

## History of Smith Valley Baptist Church Greenwood Indiana



Smith Valley Baptist Church began as a mission of the First Baptist Church of Greenwood, in November of 1953.

Doyle Brown, a member of Greenwood First Baptist, and a lay minister, was driving through Smith Valley on his way to work, and noted the growth in this small community just west of Greenwood. He believed that this would be an ideal place to begin a Baptist church. He discussed this idea with his minister, Reverend Bob Marlett, and soon a committee was formed to make arrangements and to oversee the work of planting a church.

A storeroom in a small strip mall in Smith Valley was rented for \$50 a month. Greenwood First Baptist provided a piano, folding chairs, and hymnals. The mission grew quickly. On more than one occasion there was in excess of 160 people in a room that was a mere 20 by 70 feet. The various Sunday school classes were divided only by cloth curtains, and the buzz from the other class “rooms” was only one of many obstacles teachers had to deal with weekly. Yet they managed, and the mission continued to grow in numbers and spirit.

Reverend and Mrs. William Sharp had retired, and moved into the community, and word got out that an American Baptist minister was living in the area, he was soon asked to lead the Sunday evening services. The Sunday morning services were still being led by Doyle Brown, and other lay ministers from Greenwood First Baptist.

On March 20, 1955 the church was formally organized, with 26 charter members. Reverend Sharp agreed to come out of retirement and became the full-time pastor. The small, strip mall room had already become inadequate, but there was little hope that the church would be able to acquire a larger facility, because the funds were not available.

But, a group of men from the church, several of who were involved in the construction industry, met with Reverend Sharp, and insisted that the congregation could build a new church themselves.

The church had already been given a parcel of land, on the hill just east of the strip mall, and one of the trustees, who worked for Indiana Power and Light, obtained an abandoned steel

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warehouse from the power company with the provision that the building be dismantled and removed from company property.

That was the first task dealt with by the men of the church, and they began dismantling the building in August of 1957. Once dismantled the building was moved, and then re-erected on the church's land. The men, and many women, pitched in to do this in the evenings after they finished their regular jobs, and on the weekends. That building is still part of the church's structure today, housing the entries, the utility areas, and most of the Sunday school rooms.

The church received a loan from the American Baptist Home Mission society to continue with their building project, and in June of 1958 work was initiated on the sanctuary. Again the men and women of the church provided the labor. The congregation moved into the completed sanctuary in March of 1959. The Indianapolis Star, in an article about the efforts of the congregation, dubbed Smith Valley Baptist Church, the "Miracle church", as it was built for a mere, \$30,000.

Through the years there have been several remodeling and update projects to the original structure. But, in April of 1996 a storm forced a major rework of the church. Straight-line winds ripped through the Smith Valley community, damaging many homes and businesses, and damaging the church to the extent that it was no longer safe to worship in.

At this point, the Smith Valley United Methodist church extended their hand to us, and offered the use of their sanctuary, educational area, and their fellowship hall for all of our worship, study, and fellowship needs until repairs to our church could be made.

Although not like the days of "cloth walls" in the strip mall, often it was quit a challenge as we held Sunday school classes in one area of the building, while the Methodist worship services were taking place in another. And, there was a constant juggling and re-juggling of each other's activity calendars in order to keep both congregations operating as "normal" as possible.

Yet, those challenges brought two different congregations, of two different denominations, closer together, and served as an excellent example to the community. That time after the storm formed bonds of fellowship and fellow-service for Christ, that are displayed in the joint Vacation Bible School sessions, and other activities that we share yet today.

In March, 1997, the repairs, the remodeling, and the many updates were completed, and the Smith Valley Baptist Church congregation moved back home. What they saw was a complete renovation of the sanctuary that included a new, larger, platform, increased seating capacity, and a complete renovation of the front of the sanctuary that emphasized the large, stained-glass window that was a part of the original sanctuary.

With those tasks completed, the congregation agreed that the building need to be expanded, and in May of 1998, a groundbreaking service was held to kick off the addition of a new educational wing, fellowship hall, and kitchen. That work was completed in the fall of 1999.

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The church has continued to grow both spiritually, and in numbers. In 1996 the church was led to call a youth minister as part of our pastoral staff. Lori (Reed) Ferguson filled that role. In 2000, Lori accepted the position of Assistant Pastor. A praise band was added to enhance the worship service in 2002, and the size of the Sunday morning services grew to the point that a second service was added in 2005. Since that time the early service has evolved to traditional worship type service, and the second service to a more contemporary style.

Major Christmas and Easter dramas have been added in the past two years as a part of our outreach ministry. Other activities continue to evolve that include everything from a men's softball team, to a youth fishing tournament, to monthly activities for seniors that attract 70-80 people monthly, many not members of Smith Valley Baptist.

Most recently the church made a major change to its constitution that, administratively, is based on the simple church concept. With a vibrant congregation, and a large group of children in the 6-13 age range, Smith Valley Baptist looks to the future with anticipation, excitement, and the attitude that we are still the "miracle church" that God called into being over 50 years ago.