

THE HISTORY OF THE STRATHMOOR - SOUTHFIELD - OAKLAND CHURCHES OF CHRIST

THE BEGINNING

When the United States was suffering from the effects of the Depression and one-fourth of the population had no money or income, local Christians could no longer travel far from their homes to attend worship. A few disciples had moved into the developing northwest edge of the city near the community known as Strathmoor, near the end of the trolley line which ran down the middle of Grand River Avenue. Most of the land around the intersection of Grand River and Greenfield was in farm land and only a few stores identified as the community center.

Carl and Mena Hoefler located the abandoned bank building on Grand River at Lesure and they, along with the French and Worten families paid the first \$75 to rent it for a month. It so happened that on the day the announcement went out to the other congregations of the beginning of the new group on 31 March 1935, H. Leo Boles, who was editor of The Gospel Advocate and President of David Lipscomb College in Nashville, Tennessee, was in town for a gospel meeting with the Dearborn church and was invited to speak at 3 p. m. This caused other living in the area to consider being a part of the group and 35 of them desired to be charter members. Most of them had been members at Vinewood, but others were from Dearborn, Ferndale, Hamilton and West Side Central. Thus Strathmoor became the 14th congregation of the Churches of Christ in the city of Detroit.

EARLY GROWTH

The Strathmoor congregation in 15 years became the largest Church of Christ in the Detroit area. It had the advantage of being there when this portion of the rapidly developed after the Depression, plus it attracted good members and leaders. There were three gospel meetings conducted as mission efforts to help the new group grow. In April, T. W. Phillips preached for 15 nights; in May, W. S. Long had a two-week meeting being supported by his home congregation, the Cornell Avenue church in Chicago; and that fall H. H. Adamson held a meeting being supported by his home church, the Vinewood congregation. John R. Stewart of LaSalle, CO became the first minister for the rapidly growing church before the first year ended and, since they outgrew the bank building, they relocated to the Masonic building at Grand River and Hubbell.

The following spring, a lot was purchased on Greenfield at Lyndon. At the time the entire land on Greenfield was offered for sale but the \$945 price for the corner lot seemed all they could handle. O. K. Alexander became the regular minister in 1937 and he, too, stayed two years. A. J. Bachman (1939-1945) came as minister and, since he had building experience, was put in charge of the construction of the first wooden building. A dedication service was held October 8, 1939. In 1940, Strathmoor took on the responsibility of the state work being conducted by C. B. Clifton and L. S. Rucker. In 1943, the sponsorship of a church in Battle Creek was begun with the assistance of sister churches.

In 1939, the first officers were appointed. When J. Harvey Dykes became minister (1945-1950), he brought an outstanding reputation as a preacher and writer. In 1949 the educational section of a permanent building was erected. It was during the tenure of Norman Beaman (1950-1959) as minister that the church reached its peak attendance of over 300 members. The beginning of an educational effort called Michigan Christian College began in Strathmoor's new building in 1953. The new brick auditorium was completed in 1956. But internal difficulties resulted in the beginning of the Livonia congregation in 1957 and the Southfield group in 1958.

Will Ed Warren (1959-1971) became the minister who pioneered in race relations and changed the direction of the church. At first the church suffered in being reduced to half with the departure of the two divisions. Then, with the rise of the Civil Rights movement and the inclusion of minorities into the auto unions since the early 1930s, blacks were able to move into better housing around the Strathmoor building. This forced many whites to look at life from a new perspective.

Will Ed Warren helped inspire better race relations by getting area Christians to gather for forums to discuss our cultural differences. He had been involved in a Christian athletic league among Churches of Christ where he had gotten to know several black Christians. The forums did not prove very helpful since the distance between the black and white cultures was great and tempers rose in the meetings. He then began living room meetings once a month where black and white couples came together to become better acquainted. This proved most effective in bonding the attendees together. Several from these meetings were to become leaders in the Strathmoor church and serve together for many years. When the Detroit riots occurred in 1967, this encouraged an exodus of whites from the city.

Vernon Boyd (1971-present), who had experience in race relations in Chicago was next invited as minister. He continued to build toward racial healing as the community and congregation changed from predominantly white to predominantly black. In 1979, Chris Chetsanga urged the support for Zebedee Tandí at Nhowe Mission in Zimbabwe. That began a long-term interest in evangelizing in the African country.

In 1983 the Strathmoor group was invited to merge with the Southfield congregation. The new identity of Oakland was chosen by the united saints. The Strathmoor building was sold and a portion of the income was diverted into the Oakland Christian Preschool until it ceased in 1991.