

Fiftieth Anniversary  
of the  
Fuller Avenue  
Christian Reformed Church



July, 1925 - July, 1975

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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*"How lovely are Thy dwellings, O Lord of Hosts!"* – Psalm 84:1



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GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN



Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church in 1927  
Congregation Was Organized in 1925



The Present Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church

**A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNCIL**

This is a joyful occasion for our beloved Fuller Avenue Church. The Year 1975 marks our fiftieth anniversary as an organized part of the Church of Jesus Christ. As we look back ten, twenty or even fifty years, we can recall with full hearts the many mercies of our God. What privileges and blessings have been ours.

Now as we continue our journey, however long and difficult it may be, our prayer is that we will hold fast to God's Word and the unchanging Christ, and at the same time be given vision and courage to proclaim and show the love of Christ in new and meaningful ways to a changing society.

We need not fear the journey, for Christ, the King of the Church, is our Captain in command. Along the way we will continue to share our mutual joys and burdens. Together we will press on in the firm confidence that the cause of His Church is in the palm of His almighty hand.

We believe that the God who has led Fuller Avenue Church thus far will continue to guide His redeemed "even unto the end of the age." Hallelujah!

Lord, through all the generations  
Of the children of our race,  
In our fears and tribulations  
Thou hast been our dwelling place.

Each succeeding generation  
At Thy mighty word appears,  
Thou dost count in time's duration  
One day as a thousand years.

On us let the grace and beauty  
Of the Lord our God remain,  
Strengthen us for noble duty  
That our work be not in vain.

The Council

*Arie E. Vander Male*  
Vice President

**The History of Our Congregation**

**J**ULY 17, 1975, WAS A VERY IMPORTANT DAY for the members of Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church. On that day we stood at the threshold of a new half-century. Now we look back with gratitude and praise to our faithful Covenant God Who has blessed us so richly in the first half-century of our existence.

Fifty years is a long time in the life of a church, and only a few of us can look back to its beginning. In fact, out of the 1,010 souls who are presently members of our church, there are only 28 who helped make up the first congregation on July 17, 1925. They are:

- |                                       |                              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Henrietta Balfoort (Mrs. J. R. Bos)   | Cornelius Heeren             |
| Jessie Bos (Mrs. A. W. Hulst)         | Mrs. Henry Huizingh          |
| John R. Bos                           | Dorothy Ibershof             |
| Clarence Bos                          | Mrs. Peter C. Kooi           |
| Mrs. Dick Bouma                       | William H. Korfker, Sr.      |
| Winifred Bouma (Mrs. M. Vander Velde) | Trena Korfker (Mrs. F. Haan) |
| George Brander                        | Edith Korfker                |
| Jean Brander (Mrs. F. Masselink)      | Dena Korfker                 |
| Gertrude Brander (Mrs. S. Jolman)     | August A. Rooze              |
| Mrs. Nicholas P. Brouwer              | Peter Spaanstra              |
| Grace Diephuis (Mrs. G. Fritsma)      | Alfred Spaanstra             |
| Dena Diephuis (Mrs. Wm. Van Dyke)     | Cornelius Van Duinen         |
| Mr. and Mrs. John Folkema             | Ralph Van Duinen             |
| Harry Gerbens                         |                              |

(There were, however, close to 70 members who came before our church was five years old.)

Fuller Avenue came into being at the time when the Christian Reformed churches were painfully changing over from the Holland language to the English language. Our mother church, Oakdale Park, was having four services a Sunday — two in Holland and two in English. As one solution to the problem a group of men suggested the forming of a new English-speaking church. The committee consisted of Mr. B. H. Dice, Mr. Ralph Bos, Mr. P. C. Kooi, Mr. A. Balfoort, Sr., and Mr. Jacob P. Smith. Since the Oakdale congregation was too large for one minister to handle adequately, the minister and the consistory welcomed the suggestion. Several of the consistory members were among those who met for organization.

Organization took place on July 17, 1925. Rev. H. Schultze, pastor of Sherman Street church, took charge. The group consisted of 39 families, 14 single confessing members and 1 baptized single member from Oakdale, and 2 families from Sherman Street. This totalled 203 souls. The first service was held on July 19 in the Oakdale Christian School gym, where we held all of our meetings for 1 year and 8 months. Dr. Clarence Bouma conducted the first service. Fuller Avenue became the 18th Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

**A FEW INTERESTING "FIRSTS"**

The first family to leave was the Harry Boersma family, who moved to East Paris.

The first member to be married was Margaret Herrema to Candidate Anthony A. Koning.

The first baby to be baptized was Trena Olive Bouma, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dick Bouma. This child also became the first death three-and-a-half months later.

The first adult death was Mrs. Jacob Bosscher in September, 1927.

Our first pastor was Rev. E. F. J. Van Halsema. His salary was \$2,500.

The first yearly budget for the church was \$4,900.

The first of our young men to become a minister was Jacob P. Smith.

For the first two years we still used the common Communion cup, the members going to the Communion table in groups to partake of the sacrament.

## BUILDING PLANS

Just two months after becoming a church, Fuller Avenue purchased our present



Construction Site



Laying of the cornerstone

property. In January of 1926 the plans took shape for the building of our present church. The laying of the cornerstone took place on July 7, 1926. Amid much joy and thanksgiving, the new building was dedicated to the service of God on March 2 and 4, 1927. Our first service in the new building was on March 7, 1927.



The cost of the church was \$44,053. By the end of 1927 our debt was \$40,000, with but 67 families to carry the load.

Since our pastor needed more room for his family, plans to build the parsonage began in 1929. But before it was finished, our pastor accepted a call to Passaic, New Jersey. Our second pastor, Dr. George Goris, and his family were the first occupants in October, 1930. The cost of the parsonage was \$9,000.

Early in 1931 we purchased our present Möller organ at a cost of \$4,940. At that time our total debt was a staggering \$45,000. And then came the Depression!

## DEPRESSION YEARS

Fuller Avenue was but 8 years old when our country was plunged into the Great Depression, which lasted for many years. The banks closed in 1933. Our mortgage was given over to the Kent County Board of Supervisors to satisfy their preferred claim. In 1937 this Board offered to accept 75% of our debt as full payment. They also dropped the interest charge which amounted to more than \$1,000.

Our consistory decided to float a bond for \$27,000. An ad was placed in *The Banner*, and forty men from the congregation were chosen to sell the bonds. Before the men had a chance to begin their sales efforts, all the bonds were sold!

By January, 1938, our total debt was \$31,080 at 4% interest. This amount included the price for finishing our large basement room and installing our present furnace.

The depression years were a blessing in disguise. They drew our congregation very close in love and sympathy. The needs were many, and all were ready and

willing to share each other's burdens, for Christ's sake. Our pastor, Dr. Goris, was a shining example to all. For three years he lowered his own salary from \$2,600 to \$2,000 and from time to time gave back some of his remaining salary. He also took into his home needy young couples for months at a time and filled the coal bins of many a widow.

### WAR YEARS

December 7, 1941, marked the entrance of our country into the second great World War. Many of our young men were called to serve in the army, the navy, and the air corps. Again our hearts were drawn closer together as we suffered with those who were directly involved. For many years a large flag hung on the walls of our sanctuary, containing a blue star for each member in the service of our country. The total number reached 111 before peace finally came. And by that time four of the blue stars had been exchanged for gold. Marvin Borgman, Hubert Borgman, Frank Remein, and Martin Smith, Jr., gave their lives in that dreadful conflict.

During those years a committee saw to it that our congregation kept in close contact with our soldier boys. Members of the church were asked to write weekly letters. The committee also published a monthly paper, called "Fuller Chatter Sheet", which was sent to all those in service.

For five years after the war none of our members were in the service of our country. In 1950 we again began sending men and women into the armed forces. This has continued up to the present time. Eighty-four of our members have served in the last 25 years, some of them in the Korean War or the Vietnam War. We are most grateful to God that none of them were asked to make the supreme sacrifice.

### REMODELING AND EXPANSION

When our church was 20 years old, in 1945, we liquidated our debt. For four years we were completely free of debt.

In 1951 plans were begun to enlarge our seating capacity by putting in more seats in the balcony and by moving the rows of seats closer together. We could then seat 736 plus about 30 in the choir loft.

At this time we also redecorated the sanctuary and replaced the ceiling. We also built many rooms at the rear of the church and remodeled the entrance. All this brought our debt back to \$40,000 once more. We are still not free from debt.

In 1966 we exchanged our sanctuary seats for pews.

In 1971 we completely redecorated and partially remodeled the parsonage.

In 1972 a new redwood ceiling was put in the sanctuary.

### THOSE WHO SERVED

During the entire years of our existence there have been a good many men and women who have given of their time and special talents for our church. We would like to pay tribute to them at this time.

Pastors who served Fuller Avenue:

Rev. Emo Folkert Johan Van Halsema 1925-1929 (4 years)

Dr. George Goris 1930-1941 (11 years)

Rev. John Weidenaar 1942-1949 (7 years)

Rev. George Gritter 1950-1962 (12½ years)

Rev. William Vander Hoven 1962-1970 (7½ years)

Rev. Gordon Dahnke 1971-1974 (3 years)

Before we succeeded in obtaining our first pastor, we called:

Rev. R. B. Kuiper, Rev. H. J. Kuiper

Before Dr. Goris came to us, we had called:

Rev. W. Groen, Rev. A. Jabaay,

Rev. C. Van Til, Rev. G. W. Hylkema

Before Rev. Weidenaar came to us, we had called:

Rev. J. O. Schuring, Rev. D. H. Walters,

Rev. H. Evenhouse, Rev. W. Vander Kamp

Before Rev. Gritter came to us, we had called:

Rev. W. Van Peursum, Rev. Harold Dekker,

Rev. J. C. Verbrugge

Rev. Vander Hoven was the first pastor to accept the first call.

Before Rev. Dahnke came to us, we had called:

Rev. L. Bazuin, Rev. L. Hofman,

Rev. H. Vander Well, Rev. J. Van Ryn

We are now without a pastor. We have already called:

Rev. A. Hoksbergen, Rev. D. Wisse,

Rev. L. Bazuin, Rev. H. Vander Well,

Rev. H. Wildeboer, Rev. N. Meyer



Rev. E. F. J. Van Halsema

Fuller Avenue owes much to the excellent leaders God has sent to us over the years. Rev. Van Halsema helped us make a good beginning. He faithfully and cheerfully laid a strong foundation for our congregational life, helping us to become knit together into one Christian family.

Dr. Goris continued to mold and refine our oneness in the Lord. His Christ-like example of loving concern during his long stay with us, especially during the depression years, and his positive Christian emphasis helped us grow spiritually.

Rev. Weidenaar shared with us his great knowledge of the Scriptures. He often preached on a complete book of the Bible and opened our eyes to



Rev. G. Goris

the marvelous blessings which are ours in God's Holy Word. He unfolded for us the great riches stored away for us in the great epistles of Paul and Peter and John. And he helped us understand the great doctrines of our church. We will never forget the day Prof. Schultze was stricken while preaching for us. Rev. Weidenaar, who was in the audience, walked calmly to the pulpit and preached a great sermon on Romans 8.

Rev. Gritter continued to build on the solid foundation laid during our first quarter-century. His many faithful years as our shepherd kept us well-fed and nourished by God's Holy Word. He helped us live a life of Christian love and concern both within the church and without. Many a young man and woman who are in their forties today are still giving testimony to the vast fund of necessary knowledge they received from Rev. Gritter.



Rev. J. Weidenaar

Rev. William Vander Hoven gave unstintingly of his time and love to Fuller Avenue. His tireless energy was shared by all who had a need, and his unusual concern and sympathy brought comfort and help to all. His warm love for people and his deep humility gave a lasting legacy to Fuller Avenue.

Rev. Gordon Dahnke was the last minister to shepherd our flock. He, too, left an unusual and strong stamp on our congregation. Coming as he did in the early Seventies, when change and unrest were the order of the day, he helped us "loosen up" and accept change whenever possible. He attracted a great many young people to our church so that Fuller Avenue is still a large congregation, ready to accept the challenge of a changing neighborhood.



Rev. G. Gritter



Rev. W. Vander Hoven



Rev. G. Dahnke

### Consistory Members from 1925 to 1950

#### ELDERS (38)

H. Bosma	A. H. Swets	H. Herrema	D. Bouma
G. Brander	P. Dieleman	M. Smith	B. De Graaf
S. Herrema	P. Bouma	N. Brouwer	M. Stob
J. B. Hulst	L. Flokstra	E. Haan	W. C. Buiten
J. Kamstra	B. Hertel	N. Poel	H. Huizingh
J. Mersman	J. Warners	N. Bierema	C. Keegstra
R. Bos	J. Kaashoek	W. H. Korfker	J. Timmerman
B. H. Dice	E. Y. Monsma	E. Marcusse	J. R. Bos
I. Hollemans	J. Orlebeke	J. S. Dykstra	
W. Meeuwssen	J. Folkema	A. W. Hulst	

#### DEACONS (41)

*P. Bouma	D. Tiemersma	J. Ibershof	J. Straayer
*N. Brouwer	G. Alderink	R. Prince	H. A. Warners
N. Keegstra	*N. Bierema	M. Mersman	G. Boersema
W. Spoelhof	*D. Stoepker	*E. Dekker	*Henry Bratt
*J. Folkema	A. Bosscher	H. Oosterhouse	J. Kuipers
*H. Huizingh	*W. H. Korfker	*H. Greenwood	R. Stiemsma
P. Keegstra	*E. Marcusse	J. Haveman	L. Scherpenisse
S. Rosema	*M. Stob	A. Konyndyk	C. De Bruyn
*B. De Graaf	H. Stuit	*C. Bos	
G. Hertel	*A. Rooze	Hero Bratt	
*M. Smith	*A. W. Hulst	D. Schipper	

### Consistory Members from 1951 to 1975

#### ELDERS (70)

J. R. Bos	P. Bouma	L. Flokstra	N. Weemhof
G. Brander	H. Greenwood	H. Broene	B. Fridsma
E. Haan	E. Marcusse	J. Van Bruggen	A. Holtrop
H. Herrema	D. Nagelkirk	N. Hoek	J. E. Vanden Berg
B. Hertel	W. C. Buiten	J. Vanden Berg	W. Van Dyke
A. W. Hulst	S. De Went	H. Bratt	P. Spaanstra
J. Kaashoek	T. Ribbens	A. Gritter	J. Stek
C. Keegstra	C. De Bruyn	D. Baatenburg	G. Jasperse
M. Smith	B. Ondersma	H. Datema	P. Lucasse
J. Timmerman	C. Bos	W. De Boer	J. Stegink
D. Bouma	A. Bosscher	E. Jansen	B. Wierenga
B. De Graaf	B. Bratt	H. Smith	B. De Korne
W. H. Korfker Sr.	M. Calsbeek	M. Stapert	H. Hunderman
P. Meeuwssen	E. Dekker	G. Bordewyk	V. Laninga
A. Rooze	J. Bouterse	H. Gerbens	H. Lotterman
M. Stob	G. Kuipers	H. Hunderman	
D. Stoepker	A. Vander Male	D. Vander Kamp	
N. Bierema	J. Orlebeke	W. Eberlin	

DEACONS (77)

G. Boersema	C. Kooi	L. Hendrikson	D. Boelema
*C. Bos	*H. Smith	*D. Vander Kamp	R. Calsbeek
*C. De Bruyn	J. Spoelhof	*W. Eberlin	A. Spaanstra
J. Straayer	H. De Maat	*A. Holtrop	R. Van Duinen
L. Scherpenisse	S. Jolman	*W. Van Dyke	D. Hollemans
D. Schipper	C. Roskamp	J. Boelema	H. Schierbeek
*A. Vander Male	*P. Spaanstra	A. Kaashoek	R. Winterhalter
F. Zuidema	*H. Gerbens	A. Smitter	R. Bishop
*E. Dekker	*H. Hunderman	D. Hoolema	W. Dekker
M. Huizingh	L. Vander Molen	M. Naerebout	D. Holwerda
P. Kolkman	*H. Datema	*J. Stegink	D. Kreykes
F. De Vos	*G. Bordewyk	W. H. Korfker, Jr.	A. Shuiter
*Henry Bratt	*H. Lotterman	R. Rykse	R. Zwiier
*M. Calsbeek	E. Solle	D. Van Bruggen	C. Fridsma
H. Engelhard	P. Van Lonkhuizen	R. Brayman	R. Van Duinen
C. Lappinga	L. Steensma	J. Clausing	D. Vriesenga
G. Kok	N. Cooper	N. Matheis	D. Weemhoff
H. A. Warners	*M. Stapert	*B. Wierenga	J. Rop
*N. Weemhof	L. Vander Meer	R. Bos	
P. Dykema	R. Baas	R. Morales	

During our 50 years of existence 109 members served as elders and 119 as deacons.

\*37 deacons later served as elders.

About 50% of the men served 1 term.

Less than 25% served 2 terms.

Less than 15% served 3 terms.

Less than 10% served 4 terms.

12 men served 5 terms, or 15 years. They are:

G. Brander	B. De Graaf	N. Brouwer	M. Calsbeek
B. Hertel	A. W. Hulst	H. Greenwood	E. Dekker
E. Marcusse	J. Orlebeke	T. Ribbens	L. Flokstra

2 men served 6 terms, or 18 years. They are:

J. Kaashoek, A. Rooze and D. Stoepker

4 men served 7 terms, or 21 years. They are:

P. Bouma, H. Herrema, E. Haan, W. H. Korfker, Sr.

In 1925 the consistory consisted of 6 elders and 4 deacons.

In 1975 Fuller Avenue is being served by 14 elders and 12 deacons.

First Consistory, 1925



TOP ROW (from left to right): J. Kamstra, elder; W. Spoelhof, deacon; N. P. Brouwer, deacon; G. Brander, elder; N. Keegstra, deacon; P. Bouma, deacon.  
 BOTTOM ROW (from left to right): S. Herrema, elder; H. Bosma, elder; Rev. E. Van Halsema; J. B. Hulst, elder; J. Mersman, elder.

ASSISTANT PASTORS

In 1960 Fuller Avenue called its first Assistant Pastor. For nine years Rev. Nick Monsma served our congregation faithfully and lovingly by visiting the sick and shut-ins and by preaching occasionally.

In 1970 Rev. John Schaal became our Assistant Pastor. Our many sick and our more than thirty shut-ins give good testimony to his constant and cheerful visits.

CHURCH SECRETARY

In 1958 money was set aside for secretarial help for our pastor. The work was first done by Calvin students. From 1960 to 1970 Mr. T. Ribbens took care of the secretarial needs on a part-time basis. In January of 1970 an official church secretary was hired. Mrs. Bert (Anita) Bratt has done, and is still doing, excellent work.

PASTOR'S SALARY

It may interest you to know that our first pastor began his work with us for \$2,500 and was getting \$2,600 when he left. Dr. Goris lowered his salary to \$2,000 during the depression, and when he left, was getting \$2,700. Rev. Weidenaar began at \$3,000 and ended with \$4,000. Rev. Gritter's salary ranged from \$4,200 to \$6,000. Rev. Vander Hoven's, from \$6,200 to \$8,200 and Rev. Dahnke's from \$9,500-\$10,700. Our calling salary is now \$13,300.

## CUSTODIANS

No church can run smoothly without the efficient help of a good custodian. Fuller Avenue has also been richly blessed in this area. We have had exactly as many custodians as we have had pastors. And we are very grateful to them for taking care of us so well.

Mr. Jacob Bosscher served us at Oakdale Christian School from 1925-1927.

Mr. John Prince served more than 30 years, from 1927-1959.

Mr. Ray Roeters served 1959-1960.

Mr. Theodore Kamminga served from 1960-1961.

Mr. Henry Bratt served a little more than 10 years, from 1961 to October, 1972.

Mr. Harold Vander Wal is our present custodian. He began serving in January, 1973.

The money set aside for the janitor (as he was then called) fifty years ago was \$804, and that included the supplies he would need during the year. Today our budget allows \$7,800 for our custodian's services.

## THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC AT FULLER AVENUE

Fuller Avenue has always been blessed with many talented musicians, who have succeeded in keeping our service of praise on a high level, both musically and scripturally.

Jessie Bos (Mrs. A. W. Hulst) and Trena Korfker (Mrs. F. Haan) played the piano in the Oakdale gym. Trena also trained a group of girls to sing at the Laying of the Cornerstone.

Before we had an organ instruments were used in the worship service. At the time of the dedication and for some time after we had an orchestra led by Mr. Albert Ten Haar.

Helen Keegstra (Mrs. Anderson) and Dorothy Van Zanen (Mrs. L. Kloe) played the piano in our sanctuary before we had the organ. They were also our first organists.

Marjorie Van Harn (Mrs. T. Muller) and Angie Korfker (Mrs. Wm., Sr.) played for many years. Later Mrs. Edith Kerstetter (Mrs. V.) took Mrs. Muller's place. During this period we often had piano and organ duets. Mrs. Korfker and Mrs. Kerstetter played duets for many occasions, including every Christmas and Easter. They also played at our 25th Anniversary celebration.

The organists who served us during the last 25 years are:

Mrs. Kerstetter and Mrs. Korfker	Bert Wierenga
Jerome Batts	Bonnie Bratt (Mrs. M. Meyer)
June Keegstra (Mrs. R. Hollemans)	Ann Vander Male
Alice Bos (Mrs. B. Klanderman)	Mrs. Patricia Landman
Bruce Klanderman	Kenneth Sweetman
Virginia Grashuis (Mrs. L. Vaalburg)	Joseph Galema
Kathy Jager (Mrs. F. Bolthuis)	

## CHOIR DIRECTORS

Our first singing groups were known as the "Singing School" and later the "Mixed Chorus" with Trena Korfker as director. During the two years she was married to

Fred Haan and belonged to Neland Avenue, Mr. Henry Rose and Mr. William Dice conducted the groups. When Mrs. Haan came back to Fuller Avenue in 1931, she became the Music Director. She also began a Girls' Glee Club. After several years, she started a Senior Choir, a Junior Choir, and a Teen-age Choir, which are still in existence today. Mrs. Haan had charge of the vocal music at Fuller for more than 30 years.

For several years there was also a Men's Chorus, which sang occasionally at church services and evangelistic meetings, convalescent homes, and the jail. Mr. H. Rose and Mr. A. Smith were the directors for several years. Later, members of the group took charge.

In 1961 Mr. Albert Smith took over Senior Choir. In 1965 Mr. Merle Mustert conducted the Teen-age and Junior Choirs. Mr. Peter Joustra helped out for a year. In 1968 Dr. Howard Slenk conducted the Senior Choir. Since 1970 Mr. Merle Mustert has conducted all three choirs.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday School has always been an important part of our church life. A great many men and women and young adults have given of their time and talents to teach the youth of our church. Back in 1925 the teachers were all men. Each class had two teachers, one to teach and the other to discipline. They took turns doing the teaching. Every teacher was required to attend the weekly teachers' meeting, which was conducted as a Sunday School class. The teachers took turns presenting the lesson, and the other teachers acted as pupils, who occasionally caused a disturbance to see how the one in charge would handle it. For more than 30 years a teacher was not allowed to teach if he had not been present at the Teachers' Meeting.

When Dr. Goris became our pastor, he took charge of the meetings, giving the teachers excellent lessons, plus a half hour each week of studies in Child Psychology. After Dr. Goris left the superintendent took charge of the meetings, teaching the lesson each week. In the 60's, Rev. John Schaal, who was then editor of all our Christian Reformed Sunday School materials, taught the lesson each week for many years. For the last several years teachers' meetings were no longer held except an occasional meeting for business purposes. In 1973 the Sunday School was changed to Children's Church, meeting during the church services.

In the 30's there were Sunday School classes for children from 3-year-olds to 9th Graders. In the 40's and 50's the 9th Grade class was dropped. In the 60's the classes kept decreasing, until at the present time the Children's church includes Pre-school through the 4th Grade.

The following is a list of the men and women who served as Superintendents:

B. H. Dice - 4 years	M. Calsbeek - 2 years
H. Huizingh - 3 years	N. Hoek - 10 years
P. Joppe - 6 years	G. Kuipers - 1 year
J. Folkema - 5 years	D. De Vroome - 3 years
N. Brower - 2 years	D. Van Bruggen - 2 years
A. W. Hulst - 3 years	Marcia Fisher (Mrs. J.) - 1 year
J. S. Dykstra - 6 years	

The teachers who so willingly gave of their time and efforts are too many to list here. During the early years, many of the men teachers served for more than ten

years. There are four women who served many more years. They are Joan Orange, Dorothy Ibershof, Catherine Bouma (Mrs. A. Holtrop), who reached 24 years, and Dena Korfker, who taught for 46 years, serving under 12 of the 13 superintendants. She retired in 1973.

### CATECHISM TEACHING

In the early years catechetical instruction was always carried on by the pastor or by an elder in the absence of the pastor. During the second half of our existence most of the classes were taught by elders, seminary students, and Christian School teachers. Most of the teachers were men. Nelle Vander Ark, Gertrude Vander Ark, and Dena Korfker were the exceptions.

As with the Sunday School, the age of the students changed over the years. In the beginning children in the 2nd Grade received instruction and continued until they were young adults and made profession of faith. Today the instruction begins where the Sunday School leaves off – at the 5th Grade level. The 8th and 9th grade classes now receive their instruction in the format of occasional week-end retreats. These retreats are conducted by Mr. and Mrs. P. Lucasse, assisted by other couples and young adults. The retreats are held three or four times a year. The high school students have a choice of three classes at different times during the week on the Heidelberg Catechism, the Book of John, and My Life and the Will of God.

### OUR CHURCH LIBRARY

When our church was organized, we took with us from the Oakdale Park church their church librarian. For more than ten years we still used the Oakdale Park library, and Mr. Peter Bouma was still the librarian. In 1939 we were very happy to be able to set up a library of our own, in the southwest corner of our basement, where it still is today. We began with 700 books, many of them donated. Prof. H. Schultze donated most of the religious books, including a complete commentary.

Mr. Peter Bouma was the librarian for a great many years, retiring in 1951. From that time on the librarian and the assistant librarians have always been women. They are assisted by a library board, appointed by the consistory. Several of the members have served for many years. Mrs. Carolyn Lucasse is the present librarian. Her assistants are Mrs. Nancy Jasperse, Mrs. Carole Korfker, and Miss Meredith Ter Horst.

### ORGANIZATIONS

A large percentage of the people of Fuller Avenue have taken part in the society life of our church either as member or leader. Several of the organizations are as old as our church. The Men's Society and the Mary and Martha Society began in 1925. There was also a Men's Forum for several years. The young people were members of the Young Men's Society and the Young Women's Society, known as the KYB Club (Know Your Bible Club). The Ladies' Christian Fellowship began in 1934.

In 1950 two new organizations came into being – the Senior Mr. and Mrs. Club, now called the Faith and Friendship Club, and the Junior Mr. and Mrs. Club, now called the Young Married Couples Club.

In 1959 the boys and girls no longer met separately. There was still a Young Men's Society, but a new group was started called the Young People's Society. The

younger boys started a Calvinist Cadet Corps. In 1960 the younger girls became the Calvinettes. In 1963 still another group was added, called the Young Adults. And in 1964 the Neighborhood Bible Class had its beginning.

For the last several years the Men's Society meets with the Men's Society of Oakdale Park. They meet at Oakdale church and are now called the Men's Fellowship.

All these many groups have played and are still playing an important part in helping Fuller Avenue become the precious body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

During the 60's we put up a small Cadet building on a corner of our parking lot. This helped the Cadets considerably in their manual training program. But after a few years the building was destroyed by fire. It was never rebuilt.

### INTERESTING FACTS GLEANED FROM THE STATISTICS

It took Fuller Avenue 18 years to become a congregation of 250 families. In 7 more years we had climbed to 300 families, and the number has remained high for 18 more years. The last 5 years has brought us back to around 250. In spite of a changing neighborhood we are still a large congregation, even though during the years we have lost families to 6 new congregations.

Notice that as the church grows older the number of infant baptisms decreases and the number of deaths increases sharply.

Notice also that we are, and have always been, a congregation of shifting membership. Almost as many families and individuals leave our church each year as are added to it. This is largely due to the fact that we have always been a student church. Many students of Calvin College and Seminary are members of Fuller Avenue during the years they are at school.

### OUR FORWARD LOOK

Having remembered our past in its many details, there is but one thing to be added. The Lord be praised for His matchless goodness to us, His children at Fuller Avenue! And now, as we begin the second half-century of our existence, may we continue to trust Him fully and to serve Him with all that He has given us, in the way He leads. And may we all share in the coming of His Kingdom in us, through us, and round about us to the glory of His holy Name!

written by

Dena Korfker

a charter member

GROWTH OF OUR CONGREGATION FROM YEAR TO YEAR

Year	Families	Souls	Confess. Members	Bapt. Members	Infants Baptized	Adults Baptized	Confess. of Faith	Deaths	Families Joined	Families Left	Indiv. Joined	Indiv. Left	
1925	41	203			3			1	41				
1926	63	304	148	156	4		3						
1927	80	386	186	200	11		4	2					
1928	91	427	211	216	14		15						
1929	92	438	217	221	16		5	1	9	8	8	4	
1930	107	496	274	222	9		15	1	15		11		
1931	119	350	299	251	13		11	2	12		14		
1932	124	590	310	280	10	1	21		5		40		
1933	133	648	361	287	12	1	11	3	9		58		
1934	144	684	382	302	12	1	11	1	11		36		
1935	154	725	401	324	15		8	2	10		41		
1936	165	739	413	326	13		12	1	17		85		
1937	182	826	464	362	26		11	5	17				
1938	188	821	460	355	8		18	3	3	7	25	18	
1939	202	855	513	342	10	1	21	2	12	6	23	20	
1940	210	880	531	349	26		17	5	14	6	10	20	
1941	220	910	549	361	29	1	31	1	12	9	14	22	
1942	237	964	580	384	22			3	23	11	12	14	Boston Square organized
1943	256	1013	630	383	27		37	5	19	7	11	20	
1944	262	1048	657	391	19	2	24	5	15	10	13	15	
1945	268	1084	683	401	22		21	6	13	11	21	13	
1946	278	1073	679	394	20	2	27	7	11	19	20	30	Calvin organized
1947	272	1047	668	379	31		29	6	6	16	16	35	
1948	286	1085	685	400	38	3	19	5	9	10	17	18	
1949	294	1100	696	404	22	2	21	2	6	7	15	18	
1950	298	1124	715	409	15		16	5	15	8	9	6	
Totals July 17, 1950					447	14	408	73	304	135	499	253	

Year	Families	Souls	Confess. Members	Bapt. Members	Infants Baptized	Adults Baptized	Confess. of Faith	Deaths	Families Joined	Families Left	Indiv. Joined	Indiv. Left	
1951	309	1165	732	433	31		21	4	13	32	13	14	Plymouth Heights organized
1952	296	1102	705	397	22		14	7	13	25	14	8	Alger Park organized
1953	294	1101	685	416	24	1	15	7	8	11	22	20	
1954	300	1120	702	418	43	1	11	3	19	23	23	17	
1955	303	1129	716	413	26	3	21	5					
1956	305	1109	704	405	30	1	17	6					
1957	297	1095	694	401	29		13	7					
1958	294	1083	678	405	20		4	6		(no records)			
1959	293	1104	701	403	30		26	7					
1960	285	1099	698	401	26		20	9					
1961	298	1128	713	414	32		17	8	21	19	32	21	Shawnee Park organized
1962	294	1140	730	410	34		18	8	20	23	20	22	
1963	302	1136	743	393	34		31	9	20	31	13	23	
1964	294	1128	729	399	36		23	5	12	21	33	24	
1965	291	1118	710	408	31		14	9	17	19	9	26	
1966	282	1124	718	406	25		27	7	24	18	16	24	
1967	288	1128	726	392	20	2	31	5	17	19	16	17	
1968	283	1140	731	409	29		21	10	6	9	22	24	Woodlawn organized
1969	262	1068	691	377	12	1	15	12	13	24	11	13	
1970	250	1026	672	354	20	2	11	7	4	10	9	17	
1971	240	980	638	342	12		10	10	14	7	2	19	
1972	233	971	633	338	13		13	11	16	16	10	28	
1973					13		9	8	33	13	21	8	
1974	245	977	650	327	13		11	18	24	23	29	17	
1975	250	1010	682	328	15		19	11	11	8	13	7	
Totals July 17, 1975					620	11	432	199	316	369	341	367	

## Fifty Years Of Mission Activity

The claim is frequently made that a congregation's interest in missions is a reliable criterion for determining its spiritual vitality. If that claim is true, the Fuller Avenue congregation has given evidence of spiritual vitality throughout its history.

### Madison Square Chapel

Immediately after its organization our congregation joined with the Oakdale Park congregation to undertake a program of evangelism in the Madison Square area. At first calls were made at the homes in the area and Sunday School classes were conducted for the neighborhood children. Soon worship services were included. Among the first workers were Miss Elizabeth Smitter and Mr. William Korfker, Sr. They helped to provide the required leadership, but additional help was given by individual members of the congregations.

The early years were years of searching for the most effective ways of reaching the people of the community. But the Lord prospered the work, and the role of part-time superintendent was undertaken by Mr. Henry Flokstra. After a comparatively short time the Board of the Mission recommended the appointment of a full-time superintendent. The appointment went to Mr. Thomas Afman, who began his assignment in January, 1941. His enthusiastic and vigorous leadership led to the expansion of the mission's activities. Additional help became necessary.

In 1945 Miss Gertrude Holkeboer was invited to serve as "lady missionary." She accepted the invitation and undertook the task of calling on the attendants at the mission and others who were in need of her help. Her tactful counseling endeared her to all. The mission benefited from her services until she retired in 1965. Her tenure was surpassed only by that of Mr. Korfker, who served in the mission's Sunday School program for forty years.

Mr. Afman left Madison Square in 1948 and was succeeded by Rev. Walter Du Bois. Rev. and Mrs. Du Bois soon won the hearts of the Madison Square people. Attendance at the services increased, the Sunday School continued to grow, and other aspects of the work began to develop. The store building on Madison Avenue which housed the mission, was no longer adequate. After considerable deliberation the supporting congregations agreed to erect a chapel building on Lafayette Avenue near Hall Street. The chapel building was dedicated in 1951, and the Madison Square Mission became the Madison Square Chapel.

After fourteen years of faithful and effective service, Rev. and Mrs. Du Bois left to serve a congregation in Canada. Mr. William Navis, a lay evangelist, became the new superintendent in 1962. He worked diligently. But it became increasingly apparent that the attendants at the chapel were ready for organization as a congregation. That step was taken in 1968. The Madison Square Chapel now became the Madison Square Christian Reformed Church.

Rev. Vernon Geurkink served as the first pastor from 1968 to 1974. He was succeeded by Rev. Virgil Patterson in 1974.

The daughter church is still very dear to the Fuller Avenue and Oakdale Park churches. It is a testimony to the faithfulness of God. He used the diverse abilities

of the superintendents, the efforts of the more than one hundred volunteer workers, the wise guidance of those who served on the Board of the Mission, the spirit of cooperation between the two churches on behalf of the mission, and the prayerful and financial support of the members of those congregations to build a church. We have been His co-workers.

### Mary Free Bed Hospital

In 1935 a new area of evangelism was opened at the Mary Free Bed Hospital, then known as Blodgett Home. Miss Elizabeth Smitter led in organizing a program of evangelism that would reach the patients of that hospital. At that time the patients were children, most of them were the victims of polio.

Every Sunday morning the patients were brought together for a service of worship. The service consisted of a brief gospel message and music. The latter was furnished by groups from our church. After the service the patients were grouped into classes for Sunday School instruction. For several years Bible classes were also held during the week. Help for teaching them was received from students at the Reformed Bible Institute.

The leadership of the Mary Free Bed Hospital evangelism program has always been given by a member of our congregation under the supervision of the consistory. Miss Smitter was the first leader. She was succeeded by Mr. J. Orlebeke, Mr. N. Bierema, Mr. T. Afman, Rev. W. Du Bois, Mr. B. Ondersma, Mr. R. Baas, Mr. E. Jansen, and Mr. Donald Bolthouse, the present leader. The leaders assumed responsibility for arranging and conducting the worship services and supervising the teaching and visiting. They were assisted by other members of the congregation and at times by members of neighboring congregations.

Over the years some changes have been made in the program. They were necessitated by changes in the hospital and the needs of the times. Former patients left and new patients came to take their places. The policy of admitting only children as patients was changed to that of accepting adult as well as children patients. The range of causes of disabilities is now greater than it was, yet all of the patients are victims of crippling diseases and accidents. And they all need the hope and consolation that the Gospel offers.

The Mary Free Bed ministry is now in its fortieth year. During all those years at least five members of the Fuller Avenue Church used their talents every Sunday to acquaint the patients with the way of salvation. It has not been a glamorous ministry by human standards. Results could not be readily demonstrated. But it has been a very rewarding ministry. The empathy, love, patience, and persistence of the workers elicited sincere and positive responses from many of the patients. Only eternity will reveal the results of the efforts of the many, many members of our congregation who participated in this ministry. They displayed the banner of the cross in assurance of the fulfillment of God's promise: "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:11.

### Foreign Missions

The Fuller Avenue congregation in 1944 was invited to become the calling church for the Two Wells Mission Post on the Indian Mission field in New Mexico. At that

time the Indian Mission field was under the direction of the denominational Board of Foreign Missions. The Two Wells Post was therefore regarded as a foreign mission field.

Our call was extended to Rev. J. B. Swierenga, who accepted. Inasmuch as we were his calling church, he and his field became the special concern of our congregation. Rev. Swierenga worked faithfully and kept our membership well informed about his work. Strong ties were developed between him and our congregation.

After twelve years of service at Two Wells the Swierenga Family moved to the Naschitti Mission field. This was one of the neighboring missions of Two Wells. Rev. Swierenga continued his labors there until 1958 when the Lord summoned him to take his place in the mansions above.

When Mr. M. Harberts, a graduate of the Reformed Bible Institute, took up the work at Naschitti in 1960, the Fuller Avenue Church agreed to support him. He is still our missionary at Naschitti and has continued to maintain the interest of our members in that field.

In 1946 our congregation was asked to consider the support of a missionary on a foreign field. The consistory took this matter under advisement for almost a year. The problem was that we were the calling church for Rev. Swierenga but were not his supporting church. Should we then support someone on the foreign field? The consistory, after consulting Dr. De Korne of the Foreign Mission Board, recommended to the congregation that the relationship with Rev. Swierenga and the Two Wells Mission be maintained and that we also become the calling and supporting church for a post on the Nigerian mission field. But when this proposal was submitted to the congregation our members decided to support both Rev. Swierenga and a foreign missionary.

A call was extended to Rev. Peter Dekker to serve on the Nigerian field; and he accepted the call. He entered upon this work in 1947. He was soon received into the Fuller Avenue family and with Rev. Swierenga developed warm and affectionate relationships between our congregation and the Nigerian and Indian Mission fields.

In 1962 Rev. Dekker left the Nigerian post to undertake pastoral work in a church in California. Shortly before that time Mr. Gordon Kuipers, a member of our congregation, had accepted an appointment to teach in a mission school in Nigeria. So our congregation decided to assume responsibility for the support of Mr. and Mrs. Kuipers. When they left Nigeria six years later our support of a missionary on the Nigerian field was terminated.

However, Rev. Peter Tong, a member of our church during his college and seminary days, entered upon the work of missionary in Taiwan in 1966. Fuller Ave. Church undertook his support in 1967 and has continued that support until the present.

### Community Evangelism

In 1962 our congregation also directed its attention to community evangelism. Mrs. Talena Folgers was appointed to call on the families in the immediate vicinity of our church and to extend a welcome to our services. Her efforts led to weekly Bible classes and Daily Vacation Bible School sessions during the summers. In her activities she was assisted by seminary students and members of our church. There was hardly a family within a two or three block radius of the church that was not called on. While

few of them came to our worship services, they were all told about the Gospel which is proclaimed at our services.

Mrs. Folgers found it necessary to discontinue the work in 1968. She was graduating from college and was planning to embark on a teaching career. Mr. Robert Jipping, a seminary student who had worked with Mrs. Folgers for several years, was appointed to fill the vacancy. But he graduated from the seminary in 1969 and therefore had to discontinue our community evangelism efforts. He was succeeded by Mr. Jack Huttenga, another seminary student who had had considerable experience while working with Mrs. Folgers and Mr. Jipping. He directed the community activities until 1971 when Mr. Tom Schaff, a student at the Reformed Bible Institute, took over.

During the years, however, there developed within the consistory a growing concern about the role of our members in community evangelism. Already in 1969 the consistory proposed to the congregation a rationale for greater participation in evangelism by our members and the appointment of a full-time Director of Education and Evangelism. The congregation, evidently not yet ready for this step, rejected the proposal.

Three years later the Evangelism Committee of the consistory, after reviewing the outcomes of the Thrust program, urged the consistory to recommend the appointment of a full-time seminary student "intern" for one year, beginning in June, 1972. This recommendation was approved by the congregation, and Mr. Robert De Lange was appointed to undertake that assignment.

During his term Mr. De Lange was able to develop in our members an awareness of the many opportunities that exist for cooperative effort within the congregation for the well-being of the community and the church. At the end of the year the congregation was ready to employ a full-time director of education and evangelism. An invitation to serve in that capacity was extended to Rev. Virgil Patterson. He accepted and began his ministry in the fall of 1973.

The Patterson family was welcomed into the congregation, and many firm friendships were established. Rev. Patterson worked diligently, and his labors were greatly appreciated. But after a year of service he felt led to accept the call of the Madison Square Christian Reformed congregation to become their pastor.

Since his departure our community evangelism program has lost some of its momentum. The immediate future at this time seems uncertain. But we continue to look to the King of the Church for guidance. We trust Him to supply whatever is needed to continue the work begun and to direct us into a program that will be effective in leading our community to a knowledge of the salvation that is possible through faith in Christ.

### Cuban Evangelism

The influx of Cuban refugee families into the Grand Rapids area in the early 1960's led the Fuller Avenue congregation to a recognition of the potentialities for evangelism among these disenfranchised people. With congregational approval, the consistory agreed to call and support an evangelist for this work. The call was accepted by Rev. J. Boonstra who, by virtue of his South American heritage and his education at Calvin College and Seminary, was especially qualified for this assignment. He entered upon the work in the spring of 1963. During his tenure of three years he was able to establish a strong foundation for a Spanish church. He left

in 1966 to set up a Spanish broadcast program for the Back-to-God Hour radio broadcast.

The Lord again provided. Mr. Carlos Cortina, a refugee from Cuba and a student at the Calvin Seminary, was appointed to carry on as a part-time evangelist. When he graduated in 1968 he accepted the call to become pastor of the Spanish Christian Reformed Chapel. He served until 1972 when the Lord called him to his heavenly home. During the six years in which he served he proved to be a most dedicated servant of the Lord. He devoted his energies to help his people with their physical and material needs as well as their spiritual sanctification. He will long be remembered by the Spanish people for his strong spiritual leadership and by his fellow members at Fuller Avenue Church for his devotion to the work of his Lord.

Soon after Rev. Cortina's departure the Grand Rapids Board of Evangelism assumed responsibility for the Spanish Christian Reformed Chapel. While the Fuller Avenue congregation no longer has direct responsibility, it still contributes to the support of Rev. D. Romero, our fellow member, who succeeded Rev. Cortina. Our prayers continue for his guidance as he tries, with the help of God, to build on the work done by Rev. Boonstra and Rev. Cortina.

#### **Mission Emphasis**

In April, 1973, when the consistory proposed to the congregation the employment of a full-time Director of Education and Evangelism, it also proposed the discontinuation of above-quota contributions for missions. Fuller Avenue Church had been contributing \$19,000 annually for the support of four missionaries. That second proposal, however, was rejected. Although the congregation was ready to undertake a stepped up program of community evangelism, it was not ready to give up its special support for missions.

In the light of this determination by the congregation to continue its mission support, the consistory decided to remove the above-quota support for missions from the regular congregational budget and to make it voluntary. In other words the members were no longer to be assessed for special mission support; it was to be an expression of their conviction and interest.

A Mission Emphasis Committee was appointed to implement the new plan. Its general mandate was to stimulate congregational interest in and acquaintance with the cause of missions. Due to the efforts of this committee and the cooperation of the congregation, ties between our missionaries and the societies and members of our church have been and are being strengthened, quarterly Mission Sundays have been introduced, and a Mission Emphasis Week is being held annually. The result has been a decided increase in giving for missions. Instead of contributing \$19,000 by budget assessment, the contributions last year amounted to \$29,000. And, the number of missionaries to receive support has increased from four to ten. Inasmuch as the amount pledged for missions this year is essentially the same as was contributed last year, our increased mission interest and support continues.

The Lord has again shown his faithfulness in this new venture. Few dared hope for such an increase in mission giving. But the Lord always provides more generously than we expect.

Fifty years of mission activity! Also fifty years of blessed experiences. And fifty years of revelation of God's readiness to use the efforts of his people to build his Church and Kingdom.

Written by  
John Van Bruggen

#### APPRECIATION

We wish to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for planning the special Anniversary Sundays, dinner for the charter members, and the printing of this booklet. The committee members are Mike Stapert, chairman; Jylene Baas, John and Henrietta Bos, Matthew Calsbeek, William Korfker, Sr., and David Weemhof.

Also a sincere thank you to Dena Korfker for writing the history of the church and John Van Bruggen for compiling the history of the Mission Work of our church.