

Bell Memorial Presbyterian Church

Church services have been held in the Hazel Dell (north side of Ellwood City) as early as 1892 with ministers from various denominations preaching. This became known as the Hazel Dell Mission. The first mention of the Mission in the records of the Shenango Presbytery was February 14, 1897 when an elder reported that the effort to start a church in Hazel Dell was a detriment to the Ellwood City Church. A committee was formed in April 1898 and the Presbytery recommended building a chapel. Two lots were purchased on Line Avenue and the property was held by the trustees of the Slippery Rock Presbyterian Church. In December 1902 the Presbytery continued Hazel Dell as a mission of the Slippery Rock Church and the pastor was directed to hold services every Sunday afternoon, but there was no provision for financial support. A building was erected in late 1901 or early 1902.

On January 1, 1903 the Rev Charles Bell took charge of the mission and organized a Sunday School, a Christian Endeavor Society and a Missionary Society (today known as the Leona Lash Guild). In April 1904 the Presbytery directed the Mission to pay its stipends to the Trustees of Slippery Rock. Some members of Slippery Rock were opposed to the mission yet the Mission continued with a basement being added and the building being deeded to the Presbytery on May 27, 1910.

In June of 1914 the Mission was organized as a self-supporting Presbyterian Church, debt free with 225 members under the name of Bell Memorial Presbyterian Church in recognition of its first pastor. The church was incorporated December 7, 1914 and on April 5, 1915 Rev. Bell was called as a full-time pastor after he severed his connection with the Slippery Rock Church.

In 1916 a balcony was added and additional classrooms constructed. The old Hazel Dell School building (corner of Line and College) was purchased in 1922 as a community center. With membership growing (641 members in 1928) and needing more room, the congregation voted in January 1926 to build a new church on the site of the old school with additional property being purchased. Construction began in the fall of 1928 and because of the Depression of 1929 construction proceeded slowly until it was suspended in April 1933. Eventually construction was abandoned and the unfinished building sold for commercial purposes.

With a pressing need for more space in April 1946 plans were developed for more Sunday School space and to remodel the Sanctuary. This construction was largely done by volunteer labor. The unfinished church was repurchased and used as a youth center in the late 1960's – early 1970's.

In 1978 the Presbytery approved plans for extensive renovations to Bell Memorial including a small addition which added a parlor (today's library), nursery, offices and new restrooms. This work was dedicated in October 1979.

During the 1990's, under a capital funds campaign, a handicap ramp to the fellowship hall was added with remodeling of the restrooms and a cry room was added off the sanctuary. The bell tower was also torn down due to safety issues. The bell from the tower is displayed outside of the fellowship hall.

In recent years a new sound system has been added to the sanctuary and the apartment converted into a place for the Youth Group to meet. During 2008 Bell has begun the process of looking into a Capital Funds Campaign with possible projects to include: parking lot repairs, repair or replacing the front steps, a new instrument to replace the organ, a projector for the sanctuary to name a few.

Today there is a new vision of Bell Church as a “Christian Mission Center” with mission being a very important part of who Bell is today and reflecting our roots. Our mission statement – “*Bell Memorial Presbyterian Church is a Christian mission center in which all members are missionaries, grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and share in God’s mission in the world.*” Directed by our Mission Statement all members are invited to: grow up in their love of God; grow in as they love each other; and grow out as they share in mission.

The importance of mission at Bell Memorial is clear. Since the 1990’s Bell Memorial has sent people to Mexico through Constructores Para Cristo to build homes. In 2001 members of Bell traveled to Russia and today are still involved in a twinning relationship with a church there. We have several members who have an ongoing relationship with Jamaica and travel there each January. A member also traveled with members of the Presbytery to build a church in the Sudan in January of 2006. Each summer Bell Memorial participates in the local Carpenter’s Project which helps homeowners in the Ellwood City Community with repairs. Bell is looking forward in 2008 to helping with the first Habitat Home to be built here in Ellwood City.

Bell Memorial’s worship services blend traditional and contemporary elements that bring glory to God. This includes the use of a praise team which includes drums, guitars and a group of vocalist to lead the praise songs. Our children enjoy Rotational Workshop style for Sunday School in which the same lesson is taught for several weeks in various ways (art room, computer room, video room). We have an active Youth Group with a paid part-time Youth Director.

Bell Memorial is in the second year of the Partnership of the Missional Church program supported by the Synod of the Trinity. This has led us to engage with the challenge “*to build personal, trusting relationships with teenage parents in our community with the intent of offering them a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ.*” The emphasis here is **personal, trusting** and **spiritual**. The Missional Experimental Team feels that a monthly meeting would be an effective way to reach teen parents and that there are many in our congregation who would be excellent in sharing their experiences with these teen parents. The communication between the teens and members of the congregation needs to be continued outside of the meetings.

The history of Bell Memorial also includes those that were called by God to serve. Members who were ordained included – Thomas Clyde, Keith Smith (who was licensed to preach but not ordained), Richard Scott, George Markle and Loy Summer who was totally blind. Roy Marion M.D. was called to serve as a missionary to Ethiopia.

God called the following to serve as Pastors to Bell Memorial – Charles Bell, John Wait, William McCandless, John King, Joseph Pringle, William Stafford Scott, H. Ross Karnes, Douglass Pomeroy, C. Richard Berggren, Glenn Hink, James Swanson and at present Derek Longbrake.