

Our History

Organized October 10, 1829, the First United Presbyterian Church had as its first teaching elder, Reverend Asa Brooks. The ruling elders were John Wilson, Jr., Phineas Chapin and John Hursey. The first members received into the church were John Wilson, Jr. and his wife Margaret, John Hursey, Phineas Chapin and his wife Nancy, William Shields, John Linsey, Elisha Hall, Eleanor Wymer, Elisa Davis, Nancy Hursey, Nancy Lefever, John Garrett and his wife, John Reed and wife, Catherine Armstrong, and Jane Stein.

The organization took place in the Methodist Meeting House, sponsored by the French Creek Presbyterian Church. Asa Brooks continued as a part-time pastor for the new church. The First Presbyterian Church grew rapidly, and the first church building was begun in 1834, on the site of the old jail, which was purchased on July 12, 1834. It was paid for mostly by subscription of labor and farm produce. The total cost was about \$600.00.

Asa Brooks died of a bilious fever in the same year on December 23rd at the age of forty-four, leaving a widow, his second wife, and eight children. He was buried beneath the pulpit of his new church building, "so that the First Presbyterian Church would never be without a pastor."

On August 20, 1838, almost four years later, the next pastor arrived: the Rev. Mr. Ezekiel Quillin. He was a very stern and conservative man. The church had 57 members at this time and suffered terribly from a lack of funds to complete the church building and carry out its mission. Rev. Mr. Quillin also conducted a school by the name of The Young Ladies Seminary, which was probably the forerunner of Broadus College. Rev. Mr. Quillin served for fifteen years and oversaw the organization of the Gnatty Creek Presbyterian Church on August 11, 1840. Pulpit supply for Gnatty Creek church for many years were pastors from First Church.

Under the Rev. Mr. S. B. Boardman, 1889-1894, the next church building of First Church was constructed. It is the present sanctuary, dedicated June 17, 1894. The total cost of that structure was \$15,500.00. A large memorial window to the memory of Asa Brooks was placed at the back of the sanctuary as a gift of Governor Brooks Fleming and family.

Upon Dr. Hudson's resignation to become president of Waynesburg College, Dr. Henry T. McClelland was called in 1908. He brought about the construction of the Sunday School Annex behind the sanctuary in 1913. He died during his pastorate in 1915.

The Rev. Mr. Edward Bates Turner succeeded Dr. McClelland in 1915. Immediately the McClelland Bible Class was organized. Its members excavated the area under the sanctuary and built the McClelland Room which was dedicated by Mr. Earl Brooks of Weston, descendant of Asa Brooks. The McClelland Class at one time had a membership of more than 800 and was the largest Bible Class in the United States.

In 1922, an Italian Mission was established by Rev. Mr. Alexander Moccia, assisted by Dr. E. B. Turner, pastor of First Church. The Mission became the Church of Our Savior in 1938. Their church building on East Pike Street was completed in 1939, where it presently stands.

In 1924, the Rev. Mr. Frederick G. Behner was called to First Church. During his pastorate, in 1929, the Siers property adjacent to the church was purchased. In that centennial year a new organ was purchased and dedicated.

The Rev. Dr. Nelson H. Thorn became the pastor of First Church in 1931. He was instrumental in the organization of a strong youth program which continues today. During his pastorate, in 1940, Presbyweds was organized. Dr. Thorn resigned in 1943 to serve as employee relations advisor at Wright Field, Ohio.

After Dr. Thorn's resignation, Dr. Gordon Graves Kibler was called to be our next pastor. He was installed on December 17, 1943. During his pastorate the Women's Association, the Men's Association and the Usher's Association were formed. Also, a public forum series was started, which met each January and February. On May 10, 1950, a committee was formed to determine the necessity of expanding the church by means of an addition, which would be erected on the Siers property. The addition was authorized and Westminster Hall was dedicated on March 30, 1952. Dr. Kibler died unexpectedly on December 6, 1952.

The Rev. Mr. Paul E. Francis was called and installed September 1, 1953. During his pastorate the 125th birthday celebration was held, and highlighted by the remodeling of the sanctuary to its present state. The membership at that time was 1030.

In 1961 the Reverend Mr. Samuel E. Glass became our pastor. During his ministry, a fine sense of responsibility to mission efforts was developed. He was loved for his pastoral care of the congregation. During his ministry the church purchased the Harrington property adjacent to Westminster Hall. He became seriously ill, but with the aid of his assistant, the Rev. Mr. William L. Arthur, he ably led the congregation until his death on July 4, 1968.

In October 1968 the Rev. William L. Arthur was called to serve as pastor. He served as Assistant Pastor under Mr. Glass. He is an accomplished musician, often singing or playing the piano at meetings and other churches. He wrote the hymn, "Jesus, Mighty Savior" and dedicated it to our church. During his ministry and due to his efforts, a new organ of magnificent voice and beauty was purchased. It was dedicated to the 141st anniversary celebration on October 10, 1970. Later, using bequests of the Koblegard and Stalnaker estates, an extensive renovation including all Sunday School facilities, the parlor and church office. In 1973 Mr. Arthur resigned to accept the pastorate of the Tuckahoe Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia.

In the interim, our then new Assistant Pastor, The Rev. Mr. George H. Humbert, Jr., acted as minister. He served ably and was much loved for his dedication to the pastoral care of both young and old of our congregation. The Senior High Youth Group thrived under his leadership.

In December of 1974 the Rev. Mr. Glen W. Nagel, Sr. was called. In that year individual members of this church sponsored the founding of the Bridgeport Presbyterian Church. The dedication of that church, including a nucleus of 25 First Church families took place in 1975. The Rev. Nagel has organized a study group of area ministers, the CROP Walk in Harrison County, which is one of the most successful in the United States, the organization of ecumenical charitable groups in the county, including the Mustard Seed. Our church is strong and forward-looking. Mission continues its important role in our life; First Church ranked 88th in the United Presbyterian denomination in 1975 in its giving to General Mission.

In July, 1979 a Homecoming Weekend was held, culminating in a Sunday Service with all the pastors from Dr. Thorn down, excepting Mr. Fogelin, in the service. Each minister, or a member of the deceased minister's family, participated in the service, which was followed by a reception in Westminster Hall.

In October of 1979 the 150th birthday celebration was held. Dr. Maurice Brooks, a direct descendant

of the Reverend Asa Brooks, our founder, was the main speaker.

The Rev. Dr. John Thompson Peters, a highly respected and nationally known pastor, served as Interim from 1981-1983. He played a significant role in constructing the Mission Statement used by the Pastoral Search Committee. Dr. Peters suggested that the committee consider a young pastor by the name of Robert Culp.

The Rev. Mr. Robert Culp served as senior pastor from 1983 to 1991. He brought a gentle spirit that promoted a caring, stable time at the church. He also brought a full beard that caused some comments in the congregation! The Rev Culp and his wife Cathy lived their faith as they were raising their children in the church. Unfortunately, during this time period, an aging population and diminishing budget were partly responsible for a significant change. The decision was made to go from two services on Sunday morning to just one service which would be in the later time slot.

First Church had usually employed an assistant pastor but because of budget considerations, it was decided to hire the first and only Director of Christian Education, Ms. Libby Schroeder, whose main focus was youth ministry. She demonstrated that being a Christian has responsibilities but can also be fun. During her tenure, the youth had a very active ministry participating in many events outside of Harrison County.

The Rev. Mr. Robert Touchton served as Interim Pastor from 1991 to 1992. A serious illness limited the Rev. Touchton's ability to fully participate in the pastorate. Many members of the church stepped forward to oversee the day to day operations.

The Rev. Dr. Eric M. Faust served First Church from Sept 12, 1992 to Sept 30, 2006, longer than any pastor since Ezekiel Quillin departed in 1852. Dr. Faust's 14+ years were highlighted by his enthusiasm and vision, including occasional worship services for Wholeness and Healing and mid-day services of Prayer and Word on weekday Christian festival days. Wednesday Night Live served as a gathering point for members through most of his years with our congregation.

On March 15, 2007, the Rev. Ms. Susan C. McGhee became First Church's Interim Pastor, and the first woman to hold a pastoral position in the 180-year history of the congregation. She brought a love of laughter, a deep sense of spirituality, and a gift for liturgical leadership to her work at First Church. The Rev. McGhee and the Mission Study Task Force led the congregation in developing the mission plan that is the first official step in the pastoral search process.

A Pastor Nominating Committee was elected by the congregation on December 7, 2007, and began the work of discerning God's will for the pastoral leadership of First Presbyterian Church. Before they completed their work, Rev. McGhee accepted a call to serve as the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley in Southern Indiana. She completed her work at First Church on August 30, 2009.

The Session then secured the services of The Rev. Charla Waters Koerner as a temporary supply pastor while the PNC concluded its work. Rev. Koerner was quickly recognized for her thought provoking sermons and her deep love for people. She served First Church through January 2010 at which time her husband, The Rev. John F. Koerner was called as our new pastor.

On February 1, 2010, Rev. John F. Koerner became the full-time pastor for First Church. Rev. Koerner comes to us from Parkersburg, WV where he served the Beechwood Presbyterian Church for 17 years. His family includes his wife Charla, and two adult daughters- Genie and Theresa. Under Rev. Koerner's leadership, First Church is looking for even more new and exciting ways to carry out the ministry and

love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)

Won't you come join us.

Hospitality is practiced here.

And we'll set a place for you at Christ's table.