

Our Mother Church, the Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church of Jarvis, where we used to worship, was growing by leaps and bounds. In the summer of 1957, it was felt that we were ready to establish a church of our own in Simcoe. It started at a birthday party over a cup of coffee. The brothers J. Dreyer, D. VanDijk, D. Wesseling and R. Wagter put their heads together.

Soon afterward, several families were visited and asked if they were in favour of the organization of a new church in Simcoe. The outcome was favourable. Many prayers must have gone up before the final decision was made.

We had a diversity of people. Some were farmers; some were factory workers; some wore blue, while others wore white collars. Even church backgrounds differed. For the greater part, people came from Christian Reformed backgrounds but others had their roots in the Free Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of America and the Salvation Army.

We had one thing in common though. Our longing to serve the Lord and to be one in Christ bound us together with ties of Christian love.

Those beginning years were not easy for most people. How hard we worked in the years to make ends meet. Our new congregation consisted of too many young families! Many hardships were endured. Many sacrifices were brought.

The first consistory consisted of elders C. Hogeterp, D. VanDijk, and D. Wesseling while the brothers J. Jelsema and N. Vreugdenhil served as deacons.

Our first meeting places were not all that great. Some of you may remember our services being held in such places as the Junior Farmers Building, The Orange Hall or the United Church Sunday School room.

In June, 1958, we already were able to purchase a little hall of our own. It was located on the north end of Talbot St. It even had a little kitchen in it and a small consistory room which was also used as meeting places for our societies such as: Ladies' and Men's societies, Calvinettes, Cadets and Sunday School. We sure made use of every square inch available.

The Christian Reformed Church of Simcoe now had its own building and we were now looking forward to calling our own minister.

Amongst others, we called Rev. John Vriend, who was, at that time, serving the Christian Reformed Church of Montreal. It was the fall of 1959. What a thrill to receive a positive response! Telephone lines around Simcoe must have been red hot on that day as members were calling each other, telling the good news. This minister had even studied in Amsterdam and was able to preach and converse in the Dutch language! In those days this was very important. God has seen our needs and answered our prayers.

Pastor Vriend's interest in our day-to-day living we will not forget. Mrs. Vriend served as president of our Ladies' Society and we were sad when they left after serving us from January 1960 until the summer of 1964. Of those days Rev. Vriend writes:

"One of our first challenges was the improvement of the worship facilities. The neat little greenhouse-turned-church was a fine setting for the Sunday services, but the Psalter Hymnals were threadbare, the organ asthmatic, and the landscaping around the building, well, mostly non-existent. A fund-drive and one collection supplied the financing needed to bring about a startling change! How pleased we all were!"

Another big challenge was the building of the parsonage on Charles Street. It took a bit of doing to persuade the bank manager (a product of the depression) to approve the loan but I heard no complaints from the congregation, and a fine home it became for our growing family. Convenient too, since it was only a short walk away from the church. Total cost of land and house, if I remember correctly, stayed well within the estimated budget of \$20000.

One of our strong ambitions was to evangelize. I say "our" because many members of the congregation were prepared to give themselves freely for this work. A first effort was simply to invite people to the parsonage (still on Norfolk) for a class in Christian Doctrine. We had extended an invitation to about a dozen people and had no idea how many would come but on the proper evening nine people appeared on our doorstep! What a happy surprise! Most of them became members too!

Another venture in evangelism was somewhat more experimental. It was spearheaded by Mr. Dirk Wesseling and Mr. Walter Vos, as I recall, and advertised by Mr. Peter Brouwer, then a reporter with the Simcoe Reformer. On four successive Sundays we would hold services in a hall in Delhi, centre of the tobacco growing industry. We promoted the meetings on the radio, through the press, and by means of handbills distributed from door to door. The choir practiced and sang. Everything was done to bring out the people – or so we thought. One family showed up. They did join our church. We did not, however, repeat the experiment.

A big event for the church was the Leighton Ford Crusade. Many of our members, including members of the consistory, went into training as counselors. Others sang in the Crusade choir. For the first time we really broke out of our Dutch immigrant circles to join with all evangelical churches – and some not so evangelical – to bring the Gospel to our neighbours. A genuine Revival Spirit took a hold of our town. The Crusade did not bring new people into our congregation but it did renew our own lives. It taught us to care about others.

Our next pastor, Rev. Gabe Rienks, came to serve our congregation on October 28, 1964. Before coming to us Pastor Rienks had served in the Netherlands and in Indonesia for a period of nine years. He was pastor in Pembroke, Ontario since

1959. Rev. and Mrs. Rienks should be remembered for the effort which they put into evangelism. Our evangelism work in those days was concentrated on Port Dover beach during the summer months, and the community in Simcoe around the Christmas time. Many tracts were handed out. How hard we tried to get contacts spreading the good news. Pastor Rienks served our congregation until November 1969.

Rev. Fred Bakker came in September 1970, fresh from the Seminary. Soon after his arrival, plans materialized to build a new church. A building lot was purchased and after much planning and many meetings, our new church building was erected on a corn field near the end of Oak Street. We held our Dedicatory service on Thursday, December 9, 1971. Now we had a real church with a little steeple on top.

Thinking back of those years in which Rev. Bakker served us, we remember with sadness the passing of Mrs. Fenna Bakker, the Pastor's wife. She had suffered much and the congregation was deeply moved by her spiritual strength and the power of her witnessing. We also shall not forget that through her efforts, the Mission Circle was founded. It is still very much alive today (1982).

After Rev. Bakker left just four years after his arrival, we got a young minister, Pastor Ralph Fluit. He also came fresh out of Calvin Seminary and was very dedicated to his first congregation. His friendly face adorned our pulpit from October, 1975 until March, 1980. Mrs. Marianne Fluit often delighted us with her beautiful voice.

At the present time (1982), our congregation is served by Rev. Lammert Slofstra who came to us from Chatham in March, 1981. Pastor Slofstra served two congregations in the Netherlands as well as churches in Canada before he came to us. The Lord willing, we hope to have him with us for quite a while yet.

Over the years, we have seen many people come and go, but slowly, yet surely, we grew in numbers. Simcoe, a town with a population of around 14000 people is a slowly growing town. There is no heavy industry. However, we boast of beautiful surroundings, fertile farmland and a friendly population. Our church has grown from 29 families to 91 families at the present time. We are approaching the future with great expectation. God has been with us and blessed us abundantly during the past. We have felt His presence over and over again. Would He not take care of the generations to come?

"To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever." Eph. 3:21

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