

# OUR FIRST FIFTY YEARS

By Glenn Martin

## THE DREAM

In the mid 1940s the South Dearborn Church of Christ, which met on Tuxedo Road near Dix and Wyoming close to the border of Detroit, purchased some lots at 14880 Southfield Road between Roger and Laurence in Allen Park and planned to move the congregation to Allen Park. Their plan did not come to fruition. (The South Dearborn Church no longer exists.) However, some members continued the dream, and their vision began to take root in others from nearby congregations.

Helping to plan and launch the new congregation were James D. Groves, Minister at Vinewood, David Hancock of Vinewood, Millard Loftis, Minister at River Rouge, Floyd Agee, Sr. of River Rouge and Floyd Wiley, Minister at South Dearborn. They knew that the rural towns, such as Allen Park, in a few years would become thriving metropolises in the Detroit area.

## THE BEGINNING

Finally after years of discussions and informal meetings the dream was realized. The small group had made arrangements to rent the music room of the Allen Park High School and there they had their first meeting on Sunday, December 3, 1950. James D. Groves, Minister at Vinewood, preached the first sermon and Floyd Wiley of South Dearborn led the singing. On that day, ten placed their membership with the fledgling congregation -- Leta Gorrige from East Dearborn, Lawrence and Mildred Geroux from Vinewood, Wilmuth Larson from West Dearborn, Mrs. Sydney McClearen and her son, Joe, both from Lincoln Park, Loman and Betty Nelson from South Dearborn and Charles and Imogene Steele from South Dearborn. Of these ten, Loman and Betty Nelson are the only ones continuing to attend at Allen Park.

The first Sunday contribution was \$151.88 plus \$20 from Mrs. E. E. Van Buskirks of Toledo, Ohio, \$10 from the Geroux family of Allen Park and \$25 from the Vinewood Church of Christ for a total of \$206.77. Contributions for the following Sundays in December were \$71.94, \$67.90, \$65.55 and \$59.40 plus \$15.00 from the Van Dyke congregation in Warren, Michigan for a month's total of \$486.56. Disbursements that month amounted to \$25.00.

During the remainder of December others placed their membership -- Brent H. And Billie M. Bucy from South Dearborn, William T. and Dell Bucy from South Dearborn, Jack D. and Bernice Cronk from Chase Road-Dearborn, Carver and Mavis G. Darnell from South Dearborn, Margaret H. McClearen from Lincoln Park and Chester and Violet Sims and their daughter, Judy, from Strathmoor in Detroit. It was not long before others indicated their desire to work and worship with the group, so in a short time a thriving church was meeting in Allen Park.

Chester Sims is worthy of special mention. All who go back to those early days continually mention his influence. Although he never served as an elder, he was a natural leader and gave invaluable advice that steered the congregation on a course of spiritual and numerical growth. Not only was his advice treasured, but he set an example in energetic service.

For quite some time they continued to meet in the High School on Allen Road which they rented for \$4.50 per week. (The High School eventually relocated, and the building now houses business offices.)

## THE FIFTIES

The contribution for the first year totaled \$5,209.67 which was quite a sum in those days for such a small congregation. The expenditures were \$575.28, so \$4,634.39 was available for future growth. Only one room was rented in the High School and was used for both Bible classes and morning worship. Supplies had to be moved in and out each week.

For a few months area Churches of Christ shared their ministers to preach on Sundays. On Sunday and Wednesday evenings members attended other congregations. A major item in the early business meetings was making arrangements to secure preachers for the Sunday services. Speakers were paid \$10 per Sunday. Robert Lifsey preached from July 1951 until February 1952. Finally, Bill Ellis, who preached occasionally for several congregations in the Detroit area, was secured to do most of the preaching. This arrangement lasted through 1955.

On October 11, 1950 they decided to file Incorporation Papers with the State of Michigan. This meant the congregation could legally own property and be recognized as a tax exempt institution.

January 26, 1952 it was agreed to contact the school regarding using extra rooms for Bible classes. The one to tend to this was authorized to offer as much as \$10 per week.

As the church continued to grow they began to support good works. On March 3, 1952 it was decided to send \$20 per month to the Highland Church in Abilene, Texas for the support of the Herald of Truth Radio Program. At the same business meeting it was decided to rent a typewriter for \$6 a month to be applied to the cost (\$89.50) if they decided to purchase it.

On June 2, 1952 a Building Fund was established with \$6,500 being taken from the treasury. After that, the contribution on the first Sunday of each month went into the fund. On August 4,

1952, it was agreed to loan the Church of Christ Home for the Aged, then located in Romeo, Michigan, \$7,000 from the Building Fund for a year at 6% interest.

In June of 1952 arrangements were made to rent the Masonic Hall at Osage and Ecorse Road for Sunday evening worship and Wednesday Bible study. Occasionally, the days or times of the services had to be altered to accommodate the Lodge's activities and those of a Lutheran congregation that was also renting the Lodge. Sometimes the facilities were secured for pot-lucks.

In September 1952 an eight day gospel meeting was held under a tent erected on the grounds of Melvindale High School. A portable generator was used for lights and a public address system. Warren Jones of the West Dearborn congregation was the preacher. Attendance averaged 200 per night. Nine were baptized -- Ethel Coon, Lois Radabaugh, James and Peggy Steele, Patricia Collie, Jean Lunn, Sandra Spence, Beverly Williams and Nobel Kirks. One event often mentioned by those who attended is that one evening a strong storm arose and everyone was fearful the tent was going to collapse. But it held.

December 1, 1952, it was decided to increase Bill Ellis' remuneration from \$10 to \$15 per week.

In May of 1953 arrangements were made to borrow a tent owned by the Wayne, Michigan church and in September a second tent meeting was held, this time in Taylor on Ecorse at Mortonview. Morris Womack of the Brightwood congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana was the speaker. Oran Wells and Zelma York were baptized. Relma Wells placed membership.

In November of 1954 Bill Ellis' pay was increased from \$15 to \$25 per week.

Although a diligent search has been made, records have not been found that indicate the exact date the South Dearborn church transferred ownership of their lots on Southfield Road to the Allen

Park congregation. However, it was before March 1952, when an effort was made to purchase the house next door. (South Dearborn sold them their lots for the amount they paid.)

On the 20th day of August, 1953, a building contract was signed with Harry Eberline to construct the first phase of the church building for \$26,872. Charles Steele and Loman Nelson signed the contract as Trustees of the church. This first construction was really only a shell of the building. On November 4, 1953, a mortgage was signed with Security Bank for \$10,000 payable at \$194 per month. This allowed further work to be done on the building. This mortgage was discharged on June 14, 1957.

Just about all the finishing work -- plumbing, heating and underground installation of a fuel oil tank -- was done by the members. It was not always easy. In addition to the difficult task of satisfying the city's building inspectors, there was one very discouraging event. The auditorium ceiling collapsed the night after it was installed. To say the least, they learned better techniques of ceiling construction and gained a lesson in patience. After close to two years of classes and worship being held in the basement, they began using the 160 seat auditorium. Folding chairs were used until pews were installed. Bible classes continued to be in the basement.

On the 14th of February, 1956 an agreement was entered into with the Sander Manufacturing Company of Archbold, Ohio for the purchase of 30 pews, 1 communion table, 4 communion chairs, 1 pulpit and 1 lectern. The cost was \$3,763 with 25% down. If they were to install the furniture it would cost an additional \$170. July of 1956, it was decided to borrow money to pay for these items and their installation.

There was one problem with the building that evidently was never corrected satisfactorily. In many business meetings from 1954 through 1960 there was a discussion regarding the need to work on the front doors.

The first full-time preacher was Leamon Flatt, who moved from Morgantown, Kentucky in 1955. He and his wife, Lou, worked with the church through the summer of 1957. In July 1957 Walter Banks and his wife, Ruth, moved from East Detroit and worked with the congregation until September 1958. In those days, it seemed customary for preachers to remain with congregations for only a year or two.

Late in 1958 Morris Womack, his wife, Ada, and their two sons, Jimmy and Ricky, moved from Indianapolis to Allen Park. They lived in a house on Niver in Allen Park which the church had recently purchased for a minister's residence. He also taught part-time at Michigan Christian College in Rochester (now Rochester College). In the fall of 1961 extension classes of the College were taught in Allen Park's building. These courses could be taken for college credits or audited. His work terminated on September 3, 1961.

#### 50s ADDENDA

##### 1952

- August • The men agreed to help the women advertise the church by paying for *door hangers* and distributing them in the area around Allen Park.
- Nov. • 50 song books were purchased to be used at the Masonic Hall.

##### 1955

- March • Our brethren in Italy were being severely persecuted by the Catholic Church. Martin Gray was sent to represent Allen Park with a group from Flint, Michigan that went to Washington, D.C. to meet with U.S. government officials to protest this persecution. Gray sent a personal letter to the Pope. On April 4 the **Detroit Free Press** carried a feature article concerning this protest in Washington.
- June • A special contribution was taken up for the Home For the Aged at Romeo.