Two Churches Become One
By Barbara Spier

In the beginning (A brief history of Presbyterian Churches in Oakmont):

Oakmont was incorporated into a borough on April 1, 1889 from the second ward of Verona. In 1856 a group of eleven residents associated with the United Presbyterian Church founded the Associated Reformed Church. This later became the Valley United Presbyterian Church and was the first church organized in what now is Oakmont (Gagetta, Calabrese, Zentgraf, & Rogers, 2003). At the time, Oakmont was still a part of Verona.

"In 1858, Peter Bright gave land adjacent to the Bright Cemetery on Fourth Street to the Valley United Presbyterian Church as a site for a church building", (Foote & Gagetta, 1989, p. 12). At a cost of $1,399.00. 25 members of the church were responsible for the erection of a small building at the rear of the cemetery. This building was the home of the church for forty years. (Oakmont Presbyterian Church; Oakmont, Pennsylvania, 1993). "By December, 1877, the congregation had grown to 122 members", (p. 13). This church became the First United Presbyterian Church of Oakmont. In 1906, a building for the church was constructed at the corner of Fifth Street and Pennsylvania Avenues. This is the site of the present Oakmont Presbyterian Church. In 1917 and in 1964 additions were added to the building.

The First Presbyterian Church was organized by George and Rebecca Lee, who first held services at their farmhouse. Formal organization of the church occurred on February 26, 1871. The Lees were influential in having the congregation's first church built at the intersection of Washington and Allegheny Avenues. In 1895 another building was erected as the congregation had outgrown the original building. This church was originally known as the Presbyterian Church of Edgewater; later the First Presbyterian Church of Verona; then the First Presbyterian Church of Oakmont, and later became the Riverside Presbyterian Church. (Foote & Gagetta, 1989; and Oakmont Presbyterian Church, Oakmont, Pennsylvania, 1993). The Lee family lived next door to the church and was very active in it. George Lee often preached in various churches and was often referred to as Reverend Lee.

 In January, 1992, there was a pulpit exchange between the Presbyterian Churches. During the exchange, the Rev. Stephen M. Wilson preached at the United Presbyterian Church and Rev. Donald T. Sherrill preached at the Riverside Presbyterian Church. Following the exchange, two members of the United Presbyterian Church commented on how nice it would be to have one Presbyterian Church in Oakmont. The ministers of the two churches further discussed this idea and presented the possibility to their respective Sessions. A committee was formed to explore the possibility of the merger of the two congregations. After many meetings and much discussion among members of the Sessions of each church, the idea was presented to each congregation for a vote on September 13, 1992. Although the vote was not unanimous, each congregation approved the merger. Following the approval of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, the Oakmont Presbyterian Church was formed. the first official service of the combined churches was held on October 4, 1992 (Oakmont Presbyterian Church, Oakmont, PA 1993).

The new church met at the Pennsylvania and Fifth Street location as that building was larger and not in need of major repairs. Some members of the Riverside Church had more difficulty with the merger as they were leaving a building where there was great emotional attachment. Members had dedicated windows, doors and etc. in memory of loved ones. The congregation of the Riverside Church did request that an air conditioner be added and that lighting be improved to the sanctuary of the building at Fifth Street. These changes were made. A couple of members from the Riverside Church mentioned that on the first Sunday of the combined congregation they wondered, "Whose seat am I sitting in?"

At the onset of the merger, Rev. Donald T. Sherrill and Rev. Stephen M. Wilson served as co-pastors. On January 31st, 1993, Dr. Sherrill retired and Dr. Wilson became the Senior Pastor of the Oakmont Presbyterian Church.

Reasons for the merger, member concerns, and outcomes:

Persons interviewed indicated that the reasons for the merger were that the sizes of both congregations were decreasing. This was emphasized by those from the former Riverside Church, who also indicated that that church was in need of expensive repairs and updates and that their congregation was aging. Rev. Sherrill, the minister at the United Presbyterian Church was experiencing some health problems and was considering retirement. It was believed that by merging, the resulting congregation would be stronger and better able to meet the needs of church members and the community. It was felt that, since Oakmont is a small community, two Presbyterian Churches were not needed.

Members of the consolidation committee were in agreement on most issues and experienced growth as they worked together. Initially the members of both congregations had some concern as to what traditions, groups, activities and events would be given up. Members of the choir and the women's associations had concerns about the changes. As the members got to know one another, priorities were determined, and "people worked together in working things out". The members of the two congregations quickly blended and worked for the good of all.

Those interviewed expressed a belief that the merger has resulted in a strong caring congregation. Members of the congregation are welcoming and readily help others in need through prayer, contributions and service to those both near and far. It was expressed that the Lord led the merger and the positive growth and strength of the church that resulted.

Current active members who were members of the churches at the time of the merger:

Linda Adzima	Idamary Moore
Sam & Dixie Anderson	Jon Nevin Moore
Martha Ayars	Beatrice Oliver
David Barr	Clare Oskin
Ronald Baker	Louise Osselborn
Donald & Patricia Birrell	Susan Podgers
Wayne & Diane Blackwell	Nancy Purdy
Kathy Bowser	Stacey & Drew Quinio
David Brownlee	Dale Remai

Henry & Ann Buechli

Edward Burton

Lynne Carothers

Barbara Cavendish

Joan & Robert Coates

William Coates

Henry Corson Jr.

Martha Corson

Dee Crawford

Beth DeLibero

Jody Dickinson

Kim Dinnin

Marilyn Dunlay

Jack & Sharon Eaton

James Eaton

Roberta & Robert Erickson

Kathi Ferguson

Sue Flanagan

Tim & Lynn Flanders

Tim Flanders Jr.

Bay & Gene Flanery

Janet Fusia

Paul & Barbara Gigler

Thomas Gorman

Richard & Nancy Gray

Sue Harbison

Diane Harrell

George & Ruth Hawker

Ralph & Debra Hayes

Douglas Hipp & Kristina Kaiser-Hipp

Stephen & Shirley Hoops

Sally Huber-Lewis

Doris Hunzeker

Thomas & Ellen Jubeck

Terri Kedzierski

John & Carol Kells

Marjorie King

James & Jane Kinter

Nick & Paula Kokales

Sandra Lane

Patty & Gary Lesnick

Thomas & Doris Lewis

Tammy McCarthy

Ralph & Mary McIntyre

Curtis & Karen McLaurin

Daniel McNally

Dale & Joan Remai

Robert Repp

Glenn Ride

Lillian Roberts

Carolyn Seely

Erik & Adele Sellinger

Fred & Diane Shields

Robert & Janet Shoop

David & Betty Sipe

Jason Strachan

Mary Ellen Strachan

Beverly Taylor

Elva Scheestel/Taylor

William & Doris Tomlinson

Thomas & Deborah Trumble

Gladys Vayda

Vera Viale

Sandra Wahnsiedler

Donald Weil

David & Jean Wills

Dorothy Wygant

William & Ellen Young

Donna & Joseph McNally
Thomas & Tracy Messenger
Beth Michael
Timothy & Kathryn Milberger

References:

Foote, Edward B.; Gagetta, Vince; Wolfson, Marty; (1989). Beginning at a Black Oak: A Centennial History of Oakmont 1889-1989. Wolfson Publishing, Pittsburgh, PA.

Gagetta, Vince; Calabrese, Paula A.; Zentgraf, Cheryl; and Rogers, Gary; (2003). Images of America: Oakmont. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, SC.

Interviews with members of the Oakmont Presbyterian Church.

Oakmont Presbyterian Church. Oakmont, Pennsylvania (1993). Presbyterian Publishing House Church Directory Service: A Division of Publications Service, PCUSA, Cleveland.