

A Brief History of the Holmes Road Church of Christ, Lansing, Michigan

By Bob Young

In the 1920s a group of Christians began meeting in a rented facility on Washington Avenue in Lansing, Michigan with the purpose of following the pattern of the New Testament Church. When the location became unavailable, the group met in Lockie Williams' home for six weeks. During the 1930s they worshipped in a concrete building on Mt. Hope Avenue. Toward the end of the 1930s they met on Moores River Drive until a building was secured on Banghart Street in North Lansing (c. 1940-1941).

During these early years, an emphasis was placed on house to house personal evangelism and the membership grew to about eighty. Basil Overton held several gospel meetings to enhance and reap the benefits of this personal work effort. When more growth followed, the church sought a greater influence and presence in the Lansing community. Therefore, in 1953 the Banghart Street congregation agreed to assist a group of members who desired to plant a new church in South Lansing. In November 1953, the new congregation purchased and began meeting in a church property on Forest Avenue that included a minister's home. The first service had approximately 60 people present. Soon this building filled to capacity necessitating chairs in the center aisle. (The Banghart Street church also continued to grow and eventually moved to northeast Lansing and established the Kimberly Downs congregation.)

In 1958 the Forest Avenue church purchased 2.3 acres on East Holmes Road near Cedar Street and on October 1, 1960, construction began on a church building with classrooms, kitchen, offices, nursery, storage rooms and a 450 seat auditorium. On February 19, 1961, the congregation had their first service in the new building. At this time, the church had a membership of about 80. One can only marvel at the vision of the church in constructing so large a facility. The minister at this time was Odell Kirby with Claude Fraizer, Jay Robinson, and Russell Taylor serving as elders. A minister's residence was built in 1964 adjacent to the church building. Also in 1964, Gerald Fruzia became the church's minister, replacing Odell Kirby. From 1965 to 1967, Alfred Reeves served as minister for the church, and in 1967, Allen Killom began serving as minister for the church. At this time, the church elders were Jay Robinson, Edgar Church, Howard Hagerman, and Lyle Wight.

In 1968 God worked miraculously to integrate the Holmes Road Church at a time when much of the nation was involved in racial conflict, a conflict which was especially intense in Michigan as evidenced by the events in Detroit during this summer of this year. During this tumultuous period, two churches merged as a group from Butler Boulevard and the group on Holmes Road united their works and dreams. During the early years of the merger, W.D. Wiley and then Jim Miller served alongside Allen Killom as ministers. Robert E. Hooper, history professor and church historian, notes the significance of this event as an exception to the general practice and experiences of churches of Christ at the time (Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century*, 1993, p. 279). As his source, Hooper cites the *Christian Echo*, a periodical published and read among the black brothers of the churches of Christ. One might wonder if this indicates how little attention was given to such fledgling efforts among the

white churches and their periodicals. Soon after the merger, the church leadership was also integrated.

During the early 1970s, a group of Christians came from the Kimberly Downs church, and then again in the late 1970s, a group came from the University congregation. During this time, the church had active outreach efforts on the Michigan State University campus and also in the community through a bus program. After Allen Killom left, Roger Pace served the church as minister for a little less than two years from 1974-1976. An addition was built in 1975 to provide more classrooms along with an expanded kitchen with a large meeting area suitable for eating and various events. While it was still bare concrete blocks and concrete floor, the new building was used as a distribution center during the severe south Lansing flooding of 1975. The new building also provided a secondary meeting place for children's Bible hour, an activity necessary because of the large number of children who were being bused to Bible classes. When the furnace in the main building had to be replaced in the 1980s, the annex served as an assembly place for the church for several weeks. In 1975, church membership was about 175, approximately double the number of members that had begun the church in 1961. (Because of the bus program, attendance numbers in 1975 are somewhat higher than 175.)

In 1976, Bob Young began serving as minister for the church. The church was active in the busing ministry, in outreach on the MSU campus, with a Personal Evangelism Program (PEP) and later with Fishers of Men outreach efforts, along with various other ministries. These efforts and a receptive community resulted in the church growing from a membership and attendance of about 175 in 1976 to the low 300s by the early-1980s. The parking lot was expanded twice.

In 1980, the church sent out its first missionary couple to Costa Rica, and through a providential set of events, soon settled into a productive mission work in eastern Honduras. These early efforts were supported by annual mission contributions, the first of which in 1980 resulted in gifts of slightly more than \$30000—a sizeable sum in that day. In the 1980s, a Hispanic church met in the church basement for a time. Eventually, the Hispanic congregation became part of the English-speaking assembly, swelling membership and average attendance to over 350. At this time, the church had experienced a second doubling, this one requiring only 10 years. Among the elders who served during this time were Willie Blair, Howard Hagerman, John Kiser, Jay Robinson, Ed Tarrant, Marlon Wheat, and Lyle Wight.

After Bob Young left in late 1987, Curtis McClane was hired as minister. In 1994-1995, the minister's home was converted into a work area and offices for the ministers and secretary, with an adjacent conference room in the area that was formerly the garage of the parsonage. A connecting structure erected between the church building annex and the house was made into a kitchen and expanded meeting or class area. Elders who served during McClane's ministry included Willie Blair, Scott Bostic, Howard Hagerman, John Kiser, Jack Murray, Joe Ritchie, Jay Robinson, Dempsey Scott, Ed Tarrant, Bob Stampfly, Marlon Wheat, and Lyle Wight.

After Curtis McClane left in 1998, he was followed by ministers Jerod Kelly, Alan Martin, Todd Greer, Richard Roper, and most recently, Omah Smith. During Kelly's ministry, elders who served were Jerry Johnson, Bob Pollard, Joe Ritchie, Ken Slater, and Jerry Tarrant. Later Jerry Carter and Robert Steward began serving as elders, and for most of the first decade of the century, the elders who have served are Jerry Carter, Bob Pollard, and Robert Steward. John Orr also served as an elder for a time during this decade. Robert Steward and his family moved from Lansing in 2010, and today the church is served by Jerry Carter and Bob Pollard as elders.

Through the years, the church has several times employed a second minister. These men have had various responsibilities in youth, counseling, family ministry, and as associate ministers as they served the church. These include Bobby Cox, Jim Slater, Larry McCain, Rob Roberson, Mark Bell, Dion Frasier, and Rich Roper.

During the last decade, at least two groups left the church to establish or support other congregations, but the church remains a vibrant group of over 200 believers who share a common commitment to a unity based on the word of God. The Holmes Road Church of Christ continues to serve the Lansing area and has watched as children become parents and grandparents. The future of the church is bright as it strengthens its commitment to being a friendly, loving body of believers. As a result of this commitment, today the church is a diverse mix of cultures and ages and maintains a focus on following the pattern of the New Testament Church. The church continues to reach out to its local community through various ministries, and has a global vision which is reflected in its mission work in Kenya. The church is also involved in reaching out to children in need and continues its involvement and interest in Latin American missions, especially in Honduras.