

The post-war years held exciting challenges for Mt. Pleasant's Presbyterians. At a special congregational meeting November 26, 1946, Mr. Brunelle's resignation was accepted and a pastoral search committee elected. It included John Benford, Judson Foust, David Lirones, Miss Frances Martin, Mrs. Gerritt Muyskens, and Charles B. Park. The committee worked rapidly and on February 18, 1947, the congregation unanimously elected the Reverend George James DeWitt of Dover, New Jersey, pastor.

"A former chaplain in the United States army," the Times-News reported, "Mr. DeWitt has an excellent background in theological work." A native of Holland, Michigan, the Reverend DeWitt graduated from Hope College in 1919, then studied at Princeton Theological Seminary as a fellowship student, receiving the degrees of Bachelor of Theology in 1922, and the Master of Theology in 1923. Mr. DeWitt was pastor of the Pompton Reform Church in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, from 1923 until 1931. From 1931 until he became an army chaplain in 1942, he was pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Dover, New Jersey. Between 1942 and 1946, he served as chaplain, part of the time with Patton's Third Army in France and Germany, being awarded the Bronze Star for outstanding service. After leaving the army, Mr. DeWitt took additional work at Princeton Theological Seminary.

The Reverend and Mrs. DeWitt moved to Mt. Pleasant late in March, 1947. The Times-News reported April 3, that "under the . . . leadership of their new minister, the Rev. George J. DeWitt and David A. Holford, music director, the First Presbyterian Church will have services on Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday which promise to be most inspirational." The formal installation service was held April 23, 1947. The years of the Reverend DeWitt's



The Reverend George James DeWitt, pastor of First Presbyterian from 1947 to 1952.

pastorate were fruitful as the church grew steadily. The membership was 455 in the spring of 1947. The music program continued to develop under the direction of Levi Dees who succeeded Mr. Holford in September, 1947.

This continued growth led to rewarding developments in the life of the church during the 1950s. The minutes of the Session and the Board of Trustees for the years following the war, report that the official boards continually wrestled with the problems of inadequate space and facilities for a developing program and a growing congregation. A building fund had existed for some time but the first official hint of the thinking of the elders and trustees is in the Board of Trustees Minutes, March 3, 1950: "The church planning committee has been considering possible church sites and also investigating the possibility of changes on the present site."

Two weeks later at the annual meeting of the corporation the entire congregation heard the Church Planning Committee report that they had met with an architect and "discussed revisions and additions on the present site and the construction of a new church. It seemed likely that \$50,000 would be necessary to alter the present building and at least \$150,000 to \$200,000 for a new church." The committee did not believe the existing structure could be made to serve adequately and had made a tentative study of other sites. After considerable discussion, the congregation took no action since "it was felt that more information should be gathered."

Immediate relief to the overcrowded conditions seemed imperative. The Session, Board of Trustees, and the Planning Committee met July 12, 1950, to consider purchasing a new manse in order to convert the existing manse into a Sunday School building. A committee consisting of Worth Dafoe, Frank White, and Paul Hamel was appointed to investigate. After examining several houses the committee recommended on April 13, 1951, that the congregation purchase the house at 403 South Kinney for \$22,000. After "Mr. DeWitt spoke



A Sunday School class attending a "progressive" dinner sometime during the 1950s.



a few words covering the real objective in purchasing a new manse in order to make more room for the Sunday School," the congregation approved. That summer the old manse was re-roofed, a fire escape built, and interior changes made to ready it for fall use.

Meanwhile, other changes in the organization and work of the church occurred. In March, 1950, a Board of Deacons was re-established. In September, 1950, the Session learned that plans were underway to merge the two women's organizations. Also, Mr. Dees resigned as Director of Music effective at the end of the year. Dr. Olaf Steg of the Central Michigan College music department served as director until June, 1951. In August, Floyd Heydenburg of the high school and college music staffs became Director of Music. Under the leadership of these men the music program steadily developed as an inspirational part of the worship services. Finally, on July 11, 1951, the Board of Trustees' Minutes recorded the incorporation of the church under the provisions of Act 265 of the Public Acts of 1909.

In June, 1952, the Reverend DeWitt informed the Session of his desire to accept a call to the First Presbyterian Church of Connersville, Indiana. When the elders and trustees could not dissuade him, they called a congregation meeting June 23, which approved Mr. DeWitt's request. The Times-News reported June 17:

During his ministry here, the church has enjoyed a period of sustained growth. The men's council was formed and a Board of Deacon's [sic] added. The women's work in the church was re-organized and the manse was remodeled into a church house for Sunday School expansion.

In addition, Mr. DeWitt has been an active leader in the Mt. Pleasant Minister's Association and has held important positions in Presbytery and Synod.

Following the congregational meeting that accepted Mr. DeWitt's resignation, a reception for the Reverend and Mrs. DeWitt was held in the church fellowship hall. The table was decorated with garden flowers and a four tier cake. Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Heydenburg and Mrs. Glen Hamel provided vocal music. A sterling silver tea service from the congregation was presented to the DeWitts together with matching silver pieces from the Choir Mothers' club, and a lace banquet cloth from the Tuxis Society. The Women's Association presented Mrs. DeWitt with a corsage of roses.

In July, a pulpit search committee was formed consisting of Ralph Berquist, chairman, Mrs. Frank Mead, Mrs. Leon MacRae, Miss Mildred Gingherick, Miss Lyndell Bordine, Miss Carolyn Ann Erdman, Harold Wood, Vance Orr, and Clarence Tuma. During the interim, the Reverend William McKeefrey, Dean of Alma College, served as supply pastor. The search ended happily when the congregation unanimously voted to call as pastor the Reverend J. Kenneth Cutler, a former McCormick Seminary classmate of the Reverend Wanzer Brunelle. After graduating from seminary, Mr. Cutler served as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Fort Collins, Colorado, until 1937, when he accepted a pastorate at the Forty-third Avenue Presbyterian Church of Gary, Indiana. He served the Gary congregation until 1944 when he moved to the Rosewood Avenue Presbyterian Church of Toledo, Ohio, remaining there until he became the pastor of the Mt. Pleasant church. The Reverend and Mrs. Cutler and their daughters Carolyn and Elinor moved into the Kinney Street manse the first week in December, 1952, and the Reverend Cutler filled the pulpit for the first time December 7. His sermon topic, appropriately, was "Press On." During his pastoral leadership the church would "press on" to new spiritual heights and construct a magnificent new building in which to glorify and serve God.



The Reverend J. Kenneth Cutler, pastor of First Presbyterian Church from 1952 to 1967.

The activities of the church continued to include the church worldwide. In March, 1953, while the elders and trustees were continuing to explore the feasibility of constructing a new edifice, the Session accepted "the quota [\$3,800.00] allowed by Presbytery for the Building Fund Campaign of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A."

Because of continuing large attendance, the Session, September 14, 1953, approved holding two worship services on Sunday mornings. A month later a special congregational meeting voted to purchase the "Voisin property" south of the Sunday School building, and empowered the Board of Trustees to form a Building Fund to be used to build a new church with a Christian Education unit.

Meanwhile, the regular program of the church grew. In May, 1953, the Session voted to sponsor a family who wished to move from Bagdad, Iraq, to the United States. The elders, at their June, 1953, meeting, agreed to recommend that Miss Karen Erdman "be taken under care of Presbytery in regard to her education as a director in Christian Education work." The Christmas Eve program was expanded. A service was held in 1953 at 7:30 p.m. especially for children and one at 11:00 p.m. for families. A Children's Day was celebrated in the Sunday School in June, 1954, with Mr. and Mrs. Francis Sauer, missionaries to India, as guests for the day.

The work with college students expanded. At their June, 1954, meeting the elders approved Associate Membership for college students as provided by General Assembly rules. At the July Session meeting it was reported that Dr. Gerald Poor had agreed to be "Director of Presbyterian Student Activities on Central Michigan College Campus." On September 7, the elders set Dr. Poor's term to run from September 18, 1954, to July 1, 1955, and established his pay.



Also discussed at the July Session meeting were proposed sites for a new church building, but the final decision to build a new church was not made until October 10, 1954, when a special congregational meeting was held. After considerable discussion, the congregation with 105 members present, rejected a motion to table (25-57), then approved (80-4) the motion: "The congregation shall authorize the Board of Trustees and the Session, acting jointly, to proceed with a Church Building Fund Drive and to contract for such professional fund raising services as they deem advisable." How many of those present at this meeting envisioned this as the beginning of an \$800,000.00 project? Their faith is to be commended.

Mr. Cutler reported at the annual congregational meeting, January 26, 1955, according to the Times-News, the progress toward the goal of a new church building. Interest had been growing through the year. The firm of Ketchum, Inc., of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had been employed to conduct a campaign to raise funds for the building program. The newspaper added: "The church had employed the architectural firm of J. and G. Daverman of Grand Rapids to design the building, and many individuals and organizations are already making regular contributions to the fund."

The Watson Road site for the new building was approved by the congregation on February 21, 1955, and a steering committee for the Fund Raising Campaign was elected. The campaign received excellent publicity. The Times-News, March 7, 1955, reported: "The first major meeting in connection with the First Presbyterian Church's New Church Campaign to raise a minimum of \$125,000 for a new church edifice, was held last night in the Church dining hall with more than 100 representing present and past officials, attending."

Lawrence I. Scott, General Chairman, "presided and introduced several members of the campaign's leadership organization, who outlined the purpose, the financial story, a description of the proposed new Church, according to the architect's plans, and a consideration of the size of the task ahead and its challenge. . . . Great satisfaction was expressed at both the size and enthusiasm of the group who attended." A series of informational meetings followed with each member of the congregation personally invited to attend. The Campaign Director "stressed the need of an informed membership to assure the enthusiastic participation needed for success."

The campaign got off to a brisk start. The Times-News, March 25, 1955, recounted the results of the first report meeting held the night before. Pledges totaling \$53,672.00 were returned. General Chairman Scott "expressed satisfaction" at the amount of the report and said, "We are very pleased at the large number of pledges in amounts from \$1,000 to \$5,000 as well as others which, while of lesser amounts, represent real sacrifice and devotion on the part of those who have made the pledges."

The Reverend Cutler concurred. "We are united in our enthusiasm and have complete faith that this campaign will be a complete success. . . . We all know that pledging an adequate amount means some real sacrifice but the response so far indicates the conviction of all of us that we want our new church badly enough to dedicate ourselves completely to the campaign's success."

Successful it was! At the second report meeting, March 29, pledges totaled \$107,050.00. Two nights later the figure was \$150,114.00. Sunday night, April 3, the total figure pledged reached \$172,779.00. Ultimately, the amount passed \$190,000.00. By any standards, the campaign was successful, not only in a monetary way, but also in what it meant spiritually to the congregation. Now the new facility could become a reality.

For the next eighteen months planning continued with the building committee, Frank White, chairman, the center of action. The congregation, in annual meeting, January 30, 1957, received the full financial report. Total assets (pledges and property), \$225,000.00. Architect's estimated cost of the new building, \$344,553.00. The difference, \$119,553.00, could be borrowed by mortgaging the new building, the manse, and the old building. Following this report, the congregation authorized the trustees "to borrow what is necessary and what is available to complete necessary structures." Further, the trustees were "empowered to sign a contract for the new church building, after consultation with and recommendation by the Building Committee."

As so frequently happens, the initial bids were disappointing. The Session Minutes for April 1, 1957, succinctly tell the story: "Discussion of the new church building concerned the effort to cut costs. New bids with reduced specifications will be opened Monday, April 8, 1957. Methods were discussed for raising additional funds which may be necessary."

The new bids were satisfactory and a ground breaking ceremony was held, fittingly, on Easter Sunday, April 21, 1957, at 3:00 p.m. The Reverend Cutler turned the first shovelful of dirt at the Watson Road site while a happy crowd of Presbyterians watched. The construction contract had been awarded only the Thursday before to the Barnes Construction Company of Grand Rapids. The Grewe Construction Company of Mt. Pleasant began excavation, Monday, April 22. A committee had been named to work with the architect and contractor to expedite problems that arose during construction. Chaired by Reuel Cole, it contained John Lamont, Lawrence Lee, Lawrence I. Scott, Glen Hamel, Frank White, and the Reverend Cutler.

As work on the building progressed, sentiment increased for a second fund-raising campaign to supplement the first drive. The necessary authorization came at a special congregational meeting November 11, 1957. The second campaign started February 24, 1958. The campaign was successful, ultimately raising \$152,624.16.

By Sunday, March 23, 1958, work on the new building had reached the point where the cornerstone--laying ceremony could be held. The service was held at 3:00 p.m. with the Reverend Dr. Harold Ray Martin, pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Bloomington, Illinois, and Moderator of the 169th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., as the speaker. Assisting the Reverend Martin were the Reverend Cutler, pastor; the Reverend Alfred J. Stenner, campus pastor, Central Michigan College; the Reverend John Osborn, pastor of the Rosebush Presbyterian Church; and the Reverend Bernard F. Didier, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Alma.

Various officials and members of the congregation assisted in the cornerstone--laying. Mr. Douglas McFarlane, mayor of Mt. Pleasant, and Dr. Charles L. Anspach, president of the college, spoke. Dr. Rolland Maybee, historian and chairman of the Department of Social Sciences, selected the materials that were sealed into the cornerstone.

The first service held in the new sanctuary appears to have been the Easter Sunrise Service, 1958, conducted by the high school students among the scaffolding and clutter of construction. At last the vision approached reality. Work progressed through the summer and finally, September 14, 1958, the morning worship services and Sunday School were held in the new building although the ceiling in the north wing was not yet finished.



The long years of work reached fruition as the congregation and friends packed the beautiful new church for both morning services, Sunday, October 19, 1958, to open a week-long series of dedicatory services. The Reverend Dr. Kenneth G. Neigh, Michigan Synod Executive, preached the dedicatory sermon. The Times-News reported:

Although the keynote in the music and ritual was joy and happiness over the dedication of the church to God, Dr. Neigh in his sermon voiced a somber warning to American Christians everywhere that they not attribute their material prosperity to themselves but rather recognize it as a manifestation of God's beneficence.

During the service, the Reverend J. Kenneth Cutler accepted the keys to the building from Frank White, chairman of the Building Committee, and Reuel Cole, chairman of the Steering Committee. Mr. Cutler also announced an anonymous gift of \$10,000.00 from a family of the congregation. At 8:00 that evening the new Casavant Frere's organ was dedicated with a recital played by Dr. Gordon Young, organist and choirmaster of the First Presbyterian Church of Detroit, who was also a member of the faculties of the Detroit Institute of Musical Art and of Wayne University. A public reception followed in the church Fellowship Hall.

A dedicatory dinner on Wednesday, October 22, featured as speaker the Reverend Bernard F. Didier, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Alma. To close the week of services, on Sunday, October 26, the Reverend Wanzer H. Brunelle, pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Allen Park, spoke at both morning services. That afternoon at 4:30, Mr. Floyd Heydenburg conducted a Vespers Concert by the combined choirs accompanied by Mrs. Harriett Collin. The prelude to the concert was played by Mrs. Waldo Russel Handley, a former member of First Presbyterian Church and a noted organist from Detroit.

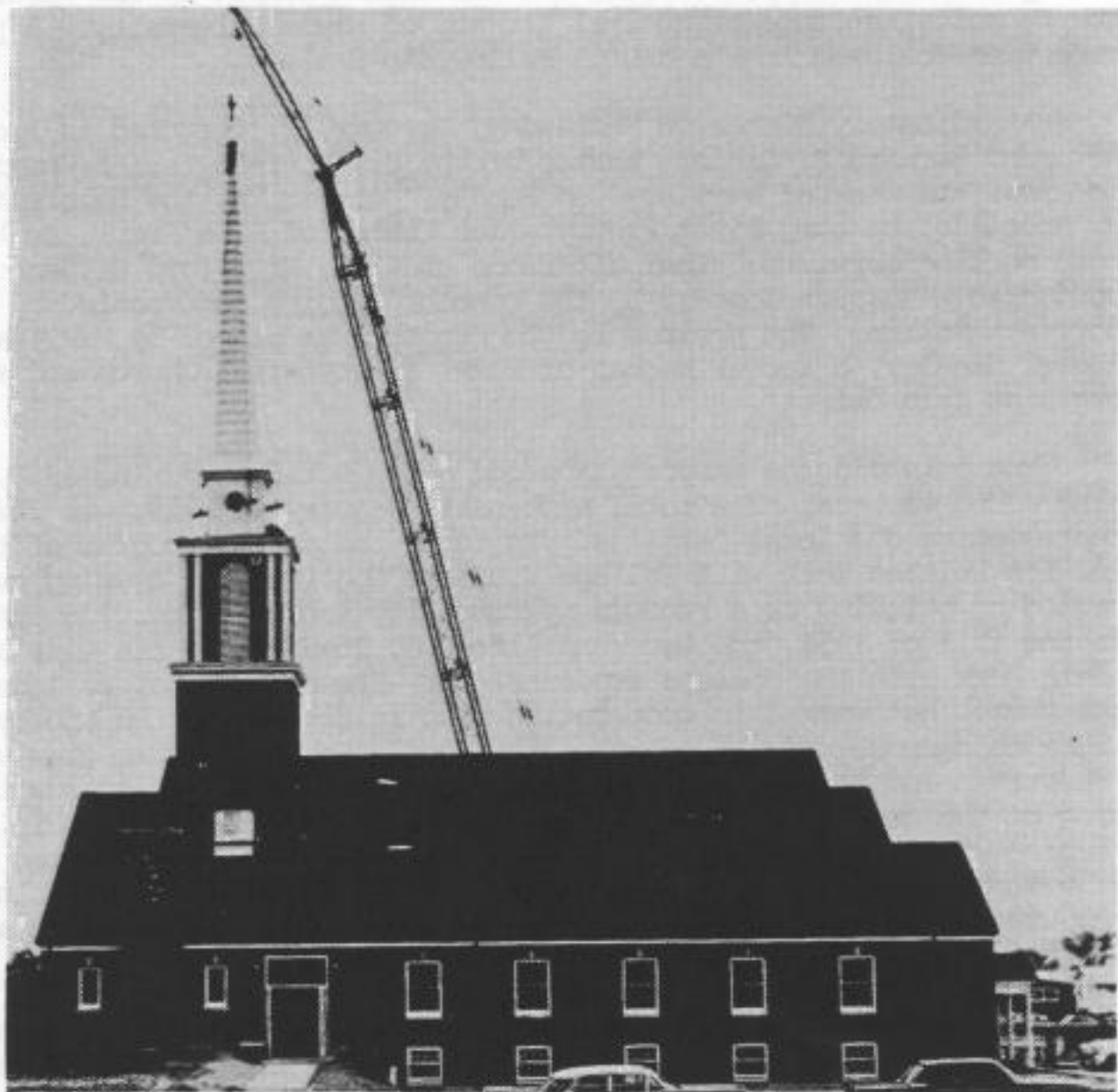
Not only did the congregation add a new building during 1958, it also added members. The total membership January 1, 1959, was 758 representing 353 local families. In fact, the entire program of the church and its related work with college students continued to develop during the period of building as a renewed spirituality seemed to pervade the people. In the fall of 1956, the Reverend Alfred J. Stenner and his wife had begun their work with the college students. Mr. Stenner was not assigned through the church but worked in cooperation with it to further the Presbyterian cause on campus. Simultaneously, the Sunday School program grew under able leadership and teaching. Each year the Every Member Canvass saw the program of the church adequately supported by a dedicated membership. In keeping with this spirit the Session in October, 1957, instituted a monthly 8:30 Sunday morning communion service. Further, the church continued to encourage ministerial candidates, giving financial support to Peter Russell during his study at McCormick Seminary from which he graduated in May, 1962.

During the months following the dedication of the new building, the people did not forget the words Mr. Cutler wrote for the printed program. "In the midst of our joy today," he wrote, "let us remember that we have not yet completely met the challenge to build a church which will adequately meet the needs of this congregation." By the fall of 1960, the officials and congregation, under Mr. Cutler's guidance, were ready to complete the task. During 1961 planning advanced, culminating October 21, when the congregation voted to hold a third financial campaign to build the educational wing of the church and to add the steeple. Again a building committee was formed and the Daverman Company employed as architects. The financial campaign proceeded and May 7, 1962, Lawrence Johns, chairman of the committee,

reported to the Session that \$108,000.00 had been pledged. Ultimately, the Third Campaign yielded almost \$110,000.00. Ground breaking ceremonies, with the children and youth participating, were held May 27, 1962, and the Englehardt Construction Company of Bay City began building. Undoubtedly, the climactic point in the building came for many members on May 27, 1963, when the silver spire with its golden cross was hoisted into place.

The dedication services for the education building were held Sunday, September 29, 1963, at the two morning services. The Reverend Cutler and the Reverend John Peter, assistant pastor, participated in the services as did Frank White, chairman of the Building Committee and several representatives of the youth groups. The dedicatory sermon was preached by the Reverend Charles E. Hurst, Stated Clerk of Synod and Assistant to the Synod Executive.

The beautiful building that now towered above the surrounding countryside was a fitting memorial to the many devoted men, women and children, from the tiny group of founders on, who had striven to further God's work on earth through the First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant.



Placing the steeple, May 27, 1963.