

Chapter 5

Following the festive Silver Anniversary celebration, the church needed to concentrate on its mission program. The Mission and Outreach Committee was very active. They continued their support of the Bakaert medical missionary work in Cameroon, supported Tom Richardson as student missionary in Japan, continued working with the Cambodian family, and established a program employing members of the congregation to collect used postage stamps in support of Church World Service.

A popular campus program was Stone Soup Fellowship on Monday night with a prayer study group following. There was continued support for the ministry of black students. Pat Latus left for seminary in August, and Therese Holder became the new coordinator. Jim McTaggart continued his conscientious efforts toward improving the church library. It was completely reorganized in 1984.

In the fall, the Acolyte Program was under the direction of Joyce Sherwood and then was continued by Deb Bennett. This program in the subsequent years was instrumental in providing instruction and guidelines for the young people involved in this part of the service. The Church School average attendance was thirty-eight, and the Summer Vacation Bible School provided instruction and fun for over sixty children. Adult Education had many church members involved in Kerygma Bible Study while others took part in a varied Adult Forum format. A very successful Lenten series featured Dr. Stanley Walters from C.M.U. who based a Bible study series on Psalms.

An important aspect of the church life has always been handled by the Congregational Life Committee. Their role has been to plan and carryout fellowship through social functions. The mention of some of these activities brings back many pleasant memories to individuals of the congregation; Advent Festival, all-church picnics, bowling parties, canoe & cross-country skiing trips, chili and spaghetti dinners, Christmas caroling, church basketball and softball teams, ice cream socials, pancake breakfasts, potlucks, progressive dinners, shrimp boil, spring/Valentine dances, square dances, tail-gating at C.M.U. football games, theater parties at the university.

It was time for the church to fill an Associate Pastor post. In January 1985, an Associate Pastor Nominating Committee was formed - Betty Enders, Wm. Franklin, Karen Heydenburg, Don Holland, Peter Koper, Nancy Lowenbergh, Harold Telfer (chairman), Dorothy Theunissen, and William Wood. This committee would report in 1986.

The Session approved the installation of a stairlift on the stairway at the west end of the sanctuary. A new computer and printer was secured for the office. The roof was replaced and the front sign was rebuilt. The Sanctuary and Narthex were refurbished and Fellowship Hall was renovated.

Two newly decorated rooms were given proper names. The large upstairs meeting room became the John Witherspoon Room while the downstairs meeting room (Fireside Room) was now the Westminster Room. The Elizabeth and Elmer Graham family presented the church with a new Grand Piano for the sanctuary in memory of their parents. It was dedicated during a December worship service. The Capital Improvement Fund projects were two-thirds of the way toward completion - \$160,400 had been received, leaving approximately \$45,000 to be collected in the final year. There were two more changes in 1986. The room used by

the Isabella Child Development Center (kindergarten room) became the Patsy Bratton Turner Room. The Fellowship Hall was named the John Knox Room. The church library was moved into the John Witherspoon Room.

Adventure Time had proven successful and was continued. This program met the second half of the worship service, for children too old for the nursery and too young to sit through the entire worship service. Marie Koper replaced Cindy Miles as Christian Education Coordinator. The Westminster Fellowship began their Fall Semester with a picnic under a large yellow tent on the front lawn following worship. The entire congregation was invited. Third Wednesday potlucks were begun to provide church members a mid-week opportunity for fellowship and education. In a few years, this would become the night for the regular Church School classes. The hand-bell choir was re-established and new robes were purchased for the Chancel Choir.

Religious art paintings were received from Mrs. Helen Willhite. "Christ With Children" and "Jesus With Children" were hung in Fellowship Hall. The large painting, "Head of Jesus," was hung in the Narthex in memory of her husband, Dr. Lyle Willhite.

The three year long Capital Fund Campaign ended, and 93.4% of the pledges were received. Frank Ingram, Chairman of the Capital Improvement Committee, deserved much credit for the conscientious job that his committee did in selecting and monitoring the projects undertaken.

On April 9, 1986, the church hosted the American Boy Choir from American Boys School in Princeton, NJ. The group had performed in more than 1500 American cities and towns in forty-five states, as well as Canada, Central and South America, Philippines, Japan, Korea and Europe.

The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (Harold Telfer, chairman) made its report and recommended the Reverend Ronald Ditmars for the position, half-time on campus and half-time with the church. Another plus for the year was the return of retired Reverend Kenneth Cutler and Alice to live in Mt. Pleasant and once again worship in First Presbyterian Church. William Franklin was Moderator of the Presbytery in 1986 and recognition was given to Dr. Steven Egler's ten years as Director of Music. The Deacons began to use Dial-A-Ride to transport members to church, assisted by Deacons riding along.

On October 12, 1986, a service of dedication was held for the stained glass Sunburst Window over the altar, a gift from the Heydenburg family. This was the first year that the Pony Express System was used in the Stewardship Campaign. It was designed to include participation by every church member in delivering a saddlebag to a neighbor; it proved highly successful as 99.6% of the budget was reached. There were 197 pledges totaling \$157,315.

A musical highlight in 1987 was the All Saints Day Bach Cantata performed with the Midland Memorial Presbyterian Church. Other special music performed included sacred music presented by numerous present and former trumpet students of Dr. Paul Willwerth assisted by Dr. Steven Egler, organist, and Mary Kiesgen, soprano. When one speaks of the church music, Sue Carey would need to be recognized for her beautiful flute solos and her work with the various youth choirs. Her husband, Michael, became a frequent liturgist for the readings of the traditional lessons and carols at the Christmas Eve Service

each year.

The Campus Committee and Westminster Fellowship completed a year with the Reverend Ronald Ditmars. Featured were the Welcome Back Brunch, the Spring Retreat, and a twenty-four Hour Fast held at the church overnight (thirty-five students participated, and \$500 was raised for worthy projects). A campus-wide communion service was held, and seventy-five students took part.

Two outstanding choirs performed in the church in 1988. First was the Luther College Nordic Choir, and this was followed by a repeat performance at the church by the American Boy Choir. Other musical features were a Community Messiah Sing-Along, and the Rutter Requiem Mass performed in combination with Midland Memorial Presbyterian Church Choir. The following year, the Goodwill Black Gospel Singers from Albion, MI performed a concert in the church sanctuary.

The Church and Society Committee supported William and Mary Franklin's trip to Russia for "Peacemaking" in July. They helped celebrate the 1000th Anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church. The committee provided a scholarship to Linda Dening to participate in an international workshop in Hungary. Also attending this were the Reverend Ronald Ditmars who had organized the group. Included were three C.M.U. students, a Michigan Theological student, and an ecumenical staff person from Sweden. The experience lasted between May 10-31. The mission work group restored a roof of a Reformed Church and restored rooms elsewhere. The purpose was to take a small step to improve East-West relations and to be ambassadors of peace. The trip was organized by Westminster Fellowship in cooperation with the World Student Christian Federation (European section).

At Easter time, the Cross of Flowers Service, in its second year, was again a very memorable occasion. The children and parents in the church truly looked forward to this celebration each spring. A new Pictorial Directory was completed. In addition to the individual and family pictures, it contained excellent pictures of various church activities.



The Cross of Flowers - an Easter tradition.

In 1988, the women's organizations in the National Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) changed their name from United Presbyterian Women to Presbyterian Women.

During 1989, the church membership rolls were reviewed and updated. Elaine Connell, Membership Clerk, undertook this gigantic task. All past membership roll books were reviewed and the names of non-participants were identified. Before removing an individual to an inactive

status, the Book of Order demanded that they be notified; finding some addresses was very difficult. Fewer than 50% responded to mailings. This was made more difficult because of the division of the church in 1980. The active membership was dropped to 417. Session voted on November 20, 1989 that a Membership Clerk become a permanent part of the Session organization.

Presbyterian churches across the nation recognized the church's Bicentennial Year celebrating our rich heritage as Presbyterians in the Reformed Tradition. For the home church, this was reflected on October 22, 1988 by the raising and hanging of our historic church bell that had called worshipers to the two previous First Presbyterian churches in Mt. Pleasant. The congregation gathered on the lawn to watch the installation. A bag-piper from Alma College, in full Scottish dress, played "Amazing Grace" and the affair closed with the singing of "The Doxology." It was a beautiful sunny day and a thrilling experience for all that were present. In addition to the hanging of the bell there were sweatshirts sold, and the sign of stained glass from the previous First Presbyterian Church was reconstructed and donated. Marydeana Duckworth made the presentation of a Michigan White Pine tree (the "Bicentennial Tree") on Earth day which was then planted on the front lawn of the church as a dedication to her husband Gene Duckworth. A plaque was placed at its base.

Two of the church's youth, Andrew Fribley and Tanya Sears, became Associate Deacons and served on various youth committees. Andrew was selected as alternate Youth Delegate to the Synod. In 1989, as an Eagle Scout project, he refurbished the church playground equipment.

The Reverend Ronald Ditmars left the Associate Pastor position to do graduate fellowship work in New York City at Union Theological Seminary. A reception was held at Ron and Nancy's home on June 11, 1989, and a final get-together was held on June 18.

The financial picture of the church was not bright. A Long Range Planning Committee, consisting of Sherry Sponseller, David Kerr, Nancy Telfer, Tammy Sears, William Peterson, Deborah Slade and the Reverend Dr. Stephen Shugert, was established. One of their charges was to give particular study to what staff would be needed to meet the church's goals and how the church could finance them. Presbytery funding for a campus person seemed very uncertain after Mr. Ditmars left. The church had been getting interest from the sale of the Dialog House, but if the campus program terminated, the principle would have to be returned to Synod. Presbytery did finally agree to \$8000 for a half-time person for Campus Ministry the last half of 1989. Later they agreed to a full-funding of this position. Knowing the financial squeeze the Stewardship chairman, John Wolf, along with Ruth Wolf, introduced a "We Are The Family" feature to be incorporated as part of the Pony Express campaign. It allowed for providing many church members with budget information and the story of the church's past. Photos were taken, notebooks assembled, and these notebooks then distributed. The campaign resulted in the receipt of \$175,100. Ruth Felter continued her extraordinary effort in supplying current, accurate, and dependable financial information to this campaign and to the Finance and Stewardship Committee in general. A quote of November 20, 1989 reflected the situation - "this is the first time in anyone's memory that we actually have a negative General Fund Balance (-\$661)."

The Long Range Planning Committee identified several areas/issues that might be hurting the church:

1. care of inactive members and attraction of new people
2. morale problems - all not "pulling their weight"
3. not enough young families - a large proportion of gray-haired people
4. Sunday School too small
5. "Cold" University Church - high percentage of university people
6. lack of maintenance in the church



The children join the Reverend Dr. Stephen Shugert for a Sunday morning story.

Planning took place for two new fund raisers to be run simultaneously. Pledges would be made at this point and payments expected between June 1991 and June 1994. The first was a Presbyterian (USA) Bicentennial Fund. This was not a local project but a church-wide program initiated and approved by

the General Assembly in commemoration of the 200th General Assembly in Philadelphia. Each individual church was asked to participate at the level it felt possible. This church's goal was to have members make a three year pledge equal to their normal stewardship one year pledge. It would be used for Evangelism, Education, Justice and Global Mission. David Lindley was chairman for this drive. Its goal was \$30,000. The second was an Organ Fund. Its purpose was to establish an Organ Enhancement and Refurbishing Fund and gain authorization to buy used pipes from Casavant Freres. Charles Ramseth volunteered to get the Organ Fund drive started. Robert Yuill later directed the project to its completion in the summer of 1995.

The church continued to support the 2¢-A-Meal program sponsored by the Presbytery Partners in Mission. 50% of the proceeds went to Presbytery efforts in Costa Rice, 25% percent to Presbytery Hunger Program, and 25% to hunger programs of the local church.