

The legacy of the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, Pennsylvania

Revealed by a history of the congregation's growth and worship sites

Following is a timeline of our congregation's historic legacy of spiritual dedication as evidenced by God's grace in granting this congregation stewardship for physical amenities with which to provide hospitality and ministry to member and the community families.

1799 The first known preaching service in the Greenville area was in 1799. This service was held on the banks of the Shenango River about one-half mile from where Greenville now stands. This resulted in the organization of the Old Salem Church, located about three miles south of Greenville.

At first there was no church building. Services were held out of doors in the forest sanctuary. A tent or platform was erected for the minister, while the congregation sat on logs on the hillside, listening to long sermons in all kinds of weather.

1825 From the Old Salem Church came thirty-one persons who organized the First Presbyterian Church of West Greenville on December 29, 1825. This took place not long after West Greenville was settled by sturdy Scotch-Irish and German peoples from Cumberland Valley and Westmoreland County. These were religious people, and among their meager possessions, they brought their Bibles, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and some works on practical religion. They met together in each other's homes where they sang, prayed, and listened as one of the brethren read a sermon from some standard work.

1826 In 1826 Mr. Joseph Keck donated land to both the Methodists and the Presbyterians. The Presbyterian plot was on Shenango Street where in 1833 a fine brick church was built, complete with frescoed walls and stained glass windows.

1830 In 1830 a log cabin was built on the present site of the First Methodist Church on Clinton Street. This structure was shared by both the Methodists and the Presbyterians

At the rear of the lot was a graveyard which was used until the opening of the Shenango Cemetery in 1864.

This building was used until 1853 when a disastrous fire made the structure unsafe for use. It was torn down that same year, and the congregation decided to rebuild.

1855 The growing congregation built a new and larger church building on that same site in 1855. An important addition to this third church building was a new pipe organ. It had only a few pipes and gained its sound from a hand-pumped mechanism powered by young boys from the congregation. This practice resulted in many tales of "power failure" due to snoozing pumpers.

That same year a major event took place in Greenville when an Erie Canal boat named the "Annie Dale" brought a large bell to the new church.

1905 The building, which still stands today, was sold to the Borough of Greenville in 1905 to be used as a City Hall. Since the borough built its present building in 1938, the former church building has undergone several changes and has been owned and occupied by several commercial businesses.

1889 As the congregation continued to grow, it became evident that a new and larger building was needed, but breaking away from the associations with the old church and location and selecting a new location posed a problem. In 1889, Mrs. Elizabeth Gridley, a member of the church, offered a lot on Main Street with the understanding that a new church building would be built there. The offer was accepted at a congregational meeting in April of 1889, and in 1902 the Session and the Trustees took steps to carry out this action.

1905 The new church, which still stands today, was dedicated on January 22, 1905. The large bell, as well as the pipe organ, was moved to the new building. The bell still calls the faithful to worship each Sunday morning. With the move to the new church, the pipe organ was equipped with water and eventually electric power.

1921 At a congregational meeting in 1921 the Session and Trustees were authorized to proceed with plans for the addition to the rear of the 1904 building. This addition housed more facilities for the Sunday school, which had outgrown the available space. The addition was completed in 1922 at a cost of little more than \$35,000. This newly enlarged building served the growing congregation and still houses the church offices, the infant nursery, a conference room, and eight classrooms.

1929 In 1929 a new pipe organ was built at a cost of \$7,252. That instrument contains some of the original pipes from the 1855 organ and is still in use in Westminster chapel today.

1961 In 1952 a Building Committee was appointed to plan for remodeling the sanctuary. After working for five years on remodeling plans, the committee recommended building a new sanctuary. The plans were approved in 1957; ground was broken in April of 1959, and the corner stone was laid on July 19, 1959. Sunday, October 15, 1961, was an exciting day for the congregation when the new sanctuary was formally dedicated.

1964 A new three-manual organ was dedicated on November 1, 1964. The organ has 22 ranks of pipes. The 1,320 pipes range in size from that of a soda straw to sixteen feet in length. The Cathedral Chimes from the old organ were refurbished and incorporated into the new instrument.

1979 In 1979, at a cost of more than a quarter million dollars, the 1904 sanctuary was remodeled and renamed Westminster Chapel and the 1922 addition was renovated, expanded and modernized. A rear entrance, a modern office complex, a church library, a choir room, and a church parlor with an adjoining kitchenette were

created. These new facilities were dedicated on April 8, 1979, and the mortgage for the renovations was burned in 1987.

In more recent years, improvements to the existing structure have continued to enable continuing hospitality and community outreach ministry support. A new heating system has been installed, the organ in Westminster Chapel has been rebuilt, a new grand piano is now in the sanctuary, a restroom has been retrofitted for use by the handicapped and an elevator has been installed which makes the building accessible to all.

2008 In 2008, the 1964 organ in the sanctuary was rebuilt and expanded to a four manual instrument.

2014 In 2014 artist and member, Donald Thomas was inspired to create and donate to this congregation a series of 15 original paintings depicting Gospel Scenes From The Life Of Jesus. Not coincidentally, this collection was inspired during a time when the congregation made a commitment to a New Season of Life in the Body of Christ. These paintings serve as a collective reminder of our source, our mission and the hope of our future.

2015 2015 marked refurbishment of the stained glass windows of Westminster Chapel and complete refurbishment of the Parlor.

2016 Refurbishing projects continued in 2016 with focus on the oak exterior doors and stained glass windows of the chapel and parlor

The year 2016 marks the 191st anniversary of this the congregation of The First Presbyterian Church, Greenville, PA.

This congregation has a long history of worship and service to the Lord Jesus Christ and is forever grateful for and inspired by the legacy of time, talent and service shared by devoted members and partners.

History updated December 2016

WELCOME!! Join us
Building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Mission of ECO, the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians,