

The Creation Story of Fellowship Church

(adapted from a sermon given by Pastor Jim Baar on September 12, 2004)

Amazing things happen when God plants the seed of faith in people. Abraham and Sarah who were too old to have children became the parents of a nation that numbered more than the stars in the heavens and the sands of the sea. Forty plus years ago this property belonged to an older couple, Tom and Janet Reimink. They farmed on this property and were known for growing beautiful gladiolas. Tom and Janet had a dream. It was their hope that someday there would be a church on their property.

In April of 1966, six families got together and began to talk about the need for a new church on the north side of Holland. One of those people was Jo Cook, a ninety-five year old charter member. Some years later, Jo wrote the following about the desire of the group: "Needing a church meant we had a desire for others to know God with us."



In June of 1966, a first worship service was held at Waukazoo School, attended by 125 people.

By December of the same year a new congregation of the Reformed Church was formed. The church was named Fellowship Reformed Church. 1 John 1:3 was chosen as a theme verse for the congregation, *"What we have seen and heard we tell you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"*.

Rev. Larry Izenbart was the first pastor called to Fellowship. For four years the congregation met in the school, setting up each Saturday for church activities and then resetting up for school on Monday morning.

Members of the charter group included:

Stu and Jane Baker

Paul and Millie Bekker

Howard and Nelvia Bouwman

Norm and Bonnie Bruursema

Ardie DeVries

Bob and Aleda DeWeerd

Leon and Evelyn Meyers

Mike McLarty

June Reimink

Thelma Righterink

Jeanne Sanford

Delores Topp

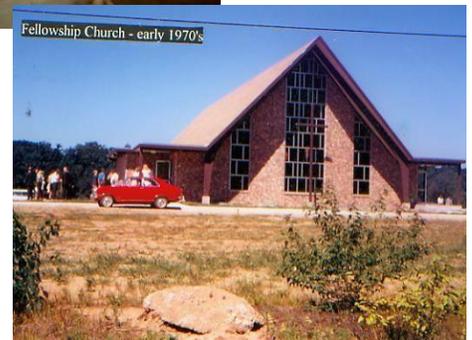
Doris Vander Kooi



In 1970, the former sanctuary was built.



Take a look at the bell tower at the southwest corner of our building sometime. This bell was the school bell at Waukazoo School. June Reimink was the principal at that school and was given the bell at her retirement. June, in turn, gave the bell to Fellowship as a reminder of our history.



In an interesting way we have come full circle in our forty years. We began in Waukazoo School with 125 people in 1966. Forty years later we have about the same number of people from Fellowship who go each week of the school year to Lakewood School to minister as mentors to kids through Kids Hope USA.



After many years of careful discernment by a Facility Discernment Team, a recommendation was brought to the congregation in September of 2014 that included a new sanctuary, expanding the offices, and re-purposing the existing sanctuary. The congregation approved the project with a 90% yes vote. In November of 2014 we proceed with a capital campaign called "Imagine." The campaign was based on Ephesians 3:20: *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.* The new sanctuary was completed in August 2016 and was dedicated in September 2016. The former Sanctuary will include a youth space that supports relationships, play, and worship. It will also have space for small groups to gather and grow. We expect all of this work to be completed in the Spring of 2017.

We recognized that this new construction was not about the building. Rather, it was about what would happen as a result of having the building. The facilities could allow us to expand our reach as a mission sending station. We give thanks for all the spaces in the history of Fellowship Church, and pray that many people will become faithful followers of Jesus through these spaces.



Worship has always been a vital part of the life of this congregation. We desire to gather around the Word of God and offer ourselves in worship and service to our God.

Rev. Ken Reynen became Fellowship's second pastor in 1975. During that time we began an outdoor summer Sunday evening "drive in" service. As the summer thunder clouds rolled in off the lake, we wondered if we should run for cover or try to get the service finished before the storm broke.

It was around that same time that another very unique worship service began. Called a Joggers Service—this shortened service early in the morning consisted of a prayer, offering and sermon for the many folks who wanted to walk, bike or run before, after or to church.

In 1981, Fellowship also called Rev. Jim Baar as an associate pastor. Over the years, Jim's responsibilities have grown and changed from Christian Education for Children & Youth to Fellowship's Minister of Congregational Care and Mission and now as Pastor Emeritus.

In 1989 Rev. Ken Eriks became the third pastor of Fellowship and the congregation continued to grow and be guided by the development of



Fellowship's stated Mission & Vision Statements.

A second session of Sunday School was eventually added on Sunday mornings during each of the two later services. It also became apparent that it was important to offer different styles of worship and the third morning service became a contemporary worship service. This again attracted many new members.

We continue to seek diverse ways to gather people in worship.

In the summer of 2007, we hired Jordan Clegg to help lead us in the area of Creative Arts & Worship.

In the summer of 2005, Fellowship called Rev. Brian Keepers to be Fellowship's Minister of Preaching & Congregational Leadership and since then, all of us have been challenged to "Turn Fellowship Inside Out."

Family has always been important at Fellowship. We have been a chronologically young congregation and have always had a strong desire to help our children, youth and adults grow in their journey of faith.



Some remember the large and active Van Allsburg and Blanksma families. They were our youth ministry pioneers making sure that there exciting opportunities to keep our youth connected to the church. Gifted persons have assisted in this ministry over the years (Scott Davis, Nancy Pell Boersen, Jeff Schurman, Ken & Sarah Diekema, Linda Annett and Corie Visscher). Our commitment in this area

has grown to the place where we now have a part-time Minister of Children & Family in Betsy Bruins and a Youth Minister in Bryce Vander Stelt. It is exciting to see the variety and the quality of ministries available to our children, youth and families.

We have also had an ongoing concern to make sure that adults are growing spiritually. In 1978 Rev. Frank De Graaf became the first full time associate pastor at Fellowship and a significant outcome of his ministry was the introduction of the Bethel Bible Program. Rev. Pat Elzinga also served Fellowship as a Minister of Education.



The concern for our overall spiritual growth led us to a full time Minister of Adult Spiritual Formation & Discipleship in Sara Beaver Vogel, followed by Rev. Megan Hodgins as Minister of Discipleship and Mission, and Rev. Marijke Strong as Minister of Congregational Care & Community Life. Pastors Megan and Marijke left Fellowship in 2015 and 2016 to serve the wider denomination. In May of 2016, the congregation voted to approve Rev. Lindsay Small as Minister of Discipleship & Congregational Life and Rev. Nate Schipper as Minister of Equipping & Missional Engagement. It's important to us that *together* we become more like Jesus—in all we think, desire, say and do—so that we might be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God.



Partnership is another word that marks our history and heritage. Over the years many of our members have felt the call to ministry in unique ways.

In the second half of their lives, the Blanksmas went to Kenya and the VanderSluis' found their way to Ethiopia (and more recently to Honduras). Many of our families,

youth and college students have explored short and longer term mission work—in Africa, Guatemala, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

A large number of our own members have felt God's call into Christian ministry and seminary (Mark Kleinheksel, Dan Lannin, Amy Avery, Elizabeth Potter, Peg Hoekstra, Tony De La Rosa, Matt van Maastricht, Chris Maybury, Tyson Wiggers, Julie Myers, Lindsay Small, Alex Arthurs) and we've had a great working relationship with Western Theological Seminary helping to prepare numerous students for ministry.

We have also stood with each other in hard and difficult times—the Carter family when Bryon became very ill in infancy; the Lacey, Bakker and Slagh family when they experienced the loss of a home due to fire; the many members and friends of Fellowship that walked through the struggle of cancer—sometimes people were healed and other times they were taken to be with the Lord, but as we stood together, somehow God's steadfast love and mercy were there.

God's blessing of Fellowship also moved us to help start other churches. In the 1980's, a group went to Columbus, Ohio to lay the ground work for what eventually became the New Hope Reformed Church. Then in the 1990's, members from Fellowship helped form the committee which led to the birth of Haven Shores Community Church in West Olive.

We have had opportunity to share in so many local ministry partnerships. Twenty plus years of CROP WALKS, eight homes built with other churches for families through Habitat for Humanity, Fourth Reformed Church partnership, the establishment of Macatawa Resource Center through the volunteer efforts of Howard Plaggemars, Les Van Hekken, Stu De Witt and others to respond to human needs of Northside folks. Members of Fellowship support local ministries not only with financial resources but also their time.

Forty years—from 44 families to over 500 families. God has promised that the Holy Spirit will build them a Church! It's not the charter members' church or the elders' and deacons' church or the pastors' church, it's GOD'S CHURCH.

Our Vision is to be a community where everyone loves God, follows Jesus, listens to the Holy Spirit and joins God in gathering people around Jesus, transforming them into passionate followers of Jesus, empowering them to join Jesus in ministry.

May it be so in the next forty years of Fellowship Church!

