

Brief history of Rockford Reformed Church
Prepared for Fifth Anniversary Celebration

Three Rockford families who were driving to different Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids discovered each other in the Spring of 1957 . They placed an ad in the Rockford Register to see how many people of this area might be interested in forming a Reformed Church in Rockford. On May 31, 1957 a group of people consisting of six families met at the home of Ray Kunst with Rev. Kik to inform them on what they should do. These people were completely unaquainted with each other. Those present at this very first gathering with Rev. Kik were; Mr. and Mrs. Albert Blouw, Mr. and Mrs. John Carter, Mrs. Frank Davis, Mr. Wm. Gringhuis, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Knox and Mrs. and Mrs. Kunst. The motion was made at this meeting to name the church The Rockford Reformed Church. Ray Kunst was elected chairman, Gordon Knox, Treasurer, and John Carter, Sunday School Superintendent.

1 Elder John Hommerson preached the first sermon on June 2, 1957 at the American Legion Hall. The hall was rented for \$15.00 a week and the Sundays that the Legion held Ham Dinners there, church was held at the Rockford Library.

2 The first Sunday School Picnic was in July at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Blouw on Brower Lake. Larry Doorn and Gordon Webster with their brides to be also were there that day with the families of the church. Mr. Doorn and Mrs. Webster were Western Seminary students who helped canvass the area that summer.

By October a few more families had joined the group and prayer meetings were held each Wednesday evening. Mr. Hommerson led the meetings which the families took turns having in their homes.

The first ladies meeting was held in October also. Six or seven women met and decided to call their group "Faith and Fellowship". The evening was spent mending hymnals donated by Grace Reformed Church. The ladies planned a Bake Sale which netted over \$100.00

The St. C.E. of Grand Rapids under the direction of Rev. G. Douma, helped ~~me~~ canvass from house to house on a Sunday afternoon that fall.

When one year had passed there were 14 families. The group had many discouragements as well as encouragements, but the Lord blessed far beyond what was asked or expected. Rev. David Ter Beest, who was president of North Grand Rapids Classis at this time, was a great deal of help in planning the organization. At last the long awaited night was held on the hot day of June 10, 1958. Rockford Reformed Church was organized at a meeting in the Legion Hall. At this meeting 22 communicant members were transferred by letter, 8 were received on confession of their faith, with 2 adult baptisms and 5 infant baptisms. The 14 families represented at this time were L. Overkamps, C. Poortvliets, G. Knoxs, J. Coles, J. Carters, Mrs. H. Norman, R. Kunsts, G. Posthumus, W. Gringhuis, H. Pleschers, G. Dykemas, B. Bronsinks, M. Spriks, and Mrs. G. Vander Werf. The first consistory consisted of J. Carter, R. Kunst and G. Posthumus as elders, and J. Cole, G. Knox and L. Overkamp as deacons.

3 During the summer of 1958 Allen Boeve, a Seminary student, had charge of the pulpit and made calls. Mr. Boeve, with his wife and 2 daughters, lived at the R. Kunst home while the Kunsts were at their cottage.

4 At these first meetings in the Legion Hall chairs had to be set up for the morning service and then taken down again after the evening service. Some Sunday mornings the early arrivers for church had to open all windows and doors to air out the place, spray a can of air freshener and clean up beer from the floors, light fixtures and piano from a party the night before, so church could be held.

One Sunday night the front door was opened and a fire cracker was thrown in during the service.

5 Here are a few pictures of the Sunday School Picnic in 1958.

Rev. Jay Weener was Moderator of the church before the minister was called.

On December 14, 1958 the motion was made at a Congregational Meeting to call Don Den Hartog, a graduating student, as the first pastor. The call was accepted. An apartment was rented for the new pastor, his wife and small son. The members cleaned, painted and de-mothed the apartment. Then some of the men helped move the Den Hartogs and all Don's heavy books from Holland to Rockford in June 1959.

6 In July another picnic was held at Gordon Park.

7 On August 20, 1959 the land on the corner of 11 Mile Rd. and 131 was purchased by the Classis of North Grand Rapids for a church.

8 On October 11, 1959 during the Sunday School hour the ground breaking ceremony was held for the new combination parsonage-church. It was a cold, windy day on the hill overlooking Rockford but many dreams and prayers were being answered. This small group realized that unbelievable things can be done when one works with God.

All the heavy beams and lumber for the church came to Rockford by train. The men of the church began unloading lumber from the time they got out of work at night until late and then all day Saturdays. Jim Bolhouse and Bernie Bronsink put up the main structure of the church with the men helping in their free time and the women serving lunches and meals.

The church received many large gifts of money from the Classis, Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids and friends of the church. Without this help and all the hours of volunteer help this small group could not have erected such a fine structure to the honor of God.

9 On May 1, 1960 the thrilled and thankful people met in their new building for the first time. As you can see from the pictures the Sunday shoes got rather muddy for a few months.

10 The laying of the corner stone was postponed until June 26, 1960 because of winter weather. This was the beginning of the dedication week.

11 This is a picture of the pastor and the consistory when the congregation moved into the new building.

¹²In June 1960 the Sunday School Picnic was held again at Gordon Park.

¹³The steeple was added to the church in 1961.

¹⁴Here are a few pictures of the picnic in 1962.

In the fall of 1960 the church decided that although they needed many things yet themselves , it would be a blessing to them to aid in the support of a missionary. So partial support of Dr. and Mrs. Vande Aarde in India was pledged. The church is now going of help support Dr. and Mrs, Gilbert Den Hartog who plan to leave for Ethiopia in August.

The Rockford Reformed Church, through many prayers, much hard work and many gifts, has prospered both spiritually and in material things. The congregation now consists of 31 families with 59 communicant members and 50 baptized members.