

Hillcrest Presbyterian Church in America September 2007

History

Confronted by the truth of God's Word and having a desire to worship God in a more Biblical way, a small group of 18 people began meeting together for worship in March 1975 at a rustic township building in western Pennsylvania. By August of that year, the group had organized as a PCA congregation with one teaching elder and four ruling elders. Within a year the group had purchased a house on three acres of property to serve as their meeting place.

In 1981, artisans and unskilled workers from within the Congregation pulled together and built a church facility located on State Route 19, about 8 miles south of Interstate 80 and about halfway between Pittsburgh and Erie. In 1996 a new wing was added that contained a larger sanctuary and seven additional classrooms.

From the small beginning in 1975, Hillcrest has grown to a congregation involving about 200 people in Sunday Morning Worship. When local colleges are in session our Morning Worship attendance is routinely swelled by approximately 100 students.

Over our history God has blessed us with four Pastors who have faithfully ministered the Word to us: Richard Knodel, Robert LaMay, Jerry Maguire, and Irfon Hughes. Since 2001 God has blessed us with the resources to have an Associate Pastor - first Chris Copeland and then Stephen Tindall. These men, too, have been faithful in ministering the Word to us. For the last three years we have been involved in planting a daughter church in DuBois, a town about 100 miles east of Volant. By God's grace we expect that work, while small, to be organized this October as a particular church.

Truly God has blessed us!

Church Demographics

Hillcrest Presbyterian Church in America is a spiritually and numerically growing Congregation of 185 communicant members (9 of whom are members of our church plant in DuBois, PA) and 3 associate members (all college students). The vocations of our members are widely diversified. They include blue collar workers, farmers, nurses, merchants, educators, doctors, and other professionals. Christian fellowship and rural hospitality blend these wide backgrounds, and attract many students from Grove City College and a few from Westminster College and Slippery Rock University.

Our congregation is also geographically diverse. While most members live within about 20 minutes of the church building, many of our members travel up to an hour to worship, with members coming from communities as far away as Franklin, Butler, New Castle, and Youngstown, OH.

The congregation is comprised predominantly of families with children ranging from babies to teens. We are blessed with 84 covenant children, 11 of whom are communicant members! The congregation also includes young marrieds, singles, widows, and older couples.

The Lord has blessed us with a love for reformed theology and worship, hearts for hospitality, and an enthusiasm concerning new opportunities for ministry.

Spiritual Condition

Hillcrest's members are at various levels of spiritual development. The majority of them are solid in the reformed faith. As a congregation, we endeavor to seek after the Lord, and we desire faithful preaching and teaching of the Word in order to become more obedient to God. Our Sunday School is well attended, especially by our covenant children, with average weekly attendance of 75 in youth classes, and about 70 adults (plus college students) in our adult class. The attendance in Sunday Morning Worship fluctuates with the season. During the summer average attendance is about 185. However, from fall through spring the attendance is usually between 280 and 300 as college students join us for worship.

Worship

The purpose of corporate worship at Hillcrest is to praise and glorify our Triune God and to give form to the highest expression of His covenant grace with His people. We endeavor to do this through observing the Regulative Principle of Worship and Biblical expository preaching.

The Lord's Day begins with Sunday School classes for adults and children beginning at 9:45 a.m, followed by corporate worship at 10:55. A corporate Evening Worship Service is held at 6:30 p.m. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered the first Sunday morning and the third Sunday evening of each month.

We recognize that all we do as a Congregation must be bathed in prayer. Thus we have a Prayer Meeting each Wednesday evening, and there is a time of corporate prayer led by men of the Congregation during the Evening Worship Service.

Programs

We are convinced that the Church does not exist primarily for or by programs. Rather, the Church exists for corporate worship and for the building of the body. As such, our goal has been to have a limited number of programs and to focus them carefully on providing assistance to parents in raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and on deepening the understanding of our adult members. Recognizing the many time pressures facing families, we have tried to keep most of the mid-week programs on Wednesday evenings so families can come together on that one evening for age appropriate programs that meet at the same time.

Sunday School - The Christian Education Committee, under the direction of the Session, has been very conscientious and successful in its efforts to provide substantive teaching for all ages. Our children's and youth classes use the materials developed by Great Commission Publications. The adult class uses curriculum we develop ourselves. In recent years we have studied the Westminster Confession, distinctives of the reformed faith, worship, individual books of the Bible, the debate over the "Federal Vision," etc. During the opening portion of our Sunday School hour an offering is taken to provide special gifts for missionaries. A different missionary is emphasized every two months.

Covenant Kids - (2 years - 6th grade) - This program meets on Wednesday evenings to provide teaching and activities on a weekly basis for our children and children from the area. Running concurrently with the school year, Covenant Kids is both an outreach ministry and a time for our covenant children to learn and fellowship together. Curriculum for the program has come from Children's Ministry International, Inc, and Great Commission Publications (the Kids' Quest Catechism Program).

Youth Group - (Grades 7-12) - Also meeting on Wednesday evenings during the school year, our Junior and Senior High Youth Groups provide a time for Bible study, activity and fellowship.

The Youth Groups study a portion of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* each year, using G.I. Williamson's commentary as a starting point. Each year each group studies an additional topic, usually focusing on a book. These studies are intended to help the young people consider how to put their faith into action. The Youth Groups also have monthly socials and at least one overnight outing to a local camp.

Vacation Bible School - (2 years - 6th grade) - VBS is an intense week of Christian education and fellowship that has joyfully taxed our facility. During recent summers we have accommodated 60-80 children, drawn both from Hillcrest and the surrounding area. The entire Congregation rallies in support of this annual event that not only provides a time of learning for our covenant children but also an evangelistic opportunity that reaches many unchurched children in the community. We use the "VBS Reach Out Adventures" curriculum. Each year in Bible School there is also a missions emphasis. The children learn about one of the missionaries supported by Hillcrest and the offerings from Bible School are used to make a special gift to that missionary.

Summer Youth Program - (Junior and Senior High) - For one week each summer, usually coinciding with Bible School, our youth meet each evening at the home of one of our members. Teaching is provided by men of the church based on curricula we develop. There is also a time for recreation, food, and fellowship. As with Bible School, the Summer Youth Program has given us a chance to provide in-depth teaching to our young people while also reaching out to area youth.

College Fellowship - Each Sunday evening during the school year the Pastor and his wife have hosted interested college students in their home after Evening Worship. There is a teaching time, and then a time for food and fellowship. Usually there are approximately 60 students in attendance. Each year several of those students become members of Hillcrest as they are convicted of their need to be members of a particular church. It is our desire to continue this ministry after the current pastor retires.

Hospitality Sunday - One Sunday a month during the school year families from the church host college students for the afternoon meal. This has been a great opportunity for members of the Congregation to get to know some of the students who worship with us, and they us.

Women In the Church - WIC meets monthly for Bible study and prayer. There is both a Day Circle and an Evening Circle. The women also support ministries such as the New Castle City Rescue Mission, Desire Street Ministries, local crisis pregnancy centers, and miscellaneous needs of Hillcrest PCA.

Men's Fellowship - Men from the church meet once a month for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. While not as large or as active as WIC, Men's Fellowship provides an important time for interested men to grow in their faith together.

Winter Seminar - A particular highlight of our Christian Education effort is the annual Winter Seminar which features a quality guest speaker for two evenings and Sunday Morning Worship. Speakers such as Jay Adams, Sinclair Ferguson, Joey Pipa, Gordon Keddie, David Coffin, David Hall, and Derek Thomas have been our guests. They have spoken on such topics as forgiveness, worship, prayer, the Westminster Assembly, and various books of the Bible.

Leadership - Hillcrest's leadership, presently consisting of a teaching elder, five ruling elders, and eight deacons, is spiritually mature. The Session is active and seeks to take seriously its responsibilities of shepherding, guarding, feeding, and disciplining the flock. Most of our Session is very active in Presbytery and we consistently send our full quota of delegates to General Assembly. The diaconate is active as well, meeting on a monthly basis to conduct business and to provide assistance to families in need. The church, at the advice of Session, decided not to call

another associate pastor when the previous associate pastor was called to another church. It is our desire to call another associate pastor once the new senior pastor is in place. We believe that our size and model of ministry, both with regard to preaching and visitation, make it necessary to have two teaching elders who are fully engaged in all aspects of pastoral ministry at Hillcrest.

Financial Condition - God has poured out His blessings financially on Hillcrest. We have had budget surpluses every year for the last two decades. Thirty percent (30%) of the budget goes to benevolences, including partial support of 10 foreign missionaries, two seminaries, Presbytery, Denomination agencies, and various other ministries. We also provide \$12,000 per year to support our daughter church in DuBois. We expect to continue that support after the work is organized.

Challenges/Opportunities - Hillcrest PCA has been provided with many opportunities to minister within the body of believers, as well as to those outside the visible church. The challenge lies in how best to respond to these opportunities while focusing on our intent of glorifying God.

First and foremost, we desire to continue to worship God faithfully. In spite of cultural pressures we are determined to retain a “traditional” form of worship that is centered around the clear exposition and application of God’s Word. We believe this is our highest calling and we believe this is what will meet the needs of a hurting and broken world.

Discipling and training men is an area of priority. We want to continue to train men of the Congregation to assume leadership roles within their families and within the Congregation, and we desire to mentor young college men for pastoral ministry. This provides a challenge for current leadership in discerning the gifts and abilities of the diverse group of men God has gathered at Hillcrest.

Other ministries we would like to expand or increase are counseling of hurting and struggling families, regular visitation of church members by ruling elders, and additional outreach to college students. We want to strengthen our evangelistic efforts in nearby communities and we would like to do more follow-up on visitors to Covenant Kids, VBS, etc. As an increasing number of our Congregation grows older, we desire to learn how best to meet their needs, and we want to continue to carry out our responsibility to supplement parental training of children and youth in providing a Christian perspective and worldview. Finally, we want to explore the possibility of planting another daughter church.

As Hillcrest continues to grow numerically, so grow our facility needs. Our sanctuary is often full to overflowing during Morning Worship, especially when college students are present, and we need some larger Sunday School rooms. A committee is at work in considering how best to expand our facilities. Whatever we do, we are committed to doing it without going into debt or taking on such a large project that it hampers our ability to do the things God has called us to do.

God has provided, and we are confident that He will continue to provide, for all our needs as He sees fit. We strive to seek His will as we meet these and other challenges and opportunities. To Him be the praise and glory forever and ever. Amen!