten in the local schools at the time). Today, however, the schedule has since settled down to 2 or 3 day classes for 1 year olds, 2, 3, or 5 day classes for 2 year olds, 3 and 5 day classes for 3 year olds, and pre-Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten plus, and transitional Kindergarten for 4 year olds, all in the morning. Today’s children enjoy music and body movement, bible time, and art classes! Of course, Summer Camp has been popular for years!

John Calvin Playschool has been significant institution in the community since its’ beginning, growing into a premier program drawing children from 4 parishes and nearly always filled to capacity. There are stories about the early days when parents would arrive at midnight before registration day to secure their children’s enrollment. The church began putting out folding chairs for their comfort, and some even brought their RV’s for greater comfort while waiting!

Through it all, the Playschool has been and continues to be a very special and important mission of John Calvin Presbyterian Church. It is a testament to its positive influence that many who went through its doors as toddlers have brought their own children and grandchildren back to be enrolled. Many families have found a church home at John Calvin due to their childrens’ experiences or even their own experiences back when they were small. Have you noticed that when John Calvin is mentioned anywhere in the area people know about the Playschool and its’ excellent reputation. Certainly a mission we can be proud of!

But what about the fire and how did we survive? And what happened during Katrina? Stay tuned for next month’s installment on the history of John Calvin Presbyterian Church as we celebrate 50 years serving Christ and this community.