

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST  
CLAWSON, MICHIGAN

During the fall of 1943 several of the members of the Ferndale Church of Christ started planning to locate a suitable site in the Clawson area to meet for worship services in order to avoid the drive to Ferndale. The first few meetings were held in private homes in the area with some five families represented, with the initial meeting being December 26 of that year.

Shortly thereafter arrangements were made to conduct their services in a small white wooden building used as an annex to the Clawson High School located on John M Street in Clawson.

Approximately six months later, the group moved to a larger building located on Parkland Street and occupied by the Parkland Elementary School. This move was made so that their mid-week Bible Classes could be held in the same building instead of in private homes as had been the practice.

Plans for a permanent building were initiated in these early months and a search for a suitable location was underway. Two lots on Fourteen Mile Road were located and purchased for \$500 each, giving them the ideal location for a permanent building in the area.

During these early years the congregation was served by ministers Clarence Medlin, Paul Shaw and Wheeler Utley, each of whom worked diligently for the church as well as held outside positions of employment to supplement the meager wages the few families were able to offer while striving to accumulate a building fund for the new church building.

The urgency of their need for their own place of worship instigated some of the members, at the proposal of John Ray Smith, to make personal loans to the church to get the building program underway. The loan was then repaid at the rate of \$100 per month and the ground was broken in early summer of 1945 for the basement portion of the building.

This first phase of the new building consisted of a large area room to be used as an auditorium with permanent-style seats, two classrooms and two restrooms as well as a baptistry. Most of the work was done by the men of the congregation and on Saturdays, when the largest number was on hand to work throughout the whole day, the ladies would prepare a pot luck dinner and serve it under the trees for the workers.

The work moved along quite rapidly and this part of the building was completed later that year with formal dedication services held the following Spring, 1946. (Wheeler Utley remained as minister throughout this period.)

A steady growth and dedication was evident throughout the next several years with Wheeler Utley working at his private business, Utley Bros. Printing Co., as well as serving as minister until January, 1949. At this time, R. C. Oliver came to serve as the first full-time minister for the congregation, serving in this capacity some three years, during which time the first Elders were appointed which included Albert Eslinger, Pink Moody, and Albert Rideout, and shortly thereafter Frank Howard was appointed in this capacity as well.

Additional space was needed by this time as the church was thriving and growing in number. Therefore, in late 1951 Zeke Maynard, who was both a building contractor as well as a preacher, was hired to proceed with the building plans. This construction work was underway in early 1952 with Zeke Maynard overseeing the contract work and once more, most of the work was done by members of the congregation, of whom Rupert Smith worked on a full-time basis with Bro. Maynard to keep the work moving as rapidly as possible.

This phase of the building brought the auditorium which is currently used and with seating capacity of 320, with the basement area being converted into classrooms with a small kitchen area. Financing of this portion of the building was done through the Broadway Financing Plan for a 15 year Bond Issue of \$35,000. The first meeting was held in the new auditorium in early 1953.

A constant growth and increased activities of the church demanded more space still in the educational department, and in 1966 another building project began to add the educational wing combined with a large fellowship area. To finance this project, another bond issue through the Security Plan was initiated for 10 year bonds totaling \$225,000. Additional properties surrounding the building were purchased giving titles to all the property on Fourteen Mile Road from Bellevue through 504 East Fourteen Mile and on Gardner Street, the three lots directly south of the building including the two lots immediately west of the building.

Completion of this educational/fellowship wing in 1967 gave sufficient space for long range growth with the fellowship area large enough to accommodate groups numbering several hundred and sufficient classrooms and library for continued growth, as well as minister's offices and storage areas.

Ministers serving the congregation during the years also included Will Ed Warren, Clifford Tucker, Lonzo Pribble, Walter Bankus, Ron Smotherman, Ken Rideout, Jim Rogers, Noland Crawford, Ken Tollet, Lacy Taylor and the current minister, Jack Duty, currently in his 6th year with the church.

Among the missionaries who have been aided financially by the church are Clifford Tucker (Venezuela), Charles Garner (Philippines), Ken Rideout (Thailand), Dale Rideout (Canadian Islands), Terri Palmer (Lowell, Mass.), Nedra Smith Sparks (Limerick, Ireland), and the Alpena, Michigan work.

Evangelists coming for special activities include, Jewell Norman, James R. Cope, Clifford Tucker, Cline Paden, G. K. Wallace, John W. Hedge, Gordon Smith, R. C. Oliver, Pat Hardeman, Martel Pace, Ortis Copeland, James R. Nichols, Guy N. Woods, Ruel Lemmons, Ellis Coates, Ken Rideout, Curtis Sampley, Charles Garner, Johnny Fox, Jack Wilhelm, Shuman Brewer, Morgan Medlin, Virgil Bentley, Carl Spain, Jim Duty and J. M. Powell.

A Teen-age Drop-In held weekly on Friday evenings gained popularity in the early 1970's with many teenagers from the Clawson area becoming involved and becoming active members of the church.

A Senior Citizens' program was initiated in early 1969 which has grown rather steadily with meetings held the 2nd Monday of each month for varied programs, devotional and lunch or dinner. This program has proven to be very successful in brightening the lives of those 65 and over and the average attendance is near 100 with these older people coming from the entire metropolitan area. Results of this activity are far reaching with these formerly 'forgotten' members being made an active part of regular activities and brightening their lives tremendously, as well as baptisms of some for everlasting results.

The need for regular transportation of our own Senior Citizens brought about the purchase of a van in 1978 which is used continually to transport all the Senior Citizens to all of the services, as well as other activities as needed.

Special activities of the church in recent years included a week-end lecture series of The Family by Jack Duty; A Slide/Narration presentation by Jack Duty on The Holy Lands, which was so popular it was repeated; a Getting Acquainted series aimed toward gaining the attention of the immediate area of Clawson, by Jack Duty; and a series entitled the Golden Years, directed by Virgil Bentley.

Through the years the Church has been diligent in the aid, including financial support, of many good works. These include victims of floods, earthquakes, tornados and other disasters, as well as a continuing benevolent work in all areas as required. Brother David Cation has conducted a Bible Correspondence Course with students in nearly every state of the nation for the past 16 years. The congregation has constantly supported Christian education, with special emphasis to Michigan Christian College and Lockett Christian Academy. The Metro Bible Lectureship is a constant endeavor, both financially and individually.

Migrating of families to other locations and into this area as well has given a constant fluctuation of attendance with the average attendance near 200 to 230. Overflow audiences have been on hand for many special programs with a deeper spirituality and commitment being prevalent and increasing daily.

The most recent 'Building' project was the purchase of property on Bellevue Street and the construction of the Minister's home with the down payment being made in full and mortgage loan on the balance, giving the minister adequate facilities for his personal use.

Elders serving during the years have included Homer Case, Graydon Sentell, Carl Springer, Gordon Smith, Jack Starnes, Bill King, Percy Gentry, Luther Simpson, Loid Anderson, and Rupert Smith, with the present Elders, John Ray Smith and David Cation, serving since 1964, David Harvill, since 1978 and Don Smith and Warren Smith since 1981.