Pastor spans globe for mission work

He is returning to Hill United Presbyterian

By Eric Freehling
Eagle Focus Editor

The Rev. Barry Dawson has gone a long way since he left his position as co-pastor at Hill United Presbyterian Church, 501 Second St., in 1985.

Dawson and his wife, Shelly, and their family have lived in Delaware, Montana and South Dakota since leaving Butler.

And they’ve gone even farther afield.

Dawson has served as the senior pastor of the American Protestant Church of The Hague in the Netherlands, the American Church in Paris, Tokyo Union Church in Tokyo and, most recently, the Protestant Church in Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman.

And, at the end of October, the Dawsons will leave again, this time for Bangkok, where Dawson will have provincial responsibilities for the Presbyterian Church mission partnerships in nine countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

But before taking up his four-year assignment, Dawson and his wife will return to Hill United Presbyterian on Sunday to give a presentation on the Presbyterian Church mission in Southeast Asia at the worship services.

“It’s a great opportunity for my wife and I,” said Dawson last month from California, where he and his wife were visiting churches to speak and raise funds for the Southeast Asia mission.

“My wife and I were actually married at Hill Church,” he said.

“There’s a lot of fond memories we have of the Western Pennsylvania area,” said Dawson. “We continue to have Hill Church friends and Butler community friends. It is a great time for us to reconnect.

“I’ve kept in touch with Jim Ihlenfeld, ruling elder of the church,” said Dawson. “The Rev. Clark Sawyer, we are very thankful for his cooperation and invitation for us to come there as well.”

Ihlenfeld, who reconnected with Dawson at the New Wilmington Mission Conference in July, said, “He called. He is familiar with the church. He will talk to folks and try to get them to understand the missions overseas.”

Dawson, who was born in Beaver County and graduated from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, said, “The Presbyterian Church has a long and storied history of global mission for the past 176 years. The Presbyterian Church has been sending out missionaries to multiple countries around the world.”

“Mission partnerships means we don’t come in and tell other people how to run their churches or their ministries. We work among them as full partners,” said Dawson. “We try to support and grow the partnerships between Christian organizations and the churches in those nine countries.”

He said he sees his position as providing a bridge to the Presbyterian Church in the United States, providing communication between U.S. churches and the churches in the Southeast Asia region.

When asked how many churches are in the region, Dawson said, “It’s hard to say. There are Presbyterian churches and there are others that might not have the name Presbyterian in them in all these countries.”

“In some countries, the church has considerable challenges that it faces because of how Christian-
The Rev. Barry Dawson and his wife Shelly have traveled the world for Presbyterian Church missions.

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