



# Bell Church

## Strategic Architecture



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### Informed by Our History

*Throughout its history*, the community of Leicester has been fertile ground for cultivating spiritual fruit stemming from the Gospel of Jesus. Francis Asbury wrote of a visit to our area on September 27, 1806. He said: “I rode twelve miles to Turkey Creek, to a kind of camp meeting. On the Sabbath I preached to about five hundred souls: It was an open season, and a few souls professed converting grace.” Beginning in 1865, B.F. Wells became the first preacher for what was then known as the Sulphur Springs Circuit. This center for “Northern Methodism” later became the community of Leicester.

Bell Church was organized in 1866. It was simply a “preaching place” frequented by Circuit Rider Frances M. Fanning, the key leader of a developing Asheville District, as the Methodist Episcopal Church returned to the south. At that time, Methodists were asking “What can we do to help some four million former slaves?” It was a new era for connectional Methodist work in Western North Carolina

The denomination quickly embraced the concept of “freedman’s aid” and established its own Freedman’s Aid and Southern Education Society. Bell’s historical emphasis on education is well documented. Professor Henry Ketron was a prominent member of Bell Church and also headed Brown Seminary in Leicester. In the 50s and 60s, area churches would send their leaders and teachers to The Leicester Valley Training School. In 1961, eight area churches participated in this formalized training designed to advance the cause of Christian Education. That year, of the forty-nine attendees that received certification from the school, twenty-five were from Bell.

Bell Church is a well choreographed group of service motivated individuals who faithfully perform the work that needs to be done. It quietly feeds the hungry as it nourishes souls. It clothes the naked and guards their dignity. It shelters the homeless, while also covering them with intercessory prayer. The church is actively engaged in balancing the needs of seniors working to accommodate the imperatives of young families. Bell rings true with the lessons learned from nearly a century and a half of service.

The church established and actively supports the Leicester Community Welcome Table which draws volunteers from three other area churches to serve meals at the Leicester Community Center. It established, coordinates, and hosts the Christmas Project which provides clothing and school supplies to needy elementary school children and their families. It regularly conducts drives to help meet the needs of the Haywood Street Congregation. Bell currently hosts AA meetings, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts as well as worshippers, those attending Sunday School, sing-alongs, and weekday bible studies.

### A Fully Engaged Powerhouse for Education

*Our education facilities* were built to serve the community of Leicester and, in 2014, many upgrades were made to improve these accommodations. The communications infrastructure was upgraded to include Gigabit Ethernet and Gigahertz CATV cabling to each of seven classrooms, the Sanctuary, and the Fellowship Hall. In addition we have worked with the phone company to upgrade their infrastructure, including new lines and ports, from our education building to their central office.

Today, Bell Church operates with an augmented vision. It is wired for, and focused upon, a set of challenges that include new educational initiatives and outreach. As our current Leadership Team and Sunday School participants now enjoy the use of new technology in one fully upgraded classroom, Girl Scout leaders use that same classroom to lead their charges in lessons concerning safe use of the Internet and other essential life skills. We are looking to provide the best possible hospitality, to enhance the experience



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of any and all community groups, that use our facilities, by upgrading other classrooms.

### **Fishers of Men & Women – Developing Objective Lures**

*We are working* to engage area residents in a conversation about the Gospel of Jesus. In order to be effective fishers of men, to draw them near, we must develop objective lures. We already team with area churches on a variety of ministries and will invite them, especially the smaller congregations seeking new avenues of service, to partner with us in this new initiative. We are actively developing programs that will draw people near, to put all of Bell Church's educational resources to the highest and best possible use within the Community of Leicester.

We have begun the work of extending our reach, to engage the culture as it is, with an infrastructure that will support remote (streamed) viewing of Sunday services for shut-ins, remote (VoIP: ZOOM, Skype, Go-To-Meeting, or Google Talk) participation in classes and meetings as well a properly maintained online presence through social media.

We plan to extend invitations to other community groups to use our education building. This would include a local home school association that is looking for a place to conduct group activities. We are exploring the possibility of hosting Special Interest Groups and/or Meet-Up Groups that focus on food, housing, and job security initiatives. This may also include help dealing with domestic violence, with resume writing, with computer literacy, and by conducting classes for those with limited English proficiency.

We plan to apply for all available grants so that we may make appropriate improvements and facilitate our outreach and hospitality efforts on behalf of the people of Greater Leicester. The expected outcome is consistent with the overall mission of this local church: *“The purpose of Bell Church is to lead the membership and the people of the community to discover and develop a lasting relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.”*

### **Open Hearts – Open Minds – Open Doors**

*We are actively seeking other Truth seekers through:*

- *Radical Hospitality:* Bell Church actively invites, welcomes, receives, and cares for strangers in the hope that they will discover the unending richness of life in Christ. The methods we are employing emphasize the exemplary life and superior teachings of Jesus. They may also represent a departure from ordinary practices. Rather than just providing meeting space for community groups, we intend to take our hospitality to the next level so that our guests may feel they have a home at Bell.
- *Intentional Faith Development:* The congregation is engaging in outreach in the hope that we can help foster growth in faith. We are a welcoming congregation that ministers to all within our sphere of influence, helping people grow in the knowledge that God is still talking while reaching out to us in Divine Love.
- *Risk Taking Mission and Service:* Although we would be delighted if our visitors were to join our church family, we engage to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ. Our mission initiatives and service projects have always involved a certain measure of risk. And yet, we are called to serve and make a difference in the lives of others without regard to any potential return on investment for the congregation itself.



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### Working in Harmony

*Bell Church finds resonance* with, and currently hosts meetings for Alcoholics Anonymous, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts. The facilities are also used for sing-alongs, staging by the Leicester Community Welcome Table, and the Children's Christmas Project. Once our technical upgrades are complete, we may consider extending invitations to other community groups. Possibilities include initiatives for practical sustenance, shelter and strivings. There is a local Home School Association looking for an activity center. Other compatible associations or discussion groups looking for meeting space are easy to find using social media.

### A New Message

*The Leicester Community* is well aware that Bell Church was on the UMC denomination's closure list. No one wants to join a church, that is understood to be sun-setting, just to experience heartache and preside over it's closure. Efforts for revitalization could, if sufficiently visible, send an unambiguous message to our neighbors that Bell is vibrant.

On Ash Wednesday, in 2014, the traffic passing our church sign averaged 1082 vehicles between six and seven AM, 1490 vehicles between seven and eight AM, and 920 vehicles between one and two PM. Due to the establishment of new homes in the area, together with the widening of New Leicester Highway, it is reasonable to conclude that traffic will increase and that the Highway Department will have new estimates useful for planning purposes.

*In light of this, any effort to raise Bell Church's profile, within the Greater Leicester Community, should include high visibility activities and exhibits that can be seen from the highway.*

The parcel of land, upon which the outdoor pavilion now sits, is being transferred to the new Cemetery Association. The side lawn, adjacent to the basement ramp, could be put to good use in ways that are far more visible to the public while also being relatively safe to use for activities involving numerous young people.

Encouraging outdoor spring, summer, and fall activities, together with three seasonal exhibits herein proposed, would help people in the community to take notice of Bell Church.

*The proposed seasonal exhibits in the front yard would be as follows:*



**Christmas** – An Expanded Nativity that would include the static displays and lights used during the Christmas season of 2019. Additional features could include a Moravian star, that the first of the wise men would be pointing to, in addition to a variety of camels, shepherds, and of course, sheep for Alan.



**Spring Sequence:** **Palm Sunday** – Decorative palm leaves frame around both church signs; **Maundy Thursday** – One smaller cross on each side of the main cross on front lawn; **Good Friday** – Place tomb on front lawn in front of main cross and remove side crosses; **Easter Sunday** – Roll stone to the side and place angel on top of stone – Put “He is Risen” on main sign; **Easter Monday** – Convert main cross to a flowering cross.



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*Our Father's Harvest* would combine a front yard exhibit with a side yard event for the children of Leicester and the surrounding community. We would ask the scouts to help build a variety of “stations” for the children to visit. The stations would be fun as well as educational. They would include a *Sinai* volcano that erupts with popcorn, a *Tree of Life* that would launch butterflies for toddlers to catch with butterfly nets, and a *Fertile Crescent* for food. Children could launch balloons with postcards that finders could mail back c/o Bell Church and forwarded to the addresses provided.

### *Other proposed activities could be as follows:*

- Bell Church's Annual Picnic
- Outdoor Worship or Song Services
- Various Scouting Activities
- Mini Concerts and Sing Alongs
- A Petting Zoo
- A Dance (Sock Hop) for Middle Schoolers
- Outdoor Movies
- Spring Plant Sales
- A Craft Fair or Flea Market
- A Neighborhood Yard Sale
- Christmas Tree Sales
- And such other activities as a highly creative congregation can develop.

This may seem like an overly ambitious list of activities. However, we could get other organizations to host events that take place on our lawn or, in the case of a charitable organization's fundraising carwash, in our parking lot for a nominal donation to the church. In the case of Haywood Street Congregation, we could do it gratis. We would clearly be hoping for, and working towards, higher visibility. The main objective is always to bring people into close proximity so they may hear and see the Gospel of Jesus at work. And, possibly, give Bell Church a try.

For those among the unchurched, with a prejudicial attitude towards church, we may be able to challenge their assumptions in positive ways. We would do this as *Fishers of Men and Women*, by *Developing Objective Lures*, while *Working in Harmony* as *A Fully Engaged Powerhouse for Education*. We are *Informed by Our History* with *A New Message* while having *Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors*.

– This Strategic Architecture **Draft** was Respectfully Submitted to Bell Church by Bob Kalk on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 –