



**Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church**

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2019

90 YEARS

AND COUNTING



The two pictures on this page depict milestones in the 90-year history of our church.

The first shows Rev. Robert W. Gibson, who blessed the cornerstone of this church as it was laid in place during a ceremony on Sunday, Nov. 3, 1929. The vintage photograph shown here was published in the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph the next day.



The second aerial photograph was taken to commemorate another milestone in the history of our church: its expansion in 1953. Both photographs are part of a new exhibit at the Historical Society of Mount Lebanon, 794 Washington Road, on houses of worship in our community. Look inside to see other photos that are part of the exhibit.



Where's the cornerstone?

If you need a hint, there's a photograph of it on the back page, where you'll also find a column on the subject of cornerstones written by our own Pastor Emeritus Rick Wolling.

IF ONLY GLASS COULD TALK

windows yield unexpected story

BY KATIE DOYLE

When I decided to write the backstory of our stained-glass windows, I thought I knew what this project would entail. Was I wrong or what?

My first misconception came from my (wrong) interpretation of a plaque under the largest window at the rear of our sanctuary, which tells the story of Christ's life: "This window presented by the Herron Hill United Presbyterian Congregation. Chancel window by the Sunday School."

The plaque beside it summarizes our early history: organized in 1889 as "33rd Street Presbyterian," moved to the corner of Herron and Webster avenues in 1910, relocated to Mt. Lebanon in 1929.

I imagined one continuous congregation, now in its third location. I liked the idea of one congregation and dug into the church's records from the 1920's, noticing the names of pastors, lay leaders and members of the congregation. The records included minutes of the last official meeting of the congregation at Herron and Webster avenues, duly noted as the "last meeting" – terse and wistful.

Next, I read records of the Mt. Lebanon congregation's initial meetings in the late 1920's. I sensed their enthusiasm at building a new church, but saw no familiar names. These folks were not only building a new house of worship; they were building a new congregation.

So what's with the plaque and its "... window presented by the Herron Hill Congregation ..."? The neighborhood near the church at the corner of Webster and Herron avenues was evolving in the 1920's. Mark Whitaker's book "Smoketown: The Untold Story of the Other Great Black Renaissance," sheds light on our history.

The Hill District was becoming an African-American and Jewish neighborhood in the

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1920's. The Liberty Tunnels had opened in 1924 encouraging new suburbs south of Pittsburgh. The membership of the church at Webster and Herron avenues was dispersing, joining congregations in their new neighborhoods. The Presbyterian hierarchy could have revoked the church's charter, but instead decided to transfer it to a congregation that didn't yet exist.

I visited the corner of Webster and Herron, now home to St. Luke's Baptist Church,

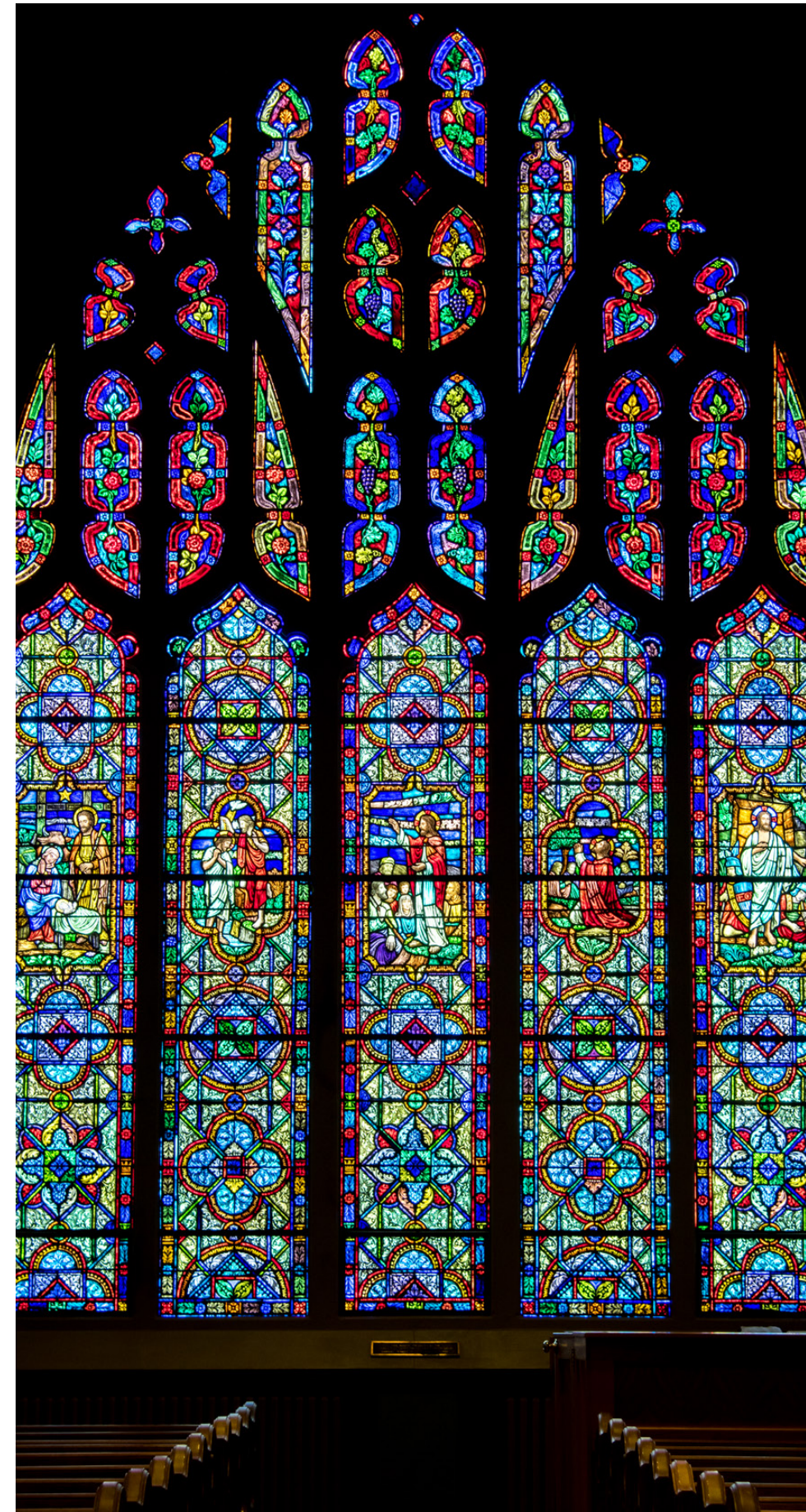
surrounded by grassy plots instead of a thriving neighborhood. So much for my story of a congregation starting a satellite church, and these two churches maintaining ties with each other.

I paid attention to the windows at St. Luke's. I thought I would write about the removal of its windows at the time of its sale in 1929 and their installation in Mt. Lebanon, but the window openings in St. Luke's were completely incompatible with the size and design of our windows.

I went back to the church records, including minutes of its Building Committee from 1929 and 1930. It became a story of "follow the money." Money from the Herron Hill church would indeed help pay for the stained-glass windows designed and made by Pittsburgh Stained Glass Studios.

Kirk Weaver now runs Pittsburgh Stained Glass Studios, in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He met with me, bringing records from his files of the contracts signed in 1929-1930. The scope of work did not include retro-fitting of any existing glass. So I couldn't write a story of a congregation removing its windows from its old building and enjoying them in its new building.

Church windows are often donated in memory of a loved one. None of our windows have inscriptions and the historical record didn't offer any relevant detail. Alas, there would be no story of saintly lives inspiring beautiful windows.



The historical record also failed to illuminate the backstory of decisions made in the 1950's when the sanctuary was enlarged from its original rectangle and "transepts" were added, each with a window.

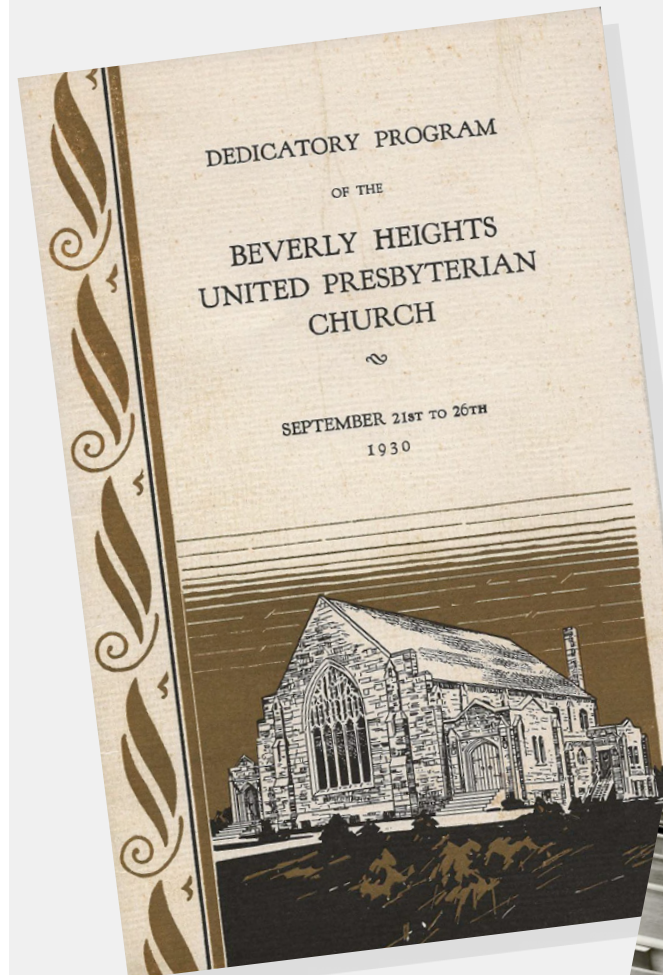
Our modern sanctuary has the Old Testament Window in the south transept and the Apostles' Window in the north transept. The selection of the 12 men for the Apostles' Window would have been straightforward (Paul substituting for Judas Iscariot).

But how were the 12 characters in the Old Testament Window chosen? The records provided no information on the selection process. Some of the six men and six women chosen are obvious, some not so. Abraham is not included, for instance – precluded by the inclusion of Sarah? My story of spirited theological discussions about which Old Testament characters to include would be only the one inside my head.

The lessons in all this? If you're writing minutes, think of the novice historian some 90 years hence and be generous. If you're the novice historian, remember there are paths you can never imagine.

Katie Doyle, author of "The Gospel in Glass," has been a member of Beverly Heights since 1979, along with her husband Jack.

ORIGINS



1 The Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church traces its origins back to the late nineteenth century in Pittsburgh. In 1889, Presbyterians in the city's thirteenth ward petitioned the Pittsburgh Presbytery for a new congregation. That October, the Thirty-Third Street Presbyterian Church began meeting in an old schoolhouse at the corner of Thirty-Third Street (Herron Avenue today) and Bigelow Boulevard. As the congregation grew, a new church building replaced the schoolhouse in 1892.

In 1909 the congregation sold its original property and moved a short distance into the Hill District, changing its name to the Herron Hill Presbyterian Church. Its new church building was dedicated on October 9, 1910.



2 In 1925, the Board of American Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America purchased land at the corner of Rocklynn Place and Washington Road in Mt. Lebanon for a new church "plant" in the growing community, near the Beverly Heights neighborhood. In July 1929, the Herron Hill congregation voted unanimously to relocate to the new site and changed its name to the Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church. Construction of the new church began in August 1929, and the first religious service took place in the new building on June 15, 1930. During construction, religious services and Sunday School classes were held at Markham Elementary School.

WWII & THE FIFTIES

3 The church provided care to its members serving in the armed forces during World War II. Service men and women received Christmas cards from the church during the War, along with the denomination's weekly magazine and the quarterly "The Garden of Prayer." In 1942, Rev. M. DeWitt Safford, the senior pastor, resigned his position to serve as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy aboard the USS Intrepid at Guadalcanal.

4 Like its members, the Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church profited from the economic and social booms following World War II. In 1950, the church purchased additional land for church expansion: the nave was lengthened, transepts were added, and a three-story addition at the back of the church contained classrooms, a lounge, a kitchen, a chapel, and offices for the staff. By 1955, membership at Beverly Heights reached 1,500 with 850 children in its Sunday School program.



THE SIXTIES & SEVENTIES



5 Beverly Heights has always had a strong commitment to mission activities. As early as 1936, the new congregation supported the growth of the Italian United Presbyterian Church. By 1967, the church earmarked one-third of its annual budget to missions in the United States and abroad. And in 1979, a plaque was unveiled listing the 40 sons and daughters of the congregation who had gone into full-time Christian vocation in the first 50 years of the church's existence.

6 In the late 1960s, Beverly Heights experimented with new forms of worship. A drive-in ministry started about 1969 where people could sit in their cars in the church parking lot or bring lawn chairs to hear the service outdoors on Sunday evening. The church also sponsored a mall ministry at South Hills Village at the same time.

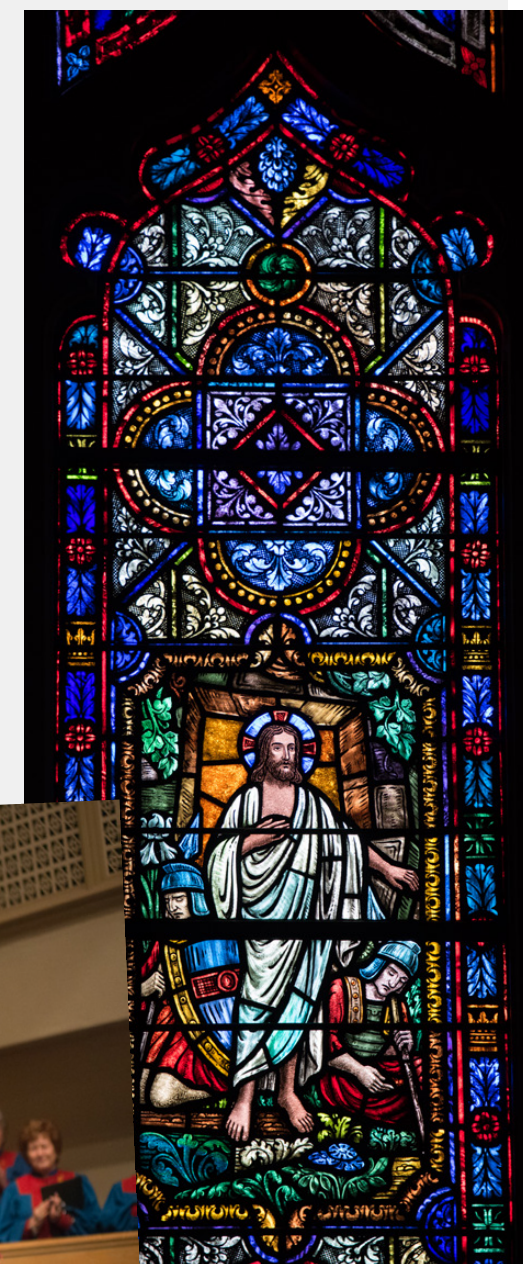


MODERN TIMES

7 In recent years, a focal point of the church's ministry has been its outreach to the local community. Through its popular Christian preschool and its annual Vacation Bible School program, Beverly Heights has ministered to thousands of children and their families (many of whom did not attend the church), while its playground has become a favorite neighborhood destination. The church has made local missions a priority as well. Church members started the PRISM ministry to international students in Oakland and the GROW Living Stones meal ministry in the South Hills.

8 A seven-year program to renovate all of the church's magnificent stained-glass windows finished in 2019. A book commemorating the project, and explaining the history and religious significance of the windows, was published, "The Gospel in Glass," written by church member Katie Doyle.

9 Rev. Dr. Richard G. Wolling retired in 2018 as the longest tenured senior pastor, having served for 33 years. He successfully navigated the departure from the Presbyterian Church (USA) as Beverly Heights became the first of many Presbyterian churches in this region to leave the denomination, joining the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He was succeeded by Rev. Dr. Nathanael Devlin, the eighth senior pastor in Beverly Heights' 90-year history.



BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING

The sign of a healthy church? **Its cornerstone.**

According to Lifeway Research, as many as 10,000 churches in America will close this year. That's 200 per week! In a recent sermon, Pastor Nate identified four churches located not more than five miles from Beverly Heights as "Closed!"

What's going on? Some lay the blame at the feet of the church's lack of commitment, selflessness and evangelistic zeal. Nate suggested that the absence of men is a key deficiency that contributes to weakness and the demise of congregations.

None of these suggestions is wrong, but the problem is more foundational. My observation as a presbytery consultant to struggling churches revealed a problem italicized by our congregation's celebration of nine decades of ministry.

A newspaper article reporting on the building of the Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church in 1929, which includes a picture of the church cornerstone ceremony, contains a clue as to why Beverly Heights still has its doors open while some churches are closing theirs. It's all about the cornerstone.

In most cases of modern building the cornerstone is not put down as a reference for the remainder of the construction but laid sometime later in the process. The building is constructed around the spot where the cornerstone will be ceremoniously inserted. In fact, the cornerstone is a central and foundational reference point in any building. It determines what is square, straight, level and plumb. If the cornerstone is off, the building will be off and it will fail.

A church fails because its cornerstone is faulty. Why is Beverly Heights still thriving? Some say the answer is good pastoral leadership, some a solid Christian education or music ministry while others suggest that a good missions program is key.

While these are all important building blocks, none rises to the level of the cornerstone. Paying attention to four ministry components establishes the square, level, straight and plumb of a vital church. Beverly Heights Church has been shaped throughout its history by these four ministry components, which serve as an antidote to the gates of hell of which Jesus spoke.

The centrality of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the eternal and divine Son of God, is the first plane of this cornerstone. It is the grace of God, manifested in the coming of Jesus Christ to earth for the purpose of dying an atoning death on the cross for sin, that is absolutely fundamental. His death and his resurrection to new life, all accomplished out of love for us to purchase

our salvation and grant us forgiveness of sin and eternal life – this is the non-negotiable upon which a church must stand.

The primacy of the Word of God is the second plane of a sure foundation. A church will thrive only to the extent that the Bible is preached with fervency, taught with regularity and applied faithfully by its leadership and people.

A third plane is worship. It's job No. 1, as we like to say. Worship is not entertainment. It is not meant to meet the needs of the worshiper. Worship is meant to extol the wonder, majesty, power and grace of God. It's about Him, not about us, and it is an essential to the church's good health.

The fourth side of the cornerstone is the advancement of God's kingdom. Faithful response to the Great Commission, reaching out to those far and near, is the King's business that must distinguish the right things from the good things in which the church engages.

A sure foundation with a true cornerstone is what establishes a church and causes it to prevail. This is what Beverly Heights celebrates after 90 years. This is what 90 more years will be founded upon: Soli Deo gloria, for the glory of God alone.

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church. "Between Sundays" is Rick's new column. It will run monthly in this space.

