

FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH



First Christian Reformed Church today located at 801 15th Avenue

As Dutch Days 2013 approaches, the "Fulton History: Did You Know" articles will focus on this year's theme, "Churches: Steeped in History." This week's article was written by Mary (Muur) Medenblik.

The First Christian Reformed Church in Fulton, Illinois, was organized on February 26, 1886. The first services were held in the basement of the Baptist Church, then located on Eleventh Avenue, and sermons were read by elders at morning and afternoon services. A little over a year after being organized, the church purchased almost eleven lots situated on the present-day Nineteenth Avenue and just east of Fourth Street. Here the first church was built, and a few years later a parsonage was added.

The Rev. H. Huizingh served the church as its first pastor from 1890-1893. He was followed by the Revs. M. Van Vessel; Theo Van Loo; William Borgman; E.J. Krohne; J. O. Vos; and J. B. Jonkman. In November of 1912, during the ministry of Rev. Jonkman, plans were made to build a new church and parsonage. Lots were purchased on Fifteenth Avenue, the present location, and within eighteen months a new church and parsonage were a reality. The new building was dedicated on January 15, 1914.

Sermons and catechism and Sunday School classes were all held in the Dutch language. But in 1914, requests were made to have catechism and Sunday School classes taught in the English language. The consistory at first denied these requests, but in 1918, it gave permission to teach Sunday School classes in English; later that year, the consistory agreed to conduct every other Sunday evening service in English. Eight years later, both the morning and evening services were held in English, but an afternoon service was still conducted in Dutch until 1953.

In February of 1917, Elder Vander Eide addressed the consistory with the need for a Christian school. A committee was formed, and help was sought from the consistory of the First Reformed Church in Fulton. Working together, they decided to organize a Christian school and to enlarge the church basement to hold classes. In January of 1925, plans were made to build a school on a piece of the church property. The old church horse-sheds were sold, and a new two-room school was built on the southeast corner of Fourteenth Avenue and Eighth Street. In 1954, a new school was built at 711 10th Street, and the two-room school was torn down and the property used for the church parking lot.

Rev. John Masselink became the next pastor and was followed by Rev. A. Blik, who served the church for sixteen years. During his ministry a daughter congregation, Morrison Christian Reformed Church, was organized in 1935.

Dr. James Putt became pastor in 1940, and it soon became apparent that a larger building was desperately needed. After much planning, the complete remodeling and enlargement of the present building was to begin in 1942. But due to World War II, there were many building restrictions and material conservation. The actual work began on August 26, 1948, and the cornerstone was laid on October 19 of that year. Finishing the project incurred further delay due to a shortage of brick, but the new building was finally finished and dedicated in 1950. At this time the membership totaled 200 families and 780 members.

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In 1965, Fulton experienced devastating flooding of the Mississippi River. The church and parsonage basements were filled with flood waters, and once again repairs and remodeling needed to be done.

A study was added to the church in 1972. Also, the need for a larger parking lot was realized, and after the purchase of additional neighboring lots, the entire parking lot was black-topped.

More renovation of the church's interior took place in the early 1980's, and later the choir loft was removed and the pulpit area expanded. A new sound system and additional technology was added to allow services to be recorded on DVD for members unable to attend services. A projection screen to view videos and display music lyrics was also added. Worship services also changed to include more contemporary music and worship format.

Throughout the years the church maintained catechism and Sunday School classes for the youth and many other societies and organization for all ages. The study of God's Word was always the focal point, but Christian fellowship and mission outreach were also goals.

The church observed Mission Emphasis Week for many years and supported many missionaries and mission projects. The young people attended conventions sponsored by the denomination and worked on mission projects both locally and in other parts of the United States. The church also ministered to the Cary, Mississippi residents for many years through donations of used serviceable goods collected twice a year.

Pastors following Rev. Meppelink included: Revs. Thomas Van Eerden, John Groenewold, Clarence Van Essen, Fred Bultman, Roger Bouwman, Albert DeVries, Wendell Davelaar, and the current pastor, Philip Stel. In 2011, the church celebrated its 125th anniversary with special services and activities. Through all the years of the church's history, it has striven to remain true to God's Word and the Reformed faith. God has indeed been faithful. May He continue to bless the church as it seeks to continue to serve Him in the coming years.



First Christian Reformed Church from 1914 to 1950 before it was remodeled

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