

CHRIST'S CHURCH: A BRIEF HISTORY

MAY 2019



GREENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR PARISH

The first Episcopal church service in Greensburg, Pennsylvania was held on September 19, 1813, at the Court House with The Reverend John Curtis Clay and The Reverend George McIlhenny as Celebrants. Both men were missionaries sent from Philadelphia by the "Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania."

From 1814 to 1822, The Reverend Moses Bennett also sent by the Diocese of Philadelphia held services in the Greensburg area. The Parish Charter was signed by vestry with The Reverend Moses Bennett serving as the Parish Rector on November 27, 1822. Two months later, the Parish Charter was signed and granted by an Act of the Pennsylvania State Legislature.

In May 1823, Christ's Church was admitted to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States by Convention. Early in that month, the cornerstone for the first church building (there have been three) was laid. By the next year, the first church was completed at a cost of \$1,683. The Reverend John Henry Hopkins crafted the church's design.

In October 7, 1851, Mr. and Mrs. William and Harriet Jack gave the land for building of the second church at Main and Tunnel Streets. Two months later, the second church cornerstone was laid at this location. Two years later, members began the first of many generous donations to provide for amazing stained glass windows. It wasn't until May of 1854 that the second building was finally completed and consecrated. It cost \$5,000 to complete.

In July of 1889, demolition of the second church began. Three months later, the third church cornerstone was laid at the same location in downtown Greensburg, the location we meet at today. Interestingly, services were held in the Masonic Temple during the construction period. Finally, in December 1891, Christ's Church was completed at a cost of \$28,185.

The Reverend H. Hobart Barber completed *A History of Christ's Church 1822 - 1907* in 1907. The next year, the Altar Guild was organized. Three years later a new pipe organ was installed for a price of \$4,100. Five years later, in April 1916, The Reverend William Francis Shero, Ph.D., began his service. He was the longest-serving rector in the history of Christ's Church and had a very high standard of music, liturgics, and a firm adherence to the traditions of the church. Under The Reverend Dr. Shero's organization, Christ's Church celebrated its centennial anniversary of the Parish in 1923.

In 1950, The Reverend Chester L. Weems became rector. By 1954, Christ's

A Brief History of Our Parish

Church was stronger and more active than ever. A new organ was installed. A Rectory was purchased on Harrison City Road. Christ's Church was considered one of the finest churches in Greensburg and also in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. In September 1955, "*Christ Church Greensburg, an Early Episcopal Parish in Western Pennsylvania*" written by Mr. Hugh Welty was published and distributed.

Twenty years later, in April of 1970, Ms. Jane McCartney became the first woman elected to the vestry of Christ's Church. That same year, Christ's Church was granted a Charter to sponsor a Boy Scout Troop. The next year saw the first female acolytes; they were Ms. Christy Davidson, Ms. Mari Haeflein, Ms. Sue Hargnett, Ms. Kendall Kay, and Ms. Jane Star. Water damage in 1972 forced the acquisition of a new Moeller organ; new choir furniture was installed.

In 1973, the Episcopal Church Women sponsors the first "Salad Bar." That same year, the congregation and vestry approved recommendations of the Chancel Renewal Committee to relocate The Lord's Table from the rear wall of the Sanctuary to a free-standing Lord's Table in the center (as it is today). A few months later, the 150th Anniversary of Christ's Church was celebrated. The first issue of *The Word* was published in 1976 by Ms. Sandy Carlson as Editor and Publisher. The "Calling and Caring" ministry also began. Two years later, the vestry approved relocating the library from the Undercroft to the CE Building. Stained glass window protective coverings were installed.

In September 1983, a major fire damaged the CE Building affecting the library and nursery; repairs were quickly begun. Three years later, a new sign/message board was installed at the church entrance. The "Second Century Renewal Fund" was established by the vestry to plan toward renovation, repair, and preservation of the church's buildings. Three years after that, Deacon Ruth Manson joined the staff. That same year, a chairlift was installed in the stairway to the Undercroft, and the entire facility was upgraded to be handicapped accessible. Christ's Church received a Congressional Citation for our accomplishments.

In 1995, the church spent over \$150,000 to replace the slate roof on the building. That summer, The Reverend Larry Knotts was installed as the 36th Rector of Christ's Church. Also that summer, Ms. Bonita Heisey became Director of Christian Education and made major changes to the Sunday School program. Schedules were altered, and a new curriculum was put in place for each age group. The result was 167 percent increase in attendance! Additionally, Adult Education incorporated a new curriculum with Mr. Willy Heisey as leader and attendance also increased.

In 1997, The Reverend Knotts initiated an *Alpha* program was initiated, small group ministries began, a Stephen Ministry was established under the leadership of Deacon Ruth Manson, and a service for younger parishioners was started. *Mysterious*

A Brief History of Our Parish

footprints appeared in "the alley" to lead the way from the Undercroft to the C.E building!
Sunday School attendance increased by 120 percent above the 1995 level.

Numerous events led to the 175th Anniversary Celebration and Dinner at Mountain View Inn on November 20, 1998. The numerous events included plays, picnics, a Seder meal, a harp recital, and more. Ms. Sandy Carlson created a special booklet on the stories behind the church's stained glass windows for this occasion. New Hardanger altar linens were presented, too. Lite@Nite, a contemporary service began on Sunday evenings that same year; Mr. Marc Dobson led the music.

In 2004, Mr. James Thompson retired as Organist and Choir Director after 50 years of dedicated Christian service. Alpha was phased out and Wednesday Night Bible Study became "Food for Thought." The following spring, Christ's Church sponsored a "Faith Alive" weekend. This special weekend event was held in our church, with neighborhood groups meeting Saturday morning in the homes of our parishioners. Men, women, and teenagers from churches near and far traveled at their own expense to serve as facilitators and leaders of programs for youth and children. Faith Alive musicians led in the worship services. Stories of faith proved how lives are refreshed by a conscious commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Lord.

"Friday Night Friends" home Bible Study Group began in April 2008. That fall The Reverend Peggy Means initiated a mother/daughter small group bible study. The Parish Youth began "Chick-fil-a Fridays" an event that continued for four years. One Friday every month during the school year, the Youth Group team fed youth that attended Greensburg-Salem Middle School. The youth team used the experience to share testimony and discuss the Bible.

Sadly in September 2008, The Right Reverend Robert Duncan, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese in Pittsburgh, was deposed by the national church. Two months later, the diocese took the second vote to disaffiliate from The Episcopal Church. Christ's Church supported that vote. In 2009, Articles of Incorporation were revised to reflect the *proper name* of our church. Our Charter indicated the name to be Christ's Church, and all documents were revised accordingly. The vestry approved all changes, including a new Personnel Policy.

The Reverend Ruth Manson, our beloved deacon, conducted and celebrated one last time at Christ's Church on November 22, 2009. Sometime in 2010, the Parish website was modified to reflect the original name: Christ's Church. In addition, the links to the Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Anglican Church of North America were updated. To correspond with our given name, the ECW (Episcopal Church Women) changed their name to CCW (Christ's Church Women). Christ's Church changed its by-laws deleting all references to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA.

A Brief History of Our Parish

Our Youth Ministry continued to expand in Outreach and Evangelism with events like servings hot dogs in the park on concert nights, support of the county food bank, and Chick-fil-a Fridays in 2011. The Reverend Barbara Knotts, wife of The Reverend Larry Knotts, died following a long illness. The congregation mourned her passing. In December, The Reverend Gretchen Peske was ordained Deacon. Bishop Robert Duncan assigned her to Christ's Church.

In February 2012, The Reverend Larry Knotts announced his retirement after nearly 17 years of service to Christ's Church. He was the second longest tenured rector of Christ's Church. The Reverend Dr. Daniel Crawford was appointed as Interim Rector while the search committee sought a new rector.

On April 13 - 14, 2013, Christ's Church celebrated its 190 years serving Greensburg and the surrounding area. On February 1, 2014, The Reverend Jeff Wylie was installed as the new rector at Christ's Church. That May, Christ's Church hosted a luncheon in honor of Assistant Bishop Frank Lyons during his visit to the Parish. The following month, the Provincial Assembly was held at St. Vincent's College with more than 900 participants attending from across the globe. Archbishop Duncan was replaced by the Most Reverend Foley Beach as part of the Provincial Assembly program. That fall, exterior work was done on the Tunnel Street-side of the church building. French drains were installed to solve the seepage problem, the old church cross was refurbished and installed atop of the steeple, and a new belfry was put in place.

In May of 2015, The Reverend Jeff Wylie conducted a Blessing of the Bikes service in front of the CE Building following the 10:30 am service. That month was also the last time Christ's Church participated in the "Adopt-a-Highway" program. In August, Christ's Church welcomed The Reverend Joe Gasbarre, his wife, Alyssa, and their son, Joey, to Christ's Church. "Fr. Joe," as he was called, served as the assistant rector focusing his attention on youth and Christian education. He started a Saturday night combined evening worship and Communion service. That same month the Parish participated in the annual and national "Back to Church Sunday" celebration followed by a "Blessing of the Pets" service in St. Clair Park, across from the CE Building in October.

On June 12, 2016, The Most Reverend Robert Duncan made his last "official" visit to Christ's Church before retiring. That October, The Reverend Joe Gasbarre officiated one last time before moving to Savannah, Georgia to become their Youth Pastor. Two months later, the Sexton of the Parish, Mr. Ken Mock, announced his retirement.

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