

The congregation eagerly awaited the arrival of the Deacons in September of 1980. After the extended period of bitterness and polarization, the congregation was in need of a pastor who could be compassionate, who understood church separation, and who could assist the members to make the tough decisions that were necessitated. They "struck gold" when the Reverend John Deason arrived. He had been professionally trained and experienced in the interim ministry. His previous work had taken place in the states of New York, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Mr. Deason had committed himself to interim service and was considered an outstanding specialist in this type of work. He helped the members not to dwell on the recent past but, instead, to look forward to the future. Kay and John elected to live in the Broadway Manse. The Kinney Manse had been sold for \$63,600.

In July, the Session had activated the Nominating Committee to fill the vacancies realized by resignation. Dorothy Theunissen and Nancy Telfer were the Session representatives. During this period, the congregation approved reducing the size of the two governing Boards from twenty-seven members each to eighteen members each. A church committee was established to revise the Church By-laws. This committee consisted of Vern Austin, Marilyn Johns, and Richard Nisbet. The Maranatha Singers separated themselves from the church. The use of the Dialog House was discontinued and its existing programs terminated. A few months later, the Reverend Katherine Epperly was hired as Interim Assistant Pastor with the responsibilities of the position of Coordinator of Campus Activities.

The Thanksgiving Eve Service was held in cooperation with Trinity Christian Reformed, First Methodist, Trinity Methodist, Sacred Heart Catholic, and Immanuel Lutheran churches.

The United Presbyterian Women of the church were a strong and steadfast group at this time. It maintained an on-going thread of strength that wound through the church, giving it a base upon which programs could be built. A review of the U.P.W. Purpose seems appropriate as the local group of women more than lived up to its intent: "Seeking to be Obedient to God's Call in Jesus Christ, We unite: To support the Mission of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., to help One Another to Grow in Christian Faith and Understanding, and to Act in Christian Concern in the Company of God's People Everywhere."

The group held another successful Tasting Bee and Bake Sale. Tasting Bees were started in 1962 and held biennially through 1986. It was held in conjunction with either a Bake Sale or a Craft Show. Recipe books were sold which contained recipes for the foods served. The program saw a high percentage of the ladies of the church involved and working together. It was replaced by a larger Craft Sale and Bake Sale where luncheon was served. Occasionally an all-church rummage sale was held. The United Presbyterian Women continued their mission projects which over the past several years had included support for Big Brother-Big Sister Program, Eagle Boy's Village, Migrant Ministry, Presbyterian Youth for Summer Camp, Detroit Church of the Covenant for race relations work, Food with Friends, Foreign Christian Service, Beacon House, individual emergency gifts for needy persons and families, support for Taiwanese and Japanese orphans, and assistance to C.M.U. Indian students. In addition to contributions to mission, the women of the church held periodic sewing meetings in which they

completed blankets for AIDS children, leper shirts, hospital gowns, baby blankets, sweaters, layettes, mittens, school bags, health kits, and bandages. The circles were reorganized into four groups and named for women in the Bible - Rachel, Priscilla, Hannah, and Lydia.

The stairwell enclosure and glass firewall were installed in the northwest corner of the education wing of the church. This was funded primarily by the Isabella Child Development Center. In subsequent years, this group financed the fencing of the playground area and the carpeting of their area and an adjacent room. The Center had originally used the present John Witherspoon Room but later moved to the Patsy Bratton Turner Room (kindergarten).

When the Christian Education Director had been relieved of his position, Hope Carlson acted as temporary Superintendent of Sunday School during the summer; then Dorothy Theunissen assumed the role. A Christian Education Task Force was formed, with the primary responsibility to select materials for the church school. It also needed to look for more permanent leadership in the area. This task force consisted of Hope Carlson, Sue Bitzer, Dale Austin, Beverly Ketcham, Tammy Sears, Cindy Miles, Annabel Brown, Beverly Crawley, Hal Crawley, and Dorothy Theunissen. The group selected, and Session approved, the use of "Christian Education: Shared Approaches" materials. Sherry Hicks was hired as part-time Christian Education Coordinator.

The Finance Committee had been able to pay all salaries and all local expenditures. With an anticipated \$15,000 deficit by the year's end, an appeal was made for increased contributions. Ted Tetreault headed the pledge campaign for 1981 - the budget was set at \$119,700 and 171 pledges came to \$88,500. The difference had to be made up through non-pledge contributions, loose offerings, interest on the Kinney Manse sale, Campus Mission Office, Sunday School pledges, and miscellaneous sources. During November, eighty names had been deleted from the rolls. Much of this was the result of the changes in church leadership and direction as described earlier.

Earlier the church had received a gift of a stained glass window from glass from the Main Street church. The G.R. Denisons had contributed this as a memorial to former presidents of C.M.U., Charles Anspach and Judson Foust. It is now installed above the door at the north entrance of the church building.



The Reverend John M. Deason, interm pastor of First Presbyterian Church 1980-81.

The Reverend John Deason made a positive observation after he had been on the job a few months - "during these past months we have worked together to restore dignity and beauty to our worship services, to provide direction and order in our sense of mission, to give confidence and stability in the ministry and to prepare the church for the calling of a new pastor." The church was certainly moving forward.

During 1979 and 1980, a committee had been working diligently to bring a refugee family to Mt. Pleasant. Included in this group were Mary Obuchowski, Oliver Oberlander, Louise Decker, and Louis Ecker. The following January the Sok Tal Nou family was introduced to the congregation. They

were from Cambodia and sponsored by the church. Monica Nou, and her daughter, Mara, remained in the community for many years. Mara became a Rotary Exchange Student abroad and traveled extensively. She received a top academic scholarship to Central Michigan University. Mara was to meet an unfortunate death through an automobile accident in 1994, only three months after her marriage and three months prior to graduation from the university; a tragic loss!

A special committee was established on Mission Directions. It included Frances Dietrich, Helen L. Hamel, June House, Rex Hewlett, Robert Heydenburg, and John Cantelon as consultant. A review of mission work over the next several years clearly demonstrated that the Church was committed in that area. Beside the sponsoring of the refugee family, other projects were to include supporting the Association for Inter-Faith Ministries, 2¢-A-Meal program (Costa Rica), Habitat for Humanity, World Hunger, Family Counseling Services, the Reverend Guy and Monique Bakaert's medical mission in Cameroon, Tom Richardson as a student missionary in Japan, and many others.

On March 22, 1981, nine people were elected to form the Pastoral Nominating Committee. This important committee was chaired by Garry Mesler and included Beverly Crawley, Nikoline Bye, John Wolf, June House, Jim McTaggart, Annabel Brown, Robert Heydenburg, and Shirley Cassel.

November 15, 1981 was the Reverend John Deason's last Sunday. Kay and John were honored by the congregation at a "Celebration of the Interim" dinner that evening. Mr. Deason left to become interim pastor to First Presbyterian Church of Cedar Falls, IA. His fourteen months with First Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant, MI. covered one of the most critical periods in the church's history. During his tenure the congregation came to terms with its history, accepted its troubles and put them in the past. The identity of the church was clarified as a positive Presbyterian Congregation with clear goals and open ministry. He had led people to new visions of what can be accomplished as a Christian Church loyal to Christ and the reformed church tradition.



The Sok Tal Nou Family sponsored by First First Presbyterian Church as Cambodian refugees in 1980.

During the period prior to Deason's arrival, Dr. Charles House, an ordained Presbyterian Minister from the Central Michigan University administrative staff, had helped the Session, the Christian Education Committee, and the Campus Ministry during that trying period. He now continued this assistance until a new pastor would arrive. This included leading the Christmas Eve Service.

In this time of tight fiscal conditions, a Committee on Energy Conservation was appointed. It consisted of Louis Ecker, chairperson, Sue Blodgett, Margaret Hartmann, Robert Krapohl, and Floyd Otteman. Its charge was to determine problems of church and Manse facilities relating to energy use. The Dialog House on South University was sold; the church could use the interest earned toward funding the campus program.

In November, the Session dismissed Scout Troop #628 which was under the leadership of a member of the Community Church. By the next fall a new troop, #634, was underway under the leadership of David Lindley.

The Campus Committee applied for a Synod grant to begin a campus program entitled "Ministry to Blacks at C.M.U.". Dr. Francis Curtis from the university was employed to assist; his office was in the Wesley Foundation.

As 1981 came to a close, the Pastoral Nominating Committee had selected the Reverend Dr. Stephen Shugert from Baltimore, Maryland to provide the leadership for the church's future. The congregation approved their selection. Active resident members at the time totaled 481.