

THE BILL BARKER YEARS

(Compiled by Bill Cadwell for the
Bower Hill Community Church 75th Anniversary Celebration)

In **1950**, Pittsburgh Presbytery decided to “plant” a new congregation in the rapidly growing South Hills suburban area. A tunnel had been cut through Mt. Washington in 1924 that made that area much easier to reach from the city. This led first to the development of Beechview and Dormont, and subsequently to the development of Mt. Lebanon.

When the Presbytery chose Mt. Lebanon for its new church, the township was then in its period of greatest development. Washington Road, the primary transportation artery south from the tunnel, was being widened to six lanes which required some buildings, such as the Denis Theatre, to be picked up and moved. Although the areas closest to Washington Road were filling up with churches, stores, houses and even a few apartment buildings, there was ample open space in other parts of the community.

Along Bower Hill Road, there was Grace’s general store and a few houses, with large open areas on both sides all the way to Bridgeville. The present Moffett Street was a red-dog road that led only to “Clatty’s Farm” and to a miniature golf course operated by Mr. Clatty. But new side streets were being opened and new houses built, which encouraged the Presbytery to purchase a piece of land on Bower Hill Road at the corner of Parkview Drive as the site for the new church. They also somehow located and purchased a wooden building that once served as a hospital at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, had it knocked down, trucked to Pittsburgh, and reassembled on the site. Painted white, with a tiny steeple topped by a Celtic cross, the building resembled a small country church.

The church was to be called the Bower Hill Community Church and (although it was sponsored by the Presbytery, with particular help from the Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church and the East Liberty Presbyterian Church), the word Presbyterian was to appear only in parentheses. Protestants had become a little less fussy about belonging to the denomination of their parents and

grandparents. Actually, few people knew what distinguished one denomination from another.

In addition to a building and a name, the Presbytery needed a seminary graduate to create a congregation. That turned out to be the Rev. William Pierson Barker, Jr., son of a Presbyterian minister in Canton, Ohio, and recently married to Miss Jean Cotton, daughter of a Presbyterian minister in Pittsburgh. Born on February 14, 1927, Bill Barker was an inspired choice for the assignment. Following graduation from Haverford College, he received one of the first 18 Ambassadorial Fellowships awarded by Rotary International to study at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and then earned a doctorate degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He was a student assistant minister at East Liberty Presbyterian Church when invited to serve as minister of the new church.

Jean was born on February 27, 1926 and graduated from Maryville College in Knoxville, Tennessee. Married in Wilkensburg on June 28, 1950, Bill and Jean were still newlyweds, but they had known each other for a very long time. Their parents were good friends and got together often, and as babies they generally slept together in one of their cribs during such visits. The Barkers had two children: John, who later acquired the nickname Jock, was born in 1951 and Ellen was born two years later. Jean devoted her adult life to supporting her husband's ministries.

The assignment for the church was a challenging one. To comply with Mt. Lebanon regulations, the wooden building would have to be replaced by a permanent structure within five years. That would require developing a large congregation willing and able to take on a substantial financial burden. From the time of his appointment, Bill worked tirelessly to interest people in the proposed church. That meant walking from door to door along the streets convenient to the site, introducing himself and going into his "sales pitch." His friendly manner quickly gained him a number of "prospects," including members of other Mt. Lebanon churches. Even people committed to other faiths were impressed by his enthusiasm for the church that was to come.

A sign was erected in front of the church announcing that the first service would be held on Sunday, September 10, 1950. After the sign went up, that date seemed to approach much too quickly. The day before the opening, there were still no seats in the building, so Bill and a potential member picked up some second-hand pews and spent the day adapting them to their new location. An old-fashioned pump organ and some second-hand hymnals had been obtained previously, and the inaugural service was a success.

Whenever Bill heard of a new family moving to the neighborhood, he called on the people and invited them to visit Bower Hill Church. He emphasized that it was a “community” church and that, although it followed the Presbyterian traditions, people of all faiths were welcome. And as people often chose churches for their location, or because they liked the minister or the Sunday school, he soon enrolled members from several denominations.

One of Bill’s important tasks was to help members understand the difference between a self-governing church such as the Presbyterian, in which the congregations made the decisions, and a hierarchical church such as the Methodist, Episcopalian and Roman Catholic, in which the religion’s hierarchy made most of the decisions.

At the first official meeting of the congregation, members of the new church chose three classes of officers as specified in the church bylaws: trustees to deal with financial and legal matters, elders responsible for spiritual affairs, and deacons to provide help to the sick, the poor, the elderly and others. Trustees were “installed.” Like the minister, the elders (who formed the church governing Session) and the deacons were “ordained” with a “laying on of hands,” a tradition that dated back to biblical times.

The church was formally “organized” by Pittsburgh Presbytery on Sunday, February 4, **1951**. At that service, 136 people were enrolled as charter members with Jean Barker given membership number 0001. The first in a long series of annual strawberry festivals was held on June 15 of that year. Another group of 27 people joined the church on October 7, bringing total membership to 163 and ending charter membership. Charles and Helen Wright, who had moved to Mt.

Lebanon earlier in the year, were one of the couples that joined the church that day. They went on to become good friends of the Barkers and leaders in the church, but their gift to the church was greater than any of that. Charles, possibly with Helen's assistance, began to write a history of the early church titled "Family of Believers" that began in 1950 and ended in 1975. It is not known who used an old-fashioned typewriter to preserve the 75 pages of text. Fortunately, that person made multiple carbon copies on onion skin paper, because it was only one of those barely legible copies that survived in the church files to become the basis of this compilation.

In its early years, Bower Hill was largely a "do it yourself" church, in which the members took on some unusual duties. The original basement had included only a single room, used for Sunday school classes and occasional meetings of organizations. During **1952**, some of the men dug out an additional area at the front, a bucket-full at a time, and fixed it up as a small kitchen.

As a result of his year's training in Edinburgh, Bill had learned to play bagpipes and sometimes joined other bagpipers in parades. So when someone asked, he agreed to put on a bagpipe concert in the basement of the church. After he had played several numbers, one woman asked the question that others had probably wondered about: "Do you wear anything under the kilt?" He smiled and went on with the next number. During most of his life, Bill played with pipe bands wherever he happened to be living.

Meanwhile, the church was making preliminary plans for a permanent building and had engaged Harold E. Wagoner of Philadelphia as the architect. Speed was necessary, not only to meet the Mt. Lebanon deadline, but also because the congregation, and especially the Sunday school, was growing so rapidly.

Committees were established to determine members' preferences on exterior and interior architecture and to help plan kitchen facilities. The committee members visited a number of nearby churches, including Westminster Presbyterian and Christ Methodist, to "get ideas." Members liked Mr. Wagoner's layout of the Methodist church, with a fellowship hall adjoined by a classroom building, but preferred Westminster's brick colonial exterior to the California

redwood of the Methodist church. The ladies were delighted with the kitchen facilities of both churches. The modern sinks, ranges and cabinets looked marvelous compared with what they had to work with in the present church.

Due to the growth in membership, a second worship service and second Sunday school session were added at the beginning of **1953**. The church also began issuing a monthly newsletter, *The Church Mouse*, in addition to the Sunday bulletins.

At the service on Sunday, March 29, Bill baptized 13 babies, an indication that the congregation included many young couples. That evening there was a service at which the rabbi and some officers of Temple Emanuel, a Jewish congregation, told of their problems getting started. Blocked from a location on Washington Road, they had purchased 20 acres on Bower Hill Road, about a mile from the church, on which they expected to construct a synagogue. That presentation led to an invitation that they hold their worship services in our facility until theirs was completed. This was the first of many Bower Hill ministries that irritated a significant number of Mt. Lebanon residents.

Conscious of the need to start work on our new building, the trustees engaged the Wells Organization of Chicago, a professional fundraising company, to direct the campaign to raise \$75,000. The Session and the Board of Trustees had decided that the amount of individual pledges would not be publicized, as this might embarrass people who could make only small contributions. The Wells representative objected to this, saying that the church couldn't possibly reach its goal unless people were "put on the spot." When he persisted in doing things his way, the decision was made to run the campaign without him, and he angrily predicted the church wouldn't raise more than \$30,000. So members were delighted to hear that the pledges had reached \$80,000, \$5,000 over the campaign objective. Colonel Wells, head of the fund raising organization, was so impressed that he refunded the \$3,500 fee the church had paid him.

The planning for the new building contemplated using the lot on Bower Hill Road on which the temporary building was located. Mr. Wagoner, the architect, was unhappy about this because the lot dropped sharply, falling 70 feet from the front

to the back. He said that even with \$25,000 to \$30,000 in additional foundation work, only the roof of the building would be visible from the street.

Early in April, Bill made a “welcome home” call on Mr. Clatty, an eighty-two-year-old member of the congregation who had just returned from a vacation in Florida. He was the owner of Clatty’s Farm on Moffett Street and still lived in the farmhouse. When Bill mentioned the trouble with the lot, Mr. Clatty said; “Why don’t you build your church here?” The farmhouse was on about 4½ acres of land, reasonably level, at one of the highest points in Mt. Lebanon. The lot was worth about \$40,000 and Bill knew the church couldn’t afford that much. Mr. Clatty said that if the church would pay him \$5,000 down, and then pay 4% interest on the balance, he would deed the lot to become the church’s property when he died. Bill reported the offer to the trustees, who called a special congregational meeting to consider the matter.

At that meeting on May 10, the trustees reported the conversations with Mr. Clatty. They were afraid the financial arrangement he had suggested would leave them open to legal action by his heirs when he died. To be safer, they proposed that the church establish an annuity, at a cost of \$14,000, under which Mr. Clatty would receive regular payments throughout his life, in exchange for a deed to the property. The new location was so much better than the one on Bower Hill Road that the congregation voted overwhelmingly to proceed.

In early **1954**, encouraged by the shift to a reasonably level lot on Moffett Street, architect Harold Wagoner drew plans for a handsome complex of buildings to be constructed in two phases. Due to the urgent need for additional classrooms, the first phase would consist of a tall Fellowship Hall with an Education Wing to the right of it. Construction of a formal Sanctuary to the left of Fellowship Hall would be delayed until the second phase. Folding chairs would be set up in Fellowship Hall for worship services, but the space could also be used for church suppers, sports activities and other social events. Folding tables could be stored under the front stage when not needed. The Education Wing looked like a one-story building, but a drop-off in the land permitted an additional set of classrooms on a lower level. The Education Wing also included a lovely small chapel, to be used

for weddings and other special events, and an office for Bill, with a handsome new desk and chair, which was a great improvement over his tiny office in the previous building. Mr. Wagoner estimated that these buildings, plus landscaping of the property and construction of the parking lot, would cost approximately \$250,000.

The proposed buildings looked fine, but \$250,000 seemed a major expenditure for the congregation. Most members were young, without large incomes, and none could make significant contributions. And although the church had received pledges for more than \$80,000, these were spread over a three-year period and only a fraction of that amount had actually been received. Fortunately, the trustees made a good pitch to one of the financial institutions they contacted, and members were relieved to hear that a mortgage to cover the building costs had been granted.

Thus, on Sunday, April 25, many members of the congregation attended the groundbreaking exercises. By that time, Jefferson Elementary School had been built on Moffett Street, extending back from Bower Hill Road, and that much of the street was paved. People who drove to the groundbreaking parked along this section and then walked along the red-dog road the rest of the way. The Clatty farmhouse had been torn down, so the site held only a contractor's shack and a large sign proclaiming that the church would be built at that location.

The bulletin of October 3 illustrated the wide range of Bower Hill activities. A "coffee hour" was held each Sunday between the 9:30 and 11:00 o'clock services, a Junior High group met at 7:00 PM, a Senior High group met at 8:00 PM, and Bill conducted a men's study group in the Downtown YMCA each Friday at noon. The Senior Choir rehearsed Friday evenings. There were two organizations for young couples: the B-4s were presumably for couples "before 40" and the Beavers were for slightly younger couples, but nobody seemed quite sure of the age differences. And the Eight O'clock Scholars were to start a fall course of six Sunday meetings on October 10.

Despite weather delays, considerable progress was made on the church building over the winter into **1955**. It was announced that there would be an "open

house” on Friday and Saturday, February 25-26, with the formal dedication that Sunday evening. A TV cameraman was going to take some pictures, so hurried calls were made for people to walk in and out the door to represent a Sunday scene. Compared to the church on Bower Hill Road, the Fellowship Hall looked enormous. Everyone felt sure it would be years before we would need a larger place for worship. At the final service on Bower Hill Road, it was announced that the building had been sold to the congregation of Union Church in the small mining community of Forbes Road near Greensburg. (For years afterward, members spoke nostalgically about the “little white church.”)

The moderator of Pittsburgh Presbytery presided at the dedication exercises in the new building. In accordance with a traditional ceremony, he knocked at the door of Fellowship Hall and the chairman of the building committee opened it. The keys were then handed to the president of the Board of Trustees, who handed them to Bill Barker. After this, the junior choir marched down the aisle, followed by the senior choir, officials and guests of honor.

Bill Barker gave the call to worship. The associate pastor of Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church read the Scripture passages, and the associate pastor of East Liberty Presbyterian Church conducted the litany of dedication. The Rev. Dr. Jarvis M. Cotton, Jean Barker’s father, delivered the sermon. Following a hymn, Bill pronounced the benediction.

On March 6, the first regular service was held in the new building. With 350 chairs set up in Fellowship Hall, there was ample room for almost the first time since 1951. The church had 660 members, compared with the 136 charter members of 1951. But the number of children had increased so rapidly that even the 13 classrooms now available didn’t seem too many. On Palm Sunday, April 3, all 350 seats in Fellowship Hall were filled, several years before the planners had expected a capacity attendance.

The first Maundy Thursday service was held that April. People sat at long tables, with candles the only light and an empty chair at the end signifying Christ’s presence among them. Loaves of partially sliced bread were passed down the

table, with each person taking a slice and pouring wine for the next in line. At the end of the service, everyone left in silence.

It had long been obvious that Bill should have an assistant. At his suggestion, the Session authorized hiring the Rev. Douglas McKenzie, an Australian whom Bill had met while a student at Edinburgh. Doug and his wife Maisie arrived in Pittsburgh on Saturday, October 1, and were guests of honor at a tea in the church on Sunday afternoon.

On Friday evening, October 7, members of Temple Emanuel had their last worship service in our church, some 30 months after we had begun providing space to them. Bill may have been unaware of what was generally known in Pittsburgh: Mt. Lebanon had a reputation for strong resistance to the entry of both Blacks and Jews. This was particularly true of the Virginia Manor district, which had a perfect record of never admitting a family they considered undesirable. They achieved this goal initially through the use of exclusive covenants recorded with the owners' deeds and when that practice was outlawed, through realtors who redlined the district and refused to show homes to those not wanted. These practices drew national attention in 1971, when Muhammad Ali tried, and failed, to purchase a home in Virginia Manor.

One of Bill's series of sermons in **1956** was titled *Kings Who Were Trumped*, telling of the dire things that happened to various biblical kings who went contrary to God's will. Church members were delighted when they learned the series was to be published as a book. But the title was a bit too ambiguous for the publisher, who was afraid people would think the book was about playing bridge. And when the book appeared, it had been retitled *Kings in Shirt Sleeves*. Bill authored another dozen books on various religious subjects and edited many of the Tarbell's Teacher Guides for Sunday school teachers.

Even with the 350-seat Fellowship Hall available, church attendance had increased so much that it was necessary to have three services on Palm Sunday and Easter in **1957**, with one at 8:00 o'clock in addition to the usual services at 9:30 and 11:00. A promotion leaflet issued in April described Bower Hill as "the fastest growing church in the Pittsburgh Presbytery."

When our church facilities on Moffett Street were being designed, various statistics convinced the planning committee that they would be adequate for years. But the statistics hadn't allowed for the post-war "baby boom" and now, after only two years, there were more Sunday school children than could be accommodated in the available classrooms. Fortunately, we were permitted to use a large basement room each Sunday morning in the next-door Ward Home for orphan children. To divide it into classrooms, several men of the church made lightweight partitions which they put up and took down each week.

On March 2, **1958**, a congregation meeting was called because of the need for a better solution to our overcrowded Sunday school than using the basement of the Ward Home. At the request of the building committee, architect Harold Wagoner submitted sketches of an additional building that would include classrooms on the ground floor surmounted by a Sanctuary. Mr. Wagoner estimated the cost of such a structure at around \$700,000.

Even with the new members who had joined since the building campaign, the congregation felt hard-pressed to keep up with its current expenses on top of payments toward the original mortgage. There was a legitimate question of whether we could take on the obligation for a new building so soon. But, following some discussion, the congregation voted to ask Mr. Wagoner to develop working plans for consideration at a subsequent meeting.

On Tuesday, September 16, a dinner for the campaign workers marked the opening of a new building fund campaign. Plans for the new building were displayed. The cost was still estimated at \$700,000, and members were told it would be necessary to get pledges for \$300,000 before the bank would consider a loan. Monday, September 29, brought the first of a series of congregational dinners in connection with the funds campaign. The committee had engaged Ketchum, Inc. of Pittsburgh, one of the nation's top fundraising organizations, to direct the campaign. But as with the Wells Organization earlier, the Ketchum people didn't like the church's policy of refusing to publicize contribution amounts, so once again our people decided to operate without professional help. Unfortunately, the funds campaign didn't come along as well as had been hoped.

Pledges received totaled only \$225,000 toward the goal of \$300,000, and it would be necessary to have another \$100,000 for operating expenses.

Up to this time, the church's only parking lot had been at the far end of Moffett Street. This had long proved inadequate, so at a congregational meeting on Sunday, November 9, purchase of the lot between the church and the Ward Home was approved. It was priced at \$8,500 and paving would cost an additional \$1,500.

In **1959**, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., of which Bower Hill was a member, and the United Presbyterian Church, long separated by some differences in beliefs, had finally agreed to a merger. That was fine, because it would create a truly "unified" body of Presbyterian churches (other than those in the South, separated since the Civil War) and would reduce costs by eliminating some duplicate facilities.

But of course, those very attempts at economy were creating some practical problems. In Pittsburgh, for example, the Presbyterians operated Western Theological Seminary on the North Side, and the United Presbyterians operated Pittsburgh-Xenia Seminary in East Liberty. It seemed obvious that only one was needed, but those people who had worked for one or the other had a concern about their jobs. John Bramer, Jr., long active at Bower Hill, was business manager of Western, and Jean Barker's father, the Rev. Jarvis Cotton, was a vice president of Western.

And what about the names of individual churches? There was a Mt. Lebanon United Presbyterian Church which dated to 1802, and a Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church which dated to 1925. When both became United Presbyterian, it seemed obvious that one would need to change its name and Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church became Southminster U.P. Church.

While these questions were being debated, sometimes with considerable fervor, Doug and Maisie McKenzie faced a different problem. Given lots of loving care, the three children they had adopted were doing well. But their natural mother, who had neglected them before, learned where they were and apparently believed she could get some money by harassing the family. Although the adoptions had been completed legally, Doug and Maisie thought it desirable to

get the children so far away that their mother couldn't reach them. So, at our service on Sunday, February 8, it was announced that Doug had resigned as associate minister and planned to take Maisie and the children back to his Australia homeland. Doug preached his final sermon in the church on Sunday, May 3, and 350 to 400 people attended a reception for him and Maisie afterward. To replace Doug, a young man named James Gardner was engaged as our assistant minister. Jim and his wife Ethelyn were formally welcomed at a reception on Sunday, September 13.

That year's stewardship campaign did not go well. By Sunday, December 6, there had been pledges from only 255 family units, about half of the church families, and they totaled only \$115,000 toward the goal of \$140,000 for **1960**.

The 1960s are remembered as a decade of considerable dissension, with sit-ins, protest marches, riots and assassinations. Originally these disorders centered on the Black struggle for civil rights, which brought support from many whites but hatred from others. Later, the disagreements about Vietnam fueled additional controversy. Eventually, these differences affected the churches, and for a few years Bower Hill was especially vulnerable.

In particular, **1961** was a year of wide mood swings for the American people. On April 12, a Soviet astronaut landed safely after making a complete orbit of the earth. Our space administration was criticized for having been beaten, and questions were raised regarding whether our educational system was adequate and whether our students were sufficiently serious about the future. Just five days later on April 17, a group of Cuban exiles made a surprise attack at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, believing their fellow countrymen would help them overthrow the Castro regime. Instead, the Cuban troops put up a strong defense, President Kennedy refused to send American troops to aid the attackers, and the attack was repulsed. American morale picked up on Friday, May 5, when Commander Alan Shepard made a successful space flight from Cape Canaveral.

Despite these concerns, the church had one of the happiest and most progressive years in its history. In particular, the year brought the start and near completion of the new building. When the architect first drew plans for it, with a handsome

Sanctuary surmounting a floor of classrooms and offices, the estimated cost was so high that the trustees felt our congregation could not afford it. Since the principal need was for additional Sunday school rooms, consideration was given to building the ground floor only and adding the Sanctuary later. An alternative was to build the Sanctuary as a shell to be completed later.

Happily, ways were found to reduce the costs without greatly affecting the appearance or utility of the structure. Thus, the panels at the front of the Sanctuary, originally specified as marble, were to be made of less expensive material painted to look like marble. Tall columns at the front, very expensive in wood or marble, would look just as imposing if fabricated from metal and painted. The three-year pledges still had another year to run, but payments came in so well in 1959 and 1960 that the trustees were able to arrange a mortgage loan sufficient to cover the remainder of the estimated building costs.

As it was during the building of Fellowship Hall, the Sanctuary construction site attracted many of our members as Sunday afternoon visitors. An excavation was dug first, after which steel beams were positioned. As other beams rose, people could visualize the outline of the Sanctuary and the steeple.

On Sunday afternoon, December 3, there was a congregational meeting in Fellowship Hall. At the appointed time, there weren't enough people for a quorum, which required the attendance of 160 people out of our total membership of about 1,600. While calls were being made to round up more members, those present were given an advance view of the new Sanctuary. Although empty, it looked handsome and was a marvelous advance over the "little white church" of only a few years before. Our 1962 budget was \$172,000, including \$22,000 for missions and \$40,000 toward the indebtedness on the new building. With 1,500 members, we were confident that we could raise that amount.

At the beginning of **1962**, work was still ongoing inside the Sanctuary. It was a big job that included painting and placing of lights and eventually positioning of the made-to-order pews and other furniture. The church had been given an

electronic organ by an anonymous donor, but some of the choir members felt that only an actual pipe organ produced satisfactory music.

Sunday, June 10, brought the official dedication of the new building and gave the congregation their first good look at the interior. Lights on the high ceiling permitted bright illumination when required and a subdued effect at other times. The basic color was off-white, but the woodwork contrasted a light brown wood finish with white for a nice effect. What seemed like a "center aisle" was really a bit off-center, with longer pews at the left than at the right, and with additional aisles at the sides. Tall windows of plain glass were along the sides and a beautiful window, assembled with bits of colored glass, was at the front. An elevated pulpit was at the left, with seats for the ministers and the organ console behind it. At the right were seats for the choir, a christening font and a stand for flowers. There were additional seats at both sides for elders serving Communion, and a handsome Communion table took up much of the space in the center. Intricate carving on the front of the pulpit quoted John 1:14: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Carvings at the ends of the pews repeated the themes: Worship, Knowledge, and Service.

At Mt. Lebanon's 50th Anniversary celebration on July 4, Bill Barker, wearing his kilt, was among those who played bagpipes with Clan Douglas.

It wasn't recognized until later that two records had been set this year for the entire Barker ministry: annual church income peaked at \$163,500 and Sunday school membership peaked at 1,337 children.

One event of **1963** had particular significance for church members: On Wednesday, August 28, 200,000 people attended a Civil Rights demonstration in Washington. It was the occasion on which Dr. Martin Luther King gave his oft-quoted speech, "We Have a Dream." But there were people, even among the Blacks, who thought Dr. King was trying to accomplish things too quickly.

With the continued growth of the church, even two ministers couldn't keep up with all the activities. So on Sunday evening, June 2, George Young Stewart was ordained as an assistant minister, while Jim Gardner continued to work with Bill

as associate minister. On the following Sunday evening, Bill preached at the Third Presbyterian Church when his best friend Fred Rogers was ordained as Minister for Evangelism. The ordination was a special one. Fred had taken evening classes at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for eight years and had graduated with a M.Div. degree. But Pittsburgh Presbytery refused to ordain him because he had no intention of becoming a church pastor. Bill, however, managed to convince the Presbytery that Fred's interaction with children and their families through the medium of television was an authentic ministry worthy of ordination. This may have been the first in a series of "validated" ministries that the Presbytery has subsequently authorized. Fred appeared periodically before church officials to maintain his ordination.

Sunday, October 6, marked the beginning of an exchange program in the church. Three Bower Hill families transferred their membership for one year to the Bidwell Church on the North Side and to the Friendship Community Church in the Hill District, and two Black families transferred their membership to Bower Hill. A few of our members quit the church rather than "sit with niggers."

The problem was actually much more serious than that. There was a strong negative reaction, both within the church and outside it, to the membership transfer program, which seems rather innocuous by current standards. Beginning that year, there would be an exodus from the church of more than 150 members every year for the remainder of Bill's ministry at Bower Hill, mostly because of liberal social decisions that members treasure today.

Jim Gardner resigned in **1964** and the church engaged a new assistant minister in May named Bruce Theunissen (pronounced Tennyson). He had worked for Whirlpool products about ten years before entering Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where he was the outstanding student of the class of 1964. He had a wife Marilou and two adopted daughters.

The church made considerable progress in **1965** but continued to be affected by serious differences of opinion among the members. Despite this, the congregation meeting on January 17 was well attended, with no need to call additional people to form a quorum, and the \$151,000 budget for 1965 was

approved as presented. The congregation also authorized Bill Barker to be away an extra two months in July and August, with full pay and benefits, to help the Church of Christ in Thailand. Jean and the children were to go with Bill. Someone had given \$4,000 “for the research use of the pastor” to cover expenses.

In March, Bill was among the participants in the “March from Selma,” joined by John Galbreath, minister of the Westminster U.P. Church. Bill arrived back from Alabama on March 25 and reported his experiences to the congregation on Sunday. He said that he would “never be the same again,” and that “anyone who identifies with that community begins to understand something of the oppression, the brutality, the grievances, the indignities, the injustices long suffered by members of the Negro race in this country of ours.”

Toward the end of his report, Bill stated what might be considered his personal credo: “There come times when, as the Christian community, we must do more than sit; there come times in the Christian community when we must do more than give of our money; there come times in the Christian community when we must do more than get on our knees and pray; there come times in the Christian community when we must do more than write letters or send messages. At some time or another, there comes a moment when the church must be engaged to send its own representatives to stand bodily and physically with the oppressed.”

Bill met that afternoon with people who wanted to hear more about the march. But by this time, his concern for Blacks was being resented by many people. He and Jean were receiving so many abusive calls that they had to tell Jock and Ellen not to answer the phone or the doorbell.

Rather ironically, at just about the time that the additional classrooms under the Sanctuary became available, the national “baby boom” ended, the Mt. Lebanon building boom slowed down, and an increasing proportion of the Mt. Lebanon population was non-Christian. Added to that, the congregation was engaged in controversies between members who felt that Bower Hill should be involved in every “good cause,” and those who shuddered at being involved in any of them.

Although the Presbyterian and United Presbyterian Churches were now “united,” some of the original U.P. churches seemed to adhere to a more fundamentalist belief than our ministers or most of our members. Unfortunately, these differences caused Bower Hill to lose a few long-time members.

On Saturday, May 7, **1966**, there was a coffee to meet Gail Buchwalter, a graduate of Wooster College, who was to receive a Master of Religious Education degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and become our Director of Christian Education.

Bruce Theunissen left the church at the end of December. He had accepted a position with the Philadelphia Presbytery to co-ordinate 14 churches in the Mt. Airy-Germantown area, a rapidly changing neighborhood.

Bower Hill membership peaked this year at 1,742.

The spring of **1967** saw the beginning of a new adult education class. In April, the church participated in the national “50 Million Dollar Campaign,” in which each family was asked to pledge \$180 over three years. This was the largest single fund drive in the history of the PC(USA). The fund was authorized in 1964 to construct and equip Presbyterian facilities such as churches, colleges, schools, hospitals and seminaries in 55 countries on four continents.

The Barkers enjoyed a short vacation at Severn River in Canada. When they returned in September, they received word that Bill’s father had died the preceding day.

This was the cruelest year of all, with existing members outnumbering incoming members 176 to 160.

In **1968**, Bill resigned as Pastor of Bower Hill Church to become Director of Continuing Education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. The past three or four years had been hard on him. He and Jean had received “crank” calls at all hours from people who objected to the church’s exchange program with Black churches and its stands on other social issues such as the March from Selma. At a meeting on Sunday, March 24, the congregation agreed to dissolve Bill’s pastorate.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, and Pittsburgh experienced so much looting, burning and other disorders following the assassination that a curfew was established between 9:00 PM and 9:00 AM. Due to his acceptance in the Black community, Pittsburgh Presbytery asked Bill to become involved and he drove his station wagon into the Hill District several times each day, taking food, clothing and bedding to those in need.

Beginning in **1969**, Bill became the puppeteer and voice for Dr. Duckbill Platypus and Elsie Jean Platypus on Fred Roger's television show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Jean was the inspiration for the Elsie Jean puppet, and that character demonstrated her own warmth and kindness.

In **1972**, Bill accepted a call to serve as Head of Staff at the First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and remained there until his retirement in 1991. He served as Interim Pastor at six Cape Cod churches over the next four years. Fred Rogers died on February 7, **2003**. On March 1, there was a private family funeral service at Unity Cemetery in Fred's hometown of Latrobe, and Bill read several of Fred's favorite Bible passages during the service. And on May 3, Bill officiated at a public memorial service in Heinz Hall attended by about 2,700 mourners.

Bill and Jean spent their retirement years in South Wellfleet, Massachusetts, where Bill died on July 8, **2012**. Jean returned to Bower Hill Church in 2015 and Session restored her member number 0001. She died on April 4, **2025**.