

**THE HISTORY OF
CENTRAL PARK CHURCH**

**From Graafschap to Myrtle Avenue
1847 - 2019**

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Acknowledgements

Our church has a rich history beginning in 1847 in the village of Graafschap, Holland, Michigan, worshiping in a small log cabin. From the earliest entries in consistory minutes we see that many people have willingly offered their time and information, enabling us to record and preserve the history of our church. Initial efforts by member Gerrit Heneveld guided our church member and historian Virgil B. White as he recorded our history from 1847-1985.

During the last two years, with much assistance from member Sam Hofman, new information has been added to that previously recorded by Virgil. In addition, we are grateful for the assistance provided by the Holland Archives and our in-church records which enabled us to review Central Park Church monthly consistory minutes since 1986. Graafschap Christian Reformed Church historian, Bill Sytsma, provided invaluable help through numerous phone calls, meetings and tours of their church museum. We remain hopeful for the accuracy of our documentation of the years shared together, as well as the many years since the separation of our original Graafschap church in 1857. It was impossible to include every individual contribution or event over all 173 years of our history. Special thanks are extended to Helen Hofman for her word processing and many rewrites.

What a thrill it has been to read, study and record these chapters of our church life. God has richly blessed our church so that we may continue to be a blessing within the Central Park community and beyond.

May 2020, Jim Zeedyk

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History of Central Park Reformed Church

The early founders of the Central Park Reformed Church were part of a group of church separatists, having withdrawn during the years 1834–1847 from the State Church in the Netherlands. This also applied to the County of Grafschaft-Bentheim in Germany, across the border from the Dutch Province of Drenthe. These were Dutch people who were strong Calvinists, and although they were geographically a part of Germany, their language was Dutch and they had very close religious ties with the churches and church leaders in the Netherlands. The civil authorities had the power to arrest and fine anyone who conducted or attended religious services outside of the State Church. Nevertheless, meetings were held in homes or in barns, sometimes in the early morning hours so as to avoid detection. It was a period of great distress.

The Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, an Associate Pastor in Arnhem and a leader of separatist groups in the Netherlands, also ministered to the Dutch people across the border in Germany. He encouraged them to consider emigration to America, as he and a group of about 100 from congregations in the Netherlands were planning to do in the Fall of 1846.

Members of the separatist churches near Nordhorn in the County of Graafschaft-Bentheim, Germany, decided to follow Rev. Van Raalte and to emigrate to America. They left their homeland in March 1847, under the leadership of Elders Stephen Lucas and Jannes Rutgers. There were 70 persons (men, women and children) and they were joined by 34 from the Province of Drenthe, Netherlands. They sailed from Rotterdam on the Windjammer Antoinette Marie and arrived in New York City on May 23 after 49 days at sea.

The group continued their voyage by boat from New York up the Hudson River and through the Erie Canal to Buffalo, New York. They then secured passage on a Great Lakes schooner, continuing through Lakes Erie, Huron and the Straits of Mackinaw. They arrived on a stormy, rainy day at the Lake Michigan shore near Holland, on June 20, 1847, where they were greeted by a colony representative assigned to shore duty at present day Macatawa. A Dutch hymn was sung after all travelers and provisions were safely brought to shore as nightfall approached. They built small shelters out of evergreen boughs which provided minimal protection from the wind and rain. The following morning, several men set off walking to the colony to secure help. It was yet another day before they and some Holland colonists arrived with flatboats to carry them and their belongings to the location of the present day Heinz Factory. Five sheds had been built there as temporary housing for new arrivals. Expecting a thriving city, they were quite disappointed to encounter a heavily-forested wilderness.

The immigrants soon selected their home site on some high ground southwest of Holland and named the place Graafschap after the County where they had lived in their homeland. There was unending toil and extreme hardship including illness and death, as they cut timber and cleared the land for farming. The first homes were of log construction built with the most primitive tools. They all suffered greatly through the first winters.

At first the new settlers traveled four miles through swamp and woods to Holland to worship with Reverend Van Raalte and his group. Due to the distance for walking and the snows of their first winter, they decided to build a log church in Graafschap in 1848. The first meeting of the Classis of Holland was held in

Zeeland on April 23, 1848. Delegates from four established churches were in attendance, including Reverend A. C. Van Raalte from Holland, Reverend C. Vander Meulen from Zeeland, Reverend M. A. Ypma from Vriesland with their consistory members and the church leaders from Graafschap. The Graafschap Church was first enrolled in the records of Classis as "Church in Allegan County."

A second Classis meeting was held in Holland in September 1848, with the same clergy present along with consistory members, including Elders Tinholt, Rutgers, and Deacon Van Anroy from Graafschap. At that meeting the assembly was informed that an invitation had been received from the Dutch Reformed Church of North America to attend their Synodical meetings in New York State. Due to concerns within the new settlement, that invitation was initially declined.

The Graafschap church extended a call to the Reverend Hendrik George Klyn (Klein) of the Netherlands. He accepted and upon arrival became the first pastor. He apparently arrived in 1849 since his first Classis appearance was at the October 1849 meeting, where his credentials were examined and approved. The elderly Rev. Klyn, unhappy after a short residence in the wilderness with the Graafschap pioneers, accepted a call from a church in Wisconsin. At the Holland Classis meeting in October 1850 he requested permission to move to Milwaukee. The Classis denied his request. However, Rev. Klyn left Graafschap in April 1851, serving briefly in Grand Haven and Chicago enroute to Milwaukee. In late 1852, the Reverend M. A. Ypma accepted a call and left the Vriesland church to become the second pastor at Graafschap. He served until early 1855 at which time he left for South Holland, Illinois.

In May 1850, Reverend Van Raalte had been sent by Classis to attend the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in Albany, New York. He reported back at the October Classis meeting that the Classis of Holland was to be recommended to General Synod for union with the Dutch Reformed Church. At that meeting, the union was affirmed, being favored by the four ministers in the Holland Classis as well as by a majority of the membership in the churches.

A contentious spirit now appeared within the membership. Some members with influence raised numerous questions concerning the union and against Reverend Van Raalte and his leadership role in the colony. The dissension, which was most prevalent in the Vriesland church, was also a matter of serious discussion in the Graafschap church. In the spring of 1857, while without a pastor, about three-fourths of the membership of the Graafschap church followed the dissenting leadership and advised Classis of Holland that they were seceding. By process of majority law, they maintained possession of the church properties. The seceders joined with others from Grand Rapids, Noordelos and Polkton to form the True Dutch Reformed Church, which subsequently became the Christian Reformed Church.

Only five families remained faithful to the Dutch Reformed Church of Graafschap: the families of Arend Jan Neerken, Egbert Dunnewind, Geert Heneveld, Hermanus Strabbing and Steven Speet. The 21 communicants of these five families carried on with great faith and courage and continued to worship regularly, generally at the home of Elder A. J. Neerken. A sermon was read by Mr. Neerken or some other competent man, and the Classis would send a minister to preach for them from time to time. The church continued in this manner for about two years. In 1859, Elder Neerken donated an acre of ground in the platted village of Graafschap, about 500 feet west of the church property of the present Christian

Reformed Church. They then built a small church on this property, to be designated as the Reformed Church of Graafschap. This church grew in membership and continued to flourish.

In 1861, Reverend Roelof Pieters, a graduate of New Brunswick Seminary, was called in conjunction with the Reformed Church of Drenthe, Michigan. Reverend Pieters accepted the call and his services were divided between the two congregations. He preached every third Lord's Day in Graafschap and took charge of the catechetical instruction for the youth, making his rounds on horseback. He served the church in this way for about three years, and during his time of service the church made steady growth. The statistics for 1863 list 26 families and 56 communicants. The Reverend Roelof Pieters was the father of Dr. Albertus Pieters, who later became a highly respected professor at Western Theological Seminary.

In the Fall of 1864 the congregation contemplated calling a minister by themselves and in January 1865, the church secured the services of theological student, Derk Broek. Upon graduation from New Brunswick Seminary in March 1865, Reverend Broek came to the church as regular pastor. The Rev. Broek kept minutes of consistory meetings and proceedings of the church. The minutes and records kept by Rev. Broek reveal that during his ministry the church grew steadily. The statistical report shows that in 1866, the first year of Rev. Broek's pastorate, the congregation numbered 28 families and 61 communicant members. In 1870, the Graafschap church showed membership of 38 families and 82 communicant members. The offering for the year amounted to \$682.00, which was a great sum for a few families at that time. In 1870, Rev. Broek left the Graafschap Church and accepted a call to a church in Singapore, just north of Saugatuck.

The church at Graafschap remained vacant until the Fall of 1870, when Rev. Englebert Christian Oggel was called. He was an 1860 graduate of the Holland Academy and continued his education at Rutgers College (1863) and New Brunswick Seminary (1866). After serving at the North Holland Reformed Church, he served as editor of De Hope, the local Dutch language weekly newspaper. He accepted the call and served the church until March 1, 1872. As stated clerk of Holland Classis, Rev. Oggel brought a more Americanized manner of spelling Dutch names, as in DePree rather than de Pree; also the "ij" in proper nouns and surnames became the letter "y". The records show that Rev. Oggel moved to Grand Haven.

In the Spring of 1873, Rev. William Vander Kley of Pella, Iowa, was called and installed in May. He was an efficient minister, a forceful speaker, and was highly respected within the Dutch Reformed Churches. Two of his most impressive sermons were published in De Hope. (Sept. 11, 1873 and April 27, 1874) Unfortunately, Rev. Vander Kley died of asthma in December 1875, in the third year of his pastorate, and was buried in the Graafschap Cemetery. During the pastorate of Rev. Vander Kley the church made steady and healthy growth. It was also at this time that the church building was enlarged, doubling the seating capacity.

After a vacancy of about a year, the Rev. Adrian J. Zwemer was called. He accepted and was installed in July of 1876. Rev. Zwemer served the church until September 1886. During his pastorate a revival took place. Many young people were converted, repenting from their worldliness, and joined the company of God's people. It was also during Rev. Zwemer's ministry that the unpleasant agitation and secession of the early 1880's occurred, brought about primarily by

the Free Masonry question. There was a general revolt against the Classis of Holland and the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Graafschap Reformed Church also suffered from this agitation, and it took level heads and wise counseling to keep the flock of God together. The Church was very fortunate in having the leadership of the competent Rev. Zwemer in this critical period, a man with wide experience who conducted the affairs of the church in such a way as to avoid disruption of the flock. Although a few families left, on the whole the church survived the storm and was largely repaid by the revival mentioned above. The fact that several young people joined the church at nearly every consistory meeting was especially gratifying. In 1886, Rev. Zwemer accepted a call to become the pastor of the Reformed Church in Middleburg, Iowa. Rev. Zwemer was the father of several outstanding missionaries and ministers of the Reformed Church.

After Rev. Zwemer left, a call was extended to the Rev. C. C. A. L. John, and he came directly to the Graafschap Church from The Netherlands, being installed in September, 1887. In 1889, he accepted a call from a Presbyterian church in Iowa. However, this new field was a bitter disappointment, and Rev. John returned to Holland and again took up the pastorate at Graafschap, serving until June, 1890. When Rev. John left for Forest Grove, Michigan, there were 51 families and 118 communicant members.

The church pastorate remained vacant for nearly three years. In October of 1892, the Rev. F. J. Zwemer, the second son of Rev. Adrian J. Zwemer, became the next pastor of the Graafschap Reformed Church. He and his wife served the church with distinction. In June 1896, he accepted a call to become the Classical Missionary of the Classis of Illinois. In September of 1896, the Rev. Jacob Vander Meulen was installed as pastor and he served until 1900, when he accepted a call

to Holland, Nebraska. In 1901, Mr. C. Kuyper, a theological student, was promised a call. He accepted and was installed in July, 1901. He served until January, 1904, when he received a call from the Fourth Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

New immigrants had come into the Graafschap area during the past 20 years, and church membership increased to 170 members. In the Spring of 1904, candidate J. E. Kuizenga was extended the promise of a call, which he accepted and became the pastor in May. There was much discussion regarding whether or not to stay at the Graafschap location. The church purchased a small lot in the Central Park area under a land contract from Gerrit and Adelia Zaalmlink. This site was later to be developed as the Central Park Chapel. Continuing at the Graafschap site, committees were formed and funds were raised for a new church building. The cornerstone was laid on June 21, 1904, with appropriate services. The previous church building had already been moved next to the Graafschap Hardware store located nearby, where worship services were held for two years during construction of the new building. In July 1904, the new church, white in color and somewhat ornate according to local nearby opinions, was re-incorporated according to the laws of the State of Michigan. The name was changed to First Reformed Church of Graafschap. The new church building was dedicated on Thursday, October 20, 1904, with messages delivered in both English and Dutch languages. Rev. Kuizenga served the church until July 1906, a short space of two years, after which he received an appointment to the Bible Chair at Hope College. He later became a well-respected teacher of Theology at Western Theological Seminary, and later at Princeton Theological Seminary.

In February, 1907, the Rev. Cornelius Heines began his ministry, serving until September 1910. During his pastorate, harmony prevailed and the church

experienced steady growth. In June 1911, the Rev. William Wolvius became pastor. He served the church until September 1915 when he accepted a call to Wisconsin. During the pastorate of Rev. Wolvius, a new bell costing \$90.00 was installed in the church tower. It had just been raised an additional level "so that the tones of the bell could be heard over a greater area, according to Mr. Gerrit Heneveld." (Holland Sentinel) It was rumored that church leaders wanted their bell to be louder than the adjacent Christian Reformed Church bell.

Member Mrs. Peter Slenk, who had so many interesting insights on the Graafschap area and its' churches, contributed this bit of early drama

"Some very loud singing came out of the two Graafschap churches during the summer prior to 1917. The two churches were divided simply by a parking lot and fence, and with the windows open, the services were painfully audible to both congregations. The ritual was similar and sometimes the same hymns might be chosen. But so great was the enmity of the two bodies of believers that they each tried to outsing the other. It made for unusually loud and ringing protestation unto the Lord"(The Good Old Days" as published in a church newsletter ca. 1970's).

There were strong feelings within the church that a new Central Park location would better serve the community west of Holland. Although Classis of Holland granted authorization to proceed, there was dissension among the members. A minority faction secured an injunction in early 1916 from Allegan County Court Judge O. S. Cross to block such a move. The last combined services in Graafschap were held on June 30, 1916. Starting in August, the majority members began meeting at Lakeview School at Lugers Corners (32nd Street and Lugers Road) until the court issues were settled. The minority members utilized the church building for Sunday services until June 1917 when the injunction was dissolved. At that time, majority members "closed the church, removed the pulpit, song books and lights and tacked a for sale sign on the parsonage." (Holland Sentinel).

At a special congregational meeting held at Lakeview School on September 12, 1917, the question of where to locate the church was decided in favor of Central Park (17 votes yes, 6 votes to continue at the school house, and 6 blank votes). The committee for solicitation of funds from outside the congregation was appointed and included William Helmink, Cornelius Zeedyk, Henry Lugers Jr., A. J. Van Zoeren, Klaas Koster and John De Boer.

On October 1, 1917, a lot (#10 of Rutgers Addition) was purchased for \$300.00 from Mr. Frank and Mrs. Sophia Bartel of Grand Rapids. The minutes of the consistory meeting of November 12, 1917 indicated: "Discussion on excavating, securing cement blocks for basement, mason work (bid accepted from Door and Van Dyke). Member Klaas Koster was to supervise all work." The church and the newly-raised steeple were immediately dismantled, removed from the site and transported by the Nyland family and other church members by horse and dray (lumber wagon) to the recently purchased Central Park site. In a 1950 article in the Holland Sentinel, caretaker George St. John said "the church was moved in sections, because it had to be lower than the Myrtle Avenue overhead electric lines powering the nearby inter-urban trains". This narrative was confirmed by long-time church members Lois Purcell and Lester Cook who were eye witnesses ("The Good Old Days" - published in a church newsletter ca. 1970). The building committee was also instructed to confer with the Graafschap CRC about the church stables, but they did not wish to purchase them. They were removed piece by piece and the lumber brought with the church. One stable/horse barn was reassembled on site. With the increased use of automobiles, the horse barn and extra lumber were later purchased by the Teusink Farm family, and 100 years later, still being utilized as a shelter for small animals. The December 6, 1917 consistory minutes showed "approval for the sale of the Graafschap site property to Mr. George te Koop (Koops) for \$1,800 was granted." A house was eventually built for his two daughters on that site (5981 Church Street).

Following the move and reconstruction of the church buildings at the Central Park site, a formal dedication was held on June 14, 1918, and the church was re-named The First Reformed Church of Central Park.

Although these were difficult times for the congregation with many major decisions to be made without the leadership of a pastor, the congregation was not lacking in leadership or courage. It is significant to note the consistory passed a resolution on December 18, 1918 "to grant lady members present with the same privilege as male members." Granting voice and vote to women in congregational meetings was very progressive for that time period.

During the summer of 1918, the church was served by Mr. Johan Bernard Hendrik Van Lierop, a student at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

In late 1919, the Rev. Ralph Bloemendal became the pastor and he served until early 1921. Beginning in late 1921, the services of Rev. Paul Eugene Hinkamp, a professor at Hope College, were secured. He served the church as stated supply pastor (minister under contract) through the Holland Classis, until the Summer of 1923. In the Spring of 1923, a parsonage was built immediately to the north of the church sanctuary.

In October of 1923, Rev. F. J. Van Dyke became the pastor. Following much study and fund-raising efforts in 1927, an electric pipe organ was purchased from the Geneva Organ Company. The cost of the rebuilt organ was \$3,100.00, a substantial sum for that time. Through special congregational support, the organ was paid for in full shortly after its installation. The Rev. and Mrs. Van Dyke were well-beloved by the congregation. Tragically, Mrs. Van Dyke passed away on May 23,

1936. Rev. Van Dyke continued to serve the church until the Spring of 1942. During his pastorate, the church grew from 28 families in 1923 to 86 families in 1942. Also, many improvements were made in the church building, bulletins were published for the first time, and the choir started wearing robes.

On January 29, 1937, a celebration of the 90th anniversary of the arrival of the Dutch immigrants was held at the Hope College Chapel. During that service, the Dutch Bible used in the pioneer Graafschap Reformed Church was presented to First Reformed Church of Central Park by church member Albert Strabbing of Graafschap.

In April of 1943, the church extended a call to Rev. Henry J. Ver Meer who came from Falmouth, Michigan. The pastorate of Rev. Ver Meer was very successful, with positive spiritual development as well as numerical growth to 140 families. Following the end of World War II, many families built homes on the western side of Holland. It became evident that the congregation was fast outgrowing its present building, with the auditorium filled to capacity on Sundays, and a lack of room for Sunday School. Members with vision could see that the church would continue to grow, and that if the community was to be served adequately, a larger building was needed. Because of the poor condition of the old church and the great cost to remodel, it was felt that a new structure was necessary. At a congregational meeting in December 1945, it was decided that a drive to collect \$30,000.00 would be made as a start toward a new church building. In January 1946, Rev. Ver Meer accepted a call to Illinois and he left in February. During the vacancy, the building program waned somewhat; however, donations were received and the women's organizations continued their fundraising efforts.

In December 1946, the congregation called Rev. Herman Rosenberg. He accepted the call and was installed in February 1947. During the week of June 20, 1947, the church celebrated its 100th Anniversary. A pageant was presented and special programs and services included former pastors and many friends. With the arrival of Rev. Rosenberg, there was renewed interest in the building program with Finance, Planning, and Building Committees working diligently. The decision was made to rebuild. In June of 1949, the cornerstone was laid and the new building was erected immediately north of the old one. Construction was completed in March of 1950, and the organ was rebuilt and installed in the new sanctuary. Dedication services were held on March 31 and it was a great time of celebration and thanksgiving. Rev. Rosenberg stated: "A great new era is before us...let the well-known words of Paul be our motto, '...this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'" Philippians 3:13-14 Rev. Rosenberg pastored the congregation very effectively. In May of 1952, he was led to accept a call to Santa Ana, California. During his ministry, the membership in the church grew to 254 families and 475 active members.

In August of 1953, the Rev. Ralph M. Menning was installed as pastor, and with his family occupied the Myrtle Avenue parsonage until January of 1958, when he was called to Midland Park, New Jersey. His tenure was one of assimilation and consolidation of membership through effective preaching and church activities.

Rev. Henry Van Raalte of Muskegon was called and installed in June 1958. That same year property was purchased and a new parsonage was built at 646 Pleasant Avenue. There was a severe need for additional space for Sunday School classrooms and improved meeting areas. A two-story educational unit was completed late in 1959, with dedication in March 1960. These building programs were

generously supported by church members and organizations, with total indebtedness at the end of 1959 at \$101,500. Rev. and Mrs. Van Raalte were much loved by the congregation, and his faithful calling and visitation program augmented his preaching and teaching for spiritual growth among church families. He ministered until January of 1970 when he left for a church in Morrison, Illinois.

To instill renewed interest in the program of the Reformed Church, especially pertaining to our local area, a series of meetings were held during March of 1963, under the Preaching-Teaching-Reaching Program – more commonly referred to as PTR. Rev. Theodore Zandstra, then of South Holland, Illinois, directed these meetings. From this program, Bible study and prayer groups were developed,

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meeting in the various homes on Sunday evenings once a month. These circles continued for several years and were an inspiration to many.

During 1970 and into 1971, Rev. Nicholas Keizer served the church as Interim Pastor. Rev. Percy Kinkema assisted as Calling Minister. The Rev. Cornelius A. Van Heest was called in May 1971 and installed in July. Rev. Van Heest was an innovator and under his pastoral direction an effective Lay Witness Mission week was held in the year 1972. As a result, a number of Central Park Church members felt called to be a part of Lay Witness Mission teams that ministered to other churches in Michigan. A special celebration was also held in 1972 to commemorate the 125th Anniversary of the founding of the church. It was a time of joyous thanksgiving to God for His special blessings. Rev. Van Heest was given pastoral assistance by a Team Ministry, and for a time the Rev. Nick Keizer continued as a part of the staff. The Bethel Bible Series was initiated in 1974 and continued for a number of years. In early 1975, Rev. Dennis Mulder was installed as Associate

Pastor. In the Fall of 1977, Rev. Van Heest resigned and accepted a call to be the pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

After more than a year of analysis and consideration, Rev. Mulder was called to become the Senior Pastor. In 1979, a new electronic organ was purchased and the dedication service was held in February 1980. In the Fall of 1980, Dr. Raymond Van Heukelom began his role as assistant pastor. Dr. Van Heukelom's preaching, teaching, and calling were of immeasurable blessing to the church.

In the Summer of 1981, Rev. Mulder tendered his resignation so he could pursue further education in the field of Counseling Psychology. A search committee was formed and the Rev. Larry L. Schuyler from Community Reformed Church in Lafayette, Indiana, accepted the call and was installed in January 1983. Major improvements were made to the church properties in 1982 and 1983 including parsonage renovation, church window insulation, and extensive basement remodeling. In 1984 the adjoining property at 601 Pleasant Avenue was purchased. Two years later the original parsonage at 602 Myrtle Avenue was repurchased for future building needs.

Seminarian Mark Vanderson began a ministry with the Jr./Sr. High youth in the Fall of 1982, which continued until his ordination as a Reformed Church minister in 1985. In June of that year, Seminarian Gary Hegstad began working with our youth. Members Al and Holly Schut both graduated from Western Theological Seminary, with Al's ordination held at Central Park Church in June. Rev. Schut accepted a call to the ministry at First Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, with Holly serving as Children and Worship Director. Dr. M. Eugene Osterhaven, longtime member of Central Park Church, retired in 1985 as Professor of Theology at

Western Theological Seminary. Central Park Church pledged \$1,000 per year for ten years to the "M. E. Osterhaven Endowment Fund."

In September 1984, Central Park Church began its support of Rev. Robert and Linda Schut of Mescalero, New Mexico. This began decades of strong support for this Native American church.

In order to provide more time for the Sunday School program, the consistory voted to change the morning worship service from 10:00 to 9:30 a.m. Rev. Schuyler was appointed Fire Department Chaplain by the City of Holland where he served for 5 years and also served for 20 years as Park Township Fire Chaplain. Under Rev. Schuyler and Dr. Van Heukelom, many new families were

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brought into the church. Financial stewardship also attained new and higher goals. The education and nurture programs were effective, and mission outreach increased. A loving spirituality was strongly demonstrated by church members. Dr. Van Heukelom took full retirement at the end of 1986. However, he and his wife, Johanna, continued as active members.

After completing two years of service at CPC, seminarian Gary Hegstad accepted a call to Armour, South Dakota, in June of 1987. Following an extensive review process, the NIV Bible was selected as the new pew Bible and was dedicated on November 15. At the November 29 congregational meeting, a revised floor plan was presented for the expansion of building facilities. Included in the plan were new offices, nurseries, an elevator and wheelchair-accessible restrooms. It was recommended to spend a maximum of \$600,000 with a requirement to raise

\$250,000 before beginning construction. Due to the financial constraints at that time, this plan was put on hold.

In December, a search committee recommended Rev. Terry DeYoung for the position of “Minister of Congregational Life”. Rev. DeYoung was installed as Associate Pastor in January of 1988, with the additional title of co-equal Vice President of Consistory. A new sound system and wood cabinet were installed in the back row of the sanctuary during the summer. In August of 1989, Kris Folkert was hired as choir director. Five-person committees were formed to study both the “Children at the Lord’s Table” and “Exploring the Possible Building Additions”.

Due to budgetary concerns in 1990, the consistory recommended ending the position of Associate Pastor. Rev. William Brownson was sent by the Holland

Classis to consult with the consistory. He urged the congregation to increase their stewardship, and the consistory rescinded their original recommendation.

Church Statistics – December 31, 1990

Church households 287 with 450 active members. Sunday School participants 224. Total Giving for 1990 was \$232,552.

In 1991, pew cushions and sanctuary carpet were installed, financed by an anonymous matching gift. For the first time, the congregation voted to elect three women as consistory members: Barb Strengholt and Ellen Van Raalte as

Elders and Marge Streur as a Deacon. With much regret, the church received and granted a May 1992 request from Rev. Raymond and Johanna Van Heukelom to transfer their membership to First Reformed Church of Holland. They were both dearly loved and appreciated by all. Kris Folkert was hired on July 1 as a full time staff member with responsibilities as choir/music/worship/youth director. A summer VBS program was renewed for the first time in many years from July 20-24, with co-chairs Lynn Van Hekken and Nancy Kuipers. It was a wonderful success and became a highly anticipated annual event. In August, the church joyfully granted a request for membership from former pastor Rev. Neil and Mary Lou Van Heest. Pastor Neil strengthened the Stephen Ministry Training program, and Mary Lou served as organist. A program called "Children and Worship" was instituted by co-chairs Glenda Van Huis and Pat Doolittle. Following the weekly children's message, the children attended this highly successful program for the remainder of the service.

Two morning worship services were initiated during the summer of 1993. The worship committee also recommended the institution of a "worship team" to lead in contemporary worship on the 2nd and 5th Sundays beginning in December. At the September consistory retreat it was decided to purchase The Worshipping Church hymnals for sanctuary use. Fifteen separate hymnals were reviewed by a five-person committee during the previous two years.

"Noah's Ark", a mid-sized boat on a trailer, was constructed by the Nevenzel family for use as a Tulip Time float in the May 1994 parades. It was well received! This tradition continued for five years until the float deteriorated and was dismantled in 1999. Distribution of Bibles to 4th graders was instituted in 1994. The first ever Lakeview City Park Outdoor Worship took place at a July evening service

with a picnic following. The church also began holding “Dose of Dining” and “Hospitality Dinners” in the Fall.

The financial shortage that began in 1990 continued for the next four years, with a declining attendance at the worship services and a steady loss of members to other churches. In 1993, the Executive Committee authorized the deacons to borrow \$15,000 from CPC members to pay for mission commitments. That year the Finance Committee urged staff reduction. In 1994, the deacons again recommended the elimination of the Associate Pastor position. At a February meeting of the consistory, a representative of the Holland Classis concurred that this was the only solution to the financial crisis. Rev. Terry De Young resigned on August 31, having accepted the position of Associate Director at the Church Herald.

The Casey Harthorn Mission House in Honduras was initiated in 1995 with Casey’s daughter Judy Vernon as director. Over 30 large boxes of clothes, shoes, toys, and food as well as cash were sent to Honduras during the year. In addition, Central Park Church also sent \$250 per month for Judy’s support. With the distance and communication issues ongoing, the church appointed a two-person team to oversee all assistance.

The consistory voted in June of 1995 to sell the deed to the nearby Central Park property that the First Reformed Church of Graafschap purchased with vision in 1904. The “CP Chapel Inc.” board built the Chapel on the site many years ago with Central Park Church permission, and maintained the site without paying any rental fee. “CP Chapel Inc.” wanted to expand the property but could not do so without owning it. Lengthy negotiations took place before the formal sale of the property occurred in 1998 for \$14,000.

The “Children at the Lord’s Table” and “Proposed Procedure for Children at the Lord’s Table” policies were adopted in August following several years of discussion. Rev. Neil Van Heest was hired in December as a Church Vision Consultant for the next 10 months. Rev. Van Heest selected 22 members for a Vision team. A Deacon’s dress code continued from previous years. Men must wear a dress shirt, tie and sport coat (optional, depending on heat.) Women Deacons must wear a suit or dress.

Church Statistics - December 31, 1995

Church households 225 with 349 active members. Sunday School participants 126. Total Giving for 1995 was \$243,072.

The year 1996 brought a structural change in the role of consistory Elders. Supervising Elders continued to oversee church policies and Shepherding Elders became responsible for the personal and family needs of the members in their “Care Cell” clusters. Planning for the church Sesquicentennial Celebration demanded considerable committee efforts in 1996. Late in the year, the congregation celebrated the over 50 years that member Roland Van Dyck had been active as Secretary of the Sunday School program, much of it behind the scenes in ordering appropriate materials. Roland was also known for his skill in playing a mix of songs on a variety of harmonicas.

A drama ministry was initiated in 1997 by Nancy Gasper and Barb Strengholt. In 1997 Glenda McKinley was the first woman to be elected Vice President of Consistory, and provided strong leadership for many years. The Sesquicentennial Celebration was held in February with the theme for Heritage Sunday “Honoring

Our Heritage and Opening Our Horizons.” A joint Founders Service with Graafschap Christian Reformed Church was also held at the original Macatawa site in July. Our “Ancestors’ Bible”, dated 1697 and donated in 1950 by a descendant of our original Graafschap Church, was brought to the Hope College Holland Archives Center for maintenance and safekeeping.

The three rental houses continued to need ongoing repairs. It was decided to retain these properties until future building construction required their sites. The matching pair of brick pillar signs located at the Myrtle Avenue and Bell Tower entrances had deteriorated. They were replaced by a new sign that cost \$3,800. Upon consistory approval, a new sound booth was built in the balcony by member Jack Van Lente, to accommodate a new sound system.

Lakewood Construction was hired in January 1998 to develop preliminary building plans. It was also decided to hire a professional consulting firm to assist in a capital fund drive. During the previous two years, the Church Education Committee reviewed the policies of local churches regarding “Children’s Ministry Protection.” A “Central Park Friendly” theme guided the committee and this policy was adopted in February.

Lakewood Construction was eager to begin the construction of a new building in 1999. Consistory members Howard Van Dam (site supervision) and Craig Smith (financial planning) were chosen to oversee all remodeling and new construction. A Capital Stewardship Building Campaign, “Making A Difference,” kicked off with great enthusiasm at the Hope College Haworth Center in April. Over \$500,000 was pledged by 113 households over the next three years. A detailed presentation of the complete proposed design included: elevator, wheelchair accessible,

larger narthex (later to be named “The Gathering Place”), first floor office, multi-use gym, and an air-conditioned sanctuary. The cost was not to exceed \$1.6 million. The church membership decided to proceed with Phase One (no gym or air conditioning) by a 75% vote. This was a huge step forward for the congregation. The visionary plan produced a high level of excitement, but there was also a recognition that church giving would need to increase.

As part of the dissolution of Bethel Reformed Church and the welcoming of many of their members, the stained glass window, “Christ Knocking at the Door,” was offered to the new building construction by Bethel and the Holland Classis. This beautiful addition was later placed strategically in the wall of the new narthex.

In addition to the anticipated building project, Central Park also partnered in 1998 with Habitat for Humanity in the construction of a home at 1097 W. 32nd Street. Doug Kooiker was church coordinator throughout this successful project. At the end of the year, it was decided to drop the long-time tradition of providing a box of candy and an orange to all Sunday School participants in the Christmas season. Other treats were then provided at the last Sunday School session of December.

At the May 2000 Congregational Meeting, the “Making A Difference” building plans were updated, with Phase One restricted to \$1,000,000 maximum. In addition, the consistory recommended that \$350,000 must be in the bank before breaking ground. In November, the Phase One costs were listed as \$937,900. A cost of \$65,500 was added for re-roofing the sanctuary, bringing the total to \$1,003,400. The deacons established a “Helping Hands” profile to match up

members with ongoing projects, both with new construction and current building needs.

With regret, the consistory accepted Kris (Folkert) Den Bleyker's resignation as youth and music director due to family commitments, with her last day being December 31, 2000. Kris continued her responsibility as choir director. Kris was beloved by the congregation and appreciated for her smile and contagious enthusiasm.

Church Statistics – December 31, 2000

Church households 221 with 334 active members. Sunday School participants 174 (an increase of 48 from 1995). Total Giving for 2000 was \$397,911, with an additional \$114,829 of building fund contributions.

Rev. Schuyler announced in February 2001 that he had accepted a position of Coordinator of the Holland Classis. Pastor Larry's ministry of 18 years was filled with many committees and projects, including his visionary leadership in the building project. On Easter Sunday, April 15, a groundbreaking event was held. An antique one-person plow was pulled by a volunteer group of all ages. Firm hands to guide the plow were provided by long-time member Fern Hornstra and Pastor Schuyler, whose farewell service was on Sunday, April 29.

In June, Rev. Sharon Arendshorst was selected as Interim Pastor. Pastor Sharon greatly assisted Central Park in establishing a Pastoral Search Committee and preparing the congregation for future progress. Adam Navis became the Youth Director in the Fall. The year 2001 was concluded on December 30 with the dedi

cation of the New Building Addition. This Phase One project included wheelchair access, elevator, nursery, library, a small serving kitchen and the Gathering Place room. It was truly amazing that within a relatively short period of months the congregation was able to almost completely pay off the Phase One debt.

The paint was hardly dry when, by faith, the consistory began discussing Phase Two early in 2002. It was recommended to hire Mr. Randy Johnson as outside consultant for our Capital Stewardship Phase Two campaign. His \$7,500 fee was offset by an anonymous donor's gift of \$2,500 as a retainer.

In August, the Finance Team gathered the funds from all the church organizations and deposited the money into a general ledger account. This permitted the Finance Team to oversee all accounts and provide more accurate reports to the congregation.

Rev. Sharon Arendshorst's last day as Interim Pastor was September 15, 2002. Her leadership was strong in all areas and her work with the Search Team was fruitful. Rev. David Landegent from Second Reformed Church of Fulton, Illinois, was extended a call on September 1 and accepted God's invitation. The "Making a Difference" Phase Two campaign was kicked off on November 10, again at the Hope College Haworth Center. Phase Two pledges were received from 75 households totaling \$434,872.

Adam Navis completed his ministry to CPC youth in 2003, accepting an editorial position at Words of Hope. Kyle Nevenzel was chosen to replace him.

Regular Wednesday night dinners began with Helen Koopman preparing the food in the outdated basement kitchen. Many hands, led by Gene Koopman, carried the food to the Gathering Place.

Rev. Landegent served Central Park Church from December 2002 to August 2011. It was a period of much creative activity, including Parasitic Praise Concerts featuring popular tunes with religious lyrics written by Rev. Landegent. One such concert was held in 2003 to benefit Brad Prince, former member, who became a quadriplegic as a result of an accidental fall.

Church Statistics – December 31, 2004

Church Households 193, Active Members 334, Average AM service attendance 200

One of the highlights of these years was the planning and construction of the gym and kitchen. In May 2005, the fundraising team of Wayne Nyboer and David Osterhaven was named, with Jack VanLente and Doug Kooiker overseeing the construction. Bill Becksvort coordinated the financial resources team. A building loan of \$1,400,000. was secured from Mercantile Bank.

In addition to the Phase One building project, private financial support by church members was provided for sanctuary re-roofing and adding air conditioning to the sanctuary, Gathering Place and the first floor of the educational unit.

The groundbreaking and construction of the ARC (Activities Recreation Center) in 2007 created additional opportunities for ministry to the neighborhood. The new kitchen, called the ARC Rock Café, was designed by Helen Koopman, who became its coordinator. A volunteer kitchen crew provided dinners preceding the midweek activities for over 90 people weekly in 2007 and occasional brunches following the Sunday morning services. The ARC was soon the center for athletic activities, including basketball, volleyball and baseball, and provided a place for winter walkers and yoga participants. In addition to his responsibilities as Youth Director, Kyle Nevenzel was appointed to oversee the athletic activities in the ARC.

In December 2005, four women who began the Children in Worship Program were honored for their 15 years of service. This weekly program was discontinued due to lack of individuals willing to take over the demanding responsibilities. In 2007, the program was reinstated by Mary White, Sheila Ash and Val Nevenzel.

Real Estate activities from 2002 to 2006 included the sale of the Pleasant Avenue parsonage in 2002, with proceeds used to pay off the Phase One RCA loan. By early 2004 the Fifth/Third loan for Phase One was also paid off in full. That same year the 600 Myrtle Avenue house was purchased and torn down for site development. The rental home on 599 Pleasant Avenue was sold for \$1 in 2006, and was moved as part of site preparation.

Many new activities were initiated during Rev. Landegent's ministry. They included Trunk or Treat, Legos for Kids and Wednesday Family Night activities. CPC member Mary DeMaagd initiated participation in Operation Christmas Child and the Red Cross blood drives in the ARC.

At the May 2007 consistory meeting, Jim Zeedyk and Pat Doolittle presented a proposal for the creation of a Memorial Garden. In 2008, the consistory approved the location of the new Memorial Garden. Guidelines and recording notebooks were established by the committee, along with detailed descriptions of where each plot was to be located.

The church Prayer Team continued their active leadership, initiating activities such as prayer chain e-mails, a 12 hour prayer vigil on the National Day of Prayer, and connecting adults and youth as prayer partners. Several Healing Services were held following Rev. Landegent's "Spiritual Warfare" sermon series.

Many improvements were made to the church building during the years of construction. Significant contributions of new technology were made by member Richard McKinley, including the sound systems, internet connections, looping, projection equipment, and enhanced wiring. The previously-named "Women's Lounge" was renamed "The Cornerstone Room." The cabinets (built by member Calvin Van Lente) containing historical items, were moved to this room. A new display cabinet, donated by the Clarence Maatman family, was filled with many trophies won by the men's and women's softball teams over the years. New

individual and family mailboxes were built and installed in the narthex. In March of 2009, a proposal introducing the 70 x 7 Serving Together program was presented to consistory by local 70 x 7 staff member Douglas Cupery and church member Jim Zeedyk. This program was designed to assist men who were returning to society from prison, jail, and/or substance abuse rehabilitation. Most of these ex-offenders needed to prepare themselves for current social and work environments. In addition, each man was to receive a community member as a per

sonal mentor throughout this transitional period lasting several months. Consistory approval resulted in CPC becoming a Serving Together site beginning on Wednesday, April 5. Three church members provided initial program direction and supervision. As a successful result of this program, three 70 x 7 participants became helpful and capable members at CPC.

A national financial recession beginning in 2007 was echoed by a severe budget crisis at CPC. This caused a 50% decrease in CPC support for RCA missions and salary reductions for the CPC staff. Attendance at the Sunday evening services steadily declined, resulting in the decision to discontinue them.

As financial conditions improved in 2008, Ruth Landegent became Director of Ministries. She initiated the Women's Coffee Break Bible Study, and coordinated the annual Vacation Bible School, Faith Walk classes and Wednesday night programs.

Church Statistics December 31, 2009

Church Households 192, Active Members 295, Average Worship Attendance 194

In the year 2011, there was a major change of staff at CPC. Rev. Landegent moved to South Dakota to serve the Reformed Church of Volga. Kris Den Bleyker completed 21 years of music ministry, and Kyle Nevenzal moved on to a teaching and coaching position in Fennville, Michigan.

Randy Bennett was hired as choir and music ministry director, and Rev. Al Schut, former member during his seminary years, began as Interim Pastor in the Fall. Rev. Schut provided strong leadership for a newly-elected consistory and was most helpful in the selection of a Pastoral Search Committee. Brent Boersma completed a 2011 school year commitment as youth ministry director and resigned in July. A group of CPC members worked together the following year as an interim youth ministry team. In the meantime, the consistory explored long term possibilities and eagerly awaited the results of the Pastoral Search Committee. Pastor Al continued as Interim for 18 months until February 2013.

The Vision for Mission Fund was established in 2012 by a gift of over \$200,000 from the estate of Virgil and Serena White. An average of \$10,000 yearly interest from this fund was designated for additional CPC mission activities. Central Park members were now able to secure financial support for personal mission trips to many locations including Panama, Costa Rica, Peru, Zambia, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Rosebud Native American Church in South Dakota and the Beautiful Response Mission in Haiti. The leadership of Al and Holly Schut and the financial aid from the Vision for Mission Fund enabled many members to participate in ongoing support of the mission in Haiti. The connection to Haiti was further strengthened by a visit from Pastor Antoine of Haiti in October 2018. Many Sunday worship services were enhanced by the personal "Engaged in Missions" testimonies of those who participated in these new mission endeavors.

The Vision for Mission Fund also provided financial aid for a number of needy programs including the Eden Mission Well in Bunia, Congo, Hurricane Relief for Puerto Rico and Haiti, local Focus on Hunger, and the Mescalero Church.

By the beginning of 2013, the Pastoral Search Committee recommended Rev. Kevin Kleinheksel, from the Ottawa Reformed Church of the Zeeland Classis, and he accepted the call. Rev. Kleinheksel began his ministry at CPC on August 5 with a desire to encourage openness in accepting differences and to “be seeker sensitive.”

A community arts and crafts sale entitled “Holiday Shoppe” was held in the ARC in October 2013. It was so successful that it became an annual event, raising significant support for mission outreach. The ARC kitchen crew also provided strong financial support for mission outreach through the production and sale of tasty pig in the blankets.

Following their retirement, Rev. Bob and Linda Schut, longtime CPC missionaries to Mescalero, New Mexico, were present during the worship service on October 27. CPC continued its strong financial and prayer support for the Mescalero Church and their new missionaries, Rev. and Mrs. Mark Vellinga.

Early in 2014, Hunter Brumels was selected as youth director, a position he held under the direction of Pastor Kevin until the end of the 2018 school year. Hunter was loved by the congregation and especially by the youth of the church. He left to become the full-time youth director at Third Reformed Church in Holland.

The CPC Community Garden was initiated in 2015, under the capable leadership of Bill Van Bruggen and Diane Geese. The garden produced an abundant supply of vegetables for the neighborhood and CPC members, and provided another opportunity for outreach to the community.

Church Statistics December 31, 2014

Church Households 191, Active Members 255, Average Worship Attendance 177

Similar to previous changing of terminology (Sunday School renamed Faith Walk), the Wednesday name was changed from Family Night to Community Night. Non-church members of our community also enjoyed the mid-week meals and were encouraged to attend Sunday service. Donations were received to help pay for a new outdoor sign, a new boiler, and for necessary repair to the sanctuary piano.

CPC was tremendously blessed to have both Mary Lou Van Heest and Ellen Van Raalte-Frieswyk as church organists/pianists, and they were honored on May 17, 2015 for their many years of service. Barb Vander Zwaag was hired as choir and congregational accompanist. Ruth Klaasen replaced Barb a year later when Barb was hired by her home church. Bill and Ellen Vander Zwaag were honored for their 26 years as church custodians. Gregg and Nancy Deters were hired in 2018 to serve as "Co-Facilities Coordinators." James Stam began serving as the capable coordinator of the ARC kitchen.

A new program designed to provide "interview" clothing for 70 x 7 men and women participants was approved. "Abba's Attic" began in the basement

storage area behind the youth room. With the addition of women participants to the program, many members donated slightly used clothing which was so appreciated.

The “Ridder Church Renewal” three year program began in October 2015 and Module 2 allowed for expansion in 2018. An outdoor joint A.M. service with Park Christian Reformed and Embody Christ began in 2017 and continued annually. CPC instituted “Name Tag Sunday” in 2017 on the 2nd Sunday of each month.

The estate of Donald and Lileeth Van Ark, longtime members of CPC, gifted \$109,000 to the church as a memorial gift in May 2017. \$59,000 was applied to the ARC mortgage with the remainder placed in a Capital Improvement Fund. The remaining mortgage for the ARC (\$601,739.32) was refinanced through the RCA Church Growth Fund.

On April 21, members chose to walk, run or bicycle the route taken by the lumber wagons as they transported the First Reformed Church of Graafschap to the Myrtle and Floral location in 1917. The 100th anniversary of CPC located at Central Park was celebrated with displays of historical items, a formal dinner in the ARC, and a Rededication Sunday on June 10, 2018 with former pastors attending.

In the summer of 2018, the CPC youth ministry program received a new director, Max Blumer. He and his wife also became the praise team worship leaders. The consistory decided to use the book God Dreams for personal and congregational edification. Retreats were held for consistory and other interested members on April 29 and May 5 of 2018. Pastor Kevin introduced the 3 year God Dreams

program to our congregation on September 11. All members were requested to drop a small stone (provided) into a large glass container each time they had an interaction where they shared the love of Christ through a simple act of friendship.

In 2019, Administrative Assistant Sandi Van Houten and Treasurer Lorrie Pastoor completed their many years of faithful service. They were replaced by member Jessica Stam, who was named Office Administrator and Treasurer.

Throughout the years, Central Park Church has lifted up many men and women in service to our country. We honor all of them. Three church members have given their lives; Louis Arthur Van Dyk and Herman Teninga in WW II and Jack Van Wieren in the Vietnam War. Their names are commemorated on the Service Plaque located at the back of the sanctuary. Current servicemen(2020) include Lt. Colonel Matt Garvelink(full time-active duty Air Force Reserve) and Staff Sergeant Jason Scholten(Air Force).

Other organizations were attracted by the high quality of CPC's facilities. Prompted by a request from a neighborhood mother, a group of home schoolers entitled Classical Conversations began renting the ARC and classrooms one day per week for academic lesson work, arts and crafts, and opportunities for physical activity. The ARC also became a weekly location for a volleyball team from the United Methodist Church. On July 7, 2019, a talented group of musicians from Fourth Reformed Church began a monthly Sunday evening hymn sing in the sanctuary. Central Park Church was increasingly becoming a community church.

During 2019, the Vision For Mission Fund showed a balance of \$219,536. The Van Ark Capital Improvement Fund showed \$35,000. Long time members Gordon and Geraldine Van Putten gifted a memorial donation of \$88,000 from their estate to be utilized for special projects. The congregation responded to the challenge of matching a \$20,000. Van Putten donation for the ARC mortgage by raising an additional \$20,796.

Church Statistics December 31, 2019

Church Households 161, Active Members 187, Average Worship Attendance 138

CPC has been known by many official names, beginning in 1847 as “The Church in Allegan County.” Subsequent name changes included Reformed Church of Graafschap, First Reformed Church of Graafschap, First Reformed Church of Central Park, Central Park Reformed Church, and by informal consistory action in May 2008, Central Park Church.

In our 173 years of continuous history, God has led us through many valleys and mountaintops. We have been so fortunate to have been considered a “community church.” Virgil White said it so succinctly in 1985: It is “our challenge to serve the whole needs of our area, both spiritually and physically, in the name of Christ.”

Lyrics from the song “Find Us Faithful” by Steve Green truly capture the same pioneer spirit of our ancestors and offer our Central Park Church congregation glimpses of our future.

**We’re pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road,
And those who’ve gone before us line the way.
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary,
Their lives a stirring testament to God’s sustaining grace.
O may all who come behind us find us faithful,**

May the fire of our devotion light their way.

May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe,

And the lives we live inspire them to obey.

O may all who come behind us find us faithful.